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Investigating Workplace Music Preferences and Their Role in Employee Productivity and Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study in Indonesia

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Abstract

Music is conventionally perceived as a medium of entertainment and artistic expression. However, among employees, music assumes a broader functional role, supporting productivity and psychological well-being across diverse workplace contexts. This study aimed to investigate the functional role of music among employees experiencing work-related stress and low motivation. A cross-sectional study was conducted among 500 employees representing diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Participants reported their musical preferences and perceived psychological effects of music across different emotional states at work. Data analysis, including word cloud visualization and heatmap modeling, revealed that genres such as pop and dangdut dominated across both emotional conditions. However, the functional objectives of music usage differed; employees experiencing stress favored music for emotional balance and familiar comfort, while those facing low motivation preferred music that energized and re-engaged cognitive resources. The findings highlight that music serves adaptive emotional and cognitive regulatory functions, leading to increased productivity, emotional stabilization, and sustained concentration. These results offer practical implications for workplace well-being strategies, emphasizing the potential of personalized auditory environments in enhancing employee resilience and performance.

Keywords: music preferences; music function; workplace well-being; employee productivity; emotional regulation

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world of work is increasingly characterized by intensifying psychological demands. Globalization, digital acceleration, and economic uncertainties have created work environments where employees are expected to perform under constant pressure, both mentally and emotionally (Bajwa et al., 2024; Liao et al., 2025). The growing expectations for productivity, combined with blurred boundaries between work and personal life, have contributed to rising levels of

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stress and emotional fatigue across occupational domains . This phenomenon is evident not only in corporate sectors but also among public service professionals and creative workers.

In Indonesia, employees across various sectors face similar or even greater challenges, particularly within the context of a developing country. Limited access to structural support, resource constraints, and cultural norms that emphasize loyalty and endurance often place workers under sustained stress. In such environments, formal mental health infrastructure is often lacking, prompting employees to seek personal and informal strategies for emotional regulation and work adaptation. These self-directed approaches have become a crucial yet understudied aspect of occupational resilience.

One informal coping mechanism that has gained organic popularity is listening to music (Dougherty et al., 2023). Music is not only consumed for entertainment but is increasingly utilized as a tool to improve concentration, elevate mood, and reduce emotional strain (Jumaa et al., 2024; Shih et al., 2016). Notably, music functions in a dual capacity: it can empower employees by stimulating motivation and focus, and it can relax them by soothing anxiety and tension. Within high-pressure work situations, music emerges as a flexible and accessible medium for emotional self-regulation tailored to individual needs and contexts (Jumaa et al., 2024).

Historically, music has been deeply embedded in human life across cultures. In Western countries, a significant body of research has explored music's role in occupational psychology, workplace wellness, and cognitive performance. Empirical studies have shown that music can enhance task efficiency, regulate affective states, and reduce stress-related symptoms (de Witte et al., 2020, 2022; Peyee et al., 2021). However, such research remains scarce in Indonesia, particularly studies examining the functional role of music among employees in real workplace settings. Music in the Indonesian context is often viewed narrowly as leisure or cultural expression, rather than as a dynamic tool for emotional support and productivity enhancement.

This gap is particularly intriguing in light of the rapid evolution of music technologies and platforms. Music is no longer a passive background element—it is increasingly curated, personalized, and algorithmically matched to the listener's mood, profession, or psychological needs. This phenomenon suggests that music consumption is becoming more targeted and adaptive, with users actively selecting music not just based on taste but also based on its emotional utility in managing daily work experiences.

