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The Role of Informal Learning in College Jazz Education in Ecuador: Contextualizing Students' Musical Capital

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Abstract

College music education was introduced in Ecuador without first establishing a formal training system for students to reach that educational level. Consequently, many students enter university without having undergone formal music studies, relying instead on informal learning. This study explores the role of informal learning within the context of a university degree in musical performance in Ecuador. To this end, an educational innovation project was implemented at Universidad de las Americas (Quito, Ecuador). Two questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data about the link between the project's methodology and the students' prior training. The results indicate that implementing a methodology aligned with students' previous experiences increases motivation levels for studying music. Therefore, it is concluded that there is a need to reevaluate certain practices associated with informal learning within the framework of higher music education, particularly in countries where the educational structure is not fully developed.

Keywords: higher music education; informal learning; music learning; motivation; jazz

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INTRODUCTION

From the early stages of the development of colonial education to the present day, the evolution of music education in countries across Latin America has been shaped by adopting educational models imported by the countries in power. This process has systematically repeated the implementation of foreign educational models that were not suited to the specific features of local students (Godoy Aguirre, 2012) and were mostly based on the European conservatoires' methodological tradition (Carrillo & González-Moreno, 2021). It is therefore of utmost importance to factor in the socio-cultural context prior to the introduction of foreign educational models given the traditions, characteristics and unique features of musical learning and transmission in Amerindian cultures. These modes of musical learning and transmission are predominantly based on oral transmission cultures in which musical knowledge is passed on by imitation and repetition, as is the case in various ancient musical cultures including those of northern India (Farrell, 1997; Nettl & Russell, 1998) and the Amerindians (Weinberg et al., 2020; Stevenson, 2022), and also traditionally in modern musical cultures such as jazz (Carter, 1986; Berliner, 1994;

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Keezer, 1996; Prouty, 2004, 2006; Poulter, 2008). Here it is interesting to note that since its origins, jazz teaching and learning have traditionally been performed by oral transmission, just like the musical cultures referred to above. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the label informal learning (as the negative counterpart of what is called formal education) can be used to refer to forms of musical learning based on imitation and repetition, memorisation and listening, which generally prevail in oral cultures, as opposed to formal, standardised education based on text, reading and sheet music reproduced in institutions known precisely as conservatoires (Nettl, 1995; Small, 1998).

The introduction of teaching methodologies such as the one used for jazz in higher music education has thus led to a rethinking of traditional conservatoire music teaching methodologies anchored in reading and performance (Farrell, 1997). Teachers from a range of educational settings have begun to explore new educational approaches which seek to build a connection between the students' cultural context and their learning, thereby generating more relevant and effective learning processes than those previously employed (Ramírez Martínez & Rodríguez-Quiles, 2020).

This is the background for the Universidad de las Américas (UDLA), a private university in Quito, Ecuador, where this study was conducted. The university runs a Bachelor's Degree in Jazz and Modern Music Performance, designed on the basis of an educational franchise from a US university which specifies aspects such as the sequencing of subjects, methodology and assessment systems. Although this educational approach had been successful in its home country, several teachers at the centre pointed out that the situation was different at UDLA and that what was proposed by the franchise was not applicable in Ecuador due to the features of its students. Based on these observations, between 2015 and 2019 an educational innovation project was implemented which involved an alternative to the combo subject. The combo subject in jazz or modern music is the equivalent of the chamber music subject: it is the subject addressing musical performance in a group.

The project's purpose was "connecting what is being studied with the reality and daily life of students" (Ramírez García & Rodríguez-Quiles, 2020, p. 18). To do this, it sought to draw on the students' previous training, most of it acquired in informal learning contexts, and embed it in the institutional ecosystem at the university. Thus, the idea was to link their previous training (their musical capital), the methodology of informal learning processes and academia. In other words, the aim was to prevent the situation described by Jaffurs (2004) in which students "learn in ways we don't teach them" (p. 190). Prior knowledge acquired in the informal setting is often dismissed by academia which sees the student as a blank slate. However, authors such as Folkestad (1998) contend that the music teacher rarely interacts with students who have no musical background. On the contrary, he argues that in most cases, students possess rich and sophisticated knowledge that they acquire from various sources and through a range of activities outside the school. Accordingly, the educational innovation project drew on the students' musical capital and adopted a methodology that emphasised learning through listening, imitation and repetition which are common practices in informal learning processes and in musical genres such as jazz (Carter, 1986; Williams, 1973; Berliner, 1994; Keezer, 1996; Prouty, 2004, 2006, 2011; Poulter, 2008). This is of utmost importance given that this methodology takes up and broadens the traditional ways of teaching and learning music while also factoring in the socio-cultural context in which it is produced, recovering not only previous musical knowledge but, most of all reaffirming and bolstering the students' cultural and musical identity.

