

SURVEYING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND PRACTITIONER RESEARCHERS IN MUSIC EDUCATION IN SPAIN

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Resumen: Examinamos las diferencias entre los académicos y los profesionales que realizan investigación en la educación musical en España -considerando como profesionales a los profesores que trabajan en la educación Primaria y Secundaria y en las escuelas de música.- Un total de 29 personas (15 académicos y 14 profesionales) completaron un cuestionario en línea sobre su demografía, su educación y sus responsabilidades profesionales, así como sobre la relación que han establecido entre la investigación y la práctica educativa. Los resultados mostraron diferencias significativas entre ambos grupos. Las diferencias más importantes aparecieron en el grado de paridad de género dentro de cada grupo, en la extensión del trabajo colaborativo con otros investigadores y en la relación que establecen entre la investigación y la práctica. Los hallazgos enfatizaron la necesidad de una mayor colaboración entre académicos y profesionales y de una mayor igualdad de género entre académicos.

Palabras clave: Investigación académica, práctica educativa, igualdad de género, educación musical, investigación profesional, España.

Abstract: We examined the differences between academics and practitioners doing research in music education in Spain -considering as practitioners those teachers working in primary and secondary education and in music schools.- A total of 29 individuals (15 academics and 14 practitioners) completed an online questionnaire about their demographics, their education and their professional responsibilities, as well as about the relation they have established between research and educational practice. The results showed significant differences between both groups. The most important differences appeared in the degree of gender parity within each group, in the extent of collaborative work with other researchers and in the relationship they establish between research and practice. The findings emphasised the need for more collaborative research between academics and practitioners and for more gender equality between academics.

Keywords: Academic research, educational practice, gender equality, music education, practitioner research, Spain.

1. INTRODUCTION

Arts education around the world faces not just national challenges –traditions and identities– but also an increasing number of global issues (Maestracci, 2006). Likewise researchers in arts education –including researchers in music education– work in local contexts that can be understood from an international point of view (Bresler, 2007). In the case of Spain, research in music education is less advanced compared with other countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom or Australia, however we deal with similar difficulties and the identification of these problems is essential to improve research in our field.

1.1 ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

An important topic in education is the distinction between academic research and research developed by practitioners –in this survey we employ the term “practitioner research” (Zeichner and Noffke, 2001) and we consider as practitioners those teachers working in primary and secondary education and in music schools.

In the field of research in music education “the motivation for researchers arise from a real need to improve music teaching within the classroom” (Rusinek, 2006: 12). Nevertheless, as Nielsen states, “the relation of research in music education to music education in practice can be characterized as a continuum from great distance over cooperation to a close relation and full integration” (2009: 30). As Lytle and Cochran-Smith state, “almost by definition, teacher research is case study—the unit of analysis is typically the individual child, the classroom, or the school” (1992: 466). On one hand, practitioners are closer to this kind of research, though they also can develop other types of research; in Spain, practice-focused research in music has increased in recent years among practitioners (Subirats, 2011). On the other hand, “action research” (Elliott, 1991) is not only developed by practitioners but also by university teachers through what is called “collaborative action research” (Henson, 1996).

Having said that, however, in this survey we are not discussing the differences between action research and other types of research but reviewing the different ways practitioners and academics consider their research. We defend the topicality of our question bearing in mind that, firstly, our vision of educational research should include both teacher produced knowledge and knowledge produced by those in the academia (Zeichner, 1995; cited in O’Connell, 2009: 1885), secondly, some consider the “kind of knowledge” that practitioner-research produces to be inferior to and less valuable than other kinds of academic work (Roulston, 2005) and, thirdly, after decades of debate, the academy-practitioner question is not yet over (O’Connell, 2009).

1.2 RESEARCH IN MUSIC EDUCATION IN SPAIN

Despite the late arrival of music in the Spanish education system –the first law including music in primary and secondary schools dates from 1990 (LOGSE)– and the historical lack of connection between conservatories and universities, research in music education in Spain has not stopped growing in recent years.