In light of this, it is important to conduct research that addresses this knowledge gap, particularly by elucidating how music functions in occupational settings within the Indonesian workforce. This study aims to investigate the preferences, needs, and behaviors of employees related to music listening during work—focusing on how music is used during stressful conditions, how genre and listening duration intersect with emotional states, and how music serves either as a means of empowerment or relaxation. Through this inquiry, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on music and workplace well-being while offering practical insights into culturally grounded strategies for supporting emotional resilience in the workplace.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional research design with a descriptive-exploratory orientation adapted from Wang & Cheng (2020), aiming to systematically examine workplace music preferences and employees' perceptions of music's role in enhancing productivity and well-being. The cross-sectional design was deliberately selected to provide a contextual snapshot of music-listening behaviors and subjective evaluations at a single point in time, without experimental manipulation or in-

ferential analysis of causal relationships. Specifically, this study sought to generate an empirical profile of the music genres preferred in workplace settings, the underlying motivations for music consumption during work activities, and employees' subjective appraisals of music's impact on their concentration, emotional state, and task performance.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of employees working across diverse professional sectors in Indonesia, including governmental institutions, private enterprises, and the creative industries. The inclusion criteria established for this study were as follows: (1) individuals aged between 18 and 60 years, (2) individuals who had been actively employed for a minimum duration of six months prior to data collection, and (3) individuals who reported engaging in music listening behaviors during work, either regularly or occasionally. Participant recruitment employed purposive sampling to include individuals who met the aforementioned criteria and could provide relevant insights into workplace music engagement. The participants consisted of 500 employees (n = 500) from various professional sectors in Indonesia, including governmental institutions, private enterprises, and creative industries. Although the study employed a descriptive-exploratory cross-sectional design and did not conduct correlational analyses, the minimum sample size was based on recommended standards for cross-sectional quantitative studies, targeting at least 500 participants to ensure adequate representation of employees from various occupational backgrounds in Indonesia.

Procedure

Data for this study were collected through an online survey administered via the Populix platform. This professional digital research platform engages respondents as verified partners, thereby ensuring the credibility and accountability of the participant pool. Before the survey was disseminated, Populix implemented a respondent screening process to match participants to the predetermined inclusion criteria. Specifically, potential respondents were assessed to ensure they met the following criteria: were active employees aged 18-60 years, had at least 6 months of continuous employment, and listened to music while working.

The survey instrument was developed in a structured format and delivered digitally through the Populix system, ensuring controlled distribution and data integrity. Participants were provided with an informed consent statement detailing the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Only those who met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate were able to access and complete the survey. The questionnaire included sections on demographic data, employment characteristics, music listening behavior in the workplace, preferred genres, frequency and duration of music engagement, and participants' subjective perceptions of music's influence on their work productivity and well-being. Data collection was conducted over a three-month period, allowing sufficient time for respondent recruitment and ensuring an adequate sample size.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the respondents' demographic characteristics and music-listening behaviors during work. A total of 500 employees from various regions in Indonesia participated in the study. The following tables and figures summarize the demographic distribution and highlight patterns across age, socioeconomic status, region of residence, and gender.

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents by age range, socioeconomic status, region of residence, gender, employment status, monthly income, education level, and type of workplace, providing contextual background for interpreting

Table 1. The table summarizes respondents' demographic and socioeconomic profiles.

Variable	Category	n	%
Age Range	< 18 years	5	1.0%
	18–24 years	120	24.0%
	25–30 years	182	36.4%
	31–35 years	91	18.2%
	36–40 years	53	10.6%
	41–45 years	34	6.8%
	46–50 years	15	3.0%
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	Lower	93	18.6%
	Middle	227	45.4%
	Upper	180	36.0%
Region of Residence	Bali	4	0.8%
	Banten	25	5.0%
	DI Yogyakarta	17	3.4%
	DKI Jakarta	35	7.0%
	West Java	127	25.4%
	Central Java	76	15.2%
	East Java	216	43.2%
Gender	Male	218	43.6%
	Female	282	56.4%
Job Status	Part-time	59	11.8%
	Full-time (Contract)	151	30.2%
	Full-time (Permanent)	172	34.4%
	Self-employed	78	15.6%
	Freelancer	40	8.0%
Monthly Income	< IDR 3,000,000	174	34.8%
	IDR 3,000,000–5,000,000	234	46.8%
	> IDR 5,000,000	92	18.4%
Education Level	High School / Vocational School	211	42.2%
	Diploma	56	11.2%
	Bachelor's Degree	224	44.8%
	Master's Degree	8	1.6%
	Doctorate	1	0.2%
Type of Workplace	State-Owned Enterprise (BUMN)	22	4.4%
	Freelancer	91	18.2%
	Government Institution	32	6.4%
	Educational Institution	22	4.4%
	Private Company	333	66.6%

