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Music teaching in primary schools of Albacete, Spain, during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The role, functions and duties of teachers have dramatically changed with the COVID-19 pandemic. This sudden change has posed enormous challenges for schools, students and teachers. This article deals with the situation of music teaching in the Spanish province of Albacete (Castilla-La Mancha)¹ in the first two terms of the course 2020–2021 through face-to-face lessons. A questionnaire, created on music teaching in elementary schools, was answered by 96 teachers, teaching an amount of 35,365 primary education pupils in Albacete. The results of this research show that the everyday teaching has experienced relevant changes, especially in instrumental practice.

Keywords: COVID-19; digital teaching; digitalisation of the music classroom; music education; primary school students

Introduction

The COVID-19 disease crisis has posed an enormous challenge to educators in almost every country. Some researchers have tackled how teachers have coped with this change (Gao & Zhang, 2020). As the global pandemic spread and transformed our lives, face-to-face teaching had to be interrupted. Instead, many courses were offered in a digital format. This situation, which began in Spain on Friday, 13 March 2020, damaged our educational system.

Subsequently, the Spanish Ministry of Education established a general framework to deal with the new educational environment we were facing, approving Royal Decree 463/2020 (Díez & Gajardo, 2021).

Although these ministerial actions turned out to be positive, different studies (Cifuentes, 2020; Ruiz, 2020; Corral & De Juan, 2021; García, 2021) showed the following difficulties encountered by both the teaching staff and the students:

- Generation of a significant digital divide, especially in rural settings and in families with fewer resources.
- Problems in the implementation or continuity of methodologies based on cooperative learning.
- Difficulties in monitoring the teaching–learning processes of students with special educational needs.

In Castilla La Mancha, specific norms were approved, such as the [Instruction 1/2020](#), of 13th March, of the regional Ministry of Education, applying educational measures in schools, and the Decree 8/2020 of 12th of March on extraordinary measures to face the COVID-19 situation.

After the lockdown period and the obliged digitalisation during the last term of the course 2019–2020, the Spanish government decided to start the new course with classroom instruction. On 15 May 2020, an act was approved, ruling the reopening of schools in September of the 2020–

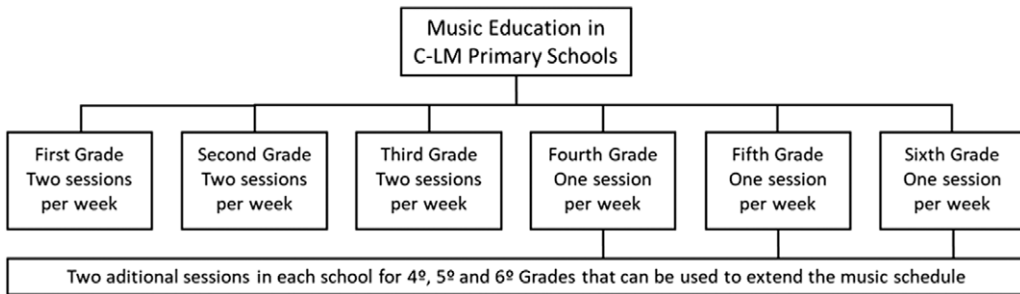


Figure 1. Time distribution of the music subject in primary education according to the C-LM law.

Source: Orden de 05/08/2014, de la Consejería de Educación, Cultura y Deportes, por la que se regulan la organización y la evaluación en la Educación Primaria en la Comunidad Autónoma de Castilla-La Mancha [2014/10617].

2021 course (Ruiz, 2020). A series of measures were proposed, to be applied by the regional educational administrations:

- Establishment of three potential educational scenarios, to deal with the different situations. The first with in-person teaching, the second with a hybrid system and the third with 100% of online teaching.
- Preparation of digital resources by teachers to implement, especially for the scenarios two and three.
- Flexibility, restructuring and adaptation of classrooms and other spaces to preserve sanitary security.
- Reduction in the number of students per classroom and their distribution by shifts.
- Substantial increase in the number of teachers per school (García, 2021).

This research deals with the teaching situation during the COVID-19 pandemic for the case of music teachers in the province of Albacete, C-LM (Spain). Central aspects with an impact on face-to-face learning are discussed, together with the impact on music teachers and how the subject of music education has been affected by the return to the classrooms.

