

Conceptions of Teaching and Learning in Instrumental and Vocal Music Education: Perspectives from a Foundation in Music Programme

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores conceptions of teaching and learning in instrumental and vocal music education within the Foundation in Music programme at Seaview University. Focusing on piano, violin, and vocal instruction, the research examines how teachers and students understand their roles, experience the learning process, and influence one another. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four teachers and five students, classroom observations, and document analysis. The study is framed by Constructivist Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and the Master-Apprentice Model. Findings reveal that music teaching is shaped by a balance between technical instruction, emotional engagement, feedback, student autonomy, and teacher-student relationships. Students' learning experiences were influenced not only by instructional approaches but also by motivation, confidence, support, and opportunities for active participation. The study concludes that effective instrumental and vocal music education extends beyond technical mastery and performance achievement. It requires pedagogical awareness, reflective practice, and meaningful teacher-student interaction. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of music education in higher education and offer practical implications for improving teaching practices, curriculum development, and student engagement in music programmes.

Keywords: *music education; instrumental and vocal pedagogy; conceptions of teaching and learning; teacher-student relationships; higher education; constructivist theory; experiential learning*

1. Introduction

1.1 The Broader Context

Historically, the teaching and learning of instrumental and vocal music has been firmly rooted in the intimate settings of music studios, conservatories, and specialized institutions. Unlike many educational disciplines where teachers often possess formal teaching qualifications, many instrumental and vocal instructors are accomplished musicians who draw upon experiential knowledge and informal pedagogical techniques (Creech, Hallam, Varvarigou, &

Gaunt, 2022). This reliance on experiential learning has led to a scenario in which teaching methodologies are inherited from their own instructors, perpetuating a cycle of practice that often lacks robust theoretical foundations (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2022). Consequently, the content of instrumental and vocal lessons remains largely undefined and is shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including the student, teacher, and institutional context. This complexity complicates the establishment of standardized curricula, further emphasizing the need for a refined understanding of teaching and learning in music education (Hallam, 2021).

Research on instructional practices within instrumental and vocal music education has consistently shown that traditional approaches prioritize performance outcomes over the processes involved in teaching and learning. Studies frequently emphasize the importance of musical performance as the primary measure of educational success, thereby neglecting the intricate pedagogical dynamics that facilitate effective teaching and learning (Evans & McPherson, 2023). As a result, a significant knowledge gap exists concerning how teaching and learning are perceived and enacted in the context of instrumental and vocal music education.

A pressing need for comprehensive studies that address this gap has become evident. Recent literature indicates that understanding how instrumental and vocal music educators and their students conceptualize their respective roles and learning processes can lead to enhanced educational practices, improved student experiences, and a more enriching learning environment (Creech et al., 2022). Insights gained from investigating these perceptions can serve as a foundation for developing innovative pedagogical strategies that better support student learning and engagement (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2022).

1.2 Identifying the Research Gap

Despite extensive research on music education, particularly in Western contexts, several significant gaps remain. Much of the literature focuses on instrumental and vocal music education, concentrating primarily on performance outcomes rather than the nuanced dynamics of teaching and learning processes. Additionally, there is limited research examining music education in developing countries like Malaysia, where Western pedagogical frameworks intersect with local cultural contexts.

One significant gap is the insufficient focus on the relational aspects of teaching and learning in music education. While considerable research has been conducted on technical and performance-based outcomes, less attention has been given to how relationships between teachers and students influence the learning process (Evans & McPherson, 2023). The teacher-student relationship can significantly impact student engagement, motivation, and ultimately learning outcomes (Creech et al., 2022). A strong rapport between educators and students fosters an environment conducive to learning, where students feel safe to express themselves creatively.

Another major gap is the limited research on music education in developing countries such as Malaysia. Most existing studies are based on experiences from Western countries, which may not be entirely applicable to the unique cultural and educational contexts found in developing nations (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2022). The Malaysian educational system blends Western pedagogical techniques with local cultural traditions, creating unique challenges for educators (Creech et al., 2022).

1.3 The Need for the Present Study

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the conceptions of teaching and learning in instrumental and vocal music education within the Foundation in Music programme at Seaview University. By examining the experiences of both teachers and students, the research aims to provide a more holistic understanding of pedagogical practices and their effects on learning experiences. The study is significant because it focuses on the relational dynamics between educators and learners, which are often overlooked in performance-oriented research.

1.4 Research Purpose and Questions

The primary objectives of this study are threefold:

1. To explore the conceptions of teaching and learning held by instrumental and vocal music educators and students.
2. To examine the relationship between teachers' and students' experiences in music education.
3. To investigate the relationship between teachers' conceptions of teaching and students' experiences of learning in instrumental and vocal music education.

To fulfill these objectives, the following research questions guide the study:

RQ1: What are the conceptions of teaching and learning among instrumental and vocal music teachers?

