

Music Teachers' Motivations, Competencies, and Challenges in Public Elementary Schools in Sorsogon City, Philippines

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Abstract

This study examines the motivations, self-reported competencies, and teaching challenges of music teachers in two central public elementary schools in Sorsogon City, Philippines. The findings indicate that intrinsic motivation, particularly a strong commitment to teaching and the desire to share musical knowledge, plays a central role in teachers' continued engagement with music instruction. Teachers generally rated their competencies as satisfactory in relation to curriculum content and performance standards, instructional strategies, and the use of teaching materials, while also acknowledging the need for further professional development. The most significant challenges identified were the lack of reference materials, limited availability of musical instruments, and insufficient access to training programmes and seminars. Additional concerns included outdated instructional skills, inadequate time for developing complex musical abilities, and confusion surrounding aspects of the spiral curriculum. Overall, the findings suggest that although teachers demonstrate commitment and a foundational level of competence, constraints related to resources and structured professional learning opportunities limit the effectiveness of music instruction. This study contributes to discussions on music education in public elementary schools by emphasising the importance of professional development support and adequate instructional provision in strengthening music teaching and learning in resource-strapped contexts.

Keywords: content standards, music education, teacher competence, teacher motivation, teaching challenges

Introduction

The transition from performing musician to music educator is often motivated by a desire to share musical knowledge, skills, and values developed through performance. For many musicians, teaching offers a way to extend their engagement with music beyond the stage and into educational settings. Entry into school-based teaching, however, requires practitioners to operate within formal educational structures shaped by prescribed curricula and institutional policies. In the Philippines, music education is organised under the K–12 curriculum, which defines expectations for how music is taught and understood in schools. Within this framework, music is positioned both as part of the formal curriculum designed to meet contemporary educational objectives and as an art form that must be preserved and transmitted across generations (Department of Education, 2013). Music teachers must therefore balance curricular requirements with artistic and cultural considerations. When motivation or instructional competence is limited, retaining this balance becomes difficult, potentially constraining classroom practice and weakening students' learning experiences.

A substantial body of research has examined the role of music in students' cultural development and social growth. For example, Kim et al. (2023) discuss how music contributes to intercultural understanding, while Parti et al. (2021) focus on the professional skills expected of music teachers. These studies underline the broader educational value of music and the responsibilities associated with its instruction. Despite this growing body of work, relatively little attention has been given to the motivations of elementary music teachers or to the challenges they encounter in their everyday teaching. In the Philippine context, in particular, few studies have investigated the relationships among teacher motivation, competency levels, and barriers to teaching music in elementary schools, especially in provincial settings such as Sorsogon City.

In response to this gap, this study aims to identify the motivations, competencies, and challenges of music teachers in two central elementary schools in Sorsogon City. It looks at the factors that encourage teachers to engage in music teaching and assesses their self-reported competence in relation to meeting content and performance standards. The study proceeds from the view that teacher motivation contributes positively to teaching quality, as suggested by Pelletier and Rocchi (2016). It further recognises that teaching and learning processes are shaped by a range of personal, behavioural, and affiliative factors. Understanding these influences may inform efforts to refine music teaching and the quality of music education at the primary school level.

Literature Review

Many studies have examined the factors that influence teachers' decisions to enter and remain in the teaching profession. However, comparatively fewer have focused on the motivations of young teachers, particularly within the field of music education. Teaching is often seen as a noble profession despite its limited material rewards, a view that continues to shape career decisions among many educators

(Mangaoil et al., 2017). In music education, entry into the field is frequently associated with personal musical ability, technical skill, and a strong attachment to music as a meaningful form of expression and communication.