According to the guidelines of the Spanish Ministry of Education, the Royal Decree 126/2014, of 28 February, establishes the basic curriculum of Primary Education. The curriculum of Music Education in primary schools in the region of Castilla-La Mancha is ruled by the Decree 54/2014, of 10/07/2014. It states that this subject is essential in the integral development of students. One of its main goals is to promote the musical sensitivity of the child as an essential element in musical perception and expression. It aims at developing musical skills, as well as socialisation and inclusion of students.

To achieve the above, the Decree 54/2014 establishes a specific hourly distribution by courses (Fig. 1) and divides Music Education into three main content blocks:

- Hearing, which refers to the investigation of the possibilities of sound, voices and instruments.
- Musical interpretation, which includes the knowledge of the musical language to interpret musical pieces with the voice and instruments and make creations with the use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) resources.
- Music, movement and dancing, which addresses the development of expressive and creative capacities from the knowledge of the possibilities of the body and the practice of dance.

Once the lockdown had finished, as in other countries, schools reopened in Spain and returned to in-person teaching. The Education Department of C-LM planned three different teaching

scenarios: in person teaching, partial remote teaching and complete online teaching. In 25 June 2020, the regional government published the act with the instructions regarding the beginning of the new course and on 27 July 2020, a digitalisation plan was approved. Technological equipment was bought to provide the region with supplementary technological materials. The budget for this programme was 15.8 million euros, including 25,000 laptops, 10,000 tablets, 10,000 routers and SIM cards, in addition to 2,000 webcams, that amounted to a total of 57,000 electronic devices. Previously to the beginning of the course, the government also prepared massive COVID-19 diagnostic tests to the 30,000 teachers and education staff of C-LM.²

Currently, social distancing of at least 1.5 m among pupils has to be followed in every school. Masks became compulsory for people above 6 years old. Mass gatherings for assemblies or blended groups in small spaces were banned. The goal was to create isolated class groups ‘bubbles’, preventing social interactions with other groups. It was essential to achieve proper ventilation in classrooms, so that respiratory particles could be diluted and reduce the infection risk (Asanati, Voden, & Majeed, 2021).

Music education in pandemic times

Due to the nature of the subject, music education faces particular harsh challenges. The impact of virus transmission in music classrooms and performances has been analysed in a literature review by Williams and Underhill (2020). Classroom transmission was analysed in activities employing a wide range of musical tasks, instrument hygiene and risk prevention. A further analysis by Williams and Underhill, (2020, p. 17) concluded that there was ‘still no clear consensus as to the role that children play, the transmission paths and the implications for the full return of schools’. In this sense, Liu (2020) affirms that music teachers should consider different aspects helping to create appealing learning experiences for pupils.

According to Daubney and Fautley (2021, p. 3) ‘Music teachers quickly worked to adapt to new and often unfamiliar models, and we have no doubt that a plethora of research on the impact of this is currently underway’.

Based on the ISM UK report *The Heart of the School is missing* (Underhill, 2020), responses from more than 1,300 music teachers were collected, showing a significant fall in music teaching in schools. Accordingly, 68% of primary school teachers and 39% of secondary school teachers reported a reduction in music education, as a result of the pandemic. In the 2020–2021 course, instrumental lessons in the classroom were not continuing in 35% of primary schools and 28% of secondary schools. As the pupils stayed in their classrooms, music specialist rooms were substituted and music teachers had to move around the schools.

In relation to the teaching of music in Spanish primary education, Belmonte (2021) points out that the pandemic has caused radical changes both in the teaching–learning processes and in the design of resources and tasks by teachers. Meanwhile, teachers continue to seek new ways to integrate virtual and in-person teaching processes of music in this educational stage (Stocco & Jaramillo, 2021).

Focusing on the impact of the pandemic on music in Spain, there are studies related to the emotional and family level (Álvarez, Masanet, & Cano, 2020; Cabedo, Arriaga, & Moliner, 2021; Riaño & Fernández, 2021), with the new technological and methodological strategies to face the teaching of music (Hernández & Pedraza, 2020; Palau, Mogas, & Ucar, 2020) or with new platforms and strategies related to musical expression (Pires *et al.*, 2020; Roig, 2020).

However, there is a lack of studies on the perception of Spanish music teachers over the current situation of teaching–learning music in schools. In this sense, this work opens an important research line that aims to focus attention on teaching music to pupils, to know their current situation and the keys that may allow us to move forward, foreseeing the 2021–2022 academic year.

