

# The Role of Traditional Musical Instruments in Healing Purposes

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## Abstract

Traditional musical instruments, embedded within diverse cultural contexts, have long played a role in therapeutic and wellness practices. This systematic review investigates their use in art-based health interventions, emphasizing therapeutic outcomes. Guided by the PRISMA methodology, 27 relevant studies were synthesized from databases including Scopus, PubMed, and IEEE Xplore. Results indicate a predominant focus on addressing psychological well-being and mental health through these interventions. While the guitar emerged as the most employed instrument, particularly in group settings, other traditional instruments—such as the Didgeridoo, Oud, Djembe, and Gending Gamelan—also demonstrated therapeutic value, especially in individual contexts. The United States appears to be at the forefront of research in this area; however, there remains a notable lack of studies in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, despite the rich traditions of healing music present there. These insights affirm the continuing relevance of traditional instruments in modern therapeutic frameworks and suggest the need for future research into virtual modalities and intercultural approaches to broaden impact and accessibility.

**Keywords:** Traditional Musical Instruments, Music, Art Intervention, Health, Wellbeing

## Introduction

Traditional musical instruments have long held a vital place in cultural life, finding expression in folk traditions, spiritual rituals, and healing practices. Typically developed by local communities without a singular inventor, these instruments are crafted from accessible materials like wood, metal, or other natural resources. Their presence in folk performances not only enriches sonic aesthetics but also deepens emotional and communal resonance.

Engaging with musical instruments has been shown to stimulate a range of cognitive, emotional, and physical processes. According to Sono School of Music (2019), instrumental practice enhances brain function and memory retention, encompassing both semantic and procedural memory. Regardless of type, musical instruments share the basic principle of sound generation through vibration, often amplified via resonance chambers. Westrup and Grame (2025) defines a musical instrument broadly as any object capable of producing musical sound, encompassing categories such as percussion, strings, winds, keyboards, and electronic instruments. Scholars propose that many early instruments evolved from utilitarian objects, such as cooking vessels and hunting tools, adapted to produce sound. Sound characteristics are shaped by variables including material composition, design, and playing technique.

Instruments also carry profound symbolic and cultural meaning, shaped by their migration through human history, trade, and adaptation. Cooper (2012) emphasizes their role in spiritual ceremonies, where they often mimic human vocal tones and lyrical expression, rather than centering on harmony or rhythm. Folk music, often performed using stringed instruments or vocal ensembles, varies structurally from monophonic to polyphonic depending on the cultural milieu. The Sachs–Hornbostel classification organizes instruments into idiophones (e.g., xylophones), membranophones (e.g., drums), chordophones (e.g., violins, zithers), and aerophones (e.g., flutes, organs).

Historical accounts trace the use of music for therapeutic purposes back to ancient Greece, where it was regarded as a treatment for psychological ailments (Longhurst, 2020). The earliest printed reference to music therapy appeared in *Columbian Magazine* in 1789, with more formalized research emerging in the 19th century (American Music Therapy Association, n.d). Today, music therapy is a recognized, evidence-based clinical practice, facilitated by trained therapists to promote emotional expression, alleviate stress, and improve quality of life (Wong, 2020). Instruments frequently used in such contexts include hand-held percussion, guitars, ukuleles, pianos, and others noted for their accessibility and versatility (Stain, 2019).

The integration of arts into healthcare systems is gaining momentum globally. Since the 18th century, artistic practices have been valued for their potential to support mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Rushton, 2006). Contemporary research supports the role of creative arts in enhancing health outcomes (Cayton, 2007). In 2014, Australia became a pioneer in institutionalizing arts and health within national policy, following extensive evidence reviews (Australian Government, 2014). The Arts Council England (2007) defines these initiatives as frameworks that utilize creative engagement to foster well-being in both individual and collective contexts. Healthcare-oriented programs typically involve trained facilitators operating in therapeutic settings, while community models emphasize broad participatory involvement (Malchiodi, 2013).

Empirical evidence supports music's impact on both physiological and psychological health. Studies show that music can elevate mood, mitigate depression, enhance circulation, and support recovery, with effects comparable to medical interventions in some contexts (Heid, 2018). Music also fosters social cohesion in group therapy and accelerates post-

operative healing (Baines & Danko, 2010). Adler (2020) underscores its stress-reducing benefits and contribution to mental stability.

Music therapy is widely applied across age groups and clinical conditions—including cardiovascular disease, addiction, autism, and neurodegenerative illnesses like Alzheimer’s disease (Cleveland Clinic Care Specialist, 2020). Research demonstrates its value in memory enhancement, emotional regulation, blood pressure stabilization, and self-esteem development (Raglio et al., 2008; Fukui et al., 2012; Raglio, 2015). Hospitals and care institutions are increasingly incorporating live performances and instrument-based therapies into rehabilitation programs (Mohd Sufie & Sidik, 2016).