During the last two decades of the 20th century Spanish universities started to develop research in music education. In the beginning, dissertations in this field were developed inside the Pedagogy departments: the first doctoral dissertation about music education was presented in 1981 at the Experimental Pedagogy Department of the Complutense University of Madrid (Río Sadornil). After 1983, a new law (LRU) allowed universities to create faculty departments in music teaching and the discipline finally was adopted by the academic institutions. Otherwise, the two main journals in the field, *Música*

y Educación and *Eufonía*, appeared respectively in 1988 and 1995. However these publications are not *sensu stricto* scientific journals, even though they have contributed to consolidating music education in our country.

With the coming of the 21st century, research in music education has taken off in Spain. Between 1981 and 1999 only sixteen doctoral dissertations about music education were defended in Spanish universities, but in the period going from 2000 to 2011 the total number of these reached one hundred-and-thirty-five (Oriol de Alarcón, 2012). Furthermore, two e-journals –with a deeper scientific view than their predecessors– appeared in the context of the university: *Revista Electrónica de LEEME-Electronic Journal of Music in Education* (LEEME), founded in the University of La Rioja in 1998, and *Revista Electrónica Complutense de Investigación en Educación Musical* (RECIEM), founded in the Complutense University of Madrid in 2004.

Since the implementation of the European Higher Education Area in 2007, research in music education has been reinforced in one way: many education faculties have created Masters degrees in “research in music education” –the terminal project being a research investigation.

The positive context of the last decade in the field also helped to develop research inside the classroom. Maravillas Díaz (1998) was one of the first authors speaking about action-research in our country and nowadays many Spanish teachers –working in primary education, secondary education and music schools– include research as a way to improve their practice. However, the scientific education of practitioners remains unknown and we do not know what percentage of teachers working in primary and secondary education and music schools holds a doctorate or a master’s degree in music education.

On the other hand, for Spanish teachers who acquire professorial positions at universities, research and publication are a main expectation. Research has been carried out more and more within teams over the last decade. Teamwork and collaboration are essential for modern science and Spanish universities are working on the consolidation of groups of research in music education. Despite this type of efforts, like Kenneth H. Phillips states (2008, p. 18), research in music education around the world is full of “one-shot” studies, namely, no line of investigation is ongoing. Gabriel Rusinek –editor of RECIEM– underlines the difficulty in abandoning individualistic research in Spain: “[b]ecause music is not a priority for the educational authorities or for public fund providers (private resources for research are rare because they are not tax deductible), it is not strange that most research has been individual, unfunded, short-length doctoral research” (2007: 173). Moreover, it is difficult to create social networks around the same subjects and interests because there are few conferences focussing on research in music education in Spain. The Society for Music Education in the Spanish State (SEM-EE) and the most important universities in our country try to promote this sort of meetings, but funding is scarce.

Regarding primary and secondary education and music schools, the problem of individualistic work appears again: the current Spanish school system makes innovation and research difficult, the main obstacles being closed and overloaded curricula, rigid academic structures and the lack of teamwork (Miralles, Maquilón, Hernández and Correa, 2012). Despite these problems there are many school teachers who try to improve education through research. Owing to the high number of music teachers working in both primary and secondary education in Spain, research in our field has a great potential. However this context will change in the next few years because after the last general law on education (LOMCE, 2013) music is no more a mandatory subject in Spanish schools.

Another important issue we want to develop in this survey is gender equality in relation to research in music education, a subject that is especially sensitive if we speak about academia. John Grashel –in a study where the purposes were to identify women authors in the *Journal of Research in Music Education* from 1953 through 1994 and to categorize the research methodology employed by these inves-

tigators– stated that “as more women gain academic positions that require them to advise graduate research and teach research methodology courses, their contribution to the research literature of music education will undoubtedly continue to multiply” (1998: 26).

Despite there being no study about the percentage of women teaching music education and its methodology in Spanish universities, we can analyse general statistics. According to the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality of Spain (Instituto de la Mujer [IM], 2013), women represent 38.64 percent of faculty members in Spanish universities, however, this percentage falls to 19.53 if we talk about chair positions.

As stated in the Women and Science Unit of Spain, if we compare men and women of the same age, with the same post PhD experience, the same research time, the same field of research and the same family situation, we can see that men publish 1.5 times more articles on average than women do (Unidad Mujeres y Ciencia, 2011: 45). The question then arises as to what extent this inequality –especially visible in the higher echelons of the professional career– affects the way women do research in music education.