At the elementary level, music teaching is commonly perceived as engaging and enjoyable, yet it presents challenges for novice teachers who lack sufficient training or pedagogical grounding. These challenges become more pronounced in the upper elementary years, particularly in grades five to six, where instruction includes more abstract concepts like intervals, chord families, and harmonic functions involving tonic, dominant, and sub-dominant relationships. Managing classrooms in which students display little interest in the subject can be discouraging, especially for teachers who possess some basic content knowledge but lack adequate preparation in music pedagogy. While those assigned to lower primary classes may find motivation and classroom management less demanding, teachers at the upper elementary level frequently encounter greater instructional difficulty. Playing a musical instrument may be relatively straightforward; however, guiding students to read notation, interpret chords and symbols on the staff, and apply these skills across instruments calls for a higher level of pedagogical competence and instructional planning.

Teacher Motivation

Teacher motivation plays an important role in supporting effective learning in elementary music education, particularly in public school contexts. Qin and Tao (2017) write that intrinsic factors such as enjoyment, interest, and personal satisfaction derived from teaching, strongly influence teachers' commitment to their roles. Delgado (2017) similarly observes that educators who find fulfillment in their work tend to demonstrate stronger and more enduring motivation, with intrinsic rewards often carrying more weight than external incentives. Such motivation is more likely to be maintained within environments that allow educators to perform effectively and with confidence.

Teacher motivation is also closely linked to student learning outcomes. A strong professional identity among music teachers has been associated with higher levels of commitment and sustained interest in the profession, especially among pre-service educators. This relationship has important implications for the development of strategies aimed at enhancing teacher engagement, strengthening instructional practices, and improving learning experiences in public elementary schools.

Teachers' reasons for entering teaching further provide insight into how music curricula may be improved at the elementary level. According to Johnson (2016), a commitment to teaching and the sharing of knowledge contributes to the creation of caring learning environments. Sergey (2017) argues that innate musical abilities and talents can encourage students to develop deeper appreciation of, and engagement with, music. Wolf et al. (2018) discuss the role of passion in sustaining teachers' dedication; they also note that continued development of subject knowledge reinforces motivation over time. According to Cuadrado (2019), recognising and nurturing learners' specific talents strengthens teachers' commitment to high-quality instruction. Mochere (2017) draws attention to the

importance of adequate resources for implementing practical teaching approaches and meaningful student learning. Collectively, these studies point to the combined importance of intrinsic motivation, sufficient resources, and institutional support in sustaining effective music education in schools.

Performance Barriers for Teachers

Elementary music teachers in public schools face sizeable challenges in developing and applying pedagogical competencies. Manila (2020) notes that limitations in instructional effectiveness are often connected to insufficient content knowledge and underdeveloped teaching skills. These difficulties are exacerbated by students' generally negative attitudes towards the subject, as well as restricted access to teaching materials and inadequate school facilities.

Similar concerns have been reported among MAPEH (music, arts, physical education, and health) teachers in Gapan, Philippines, where anxiety related to limited musical knowledge and insufficient preparation in music pedagogy adversely affects teaching competence (Pestano & Ibarra, 2021). According to Zdravić-Mihailović (2020), effective music education requires teachers who are capable of logical inquiry and analytical thinking, and that sustained professional growth depends on the continued development of musical competencies. When generalist teachers without specialised training are assigned responsibility for music instruction, the subject risks being marginalised within the broader MAPEH framework. The creation of intellectually engaging and supportive learning environments is therefore closely tied to teacher competence.

Bautista et al. (2020) observe that specialist and generalist teachers differ in both motivation and professional needs, a distinction that is particularly relevant for public elementary school music education. Reese et al. (2024) report that whereas pre-service music teachers often express confidence in teaching general elementary music, they tend to then shift their focus toward ensemble-based instruction. This pattern suggests a need for professional development specifically oriented towards general music teaching at the elementary level. The development of competent teachers depends on the availability of sustained professional learning opportunities and institutional backing, both of which contribute to equitable and engaging learning environments in which musical literacy and creativity can be nurtured.