This study investigates the role of traditional musical instruments in therapeutic settings, focusing on their historical trajectories, cultural meanings, and relevance in contemporary healthcare. Through a systematic literature review, this research explores how traditional instrumentation contributes to physical, emotional, and psychological restoration in both clinical and community-based interventions.

#### *The Need for a Systematic Review*

A systematic review, as outlined by Petrosino et al. (2001), entails the rigorous identification, synthesis, and evaluation of both quantitative and qualitative evidence to generate well-founded responses to specific research questions. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic reviews adopt standardized methods for article selection and data analysis, thereby minimizing bias and enhancing the reliability of findings (Mallet et al., 2012).

Although numerous studies have examined the therapeutic value of music, there remains a notable lack of focused investigation into the healing potential of traditional musical instruments. These culturally embedded tools are often underrepresented in modern therapeutic frameworks, despite their distinctive qualities and longstanding roles in community healing practices. This review seeks to address that gap by systematically assessing current literature on the use of traditional instruments in therapeutic contexts. While interest in music therapy continues to grow, empirical research on traditional instrumentation remains limited. By foregrounding their potential contribution to health and well-being, this study aims to foster deeper academic engagement with traditional instruments as viable components of contemporary therapeutic strategies. The following research questions guide this review:

1. Which traditional musical instruments have been used for healing purposes?
2. How do traditional instruments contribute to art-based interventions in health and well-being?

This study conducts a systematic examination of existing literature to explore the therapeutic potential of traditional musical instruments. It synthesizes key findings from empirical studies and critically assesses the extent to which these instruments contribute to healing processes. The subsequent sections detail the methodological approach, present an integrated analysis of relevant research, and evaluate the implications of traditional instruments in therapeutic settings. The paper concludes by identifying existing research gaps and proposing avenues for future investigation.

## **Methodology**

PRISMA, funding, inclusion and exclusion requirements, the systematic review method, and the abstraction and analysis of evidence included in the present research are all explained in this portion.

### *PRISMA*

The PRISMA framework—Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses—serves as a standardized guideline for conducting and reporting systematic literature reviews. It is designed to ensure transparency, methodological rigour, and replicability in the synthesis of research findings (Moher et al., 2009). PRISMA is particularly valuable for assessing studies such as randomized controlled trials, but its structured approach is also applicable to diverse forms of research. By enabling comprehensive searches across large bodies of literature, PRISMA facilitates the identification and evaluation of studies relevant to specific research questions. In the context of this review, the PRISMA protocol was employed to guide the systematic identification, screening, and analysis of literature related to the therapeutic application of traditional musical instruments. The framework supports the development of an analytical coding scheme that captures both empirical evidence and cultural dimensions of traditional instruments used in healing contexts.

### *Resources*

Search terms were adapted from prior systematic reviews and expanded to specifically target literature on traditional musical instruments in relation to well-being, health outcomes, and art-based interventions. While Scopus served as a primary indexing database, it is acknowledged that no single repository offers exhaustive coverage. To address this limitation and ensure a more comprehensive review, supplementary manual searches were conducted across several established academic databases, including ScienceDirect, PubMed, ProQuest, IEEE Xplore, Medline, NCBI, Oxford Academic, and Taylor & Francis Online.

## **The Systematic Review Process for Selecting the Articles**

### *Identification*

The systematic review process in this study was structured around three primary stages. The initial phase involved identifying key search terms, supplemented by the exploration of related terminology using resources such as thesauri, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and prior studies. Comprehensive search strings were applied across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, PubMed, ProQuest, IEEE Xplore, Medline, NCBI, Oxford Academic, and Taylor & Francis Online. No date restrictions were imposed during the search. Once the keywords were finalized, manual screening of references within selected studies was conducted to identify additional relevant literature. The search and screening process was carried out in January 2021 (refer to Table 1 for details).

### *Screening*

The initial phase of screening aimed to eliminate duplicate entries, resulting in the removal of 20 articles. Subsequently, a total of 1,200 articles were assessed based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The first criterion focused on the type of literature, with the review limited exclusively to peer-reviewed journal articles, considered the primary source of

empirical evidence. Consequently, other forms of literature such as reviews, surveys, meta-analyses, books, book chapters, conference papers, and grey literature were excluded. Only articles published in English were included, and the review was confined to an eight-year period, spanning from 2014 to 2021. Moreover, only studies explicitly involving traditional musical instruments in relation to health, well-being, or art-based interventions were retained, in alignment with the study's objectives. Priority was given to journals within the fields of health, psychology, and the arts to ensure thematic relevance. Based on these criteria, a total of 1,173 publications were excluded during this phase (see Table 2).

### *Eligibility*

In the final stage of screening, a total of 200 articles were subjected to detailed evaluation. Each paper's title, abstract, and full text were carefully reviewed to assess its relevance and alignment with the study's objectives. The aim was to ensure that selected studies met the inclusion criteria and provided meaningful contributions to the analysis. As a result, 173 articles were excluded at this stage for various reasons, including a lack of empirical data, overly theoretical or speculative content, or insufficient focus on the therapeutic application of traditional musical instruments. Ultimately, 27 articles were identified as meeting all criteria and were included in the final analysis (see Figure 1).