RQ2: How do students experience learning in instrumental and vocal music education?

RQ3: What are the relationships between teachers' and students' conceptions of teaching and learning?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study's significance is multifaceted, aiming to enrich the field of instrumental and vocal music education through a comprehensive examination of pedagogical practices. By focusing on both teachers' and students' experiences and perspectives, the research seeks to illuminate the dynamics of teaching and learning that are often overlooked in existing literature. The findings are anticipated to have a profound impact on multiple aspects of music education, including curriculum development, teaching practices, student engagement, and the overall learning experience.

One of the primary contributions of this study is its potential to inform and enhance the professional development of instrumental and vocal music educators. Research suggests that effective teaching practices are critical in shaping students' learning experiences (Hallam, 2021). However, many educators in music education rely on inherited teaching methods without critically reflecting on their effectiveness. By investigating how educators

conceptualize their teaching and the strategies they employ, this study will provide valuable insights that can be utilized in teacher training programs.

The significance of this research extends to curriculum designers and educational institutions responsible for developing music education programs. By examining the pedagogical practices of effective teachers, the study can provide evidence-based recommendations for curriculum development that align with best practices in higher education (Bauer, 2020). The integration of innovative teaching methodologies, as informed by this research, will enable curriculum developers to create more engaging and relevant music programs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concepts and Perceptions of Teaching and Learning in Music Education

The concept of teaching and learning in instrumental and vocal music education has historically been shaped by the master-apprentice model, a traditional pedagogical approach where the teacher is regarded as the master of a particular skill, and the student assumes the role of an apprentice who learns through observation, imitation, and repetition (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2022). This model, which has deep roots in classical music training, is characterized by individualized instruction, allowing teachers to work closely with students to develop both technical proficiency and artistic interpretation (Creech et al., 2022).

Learning in music education is inherently cognitive and experiential, requiring both the intellectual understanding of musical concepts and the physical mastery of instruments or vocal techniques (Hallam, 2021). According to constructivist learning theories, students develop their knowledge actively rather than passively receiving information from an instructor. This perspective has influenced modern music education, encouraging student-centered learning approaches that promote active engagement, exploration, and creative problem-solving (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2022).

In addition to constructivist theories, experiential learning models, such as Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), emphasize learning through direct experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation (Kolb, 2015, as cited in Creech et al., 2022). Applied to music education, this approach suggests that students internalize musical concepts more effectively when they actively participate in music-making, engage in reflective practice, and experiment with different artistic interpretations.

2.2 The Master-Apprentice Model in Music Education

The master-apprentice model is one of the oldest pedagogical frameworks in music education, particularly prevalent within Western classical traditions. For centuries, distinguished musicians have passed on their skills, techniques, and knowledge to students through a process that relies heavily on demonstration and repetition. In this model, the teacher, typically a master musician, demonstrates specific techniques or pieces, and the

student is expected to observe and replicate these actions to develop technical proficiency (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2022). The student's role is primarily that of a recipient of knowledge, while the teacher maintains significant authority over the learning process.

In recent years, the traditional master-apprentice framework has evolved in response to new pedagogical insights, particularly those informed by constructivist learning theories. According to constructivism, learning is an active process in which students construct knowledge by engaging with content, reflecting on it, and applying personal insights (Hallam, 2021). In the context of music education, this approach emphasizes that while students still benefit from their teachers' technical expertise, they should also be encouraged to develop their artistic voices and interpretations. This shift reflects a growing recognition of the need for a more student-centered approach in music education, one that balances technical skill development with artistic expression (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2022).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

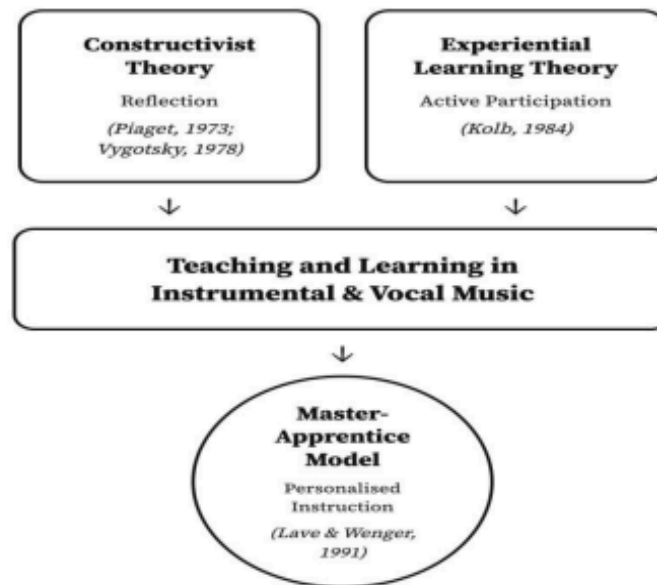
This study is guided by an integrated theoretical framework comprising three primary theories:

Constructivist Theory posits that knowledge is actively constructed by learners rather than passively absorbed (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2022). In music education, this theory underscores the importance of students engaging with musical concepts, enabling them to form personal interpretations and deep understandings (Hallam, 2021). Applying Constructivist Theory to instrumental and vocal music education requires students to take an active role in their learning process through active participation, reflection, and collaborative learning.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), developed by David Kolb, asserts that effective learning occurs through a four-stage cyclical process comprising concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2017, as cited in Creech et al., 2022). This model is particularly relevant to music education, where hands-on experience and reflection play critical roles in skill development. An essential component of Experiential Learning Theory is the role of feedback, which may come from teachers, peers, and self-assessment, guiding students through the learning cycle (Evans & McPherson, 2023).

The Master-Apprentice Model has a long-standing tradition in music education—particularly in instrumental and vocal instruction. In this model, the teacher (master) is seen as an expert while the student (apprentice) learns through observation, imitation, and repetition (Hallam, 2021). This traditional approach remains widely used in one-on-one lessons where teachers provide individualized instruction. Despite criticisms regarding its overly teacher-centered nature, the Master-Apprentice Model remains effective for developing technical skills due to its personalized guidance (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2022).

Figure 2.0: Theoretical Framework (adapted from Vygotsky, 1978; Kolb, 1984; Hallam, 2021)



2.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study focuses on the interplay between three key variables:

Teacher Conceptions: This variable encompasses how teachers perceive their role, their pedagogical methods, and their understanding of teaching and learning in music education. It reflects the beliefs and attitudes that educators hold about their practice and the impact of these beliefs on their instructional choices (Hallam, 2021).

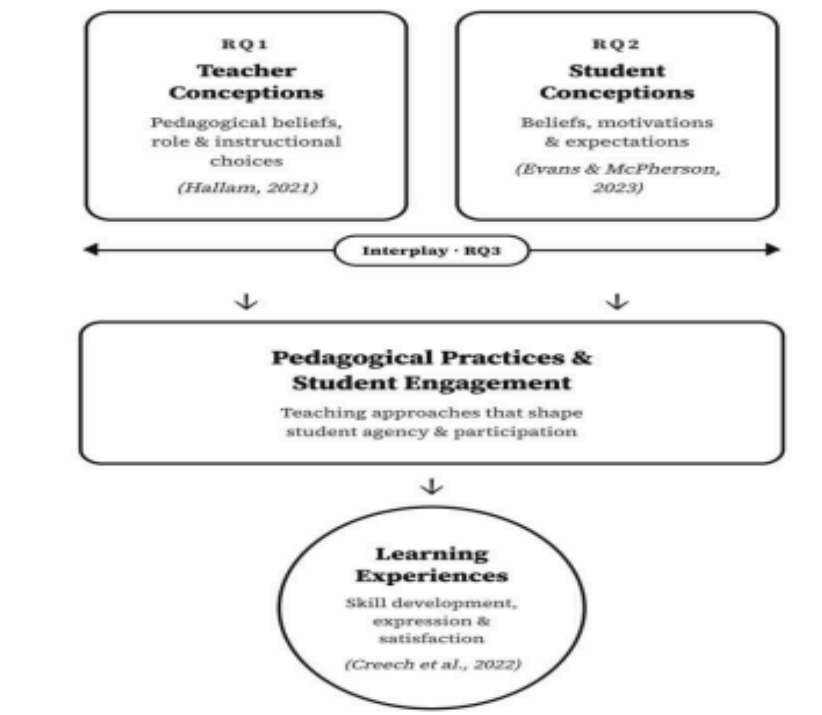
Student Conceptions: This variable captures how students perceive their learning experiences and engagement with musical material. It involves understanding students' beliefs about music education, their motivations for learning, and their expectations of the learning process (Evans & McPherson, 2023).

Learning Experiences: This variable encompasses how students experience and perceive their educational journey, including technical skill development, artistic expression, engagement, and overall satisfaction with the learning process (Creech et al., 2022).

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

The framework outlined in this study directly informs the research questions central to understanding the dynamics of teaching and learning in instrumental and vocal music education. The first research question (RQ1) investigates the conceptions of teaching and learning among instrumental and vocal music teachers. The second research question (RQ2)

focuses on the students' experiences in learning instrumental and vocal music. The third research question (RQ3) explores the relationships between these two sets of beliefs.



3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perceptions of both teachers and students in instrumental and vocal music education. Specifically, a phenomenological case study approach was adopted, which was particularly well-suited for investigating how individuals experienced and interpreted phenomena—in this case, the processes of teaching and learning music. This design was appropriate because it focused on understanding the subjective experiences of participants and how they made sense of these experiences (Vagle, 2018).