Method

This quantitative research has been carried out in primary education schools in the province of Albacete, a geographical area belonging to the Autonomous Community of C-LM (Spain). Regarding the research method used, a descriptive study was chosen through an online survey. According to Pérez (2009) and Sabariego (2010) in these surveys, the group of people from the context under study provides information related to their perceptions related to the research topic, in this case, the teaching–learning processes of music in schools between September 2020 and March 2021. This allowed us to seize the professional reality in the current situation of the COVID-19 crisis.

One of the strengths of this work is the profile of the participants, the music teachers. They possess an exclusive and fundamental knowledge (Morales, 2008) to understand what is happening within schools in these months characterised by the pandemic restrictions.

Sample

The sample was composed of music teachers from the Spanish province of Albacete. A total of 96 teachers could be reached by email and answered an online questionnaire. This province is made up of 88 municipalities and has a total of 141 primary education schools. However, not all of them have a music teacher specialist. The reduced workload of this subject and the specificity of each school imply that some of them must teach music in two or more schools. For this reason, the total number of teachers of music education in the province amounts to 108 ($N = 108$).

In order to reach the largest possible number of the target population, an intentional non-probabilistic sampling was used (Cardona, 2008; Tójar & Matas, 2009), making the population coincide with the sample. Once the questionnaire delivery period was over, the number of participants amounted 96 ($n = 96$), being 30.2% men ($f = 29$) and 69.8% women ($f = 67$), reaching a very high representativeness, reflected in the results obtained when applying the formula for finite samples, where the confidence level was of 97%, the confidence interval of 3.71% and the precision level of 50% ($p = q = 50\%$). On the other hand, considering the sample sizes for educational research by Krejcie & Morgan (in Cardona, 2008, p. 119), our sample is located between the parameters:

$$N = 100/n = 80$$

$$N = 110/n = 86$$

Being the size of the sample $n = 96$ and the size of the population $N = 108$, it can be affirmed that the general criteria of representativeness are met and that its size is not biased (Tójar & Matas, 2009).

The data provided by the C-LM Ministry of Education (via email) indicate that the number of students enrolled in primary education schools in the province of Albacete in the 2020–2021 school year amounts to 35,365. The great embodiment of the sample allows to affirm, therefore, that the results obtained in this research reflects practically all the primary school students of music education in the area of this study, the province of Albacete.

Instrument

The data collection instrument was an ad hoc-designed electronic questionnaire, called *Questionnaire on the music teaching–learning processes in primary education in times of COVID-19*. It was validated by four experts from different disciplines (Didactics of Musical Expression, Pedagogy, Research Methodologies and Musicology), who assessed the clarity, relevance, understanding and logical distribution of the questions.

Table 1. Structure of dimensions and variables in the electronic questionnaire

Dimensions	Variables
D.1: Professional data	Gender; sex; employment situation; professional category; teaching experience
D.2: Data on the teaching–learning processes of music in the school of the respondent	Music classroom; number of sessions; Orff instruments; recorder; other instruments; singing; corporal expression; active listening; musical practice; musical theory
D.3: ICT implementation as a direct consequence of COVID-19	Use of digital technology; digital electronic tools
D.4: Incidence of the pandemic in the school and relationship with the teaching duties	School's incidence; timetable incidence and in the teaching duties of the music specialist

An analysis of the internal confidence of the questionnaire scales was carried out using the Cronbach's Alpha test, obtaining values of the Alpha statistic = 0.731, an acceptable result as it was greater than 0.70 (Davenport *et al.*, 2015). Likewise, the Friedman chi-square test was carried out for the variables in range format (critical level = $0.000 < 0.05$) and the Cochran chi-square test for the dichotomous variables (critical level = $0.000 < 0.05$) showing, in both cases, the suitability of our tool.

Pozzo, Borgobello, and Pierella (2018) state the advantages of electronic questionnaires: they make it possible to access a large group of the population in a very short time, the process of completion and the delivery to the participants is facilitated and guaranteed anonymously and it helps respondents answer with greater freedom.

The design was adjusted to the type of questionnaires referred to the norm, since each of the questions posed presented valid and correct answers (Lozano & De la Fuente, 2009). In this sense, the participants had to choose dichotomous answers (yes-no type), the Likert scale answers (1-Never/Nothing; 2-Little; 3-Quite a lot; 4-Much) and also range or interval answers, more adjusted to their daily reality in the classroom.

The survey was defined based on four dimensions or blocks of interest made up of different variables (Table 1).

In addition, a series of open questions was posed to tackle the professional reality of the participants, aiming to increase the precision levels and rigour in the data collection.