Table 1

#### *Search terms combined with a traditional musical instrument*

'folk instrument' OR 'folk music' OR 'national instrument' OR 'advantage instrument' OR 'old instrument' OR 'instrument culture' OR 'music culture' OR 'heritage instrument'
'Well-being' OR 'psychology' OR 'psychosocial OR 'life' OR 'use music' OR 'calmness' OR 'physical well-being' OR 'suggest recovering' OR 'healing purpose'
'Health' OR 'music therapy' OR 'therapies' OR 'treatment' OR 'patient' OR 'diseases OR 'healing' OR 'medicine' OR 'wellness' OR 'medical'
'Art intervention' OR 'music' OR 'sing' OR 'art education' OR 'sound' OR 'perform' OR 'instrument'

Table 2

#### *The inclusion and exclusion criteria*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
Publication timeline	2014-2021	2014 and before
Document type	Article (with empirical data) and review	Conference proceeding, chapters in book, book series, books etc
Language	English	Non-English
Nature of the study	Focus on methodology	Not focus on methodology

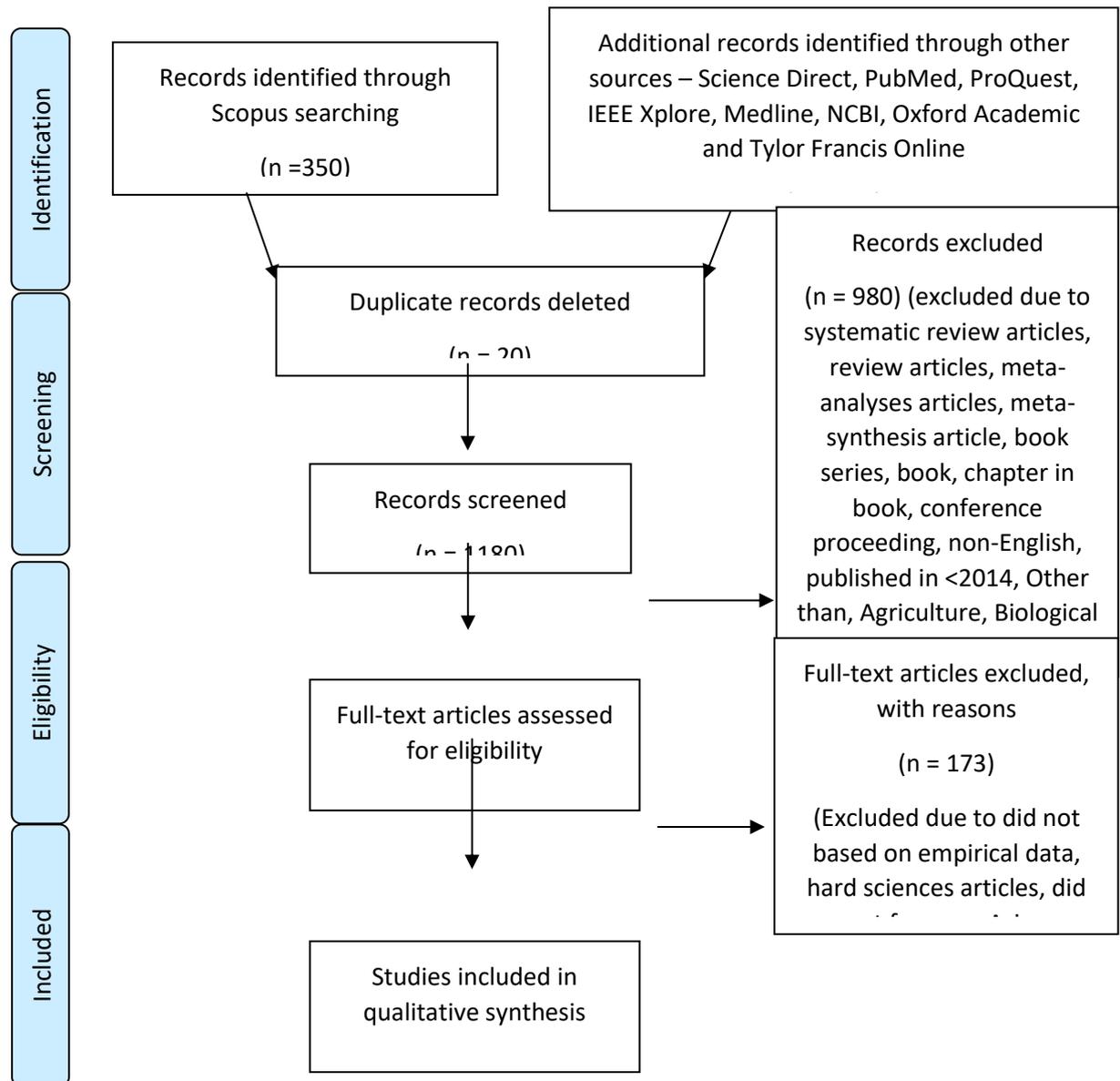


Figure 1: Flow chart representing the literature search Table 3

*Literature matrix traditional instrument music for healing purposes*

Study	Country	Traditional Instruments Mentioned	Purpose	Findings
Goldsby et al. 2017	USA	Tibetan Singing Bowl, Dorges (Bells), Ting-Sha (Tiny Cymbal), Gong, Small Bell, Didgeridoo.	Assess effects of Tibetan singing bowl meditation on well-being	Found to be a low-cost, effective stress reduction tool
Metzner et al. 2018	Germany	Piano, Marimba, Metallophone, Goblet Drums, Def (Frame Drums), Djembe, Conga, Bongos, Ocean	Explore sensory perception and improvisation in PTSD patients	Beneficial for complex trauma conditions

		Drum, Rainstick, Guitar, Kantele, Lute (Oud).		
Tang et al. <b>2018</b>	China	Drum, Gong, Mouth Organ, Xylophone.	Evaluate group music intervention for apathy in nursing homes	Improved cognitive stability in intervention group
Ploukou & Panagopoulou <b>2018</b>	Greece	Bongo Drum, Djembe, Doumbek, Maraca, Castanets, Triangle, Wood Block, Ratchet, Tambourine.	Assess effects of music intervention on nurses' anxiety & well-being	Music as a cost-effective stress relief tool
Neudorfer <b>2018</b>	Austria	Harp, Guitar, Oud, Monochord, Frame Drum, Orff.	Apply Karl Baier's anthropological spirituality theory in therapy	Supports communication in music therapy
Lee et al. <b>2019</b>	Japan	Didgeridoo.	Explore didgeridoo's role in alternative health promotion	Improved mood, depression, and autonomic stability