The Department of Education in the Philippines must address persistent issues in music instruction before they further affect elementary-level learning. These include the lack of reference materials, the absence of musical instruments, and inadequate opportunities for in-service training, which limit teachers' ability to refresh or expand their skills through workshops and seminars. Zhao et al. (2021) call for the development of innovation systems that support continuous improvement in music teacher education to enable educators to respond to evolving pedagogical practices. Poulter and Cook (2020) propose an action research model based on enactment cycles that emphasise reflective practice among music teacher mentors. This model builds confidence and competence through ongoing professional development, addresses gaps in teacher preparation, and underlines the importance of targeted training, effective resource management, and integrated

curricular approaches in strengthening music education within the primary school curriculum.

Methodology

This study was conducted at two central elementary schools in Sorsogon City on the island of Luzon: Sorsogon Pilot Elementary School and Sorsogon East Central School. The participants comprised 20 music teachers, with 10 drawn from each school. These teachers served as the primary sources of data for the study and represented a broad range of professional backgrounds, including both experienced educators and younger teachers with differing lengths of service and varying levels of training in music education. This variation allowed for a more comprehensive examination of factors affecting music teaching at the elementary level.

A descriptive quantitative research design was used to examine factors influencing music teachers' teaching performance. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews administered at times convenient for the respondents. The distribution of the survey instruments was facilitated by the school principals. A Likert-type scale was used to measure teachers' perceptions of their competencies, motivational factors, and teaching challenges, with response options ranging from strong disagreement or very low competence to strong agreement or high competence.

To establish the reliability and content validity of the survey instrument, it was reviewed and evaluated by subject-matter experts, and their recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. Following survey administration, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected teacher-participants to obtain further clarification and deeper insight into their experiences and perspectives.

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency counts, percentages, ranks, and mean scores. These procedures were applied to address the main objectives of the study, i.e., profiling respondents, identifying motivational factors related to teaching performance, and examining the challenges encountered in music instruction. Weighted mean values were calculated to assess teachers' self-reported competence in meeting established content and performance standards.

Completed questionnaires were gathered by school heads and subsequently forwarded to the research team for analysis. The data were then organised, analysed, and interpreted in order to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations for improving music education practices in the participating schools. The findings of the study are situated within central elementary schools in Sorsogon City and contribute to a contextualised understanding of factors that shape music teaching performance.

Findings and Discussion

Motivation of Elementary Music Teachers

The strongest factor motivating music teachers to demonstrate better performance is a genuine love for teaching and for sharing knowledge. This form of intrinsic motivation plays a large role in shaping teachers' commitment to effective music instruction. As shown in Table 1, "love for teaching/sharing knowledge" recorded the highest frequency, with 16 responses. This was followed by "inherent talent and skills in music," cited by 11 respondents, and "passion for music," identified by 9. Other sources of motivation included "learners' progress in the subject" and "learners' special talent in music," which received frequencies of 4 and 5, respectively.

Table 1. *Factors motivating music teachers' teaching practices*

Motivating Factors	Frequency	Rank
Love for teaching/sharing knowledge	16	1
Inherent talents and skills in music	11	2
Passion for music	9	3
Learners' progress in the subject	4	5
Learners' special talent in music	5	4
Support of school administrators and other stakeholders	1	6.5
Availability of music resources	1	6.5

These findings suggest that intrinsic motivation, specifically a love for teaching and sharing knowledge, functions as a central driver of teaching performance among music teachers. When this motivation is reinforced through observable learner progress and the recognition of students' musical abilities, it encourages continued engagement and a sustained commitment to teaching. This interpretation is consistent with the work of Qin and Tao (2021), who reported that intrinsic forms of motivation, including enjoyment and personal interest in music, exert a strong influence on teachers' commitment and performance. In a similar vein, Delgado (2017) found that music teachers who derive satisfaction from teaching roles display higher levels of motivation. Pelletier and Rocchi (2016) further observed that teachers with strong motivational foundations are more likely to develop positive relationships with their students and to nurture supportive learning environments.

Within this context, the development of intrinsic motivation among music teachers emerges as an important consideration for improving the quality of music education at the elementary level. When teachers are driven by a genuine commitment to teaching and encouraged by evidence of their students' musical

growth, higher levels of teaching performance and more meaningful learning outcomes are more likely to be realised.