The study followed a phenomenological research design, commonly used in educational research to explore how individuals experience and make sense of particular phenomena (Van Manen, 2016). The phenomenon under investigation was the conceptions of teaching and learning among instrumental and vocal music educators and students at the tertiary level. Phenomenology was ideal for this study as it sought to describe how participants constructed meaning from their experiences in a way that was grounded in their personal and professional contexts.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of instrumental and vocal music teachers and students enrolled in the Foundation in Music program at Seaview University College in Malaysia. To ensure that the study captured a comprehensive range of perspectives, a purposive sampling method was employed to select participants who possessed significant experience in music education.

In this study, the sample included four teachers (two vocal teachers, one piano teacher, and one violin teacher) and five students (two vocal students, two piano students, and one violin student). The chosen sample size—four teachers and five students—struck a balance between depth and breadth of data collection. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative studies often benefit from smaller sample sizes, as they allow for more in-depth exploration of participant experiences.

Table 3.0: Demographic Profile of Teacher Participants

Teacher	Gender	Primary Instrument	Years of Experience	Educational Background
Teacher 1	Female	Vocal	8 years	Master of Music (Vocal Performance)
Teacher 2	Female	Vocal	12 years	Doctor of Musical Arts (Vocal Pedagogy)
Teacher 3	Male	Piano	15 years	Master of Music (Piano Performance)
Teacher 4	Male	Violin	10 years	Bachelor of Music; Graduate Diploma in Education

Table 3.1: Demographic Profile of Student Participants

Student	Gender	Primary Instrument	Years of Study	Prior Musical Experience
Student 1	Female	Piano	2 years	Some prior experience
Student 2	Male	Violin	1.5 years	No prior experience
Student 3	Female	Vocal	2 years	Some prior experience
Student 4	Female	Piano	1 year	No prior experience
Student 5	Male	Vocal	2 years	Extensive prior experience (choir)

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and observations of classroom interactions involving both teachers and students. Semi-structured interviews were particularly effective for exploring participants' conceptions of teaching and learning, as they allowed for open-ended responses that facilitated detailed insights into their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The interview questions were designed to probe into various aspects of participants' experiences, including their perceptions of teaching methodologies, the impact of these methodologies on student engagement, and reflections on how these conceptions influenced educational outcomes. Conducting the interviews via WhatsApp presented an innovative approach to data collection, allowing for rapid communication and facilitating interactive discussions (Kaufmann & Peil, 2019).

Table 3.2: Alignment of Interview Questions with Research Objectives and Bloom's Taxonomy

Research Objective	Bloom's Taxonomy Domain	Sample Teacher Question	Sample Student Question
RO1: Explore conceptions of teaching and learning	Remembering, Understanding	"Can you describe your overall philosophy or approach to teaching instrumental or vocal music?"	"How would you describe your experience learning [instrument/vocals] in the programme?"
RO2: Examine the relationship between teacher and student experiences	Applying, Analysing	"How do you engage students during lessons, and what strategies do you use to motivate them?"	"How do you feel about the way your music teacher interacts with you during lessons?"
RO3: Investigate the relationship between teacher conceptions and student experiences	Evaluating, Creating	"Do you think there is alignment between your expectations of students and their actual learning experiences?"	"Do you feel that your teacher's expectations align with how you learn best?"

In addition to semi-structured interviews, supplementary data were gathered through document reviews and classroom observations. Document analysis was essential in triangulating data and contextualizing classroom practices within broader institutional frameworks (Bowen, 2009). Classroom observations provided firsthand data on various elements of the learning environment, including instructional methods, student engagement levels, teacher-student interactions, and assessment practices.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis process unfolded in four interconnected phases: data preparation and familiarization, initial coding, categorization, and thematic development and validation, utilizing ATLAS.ti as the primary Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS).

Data Preparation and Familiarization: All responses via WhatsApp interviews were transcribed verbatim. Observational field notes were uploaded as separate primary documents. The researcher conducted repeated readings of each transcript to develop deep familiarity with the dataset.

Initial Coding: An open coding approach was adopted to inductively generate codes from the dataset. The researcher coded the data line by line using ATLAS.ti's "Code Manager" to identify discrete units of meaning.

Table 3.3: Sample Coding of Interview Data and Emerging Themes

Interview Source	Emerging Code	Illustrative Phrase
Teacher 1	Technical drills	"I always start with a 10-minute drill to warm up the voice"
Teacher 2	Stage fright	"Many students freeze up before the first note"
Student 1	Slow practice helpful	"When I slow down and really focus, I make fewer mistakes"
Teacher 3	Student autonomy	"I allow students to choose some pieces—it makes a significant difference"

Categorization: Using ATLAS.ti's "Code Co-occurrence" and "Network View" features, semantically related codes were grouped into higher-order categories.