Amiri et al. <b>2019</b>	Iran	Setar, Tar, Tonbak, Kamancheh, Oud, Daf.	Evaluate Persian traditional music for primary insomnia	Improved sleep quality
Nemesh <b>2017</b>	USA	Drums, Keyboards, Guitars, Flutes.	Introduce family-based music therapy in non-clinical settings	Strengthened family bonds through music interventions
Scheffel & Matney <b>2014</b>	UK	Drum Circle, Timbales, Steel Pan Drums, Boomwhackers, Cajon, West African Xylophones (Gyil or Bala), Gourd Drums (Ipu Drum), Chimes, Table Drum, Tongue Drum, Cymbals, Buckets, Pandeiro, Tank Drums.	Examine percussion training in music therapy education	62.8% found percussion training relevant
So <b>2019</b>	South Korea	Snare Drum, Cymbals, Guitar, Ocean Drum, Metallophone.	Study experiences of Korean music therapy students	Music therapy enhances personal and professional growth

Matney 2017	USA	Piano, Marimba.	Assess multiple instruments' effects on student anxiety	Percussion equally effective as other instruments
Kang 2019	Republic of Korea	Saxophone, Flute, Mandolin.	Analyze amateur orchestra participation and well-being	Music therapy addresses socio-cultural needs
Cibrian et al. 2020	USA	Tambourine.	Test Neurological Music Therapy for Autism Spectrum Disorder	Improved coordination and behavior regulation
Rajesh & Nalini 2020	India	Violin, Piano, Flute, Trumpet.	Recognizing emotions through instrumental lessons with AI	Deep learning techniques improved recognition accuracy
Vaudreuil et al. 2019	USA	Paddle Drum, Harp.	Investigate music therapy in military rehabilitation	Music therapy improved motor function and recovery
Raghavan et al. 2016	Italy	Maraca, Mallet, Drum, Tambourine, Vertical Bells, Wind Chimes Stand, Xylophone, Horn, Blow, Cabasa, Rain Stick, Hand Chimes, Steel Drum, Piano, Harp, Guitar.	Develop Music Upper Limb Therapy for stroke recovery	Facilitated sensorimotor and emotional rehabilitation
Zhang et al. 2015	China	Harp, Piano, Guitar, Violin Cello, West African Kora, Flute, Harmonica, Melodeon, Fiddle.	Implement live music therapy in neurorehabilitation ward	Positive patient responses suggest therapy feasibility
Iliya 2015	USA	Keyboard, Guitar, Xylophone, Xylimba, Glockenspiel, Conga Drum, Bongos, Dumbek, Djembes.	Explore grief-focused music therapy	Reduced grief symptoms significantly
Djohan et al. 2020	Indonesia	Gending Gamelan.	Assess gamelan music's effect on pregnancy-related anxiety	Significant anxiety reduction in pregnant women