Competency of Music Teachers

Research consistently suggests that the quality of music education is closely related to teacher competence. Zdravić-Mihailović (2020) writes that teachers who establish intellectually engaging learning environments are more apt to exhibit higher levels of instructional skill, while also emphasising the importance of continued development to sustain effective music learning for children. Augustine and Wong (2016) likewise report that professional development is most effective when it addresses teachers' needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence, with clear benefits for both motivation and instructional practice.

Table 2. *Teachers' self-reported levels of competency across music content standards, based on weighted mean scores*

Content Standard	Weighted Mean	Description
Manifests understanding in presenting appropriate and sufficient background on music	3.65	Satisfactorily competent
Demonstrates understanding of applying appropriate teaching strategies	3.95	Satisfactorily competent
Demonstrates understanding of how to perform, create, and respond to fundamental processes appropriate to the assigned grade	3.80	Satisfactorily competent
Recommends additional professional development required for competency enhancement	3.80	Satisfactorily competent
Demonstrates understanding on identifying appropriate instructional materials	3.95	Satisfactorily competent
Demonstrates understanding of relationship between music and other disciplines	3.95	Satisfactorily competent
Average	3.85	Satisfactorily competent

As shown in Table 2 above, the highest mean score of 3.95 was recorded for indicators related to the application of appropriate teaching strategies, the selection of suitable instructional materials, and the recognition of connections between music and other subject areas. These results reflect teachers' musical background and their

ability to apply subject knowledge within classroom instruction. Despite these strengths, there remains scope for progression from a satisfactory to a very satisfactory level of performance. Teachers' openness to professional renewal points to a clear direction for improvement. On this basis, schools should prioritise targeted professional development initiatives that build teachers' competencies and are likely to contribute to improved student outcomes and overall school quality.

The music teachers in this study self-reported satisfactory levels of competency across performance standards examined. As shown in Table 3 below, the highest-weighted mean score (3.95) was recorded for the application of accurate subject-matter knowledge in teaching-learning engagement and the use of appropriate instructional materials. These results suggest that teachers perceive themselves as generally confident in managing lesson delivery and selecting materials to facilitate classroom instruction. Mean scores of 3.80 were reported for demonstrating musical competencies appropriate to the grade level and for engagement in activities related to competency development, which indicates an adequate degree of perceived professional and musical preparedness. By contrast, linking lesson content to real-world experiences and musical appreciation recorded a lower mean score of 3.65; this points to an area where further development may be beneficial. In sum, these findings reveal that although teachers consider themselves as possessing a satisfactory foundation in meeting music performance standards, there is room for improvement beyond a basic level of competency.

Table 3. Teachers' self-reported levels of competency in teaching music based on performance standards as indicated by weighted mean scores

Performance Standard	Weighted Mean	Description
Demonstrates ability to link present content with real-world experiences and appreciation	3.65	Satisfactorily competent
Applies accurate knowledge of the subject matter in delivering and teaching-learning engagement	3.95	Satisfactorily competent
Demonstrates musical competencies required of the lessons appropriate for the grade level	3.80	Satisfactorily competent
Engages oneself in activities necessary for competency development	3.80	Satisfactorily competent
Utilises appropriate instructional materials	3.95	Satisfactorily competent
Average	3.85	Satisfactorily competent

A competent music teacher promotes active student involvement through discussion and participation. Competence is demonstrated in clear content delivery, effective use of instructional materials, and the ability to connect lessons to everyday contexts. This is reinforced in the literature on Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) in music education. Using the PRISMA framework, Shahazwan et al. (2023) identified key themes related to musical knowledge, instructional strategies, learner-centred approaches, and assessment methods. Their findings point to the need for sustained professional development in strengthening instructional practice and maintaining teacher motivation.

Although music teachers in this study self-reported satisfactory levels of competence, there is potential for advancement to a higher standard. Progress in this area depends on continued professional learning, thoughtful instructional approaches, and regular avenues for skill development. Educational institutions thus play a critical role in providing opportunities and resources that bolster teacher growth and high-quality music instruction.