The distribution of the questionnaire was carried out through two different channels: via email to the management teams of the schools and forwarded to the music specialists of the schools, and via WhatsApp, to various groups of music teachers in the province of Albacete.

Finally, the data obtained were entered in the SPSS v.24 statistical package, which allowed us to carry out an in-depth descriptive analysis of frequencies, central tendencies (mean and median) and dispersion (standard deviation and range).

Results and discussion

The analysis of results is presented following the four-dimensional structure used in the data collection tool.

Dimension 1. Professional data

As shown in Table 2 and Fig. 2, the participating teachers have an average age ranging from 31 to 45 years ($M = 2.94$), an extensive teaching experience ($M = 3.42$) and a stable working situation (f career officials = 63, f private state funded = 19, f private = 2).

Table 2. Central tendency and dispersion measures

Variables	Central Tendency		Dispersion	
	M	Mdn	SD	R
Age	2.94	3.00	1.186	5
Employment situation	1.58	1.00	0.879	3
Professional category	1.46	1.00	0.710	3
Teaching experience	3.42	3.50	1.470	5

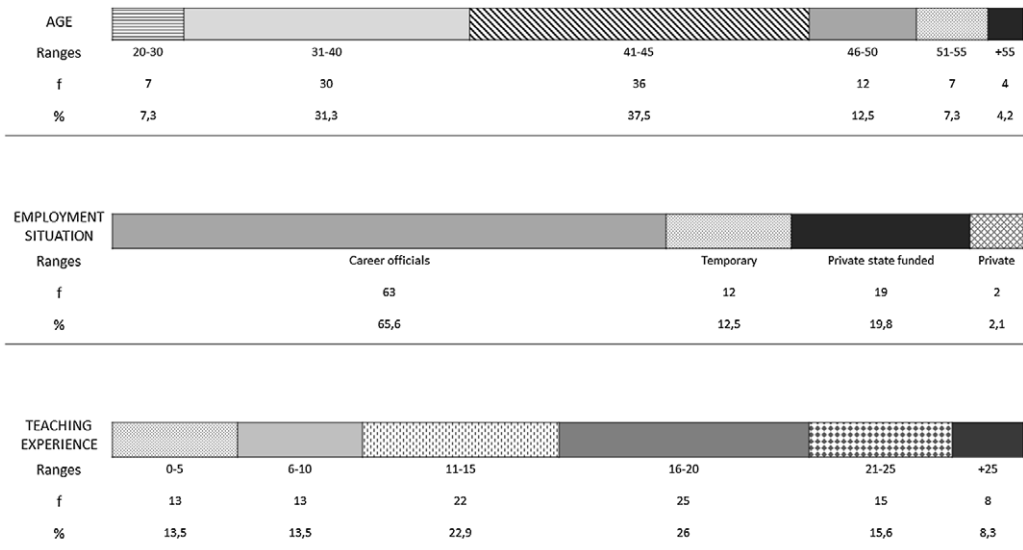


Figure 2. Frequencies (f) and percentages (%) corresponding to the dimension 1 by ranges.

This highlights the existence of a very important job stability, as well as a high rate of experienced teachers work experience >5–7 years (according to Vonk & Schars, 1987; Imbernón, 2009). In this sense, 72.8% of the teachers surveyed ($f = 70$) have a working experience above 11 years.

Dimension 2. Data on the learning processes of music

This dimension details the most important aspects related to the teaching practice and the teaching–learning processes of music in pandemic times (Table 3). In this sense, one of the aspects that stands out is that, prior to the arrival of COVID-19, 22.9% of the participants ($f = 22$) did not have a specific music education classroom, compared to 77.1% ($f = 74$) of specialists who did have this specific space. However, at the moment, only 7.3% ($f = 7$) state that they maintain their own classroom, while 69.8% affirms to keep it with usage restrictions ($f = 26$) or does not have a classroom at all ($f = 41$), referring to this fact as one of the aspects that most influences the normal progress of the teaching–learning processes of music.

