



When Performance Becomes Pedagogy: Analyzing Music Education Students' Attraction to the Stage

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Abstract

At its core, performance-based learning is an important aspect of music education in the classroom. Performance provides students with additional opportunities beyond artistic expression to bond and engage with their peers. This project seeks to identify how performance-based learning cultivates relationships with a primary emphasis on students who are socially oriented. Through observations, interviews, and reflections, the research shows that students' informal socialization during performance builds their musicianship, makes them more communicative and better collaborative partners. The results indicate that the more performance opportunities are arranged and the more unplanned socialization is tolerated, the better students are at musicianship and the better their relationships with peers. This study shows the importance of using performance as an opportunity for learning that links the formal and informal aspects of teaching and socialization, and provides substantial information on performance for the construction of the music curriculum.

Keywords: performance music education; informal learning; creativity; higher education

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INTRODUCTION

Performance in the music classroom functions as a culminating activity that synthesizes and strengthens a comprehensive range of musical skills, including perception, expression, technique, and social collaboration. Musical performance also serves as *musica practica* (Butt, 1994; Chan, 1994) – the active engagement in live musical activity, encompassing the practical dimensions of musicianship, including performance skills and techniques, notational literacy, and composition, as well as creative output. Performing music requires a regimented and organized set of prepara-

tions (McPherson & Thompson, 1998), including cataloging the music's repertoire, practicing on one's own to become proficient with one's instrument and synchronize with the ensemble, and addressing any anxiety one may experience in the lead-up to the performance. Elliott & Rao (1990) contends that musical performance possesses profound educational significance, encompassing both the process of learning and the product of musical expression. He views performance as more than a simple display. He sees value in performance as an educational tool that fosters cognitive, technical, and aesthetic growth simultaneously. Schneider Grings & Hentschke

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(2017) believes that musical performances are also a means for students to observe and appreciate their musical capabilities, in addition to helping to identify the most valuable qualities in their musical practice and themselves. Performance practice facilitates learning methods that foster the creation of social and cultural communities through meaningful events, active engagement, and real physical experience. In this practice, the flow of energy, the dynamic interplay of performers and audience members, the framing of the setting, and the creation of a response from the public are of paramount importance (José, 2017; Lange, 2006).

In formal classes, particularly from high school through college, performance is almost always an important component of the curriculum. At the tertiary level, music performance is influenced by a reciprocal chain of interactions among students, occasionally tutors, and continuously faculty members (Simones, 2017). Majors typically offer the following competencies: developing conducting, leading, and various types of ensemble competencies, arranging, instrument mastery, and performance skills (Jones, 2009). In the formal music learning curriculum, performances are divided into two types: first, performances prepared by major students as they acquire and master the instrument's technical skills; and second, performances as part of students' learning experience, encompassing all its mechanisms. The first type of problem arises when career availability is no longer satisfactory. Potter (2019) reported the continued decline of orchestras in the United States, despite an increase in the number of music performance departments. Meanwhile, performance conceived as a learning experience resonates with Reimer's (2022) "utilitarian" perspective, which interprets musical performance not merely as artistic output but as a vehicle for cultivating broader educational virtues. In this respect, performance serves as a structured framework through which learners cultivate creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative communication,

highlighting music's instrumental role in developing both individual competencies and interpersonal skills.

Informal Learning

Informal music education has emerged as a significant area of academic discourse, with diverse theoretical frameworks offering intricate insights. Lucy Green, for example, innovatively integrated popular musicians' vernacular learning techniques—such as aural learning, imitation, and collaborative peer engagement—into educational environments, establishing these methods as a valid alternative to conventional formal instruction (Green, 2002, 2017). Folkestad (2006) conceptualizes formal and informal learning not as a rigid dichotomy, but as two extremes on a continuum, distinguished by factors such as situation, learning style, ownership, and intentionality, with the majority of musical learning occurring along this spectrum. Schippers (2010) emphasizes that music education (as it is informally viewed) must focus on authentic contexts, allowing students the liberty to express themselves beyond the confines of the formal classroom curriculum. As those illuminate the promise of informal pedagogies—autonomy, authenticity, and contextual relevance—each perspective might surface tensions. Informal strategies, if unmediated, may sacrifice technical rigor; the continuum model can dilute pedagogical direction; and contextual authenticity can unintentionally marginalize expert guidance. However, a truly balanced model must blend informal vitality with formal structure, precise learning trajectories, and culturally informed scaffolding.

Green (2002, 2008) argues that overly formal educational settings may no longer be relevant, a trend observable in contemporary contexts and likely to persist. Given students' informal learning today, it better fits their current characteristics and sociocultural environment. Preparing for a music performance is a laborious, complex task that requires significant out-of-class time. So much time is spent on practice,

and so many concentrated sessions are required. A typical class time of 2 or 3 hours can never be sufficient for all the rehearsal work. Much rehearsal learning happens independently. Students also engage in many discussions and demonstrations, which they can experience individually.

