MUSICAL LITERACY AS MULTIMODAL AND MULTICULTURAL PRACTICE: REIMAGINING EDUCATION, IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN A GLOBALISED CONTEXT

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Abstract:

This article reconceptualises musical literacy as a multimodal and multicultural educational practice, moving beyond traditional notions of reading and writing music. Framed within contemporary theories of multiliteracies and critical pedagogy, musical literacy is presented as a dynamic, socially embedded form of engagement that intersects with language, identity, culture, and power. Emphasising its cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions, the article illustrates how music education can foster inclusive learning environments and support the holistic development of learners in increasingly diverse and digitalised societies. The integration of music into educational curricula activates auditory, visual, and kinesthetic modalities, promoting memory retention, emotional expression, and social interaction. Research demonstrates that music enhances linguistic skills, attention, and empathy, and acts as a powerful tool for cultural expression and identity formation. The concept of multiliteracies, particularly the "Design, Designing, Designed" model, offers a pedagogical framework that supports critical reflection, transformative practice, and culturally responsive teaching. Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice are identified as core strategies for fostering deep musical engagement. The article positions music as a cultural product that encodes collective narratives and mediates social hierarchies. Drawing on Adorno, Frith, De-Nora, and Bourdieu, it explores music's role in constructing identity, facilitating belonging, and legitimising or challenging power structures. In multicultural classrooms, music becomes a site of dialogue, resistance, and cultural affirmation. The article also discusses digital technologies as tools for expanding access, creativity, and collaborative learning, reinforcing the necessity of integrating digital literacy into music education. Ethnomusicological and anthropological perspectives further enrich the discussion, illustrating how music operates within fluid cultural contexts. Cultural identities are not fixed but negotiated through performance,

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interaction, and representation. This view supports a culturally responsive pedagogy that values diverse musical expressions, particularly for marginalised or diasporic groups. Music education thus becomes a space for empathy, intercultural understanding, and social transformation. Finally, the article links these insights to EU migration and education policies, highlighting the role of intercultural pedagogy in supporting the integration of migrant and multilingual students. It calls for educational policies that go beyond superficial celebrations of diversity to promote critical engagement and inclusive practices. In conclusion, musical literacy is redefined as a vital educational, cultural, and ethical practice. It empowers learners, transforms curricula, and offers educators a powerful medium to cultivate socially.

1. Introduction

Music has long been recognised as a vital domain through which language acquisition and musical competencies converge, fostering learners' communicative abilities and enhancing critical and creative skills essential for effective engagement across various life contexts, including professional environments. This intersection of music and language is particularly evident in educational settings, where musical activities can support language development and literacy skills in children. The term 'literacy' has evolved beyond its traditional confines of reading and writing to encompass a spectrum of competencies, leading to the emergence of concepts such as visual, digital, ecological, and musical literacies. These literacies reflect an individual's capacity to interpret and utilise information across diverse modalities. Specifically, musical literacy entails not only the ability to read and write music but also to engage with music as a form of expression and communication within various cultural and social contexts. This aligns with the broader understanding of literacy as a multifaceted and dynamic construct that includes the ability to navigate and make meaning from multiple forms of media and symbolic systems (Wray *et al.*, 2000:75).

Integrating music into educational curricula offers a multimodal approach to learning, engaging auditory, visual, and kinesthetic modalities, which can enhance memory retention and understanding. Such integration supports the development of a more holistic literacy that encompasses emotional, social, and cultural dimensions, preparing learners to navigate the complexities of contemporary society. By embracing musical literacy as a component of comprehensive education, educators can foster environments that promote inclusivity, cultural awareness, and the development of a diverse set of skills essential for lifelong learning.

2. Literature Review

Research indicates that music education enhances various aspects of cognitive development, including memory, attention, and language skills. For instance, studies have shown that active engagement with music can improve the way the brain processes information, thereby enhancing the perception of language and speech, and subsequently improving communication abilities and reading skills (Hallam, 2010; Bokiev *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, incorporating music into classroom instruction has been associated with increased student motivation and engagement, leading to a more positive learning environment (Eerola & Eerola, 2013; Foran, 2009). Furthermore, music education contributes to the development of social-emotional skills. Participation in musical activities can foster empathy, teamwork, and communication among students, which are essential for their overall development (CCEIN, 2021). Music also serves as a powerful tool for cultural expression and identity formation, enabling students to explore and appreciate diverse cultural backgrounds. This cultural engagement through music can promote social cohesion and inclusivity within the classroom setting. Incorporating music into education not only enriches the learning experience but also equips students with a diverse set of skills necessary for success in various life domains. By adopting a multimodal approach that includes music, educators can create more dynamic and inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students.

The concept of literacy has evolved significantly, reflecting the complex demands of contemporary society. UNESCO (2015) defines literacy as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute using printed and written materials across various contexts. This definition underscores literacy as a continuum of learning, enabling individuals to achieve personal goals, develop knowledge and potential, and participate fully in their communities. Theoretical distinctions within literacy include 'functional' and 'critical' literacy. Functional literacy pertains to the practical skills required for daily activities, while critical literacy involves the capacity to analyze and challenge the underlying messages in texts. Linguistic literacy is particularly significant, as students encounter the language—either their first or second—that they will use throughout their lives within the school environment. In early childhood, literacy is characterized as 'emergent,' referring to the gradual construction and externalization of a child's perception of written code through natural environmental interactions. Education builds upon this knowledge to develop writing and reading abilities, employing interactive activities that offer children varied experiences. Internationally, the term 'literacy' has been translated into Greek as 'alphabetism' (Chatzigeorgiou, 2006), 'grammatism' (Papoulia-Tzelepi & Tafa, 2005) and 'engrammatism' (Tselfes, 2004:8), denoting the cultivation of both oral and written language to enable students to utilize any received information. For the purposes of this discussion, the term 'engrammatism' is preferred, given the prevalence of related Greek words such as 'engrammatos' and 'engrammatosyne' (Babiniotis, 2002).

Modern interpretations of literacy extend beyond reading and writing skills to encompass familiarity with complex communication systems and codes. This broader perspective includes digital literacy, media literacy, and other forms that reflect the diverse ways individuals engage with information in a digitalized world. The New Literacy Studies (NLS) approach emphasizes literacy as a social practice, focusing on how literacy is used in real-life contexts and how it relates to power structures and cultural norms. This perspective encourages educators to consider the social and cultural dimensions of literacy, promoting a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of literacy practices. In conclusion, literacy encompasses a range of skills and practices that are essential for effective communication and participation in society. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of literacy allows educators to develop more holistic approaches to teaching, fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, and the ability to navigate complex information landscapes.

Contemporary understandings of literacy have evolved significantly beyond the traditional confines of reading and writing, embracing a multifaceted array of communicative competencies. This expanded perspective acknowledges the necessity for individuals to navigate and interpret complex semiotic systems—encompassing visual, digital, cultural, and musical modalities—thereby fostering a more holistic engagement with the world (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). The emergence of 'multiliteracies' reflects this paradigm shift, highlighting the interplay between diverse modes of communication and the sociocultural contexts in which they operate (New London Group, 1996). This framework underscores the importance of equipping learners with the skills to interpret and produce meaning across various platforms and cultural settings, thereby enhancing their capacity for critical thinking and adaptability in an increasingly interconnected global landscape (Kress, 2010). Within this context, the interrelationship between language and music emerges as a compelling domain of inquiry. Research indicates that musical training can significantly bolster linguistic abilities, particularly in areas such as phono-logical awareness and auditory discrimination (Patel, 2008; Moreno *et al.*, 2009). These findings suggest that music and language share cognitive and neural mechanisms, facilitating mutual reinforcement and development (Zatorre & Gandour, 2008).

