

Musical education and resilience: A path to economic and emotional empowerment for rural children

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: (1) To identify the various factors that facilitate or hinder the development and consolidation of musical education for rural children; (2) to assess whether child harassment and bullying towards girls exists in a rural community; and (3) to analyze how the practice of music promotes a personal and economic empowerment—factors that facilitate resilience—among boys and girls.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A qualitative research methodology was used. The unit of analysis comprised the child population of the Tepexilotla community, located within the mesophilic cloud forest in the Altas Montañas region of Veracruz. The sample of children was self-selected and comprised the participants in a musical group project that started with flutes. Based on participant and anecdotal observation, four thematic axes were selected: (1) musical education, (2) child harassment and bullying, (3) resilience, and (4) child empowerment.

Results: Initially, 26 children participated—18 boys and eight girls. Boys had a larger learning territory because some girls suffered harassment and/or bullying by their classmates during lessons or on the way from home to school. This conduct led to a gradual drop-out among the girls in the group. After the departure of the music teacher, the presence and institutional accompaniment of the Colegio de Postgraduados strengthened group resilience through music master classes. Currently, most group members have become young independent musicians playing in different musical groups—an activity that enhances their economic, personal, and family empowerment.

Study limitations/implications: The study was conducted only among the child population of a rural micro-region; it is not a quantitative study.

Findings/Conclusions: Gender characteristics as construed under the patriarchy have a detrimental influence on the musical education of girls. On the other hand, they benefit boys by replicating the private space for girls and the public one for boys. Hence, boys have more opportunities for formative education, while girls see their educational development prevented or limited, which harms their future female economic empowerment. However, rural musical training is a splendid educational resource that strengthens economic and cultural empowerment opportunities among rural children and youth.

Keywords: Gender, Feminism, Patriarchy, Inequality, Bullying, Child harassment.

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INTRODUCTION

The right to a formal and informal education has not been exercised under gender equality conditions in rural areas, since education for boys has had priority over school



attendance among girls. In rural communities, the high levels of marginalization, the lack of opportunities, and the lack of middle and high schools push children and adolescents to drop out of school at an early stage. Moreover, women in rural areas tend to marry when they are very young. Patriarchy has a powerful influence on rural areas, limiting access to formal and informal education for girls. Factors such as bullying and harassment also lead to school drop-out. These can cause severe problems: depression, insecurity, sadness, anguish, anxiety, head and stomach aches, as well as self-image and self-esteem issues. The word trauma means “broken skin”. Resilience, in turn, is the ability to overcome the effects and traumas (emotional, physical, sexual) that any given problem can produce in a person. Thus, we deem musical practice helpful for children to overcome trauma and advance their independence, self-esteem, and creativity (Alcira, 2019).

Inner strength and control locus (internal control to face difficult situations) are key to resilience (Pimentel-Aguilar, 2008).

Stockdale *et al.* (2002) found harmful effects of long-term trauma in their research on bullying among elementary school boys and girls. Rico and Muñoz (2022) examined the musical education programs for early-age children (under six years old) conducted in Colombia. They found that the physical, bodily, and cognitive aspects are essential when developing educational programs. Thus, musical education is presented as an alternative to address the difficulties affecting rural children and youth. Through instrument practice, musical education can enhance children’s development and integrate them into a community musical group. In this way, rural children and youth can broaden their horizons regarding their life expectations and increase their tools for personal development, favoring the generation of extra income without leaving school. Due to the social conditions prevailing in the Tepexilotla community, there are several cases of teenage marriage. The high levels of marginalization in the community cause a high level of school drop-outs among boys and girls. The musical project “Sonidos de la Niebla” [Sounds of the Mist] provided an alternative that enriched the education of rural children, particularly girls, in the micro-region. In learning to play an instrument, these girls found an alternative for economic and cultural development. Moreover, musical education encouraged some children to continue playing music in various independent groups. The courses and workshops organized for the “Sonidos de la Niebla” musical group project focused exclusively on rural childhood in the micro-region of Tepexilotla, inviting boys and girls alike.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The unit of analysis comprised the group of boys and girls who participated intermittently in the children’s musical group “Sonidos de la Niebla” between 2015 and 2019. This research was conducted through the music master classes organized by the first author of this article. Each master class session was held over four days and the series of classes

Table 1. Key factors of rural children’s resilience and rural musical education.

