



**Reconceptualising The Learning of Expressiveness in Music Performance:
Malaysian Undergraduate Voices Beyond Western Traditions**

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ABSTRACT

Expressiveness learning in music performance within higher education has been predominantly shaped by Western classical music and conservatoire traditions, often privileging notation, stylistic correctness, and the composer's intentions. In post-colonial contexts such as Malaysia, this dominance risks marginalising students' culturally embedded, oral, embodied, and participatory musical knowledge. To date, limited attention has been given to the perspectives of non-Western students, including Malaysian students. Therefore, this study reconceptualises the learning of expressiveness in music performance through the voices of Malaysian undergraduate music education (BMus Ed) students. Situated within the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts at Sultan Idris Education University (FMSP, UPSI), this study interrogates the dominance of Western conservatoire norms. It explores how BMus Ed students understand expressiveness, how their prior and current learning experiences shape that understanding, and the strategies they employ to develop expressive performance in culturally hybrid settings.

Framed by constructivist and phenomenological perspectives, this research positions expressiveness as a culturally mediated, student-constructed, and teachable competence. Therefore, a sequential mixed-methods design was employed to explore how students construct expressive knowledge through lived experience, reflection, and interaction. Study 1 involved a survey questionnaire

(n = 66), generating descriptive and thematic insights into students' conceptualisations and learning experiences of expressiveness.

Moreover, Study 2 consisted of Video-Stimulated Recall Interviews (VSRI) (n = 10), enabling in-depth exploration of students' strategies and decision-making of expressiveness in music performance. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, while qualitative data were analysed by using Thematic Analysis (TA).

The findings indicate that students conceptualise expressiveness as a multidimensional synthesis of emotional communication, musical meaning, technical mastery, personal interpretation, and embodied gesture. Previous learning experiences, often rooted in participatory, oral, improvisatory, and community-based traditions, provided intuitive and affective foundations for expressiveness. Current higher music education training has refined these foundations through technical, analytical, and ensemble-based practices, largely shaped by Western conservatoire models. Specifically, students' learning strategies clustered into three interrelated domains: contextual understanding and emotional resonance (informed by previous experiences), technical proficiency and dynamics control (developed through current experiences in formal training), and adaptive practice that integrates both.

These findings challenge transmission-based pedagogies that frame expressiveness as stylistic compliance or innate talent. Instead, Malaysian BMus

Ed students actively negotiate and assemble hybrid expressive strategies, blending Western analytical tools with movement, ornamentation, improvisation, and narrative association drawn from local traditions. Thus, expressiveness emerges as emotionally grounded, culturally situated, and enacted through both technique and embodiment.

Consequently, this study contributes to music performance pedagogy by articulating cross-cultural strategies that foreground students' expressive agency. For Malaysian higher music education, it advocates curricula, assessment, and pedagogies that legitimise oral, embodied, and community-based knowledge alongside notation-based technique. Additionally, this research offers a framework for reconceptualising expressive learning beyond Western-centric paradigms, positioning students as active constructors of expressive artistry within diverse musical ecologies.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABRSM	–	Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music
BMus Ed	–	Bachelor of Education (Music) with Honours
FMSP	–	Fakulti Muzik dan Seni Persembahan (Faculty of Music and Performing Arts)
GERMS Model	–	Generative rules; Emotional expression; Random variations; Motion principles; Stylistic unexpectedness (Juslin's model)
KPA	–	Knowledge–Performance–Affect (Schubert's model)
LCM	–	London College of Music
Q	–	Questionnaire item
RCM	–	Royal College of Music, London
RQ	–	Research Question
SPM	–	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education)
STPM	–	Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Higher Certificate of Education)
TA	–	Thematic Analysis
UiTM	–	Universiti Teknologi Mara (University of Technology, Mara)
UM	–	Universiti Malaya (University of Malaya)
UPM	–	Universiti Putra Malaysia (University of Putra, Malaysia)
UPSI	–	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Sultan Idris Education University)
VSRI	–	Video-Stimulated Recall Interview

CHAPTER ONE
“WHERE IS THE NON-WESTERN VOICE?” FRAMING THE PROBLEM
OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MALAYSIAN MUSIC PERFORMANCE
EDUCATION

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the research problem, situates the study within the Malaysian higher education context, and explains the personal and professional motivations that have shaped this inquiry. The study begins by identifying a persistent pedagogical tension in which expressiveness in performance is commonly framed by Western conservatory norms such as notation, composer intent, and score fidelity. In contrast, many Malaysian students arrive with embodied, oral, and popular music practices that are rarely legitimised in formal curricula. Notably, the mismatch matters as it shapes what teachers emphasise, how students are assessed, and which forms of musical knowledge are recognised as legitimate. Failure to address this problem may marginalise students’ cultural resources and portray expressiveness as an innate trait rather than a teachable competence.

Grounded in my experience as a pianist and university lecturer, the chapter explains why this problem is both personally and professionally significant. Vague feedback such as “play with more feeling” or “play with soul” is common in studio

teaching, yet concrete strategies for developing expressiveness are rarely articulated. Therefore, many students struggle to translate the embodied, aural, and improvisatory skills they bring from family, community, and popular music into the technical and stylistic demands of Western classical performance. Hence, this study addresses the gap by foregrounding Malaysian undergraduate voices, examining how students conceptualise expressiveness, how their previous and current learning experiences shape that understanding, and the strategies they employ to cultivate expressive performance.