Music serves as a potent medium for cultural expression and identity formation, offering individuals a means to articulate their experiences and connect with broader communities (Small, 1998). In educational settings, integrating musical literacy can thus foster inclusivity and cultural responsiveness, particularly for learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Campbell, 2004). This approach aligns with humanistic pedagogical models that prioritize the holistic development of learners and the cultivation of empathetic, culturally aware citizens (Noddings, 2005). For students with limited linguistic exposure—such as refugees and migrants—music education can provide an accessible and engaging entry point into the learning process. By leveraging the universal aspects of musical experience, educators can create inclusive environments that support language acquisition, social integration, and personal expression (Swanwick, 1999). Consequently, embedding musical literacy within educational

curricula not only enriches the learning experience but also contributes to the broader goals of equity and social cohesion.

Contemporary educational paradigms increasingly recognise the necessity of equipping students with critical literacy skills that transcend traditional reading and writing. Androulakis and Chatzimichou (2009) argue that many learners lack the tools required for navigating the complexities of modern life, largely due to educational systems that fail to integrate students' lived experiences into the curriculum. They advocate for a pedagogical shift towards critical literacy, one that connects literacy practices with real-world contexts and the diverse experiences of learners. This perspective aligns with the broader concept of multimodal literacy, which encompasses the ability to interpret and produce meaning across various modes of communication, including linguistic, visual, auditory, spatial, and gestural forms (Kress, 2010). Multimodal literacy acknowledges that meaning-making is not confined to text alone but is distributed across multiple semiotic resources. For instance, digital media, musical scores, graphic representations, audio recordings, and videos all serve as vehicles for conveying complex ideas and emotions. Even non-verbal elements such as gestures, clothing, and material artefacts contribute to the richness of communication, reflecting the multimodal nature of literacy in contemporary society.

The integration of multimodal literacy into educational practices necessitates a reconceptualisation of teaching strategies. Educators are encouraged to design learning experiences that not only incorporate diverse media but also foster critical engagement with these modes. Such an approach empowers students to analyse and interpret the intentions behind various communicative acts, considering the social and cultural contexts in which they occur (Jewitt, 2008). By doing so, learners develop a more nuanced understanding of how meaning is constructed and disseminated across different platforms and communities. Furthermore, embracing multimodal literacy supports inclusivity and cultural responsiveness in education. It validates the diverse communicative practices students bring to the classroom, particularly those from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. By recognising and incorporating these varied literacies, educators can create more equitable learning environments that respect and build upon the existing knowledge and experiences of all students (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). In conclusion, the shift towards multimodal literacy represents a critical evolution in educational theory and practice. It challenges traditional notions of literacy, advocating for a more holistic and inclusive approach that prepares students to navigate and contribute to an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

In contemporary multicultural educational environments, music education plays a pivotal role in redefining emergent literacy and adapting pedagogical approaches to align with the evolving digital landscape. The proliferation of information technology has significantly transformed the accessibility and dissemination of musical knowledge, necessitating a reevaluation of traditional teaching methodologies. Merakou (2016) underscores the profound impact of digital advancements on music education, highlighting the abundance of electronically available resources such as recordings,

scores, bibliographic databases, and scholarly texts. This wealth of information offers unprecedented opportunities for research and education, enabling musicians to access and engage with a diverse array of musical materials. However, the vastness of these resources also presents challenges in information processing, requiring the development of new research methodologies to effectively identify, study, and utilize relevant content. The integration of digital technologies into music education has been shown to enhance the learning process by fostering greater student engagement, improving creative skills, and facilitating collaborative projects. Studies indicate that students who utilize digital tools in their music education exhibit increased interest and proficiency in the subject matter (Wise, 2016; Guo *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in music education has been recognized for its potential to democratize access to musical knowledge, particularly in higher education institutions (Adewale *et al.*, 2021).

In the context of emergent literacy, the incorporation of digital resources into music education supports the development of foundational skills by providing interactive and multimodal learning experiences. This approach is particularly beneficial in multicultural settings, where diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds necessitate adaptable and inclusive teaching strategies. By leveraging digital technologies, educators can create dynamic learning environments that accommodate varying learning styles and cultural perspectives, thereby promoting equity and inclusivity in music education. In conclusion, the evolution of information technology has necessitated a transformation in music education, emphasizing the importance of digital literacy and innovative pedagogical approaches. By embracing these changes, educators can enhance the effectiveness of music instruction, support the development of emergent literacy, and foster inclusive learning environments that reflect the diverse cultural fabric of contemporary society.

The integration of music information into educational frameworks serves as a catalyst for both creative development and the preservation of cultural heritage. Lavranos (2016) underscores the significance of engaging with diverse musical domains—such as composition, performance, improvisation, analysis, and listening—as a means to stimulate creativity among educators and students. This engagement not only enhances the creative process but also enriches its outcomes, fostering a deeper connection with musical traditions and practices. The interaction between music information and musical creativity is pivotal in maintaining and evolving cultural heritage. By disseminating music information across various cultures, a continuous dialogue is established, allowing for the exchange and development of musical ideas. This process contributes to a collective musical knowledge and culture, wherein students and educators connect with their own traditions and those of others, facilitating a broader understanding and appreciation of diverse musical landscapes. Effective management of musical language and information necessitates the ability to apply appropriate practices tailored to specific musical activities with social and cultural relevance. The social functions of music inform these practices, influencing choices regarding content,

structure, and style. Such an approach ensures that music education remains responsive to the cultural contexts it inhabits, promoting inclusivity and cultural awareness.

In the context of Greek musical cultural heritage, music education plays a crucial role in documenting, preserving, and disseminating traditional knowledge. By integrating music information into educational practices, educators can foster environments that not only support creative expression but also contribute to the safeguarding of cultural heritage. This dual focus on creativity and preservation underscores the transformative potential of music education in contemporary society. In conclusion, the strategic incorporation of music information into educational settings enhances creative capacities and supports the preservation of cultural heritage. By adopting practices that are sensitive to the social and cultural dimensions of music, educators can cultivate a rich, inclusive, and dynamic learning environment that honours and perpetuates the diverse musical traditions of their communities.

Musical literacy, as articulated by Barton (2013), transcends the mere ability to read and write music; it encompasses the interpretation of musical practices and an examination of the social, economic, cultural, political, and environmental dimensions that influence these practices. This comprehensive understanding connects learning experiences with personal expression and the construction of individual identity, linking musical literacy to the well-being of individuals and society, value systems, participation in cultural and social life, and the inclusion of marginalised social groups.

In this context, musical literacy is inseparable from the social practices in which it is embedded. It involves the capacity to critically, creatively, and effectively integrate musical practices into various social and cultural contexts. This integration goes beyond recognising, recording, memorising, and interpreting musical symbols and structures; it requires a flexible and creative utilisation of musical knowledge and skills appropriate to each communicative context. The goal is to achieve objectives related to the social dimensions of musical practice and the understanding, use, critique, and production of musical compositions and texts with diverse social functions, leading to varying musical structures, typologies, and styles.