Interior strength	Locus of control	Internal control
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Source: Own elaboration by Silvia Pimentel and Edgar Ramírez.

covered five thematic axes: harmony, choir, rhythmic, ensemble, and instruments. The instrument master classes covered the following subjects: flute, violin, and vocal technique.

The musical group originated in mid-2015, with the teachings of professor and director Apolinar Vázquez de la Cruz, aided by saxophonist Salomé Vázquez as his representative, and musician Miguel Ángel Cruz Alvarado. They taught 32 girls and boys from Tepexilota and the neighboring communities of Tetla, Carrizal, and other towns. The number of group members varied over time. The children were between seven and 15 years old. A qualitative study was conducted based on the observational recording of photographs, videos, lists, field notes, and historical memories. In 2015, 35 flutes were given to boys and girls, with 28 delivered in groups and the rest extemporaneously and sporadically, answering requests by children who expressed they also wanted instruments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Method

In 2015, the first author of this article acquired soprano flutes —an act of vital importance to start the project. To be selected by PACMyC [Spanish initials of Support



Figure 1. Flute master class by Jorge N. Loaiza Pimentel in 2015.

Table 2. Stages of the project.

Stage	Objetivo
Delivery of flute recorders	To increase the probability of being selected in PACMyC. One of the program evaluators mentioned the need for previous instruments to have the right to participate in the selection.
1st Flute master class	Flute course taught by the teacher Jorge N. Loaiza-Pimentel
Writing of the PACMYC proyect. (by Dr. S. Pimentel)	Be selected and participate to receive financial support and purchase more appropriate instruments for the group.
Initial purchase of 13 flute musical instruments	After being selected in the PACMyC 2016 call, these instruments were acquired with the award subsidy, which were selected by the professor-director of the musical group “Sonidos de la Niebla – Sounds of the Fog, Tepexilota Veracruz”. It continued of teaching face-to-face classes by the teacher-director of the group for 4 months.
Master classes	Harmony, solfeo and rhythmic by: Indra Garduño Reynoso, Edgar Ramírez, Alexis Rivera Palacios y Raquel Fuentes Hernández

Program for Municipal and Community Cultures], the musical groups competing in the call must already have musical instruments. Once support was gained in 2016, various instruments were purchased for the group: 1 drum set, 1 transverse flute, 1 saxophone, 1 guitarrón, 2 vigüelas, 4 violins, and 3 trumpets.

The departure of the teacher and director of the group to Mexico City in 2016 led some boys and girls to drop out. This event occurred approximately four months after the PACMyC project subsidy began.

The master classes were taught over three four-day work sessions. Thus, the musical project continued thanks to the participation of teachers from different musical disciplines, who strengthened the project’s musical education in the different aspects referred to in Table 3.

A survey was carried out in 2022 to measure the master classes’ impact on those members who had remained in the group the longest. Two girls and five boys between 12 and 22 years old participated. They evaluated various aspects of their experience within the group. The first question asked them to rate their experience in the group,

Table 3. Master classes group work by days.

Master Classes			
Teaching	Teacher/s	Journey	Date
Flute recorder	Jorge N. Loaiza Pimentel	2015	Septembre 6, of 2015
Chorus, ensamble	Alexis Rivera Palacios	working week	November 16, 17, 18, and 19, of 2017
Rythmic, batery, ensamble	Indra Garduño Reynoso	first working week:	16, 17, 18, 19 november of 2017
		2 nd working week	15, 16, 17, 18 december 2017
		3 rd working week	9, 10, 11 march 2018
Harmony, ensamble	Edgar Ramírez González	1 st working week	16, 17, 18, 19 november 2017
		2 nd working week	15, 16, 17, 18 december 2017
		3 rd working week	9, 10, 11 march 2018
Violin	Raquel Fuentes Hernández	3 rd working week	9, 10, 11 march 2018



Figure 2. Handing out flutes to boys and girls from the region in 2015.



