

A Study on the Influence of Participatory Music Teaching Methods on the Pedagogical Perspectives of Master's Students in Music Education: An Analysis Based on Experiences Following an Improvisation Course

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Abstract: Participatory music pedagogy has become popular in music education in recent years in the international system, as it focuses on accessibility, social interaction, and creativity in learning music. Nevertheless, there are limited qualitative studies that consider the effects of exposure to participatory pedagogy on the teaching conceptualizations of the learners who were educated using traditional methods in music. The setting of this study was in an improvisation course in one of the universities in Hong Kong. It employed semi-structured interviews of six master's students in music education who had diverse undergraduate backgrounds (music education, instrumental performance, and vocal performance). Their actual experiences in their lives at the conclusion of the participatory improvisation course and its impact on their music education conceptions were examined in the study. The research was conducted based on four questions: How do students describe their participatory learning experiences in the course? What do they see as special features as opposed to conventional pedagogies? What is the impact of the course on their concept of music education? How do they see the implementation of these ideas and methods into future teaching practice? The initial findings indicate that the philosophy of the course, low floor, high ceiling, gamified collective improvisation practices, and social music experiences motivated the students to reevaluate the traditional models of skills. The conceptions of teaching expressed by students changed in their very meaning of imparting musical skills to allowing everyone to appreciate music with positive attitudes toward future application. The research offers empirical data regarding the impacts of participatory pedagogy among graduate students and presents lessons that can be applied in the curriculum reform in the new century in music teacher education.

Keywords: Participatory music pedagogy; Teaching conceptions; Master of music education; Improvisation course

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1. Introduction

Twenty-first-century education in music is under deep pressure of change, as well as with tremendous possibilities to change. The teaching of traditional music has traditionally focused on the development of skills and the reproduction of the repertoire. Although this orientation has played a significant role in the development of professional musicians, it has also unwillingly created a wall to the learning of music, thus making many learners perceive music as an inaccessible professional field ^[1]. However, over the past several years, there has been a “participatory turn” in the study of international music education, where music learning is no longer perceived as a technical training but is being re-conceptualized as an approachable, social and creative cultural practice ^[2,3].

The academic community is increasingly ascertaining the value of improvisation pedagogy ^[4,5]. The studies prove that improvisation not only improves the aural skills, learning autonomy, and musical creativity of learners, but it also promotes the social confidence and positive learner identity of the learners ^[6].

Nonetheless, current studies have concentrated more on K-12 or undergraduate students with little consideration of the graduate level. Specifically, there is still no in-depth qualitative investigation of the effects of exposure to courses in participatory improvisation on the current teaching conceptions of master’s-level music education students who have already received systematic training in traditional music. This group has a certain dual identity: it is not only the seasoned learners who have gone through the period of traditional training, but also the future teachers who have just stepped into the classroom or already have.

This gap is covered in the current research. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with six master’s students in music education at a university in Hong Kong, all of whom had taken a participatory improvisation course. The study was guided by four core questions: (1) How do students report their participatory learning experiences in the course? (2) What do they see as the unique characteristics of such a course in contrast to traditional pedagogies? (3) How has the course affected their ideas of music education? (4) What do they imagine they could put these ideas and methods into practice in their future teaching activities?

The importance of the current research is reflected on both theoretical and practical scales. Theoretically, the paper investigates the appropriateness of participatory music theory ^[2], community-based music philosophy ^[3], aural learning studies ^[4,5,6], and the cultural dimensions framework of improvisation in graduate-level music teacher education and how these theories can assist us in the understanding of the mechanisms of teaching conception transformation ^[7]. On the practical level, the study provides empirical evidence of the innovation of music teacher education curricula, especially concerning the manner in which to balance between the transmitting of the ideas and the contextual practice, the development of reflective practitioners, and the incorporation of the unique value of the experienced learners into the curriculum development, thus to add to the innovative establishment of the music teaching theory in the new era.