This perspective aligns with the view that musical literacy is a dynamic, socially situated practice. It reflects the understanding that literacy, in general, is not a static set of skills but a social practice that varies across different contexts and cultures. In the realm of music education, this means recognising the diverse cultural backgrounds of learners and incorporating their experiences into the curriculum. Such an approach fosters inclusivity and acknowledges the role of music in identity formation and cultural expression. Moreover, this comprehensive view of musical literacy underscores the importance of critical engagement with music. It encourages learners to not only perform and interpret music but also to understand its broader social implications. By doing so, music education can contribute to the development of socially conscious individuals who appreciate the multifaceted role of music in society. In conclusion, musical literacy, when viewed through this expansive lens, becomes a vital component of holistic education. It

equips learners with the tools to navigate and contribute to the complex musical landscapes of their communities and the wider world.

According to Abrahams (2021), musically literate individuals are those who, both individually and collaboratively, engage with music at varying levels, breadth, and depth. Specifically, they are those who have developed an understanding of a range of musical concepts and issues; engage with music cognitively, emotionally, and socially; possess musical skills acquired through various means; are familiar with terminology that allows them to express their ideas about a musical work (e.g., form, structure, aesthetic criteria); have developed practices and behaviours for applying this knowledge and these skills to make choices in diverse musical contexts; pose questions, critically examine, and reflect on the phenomenon of music and its multiple dimensions; and are aware of their attitudes towards music and music education. This comprehensive approach to musical literacy aligns with contemporary educational paradigms that emphasise holistic development (Hallam, 2010; Csíkos & Dohány, 2016; Rajan, 2022). Engagement with music has been shown to enhance cognitive functions, including memory and attention, as well as social and emotional skills. Furthermore, active participation in music-making fosters a sense of community and collaboration, essential components in today's interconnected society.

Integrating music education into the broader curriculum not only enriches students' academic experiences but also supports the development of critical thinking and creativity. By exploring various musical genres and cultural contexts, learners gain insights into diverse perspectives, fostering inclusivity and cultural awareness. This aligns with the concept of multiliteracies, which advocates for the inclusion of multiple modes of communication and expression in education. In conclusion, musical literacy, as defined by Abrahams (2021), encompasses a multifaceted set of skills and understandings that extend beyond traditional notions of music education. By embracing this comprehensive framework, educators can cultivate environments that promote personal growth, social cohesion, and a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of human expression through music.

Contemporary understandings of musical literacy extend well beyond the traditional confines of reading and writing musical notation. It now encompasses an individual's ability to engage effectively within diverse social environments and communicative contexts, utilising a range of musical sources and outputs—including visual elements—to fulfil educational, professional, and social objectives. This expanded conception is particularly pertinent in the digital age, where technology has facilitated the emergence of multimodal musical texts and practices.

The integration of digital technology into music education has revolutionised the ways in which learners interact with musical content. Interactive platforms and applications enable students to compose, perform, and analyse music using a variety of multimedia tools, fostering a more engaging and personalised learning experience. Such technologies not only enhance technical skills but also promote creative expression and critical thinking, essential components of comprehensive musical literacy.

Moreover, musical literacy encompasses cognitive and metacognitive dimensions, including the development of critical thinking skills necessary for interpreting and evaluating musical content. It also involves social intelligence, enabling individuals to understand and navigate the cultural and societal contexts in which music is created and experienced. This holistic approach recognises music as a social practice, deeply embedded in cultural traditions and communal activities. In this context, musical literacy serves as a vital tool for cultural engagement and personal development. It empowers individuals to participate actively in cultural life, fostering inclusivity and social cohesion. By embracing a multifaceted view of musical literacy that integrates technological proficiency, cognitive skills, and cultural awareness, educators can better prepare students to navigate the complex musical landscapes of contemporary society. In conclusion, redefining musical literacy to include digital competencies, critical and creative thinking, and social understanding reflects the evolving nature of music in the modern world. This comprehensive perspective ensures that individuals are equipped not only with technical skills but also with the cognitive and social tools necessary to engage meaningfully with music across various contexts.

These findings underscore the significance of integrating musical literacy into educational frameworks to foster holistic development and cultural inclusivity. This comprehensive exploration underscores that musical literacy transcends traditional notions of reading and writing music, encompassing a multifaceted set of skills that integrate cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions. By engaging with music, learners develop critical thinking, creativity, and cultural awareness, which are essential competencies in today's interconnected world.

The integration of music into educational curricula offers a multimodal approach to learning, engaging auditory, visual, and kinesthetic modalities. This approach not only enhances memory retention and understanding but also supports the development of a holistic literacy that prepares learners to navigate the complexities of contemporary society. Research indicates that music education contributes to cognitive development, including improvements in memory, attention, and language skills, and fosters social-emotional growth by promoting empathy, teamwork, and communication. Furthermore, music serves as a powerful tool for cultural expression and identity formation, enabling students to explore and appreciate diverse cultural backgrounds.

This cultural engagement through music can promote social cohesion and inclusivity within the classroom setting. By adopting a comprehensive framework of musical literacy, educators can cultivate environments that promote personal growth, social cohesion, and a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of human expression through music. Redefining musical literacy to include digital competencies, critical and creative thinking, and social understanding reflects the evolving nature of music in the modern world. This comprehensive perspective ensures that individuals are equipped not only with technical skills but also with the cognitive and social tools necessary to engage meaningfully with music across various contexts.

3. Applying the "Design, Designing, Designed" Model to Music Education: A Multimodal and Multicultural Pedagogical Framework

The emergence of the multiliteracies framework marked a paradigm shift in literacy education, offering a response to internal theoretical debates and external critiques of the traditional text-centred approach. First articulated by the New London Group (1996), the concept was introduced during their seminal meeting in New London, Australia. It highlights two central ideas: the increasing multiplicity of communication channels—amplified by digital technology—and the growing linguistic and cultural diversity in globalised societies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Mills, 2010).

Multiliteracies advocate for pedagogical approaches that embrace multimodality, or the use of multiple semiotic systems, such as image, sound, gesture, spatial design, and spoken and written language. This framework is especially pertinent in 21st-century classrooms where students engage with complex texts and technologies. It positions literacy as a dynamic, socially embedded process rather than a static skill set (Kress, 2003; Jewitt, 2008).

At the core of this model lies the triadic concept of Design, comprising the phases of 'Design', 'Designing', and 'Designed'. These phases represent the recursive pro-cess of meaning-making, in which learners utilise available cultural and semiotic resources ('Design'), actively shape these in specific contexts ('Designing'), and produce novel outcomes ('Designed') that themselves become resources for future meaning-making (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). In music education, this model provides a robust pedagogical framework. It reconceptualises musical literacy as an active, intercultural, and multimodal practice that integrates students' lived experiences and cultural identities. The model's four pedagogical components—Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice—offer adaptable strategies for fostering deep musical engagement:

- *Situated Practice* immerses students in authentic musical environments that reflect their cultural experiences. Activities such as singing, improvisation, and collaborative composition enable learners to engage meaningfully with music tied to their identities (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).
- *Overt Instruction* provides systematic teaching of musical structures, forms, and genres using metalanguage to support analytical and comparative thinking. This component is essential for students to understand music within multicultural contexts and to critically listen across traditions (Green, 2008; Swanwick, 1999).
- *Critical Framing* enables students to analyse the socio-political, historical, and ideological dimensions of music. Drawing from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), this component encourages learners to interrogate dominant musical narratives and recognise music's role in cultural resistance, advocacy, and representation.
- *Transformed Practice* encourages students to reapply and adapt musical ideas in new contexts, utilising both traditional and digital tools. This approach aligns with Kress's (2010) concept of re-designing meaning in multimodal contexts and

supports students in composing hybrid musical works that resonate with contemporary cultural landscapes.