the study's findings.The demographic characteristics of the 500 respondents in this study indicate a predominance of young adult employees. The largest age group was 25–30 years (36.4%), followed by 18–24 years (24.0%) and 31–35 years (18.2%). Only a small proportion of respondents were aged over 40 years, suggesting that the sample comprises mainly early-career professionals. By gender, 56.4% identified

as female and 43.6% as male, indicating a slight female majority and a relatively balanced gender distribution.

Regarding socioeconomic background, nearly half of the respondents (45.4%) were from middle-class households, 36.0% from the upper socioeconomic class, and 18.6% from the lower class. These figures suggest that most participants have stable financial circumstances. In terms of monthly income, 46.8% earned between IDR 3,000,000 and IDR 5,000,000, while 34.8% earned below IDR 3,000,000, and only 18.4% earned above IDR 5,000,000. This distribution reflects a typical income pattern among Indonesian urban workers.

Educational attainment among respondents was relatively high. A majority held at least a bachelor's degree (44.8%), while 42.2% had completed senior high school or vocational school. Only a small fraction of participants held a diploma (11.2%), master's degree (1.6%), or doctorate (0.2%). This indicates a well-educated sample with sufficient cognitive literacy to engage with abstract or symbolic tools such as music, auditory media, and task management systems.

Employment status further reflected the stability and diversity of respondents' professional contexts. The largest group comprised full-time permanent employees (34.4%), followed by full-time contract workers (30.2%) and self-employed individuals (15.6%). Smaller proportions were engaged in part-time work (11.8%) or freelancing (8.0%). By workplace type, most participants (66.6%) were employed in private companies, followed by freelancers (18.2%), government institutions (6.4%), educational institutions (4.4%), and state-owned enterprises (4.4%).

Geographically, the majority of participants were located in East Java (43.2%), followed by West Java (25.4%) and Central Java (15.2%). Other provinces, such as DKI Jakarta (7.0%), Banten (5.0%), DI Yogyakarta (3.4%), and Bali (0.8%), were less represented. This indicates that the sample is primarily drawn from Java, particularly from urban and peri-urban areas, which may limit the generalizability of the findings and highlight the role of regional work culture in shaping auditory preferences and music-related practices.

Auditory Preferences and Music Use in the Workplace

This section presents descriptive findings on employees' auditory preferences and their use of music in the workplace. The data were collected using Likert-scale items, each ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*, to assess respondents' attitudes toward various auditory modalities, including spoken communication, alarms, podcasts, and music. The analysis focuses on the distribution of responses across eight statements, highlighting both total agreement (combined *Agree* and *Strongly Agree*) and total disagreement (combined *Strongly Disagree* and *Disagree*).

The findings indicate a strong preference for auditory-based strategies in the workplace context. More than four-fifths of respondents reported that music positively impacted their productivity, while over seventy percent indicated that they used music specifically to enhance focus during work tasks. Verbal auditory input, such as explanations from colleagues and oral presentations, was also highly valued, suggesting that audio-based communication plays a central role in employees' cognitive engagement and motivational processes.

In contrast, preference for passive auditory learning formats such as podcasts and meeting recordings was more moderate, reflecting individual differences in task demands and information-processing styles. Overall, these patterns suggest that auditory modalities—especially music—serve not simply as background stimuli but as deliberate self-regulation tools to support concentration, emotional balance, and work efficiency.