Performance Barriers in Teaching Music

Welch (2021) observes that young children are capable of achieving substantial developmental gains through musical engagement. However, they also draw attention to persistent gaps in teachers' pedagogical knowledge of music instruction. This concern is reflected in the findings of this study. As shown in Table 4 below, music teachers reported a range of challenges that constrain effective music learning, most notably the lack of reference materials, the unavailability of musical instruments, and not enough access to training and professional development.

Among the reported challenges, the lack of reference materials emerged as the most pressing concern and received the highest rank, 1. Closely following were the unavailability of musical instruments and restricted access to training programmes and seminars, both ranked 2.5. These findings suggest that material and professional support structures are insufficient in many school contexts. Other concerns included outdated instructional skills and, for some teachers, inadequacies in musical proficiency, both of which ranked 4.5. Issues connected to negative learner attitudes ranked sixth, while the least frequently cited concerns were insufficient time for developing complex musical skills and confusion surrounding the spiral curriculum approach. Taken as a whole, the findings show that many of the difficulties encountered by music teachers are associated with inadequate instructional resources, a matter that falls largely within the remit of school administration. The dearth of reference materials, lack of access to musical instruments, and insufficiently structured professional development opportunities have a direct impact on the quality and effectiveness of music instruction. Addressing these concerns is likely to improve teaching practices, student engagement, and learning outcomes.

Table 4. *Challenges encountered in music teaching*

Challenges	Frequency	Rank
Lack of reference materials	10	1
Unavailability of musical instruments	8	2.5
Lack of training/seminars	8	2.5
Outdated instructional skills	4	4.5
Inadequate musical skills	4	4.5
Negative learner attitudes	3	6
Restricted time allotment for complex skills development	1	8
Confusion about the spiral curriculum	1	8

In recent years, the rapid expansion of schools has increased demand for music educators, and in some contexts, this has led to the assignment of individuals with limited formal training to music teaching roles. Such situations can lead to the adoption of less effective instructional strategies and the implementation of curricula that lack coherence or pedagogical depth. Gallo (2018) stresses the importance of expanding teacher preparation and providing sufficient resources in response to the growing demand for music education. In a comparative analysis of professional development experiences, Gallo (2018) found that music educators in the United States were less likely than teachers in other disciplines to participate in collaborative instructional planning and demonstrated lower levels of technology integration in their professional practice. At the same time, music teachers reported relatively high confidence in their subject-matter knowledge. This contrast suggests that even though content knowledge may be reasonably supported, there is still a critical need for more comprehensive, collaborative, and practice-oriented professional development that addresses pedagogical application rather than content alone. Professional learning that responds directly to the instructional realities faced by music teachers is therefore essential for improving classroom effectiveness.

Research further points to uneven levels of institutional provision across different school contexts. International schools, for example, often provide more consistent practical assistance than public or private schools, as they are more likely to hire qualified music specialists, implement standardised programmes, and offer better facilities (Tanaka, 2022). Moses et al. (2021) argue that effective music education policies and sustainable partnerships in both public and private schools depend heavily on government involvement and systemic capacity. These findings point to the importance of prioritising the provision of reference materials and musical instruments, especially within music departments, as well as expanding access to targeted and ongoing training opportunities for teachers. The improvement of instructional resources and professional development structures is central to advancing music education, enhancing student involvement, and supporting positive learning outcomes. Without such measures, teachers are likely to continue encountering challenges that impede the delivery of quality music instruction.

The results of this study give insight into the motivating factors, competency levels, and challenges experienced by music teachers, all of which have implications for teaching performance. The strongest motivating factor identified was a love for teaching and sharing knowledge, which received the highest frequency score of 16. This finding indicates that intrinsic motivation plays a key role in sustaining teachers' commitment and effectiveness in the classroom. Other prominent motivators included inherent musical talents and skills, followed by a strong interest in music. These results illustrate the importance of personal interest and musical proficiency in maintaining effective teaching practices. Learner progress and the recognition of students' talents were also identified as motivating factors. These findings indicate that student achievement plays an important role in shaping teachers' professional motivation.