2. Literature review

These pedagogical approaches to improvisation and participatory music-making have gained more and more scholarly attention in the area of music education in recent decades. This literature review is a summary of the fundamental theoretical and empirical studies of course readings and research guide, which provides the background to learning what participation in improvisation courses entails to develop the teaching conceptions of the master’s students in music education. The review is structured in four themes: (1) the theoretical bases of

participatory music pedagogy; (2) improvisation pedagogy and aural learning; (3) the cultural and social aspects of improvisation; and (4) the comparison of participatory music with the traditional pedagogies ^[7].

2.1. Theoretical bases of participatory music pedagogy

Turino (2008) distinguishes participatory from presentational music practices. His concept of formulaic practices - the repetitive musical forms of riffs and chord progressions - describes how simple forms can contribute to creativity and accessibility as opposed to limiting expression. This theoretical approach directly sheds light on the pedagogical structure of improvisation classes such as the one under research, where tasks such as ukulele picnics that encourage instrumental learning and use of the instruments, call-and-response (echo) singing that enhances the feeling of involvement in the students, and walking circle singing practices that reflect participatory concepts. Higgins (2012) continues the philosophy of community music and states the importance of inclusiveness, accessibility, and shared creativity. She proposes music education to defy the lines of profession; to allow everyone to be musical participants ^[3]. Thibeault (2015) elaborates on this idea through the suggestion of participatory ensembles (e.g., folk groups, community bands) as a means of universal music education with the focus on improvisation, aural education, and informal practices ^[8].

2.2. Cultural and social aspects of improvisation

At a higher level, improvisation is also being interpreted as a cultural art and interpersonal experience. Campbell (2009) argues that cultural and social experience would help in learning to improvise and improvisation as such is a learning mode that will define musical self-concept ^[9]. Higgins and Mantie (2013) suggest a three-part model of comprehending improvisation: as ability (personal ability), as culture (common practices and values) and as experience (embodied participation). The framework is a good analytical resource in studying the nature of the changes in the instructional conceptions of students toward skills or experience orientations ^[7].

2.3. Improvisation pedagogy and aural learning

There is a considerable amount of research concerning the contribution of aural learning to the development of improvisation. Aural learning has the pedagogical value of facilitating better listening, learner agency, enjoyment, and improvisational confidence, as confirmed by the study of Varvarigou (2014), and ear-playing tasks are associated with these beneficial effects of aural learning. Watson (2010) generalizes the study of jazz education and establishes aural imitation ability and self-evaluation as the most effective predictors of improvisational accomplishment. In his review, he writes that it is essential to balance the study of techniques with aural practice and the course does that by combining pattern practice (e.g., scales, riffs) with reflective portfolio assessment. All these studies support the idea that aural learning and guided reflection are the key aspects of effective improvisation pedagogy, and they are an empirical basis for exploring the views of the students about the methods ^[1].

2.4. Comparisons with traditional pedagogies

In order to comprehend the uniqueness of the participatory approaches to improvisation, it is required to refer to the classical music pedagogy, such as the Orff approach and to the Dalcroze Eurhythmics ^[10]. The elemental music approach of Orff is expressed in the study by Keetman (1974) and involves the combination of music, movements, and speech, but in most cases, it is teacher-centered and structurally determined ^[11]. Likewise,

Schnebly-Black and Moore (2004) refer to Dalcroze activities as focusing on body reactions to musical stimuli, but usually in teacher-directed and pre-designed activities ^[12]. Although these two approaches also involve physical interaction and imagination, they are not as student-led and learner-centered as participatory improvisation classes ^[13]. These differences aid in highlighting the way in which the students who were trained according to the traditional approaches take note of the new features of the target course ^[13].

2.5. Research gap and significance of the present study

Although there is abundant theoretical and empirical literature on the issues of participatory music, improvisation pedagogy, and aural learning, research has not been conducted on how the approaches affect the concept of teaching in graduate music educators. It appears that there is no existing literature that has extensively covered the K-12 context or undergraduate students, although some work exists on preservice contexts ^[14], which has created a gap in terms of the transformative nature of participatory courses at the master's level. The current research fills this gap by exploring the first-hand experiences of master's students in the field of music education who have taken a participatory improvisation class. Based on the theoretical sources discussed in the sections above, this paper will unveil the transformations caused by such courses on the beliefs of students regarding the issues of music teaching and learning, as well as the role of the teacher, thus providing input to the current discussion of innovation in music teacher education ^[14].