Hallam (2001) and Hallam et al. (2018) reports that there is a structured planning strategy involving preparation, planning, monitoring, and evaluation when students are required to perform, something that also occurs more informally. Performance opportunities were essential to the learning experience. Presenting in front of peers allowed for positive feedback, which was motivating (Hallam et al., 2018). Music performances exhibit a dual character, as they are both valued and feared. Students frequently appreciate these experiences for fostering creativity, negotiation, and collaboration skills. However, performing before peers may also induce considerable anxiety and apprehension in some individuals.

Music Performance

Playing an instrument or singing a song requires a unique set of physical abilities that must be honed in response to dynamic, interactive environments shaped by people, technology, acoustic spaces, and social and cultural influences (van der Schyff & Schiavio, 2022). In the process of learning music, for instance, within a classroom setting, students engage in mutual interaction and technical coordination regarding the tasks they will undertake together, while simultaneously producing a shared creative output. This phenomenon, as described by Sawyer & DeZutter (2009), is referred to as “distributed creativity.” In order to express themselves creatively, people are driven to create melodies or rhythms that they find aesthetically beautiful, harmonic, or otherwise interesting and entertaining (Tan et al., 2018). Within the classroom, however, a teacher must examine whether such creativity is primarily geared toward artistic-aesthetic activities or if it is more deeply engaged with

the practical, performative parts of music itself.

In classroom music practice, individuals engage in activities such as listening, composing, performing (Tan et al., 2018), arranging, and improvising (Hidayatullah, 2020). While engaging with a musical repertoire, students concurrently integrate these activities. The initial stage of performance encompasses listening, practicing, repetition, and modifying material into a presentable format—activities that necessitate higher-order thinking skills. Moreover, numerous individuals may presume that improvisation is more intimately linked to creativity because of its spontaneous nature. Nonetheless, this is not invariably true; several theorists contend that creativity may also be understood from a ‘unique’ standpoint when examined in other, more specific activities such as listening, composing, and performing (see.

van der Schyff & Schiavio (2022) asserts that assessments of creativity frequently focus on the ultimate outputs of creative individuals, such as artistic or musical works, judged by their societal influence. This approach often overlooks the real situations and processes where creativity happens. In musical performance, and when learning performance skills, creativity involves more than just the final result. It also includes physical skills, direct interaction with others, the use of instruments, the sound environment, and cultural influences. This work seeks to assess and encourage discussion of music performance and instruction in higher education (HE) in Indonesia, despite significant problems in music education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Brief View of Music Education in Indonesia

The significant expansion of public and private HE institutions offering both instructional and non-instructional music programs has shaped the landscape of Indonesian music education. This institutional growth reflects the emergence of a

national framework for formal music education, thereby increasing opportunities for prospective musicians and educators. Across Indonesia, select arts institutions and universities with renowned music departments open their doors to students seeking formal tertiary-level music education.

The Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) campuses in Yogyakarta, Denpasar, and Surakarta each have a Faculty of Performing Arts offering undergraduate and postgraduate programs in music performance, composition, ethnomusicology, and music education. The ISBI network, spanning ISBI Bandung, ISBI Aceh, and ISBI Tanah Papua, weaves music studies into a vibrant tapestry of cultural and artistic exploration, celebrating both the preservation and creative evolution of regional musical traditions. Located in the capital, the Institut Kesenian Jakarta (IKJ), through its Faculty of Performing Arts, offers a Bachelor's program in Music that has produced many prominent performers, composers, and educators. Beyond these specialized arts institutions (non-educational), some state universities—such as Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ), Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES), Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY), UNP, Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED), Unila, Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA), and Universitas Negeri Malang (UM), and Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI)—also maintain dedicated music education departments, typically within their faculties of language and arts education, thereby contributing to both the professional training of musicians and the preparation of future music educators. These universities, known as Teacher Training and Education Institutions (LPTK, or Teacher Training Institutes), are central to higher music education in Indonesia. They provide the foundation for musical learning, inspire the nation's artistic spirit, and nurture its cultural heritage. These institutions are associated with professional organizations, particularly the *Asosiasi Program Studi Pendidikan Sendra-tasik Indonesia* (AP2SENI) and the *Asosiasi*

Pendidik Seni Indonesia (APSI).

Many formal higher education institutions do not fully solve the problems found in formal schooling. Mack (2001, 2007)2001, 2007, 2015 discusses the persistent challenges of music education in Indonesia, which are linked to a variety of historical factors. These include: (1) the influence of Dutch missionaries and the colonial administration on the development of education, (2) misconceptions regarding the interpretation of national anthem, (3) misunderstandings regarding globalization and international interests in the arts (including music), (4) the alienation of Indonesian society through the importation of Western music knowledge, (5) the propensity of formal schools to prioritize the rote memorization of theoretical terms, and (6) the absence of adequate instructional methodologies consistent with the development of artistic proficiency, particularly in the context of art music. Mack (2007)2015 further argues that the absence of government policies in Indonesia explicitly supporting music education is not the only serious matter; the more fundamental issue is that music teaching materials are almost exclusively derived from another (Western) culture.