The findings of this study emphasize the significance of auditory modalities—particularly spoken communication and music—as integral elements of emp-

loyees' daily work strategies. High levels of agreement across statements indicate that auditory-based interactions not only facilitate effective information processing but also serve as emotional and motivational regulators in workplace environments. These results align with prior research suggesting that sound-based stimuli, such as music and verbal engagement, activate cognitive pathways associated with attention, affective modulation, and task persistence. The minimal levels of disagreement further support the cultural resonance and practical utility of auditory media, particularly in professional contexts that demand adaptability and focus. Thus, integrating auditory strategies into organizational practices may offer a low-cost yet psychologically potent means of enhancing employee well-being and performance.

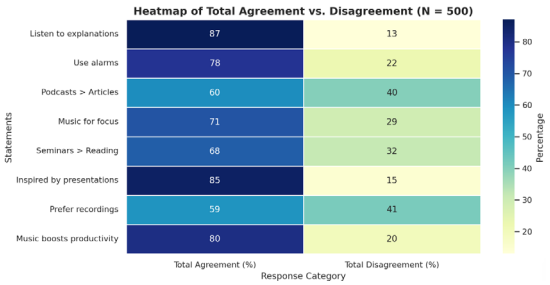

Figure 1. Total Agreement vs Disagreement

As shown in Figure 1, music is among the most strongly endorsed auditory strategies, reinforcing its perceived role in enhancing focus and productivity at work. The heatmap illustrates the percentage distribution of total agreement versus total disagreement among 500 employees regarding various statements on auditory preferences and work productivity. The data reveal a consistent tendency toward agreement across most categories, indicating the perceived value of auditory strategies in supporting work performance and engagement.

The highest levels of agreement are observed in statements such as "Listen to explanations" (87%) and "Inspired by presentations" (85%), suggesting that auditory input from verbal communication plays a critical role in comprehension and motivational enhancement. Similarly, "Music boosts productivity" receives 80% agreement, reaffirming the widespread belief in music's functional role in improving workplace output.

A substantial number of employees also support the use of alarms (78%), music for focus (71%), and seminars over reading (68%), indicating a preference for real-time, auditory engagement over text-based information. Meanwhile, "Podcasts over articles" and "Prefer recordings over minutes" show lower agreement (60% and 59%, respectively), with relatively higher levels of disagreement, possibly reflecting individual differences in learning modalities or situational access to audio materials.

In conclusion, the heatmap underscores a clear auditory inclination among employees, particularly favoring spoken and musical inputs to enhance comprehension, focus, and motivation. These findings highlight the importance of integrating auditory-based tools and strategies into workplace learning and productivity systems.

Patterns of Music Selection and Listening Behavior in Workplace Contexts

The analysis further explored employees' music-related behavior in relation to specific emotional and cognitive states during work. Data were collected to identify the genres most commonly selected in response to psychological stress and motivational decline, and to measure daily listening frequency and duration.

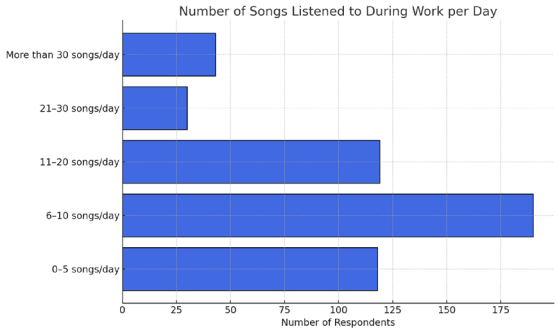

Figure 2. Number of Songs Listened to During Work per Day

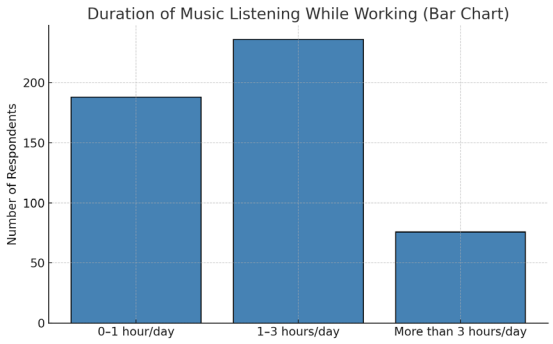

Figure 3. Duration of Music Listening while Working

The analysis further explored employees' music-related behavior in relation to specific emotional and cognitive states during work. Data were collected to identify the genres most commonly selected in response to psychological stress and motivational decline, as well as to measure daily listening frequency and duration.