Table 3.4: Categorisation of Codes into Emerging Categories

Codes	Category
Positive feedback, encouragement, celebrating small wins	Teacher motivational strategies
Tuning problems, performance fear, time constraints	Student learning barriers
Peer learning, ensemble coordination, group feedback	Collaborative pedagogy
Demonstration, slow practice, breaking down passages	Scaffolding techniques

Thematic Development and Validation: The "Network View" in ATLAS.ti facilitated the visual mapping of how categories interrelated. Overarching themes were derived through synthesis. To enhance analytical rigor, a second researcher was invited to independently review and validate the themes. Member checking was employed by sharing preliminary findings with participants to validate interpretations.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines established by the institution's ethics review board. Key ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, data security, and participant well-being. Participants were required to provide informed consent before participating. Personal identifiers were removed from all data, and pseudonyms were assigned to all participants. Data were stored securely on password-protected devices.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview of Thematic Structure

Thematic analysis of teacher and student interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis revealed three overarching themes corresponding to the research questions:

RQ1: Conceptions of Teaching and Learning Among Teachers — Three themes emerged: (1) Pedagogical Approaches, (2) Role of Student Engagement, and (3) Challenges in Instructional Delivery.

RQ2: How Students Experience Learning — Three themes emerged: (1) Learning Motivation, (2) Effective Teaching Strategies, and (3) Challenges in Music Learning.

RQ3: Relationships Between Teachers' and Students' Conceptions — Three themes emerged: (1) Alignment and Misalignment in Teaching and Learning Expectations, (2) Student-Teacher Communication, and (3) Impact of Teaching Methods on Student Experiences.

4.2 RQ1: Conceptions of Teaching and Learning Among Instrumental and Vocal Music Teachers

Theme 1: Pedagogical Approaches

Teachers demonstrated a range of teaching methodologies, incorporating both traditional and student-centered approaches. Teacher 1 (Vocal) described: *"My teaching philosophy centers on three pillars: technical skills, artistic expression, and personal development. I aim to foster love and passion for vocal music while building strong foundations."* Teacher 2 (Vocal) emphasized: *"I believe in a holistic approach that integrates emotional expression with technical proficiency. I tailor my strategies to accommodate individual learning styles because no two students learn exactly the same way."*

Teacher 3 (Piano) stated: *"My focus is on building strong foundational techniques while encouraging students to explore their own unique interpretive styles."* Teacher 4 (Violin) noted: *"My approach has evolved over time—I used to focus solely on exam preparation, but now I set goals collaboratively with students. This shift has made teaching more rewarding and students more engaged."*

Theme 2: Role of Student Engagement

All four teachers highlighted the importance of student engagement and motivation. Teacher 1 explained: *"I foster engagement by applying a positive mindset, emphasizing progress over perfection, and setting achievable goals. I build rapport by sitting down to listen and talk to*

students." Teacher 2 added: *"I create an interactive and supportive environment where students feel comfortable experimenting with their voices. I motivate students by highlighting their progress over time."*

Teacher 3 noted: *"I engage students by allowing them to choose repertoire and incorporating songs that resonate with their interests. When students have a say in what they learn, they practice more willingly."* Teacher 4 observed: *"I use encouragement and simple gestures like thumbs-up to create a supportive atmosphere. Sometimes a genuine 'well done' means more than any technical correction."*

Theme 3: Challenges in Instructional Delivery

Teachers identified several challenges. Teacher 1 acknowledged: *"I tend to focus on my students' skills and technique, which sometimes causes problems. I have to carefully study the artistry of music and remind myself that technical precision without expression is hollow."* Teacher 2 noted: *"I face challenges like stage fright and technical limitations with students. These require patience, consistent practice, and personalized guidance."*

Teacher 3 observed: *"I encounter issues such as vocal strain and difficulty applying music theory. Students need regular feedback and gradual skill-building."* Teacher 4 stated: *"The learning process is lengthy. Some students lack foundational knowledge, which slows down the class. I have to differentiate instruction significantly."*

Table 4.1: Summary of Teacher Conceptions

Theme	Key Insights	Supporting Quotes
Pedagogical Approaches	Blend of traditional and student-centred approaches; emphasis on both technical proficiency and expressive development	"I tailor my strategies to accommodate individual learning styles" (Teacher 2)
Role of Student Engagement	Engagement enhanced through autonomy, positive reinforcement, and rapport-building	"When students have a say in what they learn, they practice more willingly" (Teacher 3)
Challenges in Instructional Delivery	Balancing technical and expressive demands; addressing performance anxiety; managing diverse skill levels	"Technical precision without expression is hollow" (Teacher 1)

