

Pathways for Integrating Music Psychology into Music Education

Luoxi Wang

Department of Vocal Studies, Conservatorio di Musica Alfredo Casella, L'Aquila, 67100, Italy

Abstract: Music psychology offers theoretical support for the improvement of music education by integrating concepts of learning, motivation, emotion, cognition and performance. This paper studies the main paths for effectively applying music psychology in actual music education. The three general places where the integration will be realised are curriculum design, teaching methods and all-round student support. Music psychology can be used to determine appropriate goals for teaching, conduct assessments, and select relevant musical works more intelligently. In addition, the internal motivation, self-efficacy, emotional regulation and reflective practice of students in the classroom can also be strengthened. Strengthen the psychological support system at all levels of the institution to help teachers prepare for the high-stress environment of work more effectively, reduce occupational stress, and promote the construction of a high-inclusion classroom. Based on the synthesis of recent systematic reviews and educational studies, this paper holds that music psychology should not be treated as a theoretical and detached subject of study. Instead, it should be viewed as a basic system to actively promote an all-encompassing, compassionate and age-appropriate way of teaching music in all areas of education.

Keywords: Music psychology; music education; self-efficacy; motivation; curriculum design; reflective teaching.

1. Introduction

In recent years, music education has changed a lot, and now it is not only about learning to play instruments and sing; At the bottom, it asks students to think, feel, remember and express themselves in other ways. Therefore, the scientific principles of music psychology have shown good results in teaching practice. Multiple studies of psychological factors and educational research have consistently shown that emotions, intrinsic motivation, attention to learning and a sense of well-being are all closely related to students' continued progress in music classes over an extended period.

Although the theoretical link is close, music psychology is often taught separately at universities, and thus the future educators lack a readily available reference system for their daily classroom teaching. However, the actual conditions in a modern music classroom also need to be understood psychologically. Teachers frequently have to deal with many kinds of differences among learners, such as different levels of motivation, performance anxiety, various attentional problems, or various group dynamics that can affect whether or not learning occurs. By adding ideas from psychology to all levels of music education at an appropriate time, we can provide teachers with the necessary tools to build an all-encompassing and comforting learning environment for contemporary students.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how to use the theory of music psychology effectively and permanently in the teaching of music every day. Therefore, it is proposed that this essential integration be carried out systematically at three different but overlapping levels: macro-level curriculum construction, micro-level pedagogical implementation, and holistic institutional student support. Actively spread psychological theories from abstract academic journals to the chaotic reality of the classroom, and thereby enable teachers to design highly effective, personalised teaching plans through music psychology. Therefore, psychology has moved away from its original position as a strictly theoretical basis

for musical analysis and is now being applied in more practical ways in daily educational work. The following three paths of integration will be presented in detail, and then practical models for immediate application will be discussed.

2. Curriculum Pathway

The first link in the chain of integration is curriculum construction. Music psychology provides necessary, scientifically supported information to help educators decide what specific materials to teach, when at an appropriate developmental stage they should be introduced, and in what reasonable and logical sequence the whole learning process will be organised. Psychologically informed curricula are aware that students learn music in different ways and at different speeds, and therefore address these differences explicitly. In addition, the construction of psychological and emotional safety is no longer considered a pleasant extra in the classroom, but rather a basic requirement for good learning and learning-related memory formation [4, 6]. Psychologically sound curricula are based on the premise that four fundamental elements should be nurtured concurrently: technical-physical ability, intrinsic enthusiasm for the art form, active artistic creation, and deep-seated self-reflection. According to the above psychological conditions for curriculum design, the number of students dropping out has declined.

Curriculum design will also be improved through in-depth studies of motivational theories for learning. If a curriculum is too rigid, outdated in historical context, or overly demanding, it will likely lead to severe anxiety or total disinterest among students. On the other hand, if it is too disorganized and lacks clear progression indicators, students will be unable to build a sense of musical discipline for advanced learning. Music psychology provides empirically supported learning materials and systems for differentiated instruction to ensure that the content is suitable for all students' current cognitive development levels [3, 5]. In practical terms, educational administrators and teachers need

to set reasonable and achievable goals, provide timely and positive feedback, and present gradually increasing musical tasks to build students' self-confidence systematically [7].