It is essential to point out that even though the degree course was focused on the study of jazz and modern music, the-

se practices were rare as the process of including jazz in schools meant that this musical approach was largely discarded and replaced by methodologies tied to the formal study of music based exclusively on reading and interpretation, on the use of notation and the score as the only means of conveying musical knowledge. While it may be debatable whether jazz or so-called modern music "is foreign music" that does not belong to the musical traditions of American Indian cultures, what is important here is their recognition as pedagogies of musical learning through listening, imitation, repetition, and improvisation above and beyond their content or repertoire (Javors, 2011). The consequences have been reported in extensive studies showing constant frustration on the part of students in musical learning and early drop-out, not only in countries with traditional oral-based cultures but also in many Western ones (Kavčič Pucihar et al., 2024).

From the early stages of the development of colonial education to the present day, the evolution of music education in countries across Latin America has been shaped by adopting educational models imported by the countries in power. This process has systematically repeated the implementation of foreign educational models that were not suited to the specific features of local students (Godoy Aguirre, 2012) and were mostly based on the European conservatoires' methodological tradition (Carrillo & González-Moreno, 2021). It is, therefore, of utmost importance to factor in the socio-cultural context before introducing foreign educational models, given the traditions, characteristics and unique features of musical learning and transmission in Amerindian cultures. These modes of musical learning and transmission are predominantly based on oral transmission cultures in which musical knowledge is passed on by imitation and repetition, as is the case in various ancient musical cultures including those of northern India (Farrell, 1997; Nettl & Russell, 1998) and the Amerindians (Weinberg et al., 2020; Stevenson, 2022), and also traditionally in modern musical cultures such as jazz (Carter, 1986; Berliner, 1994; Keezer, 1996; Prouty, 2004, 2006; Poulter, 2008). Here it is interesting to note that since its origins, jazz teaching and learning has traditionally been performed by oral transmission, just like the musical cultures referred to above. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the label informal learning (as the negative counterpart of what is called formal education) can be used to refer to forms of musical learning based on imitation and repetition, memorisation and listening which generally prevail in oral cultures, as opposed to formal, standardised education based on text, reading and sheet music reproduced in institutions known precisely as conservatoires (Nettl, 1995; Small, 1998).

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Informal music learning

Since the 1990s, authors such as Lilliestam (1996), Fornäs et al. (1995), Green (2002, 2005) and Folkestad (2006) have underlined the need to study the informal processes associated with music learning, which they define as a multidimensional process that should be studied in all its contexts and not just the institutional one. Authors such as Folkestad (2005) and Herrera, Cremades and Lorenzo (2010) point out that nowadays, the music-teaching process is based on the study of Western classical music to the exclusion of other methodologies which would make it possible to build "the necessary connection with the real sound environment that surrounds the students and makes up the bulk of their knowledge and experiences" (Herrera, Cremades & Lorenzo, 2010, p. 38). Green (2006) argues that introducing the various methodologies tied to informal learning would have positive effects on students and that although different teachers in different countries have tried to blend the classroom with students' musical culture outside school, at present, formal music education has only changed its curriculum by adding content and not informal learning methodologies (Green, 2005). She, therefore, suggests fashioning a less traditional learning context (less Eurocentric or anchored in the tradition of conservatories) which retrieves practices

of learning musical genres such as jazz (or other popular or folkloric genres) in which music is approached without starting "from musical reading-writing as a *sine qua non* for making music" (Ramírez Moreno & Rodríguez-Quiles, 2020, p. 20). This would also craft "a more effective and meaningful learning environment in that it is generally comfortable and without the pressure to get a numerical grade" (Mok, 2017).

However, although most of these authors agree on the importance of studying informal learning, they do not all share the same definition of it, thus leading to a number of categories. Folkestad (2006) notes that these categories are not exclusive, and in most of the various authors' conceptions they have areas in common. Rogers (2007) defines informal learning on the basis of where it takes place, thereby defining informal learning as any which is conducted outside schools. Meanwhile, Jorgensen (1997) defines the term on the basis of who leads and makes decisions about what and how to study, where informal learning is that which is not led or sequenced by a teacher. Finally, some authors refer to the intention of the process, either in relation to whether the student is aware that they are learning (Ziehe, 1982) or whether the activity has an educational purpose (Trilla, 2003).

Nevertheless, and anchored in the needs of this study, informal music learning will be examined by drawing on the ideas of authors such as Green (2002, 2005, 2008) and Lilliestam (1996) who derive their definition of informal learning from an analysis of its methodology. This methodology is characterised by practices in which the student selects the repertoire they wish to study and engages in a continuous process of trial and error, both individually and in groups. The student organises their study independently or with the assistance of people close to them, such as family or friends, and builds in improvisation and composition as essential components of the learning process. Finally, it is pertinent to note the omnipresence of hearing in the above processes since the student can learn by imitating recordings or their peers by harnessing this sense. Thus, conscious peer direction and unconscious learning through attentive listening, imitation and dialogue among the group's members can be observed in a group setting (Mok, 2017). All this entails a paradigm shift from a culture based on the eye, reading, text and score towards the recovery of an oral culture based on hearing as the primary sense of learning music, art and science which resides squarely in listening (Calvi, 2018).