Philips et al. <b>2019</b>	USA	Didgeridoo.	Compare didgeridoo sound meditation to silent meditation	Effective in stress and mood improvement
Lange et al. <b>2018</b>	Germany	Timbale, Drum Set, Kettledrum, Congas, Djembés, Tambourines, Vibraphone, Marimbaphone, Xylophone, Glockenspiel, Boomwhackers, Chimes, Metallophone, Bass Chime, Tomtom, Tympanum, Bigbom, Claves, Temple Block, Maracas, Cabaza, Caxixis, Cajon, Triangle, Agogobell, Gong, Singing Bowl, Ocean Drum, Kazoo, Rain Maker, Piano, Guitar, Bowed Psaltery, Lyre, Monochord, Accordion, Soprano Recorder, Slide Whistle.	Investigate active music creation's psychological impact	Music creation improves self-efficacy and well-being
Roa & Ettenberger <b>2018</b>	Colombia	Nylon-String Guitar, Shakers, Ocean Drum, 'Samafón'.	Examine music therapy's role in family-centered care	Addressing parents' needs enhances therapy outcomes
Bukowska et al. <b>2016</b>	Poland	Cajon, Conga, Drums, Maracas, Tambourine.	Study music therapy's effect on Parkinson's disease	Improved mobility and postural control
Luis et al. <b>2019</b>	Egypt	Oud.	Evaluate live oud music for cardiac surgery patients	Reduced stress response in surgery patients
Heiderscheit et al. <b>2014</b>	USA	Guitar, Harp, Native American Flute, Piano, Flute.	Study music preferences in clinical anxiety management	Patient-directed music therapy effectively reduced anxiety

Martin & Wood 2017	Australia	Djembe.	Assess music therapy's impact on adolescent PTSD	Reduced symptoms and antisocial behavior	PTSD and
Yinger 2016	USA	Classical Guitar, Plastic Maracas, Lollipop Drums, Tambourines, Castanets, Rainstick, Ocean Drum.	Examine cognitive-behavioral music therapy for children	Music therapy reduced distress and improved coping	

Table 4

*List name type and frequencies traditional musical instrument*

Instrument Type	Frequency	Instrument Type	Frequency
<b>String Instruments</b>		<b>Percussion Instruments</b>	
Guitar / Classical Guitar / Nylon-String Guitar	11	Djembe	5
Oud	4	Harp	5
Violin / Violin Cello	2	Maraca	5
Bowed Psaltery	1	Ocean Drum	5
Mandolin	1	Tambourine	6
Lyre	1	Conga Drum	4
Setar	1	Drum	4
Kamancheh	1	Xylophone	4
West African (Kora)	1	Daf / Def (Frame Drums)	3
		Didgeridoo	3
<b>Wind Instruments</b>		Metallophone	3
Flute	6	Rainstick / Rain Maker	3
Harmonica	1	Cajon	3
Mouth Organ	1	Triangle	2
Kazoo	1	Cymbal	2
Horn	1	Doumbek / Dumbek	2
		Glockenspiel	2
<b>Percussion &amp; Bell Instruments</b>		Timbale	2
Tibetan Singing Bowl	1	Castanet	2
Singing Bowl	1	Chimes	2
Gong	2	Tank Drum	1
Gending Gamelan	1	Drum Circle	1
Agogobell	1	Fiddle	1
Caxixis	1	Glockenspiel	2
Cabasa / Cabaza	2	Marimbaphone	1
Pandeiro	1	Orff	1
Tar	1	Snare Drum	1
Tonbak	1	Blow	1
Goblet Drum	1	Table Drum	1
Small Bell	1	Vibraphone	1
Ting-Sha (Tiny Cymbal)	1	Tongue Drum	1
Dorges (Bell)	1	Temple Block	1
Bass Chime	1	Kettledrum	1
Caxixis	1	Marimba	2
Tympanum	1	Steel Pan Drum	1