Teachers who are intrinsically motivated tend to display higher levels of involvement, enthusiasm, and persistence in their instructional roles. Interest in the subject area, combined with musical skills, contribute to stronger teaching capabilities and more positive educational experiences for learners. In this study, teachers reported competence in meeting content and performance standards, applying appropriate teaching strategies, integrating music with other disciplines, and selecting instructional materials effectively. Although these competency levels were generally satisfactory, the findings suggest that further improvement towards a very satisfactory level is possible through continued professional development and adequate institutional support.

The primary challenges identified in the study were the lack of reference materials, the unavailability of musical instruments, and insufficient access to training programmes and seminars. These constraints point to persistent gaps in the provision of resources and professional growth opportunities necessary for effective music instruction. Additional concerns related to outdated instructional skills and deficiencies in musical expertise further stress the need for regular skills development and updated training. Teachers also raised issues regarding limited attention to music as a learning area, insufficient time to develop complex skills, and confusion surrounding the spiral curriculum approach, all of which warrant closer consideration and intervention.

Overall, the study identifies intrinsic motivation, musical proficiency, and student achievement as key factors influencing music teachers' commitment and effectiveness. Whereas the teachers surveyed currently demonstrate satisfactory levels of competence, the findings indicate that substantial potential for improvement exists when adequate resources, continuous professional development, and supportive learning environments are made available. Teacher development should not be viewed solely as the responsibility of school leaders, but as a shared commitment that involves teachers themselves (Rahmatullah, 2016). Given the central role of teacher performance in achieving school goals (Alimmudin et al., 2022), addressing the challenges identified in this study is likely to enhance both teaching practices and students' learning experiences in music education.

Conclusion

The study showed that the main factors motivating music teachers include the desire to teach and share knowledge, natural musical ability and talent, a strong interest in music, satisfaction derived from learners' progress, and a commitment to nurturing students with special abilities. Support from school administration and the availability of resources were mentioned less frequently. Overall, 84.4% of respondents reported satisfactory levels of competence in both content and performance standards. Despite this, several challenges are evident, particularly the lack of reference materials, limited access to musical instruments, and insufficient training opportunities. Some teachers also reported reliance on outdated instructional skills, while others demonstrated gaps in essential musical competencies. Less frequently cited concerns included student attitudes, incomplete mastery of complex skills, and difficulties associated with the spiral curriculum approach.

Many of these challenges can be addressed at the elementary school level through the provision of adequate instructional resources and musical instruments. Regular and ongoing in-service training programmes and workshops focusing on current pedagogical approaches, teaching techniques, and technological developments in music education are also likely to strengthen teachers' competencies and motivation. Greater interest and backing from school administrators and other stakeholders can further build teacher morale and commitment. Moreover, the careful design and implementation of a coherent music curriculum may ensure sufficient time for skill development and a clearer understanding of curricular structure. When musical concepts are connected to learners' everyday experiences, they become more accessible and meaningful.

This study is limited to an examination of teaching performance among music teachers at Sorsogon Pilot Elementary School and Sorsogon East Central School in Sorsogon City. It focuses on the current state of music teaching, including self-reported competence, performance standards, and motivation. The narrow scope restricts the generalisation of findings to other schools or regions. Furthermore, external factors such as socio-economic conditions, student diversity, and teacher workload were not examined. As the data were self-reported, the possibility of response bias must also be acknowledged, and the absence of longitudinal data precludes analysis of change over time. Future research may address these limitations and further explore factors influencing the quality and sustainability of music education.

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Biography

Shane D. Escalante is an instructor at Sorsogon State University, Philippines, with a bachelor's degree in elementary education and an MA in education. Her work draws on classroom practice and focuses on music teaching and learning in basic education, particularly indigenous pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching in public schools.