Informal music learning and jazz: a methodological connection

The study of the development of jazz teaching reveals various connections with informal music learning. Carrillo and González Moreno (2021), citing Green (2002) and Vitale (2011), point to various processes by which popular musicians harnessed the informal learning strategies described above to learn music. They include learning "through interaction with other musicians, the use of self-taught learning methods, as well as enculturation processes" (p. 140). The authors also note the importance in these processes of "learning through hearing and imitation, collaborative work and developing creativity" (p. 140). With respect to learning jazz, authors such as Williams (1973), Carter (1986), Murphy (1994), Berliner (1994), Prouty (2006) and Goldman (2010) take a very similar line and when describing how musicians learned jazz, they emphasise the significance of oral learning in the early stages of the development of the musical genre, as jazz had not been codified in any other way than aurally. Listening and imitation among musicians thus became essential for the transmission and learning of the genre, something which connects at the methodological level with the previously described conceptions of informal learning from authors such as Lilliestam (1996), Folkestad (2006) and Green (2002, 2005, 2008).

Berliner (1994) differentiates between two types of learning: auditory learning,

imitation, and the presence of a community of musicians. Firstly, situations involving a musical role model: "Experts guide younger members in applying their technical knowledge by constantly rehearsing and performing with them, thereby transmitting their deep sense of responsibility for the music" (Berliner, 1994, p. 50). This musician serves as a guide or mentor for the youngest musicians who imitate them. An example of this is the informal instrument practice sessions between musicians from the same neighbourhood or participation in jam sessions, which became laboratories where they could interact and learn from the aforementioned musical role models.

Secondly, situations where musicians learn by osmosis as they are involved in music activities that are part of their daily lives, such as the repertoire performed at mass, popular songs played at family gatherings and other musical examples associated with social events. Indeed, Berliner (1994) defines the jazz community as the main educational agent in the early part of the twentieth century, thereby forging a new connection with informal learning in which the group is involved not only as an educating agent but also as a source of extrinsic motivation.

Jazz musicians learn to improvise by interacting with other musicians following a pattern of imitation and repetition and innovation with respect to what is heard and played in which the better trained musicians are conveyors of technical skills, knowledge, ideas, insights, beliefs and more which are transmitted by imitation and repetition, by contagion or osmosis to the beginner musicians. This is especially the case in jam sessions, in the collective musical improvisation session taking place in the public venues scheduling them where the musician is exposed to interaction with other musicians, generally in an atmosphere of camaraderie and mutual support yet also competitive, and in which a logic and dynamic of virtuous competition in improvisation skills, implicit criticism and review of the outcome of the joint action unfolds (Calvi, 2018).

Later on, jazz as a musical genre underwent a series of changes in the way it was taught due to a process of institutionalisation that was essential for its admission into academia (Javors, 2001). Javors (2001) contends that these changes are due to the Eurocentric approach of educational institutions today, which hinders the inclusion of a musical genre with an Afro-centric aesthetic. Other authors such as Nettl (1995) point to other problems such as the rejection of improvisation in this type of school. Consequently, jazz and its teachers had to address a process of codification of its language which would enable them to adapt to the needs of using the notation present in universities or conservatories and build a common theoretical foundation which they could tap to communicate (Prouty, 2011). An instance of this is the work done by musicians such as George Russell, which led to the development of scale-chord relationship theories, a tool that underpins the teaching of improvisation today. This exemplifies a process of denaturing the musical genre in which characteristic aspects of jazz, such as certain melodic or rhythmic inflections, are left out (Ake, 2002). This process thus shifts the learning of jazz from the informal to the formal setting, thereby relinquishing the methodology described above.

In Western culture, music literacy has a very specific meaning which is the ability to read musical notation. In this context, visual interaction with the score is considered paramount, often overshadowing auditory learning methods. Hence notation is of immense importance in Western musical communities, overlooking the fact that many of the first musical encounters often occur through hearing and not sight. Nonetheless, music is perceived primarily in modern societies as what is written on a score rather than what is transmitted orally or learned by imitation and repetition (Nettl, 1995).