3. Research methods

The study employed a qualitative research methodology to investigate in detail the effects of learning experiences in a participatory improvisation course on the teaching conceptions of master's students in the field of music education. Qualitative research approaches are appropriate when the researcher is interested in the subjective life of people, in the way they construct meaning and conceptual changes in a given situation ^[15], which is closely connected to the key research questions in this research. The research applied the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the methodological background, which aimed at investigating how the participants make meaning out of the lived experiences, and the interpretation of these meanings by the researchers ^[16].

3.1. Participants and sampling

The sample consisted of six master's students of music education who had attended the course on improvisation. Purposive sampling has been employed to maintain the sample to represent a varied population of undergraduate institutions (music conservatoires, normal universities, comprehensive universities), different areas of major (vocal performance, piano, guzheng, clarinet, trumpet, musical theatre), and different experiences of teaching (five fresh graduates and one experienced in-service teacher). This heterogeneity will assist in absorbing the potentially differentiated effects of participatory pedagogy on various learners. In **Table 1**, the basic information of the participants is shown.

3.2. Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The interview protocol was designed based on the research questions and four core dimensions (experiential dimension, comparative dimension, impact dimension, and application dimension), containing open-ended questions and probes to encourage participants to describe their authentic experiences in detail. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and was conducted online. All

interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. After each interview and transcribed the recordings word by word and sent the transcripts to the participants to verify them as accurate. Also, the researcher gathered course-related reflective texts (e.g., written reflections of personal improvisation portfolios) as triangulation data.

3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis^[17]: familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report. The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts, conducted open coding of meaningful units, and then grouped codes into preliminary themes. In the process of comparison and discussion, four central themes and their subthemes were eventually narrowed down. The researcher used reflexive journaling and peer debriefing (inviting another researcher to code on their own and compare) in the analysis to increase the trustworthiness of the analysis and its transparency.

4. Results

This research involved semi-structured interviews with six music education master's students who had attended the improvisation course, gathering their own personal experiences related to participatory improvisation pedagogy and the implications of their experiences to their teaching conceptions. The participants were of varied backgrounds (see **Table 1**), comprising graduates of music conservatoires, normal universities and comprehensive universities, majoring in vocal performance, piano, guzheng, and clarinet, trumpet and musical theatre. They had studied music between 12 and 19 years. Five of them had just graduated to master's, and one (Interviewee A) had frontline teaching experience. This chapter consists of a thematic analysis of all the data collected in the interview in relation to the four dimensions of the interview protocol, namely the experiential dimension, the comparative dimension, the impact dimension and the application dimension, with special emphasis on the subjective approach to the interview by the experienced teacher, Interviewee A.

Table 1. Participant information

Code	Undergraduate Institution Type	Major	Years of Music Study	Other Instruments Mastered	Teaching Experience (after learning this course)
A	Music Conservatory	Vocal Performance	18	Piano, Guzheng, Ukulele, Guitar	Yes
B	Normal University	Vocal Performance/Clarinet	17	Flute, Violin, Harp	No
C	Comprehensive University	Guzheng	16	None	No
D	Music Conservatory	Trumpet	12	Piano	No
E	Comprehensive University	Piano	14	None	No
F	Music Conservatory	Musical Theatre	19	Piano (basic)	No

4.1. Experiential dimension: Core features of participatory pedagogy

4.1.1. Memorable participatory activities

Each of the six interviewees was so impressed with the numerous participatory activities in the course, which disrupted the traditions of traditional music classrooms. According to Interviewee A, passing the microphone and letting all students improvise singing was very special, which had to make her respond instantly. Interviewee

B vividly recalled the activity of “spoon percussion” and said that it dismantled her functional fixedness regarding everyday objects and that she came to understand “how to play music in everyday life.” Interviewee C emphasized the use of small instruments as it enabled students in the various levels to play collectively, and in turn, this gave them a sense of belongingness. Interviewee D was impressed by the “echo part” and the jazz solo part, as it gave the students the chance to learn a genre of music fast without losing fun. Interviewee F most liked the ukulele picnic, which she performed learning in the form of play and under a relaxed and happy environment. Being a classical piano learner, the interviewee E experienced general feelings of novelty and perceived the constraints of classical music.