At the school level, there remains a significant gap in knowledge and pedagogy that should otherwise support teachers in effectively teaching music to their students. Music ideas and theories have not been implemented in ways that are understandable to pupils within the school curriculum. Ideally, students should be introduced to practical experiences, which can serve as a basis for understanding music's broader social context (Sukmayadi, 2014). However, the lack of competence among school music teachers often leaves them without a clear pedagogical framework for conducting music education at its most basic level. As a result, many teachers fail to effectively "pedagogize" music in the school setting. After over a decade, these issues have remained unchanged, particularly in formal schooling, where teachers continue to face numerous technical chal-

lenges. One such challenge is that not all music teachers in schools have received adequate music education; some even come from teacher-training institutions mentioned earlier without a strong foundation in music. As a result, formal schools are unable to ensure that music education is provided thoroughly by trained professional music educators. The quality of music instruction and students' musical learning outcomes are ultimately influenced by this condition.

Interestingly, the founding father, Ki Hajar Dewantara, had already articulated a brilliant vision for the direction of Indonesian music education a century ago. Philosophically, Dewantara sought to identify an educational "model" rooted in traditional practices (Tsuchiya, 1987). Through his discourse on *wirama* (rhythm), which he described as education through the "habituation of rhythm," Dewantara emphasized its potential to cultivate moral character when adapted to the cultural context of its practitioners (Dewantara, 1977). In addition, Dewantara effectively transmitted his concepts regarding the decolonization of music education via the *Taman Siswa* movement, which prioritized student self-governance and the incorporation of local wisdom (Irwin, 2019). Had this idea been systematically implemented – similar to how Germany institutionalized early music education policies (Sukmayadi, 2014) – the landscape of music education in Indonesia might have evolved quite differently from what it is today. Moreover, within the discourse on the "formalization of music education" in Indonesia, teaching and transmitting music – whether through community traditions or in formal schools led by teachers without specialized training in music education – are increasingly acknowledged as valuable expressions of local cultural potential. Such vernacular modes of music learning are considered equally significant when placed alongside Western pedagogical approaches, highlighting the need for a more inclusive understanding of music education (Hidayatullah, 2024).

Colonial stories still overshadow formal music education in Indonesia today. The "Mozart effect" is still a big deal in the music education industry, and for some people (Aryandari, 2023), Western music is still seen as the best way to learn and grow. Western classical music is often regarded as an established narrative (see: high culture) whose position is superior to local musical traditions (Andita, 2018; Aryandari, 2024; Sudarman, 2015). Moreover, classical music, much like jazz, has become a marker of social status, accessible primarily to certain social groups who consume and study it. Given this situation, it is unsurprising that the wider public and stakeholders in formal music education continue to perceive Western music as inherently superior. From Mignolo's perspective, this represents a consequence of Western colonial instruments, whereby academic disciplines and societal perceptions alike have become hegemonized and continuously rendered inferior under enduring colonial influence (Mignolo, 2009, 2011, 2021; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

During the Dutch colonial period, music education was heavily oriented toward the Western classical tradition (Aryandari, 2024). Schools established by the colonial government, particularly those intended for the elite and *priyayi* classes, specifically taught European music such as the works of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven (Sudarman, 2015). Moreover, Western music was frequently performed and broadcast at various palace festivities, with minimal inclusion of Javanese gamelan. In many cases, the conductors were Europeans. At the same time, the musicians were local Indonesians. This situation vividly illustrates how the postcolonial memory of Western musical knowledge has remained deeply ingrained in the consciousness of much of the local society (Andita, 2018).

Music Performance at University

Performance is not a novel concept in Indonesian society. Various types of performance had previously been intro-

duced to local communities long before official universities were established, and included the performing arts in their curricula. The earliest forms of Indonesian performing arts originated from indigenous practices before their later formalization within academic institutions. Local performances were communal in nature, involving the active participation of audiences as part of the event (Bandem, 2008). The performers were drawn entirely from the local community and were generally intended for their own members—what Yampolsky (1995) has described as “face-inward.” In Bali, the performing arts have flourished primarily due to government support, as they are a significant source of revenue in the tourism sector. The teaching of dance and music often occurs informally within households or through the many non-formal institutions (*sanggar*) spread across the island. As a result, arts education (including music) has expanded, with informal learning activities often exceeding those conducted within formal institutions (Bandem, 2008).

Most Indonesian society maintains a close relationship with performance, as the artistic situation in Bali illustrates the strong support provided by the government and local communities, mainly due to its contribution to regional income. Another contributing factor is the frequent organization of performances by local communities, which facilitates ongoing engagement in informal learning. Rasmussen (2010) explains that, from a spiritual perspective, Indonesians acquire religious knowledge through *dakwah* (Islamic preaching), which is often conveyed through musical performances. From this perspective, music plays a central role in social behavior, in which physical activity and interaction are central. Performance constitutes a fundamental component in the structure of music education. Historically, it was first transmitted to the broader public through Islamic traditions, given that most of the population adheres to Islam (Indrawan, 2018). The extent to which (mostly) local communities are exposed to performan-

ces has shaped a collective perception that extends into formal domains, including when students pursue HE, particularly in the study of music by performance.