In high-pressure or stressful situations at work (Figure 4), respondents preferred calming, emotionally grounding genres such as religious music, instrumentals, and jazz. These genres were interpreted as fulfilling a relaxing or ritualistic function, often associated with affective regulation and mental decompression. In contrast, during periods of motivational loss or fatigue (Figure 5), employees favored pop, *dangdut*, and rock, which are characterized by rhythmic intensity, emotional familiarity, and energizing lyrical themes. These genres were understood to have empowering and stimulating effects that reactivated work engagement.

The two-word cloud visualizations depict music genre preferences among employees across two distinct psychological states: work-related stress and lack of motivation (Figure 6). While both conditions show a strong preference for similar genres—most notably pop and *dangdut*—the underlying song selections within these genres differ. This suggests that although the genre category remains consistent, employees associate different sub-genres, lyrical themes, tempos, and emotional tones with each situational need. For example, a Pop song with calming lyrics and soft instrumentation may be preferred during periods of stress, whereas an upbeat, energizing Pop track may be chosen to combat a lack of motivation. Thus, the findings highlight that genre alone does not capture the full emotional utility of music; instead, it is the specific characteristics of the chosen songs within each genre that align with the listener's psychological state and intended emotional outcome.

Regarding listening volume, 38.0% of respondents reported listening to 6–10 songs per workday, 23.6% to fewer than 5 songs, and 23.8% to 11–20 songs. A smaller percentage (8.6%) listened to more than 30 songs, suggesting variability based on task type and individual listening habits. Regarding duration, nearly half of the respondents (47.2%) spent between 1 to 3 hours per day listening to music while working. An additional 37.6% reported listening for less than 1 hour, while 15.2% engaged in music listening for over 3 hours per day.

Figure 4. Word Cloud Music Genres When Experiencing Work-related Stress

Figure 5. Word Cloud Music Genres when Lacking Motivation

These findings indicate that music serves not only as background activity but also as a strategic auditory tool that employees deploy to manage their emotional states, cognitive energy, and workplace

performance. Variations in genre choice across psychological states further underscore the nuanced, functional role of music in work-related affective regulation.

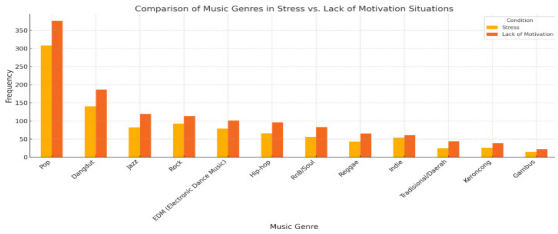

Figure 6. Comparison of Music Genres in Stress vs Lack of Motivation Situation

The Finding of Functional of Music by Employee

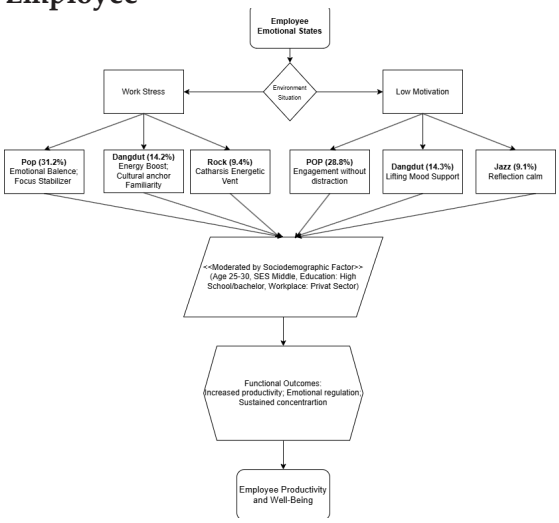

Figure 7. Conceptual Model of Adaptive Music Use for Employees

The conceptual model proposed in this study illustrates the adaptive utilization of music by employees in response to varying emotional states encountered within the workplace environment. The model initiates with the identification of the employee's emotional state, which subsequently branches into two principal pathways: work-related stress and low motivation.