Psychologically, a different type of assessment for students in art education has also begun to appear. Modern educational psychology generally believes that tests and assessments should be mostly formative, highly supportive, and deeply encouraging, rather than strictly summative and punishing. When students have a clear and open idea of what they are learning about, and they view the regular tests as opportunities to improve rather than as final assessments of their abilities, they will be more willing to continue studying after failing some of the tests. Although it is difficult to evaluate the highly subjective art of musical performance objectively, psychological principles can be used to focus on a student's own growth, emotional expression and effort, rather than relying solely on high-pressure, stressful comparisons with others [6, 10]. A change in the philosophy of assessment will also spread throughout the music department. Another is that by using psychological foundations for assessment, one can cultivate a growth mindset in students; that is to say, they learn that their musical ability is not fixed by talent but rather can be improved through persistent study. It has deepened their interest in learning to music and fostered an interest in the arts that will last for life rather than a temporary sense of duty.

3. Pedagogical Pathway

The second main way is to use psychological ideas in teaching daily life to foster students' enthusiasm for learning, develop their thinking abilities and control emotions, etc.

The first type of pedagogical application is the intentional promotion of students' internal motivation and sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a person's inner sense of how capable they are in completing difficult tasks independently [8]. When students have a high sense of self-efficacy, they will naturally believe that they can improve through effort and will therefore continue to study music aggressively despite encountering significant technical difficulties or difficult works. Music teachers can promote students' sense of self-worth proactively and in a systematic way by using peer models strategically, introducing highly scaffolded musical activities to prevent early frustration, creating repeated experiences of early and undeniable success, and providing highly specific, actionable feedback instead of general, unhelpful praise [3, 7, 8]. In addition, students' motivation will naturally and rapidly increase when the curriculum content is perceived as culturally and personally relevant to their lives outside of school. Psychology can help teachers understand that during their studies in music, students are also going through significant changes in their social and emotional lives [1]. Thus, effective teaching should intentionally create an environment for students to make choices themselves, engage in free-form creation, and connect emotionally with the selected works.

The other type of teaching in this paper is scientific management of attention and working memory. When students perform poorly in the music class, it is often because they lack sustained attention or working memory to an extent; it is not usually a deficiency in their ability to learn music at a basic level. Generally, the large-scale, difficult music problem proposed in music psychology can be divided into several smaller, more manageable sub-problems. It is also argued that spaced retrieval practice should be implemented,

and, at the same time, multiple sensory modalities (i.e., visual, auditory, and kinesthetic) should be used to facilitate deep and lasting learning in the brain [3, 6]. A cognitive approach is needed for ensemble playing and complex instrumental performance because students must simultaneously operate at high speeds in visual reading, intensive auditory processing, fine motor skills and accurate social timing. A psychologically aware teacher will proactively help reduce cognitive overload and study stress by adjusting the speed of teaching carefully and actively guiding the formation of efficient, stable study habits [2].

Finally, modern pedagogy needs to pay attention to managing strong emotions in a complex way. The learning and public performance of music can simultaneously trigger strong emotions such as excitement, a sense of achievement, feelings of inferiority, and even severe performance anxiety during a single lesson. Teachers who are highly attuned to the emotional state of their students can proactively reduce this stress and deliberately view performance anxiety as a normal, completely manageable part of artistic development [9, 10]. Being too far from home and lacking emotional support makes it hard to learn. When students are in a calm state and feel that their teacher understands and supports them well, their brains are in an optimal condition for learning [1, 5]. Music psychology can help teachers see emotional regulation as an indispensable part of teaching in a better and kinder way, rather than an extra-curricular behaviour problem. Teachers in the new era should also be better self-aware practitioners of the psychological method. A reflective music teacher continuously observes the psychological state of the students in the classroom and adjusts teaching methods based on changes in behaviour. At this level of pedagogical flexibility, the psychological integration will be a living system rather than a fixed set of rules.

4. Support Pathway

The third main way of integration focuses on building all-encompassing and strong support systems for students and teachers. The psychology of music has developed various specialized and empirical instruments to proactively address and alleviate severe problems that students face in their studies, such as intense performance anxiety, excessive perfectionism, profound low self-esteem, and specific learning difficulties in an artistic environment. A psychologically-based music program does not need to wait for a severe psychological crisis to occur before taking measures in response to one. Instead, it will focus on proactive, system-wide prevention by regularly providing high-supportive feedback, setting strict standards for a healthy, non-toxic comparison culture in the competitive classroom, and frequently offering low-stakes, safe performance opportunities to gradually desensitize students to crippling stage fright [7, 9, 10].

In order to provide more support for students at this time, schools need to strengthen their teacher training. At present, a large number of professional music teachers are excellent artists with outstanding technical abilities but lack formal, systematic training in educational psychology and mental health first aid. All-encompassing and continuous professional development can equip these excellent teachers with the required theoretical foundation to understand how motivation, physiological stress responses, and peer socialisation dynamics directly affect their students' ability to learn and flourish [2, 3]. According to the general research on

integrating psychology in schools, teachers themselves have experienced a substantial reduction in occupational burnout and a significant increase in job satisfaction after confidently applying psychological theories to deal with difficult or challenging behaviors in the classroom [5, 10].