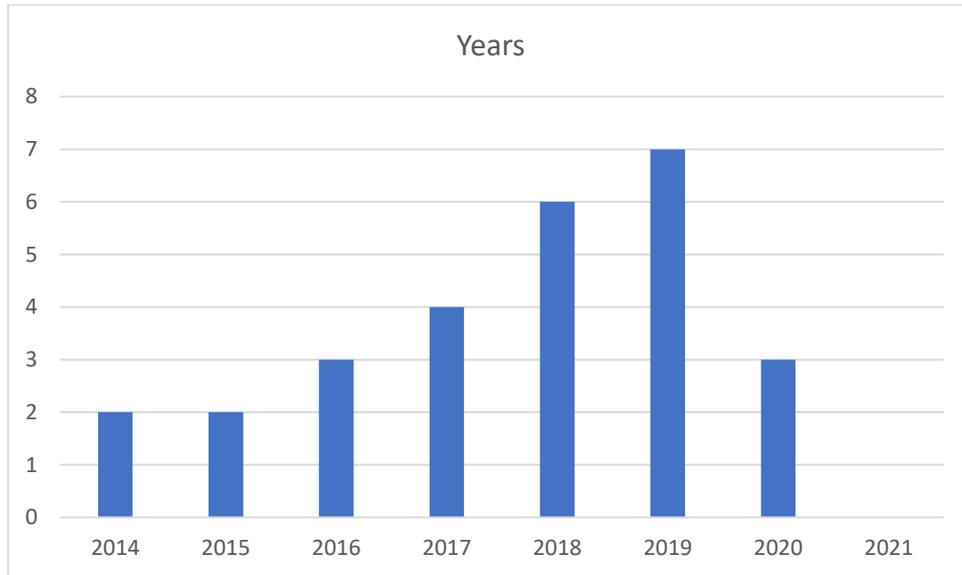


Figure 2: Year of publication

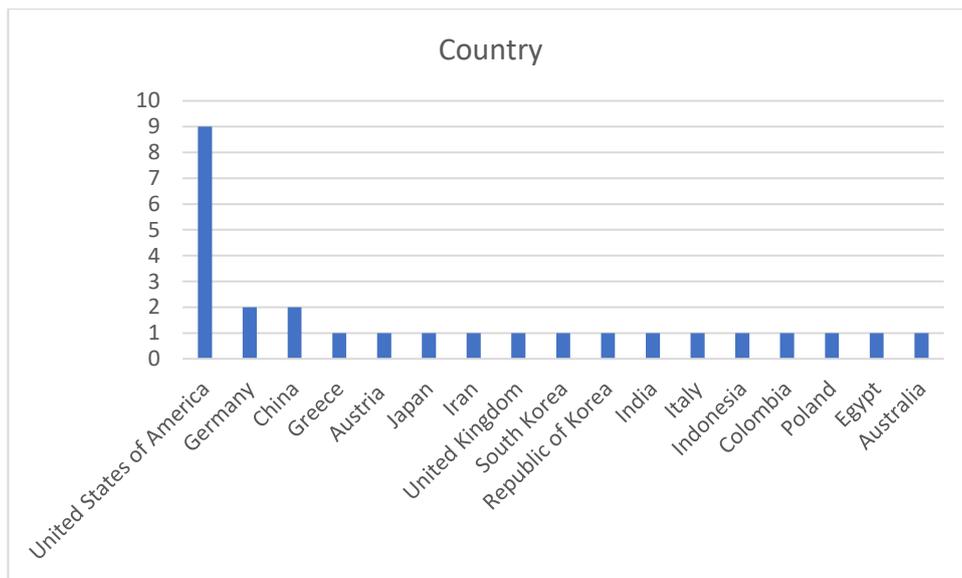


Figure 3: The country where the study was conducted

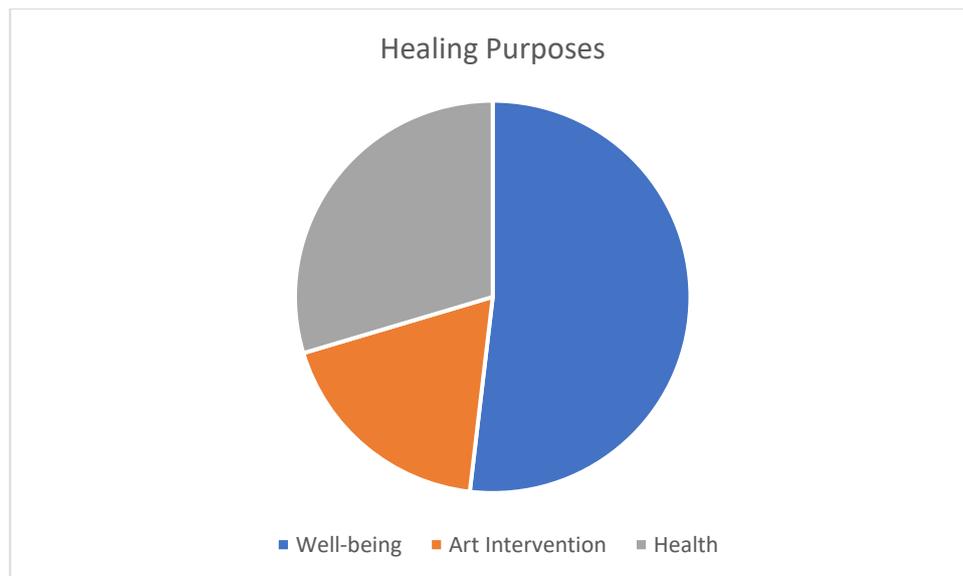


Figure 4: Total percentage category healing purposes

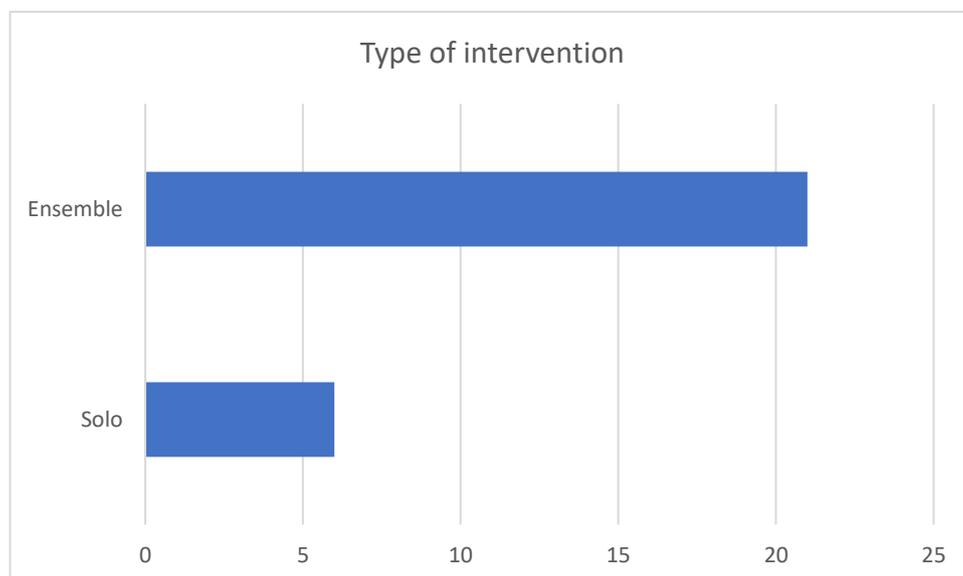


Figure 5: Type using intervention in healing purposes

## Results and Discussions

### *Traditional Musical Instruments Used for Healing Purposes*

This review identifies a wide array of traditional musical instruments employed in therapeutic contexts, underscoring their value in enhancing mental health, supporting physical rehabilitation, and promoting emotional well-being. Among the instruments reviewed, the guitar—across its classical, nylon-string, and acoustic forms—emerges as the most frequently utilized, appearing in 11 studies (Nemesh, 2017; So, 2019; Raghavan et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2015; Iliya, 2015; Lange et al., 2018; Roa & Ettenberger, 2018; Heiderscheit et al., 2014; Yinger, 2016; Goldsby et al., 2017; Philips et al., 2019). Its popularity stems from its versatility, accessibility, and ability to produce both melodic and harmonic content, making it effective for both individual and group-based interventions. The guitar has been used to address stress, support emotional expression, and enhance social connection.

Other frequently cited traditional instruments include the flute, harp, djembe, xylophone, conga drum, and tambourine. The flute, mentioned in six studies (Heiderscheit et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2015; Rajesh & Nalini, 2020; Kang, 2019; Nemesh, 2017; Tang et al., 2018), is noted for its calming qualities and benefits related to breath regulation and emotional modulation—especially in mindfulness and stress-relief therapies. The harp, referenced in five studies (Neudorfer, 2018; Vaudreuil et al., 2019; Raghavan et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2015; Heiderscheit et al., 2014), has shown efficacy in reducing physical pain, enhancing focus, and promoting cognitive and emotional recovery.

Percussion instruments such as the djembe and conga drum are frequently incorporated into rhythm-based therapy for their role in improving motor skills, enabling emotional release, and fostering group cohesion—particularly in trauma-informed care and collective healing sessions (Ploukou & Panagopoulou, 2018; Metzner et al., 2018). The tambourine, used in movement-oriented interventions, supports rhythmic coordination and is especially effective among individuals with neurodevelopmental or motor challenges (Cibrian et al., 2020).