In general, the music education curriculum in Indonesian HE institutions focuses on four basic musical competencies: composition, research, teaching (pedagogy), and performance. During the college entrance selection process, all fundamental competencies are assessed through a performance test, which indicates students' initial proficiency (Utomo et al., 2025). Students who aspire to become practitioners typically enroll in non-educational institutions, while those who aspire to become instructors attend LPTK. In actuality, however, the number of LPTKs offering music instruction programs is substantially higher, indicating that career opportunities in schools and other formal educational contexts are more expected. Within educational institutions (LPTK), students demonstrate heightened enthusiasm for practical skills, technical mastery, and exceptional performance in music. This situation cultivates the impression that achievement (of skill acquisition) is seen as more appealing than engaging in research or delving into academic literature.

Compared to other academic disciplines, music education occupies only a marginal portion of the national curriculum in Indonesia, largely because its outcomes are perceived as insignificant (Aryandari, 2023). Furthermore, opportunities to develop the performance skills required of professional musicians are limited; where they do exist, they are mostly confined to non-formal music schools operated under well-known brands such as Yamaha or Purwacaraka. Beyond these institutions, there are relatively few success stories of building sustainable careers in the music performance industry (Milenković, 2015).

Musical performance extends beyond technical proficiency (González-Moreno, 2013), as it also entails cognitive dimensions—such as musical understanding—and emotional dimensions, including stress management and motivation.

Through effective self-regulation, music students are better equipped, both cognitively and emotionally, to face the demands of stage performance. Self-regulation is considered a key factor in improving the quality of musical performance (Hidayatullah et al., 2024). Students should implement structured practice strategies that include goal-setting, progress monitoring, and evaluation of practice outcomes. Feedback is another important part of learning performance in music education since it significantly impacts students' growth (McPherson et al., 2022). Students gain deeper knowledge and perform better as a result of feedback from instructors and classmates, self-evaluation, and real-world experience. Students' capacity for reflection is central to this process. It enables them to identify subsequent steps in their learning trajectory, thereby fostering greater self-confidence (Brooks et al., 2021; Hattie et al., 2020; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie & Zierer, 2024).

The HE music curriculum incorporates theoretical and practical aspects, generally covering three primary areas: Western classical music, traditional or vernacular music, and popular music. Although each domain has its fan base, students in all these fields always show excitement when playing in front of an audience. Reflecting their sustained exposure to performance practices, students are naturally eager to present music to an audience. Since Lucy Green's seminal study on how popular musicians learn, the legitimacy of informal approaches to popular music education has gained increasing recognition. Such methods are considered particularly relevant in Indonesian higher education, as they align with students' preference for collaborative, flexible practices and their inclination to develop an individual learning style (Smith, 2014).

Performative Music Education (PME)

Performative Music Education (PME) provides students with learning experiences grounded in direct interaction with creative practice (composition,

arrangement, and performance) and ongoing reflection integrated throughout the process (Rodríguez-Quiles, 2017). Conway (2020) emphasizes that music instruction in higher education should be student-centered, positioning performance not as an end in itself but as an integral part of a broader process that encourages students to continually explore and develop their potential. PME intersects with Elliot's philosophy, which can be briefly defined as music education, at its core, the practice of making music in which various creative musical elements and values are embedded. PME provides comprehensive learning essentials, including planning, discussion, practice sessions, and music presentation, all packaged in a music performance-based model.

METHOD

Research Design

This study investigated the learning style and student perception of performance at the Universitas Lampung (Unila), Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP), and Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia (ISBI) Aceh. It used an ethnographic approach with four data collection methods: (1) semi-structured interviews with 45 students, lecturers, and staff; (2) participant observation of informal and formal settings and events within the performance class; (3) participant self-documentation, which included written or oral interviews; and (4) collection of relevant documents such as curricula, learning materials, and course strategies. We used Barton's (2014) ethnographic model to investigate students' perspectives in performance-based music classes through an ethnomusicological perspective. We focused on participant observation to understand 'around' the teaching and learning context. This aspect of the model emphasized that teachers' conceptions of music teaching are inextricably embedded within the cultural contexts in which music is taught. From this ethnographic perspective, students' perceptions of their musical experiences during

practice, performance culture, and social practices. Guided by this epistemological lens, we further investigated how students collectively perceived and constructed the meanings of performance culture through the ethnographic questions presented in Table 1.

In addition to communicating with students and observing the processes of practice and rehearsal in large-ensemble classes, the lecturers provided reports on student progress, assessment, and evaluation. They offered detailed accounts of the performance contexts, which were then validated through direct observation. Data were further enriched through both direct questioning and the use of questionnaires. Beyond the lecturers who taught performance classes, input was also sought from lecturers of other courses regarding students' behaviors in performance settings.

Research Site and Participants

We enrolled 45 students from three institutions—Universitas Lampung (Unila), Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia (ISBI) Aceh, and Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP)—in performance-based music classes, with particular emphasis on local and indigenous musical traditions. Throughout the study, we continuously interacted with the lecturers who facilitated these courses, discussing the students' progress regarding their perceptions of the performance process and how they expressed local cultural values through the music they per-

formed and collaboratively created. The participants were second- and third-year students who had previously studied music theory, fundamental cultural knowledge, the history of Western and Indonesian music, and the basics of composition and arrangement. These foundational skills and knowledge were applied and further developed within the performance classes. The participants, aged about 20–24, originated from different areas in Sumatra and Java, resulting in a mix of backgrounds. Furthermore, some of the students were taking regular performance courses and showing their work; they had already performed, whereas others were from the general collective or other non-previously organized courses in which they did not perform.