Figure 3. Debut of the musical group “Sonidos de la Niebla” at the first Tepexilotla Ecocultural Festival in 2015. From left to right: Silvia Pimentel, Apolinar Vázquez, and Salomé Vázquez.



Figure 4. Third day of master classes in the community kindergarten in March 2018.

Cuadro 4. Members of the group in 2016 during the PACMyC subsidy.

Instrument	Boys	Girls
Violin	3	2
Guitars	2	
Trumpet	2	
Vihuela	3	
Guitarrón	1	
Total niños/niñas	10	2
Representative manager	1	
Rehersals coordinator	1	
Teacher and Group Director	1	

based on four parameters: excellent, good, average, and poor. Five participants rated their experience in the group as good, one rated their participation as average, and one as excellent. Regarding the departure of Professor Apolinar, in a range of happy, sad, and I did not care, five members stated that they felt sad about the teacher’s departure, while two said they did not care.



Figure 5. The soprano Alexis Rivera in singing class during the second master class session, 2017.

Table 5. Group development.

Topic	Beginning	Development	Last Stage
Musical education	In 2015 the boys and girls initially started with 35 flutes (with the support of Dra. Pimentel), 2 trumpets and a horn (with the support of Apolinar teacher).	The teacher and director taught classes to boys and girls in person in the community. In 2017 Then, he changed his address to Mexico City, from where he continued teaching classes sporadically via telephone, placing emphasis on trumpets.	Master classes from various teachers. Plus intensive flute course. 3 courses of master classes: harmony, music theory, rhythm, vocal technique, ensemble and violin.
Child harassment y bullying	The study room was in rough construction on the second floor, so an improvised staircase was used for access. This gave rise to the boys peeking out to see the girls' underwear underneath the dress when they went up the stairs.	The girls reported that when they went to the rehearsal to practice the instrument, the boys laughed at them and made gestures at them.	A mother and her daughter, who was studying at musical group, reported harassment by the director. This was categorically denied by the director himself.
Resilience and child empowerment	Most of the children (boys and girls) continued to attend music classes with the teacher and group director. La mayor parte de los niños siguieron asistiendo a las clases con el profesor y director del grupo.	Because the teacher changed his home address to Mexico City, some children reported missing him. They later went with a substitute woman teacher who taught a weekly violin class in the community. Low attendance was reported irregularly.	The PACMYC project was fulfilled by bringing in musician teachers who gave master classes in 4-day courses on different weekends. The master classes promoted knowledge on the following topics: Flute, violin, singing, harmony, ensemble and rhythm. Reinforcing the musical ensemble with 2 concerts: one in Córdoba city and a Christmas concert in the community chapel.
Economic empowerment	At the beginning, the children's musical group only participated in the Tepexilotla Ecocultural festival. After the first intervention in the Tepexilotla Ecocultural festival (2015), the group's participation was requested in different nearby towns. Events in which they participated with/without financial reward, voluntarily and with great enthusiasm.	Within a few months the group was hired at various events, where the teacher and director shared the income with the group members.	In 2018, the teacher and director of the group decided to convert the group into mariachi. As of 2019, the members play in different musical groups, in other states of Mexico and in Mexico City.

In this survey, six members took one of the master classes offered between 2015 and 2017. All of the participants stated that they would continue playing with Professor Apolinar. On a scale from 1 to 6 designed to measure how useful Professor Apolinar's classes were, five members rated them with a 5, one with a 4, and another one with a 3. Participants were also asked if they found playing a musical instrument of consequence. The ranges were "not at all useful", "moderately useful", and "very useful". Six responded with "very useful" and one with "moderately useful." Moreover, they were asked if playing a musical instrument helped them financially, to which six answers were affirmative and one was negative.

CONCLUSIONS

The benefits provided by musical education in such a remote community are undeniable. These benefits range from cultivating artistic endeavors based on learning to play a musical instrument to developing histrionic skills at an early age. These learnings facilitate interpersonal communication, improve self-esteem and personal self-image, and strengthen cognitive abilities such as attention, concentration, and memory. Rural community musical education prevents violence by putting an instrument in the hands of boys and girls. Moreover, it contributes to family income while providing an informal education alternative that benefits childhood and youth culture. Unfortunately, patriarchal education affects the performance of rural girls due to harassment and bullying.

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