In situations of work stress, employees predominantly select musical genres such as pop (31.2%), *dangdut* (14.2%), and rock (9.4%). Each genre serves distinct psychological functions: pop promotes emotional balance and stabilizes cognitive focus, *dangdu*t acts as an energy booster by reinforcing cultural familiarity and providing emotional security, while rock facilitates emotional catharsis and offers an energetic outlet for stress release. Conversely, when experiencing low motivation, employees gravitate towards genres like pop (28.8%), *dangdut* (14.3%), and jazz (9.1%). In this context, pop supports engagement without inducing cognitive overload, functioning as an ambient stimulant; *dangdut* aids in uplifting mood and restoring motivational energy; and jazz fosters reflective calmness and emotional re-centering.

The selection of these genres and their corresponding emotional functions is moderated by key sociodemographic factors, including employees' age (predominantly 25–30 years), socioeconomic status (middle class), educational attainment (high school or bachelor's degree), and workplace type (primarily private sector). These moderators influence how employees internalize and operationalize music as a self-regulatory mechanism during work activities.

Ultimately, the culmination of these adaptive auditory strategies leads to positive functional outcomes, notably enhanced productivity, improved emotional regulation, and sustained concentration. The integration of personalized music use within workplace routines thus contributes meaningfully to broader objectives related to employee performance and psychological well-being.

The study identifies that employees adaptively use music to meet specific emotional needs arising from workplace dynamics. The following discussion elaborates on the functions of each musical genre based on theories of emotion regulation through music.

Pop Music: Emotional Balancer and Cognitive Focus Stabilizer

Pop emerged as the most frequently selected genre during both work-related stress and periods of low motivation. This finding aligns with the theory of adaptive emotion regulation (Dougherty

et al., 2023), which posits that music characterized by simple rhythmic structures, familiar melodies, and emotionally light themes can stabilize mood without overloading cognitive resources (Roth et al., 2019). Pop music enables employees to maintain work concentration while receiving moderate emotional stimulation that helps sustain positive arousal levels.

_Dangdu_t: Cultural Familiarity and Mood Support

_Dangdu_t stands out as a local genre serving a dual function: as an energy booster during stress and as a mood enhancer during motivational decline (Ma et al., 2017; Weintraub, 2010). In accordance with the social surrogacy hypothesis, music rooted in local culture can fulfill socioemotional needs by fostering a sense of connectedness and familiarity, even within individualized work contexts (Weintraub, 2011; Wiharyanti et al., 2020). The use of *dangdut* by employees reflects the employment of music as a "cultural bridge" for emotional stabilization and psychological reconnection.

Rock: Catharsis and Energetic Vent

In situations of work-related stress, rock music is often chosen for its capacity to facilitate intense emotional expression. This aligns with the catharsis theory (Arnett, 1995), which suggests that high-energy music can safely channel emotional tension through immersive musical experiences without necessitating overt physical expression (Temperley, 2018). Rock thus serves as a cathartic medium, helping employees to release accumulated mental tension caused by work-related pressures.

Jazz: Reflective Calm and Emotional Restoration

During periods of low motivation, jazz is often adopted to induce calmness and facilitate emotional reflection. The mood management theory supports this finding (Zillmann, 1988), which posits that individuals selectively engage with auditory stimuli to modulate or restore their affective states. The complex structure and slower tempo of jazz music allow for deeper emotional reflection, supporting internal motivational recovery and promoting adaptive self-regulation (Lee et al., 2021; Pathak et al., 2024).