2. METHOD

2.1 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this paper we discuss the differences between university researchers and practitioners doing research in music education in Spain. We formulate one fundamental question: Can we perceive significant differences between the way academic and practitioner researchers in music education carry out their research in Spain?

This main question lead us to four secondary questions:

- What level of education do researchers in music education in Spain have?
- Is research in music education in our country being developed in a gender-equitable context?
- Do they develop research within teams or individually?
- What kind of relationship do they establish between research and educational practice?

2.2 PARTICIPANTS

In order to ensure that participants were developing real research activities in the last few years, we surveyed Spanish researchers in music education having published papers –between 2004 and 2014– in the two main scientific e-journals in the field: *Revista Electrónica de LEEME-Electronic Journal of Music in Education* and *Revista Electrónica Complutense de Investigación en Educación Musical* (RECIEM).

In the period selected, a total of 115 authors published at least one paper in one of these two journals –most of them having published as a co-author. Out of the total number of authors, 84 were researchers working in Spain and 31 were researchers working abroad. Among the researchers working in Spain, 9 of them published two articles, 3 researchers published three articles, 3 researchers publish four and 1 researcher published a total of six articles. Consequently, 84 questionnaires were distributed –via e-mail– to the authors working in Spain and having published papers between 2004 and 2014 in these two e-journals.

2.3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND RECRUITMENT

A questionnaire was developed for distribution via e-mail to the participants. The e-mail included the

objectives of the survey and a link to a Google Form comprising of 16 items about the respondents' demographics, their education, their professional responsibilities and their research activity (Appendix 1). The identities of the respondents were not linked to the survey responses because of data protection. Questions one to eight were multiple-choice or 'Yes/No'. The last two questions (nine and ten) were answered on a 5-point Likert scale and focused, respectively, on the relation between research and educational practice and on the main problems respondents encounter in carrying their research out.

The survey was conducted during a 9-week period (between July and September 2014). We decided to launch the questionnaire the second week of July because in this period teachers in Spain have already finished classes and they have non-academic accomplishments (professional meetings, research activities, implementation of teaching resources, etc.).

2.4 RESPONDENTS

During the data collection, two e-mails reported a sending error, so the survey finally arrived to 83 researchers. A total of 29 individuals completed the online questionnaire, this is a response rate of 35%, which is a low percentage. However, low response rates are usual in online surveys (Heerwegh y Loosveldt, 2009): in a meta-analysis of surveys research, Shih and Fan (2009) stated that Internet survey response rates were, on average, 33%. In Spain, Pavía, Rausell, Marco and Coll (2011) conducted an online survey among teachers from a Spanish university in which the response rate was 25%, both figures below our response percentage.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

In the analysis of the results we use both descriptive and inferential statistics. For every question we establish three frequencies (reported as percentages): the frequency between practitioners, the frequency between academics and the general frequency. Relevant differences in a specific item are represented by graphs.

The two groups we are analysing –academics (n=15) and practitioners (n=14)– are independent and not normally distributed, so to find significant differences between them in the Likert-scale questions, we employ a non-parametric test: the Mann-Whitney U test (with alpha set at 0.05). All data has been surveyed through SPSS version 22.

3. RESULTS

Academics represent 51.7% of respondents (n=15) and practitioners 48.3% (n=14). Concerning their initial education, there are no differences between both groups: only 7.1% of practitioners and 13.3% of academics hold a Bachelor's degree in music education as initial education; 71.4% of practitioners and 73.3% of academics have a Bachelor's degree in music or in musicology; and 21.4% of practitioners and 13.3% of academics have both degrees as initial education.

Considering the number of doctoral degrees, we notice the first difference between both groups of researchers: 93.3% of academics hold a doctorate compared to the 57.1% of practitioners. Having said that, there are no significant differences in the field of study in which they got their doctoral degree, 75% of practitioners and 69.2% of academics developed their doctoral dissertations in music education –the rest of both percentages did it in another field of study.

If we talk about gender (Figure 1), males –58.6% of respondents– outnumbered their female counterparts –41.4%. Between academics, female ratio falls to 26.7%. However, between practitioners this gender predominance is reversed: females represent 57.1% in front of 42.9% of males.