4.3 RQ2: How Students Experience Learning in Instrumental and Vocal Music Education

Theme 1: Learning Motivation

Theme	Key Insights	Supporting Quotes
Learning Motivation	Driven by personal expression, performance opportunities, autonomy, and positive feedback	"When I can choose pieces I like, it makes learning enjoyable" (Student 1)
Effective Teaching Strategies	Clear demonstrations, historical context, step-by-step guidance, peer learning	"Seeing my teacher demonstrate shows me what to aim for" (Student 1)
Challenges in Music Learning	Technical difficulties, communication barriers, teacher strictness, time management, performance anxiety	"Stage fright makes my mind go blank" (Student 5)

Students expressed that motivation was influenced by personal expression, teacher support, performance opportunities, and autonomy. Student 1 (Piano) shared: *"I enjoy being able to express myself through music. It's very satisfying to see progress over time. When I can choose pieces I like, it makes learning enjoyable and personal."* Student 2 (Violin) noted: *"I appreciate the many opportunities to perform. Competitions and performances push me to practice harder."*

Student 3 (Vocal) stated: *"I find motivation in playing pieces I like and the joy of performing in concerts. When the music resonates with me personally, practice doesn't feel like work."* Student 5 (Vocal) added: *"Positive feedback from my teacher encourages me to keep improving. When she notices small improvements, it makes me feel like my effort matters."*

Theme 2: Effective Teaching Strategies

Students identified several teaching methods that helped them learn. Student 1 valued: *"Demonstrations by the teacher, slow practice with guidance, and targeted exercises. Seeing my teacher demonstrate a passage correctly shows me what to aim for."* Student 2 appreciated: *"Lessons where I learn historical knowledge about the great composers without feeling bored. When my teacher connects music to stories and context, it comes alive."*

Student 4 noted: *"I learn best when we analyze musical pieces together rather than just practicing technique. Understanding why a piece is written a certain way helps me play it more expressively."* Student 5 observed: *"Group work helps because I can learn from my peers. Watching others struggle with the same challenges and overcome them gives me confidence."*

Theme 3: Challenges in Music Learning

Students faced various challenges. Student 1 struggled with: *"Maintaining consistency in tone and control, especially during fast or technically demanding passages. Some weeks I progress, other weeks I feel stuck."* Student 2 faced: *"Difficulties communicating with my piano teacher sometimes. When instructions aren't clear, I waste practice time doing things wrong."*

Student 3 noted: *"I find it challenging to play in perfect tune. My teacher is sometimes too strict, which makes me nervous during lessons."* Student 4 described: *"Balancing academics and music practice is difficult. I struggle to find time for both."* Student 5 experienced: *"Stage fright affects my performance. I need more exposure to live performances to overcome this."*

Table 4.2: Summary of Student Learning Experiences

4.4 RQ3: Relationships Between Teachers' and Students' Conceptions

Theme 1: Alignment and Misalignment

Theme	Key Insights	Supporting Quotes
Alignment and Misalignment	Tensions exist between technical precision and expressive freedom	"When I emphasize technique too much, students feel constrained" (Teacher 2)
Student-Teacher Communication	Clear communication enhances confidence and engagement	"When teachers explain expectations clearly, I feel more confident" (Student 5)
Impact of Teaching Methods	Individualized feedback and structured guidance improve outcomes	"Individualized feedback helps me know exactly what to work on" (Student 1)

Teachers and students identified areas of alignment and tension. Teacher 2 acknowledged: *"I focus on technical precision, but some students prefer expressive freedom. Balancing both is challenging."* Student 3 expressed: *"I feel restricted when technical accuracy is prioritized over musicality. I want to express emotion, not just play correct notes."*

Teacher 3 noted: *"I set collaborative goals with students, but occasionally my expectations are higher than what students think they can achieve."* Student 1 shared: *"My teacher's expectations are sometimes higher than what I can deliver. This pressure makes me anxious."*

Theme 2: Student-Teacher Communication

Effective communication emerged as crucial. Student 5 stated: *"When teachers explain their expectations clearly, I feel more confident in my progress. I need to understand not just what to do, but why."* Teacher 3 confirmed: *"I ensure students understand the rationale behind each exercise so they are more invested in their learning."*

Teacher 1 added: *"I improve alignment by asking students for feedback or reviews of lessons. Sometimes I assume they understand, but when I ask, I discover confusion."* Student 3 expressed: *"I desire more patience and better explanations from my teacher. When I make mistakes, I need guidance, not just correction."*

Theme 3: Impact of Teaching Methods

Students consistently reported that teaching methods significantly influenced their learning. Student 1 stated: *"I perform better when I receive individualized feedback instead of general comments. When feedback addresses my specific challenges, I know exactly what to work on."* Teacher 4 noted: *"Students need structured guidance at the start, but I gradually encourage independence. I use assessments to tailor instruction to each student's needs."*

Student 2 observed: *"When my teacher adapts to my learning style, I learn better. I'm a visual learner, so when he draws diagrams or writes things down, it helps me remember."* Teacher 3 concluded: *"I try different approaches with each student. What works for one might not work for another. You have to be flexible and observant."*