The pedagogical aim of this model is to cultivate learners' capacity to understand, modify, and ultimately transform musical conventions. Martin (2000) outlines this process through three key stages: (a) creative imitation, (b) contextual adaptation, and (c) transformative innovation. This mirrors Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, wherein learners progress from scaffolded learning to autonomous expression.

When embedded in multicultural and inclusive education, the Design model facilitates the development of both technical and reflective skills. It empowers students to see music as a living, evolving practice shaped by social interaction and cultural meaning. In doing so, music education becomes a participatory and democratic space—one that fosters diversity, creativity, and critical engagement.

Music has long been regarded as more than an aesthetic or artistic endeavour. It is increasingly understood as a cultural product—deeply embedded within, and reflective of, the social, political, and historical dynamics of its time. According to Theodor Adorno (1997), music functions as a non-rational institution within society, akin to religion or art, playing a crucial role in offering individuals a space of resistance and affective engagement within an increasingly rationalised and mechanised Western world. In Adorno's view, music serves as a refuge for subjectivity and imagination, representing what he terms a "socially non-rational" realm—paradoxically both shaped by and reacting against the rational structures of modern capitalism.

From this perspective, music is not merely entertainment; it is a symbolic language that articulates collective emotions, historical memories, and socio-political tensions. It can embody national pride, resistance movements, or socio-political critique, offering a powerful medium through which communities express their values, negotiate their identities, and confront hegemonic discourses (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000). Shared musical experiences can thus become critical vehicles for social interaction, fostering a sense of belonging and communal solidarity. Stokes (1994) underscores the importance of music in minority and marginalised communities, where it often becomes a primary marker of group identity. In such contexts, music allows for the articulation of cultural distinctiveness and resilience, serving both as a form of symbolic empowerment and as a means of intergenerational transmission of heritage. For example, diasporic communities often maintain their cultural cohesion through music, which becomes a repository of shared history, emotion, and resistance.

Music also participates in what DeNora (2000) terms the "*social construction of the self.*" Through everyday practices such as listening, performing, and composing, individuals use music to regulate emotions, construct personal narratives, and shape their social interactions. In this way, music is implicated in the broader processes of identity formation. Frith (1996) asserts that musical experience is not just a reflection of identity but a means of producing it: music provides the cultural and emotional tools with which individuals and groups negotiate who they are and how they relate to others.

This understanding is particularly relevant in multi-cultural educational contexts, where music can act as a bridge between diverse cultural worlds. As Folkestad (2002) points out, musical identity is formed not in isolation, but through cultural, national, linguistic, and religious affiliations. In such environments, music education must be attentive to the plural ways in which students relate to music, valuing diverse musical traditions and practices as equally valid forms of cultural expression (Campbell, 2004).

Furthermore, music contributes to the legitimation of social hierarchies. The types of music one listens to—or is encouraged to learn—can reflect and reinforce one's position within societal structures. As Bourdieu (1984) has argued, musical tastes are not neutral but are linked to social class and educational capital. Thus, to understand music as a cultural product is also to acknowledge its role in maintaining or challenging systems of privilege and exclusion. Frith (2003) elaborates on the dual nature of music in contemporary society. On one hand, music is commodified by the cultural industries and repackaged for mass consumption. On the other hand, it functions as a deeply personal medium through which individuals navigate emotions, memory, and identity. The same song may serve as both a commercial product and an intimate artefact, symbolising a specific moment in a listener's life or social context.

Moreover, ethnomusicological perspectives emphasise that musical meaning is not universal but context-dependent. Titon (2014) highlights that every musical culture operates with its own ontologies and epistemologies: definitions of what music is, how it should be performed, who may perform it, and how it is transmitted. Some traditions emphasise oral transmission and improvisation, while others prioritise notation and formal instruction. Understanding music as a cultural product, therefore, requires an appreciation of the particular social, historical, and spatial contexts in which it is embedded.

Recent anthropological approaches to music, as outlined by scholars like Nitsiakos (2006), advocate for a non-essentialist view of culture. Music, rather than being tied to fixed geographical or ethnic boundaries, is increasingly viewed as a dynamic, negotiated practice. Cultural identities are not static entities but are produced and reproduced through interaction and representation—within which music plays a central role. Stuart Hall (1990, 1991) conceptualises identity as a process of continuous construction, shaped through cultural representations. Barth's (1969) theory of ethnic boundaries similarly suggests that identity arises not from intrinsic cultural traits but from the boundaries constructed and maintained in social interaction. Applied to music, this implies that musical practices and symbols help define both inclusion and exclusion, solidarity and difference.

In educational contexts, this theoretical framework calls for a culturally responsive pedagogy that sees music not only as a technical or aesthetic discipline but as a dialogic space of cultural negotiation (Swanwick, 1999; Schippers, 2010). Music classrooms become sites where students encounter multiple traditions, question dominant narratives, and develop intercultural understanding. Music education, then, becomes a space not just for skill development, but for citizenship, empathy, and social

transformation. To understand music as a cultural product is to recognise its dual role as both a reflection and a shaper of social reality. Music encodes collective histories, identities, and emotions, while simultaneously enabling their contestation and reinterpretation. This view has profound implications for education, where music can serve as a powerful medium for inclusion, identity formation, and cultural dialogue. Educators, therefore, have a vital role in facilitating meaningful musical experiences that honour diversity, promote critical engagement, and empower learners as active participants in the cultural fabric of their communities.

Music is not merely an artistic endeavour or an aesthetic experience; it is fundamentally a cultural product, deeply embedded in the social fabric of communities. As such, it both shapes and is shaped by the contexts within which it is created, performed, and consumed. Its influence transcends mere entertainment, functioning as a vital medium for expressing individual and collective identities, negotiating social relationships, and articulating cultural meanings (Stokes, 1994; Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000).

Tia DeNora (2000: 47) compellingly argues that music plays an active role in "*the social construction of the self*," suggesting that individuals engage with music not in isolation, but "*as part of a fundamentally social process of self-construction, formation, and support*." In her analysis, the self is not a static entity but a dynamic site of cultural production, formed and reformed through musical experience. Music, therefore, provides a set of tools through which individuals construct their subjectivity, participate in cultural discourse, and establish social agency.

The communicative function of music lies not only in its sound but in its capacity to symbolise identities and facilitate belonging. As Simon Frith (1996: 108) suggests, music represents people to themselves and to each other, acting as both a mirror and a bridge between personal expression and collective affiliation. In this regard, music becomes a site of identity performance, where individuals align with particular styles, genres, and traditions to signify their cultural positioning.

The idea of musical identity as a socially constructed phenomenon has been further elaborated by Folkestad (2002), who contends that musical identity develops through both individual interaction and the broader socio-cultural environment. Musical preferences are shaped not only by personal tastes but also by cultural heritage, national background, religious affiliations, and racial experiences. In educational and ethnomusicological research, this intersectionality is increasingly recognised as vital to understanding how learners and communities engage with music (Papastavrou, 2010; Schippers, 2010). Moreover, the processes through which individuals associate with particular musical forms reflect their desire for both differentiation and connection. That is, while music allows people to assert a distinct identity—often in opposition to other groups—it simultaneously facilitates community and shared meaning. In multicultural societies, music thus becomes a vehicle for negotiating the tensions between inclusion and exclusion, unity and diversity (Hall, 1996; Slobin, 1993).