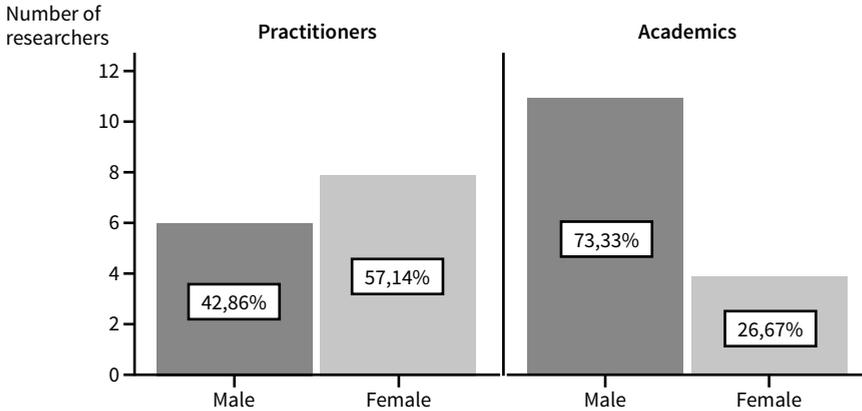


Figure 1. Gender predominance between researchers.

Concerning the inclusion of research activity into the work schedule of participants, 86.7% of academics have available time for research recognized by their institution –13.3% of them not having this labour agreement. For their part, only 14.3% of practitioners have this clause on their contracts –85.7% of them do not.

Another important difference between practitioners and academics is the extent of their participation in congresses (Figure 2). Regarding the question “have you participated in any congress about music education in the last year?”, only 14.29% of practitioners answered “yes”, as opposed to the 60% of academics giving the same response.

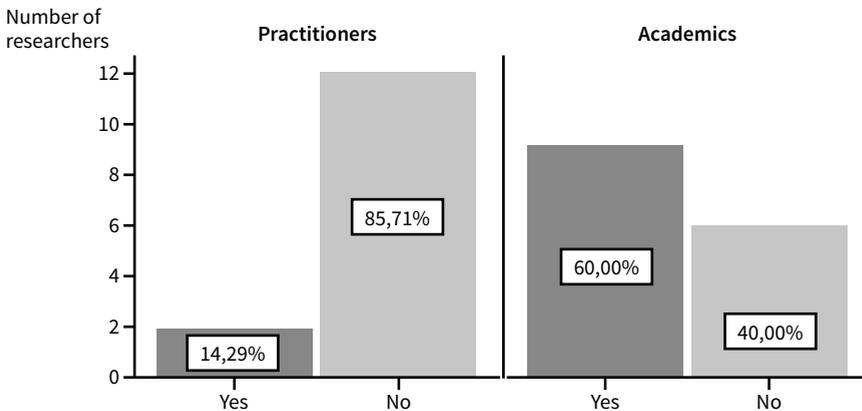


Figure 2. Have you participated in any congress about music education in the last year?

The most important difference between practitioners and academics appears in question 8, “Are you taking part in any research team at the moment?” (Figure 3). While only 21.43% of practitioners are taking part in a research team, all academics develop their research activity inside a team.

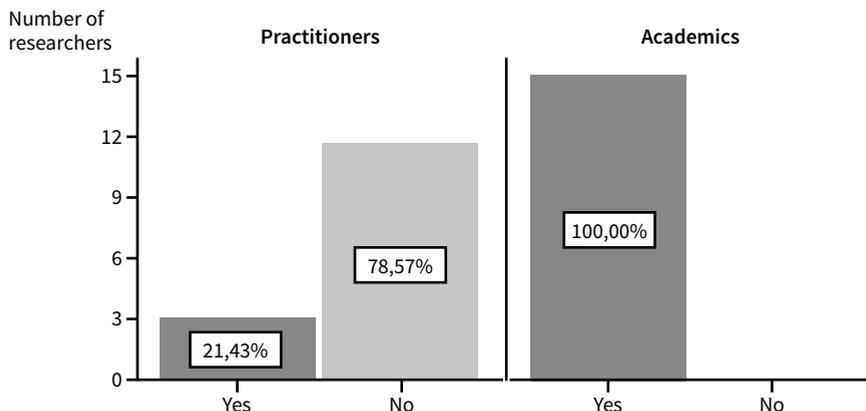


Figure 3. Are you taking part in any research team at the moment?