Certain instruments, such as the didgeridoo and Gending Gamelan, have been recognized for their efficacy in solo therapeutic use due to their distinctive tonal and vibrational properties. The didgeridoo has been applied in breath-focused therapies, aiding in the management of respiratory issues, sleep disturbances, and stress-related disorders (Lee et al., 2019). The Gending Gamelan, an Indonesian traditional ensemble, has demonstrated potential in reducing anxiety and enhancing meditative focus (Djohan et al., 2020). Instruments like the oud, tambourine, and djembe have also proven effective in individual expressive therapy settings, promoting self-regulation and emotional processing (Luis et al., 2019; Martin & Wood, 2017).

Overall, the findings suggest that while solo instrumental practices support internal emotional regulation and relaxation, ensemble-based therapies tend to be more effective for enhancing social interaction, rhythmic engagement, and communal healing (Goldsby et al., 2017).

#### *Traditional Musical Instruments in Health and Well-being*

Traditional musical instruments serve not only as therapeutic mediums but also as essential components of art-based health interventions. These practices are increasingly implemented in clinical environments such as hospitals, rehabilitation centres, mental health facilities, and community settings, where their artistic and cultural value is acknowledged (Scheffel & Matney, 2014). Evidence from the reviewed literature indicates that traditional music therapy is particularly effective in alleviating psychological distress, fostering social interaction, and supporting holistic well-being (Ploukou & Panagopoulou, 2018).

Mental health emerges as the most prominent domain within this body of research, with over half of the reviewed studies (52%) focused on psychological outcomes (Philips et al., 2019). Traditional musical interventions have been shown to reduce symptoms associated with stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma (Goldsby et al., 2017). For instance, Tibetan Singing Bowl therapy is highlighted as an affordable and impactful method for promoting relaxation and stress relief. Similarly, Javanese Gamelan music has been effectively used in

prenatal settings to reduce maternal anxiety and enhance emotional stability (Djohan et al., 2020). The Didgeridoo, another traditional instrument, has demonstrated positive outcomes in regulating the autonomic nervous system and improving emotional equilibrium (Lee et al., 2019).