4.1.2. The “Low floor, high ceiling” philosophy

The underlying philosophy of the course, low floor, high ceiling, was cited by several interviewees. Interviewee B used the example of ukulele lessons: “You could learn the easiest songs and play along with them in one or two lessons, but when you wanted to get more complex, you could add more chords and different rhythms, and then you would have a challenge and feel a sense of accomplishment through the process.” Interviewee F took a group collaboration view: “Every task was easy; we could do it in the most basic manner or introduce our innovations, and came to the end result that the basic teaching and innovation is the best one.” Interviewee A was exposed to this philosophy in the process of rehearsing an ensemble: “Each student was allowed to have a part that he or she could play, even the ones who were not good with instruments or voice would have the opportunity to contribute in the form of percussion or singing and discover their own areas of shining.” Nevertheless, Interviewee A also confessed to being troubled by the practice of piano improvisation assignments as she was not especially good at improvising on an instrumental level.

According to the research performed by Varvarigou (2017b), aural experimentation performed in a group in a playful environment increases confidence and positive identity of learners. The experience of “the low floor” among the participants in this study, like Interviewee B saying that I was particularly happy when I could successfully play a piece with the professor the first time and Interviewee C saying that everyone was highly engaged, confirms the same. The problem that Interviewee B mentioned as the high ceiling was the lack of a score, the lack of a standard answer, which needed to be self-created, in other words, the essential part of improvisational skills as stated by Watson (2010): self-directed creative expression.

4.1.3. Classroom atmosphere and the interaction between teachers and students

All interviewees perceived the classroom atmosphere as “relaxed,” “pressure-free,” and “enthusiastic.” Interviewee A noted that “the teacher wanted to motivate students to join in the music.” Interviewee B, who was slower to adapt as an introvert, found that fellow students were extremely helpful; there was never any competition, and it was just how to play with music. Interviewee D described it as “not teacher-student interaction, but an on-site music-playing interaction.” Interviewee E summed it up to mean music as a means of imparting music knowledge as opposed to teaching.

4.2. Comparative dimension: Differences from traditional pedagogies

4.2.1. The three major music education pedagogies

Three interviewees (B, D, E, F) reported having no systematic study of Orff, Dalcroze, or Kodály methods during their undergraduate years; thus, their comparisons were mainly based on their own instrumental/vocal training experiences. According to interviewee B, traditional training was characterized by a linear logic of first practice

scales, first read scores, but this course was play first, learn later, learn while playing, where being wrong was viewed quite differently: “Previously, then being wrong was an issue, but in this course, it was an interesting innovation, very interesting indeed to be wrong in some way or another.” Interviewee D also noted that the course “did not teach basic theoretical knowledge in advance, but integrated it through practice.”

Interviewees A and C, who studied the three methods, compared them more specifically. Interviewee A believed this course “integrated these methods, taking elements that can be frequently used in modern times.” She exemplified that the previous workshop training “focused on in-depth study of one particular method, such as Orff instruments or body percussion,” whereas this course “connected all these elements in one lesson.” Interviewee C, after comparing the Kodály method with this course, stated that the latter “mainly taught how to interact with students and enable them to improvise and participate in music based on their existing foundation.”

4.2.2. Conflict and complementarity of pedagogical logics

Interviewees had their own understandings of the “pedagogical logic” behind the course. Interviewee B provided a very graphic metaphor: “the logic of traditional teaching is linear, as in, building a house, layer on top of layer”; the logic in this course is, she said, “a spiral: you splash, then come up to the surface and discuss how you splashed, then go down and splash, and by and by you learn how to swim.” She thought that the two logics could be used in a complementary way. A traditional teaching offers the “vocabulary” (scales, arpeggios, finger reactions), and improvisation is the way to learn “how to talk with this vocabulary.” Interviewee F held a similar view, considering improvisation as “heuristic” and traditional teaching as “cramming,” and that “combining them could achieve an effect greater than the sum of its parts.” Interviewee E, from the perspective of changing times, pointed out: “The word ‘traditional’ is only a relative concept... the initiative is in our hands.”