As such, music should be understood not only as an object of cultural consumption but as a performative and dialogic medium through which identity is continuously constructed and contested. This perspective holds significant implications for music education, particularly in pluralistic classrooms, where acknowledging the multiplicity of musical identities can support intercultural understanding, empathy, and inclusion.

Music plays a pivotal role in legitimising existing social structures and delineating individual and collective positions within them. Far from being a neutral or purely aesthetic phenomenon, musical practice is intimately connected to questions of power, representation, and belonging. As Bourdieu (1984) famously argued in distinction, aesthetic preferences, including musical tastes, serve as markers of social stratification and are inextricably linked to one's position in the social hierarchy. In this sense, musical choices are not arbitrary but reflective of broader socio-economic and cultural dispositions—or what Bourdieu refers to as "*habitus*." Where individuals choose to locate themselves musically—through their engagement with particular genres, styles, or performance practices—mirrors their broader social affiliations, aspirations, or resistances. Music thus functions as both a mirror and a map: it reflects one's place in society while also providing a navigational tool for positioning oneself within the complex fabric of social life (Frith, 1996). Musical identity, in this context, is not a passive reflection of taste but an active construction of selfhood, mediated by cultural norms, peer groups, educational experiences, and media influences.

As Papastavrou (2010: 38) observes, musical identities extend beyond the realm of preference and into the terrain of symbolic expression. They form part of an individual's effort to articulate how they perceive themselves in relation to others and how they wish to be perceived. This symbolic dimension of music is evident in its use across rituals, propaganda, social movements, and personal life narratives—contexts in which music becomes a vehicle for communicating values, emotions, affiliations, and ideologies.

Moreover, musical communication is often embedded in what Hallam (2010) describes as the "*musical language*" of a community—a shared semiotic system that enables group members to understand and relate to one another through sound (Small, 1998; DeNora, 2000; Born, 2011). Each social group, whether defined by ethnicity, class, generation, or subcultural alignment, develops its own musical codes, aesthetics, and practices. These musical languages not only differentiate groups from one another but also serve to foster internal cohesion and a sense of belonging (Turino, 2008; Stokes, 1994). This phenomenon is particularly salient in contexts of multiculturalism and migration, where diverse musical expressions co-exist and interact. In such settings, musical identity can serve as a bridge across cultural divides or, conversely, as a means of reinforcing boundaries and exclusions. For marginalised or minority groups, music often becomes a crucial tool for asserting cultural autonomy, resisting assimilation, and preserving collective memory (DeNora, 2000; Slobin, 1993).

In light of these observations, it becomes clear that musical identities are socially constructed, historically contingent, and dynamically negotiated. They are expressions not only of aesthetic sensibility but of social positioning and cultural engagement.

Understanding musical identity as a form of social expression allows educators, ethnomusicologists, and cultural theorists to better appreciate the complex interplay between sound, society, and the self.

Musical communication is a multifaceted and context-dependent phenomenon that transcends the auditory domain, involving emotional, spatial, and social dimensions. It operates within a variety of social spaces and musical genres, shaping and being shaped by the rhythms of everyday life. These rhythms—spanning from work and leisure to stages of life such as maturation, romantic engagement, ageing, career transitions, and geographical mobility—intersect with musical rhythms in deeply symbolic and affective ways (DeNora, 2000). Music serves not only as background or accompaniment to life events but also as a medium through which these events are given emotional contour, social meaning, and collective resonance.

Musical experiences are situated in diverse physical and cultural spaces—concert halls, clubs, homes, public squares, digital platforms—each offering a distinct set of communicative affordances. As Small (1998) notes through his concept of "mu-sicking," music should be understood not merely as a product but as an active process of social interaction. Within these contexts, individuals engage in acts of musical communication that foster shared understanding, emotional intimacy, and identity formation.

However, musical communication does not operate in a socially neutral vacuum. As Frith (2013) asserts, musical sociality—the way people interact through and around music—can be a double-edged sword. While it often facilitates inclusion and community formation, it can also serve as a mechanism of social exclusion. Music, as a cultural resource, participates in the construction of boundaries between 'us' and 'them', demarcating who belongs and who is perceived as an outsider (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000). Empirical research supports this ambivalence. Tarrant *et al.* (2001) and North and Hargreaves (2001) found that adolescents often use musical preferences as markers of group affiliation. Musical taste becomes a symbolic indicator of shared values and lifestyle choices, functioning as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Simultaneously, it acts as a criterion for social filtering—individuals may be accepted or excluded from social circles based on their alignment with a group's musical identity. Papapanagiotou (2010: 51) similarly emphasises that such dynamics can discourage individuals from freely expressing their musical tastes and, by extension, their personal identities, particularly when their preferences deviate from group norms.

These findings highlight the complex role of musical communication in both reinforcing and challenging social structures. They call for educational approaches that promote critical engagement with music, encouraging learners to reflect on the ways in which musical choices influence social inclusion, exclusion, and self-expression. In multicultural and pluralistic societies, such reflection is essential for cultivating empathy, intercultural understanding, and a more inclusive musical discourse.

Simon Frith's (1996) seminal work on music and identity offers a compelling framework for understanding how musical practices are intimately linked with processes of individual and collective self-definition. According to Frith, both music and identity

"*describe the collective in the individual and the individual in the collective,*" and are, therefore, inextricably bound up with questions of aesthetics and ethics. His analysis transcends the simplistic view of music as a passive medium of expression; instead, he proposes that music is an embodied social practice—a performative act through which individuals not only express but enact their identities in real time and social space.

Frith challenges the notion that music merely reflects pre-existing social meanings. Rather, he suggests that music has the power to constitute identity through its affective and participatory dimensions. Musical performance and listening become ways through which people internalise communal values, rituals, and narratives—constructing themselves not merely as passive receivers, but as active participants in the cultural fabric of society. Music, therefore, functions as a "*technology of the self*" (Foucault, 1988), allowing for the creation, negotiation, and transformation of social identities. This dynamic is particularly evident in the way various musical genres are aligned with subcultures and lifestyles. As Martin (1995: 21) observes, technological changes in music production and dissemination have enabled individuals to use music not only as an expressive tool but also as a means of declaring belonging to specific cultural or ideological communities. The rise of digital music platforms, social media, and personalised playlists has only intensified this phenomenon, offering individuals unprecedented control over how they curate and signal their musical—and hence social—identities.

Frith (2003) further expands on this by identifying a dual function of music: on one hand, as a commodified product shaped by the logics of the cultural industry, and on the other, as a deeply personal and affective resource for organising memory, emotion, and selfhood. The commercial appropriation of music transforms it into a vehicle for consumer identity, influencing fashion, speech, behaviour, and even political alignment (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). At the same time, music retains its ability to foster intimate, private experiences, functioning as a soundtrack to personal narratives and everyday life events (DeNora, 2000). Moreover, musical identity is inherently fluid and relational. Different genres, practices, and performance styles offer varied scripts through which individuals can perform their identities, often adopting and adapting musical codes from multiple cultural sources (Stokes, 1994). This flexibility allows for hybrid forms of identity to emerge—particularly in multicultural and diasporic contexts—where music becomes a site for negotiating tensions between tradition and modernity, heritage and innovation.