To protect participants' confidentiality, all student participants quoted in this article are identified using anonymized codes (e.g., S01, S02, and S03), followed by their ages in parentheses. The codes do not correspond to the participants' real names or initials.

Data Collection Techniques

In collecting data, this study employed semi-structured interviews with 45 students, lecturers, and staff, combined with participant observation of both formal and informal activities inside and outside the classroom. Participant self-documentation was also included, in which students provided reflections through written and

Table 1. Ethnographic questions and analytical focuses concerning students' perceptions of performance culture

Ethnographic question	Analytical focus
How do students interpret their performance experiences?	Performance as a social, musical, and pedagogical experience
What values do students consider important in performance practices?	Collaboration, belonging, emotional connection, and shared responsibility
What does performing on stage mean to students?	The stage as a space for recognition, collective achievement, and musical expression
How is students' musical identity formed through performance practices?	Identity formation through participation, interaction, and collective music-making
How do lecturer-student relationships influence performance practices?	Facilitation, egalitarian communication, feedback, and student agency

(Source: Hidayatullah, 2026)

oral interviews. Other relevant documents, such as curricula, learning/teaching materials, and course activities, were collected to support this analysis. Participant interviews were conducted in order to collect specific and personal details.

Participatory Observation: We were directly involved in the rehearsal process through participant observation. Outside the classroom, students practiced individually to prepare for ensemble rehearsals, and we documented each event that occurred both during rehearsals and in the actual performances. The observations focused on students' interactions during rehearsals, individual practice, and performances, including their attitudes and expressions regarding instrumental techniques, verbal and nonverbal communication, interpretation of musical compositions, and responses to lecturers' instructional feedback and rehearsal notes. The recordings we collected ourselves were also requested by the researcher, who requested video documentation of the entire practice and rehearsal process. Interestingly, many students consciously recorded their activities on their smartphones and shared them on social media, which were also incorporated into the study as self-documentation data. Informal conversations among students during practice sessions also served as valuable data sources. Furthermore, informal interviews were also held with the teachers of the performance classes. Notes of observations served as the primary source for identifying emerging themes and were organized and analyzed in NVIVO15. The researcher served as a teacher and co-participant, and regularly interacted with students concerning their musical work.

Semi-structured Interviews: The interviews were semi-structured to elicit deeper and more natural responses, particularly from the students. The questions were adapted to the context of each situation. They were often carried out outside the classroom to encourage students to openly share their views and experiences of learning musical performance. Probing techniques were also employed to explore their

responses further and to uncover unexpected insights. The questions posed to the students focused on how they interpreted performance-based music classes in comparison with theory-oriented courses; the extent to which performance stimulated their creativity, improvisational skills, and enthusiasm for learning local music; how performance fostered spaces for collaboration and exploration in music-making; and whether studying local or indigenous music enhanced their awareness and curiosity toward these traditions. Some students, selected at random, responded through direct interviews, while the others completed the provided questionnaires.

Document Analysis: Documents were also used as data sources, including the curriculum or syllabus for the performance class (Malay Music), teaching modules and materials, course evaluation instruments, lecturers' records of student progress, daily meeting journals, class attendance lists, and final course reports. In addition, rehearsal processes uploaded to social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube via the students' official channels were analyzed, along with the comments posted in response to these uploads.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in five stages: transcription, open coding, axial coding, theme construction, and interpretive abstraction. In Phase 1, we transcribed all data from interviews, observations, field notes, and documentation into a text format suitable for analysis. We carefully observed the students' performances on stage, interviewed them afterward, and noted their expressions, gestures, and interactions backstage. The recorded observation and interview data were transcribed and organized using NVIVO15. Each document type was classified and coded to generate preliminary themes for the study. Once these themes were established, they were grouped into relevant clusters and developed into broader thematic categories. The themes that were identified

included students’ notions of practice and rehearsal, habits of practice, verbal and non-verbal communication, forms of in-rehearsal interaction, improvisation, and hermeneutic interpretations that afforded musical expression.

In Phase 2, open coding, the data is divided into small, meaningful segments. The transcripts are reviewed, and “concept labels” are assigned. The interview results emphasize emotional engagement, performance excitement, theory-performance tension, and stage attachment. This is a crucial stage in ethnography, which also involves “in-depth description.” At this stage, the analysis focuses on cultural activities and common forms of social action (Tisdell et al., 2025).

In Phase 3, axial coding involves identifying relationships, patterns, and structures discovered in the previous phase. The codes developed point to musical performance as a space of recognition (for students). At this stage, broad categories, social relationships, and structures of meaning begin to be conceptualized systematically.

Based on axial coding, broader analytical themes (phase 4; theme construction) were developed by integrating recurrent patterns, shared meanings, and socially situated experiences across interviews, observations, and field notes. At this juncture, the qualitative and descriptive analysis shifted toward an interpretive, sense-based understanding of how participants collectively experienced and made sense

of performance-based musical learning in their environment. The themes presented are carefully crafted and contextualized to enhance their educational significance.