Mann-Whitney U tests indicated statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between practitioners and academics on only 2 of the 8 Likert-scale items (tables 1 and 2): practitioners expressed significantly greater agreement with statements 11, “action-research is a very appropriate method to enhance research in music education” ($U = 35.00$; $Z = -3.23$; $p = .001$), and 12, “I would like to do more research inside the classroom” ($U = 38.00$; $Z = -3.25$; $p = .001$).

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of practitioners and academics in statements about their research practice*.

	Practitioners		Academics		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
9. I try to focus my research on a main topic.	2.93	1.20	3.20	1.01	3.07	1.10
10. My research concentrates on the direct improving of educational practice.	4.36	.74	3.60	1.24	3.97	1.08
11. Action-research is a very appropriate method to enhance research in music education**.	4.64	.63	3.47	.99	4.03	1.01
12. I would like to do more research inside the classroom**.	4.86	.36	3.80	1.08	4.31	.96

*Rate from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) ** $p < .05$

The only mean below the central value of 3 (Neutral) appears between practitioners in item 9 –“I try to focus my research on a main topic”– ($M = 2.93$), in spite of the high value of the standard deviation ($SD = 1.207$). For academics, this item is also the less valued ($M = 3.20$; $SD = 1.040$).

The most valued item for practitioners is number 9, “I would like to do more research inside the classroom”, with a very high mean ($M = 4.86$) and with low statistical dispersion ($SD = .363$). For academics, this is also the most valued item, however, its mean is significantly lower compared with that of practitioners ($M = 3.80$) and its standard deviation is relatively high ($SD = 1.080$).

Table 2. Question 13: What are the main problems when carrying your research out?*

	Practitioners		Academics		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
13a. Lack of time.	4	1.24	3.87	1.12	3.93	1.16
13b. Lack of support from my employers.	3.79	1.47	3.40	.98	3.59	1.24
13c. Little flexibility of the educational system (curriculum).	3.64	1.33	3.27	1.10	3.45	1.21
13d. Difficulty in creating a research team.	3.93	.99	3.53	.99	3.72	.99

*Each item is rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The question inquiring for the main problems when carrying a research out, question 13 (Table 2), shows no significant differences between practitioners and academics. Regarding the total mean and the total standard deviation (for both groups, practitioners and academics), the more relevant problems for researchers –in order of rating– are: “lack of time” ($M = 3.93$; $SD = 1.163$); “difficulty in creating a research team” ($M = 3.72$; $SD = .996$); “lack of support from my employers” ($M = 3.59$; $SD = 1.240$); “little flexibility of the educational system (curriculum)” ($M = 3.45$; $SD = 1.213$).

4. DISCUSSION

In order to answer the main research question, namely, if we can perceive significant differences between the way academic and practitioner researchers in music education carry out their research in Spain, we have to clarify the four secondary questions.

Regarding the first research question, dealing with researchers’ education, we face two different facts. On the one hand, practitioners and academics do not differ in their initial education, the majority of them have a Bachelor’s degree in music or in musicology. On the other hand, there are more researchers with a doctoral degree in the group of academics than in the group of practitioners. However, this last statement has to be analysed in detail: the percentage of practitioners holding a doctorate is very high, 57.1%, keeping in mind that in order to work as a teacher in primary and secondary education or in music schools a doctoral degree is not required; the percentage of doctoral degrees amongst academics is also very high, 93.3%, since the average of doctors between teachers in the Spanish university is 64.8% (Michavila, 2012). These figures do not show an overwhelming difference between practitioners and academics, but they disclose the high level of quality of the two e-journals selected for this survey.

The second research question is in what extent research in music education in our country is being developed in a gender-equitable context. The analysis of demographics shows a divergence between practitioners and academics in that sense. The high percentage of women in the group of practitioners, 57.14%, is a reflexion of the high number of women working in primary and secondary schools in Spain –69.3% of teachers working in these educational levels are women (IM, 2014). This gender predominance is reversed when we speak about the group of academics, where a 73.3% of researchers are men – which is an unsatisfactory percentage for a modern country. Consequently, research in music education in Spain is not being developed in a gender-equitable context because the large majority of academics are men.