Music should be understood not merely as a cultural product that reflects identity, but as a social practice that produces and shapes identity. It mediates the relationship between self and society, individual and collective, past and present. Through its aesthetic structures and performative capacities, music enables individuals to explore who they are, who they were, and who they might become. Every musical culture is inherently shaped by a unique system of perceptions and values that govern how music is created, understood, and transmitted. These systems are inextricably linked to broader worldviews—ideological frameworks that determine, for instance, what qualifies as "music" within a specific cultural context, where it is believed to originate, and the

functions it is expected to fulfil (Titon, 2014). Such perceptions influence whether music is primarily regarded as a form of spiritual practice, entertainment, ritual, social commentary, or educational tool.

Cultural interpretations of music differ widely in terms of aesthetics, structural norms, and conceptual foundations. As Nettl (2005) and Merriam (1964) have pointed out, music is not a universal language in the sense of shared codes or meanings; rather, it is a culturally constructed system of signification that varies in purpose, symbolism, and social role. For example, what is perceived as harmonious, emotionally expressive, or artistically valid in one tradition may carry completely different—or even opposing—connotations in another. The aesthetics of a musical piece are not merely embedded in sound but are co-constructed through cultural expectations, historical practices, and communal listening habits (Becker, 2004).

The performative context also significantly influences the ways in which music is produced and received. This includes the social settings in which music is performed (e.g., sacred spaces, public festivals, intimate gatherings), as well as the functions assigned to it—whether ceremonial, pedagogical, therapeutic, or recreational. As ethnomusicological studies have demonstrated, these contexts frame the rules of participation, audience behaviour, instrumentation, and the degree of improvisation or formality expected (Kaemmer, 1993; Rice, 2014).

Transmission methods reflect the historical and epistemological underpinnings of each musical tradition. Some cultures rely heavily on oral transmission, with music taught through demonstration, repetition, and memory, fostering flexibility and communal learning. Others favour notation systems, emphasising precision, textual fidelity, and historical continuity (Nettl, 2005). These differences are not mutually exclusive but often co-exist or overlap, particularly in hybrid or diasporic musical settings.

Despite these cultural distinctions, music remains a lived experience that enables individuals and communities to assign meaning to the world around them. Through musical engagement, individuals construct narratives of identity, belonging, and transformation. As Turino (2008) asserts, musical meaning is formed "*in the here and now*" but is always situated in relation to the past. This temporal layering highlights music's capacity to connect present experiences with historical memory, underscoring its dual nature as both subjective expression and collective practice (Blacking, 1973; Stokes, 1994; Janata, 2009).

Importantly, the pedagogical implications of this view are profound. Musical learning should not be confined to formal institutions or Westernised frameworks of music education. Instead, it should acknowledge the plurality of musical knowledges, validating informal, community-based, and intergenerational modes of learning. As Veblen (2012) and Campbell (2004) note, music education must be culturally responsive, embracing both the diversity of musical practices and the multiple literacies through which learners engage with music.

Musical meaning is not static or universal but emerges through the interplay of cultural, historical, spatial, and aesthetic dimensions. Recognising the contextual and experiential nature of musical knowledge allows educators, researchers, and practitioners to approach music not only as an object of study but as a medium of cultural identity, social cohesion, and personal expression. In contemporary music ethnography, the prefix "ethno" has evolved beyond its traditional association with geographically and culturally bound communities. It now assumes a fluid, dynamic, and often unlocatable character, one that resists essentialist definitions and demands new modes of anthropological description and interpretation. This shift reflects a broader transformation in the disciplines of anthropology and ethnomusicology, wherein the foundational concepts of culture and identity are increasingly disentangled from notions of fixed place and territory (Appadurai, 1996; Biddle & Knights, 2007).

Rather than conceptualising culture as a homogeneous and static entity that defines a specific group of people over time, it is now widely understood as a historically dynamic category, subject to constant redefinition and renegotiation. As Nitsiakos (2006: 363) emphasises, culture exists "*in constant flux and subject to the negotiation of collective identities and differences.*" This reconceptualisation positions culture as relational and performative, shaped by the social, political, and historical contexts in which it is enacted and contested. This paradigm shift has significant implications for the study of music and dance, which are no longer viewed as fixed repertoires of unchanging stylistic features or as static "*catalogues*" of national or ethnic authenticity. Rather, these expressive forms are now understood as living, mutable practices, deeply embedded in the social life of communities and shaped by historical contingency and power relations (Stokes, 1994; Turino, 2008). As Nitsiakos (2006: 88) asserts, dance and music are "*historically determined and subject to social and political manipulations and negotiations.*"

Moreover, this perspective allows us to move beyond the long-standing reflection theory—the idea that music passively mirrors the social structures of the society that produces it. Instead, music is approached as an active agent of meaning-making, a site where local hierarchies are constructed, negotiated, and potentially transformed. In this view, music does not merely express pre-existing identities; it participates in their formation and contestation. It becomes both a product and a process—an artefact of cultural production and a medium through which cultural identity is continuously redefined (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000; Slobin, 1993). Importantly, this reconceptualisation aligns with postmodern and postcolonial critiques of the essentialism inherent in early ethnomusicological narratives, which often exoticised or 'othered' non-Western musics. Today, researchers acknowledge that cultural identities are hybrid, diasporic, and intersecting, shaped as much by displacement, migration, and media as by tradition or geography (Gilroy, 1993; Appadurai, 1996).

Musical practices, in this context, become arenas of negotiation, where individuals and groups articulate their sense of belonging, difference, and transformation. They serve as symbolic resources through which place is not only remembered but also reconstructed, especially within diasporic or transnational settings. As Con-nell and

Gibson (2003) argue, music contributes to the symbolic reconstruction of place, allowing communities to redefine spatial and social affiliations beyond physical boundaries.

The contemporary study of music requires a decentred ethnography, one that embraces the complexities of identity, mobility, and cultural hybridity. Music is not merely rooted in place—it is relational, transitory, and historically situated, deeply intertwined with the evolving landscapes of cultural memory and social change. This perspective enriches our understanding of music not only as an aesthetic object but also as a performative, political, and pedagogical practice that reflects and reshapes the world in which it sounds. Identity functions not merely as a descriptive marker but as a communicative process through which individuals and groups perform and negotiate self-understanding. In this respect, identity is not static, but dynamic, constructed through acts of representation that unfold across time and context. Fredrik Barth's seminal boundary theory (1969) marked a pivotal shift in the study of cultural identity by arguing that the essence of a group's identity lies not in a set of immutable cultural traits, but in the social boundaries maintained through processes of differentiation and interaction with others. Thus, the emphasis in anthropological and sociological research has moved from analysing "*content*" to exploring the mechanisms by which groups define and redefine themselves in relation to others.

In alignment with post-structuralist thought, Stuart Hall (1990; 1991) expands on this notion by defining identity as a "*structured representation*," a production that is always in process. Identity, according to Hall (1990: 222), is never a finished product, but rather a narrative constituted through historical, cultural, and discursive formations. It is, therefore, not something we 'have' but something we continually 'perform'. This insight is crucial in understanding the role of expressive practices such as music and dance, which do not merely reflect identity but actively participate in its ongoing production and renegotiation.

From this perspective, music and dance do not simply express cultural identity—they are themselves mediums of cultural representation. They offer insights into the power dynamics between social groups, illuminating how communities resist, subvert, or reproduce dominant cultural narratives. For example, in the case of the Roma, music and dance have historically operated as tools of cultural resistance and visibility, allowing for the assertion of identity in the face of marginalisation (Silverman, 2012; Pettan, 1996). These practices become arenas of contestation, where symbolic strategies are deployed to challenge the hegemonic strategies imposed by majority populations or state mechanisms.