Table 4.3: Relationship Between Teacher and Student Conceptions

4.5 Thematic Network Analysis

Research Objective	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence
RO1: Explore conceptions of teaching and learning	Teachers blend traditional and student-centred approaches; students emphasise personal expression and performance opportunities	Teacher interviews revealed diverse pedagogical philosophies; student interviews highlighted motivation through autonomy and teacher support
RO2: Examine relationship between teacher and student experiences	Teachers prioritise engagement through autonomy support and positive feedback; students value clear communication and creative expression	Teachers described strategies for fostering motivation; students expressed need for clearer explanations and balance between technique and musicality
RO3: Investigate relationship between teacher conceptions and student experiences	Alignment varies; tensions exist between technical precision and expressive freedom; effective communication enhances alignment	Both teachers and students emphasised importance of clear expectations, individualised feedback, and shared understanding of learning goals

Figure 4.1: Thematic Network of Teaching and Learning Conceptions

The thematic network analysis revealed three primary thematic clusters:

1. **Pedagogical Approaches** functions as the foundational node, encompassing technical mastery, artistic expression, and student-centered learning orientations.
2. **Student Engagement** manifests through autonomy in song choice and positive feedback mechanisms, operating as both an outcome of and influence upon pedagogical approaches.
3. **Challenges** occupies a peripheral yet significant position, encompassing stage fright, time management constraints, technical difficulties, and communication barriers.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study explored conceptions of teaching and learning in instrumental and vocal music education within the Foundation in Music programme at Seaview University. The findings reveal that teachers employ a combination of direct instruction and student-centered approaches, with a persistent but evolving master-apprentice model. Students' motivation is driven by autonomy, teacher support, and performance opportunities, while challenges include time management, performance anxiety, and communication barriers. The relationship between teacher and student conceptions reveals areas of alignment and tension, particularly concerning the balance between technical precision and creative expression.

Table 5.0: Summary of Key Findings by Research Objective

5.2 Discussion in Relation to Theory

Constructivist Learning Theory: The findings contribute to Constructivist Learning Theory by demonstrating that music learning is most effective when students actively construct their own knowledge through engagement, reflection, and collaboration (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2022). The emphasis on student autonomy in repertoire selection and the value students placed on analytical discussions and peer learning support the constructivist notion that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction and dialogue.

Self-Determination Theory: The study strongly supports Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) by emphasizing that student motivation is influenced by three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Students who experienced choice in repertoire and collaborative goal-setting reported higher motivation. Teachers who provided positive feedback and celebrated small victories helped students develop competence. Teachers who built rapport through open communication fostered relatedness.

Cognitive Load Theory: The study extends Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) by illustrating that overly complex musical tasks can overwhelm students unless appropriate instructional support is provided. Strategies such as chunking information, scaffolding, and gradual skill progression help manage cognitive load and improve learning efficiency (Sweller, Ayres, & Kalyuga, 2019). The challenges students reported—technical difficulties, time management pressures, and performance anxiety—can be understood as forms of cognitive and affective load that impede learning.

Master-Apprentice Model: The study reveals both the persistence and evolution of the Master-Apprentice Model in contemporary music education. While elements of this traditional approach remain—particularly in the emphasis on technical mastery through demonstration and imitation—teachers increasingly incorporate student-centered practices that challenge the hierarchical nature of the traditional model. Teacher 4's evolution from exam-focused instruction to collaborative goal-setting exemplifies this shift.

5.3 Implications

For Educators: The findings highlight the critical role of differentiated instruction in instrumental and vocal music education. Teachers should assess individual skill levels, offer varied repertoire options, provide multiple modes of instruction, and adjust pacing based on

student progress. Scaffolding strategies, such as breaking down complex compositions into manageable sections and gradually removing support as students become proficient, align with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Teachers should also emphasize creative exploration through improvisation, composition, and interpretation to foster deeper engagement and intrinsic motivation.

For Students: The study underscores the importance of student autonomy and self-regulated learning. Students should set personal goals, maintain practice journals, choose repertoire aligned with personal interests, and self-record performances for critical self-assessment. Collaborative learning through ensemble participation, peer mentoring, and student-led workshops enhances motivation and skill development. Students should actively seek specific, individualized feedback and ask clarifying questions when instruction is unclear.

For Policymakers and Institutions: Educational institutions should invest in professional development programs that equip music educators with modern teaching strategies, including student-centered learning models, technology-enhanced instruction, and inclusive pedagogies. Institutions should provide digital learning tools, recording equipment, and online platforms for resource sharing. Policymakers should increase funding for music programs, establish industry partnerships, create scholarship programs for talented students from diverse backgrounds, and support community outreach initiatives.

For Curriculum Development: Curricula should balance technical and expressive goals, incorporate student agency, address performance anxiety through mental skills training, integrate technology, promote collaborative learning, and provide individualized feedback through regular formative assessment.