Informal learning and its intersection with motivation and musical capital

Notwithstanding the established ca-

tegories, the features of this study make it critical to unpack the potential intersections between motivation, students' musical capital and informal music learning. In terms of motivation, Green (2002, 2005) emphasises its significance in informal music learning processes. She argues that students who participate in informal learning show high levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is a driving force for their individual progress and is fuelled by the fact that these students feel identified with both the musical activities they engage in and also the music they play, which allows them to define themselves on a personal level (Fornäs et al. 1995; Green 2002, 2005; Coulson 2010, Valenzuela 2014). Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation stems from many of these learning activities being conducted on a group basis. The group, often consisting of friends or family members, prompts the students to develop a sense of responsibility, cooperation and commitment to music learning (Jorgensen 1997; Green 2002, 2005).

It is crucial to note the dynamics of peer interaction and communication in improvisational music learning processes, how affective, cognitive and communicative bonds are established with the other person or people that allow music learning. This is especially true in music genres such as jazz where the virtuoso competitiveness between musicians enables modes of learning by osmosis, imitation, repetition, contact and affection in horizontal spaces such as jam sessions, chance musical encounters, etc. (Calvi, 2018). In aseptic settings such as music institutions (conservatories) where teacher-learner relationships are hierarchical and vertical, knowledge is examined and quantified, thereby blocking the learning process and removing motivation. Pleasure is a core component of any learning process, especially in music (Colwell & Richardson, 2002).

In terms of musical capital, Coulson (2010) draws on Bourdieu's conception of capital to coin a term (musical capital) which encompasses the music experiences and knowledge that enable individuals to develop their musical identity. She says this musical capital is obtained from early ages by experimenting with music in an open, intuitive and inclusive way with the support of the role models involved in the process, especially when these are more experienced musicians. Herrera, Cremades and Lorenzo (2010) point out the intersection between motivation, informal learning and musical capital by emphasising the importance of connecting classroom experiences with the information which has shaped the student's musical background through the inclusion of practices related to informal learning in order to enhance their motivation for learning music.

METHOD

Description of the Educational Innovation Project

The educational innovation project in this study was conducted as an extracurricular subject as part of the music degree programme at the Universidad de las Américas in Quito, Ecuador. The extracurricular subjects at the university were referred to as "club". The teachers started from the hypothesis that the results in the programme were not ideal due to the absence of an appropriate training system for the university in Ecuador and the lack of an educational proposal tailored to the students' particular features. In response to this situation, an approach was adopted that sought to enhance the students' musical capital by focusing on instrumental practice and hearing development.

This approach took the form of using the repertoire as a key tool to address various theoretical and musical aspects arising from instrumental practice. Following Weintraub's (1993) perspective, this way of working means that theory comes out of practice and not the other way around, thus meeting the specific needs of the students at any given time. In terms of auditory learning, repertoire was worked on using recordings as the main tool. Monson (2009) points out that recordings play a key

role in jazz and modern music teaching as they fulfil the same role as sheet music or a reference bibliography.

However, the inclusion of recordings in the learning process did not mean discarding written media; rather, the latter were used to add to and enrich the process, the primary focus of which was the auditory aspect. Although learning by ear has been virtually eliminated from educational institutions, Lilliestam (1996) argues that learning through notation should not be seen as diametrically opposed but instead as complementary practices on a continuum depending on the degree of cultural literacy. The innovation project sought to break down the dichotomy between oral and written media. Authors such as Fraser (1983) and Prouty (2006) contend that while hearing is essential in musical learning and improvisation, the integration of sound and notation is equally necessary.

Following Fraser (1983) and Prouty (2006), the innovation project was designed specifically to break down this dichotomy between oral and written media since, as these authors argue, both sound and notation play a key role in improvisation learning. Based on the results of the innovation project, this study describes the role of informal music learning at the methodological level in the context of higher studies in jazz and modern music in Ecuador.

Project implementation and participants

The educational innovation project was implemented at the Universidad de las Américas (Quito, Ecuador) between 2015 and 2019 with a total of 29 student participants. A pilot group and five different groups were organised during this period (see Table 1):

Table 1. Distribution of the groups

Period	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Spring	Pilot group	Gr. #2	Gr. #3	Gr. #4	Gr. #5
Fall	Gr. #1	Gr. #2	Gr. #3	Gr. #4	Gr. #5

These groups were formed after teachers of the combo course shortlisted students based on their musical level and interests. Once shortlisted, students had the option to decide voluntarily whether they wished to take part in the project. Each group had two one-hour sessions per week which were run in the same place where the music degree combo classes were held: a venue equipped with the instruments required, plus a computer and loudspeakers. The sessions unfolded in very different ways depending on the members and the subject matter. As Ramírez Martínez and Rodríguez-Quiles (2020) note, these sessions could not be rigorously planned in advance since their value lies in their adaptability to the educational needs of the moment. On this basis, the sessions might include the following sections:

1. Instrumental warm-up in the form of a jam session.
2. Presentation of the repertoire and subject matter by listening to references (CDs, concert videos, etc.).
3. Transcription/composition of the repertoire in question. Depending on the difficulty or length of the example, this section was assigned as a task to be completed outside the classroom.
4. Performance and recording of the repertoire.
5. Listening to the recording and feedback from the teacher and fellow students.
6. Theoretical and practical exercise proposal.
7. Guided improvisation imitating the guidelines obtained from the auditory reference or the teacher.
8. Conclusions.