Within the educational context, particularly in multicultural societies, these understandings hold profound pedagogical implications. Music education that embraces a multicultural orientation is not a superficial celebration of diversity but a substantive, critical engagement with cultural complexity. It opens a dialogic space in which multiple musical identities can be constructed, legitimised, problematised, or even contested. In doing so, it challenges dominant narratives and provides a transformative platform for both cultural expression and intercultural understanding (Karlsen & Westerlund, 2015).

Crucially, multicultural music pedagogy should not be viewed as a top-down synchronisation of global trends, but rather as a responsive and reflexive educational model. As Banks (2006) and Nieto (2010) suggest, culturally responsive education foregrounds the lived experiences of learners and views diversity as a strength, rather than a challenge. Through this lens, music becomes a vehicle for critical consciousness, helping students develop the capacity to 'listen'—not just musically, but socially and ethically—to the stories, histories, and positionalities of others (Wright, 2010; Veblen *et al.*, 2013).

Moreover, music education, as a cultural practice, offers marginalised groups the opportunity to incorporate elements of contemporary developments, articulate collective memories, and symbolically constitute themselves as subjects in the public sphere. It facilitates the transmission and renewal of cultural knowledge, enabling learners to navigate, reshape, or resist sociocultural hierarchies. By attending to the interplay between structure and agency, this approach to music education contributes to a reimagining of both pedagogy and society—one in which the arts serve not as ornaments but as fundamental tools of civic participation, cultural affirmation, and educational equity.

4. Is Music a Cultural Product? Issues of Identity, Culture, and Education

According to Adorno (2002), music is interpreted as an integral part of the broader culture of a region or state, functioning as a non-rational institution within society, akin to other social institutions. Its role is to alleviate, in a manner familiar to both the heart and mind, the pressures exerted by the rationalisation of Western society. In other words, music represents a socially non-rational space, a product of the irrational reality within a rational society (Adorno, 1997: 26). Music also serves as a symbol, presenting and projecting ideas beyond the musical realm. It can symbolise patriotic sentiments, social upheavals, and political developments, expressing the core social values that define a community. Shared musical experiences create spaces for meeting, interaction, and communication among individuals. Members of various communities—including marginalised or minority groups—share their emotions through music that serves as a hallmark of their group, using it as a primary symbol of their collective identity (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002).

Music is a cultural product that influences and is perceived by social groups in diverse ways. Tia DeNora (2000: 47) notes that individuals engage with music "*as part of a fundamentally social process of self-construction, formation, and support. [...] The self is an integral part of the cultural construction of subjectivity, a component of how individuals participate in forming their identities as social agents*." The issue of musical communication and identity lies in how music represents people and connects with social groups (Frith, 1996: 108). This naturally raises the question of the musical identity of social groups. As Folkestad (2002) argues, music has always played a significant role in shaping the identities of individuals and groups, providing a means to define oneself as belonging to

or associated with a particular group, and distinguishing others who belong to different groups. For Folkestad, the development of a musical identity is not solely linked to age, gender, musical taste, or other preferences but is also the result of the cultural, national, religious, and racial context in which individuals live (Papastavrou, 2010: 39).

Music legitimises existing social structures and serves as a criterion for our position within them. In other words, where we choose to place ourselves musically determines or reflects where we choose to position ourselves within society. Thus, musical identities are not merely a variety of choices and tastes but different expressions of ourselves. They not only convey our musical preferences but constitute a part of our identity that attempts to articulate how we envision our desired relationships within the social fabric. If this were not the case, music would not have existed as a ritual, propaganda tool, or an integral part of our personal experiences (Papastavrou, 2010: 38). It has been suggested that every social group has its own "*musical language*," a shared musical code, an independent system through which musical communication occurs (Bourdieu, 1984; DeNora, 2000; Turino, 2008).

Musical communication relates to the variety of spaces required for musical experiences across different genres, the relationship between the rhythms of musical entertainment and the rhythms of life (work, leisure, maturation, love, ageing, job changes, relocation, etc.), and with like-minded listeners and musicians. It is also widely accepted that musical sociality can lead to inclusion as well as exclusion (Frith, 2013). Research (Tarrant, 2001; North & Hargreaves, 2001; Papapanagiotou, 2010: 51) concludes that an individual's musical preferences are interpreted as criteria for "*acceptance*" or "*rejection*" by a social group, often discouraging individuals from freely expressing their personal identity.

According to Frith (1996: 109), music and identity share certain characteristics. Both "*describe the collective in the individual and the individual in the collective...*" and both are matters of "*aesthetics and ethics.*" However, Frith does not so much accept that music is the medium through which social groups articulate their ideas and beliefs, but rather that music is an act that embodies within its very existence the relationships between the individual and the collective, upon which the ideas and beliefs of social groups are founded. Music constitutes an experiential embodiment of these ideas, not merely a means of expressing them. Different musical forms and genres can shape diverse types of musical identities. Nevertheless, the way music influences the formation of identities remains consistent (Frith, 1996). Martin (1995: 21) states that due to changes in production and distribution, music "*can now be used to create or declare a range of possible lifestyles or identities.*" Frith also addresses this dimension, referring to a dual social function of music revolving around the concept of use. On one hand, music is transformed by the cultural industry into a commodified tool for market control. On the other hand, on a personal level, music becomes an individualised tool, acquiring a psychological-emotional role used for organising and self-defining one's identity and memory (Frith, 2003: 98).

Every musical culture is characterised by its own system of perceptions regarding music, which is linked to its broader worldview (e.g., what is considered music and what

is not? Where does it originate, and for what purpose is it created?). Music is associated with an aesthetic perception that varies from culture to culture, as views differ on the interpretation of concepts and processes surrounding it. The cultural context in which music is performed also plays a significant role in how each society produces and perceives music (e.g., in what circumstances is music played, and in which is it not? In what spaces does it occur?). This is because each musical culture has its own history, which consequently has its own way of being transmitted from generation to generation (e.g., why are some musical traditions primarily oral and others written?) (Titon, 2014: 258-261). At this point, we must consider that all the above do not necessarily align in every culture, but have overlapping aspects.

The "*ethno*" in music ethnography today assumes a fluid and unlocatable character, to which anthropological description must respond. The concepts of culture and identity are disentangled from that of space and do not constitute homogeneous and static categories defining a group of people over time. Consequently, culture is perceived as a historical dynamic category "*in constant flux and subject to the negotiation of collective identities and differences*" (Nitsiakos, 2006: 363). As such, dance and music are not perceived as static cultural phenomena, as "*catalogues*" of stable and unchanging characteristics, but as dynamic processes "*historically determined and subject to social and political manipulations and negotiations*" (Nitsiakos, op. cit., 88). This perspective allows us to examine music beyond the notion that considers it a cultural phenomenon synonymous with place, that is, rooted in a geographical territory. Beyond the theory of 'reflection' of social structures, music provides the meanings through which local hierarchies are negotiated, transformed, and contribute to the symbolic reconstruction of place and social groups. It is simultaneously a product and a process and is clearly related to cultural identity as a social and cultural construct grounded in history.

Identity serves as a means of communication through which self-identification occurs. According to Barth's boundary theory (1969), the cultural identity of a group is not a set of predetermined social characteristics. Thus, research interest shifts from the cultural content of groups to the boundaries and processes that define them and their identities. Stuart Hall defines identity as a structured representation (1991:21), a 'production' that is always in progress, never complete, and always constituted through representation (Hall 1990:222). Following this observation, we can consider that, beyond the fact that dance and music constitute cultural identity, they also serve as representations of it. This allows us to explore issues concerning the relationships between social groups as well as the practices and strategies they employ in space and time. Specifically, in the case of the Roma, through the interpretation of representations, we detect various resistance tactics that focus on dance and music against the strategies of dominant groups.