Regarding the current state of the educational-musical strategies of the primary music education curriculum, the teachers surveyed point out that active listening activities are being the least affected with 80.2% ($f = 77$) finding no difficulty in carrying them out. As shown in Fig. 3, the instrumental practice seems to have the greatest problems in its implementation:

Table 3. Central tendency and dispersion of the variables related to the teaching–learning processes of music in times of pandemic

Variables	Central tendency		Dispersion	
	M	Mdn	SD	R
Use of the specific classroom	2.81	3.00	0.874	3
Variation in number of sessions	3.54	4.00	0.939	3
Use of Orff resources	2.45	2.00	0.869	3
Orff strategies	2.55	2.50	1.383	3
Other resources	3.07	3.00	1.059	4
Recorder strategies	2.94	3.00	0.818	3
Implementation other instruments	3.95	4.00	0.550	4
Singing strategies	1.90	2.00	0.864	3
Corporal expression strategies	2.31	2.00	0.730	3
Musical practice difficulties	3.00	3.00	0.616	3
Musical theory difficulties	2.35	2.00	0.858	3

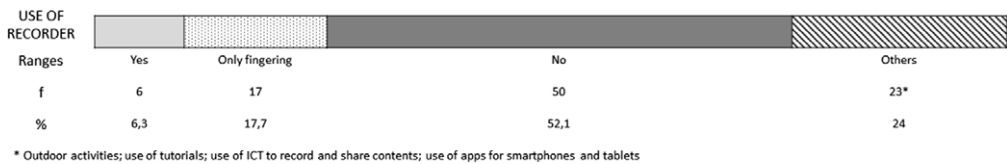


Figure 3. Frequencies (f) and percentages (%) by ranges, related with the instrumental practice.

- The activities related to the learning and performing of the recorder have been reduced to simple fingering exercises or to the use of video tutorials and home practice ($f = 40$). Only a small number of participants are using outdoor spaces to carry out activities with the instrument ($f = 6$) although this practice is dependent on weather conditions. On the other hand, it is remarkable the large number of teachers ($f = 50$) claim not to be able to carry out learning and interpretation activities with this instrument, either in class or through digital platforms.
- The performance with Orff instruments has become another drawback. The surveyed teachers expose the great difficulty in making instrumentations and other activities with these resources. In certain cases of those who are carrying out practices with Orff instruments ($f = 12$), teachers have opted for cleaning them between sessions and the use of course-specific bubble boxes with a small number of instruments.

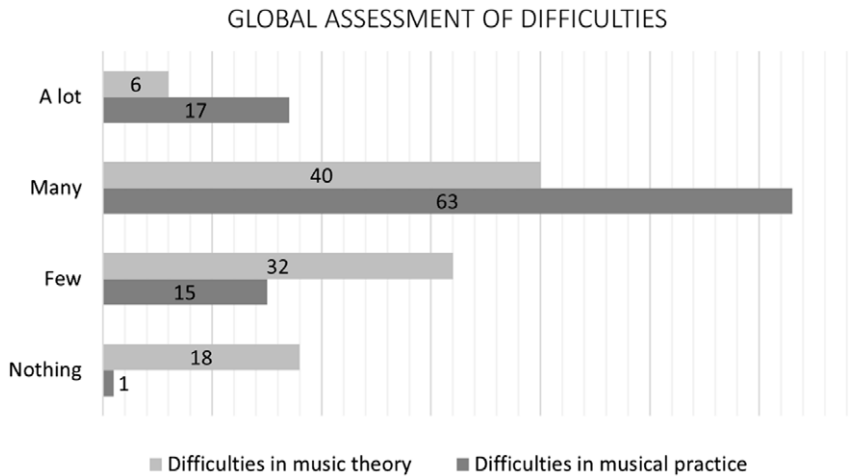


Figure 4. Overall figures (f and %) about the difficulties encountered in learning-teaching processes of musical practice and music theory.

Both, teachers who implement instrumental practices with the recorder and Orff resources and those who do not ($f = 69$), point out that at the beginning of the course, they requested alternative material (Chinese chopsticks, drumsticks, glasses, etc.) and home-made instruments. Using these tools, they have worked out all the necessary aspects related to the educational-musical field. In addition, they have utilised body percussion as a more accessible strategy to develop their students' capacities related to instrumental practice.

In relation to this area, a high percentage of respondents (28.1%, $f = 27$) state that their work situation prevents them from carrying out any kind of instrumental practice, and therefore, their students are not in a proper position to develop these creative, compositional and interpretive skills.

On the other hand, the number of specialists who chose to ask their students for an alternative instrument such as the ukulele ($f = 2$), the glockenspiel ($f = 6$) or a small keyboard ($f = 5$) is practically absent at 13.6%.

Regarding the activities related to school singing, 83.3% of the teachers surveyed ($f = 80$) claimed that they were not encountering difficulties when performing singing activities in a standardised way.