4.3. Impact dimension: Reconstruction of teaching conceptions

4.3.1. Transformation in understanding “Good music teaching”

All interviewees reported a change in their understanding of “what constitutes good music teaching” after completing the course. The core shift was from a “skill-centered” to an “experience-centered” and “meaning-centered” perspective. Interviewee A emphasized that “good music education enables students to feel the emotions of music,” because “music is ultimately about feeling; it cannot be taught; what teachers can do is to mobilize their own emotions or use various methods to let students experience music.” Interviewee B realized that good teaching should allow students to experience the moment of “oh, I can do it”--breaking through self-imposed limitations. Interviewee C defined good teaching as “enabling students to discover beauty and experience beauty on their own.” Interviewee D stressed the importance of “letting people feel good music and fall in love with music.” Interviewee F reflected: “Constantly challenging my limits is good, but... after many times, I gradually lost my initial passion, which became a kind of shackle for my music learning, because I believe art is essentially free expression and embodiment.”

Varvarigou’s (2014) research shows that aural playing enhances “enjoyment” and “improvisational confidence,” which aligns closely with the participants’ repeated mentions of “enjoying music,” “discovering beauty,” and “free expression.” Campbell’s (2009) view that improvisation shapes “musical self-concept” is also confirmed--Interviewee F’s contrast between “shackle” and “freedom” exemplifies the reconstruction of self-concept.

4.3.2. Adjustment of music learning goals

Along with the conceptual shift, participants' priorities regarding music learning goals also changed. The majority indicated that their teaching priorities have shifted, with creativity and enjoyment rising. Interviewee B made it clear when he said, "Without the joy of music itself, one can hardly maintain skills." She remembered that when being a child, she used to find practicing the piano as a struggle, but this course made her feel that she could be out of tune, she could commit mistakes, and that even her mistakes may be acceptable. Interviewee D also mentioned that "creativity and enjoyment have moved forward in the teaching sequence." Interviewee E also said that he would like to learn some simple instruments, such as the recorder, to teach better because now he appreciates the variety of teaching tools.

4.3.3. Reconsideration of the teacher's role

Regarding the teacher's role, participants generally leaned toward "co-participant" or "facilitator." Interviewee B observed that the professor "often acted more like a co-participant; he didn't stand in front directing, but played with us, only offering guidance when we had problems." This role made her "stop worrying about whether the teacher was watching my mistakes and became more willing to try." Interviewee C clearly answered "co-participant." Interviewee F proposed the concept of "co-creator," arguing that "teaching is not something decided by one person; the process and outcomes are co-created with students." Interviewee E also agreed with the latter view, believing that "participatory music better enables students to learn knowledge and can also shorten the distance between teacher and students."

Interviewee A's perspective was more nuanced: she believed the teacher's role should vary by age group: "For younger children, music teachers do need to act as guides, leading them through each step; when students are older, teachers need to be more like co-participants, creating musical improvisations together with the children in the activities." This view reflects her accumulated teaching experience and suggests that the teacher's role is not static but should flexibly adapt to students' developmental stages.

4.4. Application dimension: Localizing innovative ideas

4.4.1. Most desired teaching methods to try

Participants showed a strong willingness to transplant methods from the course. Interviewee A most wanted to try "percussion improvisation" because "this instrument is the easiest to start with" and could boost students' confidence. Interviewee B wanted to "start from the music students like," using her own experience as an example: in her first improvisation assignment, she deliberately chose a rock song instead of jazz because "it was the least 'jazz' combination, at least I wouldn't feel clueless." Interviewee C hoped to "let every student create their own music" in group teaching to cultivate aesthetic and perceptual abilities. Interviewee D was interested in the "practice-over-theory classroom setting" because most of her previous teaching experiences had been "theory-based, with a little practice added later." Interviewee E simply answered "improvisation teaching." Interviewee F had a particular fondness for the "spoon teaching method," believing that using everyday objects to perform songs was "extremely simple" yet innovative.