Within the framework of the above considerations, we understand that music pedagogical thought with a multicultural orientation is not merely an extension of an imposed synchrony but, we might say, shapes a strong social and cultural component within the educational context. It creates a 'space' in which various 'musical identities' are

constructed, legitimised, recognised, radicalised, transmitted, and perpetuated, or conversely, altered, undervalued, and marginalised. It is the space in which we learn to 'listen' to others. Therefore, it is of particular interest to trace international trends regarding the management of multiculturalism, both at the level of pedagogical ideology and in terms of educational strategies. Specifically, music education can be conceived as a cultural practice through which each ethnic group is able to incorporate elements of contemporary developments, symbolically constitute itself, and share the experience of its cultural identity. This theoretical perspective is a useful tool that contributes to overcoming the limitations imposed by the 'structure/agency' dichotomy.

5. Migration, Education, and Intercultural Pedagogy in the European Union: Policy Developments and Implementation Challenges

Since the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty in May 1999, the European Union (EU) has gradually developed a shared and more coherent policy framework concerning asylum and immigration. This effort was further consolidated with the strategic vision articulated at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, where the EU committed to becoming "*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*" (European Council, 2000). This vision underscored the vital interconnection between economic progress, social inclusion, and the cultivation of a highly educated and adaptable citizenry.

Within this broader strategic framework, education has emerged as a crucial lever for achieving social integration, particularly with regard to legal migrants and their children. The Thessaloniki European Council in June 2003 reaffirmed the foundational role of language learning and intercultural education in promoting equity and cohesion across member states. One of the key priorities has been to ensure that the children of legally residing immigrants have equal access to education on the same terms as EU nationals (Eurydice, 2004). However, in practice, many European countries extend this entitlement universally, irrespective of legal status, recognising education as a fundamental human right (UNESCO, 2015).

Integration strategies vary significantly across the EU. Some systems prioritise immediate mainstreaming, placing immigrant children in age-appropriate classes with native peers and supplementing their learning with additional language support either in class or through after-school programmes (OECD, 2015). Other systems adopt transitional models, offering preparatory classes until learners reach the required linguistic proficiency to participate fully in mainstream education. The duration and intensity of such support measures differ widely, often influenced by national policy orientations, demographic patterns, and resource availability (Huddleston *et al.*, 2013).

The inclusion of students' heritage languages and cultural references remains a contentious and inconsistent area of policy. Although Directive 77/486/EEC mandates member states to provide for the preservation of migrants' linguistic and cultural

backgrounds, implementation has been uneven. Initially designed during a time when migration was perceived as temporary, the directive's original aim was to facilitate reintegration upon return. Today, however, the reality of permanent settlement necessitates a reorientation towards supporting cultural continuity and identity development for children growing up in host societies (Council of the European Union, 1977; Karsten, 2006).

The evolving landscape of migration and education has also prompted significant theoretical developments in the field of intercultural pedagogy. Scholars agree that educational systems must move beyond tokenistic multiculturalism and adopt deep, sustained engagement with cultural diversity. Intercultural education promotes reciprocal understanding, critical reflection, and pedagogical strategies that foster democratic citizenship in diverse classrooms (Banks, 2008; Portera, 2011). The increasing mobility of both students and educational professionals through EU-funded programmes such as Erasmus+ has further enhanced intercultural dialogue and awareness (European Commission, 2023).

Nevertheless, the gap between theoretical aspirations and practical realities remains considerable. While policy discourse reflects growing consensus on the need for inclusive and culturally responsive education, implementation on the ground is often hampered by structural constraints and a lack of teacher training. In many member states, including Greece, the academic discourse on intercultural education remains largely *"imported and normative"* (Damanakis, 1997), with insufficient emphasis on contextually grounded, practice-based approaches. Furthermore, universities and teacher training institutions have yet to fully integrate experiential and reflective methods into their curricula to prepare educators for the multicultural dynamics of the modern classroom (Ghosh, 2016).

The burden of reconciling policy with practice often falls on teachers, who are increasingly vocal about the need for continuous professional development that is directly applicable to their pedagogical challenges. This includes training in managing linguistic diversity, fostering inclusive learning environments, and navigating complex identity negotiations within school settings. Encouragingly, there is growing recognition among education authorities of the importance of moving beyond theoretical formulations towards practice-informed policy (Sleeter, 2012). While the EU has made substantial progress in embedding intercultural education within its broader integration strategy, much remains to be done to bridge the implementation gap. As migration continues to shape the demographic and cultural fabric of European societies, the need for robust, equitable, and culturally responsive educational systems becomes ever more urgent. Each school within the EU must be conceived as an intercultural microcosm—one that reflects, respects, and responds to the plurality of identities it hosts.

6. Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

The findings presented in this article affirm that musical literacy, understood through a multimodal and multicultural lens, constitutes a critical component of contemporary educational practice. Moving beyond traditional paradigms that focus solely on reading and writing musical notation, musical literacy emerges as a dynamic, context-sensitive, and socially embedded form of engagement that intersects with language, identity, culture, and power.

Importantly, the integration of musical literacy into educational curricula not only enhances students' cognitive, linguistic, and emotional development but also fosters inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. As evidenced by empirical and theoretical insights, music functions both as a means of self-expression and as a tool for intercultural dialogue. It empowers learners to engage critically with their social world, supports the construction of identity, and cultivates a sense of belonging—particularly for students navigating multilingual, migratory, or marginalised contexts.

The implementation of the "Design, Designing, Designed" model from the multiliteracies framework proves particularly fruitful pedagogically. It offers a flexible structure for building learning experiences that reflect students' lived realities and encourage creative, transformative action. Its emphasis on critical reflection and transformative practice aligns with broader educational aims such as social justice and participatory democracy. The recognition of music as a cultural product highlights its role in encoding collective narratives, negotiating social boundaries, and legitimising social positions. Music thus emerges as a performative and political act, shaped by and shaping the sociocultural contexts in which it is embedded. This approach challenges essentialist understandings of musical identity and calls for educational strategies that recognise, honor, and engage hybrid, diasporic, and historically situated musical expressions.

The integration of digital technologies into music education further expands the field of musical literacy, enabling new forms of creativity, access, and collaboration. In the information age and the context of global connectivity, digital media facilitate multimodal learning experiences that resonate with contemporary youth cultures while also supporting the documentation and preservation of diverse musical heritages.

The implications for educational policy are clear. As European societies grow increasingly multicultural, music education must respond to the linguistic and cultural diversity of today's classrooms. Policies and practices grounded in intercultural pedagogy must go beyond the rhetoric of celebrating diversity and promote deep, critical engagement with cultural difference. Music can and should be at the forefront of this transformation, as a medium of empathy, inclusion, and mutual recognition.

In conclusion, musical literacy as a multimodal and multicultural practice holds transformative potential for both the learner and the educational system. It invites a rethinking of curricula, teacher education, and pedagogical priorities, grounded in the understanding that music is not merely art, but a fundamental educational, cultural, and

ethical practice. By embracing this expanded vision, educators and policymakers can cultivate learning environments that are pedagogically vibrant, culturally inclusive, and profoundly human.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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