Design

The study was conducted using a mixed methodology. Firstly, a qualitative approach was employed due to the nature of the problem, the small number of participants and the interest in exploring their experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 2016). This approach is also justified by the diversity of the group made up of participants with different personalities and backgrounds,

which is aligned with the constructional perspective that interprets reality as a shared and diverse experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2005). Accordingly, the main data collection tool used was semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 2011). In turn, a quantitative part was added by using two *ad hoc* questionnaires in order to triangulate the information and glean a more complete view of the phenomenon studied (Cook & Reichardt, 1986). Both instruments were validated by expert groups.

The interviews included student, teacher and administrator informants. The teacher informants included a number of profiles; one of them was a teacher taking part in the innovation project, another was a teacher at the university where the project was carried out and finally there were two teachers from other universities in the country. As for the administrators, one of them was the director of the music degree course at the university where the project was conducted while the other was from an external university. A general script was drawn up divided into several sections which are associated with the categories and subcategories of analysis (See Table 2).

Table 2. Interview analysis categories and subcategories

Category	Subcategory
Prior training	Informal training
	Family
	Peer group (friends, etc.)
	School
	Other
Opinion	University
	Music degree course
	Students
	Subject: combo
	Subject: innovation project

The interviews were recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis with Atlas.ti software. The process was conducted via videoconference and started with a mock interview that was discarded from the analysis.

Two questionnaires were drawn up, both designed to obtain descriptive data from the participants. The input questionnaire at the start of the project was divided into four sections: student identity, socioeconomic level of the family and cultural profile of the home town, previous musical training of the participant and informal learning. The second, output questionnaire was divided into three sections: description of the university studies completed, opinion on the university and the music degree programme, and opinion on the innovation project. Data were collected using Google Forms, and the results were codified and analysed using SPSS software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants' prior training and creation of cultural capital

The project participant was a student who began their musical studies between 12 and 13 years of age (average age 12.6 years). The forms of learning most chosen by the participants were self-taught, at 69%, and private lessons, at 51.7%. Only 17.2% said they had received musical education at school which is described as very basic or elementary, reflected in expressions they used when describing it such as "school drumming" or "rock pattern and school basics". Just as in studies such as the one by Coulson (2010), the role of families was relevant. As Herrera, Cremades and Lorenzo (2010) and Coulson (2010) point out, the family plays a crucial role in the behavioural, cognitive and emotional development of children, thus influencing the creation of their musical capital and the learning process. Table 3 shows how families were the first link between several participants and their musical training, even though only 12 of the parents had an occupation related to artistic endeavours.

In terms of the creation of their musical capital, the participants reported various experiences that, in some way, contributed to their training as musicians. The activities in which they said they had a

Table 3. Prior training: the family

Participant	Font
Student 1	On my father's side, he played in a village band. He played the clarinet, he gave it up many years ago. He also liked protest music, he was in lots of demonstrations when there were a lot of them here, so protest music was an important part of his life, so there was a guitar in my house.
Student 2	I always liked music. I started studying bass because both of my brothers played guitar and they told me that I would play bass.
Student 3	I basically started at a very young age. I mean, my family, my father is not a trained musician, let's say academically, but he has made a living from music all his life. He has been an orchestra conductor, all of it purely by experience. So I've been surrounded by that since I was a child. My older brother is also a musician, just as hands-on, and I learned to play some instruments from an early age and I wanted to study music when I grew up, but unlike my father, I wanted to do it academically. So I did start playing... I started playing drums. I learned the drums because my dad and my older brother are basically percussionists and I basically learned with them. They taught me everything they knew. I had a band with my brother and we played our own songs. He played the guitar and I played the drums... we would play songs by bands we liked as covers and we would also compose. I learnt to play the drums by copying songs I liked and as I was always surrounded by that.
Student 4	Well, I started playing the drums when I was a young kid. As my father is a musician and he was studying for his degree in music... I used to go with him to big band rehearsals and all that stuff. And I always, always liked it. I had more of a thing for drumming and I think a friend of my dad's gave me some drumsticks and I took them home and then my dad put together a drum kit with, with mattresses, with pillows, and things like that for me to play and that's when I started to use the drumsticks, I started to play something, not a drum kit, but something. And I was so insistent on the drums and always the drummer and this and that... that when I was about 5 or 6 years old, my dad bought me a drum kit for Christmas.