Build a strong psychological support system to promote the deep-rooted and institutionalized inclusion of the arts. A typical modern music classroom has students from all over the country with different backgrounds, various levels of physical fitness, and diverse ways of learning due to neurodivergence; therefore, they will respond to the same musical task in all sorts of different, unpredictable ways. Educational psychology offers teachers some support in the planning of differentiated and universal design instruction; as a result, many more students from various educational backgrounds will be able to participate in class activities and learn well without being excluded [4]. This psychological commitment to structural accessibility will help promote more equitable, long-lasting and highly socially responsible music education in recent years.

5. Practical Models

To successfully and efficiently apply the above complex psychological theories in actual teaching at school, a four-stage structured integration model can be employed. First, the teacher needs to precisely determine and fully understand the specific problem in music education occurring in the classroom. This could be shown as a continuous lack of motivation during rehearsals, intense performance anxiety before a high-stakes jury, or very inefficient, disorganized individual study habits that lead to a standstill. Secondly, based on related psychological studies, the teacher should select a suitable and empirically supported psychological concept that is closely connected to the problem diagnosed in the students. It may be that, using the principles of self-efficacy to boost confidence, setting up a positive reinforcement schedule to shape behaviour, or applying cognitive-emotional regulation strategies to handle stage fright [2, 8, 10].

Third, the teacher needs to actively and creatively transform this abstract psychological idea into an actualisable lesson plan. For example, if directly addressing dangerously low self-efficacy, the teacher may use structured goal-setting journals, facilitate supportive peer-to-peer assessment rubrics, or organise highly guided, step-by-step practice sessions that ensure small successes. Fourthly, continue to observe and critically assess whether the used psychological strategies have successfully supported both the quick learning of technical musical skills and the all-around long-term mental health of the students [1, 5]. A good model for the school will use psychology to make many decisions every day. Psychology is no longer considered a mysterious foreign object to be added to the arts. Practical application is also highly effective in enhancing learning when psychological principles are directly applied to solve real-world teaching problems and meet learners' immediate, actual needs consistently [3].

6. Conclusion

Music psychology has great and far-reaching effects on

raising the quality of all kinds of global music education. By using validated psychological knowledge systematically, teachers have been given a very reliable and scientifically sound foundation for developing their curriculum, creating new ways of teaching, and providing all-round care for students. As shown in the above analysis, by building intrinsic motivation, fostering a sense of self-efficacy among students, rationally managing cognitive load, helping them regulate complex emotions through empathy, and employing reflective teaching, all will result in significant and observable educational effects. Although there are certain serious problems, such as the use of abstract psychological terms and the urgent need for comprehensive-scale teacher training, all of these components must be jointly addressed in order to promote the all-round development of students' minds. Music psychology should not be restricted to a single theory class at the university, and a separate class for it can be arranged. It should be introduced in an active and energetic way to all students' daily lives and the culture of music classes. When teachers fully implement this psychological model, music education will no longer focus on teaching the technical skills for instrumental performance; instead, it can be a deep and enriching subject that helps all students live well and feel good about themselves mentally.

References

- [1] Sun, J. (2022). Exploring the impact of music education on the psychological and academic outcomes of students: Mediating role of self-efficacy and self-esteem. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 841204. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.841204>.
- [2] Chen, Y. (2024). Music psychology and its integration in middle school music education in China. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 50(1), 105–113.
- [3] McClellan, E. R. (2023). *The psychology of teaching and learning music* (pp. 45–50). Routledge.
- [4] Goopy, J., & MacArthur, S. L. R. (2026). Music learning and school-aged children's and adolescents' wellbeing: A scoping review. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 48(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X251323562>
- [5] Schmid, S. (2025). Music-related wellbeing as a teaching objective? A critical interpretive synthesis. *International Journal of Music Education*, 43(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/02557614241237231>
- [6] Ofsted. (2021). *Research review series: Music* (pp. 15–20). Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.
- [7] Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81–112. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543077001081>
- [8] McPherson, G. E., & McCormick, J. (2006). Self-efficacy and music performance. *Psychology of Music*, 34(3), 322–336. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735606064841>
- [9] Papageorgi, I., Creech, A., & Welch, G. (2013). Perceived performance anxiety in advanced musicians specializing in different musical genres. *Psychology of Music*, 41(1), 18–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735611422864>
- [10] Blair, E., & van der Sluis, H. (2022). Music performance anxiety and higher education teaching: A systematic literature review. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 19(3), Article 05.