Beyond psychological benefits, approximately 30% of the included studies address physical and neurological health improvements facilitated by traditional music therapy. Applications include motor skill rehabilitation, cardiovascular health, and sensory integration (Bukowska et al., 2016). Neurologic Music Therapy (NMT), particularly among children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), has been shown to enhance motor coordination and sensory responses (Cibrian et al., 2020). In another example, traditional Persian music therapy has been linked to improved sleep quality and the treatment of primary insomnia (Amiri et al., 2019). Moreover, percussion-based music therapy has yielded notable improvements in mobility and postural control among individuals with Parkinson's disease, suggesting a strong link between rhythmic stimulus and neuroplastic adaptation (Bukowska et al., 2016).

In addition to therapeutic gains, traditional music practices also support cultural continuity, creative expression, and community engagement. Approximately 19% of the studies reviewed explore these sociocultural dimensions, emphasizing the role of music in reinforcing identity and collective well-being (Scheffel & Matney, 2014). Family-based musical interventions, for example, have been shown to strengthen emotional communication and social bonding, illustrating the social capital embedded in communal music-making (Nemesh, 2017).

This review reaffirms the significance of traditional musical instruments in both psychological and physical healing. While the guitar remains the most frequently utilized instrument, others such as the Didgeridoo, Oud, Djembe, and Gending Gamelan have proven highly effective in individualized therapeutic settings. Ensemble-based therapy remains prevalent, particularly for enhancing cognitive stimulation, emotional resilience, and interpersonal connection. Although the United States remains a leader in music therapy research, regional disparities are evident—especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, where rich traditions of healing music exist but are insufficiently documented (Heiderscheit et al., 2014).

Future research should prioritize the development of virtual music therapy platforms to improve accessibility and inclusivity (Philips et al., 2019). Additionally, cross-cultural investigations are warranted to explore the integration of indigenous music traditions into formal therapeutic models. Recognizing and validating traditional musical instruments as evidence-based therapeutic tools can support the advancement of a culturally inclusive, scientifically grounded, and globally applicable model of music therapy (Nemesh, 2017). Bridging traditional knowledge with contemporary clinical practice may ultimately foster a more holistic approach to health and well-being.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the advancement of modern musical technologies, traditional musical instruments remain highly relevant in contemporary therapeutic practices. These instruments—often crafted from natural materials such as wood, iron, and animal-derived elements and originating from communal traditions rather than individual inventors—have evolved beyond

their original functions in folk music, rituals, and ceremonies. Today, they are increasingly recognized for their therapeutic value in both clinical and community health contexts.

Notably, the United States leads in the integration of music therapy into healthcare, where traditional instruments are actively utilized in psychological and physical treatment programs. The results of this systematic review affirm the therapeutic significance of traditional musical instruments across psychological and physiological domains. The guitar stands out as the most frequently employed instrument due to its versatility and adaptability in diverse settings. However, other traditional instruments—including the Didgeridoo, Oud, Djembe, and Gending Gamelan—demonstrate particular effectiveness in individualized therapy, offering unique tonal and vibrational qualities conducive to emotional regulation and relaxation. Ensemble-based interventions also remain prevalent, especially in fostering cognitive stimulation, emotional expression, and social connectedness. Nevertheless, disparities in research and application persist, particularly in underrepresented regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite the region's rich musical heritage and reliance on traditional healing music, systematic investigations remain limited (Heiderscheit et al., 2014). This underscores the need for a broader, more inclusive research agenda.

Future inquiries should consider the potential of digital and virtual music therapy platforms to enhance accessibility, especially for remote or underserved populations (Philips et al., 2019). Additionally, cross-cultural studies are needed to explore how indigenous musical traditions can be respectfully and effectively incorporated into mainstream therapeutic models. Recognizing traditional instruments as empirically supported tools for healing not only preserves cultural heritage but also enriches the global landscape of music therapy. By integrating ancestral musical wisdom with contemporary scientific approaches, music therapy can continue to evolve as a holistic, inclusive, and culturally grounded form of healthcare.

This study makes a meaningful theoretical contribution by bridging the fields of ethnomusicology, health sciences, and art-based intervention. It reconceptualizes traditional musical instruments not merely as cultural artifacts but as integral components of evidence-based therapeutic models. By synthesizing insights from 27 empirical studies, this review advances a theoretical framework in which music is understood as both a medium of cultural identity and a scientifically validated intervention for health and well-being.

Contextually, the research addresses critical disparities in the literature, particularly the underrepresentation of African and Southeast Asian musical traditions in formal therapeutic discourse. By emphasizing the value of traditional instruments in addressing contemporary health challenges—including trauma, neurodegenerative disease, and social disconnection—this study advocates for culturally sensitive and contextually relevant applications of music therapy. Ultimately, the findings encourage policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to adopt a more inclusive, culturally informed approach that honors ancestral musical knowledge while advancing global health outcomes.

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