4.4.2. Challenges and difficulties in transplantation

Despite their enthusiasm, participants were keenly aware of challenges in application. The most common issues were differences in student foundations, school curriculum requirements, parental attitudes, and classroom management. Interviewee B mentioned that "in a class of forty or fifty students, if you completely let them

explore freely, the situation might get a bit out of control.” Moreover, mainland classrooms have examination pressure: “If I told parents, ‘This semester we’re just playing with spoons,’ I suspect many parents would come to talk to me.” Interviewee D also pointed out that “many parents expect tangible results, such as grade examinations or competitions.” Interviewee C worried that “parents might think that if students haven’t learned something new, it’s a waste of time.” Interviewee E, from a hardware perspective, noted that “classroom setup is difficult to implement in mainland China,” and the small proportion of music classes might dampen teachers’ motivation.

Regarding whether specific methods could be directly transplanted, participants generally believed that jazz improvisation and completely free exploration were more difficult. Interviewee B thought that “completely free exploration” and the course’s evaluation method (not emphasizing right or wrong) were the hardest to transplant. Interviewee C pointed out that “jazz improvisation learning” had almost no presence in mainland primary and secondary schools: “it’s not in the textbooks, and it won’t be in the syllabus.” Interviewee F also believed that jazz teaching “has certain difficulties for primary and secondary schools” because it requires pitch accuracy, musicality, and cognitive understanding; students might find it “funny and strange.” Interviewee A, as the experienced teacher, provided a more systematic reflection on this, which will be analyzed in depth in the next section.

5. In-depth analysis: The unique perspective of an experienced teacher – The case of Interviewee A

While the five fresh graduates’ ideas about teaching application were mostly at the “aspirational” stage, Interviewee A’s interview revealed more complex practical considerations. Her experience highlights structural resistances in implementing participatory pedagogy.

5.1. “What makes a teaching method possible”

When answering the question regarding the pedagogical logic of the course, Interviewee A identified a fundamental dilemma: “In fact, when I began working, I was attempting to apply these same techniques to teaching, and to be honest, it was incredibly challenging, because behind the seamless application of these teaching techniques, there is the fact that already, the participants themselves have a relatively high level of musical literacy.” She also described that basic music education in mainland schools “might not have delved into this field”, and that “to have them smoothly accomplish such classroom instruction, we must begin to introduce such instruction early, and that only then could they possibly accomplish the type of improvisation we could in the classroom, when they are older.”

This is related to one of the main contradictions in the application of Higgins (2012) philosophy of community music into the world of the formal educational system. The point that Thibeault (2015) makes about the creation of a vision of universal music education in the eyes of Interviewee A, that it is something that needs to be nurtured and not simply planted in one lesson or course.

5.2. Pragmatic verdict on “Which methods can be transplanted”

When asked about which practices were hard to transplant, Interviewee A replied without mincing words: “Actually, I believe the others besides the percussion part are pretty hard to transplant.” As an example of her own school, she pointed out that there were classes in which collectively the classes had been taught the

Zhonghua Xiao Sixian (an instrument analogous to the ukulele); in special classes, one might adopt ensemble teaching approaches, but in the ordinary classes, it is difficult to do so. This was judged by her knowledge of the curriculum in schools and was an expression of her reflection on how she was adjusting to the local conditions, not as rejection, but how to find places of integration between the ideas taught in the course and her local resources.

5.3. Shrewdness in classroom management realities

When discussing the challenges of percussion improvisation, Interviewee A specifically mentioned students' self-control issues: "Students in this class may have poor self-control, which can make your lesson very difficult to conduct, especially when they have instruments in their hands and might randomly bang them to make noise." She also pointed out that some classes "might not be very good at musical rhythm, requiring the teacher to spend more time teaching them." These facts were not so prominent in the interviews of fresh graduates; they show the discrepancy between the ideal teaching and the real classroom, and reflect the results of Varvarigou (2017a) that group improvisation assumes such social constructs as social confidence and cooperation skills.

