

An Exploration of Recent Approaches to Research in Music Education

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We explored research approaches used in music education studies published in refereed journals since 2010. Senior researchers were queried to identify five journals. A clear split in number of recommendations occurred between the 5th and 6th ranked journals; we decided to include five journals in our investigation. These were, in rank order: *The Journal of Research in Music Education* (JRME), *The Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* (BCRME), *Music Education Research* (MER), *Research Studies in Music Education* (RSME), and the *Journal of Music Teacher Education* (JMTE). Approaches were categorized through several research team processes for reliability and validity checks. The team aimed to put aside preconceived notions of what defines a research design; all decisions emerged from reviewing the published studies. We found authors frequently do not state the design of their study; on average only 50% of the authors do so. Of the quantitative designs, descriptive is the most frequently used design and most experimental studies conducted are quasi-experimental, likely due to restrictions in sample selection. The most often employed qualitative approach is case study followed by general qualitative designs. All journals have a least 2-3 designs not represented. While more quantitative studies have been published in JRME, and more qualitative studies in MER and RSME, it is clear that all these journals are open to a variety of research approaches. Based on the results, our team conversations are currently focused on which labels for designs indicate an approach to research, as opposed to means of collecting and analyzing data. For example, is “discourse analysis” a research design or is it a data analysis approach, similar to ANOVA in a quantitative study? Is “factor analysis” a design or an analysis tool? Is “survey” a design or a data collection tool? While identifying and labeling the numerous approaches to research currently being employed was a challenge, it is encouraging that our profession is accepting a wider variety of approaches to scholarly inquiry.