Greater difficulties arose in the physical expression activities. A 62.5% ($f = 60$) of the respondents indicate that they could carry them out, but following specific protocols related to the amplitude of movements and the spaces assigned to each student, or the constant ventilation.

In contrast, 21.9% ($f = 21$) of the participants indicated that the conditions in which they are currently working prevent them from developing activities related to physical expression.

Generally, it should be noted that the most important obstacles that music specialists are encountering in their teaching are directly related to musical practice, while the strategies related to music theory are not undergoing considerable variations (Fig. 4).

Regarding the schedule changes that this discipline has undergone during the pandemic, most teachers who participated in this study reported that their schools have maintained, without variations, the time devoted to music education (Fig. 5).

Dimension 3. ICT implementation as a direct consequence of COVID-19

Regarding the implementation of ICT resources assisting the music teaching-learning processes (Fig. 6), 81.3% of the teachers ($f = 78$) recognised that they used different tools and digital platforms, while 18.8% ($f = 18$) did not.

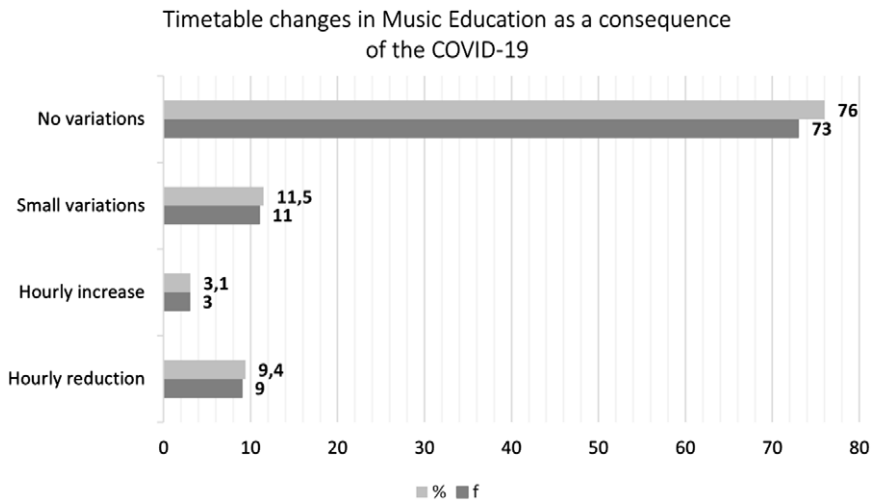


Figure 5. Time variations in the subject of music education caused by the pandemic.

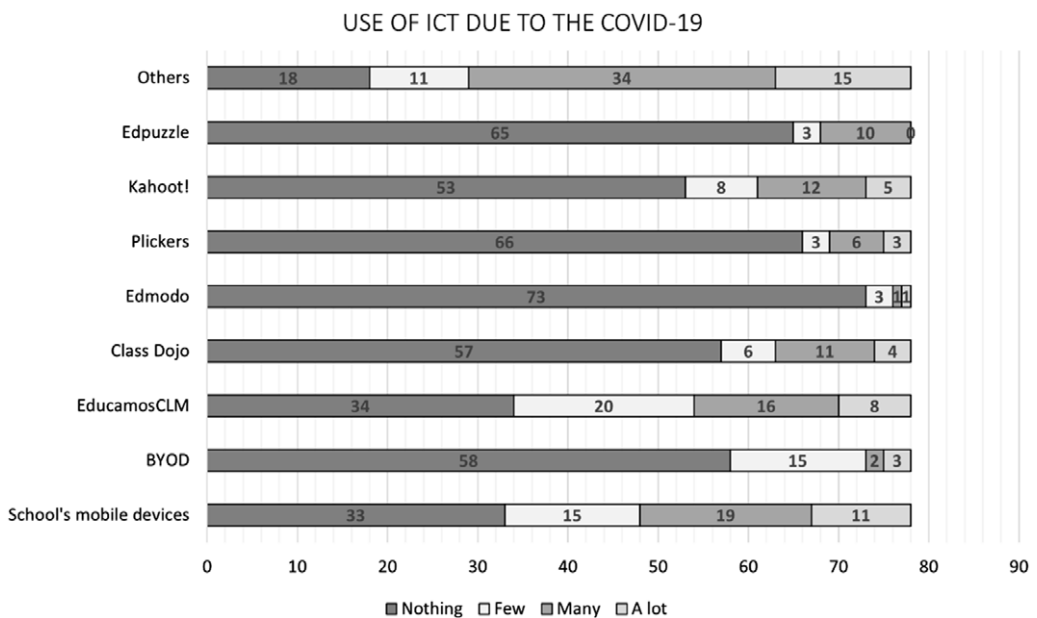


Figure 6. Frequency (f) related to the ICT use, due to the COVID-19.