The third question asked if researchers develop their activity individually or in teams. The results showed significant differences between academics and practitioners: all academics declared taking part currently in a research team, while only 21.4% of practitioners stated the same response. The low percentage of practitioners taking part in a team weakens the quality of their research activity, especially if we consider action-research essentially collaborative (Cain, 2013). However, it is important to stress that, even if all academics assure taking part in a research team, not all researchers working in university develop collaborative work in the same degree; Cabezas, Jiménez and Delgado (2013), in a study about research in the University of Murcia –in the southeast of Spain–, stated that research teams in social sciences are small –1.8 persons per team– and many of them act as “artificial or administrative teams”, this is they are established in order to accomplish education authority standards but they do not develop a real collaborative work.

Despite the different degree of participation in research teams between both groups, practitioners as well as academics agree with the difficulty to create one –Item 13d of the questionnaire. This difficulty is maybe related, among other reasons, to the lack of time of researchers –Item 13a–, bearing in mind that time in collaborative work is more difficult to manage.

Another item related to the degree of collaboration between researchers is the participation in congresses. In this sense, question 8 of the questionnaire revealed differences between practitioners and academics, the former participated significantly less in congresses than the latter. This difference could be due to the fact that academics have to participate in congresses and publish a minimum of papers every six years in order to progress in their professional career –which is not required for practitioners. We consider that the low participation of practitioners in congresses represents a problem in front of research collaboration because these meetings are a very appropriate place to establish professional relations with other researchers.

The fourth research question –What kind of relationship do practitioners and academics establish between research and educational practice?– is maybe the most important one because the objective of research in music education is, ultimately, the improvement of educational practice. The results showed two statistically significant differences: practitioners agree more than academics with the sentences “Action-research is a very appropriate method to enhance research in music education” and “I would like to do more research inside the classroom”. These two sentences disclose the main objective of practitioners when doing research, namely, the direct improvement of their educational practice.

The improvement of educational practice is however a complex task that requires an analysis from multiple points of view. In that sense, if a teacher is determined to be more effective in their classes through research, it is maybe not a good idea to focus on a specific subject for a long period of time. It is not surprising that practitioners do not agree with item 9, “I try to focus my research on a main topic”. From this point of view, the perspectives of academics and practitioners in Spain are different, because the former work in an institution that try to stabilize lines of investigation in order to make research more collaborative and more solid and the latter research as freelancers with no guidelines specified by their institution.

Considering the research questions developed above, we are in a position to answer the main question of this survey and we can state that there are significant differences between the way academic and practitioner researchers in music education carry out their research in Spain.

Finally, we want to underline two facts that represent a challenge for research in music education in our country. Firstly, if we want to promote solid as well as useful research, there is a need to foster collaboration between researchers, especially between practitioners and academics –this is a difficult task considering the different characteristics of the institutions that employ them. Secondly, it is essential to close the gender gap in our field, a challenge that depends mainly on university policies.

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APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESEARCHERS IN MUSIC EDUCATION

Please respond truthfully to all of the questions to ensure the validity of the survey. You don't need to write down your name.

1. Gender:

- A. Male B. Female

2. What is your initial education?

- A. Bachelor's degree in music education
 B. Bachelor's degree in music or in musicology
 C. Both of them

3. Do you have a doctoral degree?

- A. No B. Yes

4. If yes, in which field of study?

- A. Music education B. Musicology C. Another field

5. In what educational stage do you mainly work?

- A. University (teachers and doctoral students)
 B. Primary education
 C. Secondary education
 D. Music schools

6. Is research activity included in your work schedule?

- A. Yes B. No

7. Are you taking part in any research team at the moment?

- A. Yes B. No

8. Have you participated in any congress about musical education in the last year?

- A. Yes B. No

Please, rate the following statements about your research practice: SA A N D SD

-
9. I try to focus my research on a main topic
 10. My research concentrates on the direct improving of educational practice
 11. Action-research is a very appropriate method to enhance research in music education
 12. I would like to do more research inside the classroom

SA: Strongly agree; A: Agree; N: Neutral; D: disagree; SD: Strongly disagree

13. What are the main problems when carrying your research out? SA A N D SD

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- 13a. Lack of time
 13b. Lack of support from my employers
 13c. Little flexibility of the educational system (curriculum)
 13d. Difficulty in creating a research team