The integration of music functions into work behavior affirms the dynamic emotion regulation model in music (Evans & Schubert, 2008; Liu et al., 2021; Thompson & Quinto, 2012; Wood & Semwal, 2015), emphasizing that music selection is driven not merely by aesthetic preferences, but by dynamic, situational emotional needs. Employees intuitively adapt to different musical genres to manage the emotional spectrum encountered at work, demonstrating emotion regulation strategies rooted in auditory-stimulus-based intelligence (Keeler & Cortina, 2020; Sanseverino et al., 2023; Wu, 2024).

Furthermore, the findings of this study directly address the research gap identified in the literature review—specifically, the limited empirical exploration of music's role as an emotional regulation tool in the workplace within the Indonesian context. While numerous studies in Western countries have examined the relationship between music, emotion, and productivity (Liew et al., 2023; Parada-Cabaleiro et al., 2023; Trochidis et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2022), similar investigations in developing countries, particularly Indonesia, remain scarce

Future Research Directions

While this study provides foundational insights into the adaptive use of music for emotional regulation among Indonesian employees, several avenues for future research are suggested. First, longitudinal studies are needed to examine how consistent use of music affects long-term emotional resilience, engagement, and burnout rates across occupational sectors. Second, experimental designs that manipulate exposure to genre could clarify causal relationships between specific musical characteristics and targeted emotional outcomes in workplace settings. Third, future rese-

arch should investigate cross-cultural comparisons to determine how cultural factors mediate genre preferences and emotional functions of music, thereby expanding the ecological validity of the findings. Finally, integrating physiological measures such as heart rate variability or cortisol levels could provide objective evidence for the psychobiological mechanisms underpinning music's regulatory role in work environments.

Implications for Music Education

The findings of this study offer significant contributions to the development of music education curricula, particularly in expanding the understanding of music as a tool for emotional regulation and psychological well-being beyond its purely artistic functions. Music education can introduce the concept of music as an adaptive medium for situational emotional needs, teaching students not only the technical aspects of musical performance but also the conscious application of music for self-regulation purposes.

Integrating modules on the emotional functions of music could enrich the training of future musicians, educators, and music professionals in several ways. First, students can be encouraged to explore how different musical characteristics—such as rhythm, tempo, and emotional texture—affect individual mood states and productivity across various contexts. Second, academic programs could introduce practice-based projects, such as designing thematic playlists to support mental well-being in everyday life and workplace environments.

Furthermore, music education can play a critical role in fostering cross-cultural awareness regarding diverse musical preferences and the potential of local music, such as *dangdut* in the Indonesian context, as a powerful social and emotional medium. This approach would enhance the social relevance of music education by encouraging students to understand music not only as an aesthetic expression but also as a practical tool for supporting individual and collective well-being within contemporary society.

Beyond its psychological function, the findings suggest that workplace music listening may be understood as a form of informal musical engagement, in which employees actively negotiate sound, emotion, and work demands in everyday contexts. From a music education perspective, this reinforces the view of music as an applied cultural resource embedded in lived experience and self-regulatory practice, rather than merely an aesthetic object (Evans & Schubert, 2008; Keeler & Cortina, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the strategic and adaptive role of music in supporting employees' emotional regulation and productivity in the workplace. Findings reveal that employees selectively engage with different music genres depending on their psychological states: energizing genres such as pop, *dangdut*, and rock are preferred during periods of work-related stress to promote emotional release and cognitive stabilization, whereas emotionally soothing genres like jazz and instrumental music are favored during episodes of low motivation to restore focus and internal rhythm.

Moreover, the moderate daily duration of music listening (1–3 hours) and the semi-continuous listening pattern (6–10 songs per day) suggest that music is integrated into work routines not as a distraction but as a background enhancer of cognitive tempo. Sociodemographic factors—specifically younger age groups (25–30 years), middle socioeconomic status, and private sector employment—moderate these patterns, reflecting broader shifts toward personalized ambient media use in modern work cultures.

Collectively, the findings underscore that music is not merely a passive element of the work environment but serves as an active, self-directed tool for emotional management, mental pacing, and performan-

ce optimization. Future research could further explore the longitudinal impact of tailored music interventions on workplace resilience, engagement, and psychological well-being.

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