The diversity of digital tools used by the respondents (Fig. 7) is particularly striking, as well as their reported low use of the *EducamosCLM* platform ($f = 24$). *EducamosCLM* is a digital tool created by the educational administration of C-LM for the primary education schools, including the province of Albacete, to address the three learning scenarios defined for this school year: face-to-face teaching, hybrid teaching and online teaching.

Dimension 4. Incidence of the pandemic in health terms and relationship with teaching

Between September 2020 and March 2021, the incidence of COVID-19 in schools in the province of Albacete (Table 4) has not been very prevalent, in terms of health. So far, there has been no case

Table 4. Incidence of the pandemic on the school duties and influence on music teachers

Variables	Central tendency		Dispersion	
	M	Mdn	SD	R
Incidence in the school	2.66	3.00	0.678	2
Influence on teaching work	1.92	2.00	0.574	2

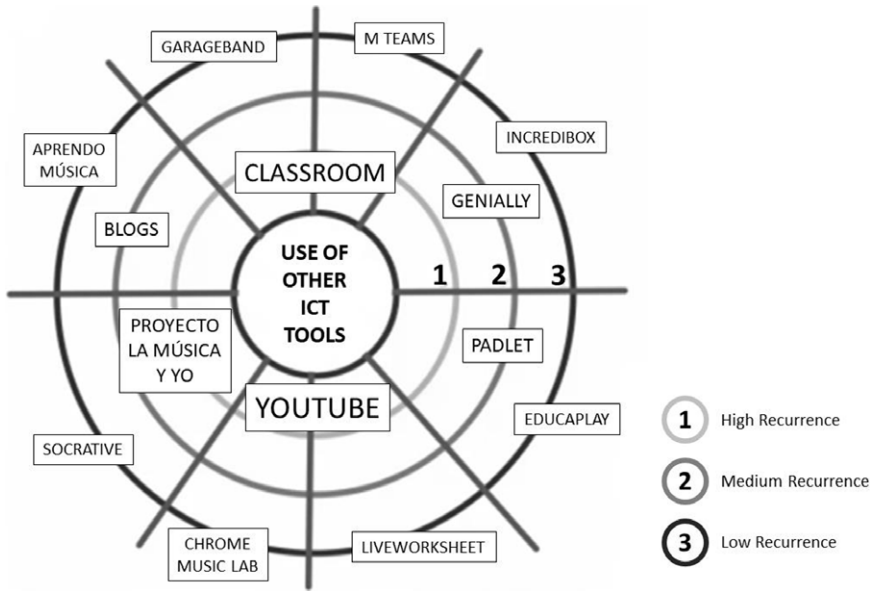


Figure 7. Use of other digital tools according to recurrence and frequency.

of closure or total confinement of any school; however, 45.8% ($f = 44$) have suffered lockdown in some classes, and 42.7% ($f = 41$) have reported isolations as well, for students and teachers and other staff of the school.

Regarding the most significant consequences of the pandemic in relation to the specific functions that teachers had to assume, 66.7% of the participants ($f = 64$) indicate that their functions have not undergone significant changes (Fig. 8). The remaining 33.3% ($f = 32$) had to perform tutoring duties and, above all, had to modify their schedule at times, to replace colleagues who were not able to attend schools at specific times and for reasons related to the COVID-19 incidence.

Finally, the participants could express their opinions and perceptions regarding the current situation of music teaching at this educational stage. Most of them pointed out that music education is one of the most affected subjects by the COVID-19 crisis, as musical expression activities are being strongly limited and the discipline is suffering. A recurrent comment is related to the reduced time allotted to this discipline, due to the many substitutions that music specialists were required to carry out.

