
QUESTION...

Is it beneficial or desirable for school aged singing students to be able to read music and understand music theory?

If it is useful to read music to what extent and at what level is it beneficial or essential?

Ruth Tickle Module 6 presentation
9th October 2026

BACKGROUND

❖ Justification

❖ Aims

❖ Objectives



CURRENTLY AVAILABLE LITERATURE

- ❖ ‘Why Can’t Johnny read Music?’ Edgar Gordons (1958)
- ❖ ‘Musicians’ views on the role of reading music in learning, performance and understanding’ Arthurs & Petrini (2023)

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data gathered via:

- ❖ Questionnaires
- ❖ Interviews

Participants to include:

- ❖ Current school aged pupils
- ❖ Past students studying music at university
- ❖ Music/Instrumental teachers
- ❖ Singing teachers

ETHICS

Ethics

- ❖ Insider Researcher
- ❖ Colleagues
- ❖ Bukamal (2022)



FRAMEWORKS

❖ Mixed Methods

❖ Sequential explanatory design

❖ Qualitative Thematic Analysis. Braun & Clarke (2021)

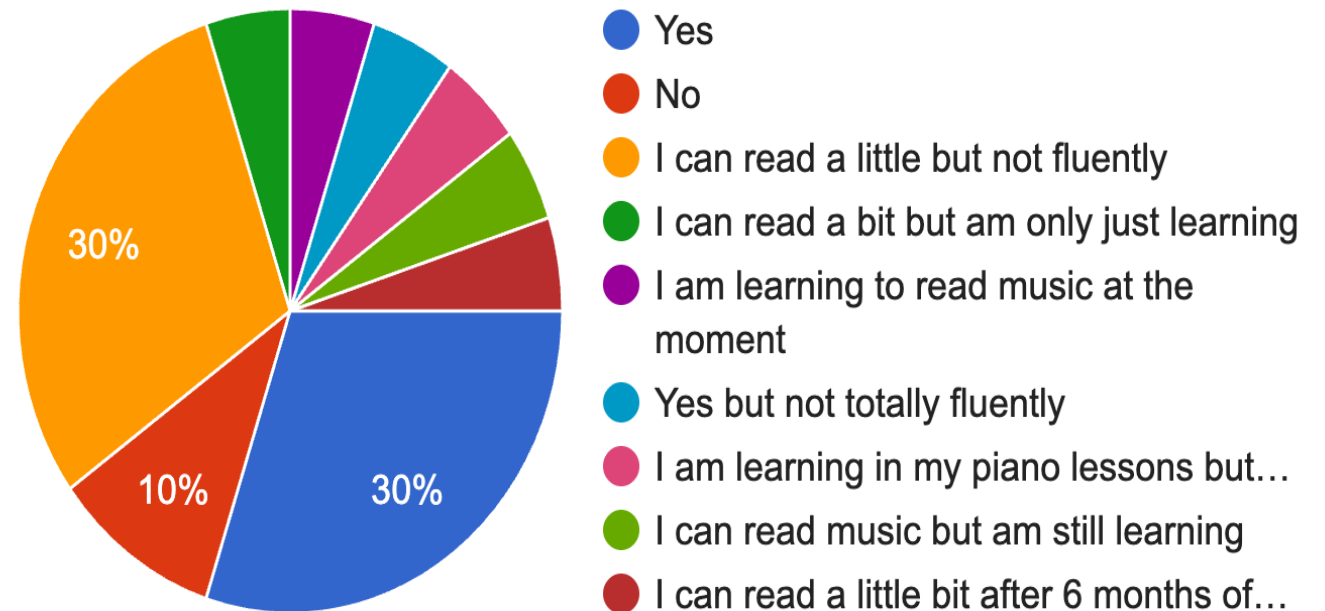
- **Familiarisation** – ensure familiarity with data collected by listening to interviews multiple times & reading interview transcripts.
- **Coding** – review raw data collected to identify ways to structure findings.
- **Themes** – search for themes that arose in multiple interviews to further develop them & draw conclusions. Hard copies of raw data to visually highlight themes as they arise.
- **Reviewing themes** – double check to ensure firm themes that sit within data collection & would lead to relevant findings & conclusion.
- **Defining and naming** – ensure constantly referring them back to original question to avoid drifting off topic
- **Writing the report** – all themes collected & collated to allow the reader to understand the conclusion.