In Phase 5, we further explored the theme to develop it into a concept, which ultimately led to our findings; we then ensured that these findings were discussed in a way that contributed to the theoretical framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The musical creative process

Analysis of the student interviews revealed several salient insights into the processes of music learning within performance classes. First, students perceived that performance-based music learning encouraged the development of their creativity. Second, they felt freer to experiment with musical elements such as tonality, melody, rhythm, harmony, form, and dynamics. Third, they perceived improvements in their technical and improvisational skills. Fourth, the majority stated that “creative ideas were best fostered in an ensemble setting by people collaborating in a group.”

In the activities integrated with the didactic values, students’ creative thinking appeared. They experimented with a multitude of approaches to define the concept of music. Improvisation also enabled them to hone their instrumental technique and to sharpen their ability of spontaneous musical ideas. During group practice sessions,

Table 2. Thematic constructions derived from interpretive analysis

Themes	Construction
Encouraging creativity through performance	Performance as a Social Space for Creative Identity Formation
Freedom to experiment with musical elements	Negotiating Musical Agency through Exploratory Performance Practices
Development of improvisation	Improvisation as Situated Musical Meaning-Making
Collaboration as a catalyst for creative ideas	Collective Musicking and the Social Construction of Creativity
A dynamic arena for musical exploration and creative innovation	The Performance Arena as a Cultural Ecology of Musical Experimentation

(Source: Hidayatullah, 2026)

students collaboratively discuss and integrate their ideas. Incremental modifications progressively enhance the compositions under development. In ensemble rehearsals and performances, group activities fostered discussion, idea sharing, and the cultivation of sensitivity in both verbal and non-verbal communication. For example, performing Malay music in traditional costumes and playing percussion instruments enables students to acquire essential aspects of nonverbal communication (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Group musical performance on stage (Source: Hidayatullah, 2025)

Student Perception

During the rehearsal process in a music ensemble, each student has a unique experience. Based on the interview results, they mentioned keywords that closely reflect their feelings. In general, the students felt that rehearsals before the performance greatly helped them develop their individual and group skills, cultivate motivation, grapple with ideas, apply theoretical knowledge, and deepen their understanding of local musical idioms; some of which were new to them (See Figure 2).

MAN (21), a student at ISBI Aceh, said, "...my motivation for studying music

is to gain more experience in the areas of creation, arrangement, and composition—to delve even deeper. As for the satisfaction I get from music education itself, that alone is more than enough to get me started or to spark it all..."

YDP (21), a student in the Music Education program at Unila, said, "I see [these joint practice sessions] from a more unconventional perspective—one that the other students sometimes don't realize. For me, there's no such thing as being satisfied with learning."



Figure 2. Word cloud on students' perceptions of music performances (Source: Hidayatullah, 2026)

Performance-based music education brings together technical instruction and social-emotional learning. It encourages creativity, builds teamwork, helps students apply theory in practice, boosts motivation and satisfaction, and supports personal growth and confidence in performing. The investigation results show that most respondents view performance experiences as an effective and transformative way to learn. Students were almost unanimous in stating that performance-based learning fosters creativity and offers opportunities for musical experimentation (melody, rhythm, harmony). This is evident in the majority of students' responses about creativity and exploration. Performances foster genuine interaction within the ensemble, thereby enhancing students'

ability to listen, respond, and share ideas; 100% of students reported that the course helped with collaboration and ensemble work. Open-ended comments confirmed that performances “encourage the discussion of ideas” and the division of roles.

S03 (22), a student in the Music Education program at Unila, said, “My collaborative skills have improved quite a bit thanks to performances (such as the Malay-style performance), because we are encouraged to express the ideas in our heads and discuss them with our friends or group.”

Study results reveal that students actively used music theory and harmony when crafting arrangements and performing. Most participants felt the course helped them blend knowledge with hands-on skills, highlighting how performance sparks meaningful learning transfer. Peer-to-peer practice during performance preparation boosts motivation to create and satisfaction with the learning process; the majority of students felt more motivated and satisfied compared to theoretical methods. Statements such as “I want to gain more experience in composition and arrangement” appeared in the open-ended responses.

Moreover, many students stepped onto the stage with newfound confidence and a richer sense of musical self-expression after completing performance-based courses. This transformation shaped not only their performative identity but also their readiness to embark on professional journeys.

The role of Lecturers

Lecturers as educators play a central role in performance classes, because even though they are facilitators, their functions as mentors, correctors, evaluators, and motivators remain dominant. The background of lecturers in performance classes is generally as music practitioners outside the campus. Students’ perceptions of performance are also shaped by the lecturers they observe. To this point, all lecturers have maintained a close personal rapport with students, which has positively influenced their interest in performance. As facilitators, lecturers further emphasize that performance parallels the research process, requiring observation, documentation, analysis, production, and dissemination.

For students in Indonesia more broadly, the study of traditional or local music does not generally foster heightened enthusiasm. Most students have overlooked traditional or local music education, not because it lacks appeal, but because opportunities to engage with indigenous music are limited. The Malay music classes offered in the Music Education Study Program (MESP) at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Unila, for example, provide students with the freedom to explore and discover new possibilities throughout the learning process. Such freedom to explore plays a pivotal role in fostering student enthusiasm.