fair amount or a lot of experience included playing in cover bands (48%) and undertaking a musical project of their own (37.9%). These experiences are highly rated by the participants and emphasise not only the musical training received but also the values they learned as a result of informal learning. These include versatility, developing curiosity, motivation and personal added value (see Table 4):

Green (2005) argues that these experiences are highly significant in student development, describing them thus:

> "All the activities revolve around music in which learners are thoroughly enculturated and with which they strongly identify. Through these practices, young popular musicians can develop relatively advanced aural, improvisatory, compositional, and technical skills and, in some cases, theoretical understanding. These musicians typically value personal qualities of cooperation, responsibility, and commitment. They place more emphasis on musicality or "feel" than on technical prowess. Most significantly perhaps, they respect a wide range of music, including classical music, and display high levels of motivation, commitment, and enjoyment in music making." (p. 28)

However, neither their prior training nor their musical capital seems to have been sufficient for entry to higher education. Both teachers and administrators argue that the prior training of students when starting university is insufficient and point out how the country's structure does not allow students to acquire the knowledge required for this kind of musical studies. As one of the administrators put it: "to build a school with quality musical

Table 4. Prior training: rating experiences associated with informal training

Participant	Font
Student 1	I was in rock bands playing covers. Informal learning I think is a survival thing, I like to think of it that way. You have to solve problems in one way or another. That's something I think is very valuable, I mean, when you don't know what's going on and you want to do something you have to use whatever method you have to achieve it and I think that's something that helped me at university as well. Those of us who come from a more informal school are used to adapting to whatever there is, to whatever the situation may be. We have, I don't mean more experience, but a greater familiarity with this versatility, as I said, this state of survival, of having to adapt to whatever conditions you're in. Maybe people who are more school-oriented had a harder time adapting to different situations which might come up in the environment.
Student 2	A really important part of that learning was in the band I have, which is progressive rock, we were always playing new songs. For example, by *Rush*, *Pink Floyd* or *Porcupine Tree* and those progressive rock bands... and we were always kind of trying to push it with the compositions as well, like trying to go beyond what we were already doing. So that's very important for me; it has made us improve our technique.
Student 3	I guess with the informal way you develop more of this creative side or your curiosity about things. I feel like if you're curious enough, you do it because you want to. I feel like you have more motivation to learn things, and it's more fun and more enjoyable.
Student 4	What I did with my band at school had a lot more value because it had that... personal added value... this is my project and I'm going to take it forward. And I have to see how I'll do it.
Student 5	It has taught me to toughen up. From a very young age it taught me that I have to learn to accept the personalities of all musicians, to learn to be told that you can't do it, to learn that I have to sit for weeks to learn a piece that doesn't come out right away, and I have learned to react quickly and adapt to styles and adapt to the surroundings I'm in.

performers, we have to look at the foundations [...] In Ecuador we don't have a decent state education system in music from an early age. Because schools and colleges don't have that education" (Interview 6 - Participant Administrator 2).

Motivation and its impact on studies

In the various periods of prior training, it was found that the participants had an intrinsic motivation for music learning, which is characteristic of informal learning processes. However, on entering university, the participants describe a clash of expectations between the students and the educational model set out at the university: it is indisputable that the students, influenced by contemporary society, social media and the music industry, tend to see the study of music as a process centred exclusively on achieving the role that this society and the musical environment propose. However, academic instruction in music seeks to create all-round professionals trained not only to develop their artistic talent but also to gain in-depth knowledge of the music profession as a whole. Analysis of the interviews revealed that at a macro level, the students' idea of studying music was far from what the degree course actually offered (see Table 5):

Thus, the intrinsic motivation gained through the informal learning processes of prior periods which led them to want to pursue higher studies in music disappears when they encounter an institutionalised learning process which differs greatly

Table 5. University period: the concept of studying music at university

Participant	Font
Student 1	They came in with an idealised idea of what it is to be a musician and what it is to study music. They entered a school not necessarily to learn but only because they said "if I get in here I'm going to be a musician" and I'm not necessarily going to have to study to become a musician or to improve or to evolve as a musician. A lot of people came here who had learned on their own and felt that, like a lot more freedom and not necessarily a requirement to learn. In many cases they felt that they didn't want to... to theorise everything that they had learnt before, like not understanding everything that comes after that. It's just that... that might motivate or end up shutting the door on your dreams, so to speak. If you look at the percentage of people who graduated, that's exactly what happened, like most... more than half of the people who started studying ended up dropping out for "this or that reason" from the degree.
Student 3	There were kinds of students who were more into following the rules, doing what was prescribed, and there were other students who were a bit more rebellious, let's put it that way. It's like they didn't get used to the way of studying because I feel that the idea they give you when you study music is sold as "it's easy, I don't have to do maths and I don't have to do anything else and I want to study this because I want to get it done quickly, to get a qualification now" or because... I don't know, others who think that you don't need discipline or something like that. Actually, it's like any other degree, it needs constant discipline and focus. I feel like there were quite a few students who were the ones who thought that way, that it's a job that's going to be hard work... and others who wanted to do it in a more liberal way.
Admin. participant 1	One thing I don't think they're aware of is the formation that it takes. This ain't a hobby. You and I know that. Anybody who's conscious knows that. It's not a hobby. It's not a past time. It's not reading a book or... it's a lot of practice, a lot of application. You have to immerse it, it's just a lifestyle, it's a way of life, it's a philosophy. It's much deeper. And unfortunately, I think they have very superficial picture... because they're bombarded with imagery, that's what they know... that today anybody can be a composer, a musician.