5.4 Recommendations

Enhancing Teaching Practices:

1. **Adopt Blended Learning Approaches:** Integrate video demonstrations, recording apps for practice submissions, online resource libraries, and interactive music software to complement in-person instruction.
2. **Encourage Performance-Based Learning:** Schedule regular studio classes, community outreach performances, formal and informal recitals, and mock auditions.
3. **Implement Differentiated Instruction:** Conduct initial and periodic assessments, develop individualized learning plans, offer varied repertoire options, and adjust pacing based on student readiness.
4. **Foster Reflective Teaching Practices:** Maintain teaching journals, seek student feedback, record lessons for self-observation, and participate in peer observation and collaborative reflection.

Supporting Student Learning:

5. **Offer Time Management Workshops:** Provide workshops on effective practice techniques, scheduling, and goal-setting.
6. **Foster Student Autonomy:** Offer repertoire choices, encourage personal goal-setting, provide opportunities for student-led projects, and teach self-assessment skills.

7. **Address Performance Anxiety:** Integrate mindfulness and relaxation techniques, teach breathing exercises and visualization strategies, provide gradual exposure to performance situations, and offer counseling referrals for severe anxiety.
8. **Enhance Feedback Quality:** Balance positive reinforcement with constructive criticism, provide specific examples, demonstrate corrections, and teach students to self-assess using video recordings.

Policy and Institutional Support:

9. **Invest in Professional Development:** Allocate annual funding for teacher professional development, bring in guest clinicians, support teacher attendance at conferences, and create in-house professional learning communities.
10. **Ensure Access to Quality Resources:** Establish instrument maintenance schedules, provide adequate practice facilities, invest in recording equipment, and maintain a lending library of instruments.
11. **Strengthen Industry Collaborations:** Invite guest artists for masterclasses, arrange internships with professional music organizations, facilitate attendance at professional performances, and create mentorship programs.
12. **Develop Holistic Assessment Frameworks:** Incorporate self-assessment and peer assessment, use portfolios, include reflective writing assignments, and assess process as well as product.

5.5 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The small sample size (four teachers and five students) may not fully capture diverse perspectives. The study focused exclusively on piano, violin, and vocal music within a single institution, limiting applicability to other instruments, voice types, and institutional contexts. The qualitative nature of the data, while providing rich insights, may lack the precision of quantitative measures. The use of WhatsApp for interviews, while innovative, may have limited the richness of data compared to in-person interviews. The study was conducted over a three-month period, providing a snapshot rather than an examination of how teaching and learning conceptions evolve over time. The study relied heavily on self-report data, which may be subject to social desirability bias.

5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should consider longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of student-centered teaching methods; investigate the effectiveness of digital learning tools and AI in personalized music instruction; explore cross-cultural comparisons to understand how cultural differences influence student motivation and pedagogical approaches; examine the effectiveness of performance anxiety interventions; investigate effective models for teacher professional development; and explore how to effectively foster student agency and self-regulated learning. Mixed-methods approaches combining qualitative and quantitative data would provide a more comprehensive analysis.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated conceptions of teaching and learning among instrumental and vocal music educators and students within the Foundation in Music programme at Seaview University. The findings demonstrate that while teachers employ both direct instruction and student-centered learning approaches, a disconnect often exists between teacher expectations and student learning preferences. Students benefit from autonomy, structured support, and performance opportunities but frequently struggle with challenges such as time management and performance anxiety.

The study makes several contributions. Empirically, it provides rich qualitative data on how teachers and students experience music education in a tertiary setting. Theoretically, it extends and refines Constructivist Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Cognitive Load Theory by applying them to the specific context of instrumental and vocal music education. Practically, it offers actionable recommendations for educators, students, institutions, and policymakers, grounded in empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks. By focusing on a Malaysian tertiary institution, the study contributes to the limited literature on music education in developing countries and non-Western contexts.

The findings underscore the need for adaptive teaching strategies that balance technical mastery with creative expression, ensuring that students receive a well-rounded and meaningful music education. Implementing blended learning approaches, integrating technology, and fostering performance-based learning can significantly enhance the effectiveness of music education. Providing targeted professional development for educators, ensuring access to quality musical resources, and strengthening industry collaborations can help bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and real-world application.

Addressing challenges such as performance anxiety and time management through structured interventions can further support student success in instrumental and vocal music education. When students feel supported, engaged, and empowered in their learning, they are more likely to persist through challenges, develop their artistic voices, and achieve their full potential as musicians.

Music education is not merely about training performers; it is about fostering creativity, emotional expression, critical thinking, and personal growth. The best music education empowers students to find their unique voices, connect deeply with music, and share that connection with others. By building on the insights presented in this study, educators and policymakers can refine and enhance music education practices, creating more inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments for future generations of musicians.

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