Lecturer-Student Proximity in Performance-Based Music Learning

The role of lecturers or teachers is

Table 3. Students’ perceptions of their music practice experiences during practice (N=45)

State on performance-experience	Student Response
Performance enhanced creativity in musical expression	100%
Improving improvisation skills	100%
Development of creative ideas	93,3%
Enhanced understanding of local wisdom	95,6%
Connect with elements of local music	97,8%
Share ideas and contribute within a music group	100%
Connect music theory with live performance	97,8%

(Source: Hidayatullah, 2026)

equally significant, as those in HE serve as comprehensive facilitators of learning. In Lukovska's (2024) view, this is referred to as the interrelated trinity role of "composer-performer-teacher." The interaction system built by lecturers is quite complex because musical performances and education are integrated into a creative pedagogical process. One of the lecturers, T01, who teaches Malay Music at MESP, brings a multifaceted background: he is a composer with several recorded works, an active stage performer, and a university lecturer. S04 (21), one of the students, said:

"...what makes us feel comfortable is that Mr. L01Hero doesn't blame us when we make mistakes. He gives examples, but doesn't judge our mistakes. So, we are motivated to keep improving ourselves..."

Webster (2011) explains that (1) "knowledge is formed as part of the active interaction, (2) theoretical knowledge that learners experience will ultimately build meaning together with that knowledge, (3) learning is essentially a social activity. In the social context of learning, positive interactions are not limited to students; teachers and lecturers must also cultivate rapport with their students to foster a supportive environment that nurtures curiosity and sustains the desire for continued learning. Constructively, learning and teaching encompass active engagement, the structured development of methods, and the formal processes that take place within the classroom (Shively, 2015). S05 (21), one of the students, recounted her experience:

"...studying in the performance class, especially with our lecturer, was his relaxed demeanor, egalitarian communication, and the fact that we were allowed to receive guidance on our music projects outside of class, for example, in the cafeteria or other public spaces..."

As a new pedagogical insight, Lucy Green's research has become one of the most well-known studies on how popular

musicians learn, as it not only inspires new methods for formal music education but also criticizes overly conventional teaching methods. Musicians learn by listening, teaching themselves, and with their friends (Green, 2002, 2008, 2017). A music performance classroom, at least, encompasses those fundamental principles of music learning. Gaunt et al. (2021) argues further that continuous practical experience in music classes prepares students to connect and engage with the community, offering invaluable preparation and transition to professional life. Thus, the gap between the music education curriculum in universities and society's practical needs is gradually narrowing. Furthermore, lecturers who are also active music practitioners (as performers) bring direct experiential (see: Kolb, 2014) knowledge to their teaching, enabling them to share real-world insights with students. They place more emphasis on the social and contextual dimensions of music rather than just music theory.

Pedagogy

Performance-based music education grounded in local traditions creates a pedagogical space that nurtures six key principles: creativity, collaboration, empowerment, the guiding role of the educator, an informal atmosphere, and rich social interaction.

The first of these looks to *creativity* as the predominant foundation when students are given the chance to investigate indigenous musical expressions, work traditional materials into original creations or reinterpret repertoire with individuality. This creativity not only refines students' artistic skills but also cultivates a sense of ownership and responsibility toward their cultural heritage. Students from different ethnic backgrounds teach each other and form a natural convergence of musical styles. This circumstance aligns with Hoffman's (1978) perspective and is further reinforced by Reimer (2022), who argues that music cannot be isolated from culture; rather, musical knowledge is grounded in the very epistemology that underlies and

permeates cultural life as a whole

Second, collaboration emerges through ensemble practice, where students develop the capacity to listen attentively, adapt, and negotiate with their peers. In the case of local music, collaboration would also require us to create a collective consciousness that “music is a social activity that flourishes through sharing with others, being in proximity to others.” They recognize each other’s different musical abilities, and the instructor asks one of the students to lead the group project.

Third, empowerment occurs when students are given the space to make artistic decisions, lead rehearsals, or design small sections and arrange them neatly. Thus, students are not only passive participants, but also active agents who are confident in articulating their musical identity and arousing curiosity that leads them deeper. The lecturer, being aware of each student’s abilities, empowers the more capable individuals to support and guide their peers within the group.

Fourth, the role of educators has evolved from that of mere instructors to facilitators and mentors. Lecturers are more like path makers, inspiring others to follow and giving an example, but students’ freedom of experimentation should not be clipped. Lecturers’ input to students and students’ informal orals. This style follows class lecturing, where lecturers present information to students, who, on their own initiative, engage in extensive informal oral communication. Lecturers create a contented atmosphere through egalitarian communication, encouraging students to be more active in discussions.

Fifth, an informal atmosphere is developed so that the music performance classes are non-intimidating, cordial, and casual. In that environment, students are more likely to take risks without fear of failure and to participate in the natural learning process. Errors are sometimes used as a way of improvement, making instructions more efficient while students learn to increase their effectiveness (Feldman et al., 2016). This situation does not arise or-

ganically; lecturers deliberately arrange it to be as informal as possible, so that even though classes are held on campus, the unstructured learning style still applies to students.