from their previous informal experiences: "in many cases you could feel this unwillingness to theorise everything that they had previously considered... like not understanding everything that comes afterwards" (Interview 9 - Student participant 1). Here, Resnick (1987) describes the formal educational setting as a place where rules are taught and students are discouraged from embedding the knowledge they have gleaned informally which disrupts the continuity between what they already know and what they learn at school. Other authors such as Green (2002), Jaffers (2004) and Wright (2008) point precisely to the failure to include this informal learning in the school setting as one of the main reasons for students' disengagement at university.

When looking at the subjects related to instrumental practice, a similar pattern of demotivation emerges. In the specific case of the combo subject, the participants hold opposing views as they rated aspects such as the proposed content of the subject (69%) and the teaching staff (86.2%) highly, yet 62.1% of the participants claimed that the students' engagement in the subject was medium to low. Likewise, and even though they appreciated the contents of the subject, the participants noted the limited depth in tackling them: "Usually it was: 'yeah, let's just play this song and we're done...' And there was nothing more to get into" (Interview 7 - Student participant 3); "I felt frustrated in the combos because it was like... I'm here to play covers and nothing else. There was nothing more than that, there was no way to go further" (Interview 8 - Student participant 4). This analysis suggests that, notwithstanding

the similarity between a practical subject and the student's previous experiences (similarity with their musical capital), there was something in the delivery of the subject that made the students feel demotivated, disengaging them not only from the subject but also from their university education.

Connection to informal learning

After taking part in the innovation project, the participants defined the experience as follows (see Table 6):

Table 6. Innovation project: assessment

Participant	Font
Student 1	In my case especially talking about the clubs, it was wonderful. It was sometimes painful, suffering, but it was wonderful. Because of the number of challenges there were, the number of new skills and abilities we had to pick up.
Student 2	The club was completely different from what I had experienced before, something 100% demanding in all the classes.
Student 3	Those were the classes you enjoyed the most and learned the most.
Student 4	There you basically learn 80% of what you study. The other 20% you get in classes like harmony, arrangements, composition and so on.
Student 5	It's like making real music, not wasting time on things that should have been done right from the start of the course. You cover a lot more topics than in a combo or a thirty-minute class.

One of the reasons for the innovation project's results is the role of motivation in connecting the project and the participants' musical capital. These connections are built on three levels:

Voluntary participation: as discussed above, after the selection conducted by the teaching staff, the participants decided voluntarily whether they wanted to be part of the innovation project, just as they had done in previous experiences when learning music in a self-taught way or pursuing music projects such as cover bands. When asked about their motivation for tackling their degree subjects, the participants claimed that many students' only motivation was to pass the subject and not to learn in it: "the attitude that the class is just the class, it's compulsory"; "most of them are not pushing hard enough like they are not being ambitious or studious enough" (Interview 2 - Student participant 2). Nonetheless, when asked about the project, the participants contended that they took part in it based on their inherent motivation, pointing out that they were there just for the sake of learning as it was not part of the degree structure: "you're not doing it just for a grade, you're going to learn" (Interview 2 - Student participant 2); "there wasn't even a grade or anything. We were there for the fun of it basically" (Interview 7 - Student participant 3); "the combo is a compulsory class; the club is the place where you go because you want to. In the combo, many people make an effort while others don't, whereas in the club, everyone makes an effort and everyone wants to get to the same place" (Interview 1 - Student Participant 5). This is in keeping with Mok (2017): a meaningful learning environment with no pressure such as getting a grade.