FINDINGS – STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

- ❖ 20 Participants
- ❖ Participants aged 6-18 years
- ❖ Receiving singing lessons for between 1-10 years
- ❖ 19 participants receiving tuition on another instrument
- ❖ 94.4% learning to read notation in instrumental lessons not singing lessons
- ❖ 2 Participants no note reading skills

Are you able to read music?

20 responses



FINDINGS – STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

From 18 Participants:

- ❖ 8 Participants thought singers need to read notation,
- ❖ 3 said notation reading could be helpful but not essential,
- ❖ 7 thought notation reading not needed at all.
- ❖ 7 would use their notation skills to learn a new song
- ❖ 11 would learn a new song aurally or with their teacher

STUDENT INTERVIEWS

❖ **Participant 1** – Fluently read music

- All singers should be able to read music well
- Singer who does not read music will have to rely on their singing teachers notation reading skills to succeed

❖ **Participants 2, 5 & 6** – Read some music

- Genre dependant
- Singer who does not read music will have to rely on their singing teachers notation reading skills to succeed

❖ **Participant 3** – Cannot read any notation

- Violin lessons via Colourstrings
- Singer who does not read music will have to rely on their singing teachers notation reading skills to succeed
- Additional needs

❖ **Participant 4** – Reads some music

- Additional needs

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS STUDYING MUSIC

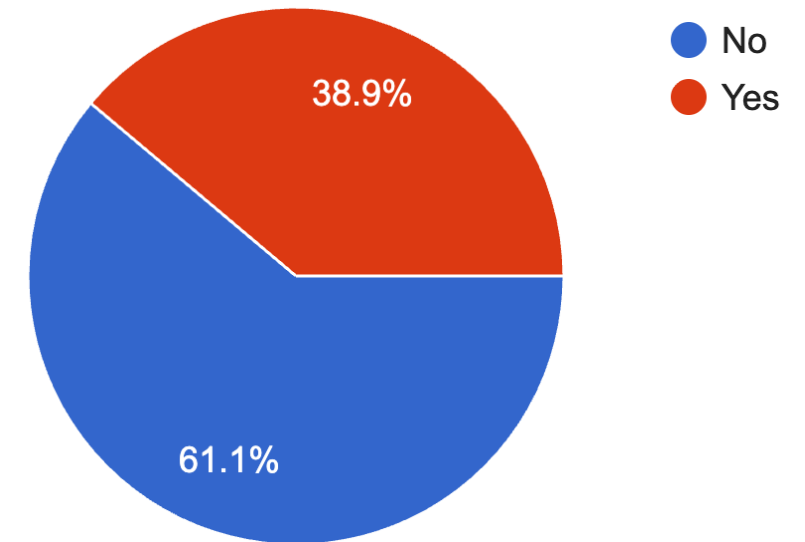
- ❖ 2 students studying classical music
- ❖ 1 student studying Musical Theatre
- ❖ Notation read essential and helpful for all but less so for Musical Theatre genre

MUSIC AND SINGING TEACHERS

- ❖ 18 teachers took part
- ❖ 80% of instrumental teachers taught notation reading automatically
- ❖ 29% of singing teachers taught reading automatically
- ❖ 39% encountered students with additional needs unable to read notation

As an instrumental or singing teacher have you ever had a pupil was unable to read music due to learning disabilities for example?

18 responses



CONCLUSION

- ❖ Emotional
- ❖ Notational gap has occurred!
- ❖ Pedagogically adaptive teaching – all students are different

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