5.4. Implications and reflections

The interview with interviewee A indicates that, though the innovative nature of participatory pedagogy can hardly be denied, its application should be done with full regard to the differences in the educational settings. Practical barriers to mainland basic music education can include the size of classes, hours in classes, unitary assessment, and anxiety of parents; failure to pay attention to the conditions and merely transplanting the methods can result in maladaptation. Nevertheless, Interviewee A did not think of herself as a pessimist but had tried the same strategies and thought that it was not completely impossible, but should be cultivated systematically over a long period. This cautiously positive outlook might be exactly the subject matter competence that music teacher education should impart to future teachers: the ability to welcome new ideas and, at the same time, have the capability to adapt to local conditions flexibly.

6. Summary

The results of the analysis of 6 interviews indicate that the course of participating improvisation had a profound impact on the teaching concepts of the master of music education students, changing their approach to teaching music skills to an experience-based approach and redefining their vision of the goals of music learning and the teacher. The low-floor, high-ceiling structure of the course, together with gamified group tasks and an inclusive environment, gave the students learning experiences that were quite different from traditional training and triggered their focus on creativity, pleasure, and teacher-student co-participation. Nonetheless, at the application idea level, fresh graduates had positive yet generalized ideas, whereas the experienced teacher, Interviewee A, showed the structural barriers that ideas can meet during implementation, which are student literacy bases, classroom management, curriculum demands, and parental expectations. This opposition implies that the education of music teachers must not only pass the innovative teaching concepts but also foster the skills of learners to take up and adapt flexibly in real-world situations so that true innovation and growth can be attained in terms of music teaching theory in the new era.

6.1. Reflection and discussion

In this research, six master's students in the field of music education were interviewed, which allowed for determining the complex nature of the influence of a participatory course on improvisation on their teaching conceptions. The research also revealed disparities between the fresh graduates and the more experienced teachers in terms of application ideas: the former had optimistic and vague conceptions, whereas the latter (Interviewee A), based on the frontline practice, reflected extensively in terms of structural impediments to implementation, such as student literacy backgrounds, classroom management, curriculum imperatives, and parental expectations.

6.2. Theoretical contributions

This research will be used to give empirical evidence of how participatory music pedagogy interacts with graduate students. The results can be compared with the participatory music theory suggested by Turino (2008), community music philosophy by Higgins (2012), and the study of aural learning and group improvisation by Varvarigou (2014, 2017a, 2017b) to confirm that the theories can be applied in the education of music teachers in higher education. Besides, the article expands on the triple improvisation framework by Higgins and Mantie (2013) in ability, culture, and experience by using it to deconstruct conceptual transformations in teaching.

6.3. Limitations

There are a variety of limitations that should be mentioned. To begin with, the sample size (six) is small and the fact that all the participants belonged to the same course in the same university in Hong Kong restricts the generalizability of the findings. Second, the interview (about 20 minutes) was much shorter than the one associated with the qualitative research, which may have limited the ability to explore some of the complex experiences in-depth. Third, the insider position of the researcher, as one of the course members, although it helped to obtain genuine data, might have caused selective attention or interpretation bias. Fourth, the research involved only student opinions without involving instructors and course creators; course descriptions were based mainly on the course outline and the memories of the study participants. Fifth, the research study focused on changing teaching conceptions, but it did not follow the process of how these conceptions were converted into the following teaching practice.

6.4. Implications for music teacher education

The results are significant to the education of music teachers. In the first place, teacher education programs must be more balanced in terms of the delivery of ideas (transmission) and contextual practice (delivering to the learners, as well as developing their capacity to interpret new teaching ideas flexibly, and think critically) in real classrooms. The experience of Interviewee A supports the idea that ideas can continue to be castles in the air without being aware of workable limitations. Second, teacher educators must focus on educating so-called reflective practitioners, who must continuously examine the contradictions between their personal learning practices and future pedagogic situations. Third, the curricula might include some workshops on localization that will help learners analyze the learning environments around them and how they can implement new approaches to fit particular situations. Lastly, teacher educators ought not to underestimate the special worth of an experienced teacher, who can reconcile theory and reality and offer a precious practical wisdom to his or her colleagues.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research provides insights into the possibilities of participatory improvisation courses to transform the teaching conceptions of students in master's programs in music education, but also warns that despite the necessity of innovation, it is only through the foundation of ideas on a deeper comprehension of real-world situations that true progress in the area of mastering the concept of music teaching in the new era can be achieved.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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