The methodology: at the methodological level, a bond is established with their previous experiences through the promotion of learning by ear, imitation and instrumental practice which are common practices in informal learning as outlined above. The participants rated the methodological aspects highly, noting that: "even if there is written theory, there is nothing better than practice to understand how swing should really sound or how an up-tempo piece should sound" (Interview 9 - Student participant 1); "there may be books and all that, but unless you play, unless you are involved until you understand what the right approach is... I think these are things that in the combos you can't really see"

(Interview 1 - Student participant 5). Indeed, when comparing the combo subject with the project (subjects that should have a similar methodological approach), 82% of the participants said that, even though they were designed as the same type of subject (a subject for playing in a group), there was no connection between the way of working in the project and in the combo subject. Making the features of informal learning the main tools of the classroom thus prevents the disconnect between the system proposed by the university and the student described above, thereby averting the loss of motivation when addressing musical learning. This in turn ties in with the ideas of Valenzuela (2014), who holds that when students are challenged in a way that is aligned with their skills and ways of doing things, they are more highly motivated. When comparing the combo subject with the project, 82% of the participants said that, even though they were designed as the same type of subject (a subject for playing in a group), there was no connection between the way of working in the project and in the combo subject.

The importance of the group: the group plays a crucial role in informal learning processes as an educating agent that enables both peer imitation and motivational feedback among its members (Jorgensen, 1997; Green 2002, 2005). As Dewey (1994) points out, in a social constructivist setting, a community of learners is built where collective experiences take on different meanings, both personal and academic or, in this case, musical. In terms of the project, the participants described the importance of the group on the basis of two factors: the set-up of the group and the motivation it brought them. Firstly, they argued that it was important that the members of each group were selected and grouped based on the teachers' criteria as this meant they had a greater affinity (musical and knowledge) between them: "I think the fact that they chose the students was important because they picked the students the teachers think will play well with each other, and that is important because it motivates you... they put you with students who are in the same place as you" (Interview 7 - Student Participant 3); "In principle, because of the selection of students. I feel that the level was balanced. At the clubs, I think they put you with people who are at your level" (Interview 2 - Student Participant 2). The participants also underlined the role of the group in fostering learning and, as described by Wenger (1999), in addressing challenges collectively as equals: "We were like-minded peers. I had a rapport with them and I could ask them and learn more from them, learn more together" (Interview 8 - Student participant 4); "It was peer pressure. It doesn't mean competitiveness but rather just seeing the person next to you and pushing each other" (Interview 9 - Student participant 1); "It's given me the chance to play with musicians who are better than me and make myself study a thousand times harder. And not just perform to get a grade but rather to perform so that my colleagues in the band and my teacher can say 'okay, this is working'" (Interview 9 - Student participant 5).

CONCLUSIONS

Music teaching is constantly faced with the challenge of finding (and justifying) its place in the educational arena, grappling with problems that are repeated like an *ostinato* regardless of place or time. Yet music is more than just a discipline as it has been with humanity since time immemorial in all cultures of the world and, therefore, needs no justification. From the anthropological standpoint, its practice is essential for the development of the human species, and now more than ever it is once again an essential activity to alleviate contemporary ills.

One of these challenges confronting today's Western music education model is the high attrition rate at its various educational levels (North et al., 2000; McPherson et al., 2015; Kavčič Pucihar et al., 2024). An example of this is the specific case of this study, the Universidad de las Américas,

where students enter a degree course in which studying music is presented to them very differently to what they had pictured. They are also introduced to a way of practising music which differs significantly from their previous experience, which prompts some students to drop out of their studies.

Many of the student participants have a skewed image of what a musician is and what becoming a professional performer or composer entails. This is due to various social or socio-cultural factors beyond the scope of this study. However, it is also evident that many of the educational models proposed by academia are far removed from the students' musical reality. Their musical capital outside school is very different from what they experience inside it. This is because in school, studying music is addressed with content and methodologies that are outdated in relation to the constant (and often too fast) progression of music in contemporary society. This disconnect means that students are not motivated to practise music in a formal setting because they are not able to contextualise their musical endeavours within it.

The results of this research show that the study of informal learning and its practices plays a crucial role in the methodological contextualisation of students' musical capital in the framework of higher music education. In other words, formal music learning methodology can be enhanced by adding practices such as learning by ear and imitation in such a way that the student is able to relate their previous experiences to those they have at university.

This is all the more evident in the speciality of jazz and modern music, where informal learning is even more prevalent in previous periods due to the absence of preparatory levels. This will enable students with the profile of those at the Universidad de las Américas to make the most of the musical capital they have acquired, notwithstanding the shortcomings of their previous formal training. As noted above, interaction with a student who has no musical training is rare (Folkestad, 1998). It will also enhance the motivation they acquire innately during informal learning processes and which in many cases leads them to pursue higher education in music.

There are two potential areas for further research. Firstly, the study will be extended geographically in Latin America to get a picture of students as they prepare for university studies in countries whose educational systems may have features in common and face similar difficulties. Secondly, these kinds of educational practices should be embedded in the official music degree programme and transformed from innovation projects or pilot studies into a mainstream part of the education system. There is also a potential extension of the study, which is related to one of its limitations. This would be to conduct the research in state education since the institution where the innovation project was undertaken is a private university. This extension would be particularly significant in the Latin American setting where there are considerable socioeconomic differences between students in the state and private sectors.

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