Sixth, social interaction is at the core of the entire learning process. Through conversation, group work, and shared performances, students discover that local music is far more than an aesthetic expression; it’s a way to foster connection, solidarity, and relationships with their neighbors. Students are taught through social epistemology (Goldman, 2021; Reimer, 2022), in which the knowledge and skills they acquire are derived from the relationships they have formed over time, as well as collective practices that ultimately shape shared values that are transmitted personally.

Performance Culture

In music courses, performances are seen as more than just the end result of teaching. They create a social space where experiences, emotions, and relationships come together. Many students in this program do not see performance as simply an “assessment of skills.” Instead, they view it as a physical moment where body, voice, and a sense of togetherness all meet. The meaning of “performance” moves beyond practical skills and becomes a way for students to experience their place within a group.

From the students’ perspective, the values considered important in musical activities are not always related to the theoretical analysis of musical compositions, but rather, unconsciously (for the students)—to collective experiences that encompass a sense of togetherness and emotional synchronization. The intensity of physical interaction during rehearsals creates a sense of belonging among them. For students, music fosters a genuine sense of social connection. Music theory is often treated as a secondary layer; it is useful, but not essential to the experience they consider most meaningful. For students, going on stage means much more than just giving an ar-

tistic performance. The stage becomes a place where the hard work of many people is shown and appreciated. Individual identities join to create a united musical group. As the performance goes on, students are introduced, and the group's presence is made clear, showing their strength in working together and sharing their music with everyone. In this way, the stage becomes a place where achievements are both noticed and opportunely shared.

Without even realizing it, students start to create a common identity as they immerse themselves in performance practice. They progressively become musicians in the truest sense as a result of their continuous involvement in group activities, which require coordination, physical discipline, and a great sense of mutual responsiveness. The distinctive circumstances and connections they come across, created via lively interactions with classmates, instructors, and listeners, give them a sense of belonging. Performance of music becomes more than just knowledge; it becomes a dynamic, ever-evolving social practice molded by each encounter.

Additionally, these performance practices are greatly influenced by the interactions between lecturers and students, in addition to peer relationships. Students prefer to see rehearsals as preparation for the real stage performance, but since they see academics as friends, the connection should be results-oriented rather than hierarchical. It's interesting to note that musical reflection emerges when student interactions are more dialogic and interactive, where theory and practice genuinely support one another. Students feel at ease and connected to the lecturer when they act as a friend, not expecting perfection from them but nevertheless keeping an eye on their development.

Students' overemphasis on performance over form is a sign that music needs to give them a powerful social-emotional experience. When music education connects these two aspects—the shared delight that results from playing together and the conceptual depth that gives that

experience structure—it is effective. Without that balance, students are unable to actively participate in music education and develop a sense of efficacy; music does not truly live for them.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that performance-oriented learning in music education is more than a learning experience aimed at achieving artistic competence or technical musicianship. Instead, the ethnographic data show that performance operates as a socially based pedagogical ecology in which students navigate identity, belonging, communication, and collaboration through group music-making. In ensemble rehearsal and informal performance preparation, students do not learn just the music; they learn how to stake out a position relationally in a shared cultural space where meaning, recognition, and belonging are negotiated on an ongoing basis.

The results also indicate that performance practices blur the boundaries between classroom learning and social activity in typical ways. Ways of musical collaboration, peer negotiation, and the collective rehearsal process serve as acts of social pedagogy, as students become more empathetic, sensitive, respectful, and communicative through encountering and performing together. Classroom performance, in this view, cannot simply be reduced to aesthetic production but should be understood as an exercise — a kind of “social practice” that positions students within broader cultural and communal realities without alienation. Performance-based learning then works multilaterally as both an artistic practice and social formation.

This research contributes to the field of music education by treating musical performance neither as the final product of teaching nor as a site of aesthetics. Rather, it views performance as a space for learning where students construct their musical identities and social agency over time. The research demonstrates that learning in a performance space encompasses more

than the technical aspects of music, as students negotiate ideas and construct a sense of belonging through social relationships. In this sense, informal social communication is perceived as more than an appendix to the structured educational plan. It is the means by which learners' collaborative values, creative understanding, and socially oriented musicianship are formed. This paper, therefore, suggests that musical performance is a far more complex, relational, and cultural practice within the social worlds of students' performance activities than a purely technical or performative function.

From a pedagogical perspective, music education curricula must be less focused on the product of performance and more on developing instructional contexts that account for rehearsal culture, peer interaction, and informal musical exchange, integrating these into the educational experience. It is incumbent upon music educators to create pedagogical spaces that invite collaboration and dialogue, and that aim for social salience and musical engagement. This way, performance can serve the dual purpose of art and pedagogy. It can help nurture, alongside the artistic imperative, communicative competence, social responsibility, and culturally engaged performance.

Finally, this analysis highlights the necessity of such critical contemplation of performance culture values in higher music education, as formally institutionalised practice becomes ever more informal. Future research could investigate the informal pedagogical practices emerging from performance culture and explore their impact on students' professional identity, creative agency, social engagement, and participatory practice in varied institutional contexts.

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