Another recurring opinion relates to the apparent lack of agreement on the criteria of educational administrations. The perception of respondents focuses on three areas: first, the lack of material and economic resources to adapt the curriculum to the pandemic situation; second, there has been a lack of effective coordination between health and education administrations, which has sometimes led to moments of confusion and uncertainty and third, the lack of human

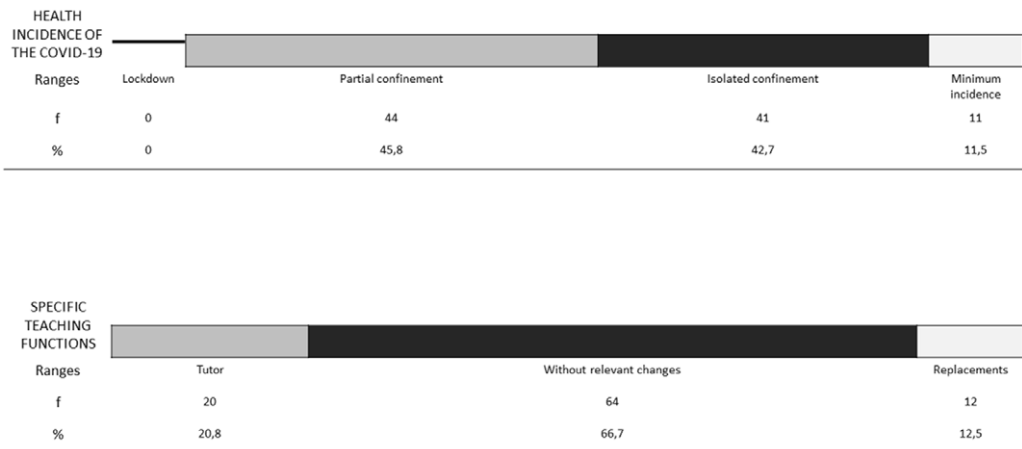


Figure 8. Ranges related to the health incidence in the schools and to the specific teaching functions derived from the current situation.

resources to cope with the health and educational standards, ordered by the administrations. This has significantly increased the workload of both teachers and non-teaching staff of the schools.

Conclusions

According to the norms and protocols followed in Spain and particularly in the region of C-LM, the government has prioritised in-person teaching while reinforcing the preventive measures against COVID-19 outlined in the official publications at the national and regional level. Based on these protocols, schools had to assume important changes that have also affected the teaching-learning processes of the different curricular areas.

Regarding the current situation of music education teachers in primary schools in the province of Albacete, the data highlight that the average of the teachers have a wide professional trajectory and great job stability.

Considering their opinions and perceptions on the impact of the pandemic on their teaching, it is remarkable that there exists a wide consensus related to the damages caused by the loss of the specific music classroom. This has been a result of the conversion of the music classroom into a time or space for other goals.

Most teachers point out that musical expression, especially instrumental practice, is the main area that is suffering the consequences of COVID-19. In this sense, the performance with the recorder and with Orff instruments is very complicated and, in many cases, these instruments have been replaced by alternative material.

Considering the part of vocal expression, the practices continue to be maintained on similar levels to previous courses, although they are carried out, mostly with a mask and in spaces with good ventilation in compliance with protocols.

In relation to the part of corporal expression or body music, the health recommendations regarding the safety distance and the mobility of students within the classroom seem to be affecting activities. These instructions are limiting, to some extent, the implementation of this type of activities, as they have been reduced to individual exercises, due to the social distancing restrictions.

These limitations have forced teachers to update the use and implementation of ICT in the music classroom, which has increased substantially. Channels and platforms such as YouTube, Classroom or Class Dojo and specific music education blogs have become essential tools in the

proper development of the teaching–learning processes of music. It is important to remark that the *EducamosCLM* platform, created especially for teachers in C-LM, had a minority acceptance among the music teachers, who have preferred other platforms and digital resources.

With regard to the physical health situation, during the months in which this research has been carried out, no cases of classroom closures or total confinement in Albacete schools have been recorded. According to the participants, the incidence of the virus is not reaching high levels in schools. Thus, to date, the in-person teaching is maintained, and it has not been necessary to activate any of the other itineraries established in the protocols against the COVID-19.

The teachers also stated that their work as music teachers has not been significantly modified. However, the substitutions of colleagues have resulted into an added difficulty, as the curriculum development of this subject has been reduced. In addition, only a small number of participants had to assume tutoring duties, not being able to teach their music education classes.

Finally, we would like to thank the dedication of these teachers who are working to develop musical curriculum in their schools despite the difficulties. These complex situations involve both professional problems and personal health. They had to make huge efforts to maintain high levels of creativity to face the teaching–learning situations of music in primary education.

Notes

1 Hereafter C-LM.

2 The whole of the information related to regional acts regulating the COVID-19 situation is available at: <http://www.educa.jccm.es/es/coronavirus>.

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