Finally, the chapter outlines the research aims, questions, and methodological approach, and previews the thesis structure. It explains why a student-centred, mixed-methods design (a survey questionnaire followed by Video-Stimulated Recall Interviews [VSRI]) is appropriate for capturing the subjective, embodied, and context-dependent nature of expressiveness. The remainder of the thesis progresses from the contextual and theoretical framing (Chapters Two and Three) through methods and empirical findings (Chapters Four and Five) to critical discussion and practical recommendations (Chapters Six and Seven). The overall aim is to reconceptualise expressiveness as a culturally mediated, teachable, and hybrid competence that can be supported by curriculum, pedagogy, and policy.

1.2 Background and Motivation

My personal and professional journey as a pianist and music educator, spanning private studio teaching and university lecturing in Malaysia, led me to question how students learn to convey *expressiveness* in music performance. Based on the training I received from early lessons to university studies, I often received vague feedback like “play with more feeling” or “play with soul,” but rarely concrete strategies for achieving this expressiveness. I noticed similar experiences among my peers across different instruments. Some were praised as “naturally expressive”, while others were criticised for “lacking emotion” or “playing like a blank paper”, with little guidance offered for improvement. These experiences prompted me to reflect: Is expressiveness simply a matter of talent or intuition, or can it be learned through clear, purposeful strategies?

As I transitioned into teaching undergraduate music education students in a Malaysian university, I observed similar challenges. Many students came from diverse musical backgrounds, including informal, participatory learning traditions such as popular and traditional genres, in which expressiveness was shaped through oral transmission or learning by ear. However, within the university setting, they were expected to adopt Western classical music pedagogies that emphasised expressive performance, technical precision, and faithful interpretation of notated compositions. Consequently, this mismatch often left students struggling to integrate their prior musical experiences with the demands of formal, Western-dominated musical performance.

1.3 The Research Context and Problem

The higher music education system in Malaysia, like many post-colonial systems, remains heavily influenced by the Western classical conservatoire model. This model emphasises master-apprentice teaching, technical mastery, and the communication of composer intentions. However, such an approach can unintentionally marginalise the expressive approaches familiar to students who have grown up engaging with non-Western, popular, and/or traditional musical genres. In my teaching context, I saw students relying heavily on tutors and lecturers for direction, unsure how to shape and own their expressive voice in music performance.

Moreover, further observations indicate that, despite the growing diversity of students' musical identities, limited research has examined how Malaysian undergraduate students in music and music education understand, experience, and develop expressiveness in performance. Existing studies focus on Western classical music pedagogical models, examining how undergraduate music students perceive and learn expressiveness within that context. However, it remains unexplored how undergraduate music students in non-Western contexts navigate between Western models and their diverse musical backgrounds. This gap is particularly significant in Malaysia, where students often draw upon popular and traditional musical genres alongside conservatoire conventions.

Therefore, to address this gap, research is needed that foregrounds the non-Western voices of Malaysian students, exploring how they learn and embody expressiveness within both their cultural contexts and the Western classical music frameworks imposed in Malaysia's higher music education. By situating the learning of expressiveness within the students' lived experiences, this study contributes to a more pluralistic understanding of music performance skills.

1.4 My Research Rationale

Based on my background, motivation, and research problem, three factors underpin my decision to pursue this study. Firstly, this stems from my personal curiosity, based on my experience as a piano learner and teacher, about whether expressiveness in music performance is innate (a matter of nature) or can be cultivated through pedagogy (nurture). Secondly, there is an apparent lack of research on how expressiveness is learned within Malaysia's higher music education context. Most existing studies emphasise motivation, achievement, or well-being in music learning (Mohamed Razali & Ma'rof, 2024; Ooi, 2017), while investigations into performance expressiveness are scarce (Ooi, 2017). Thirdly, undergraduate music education students often struggle to convey expressiveness when working with unfamiliar Western conservatoire conventions of classical music, compared to their ease with Malaysian musical traditions, as witnessed in my own workplace. Collectively, these factors led me to design my PhD research, which explores the development of expressiveness from the perspectives of undergraduate students at my institution.

The rationale for focusing on my own institutional workplace of undergraduate music education students lies in their representative position within Malaysian higher music education. In this sense, undergraduate music education students in Malaysia are fewer in number than other undergraduate students in music performance streams and, as such, remain understudied. Focusing deeper into my faculty, courses such as Applied Music (which involves one-to-one vocal or instrumental learning) form the backbone of performance skills training. However, at present, there is no dedicated course that specifically addresses expressiveness as a skill in its own right. In most cases, students are expected to acquire expressive capacities implicitly through repertoire study and adherence to Western conservatoire traditions (Hebert, 2023). This creates tension, as undergraduate music education students often struggle to convey expressiveness when interpreting Western classical music while being familiar with Malaysian popular and traditional music.

Therefore, by exploring students' institutional context, I can understand how they perceive and navigate these challenges and how student-centred strategies might better support their learning. The goals of courses such as Applied Music, which aim to produce graduates who are both technically proficient and artistically expressive, align with the aims of my research, making the faculty an appropriate and meaningful site of inquiry.

By connecting my research rationale to the processes I have undertaken, my objectives are, first, to document how undergraduate music education students

understand and experience their learning of expressiveness in music performance. The second objective is to explore the strategies that they employ to integrate their musical backgrounds with Western classical music traditions. The third objective is to propose pedagogical contributions that embed non-Western contexts into music performance skills training, thereby enriching the Applied Music and other courses in the faculty.

To achieve these objectives, I adopted a student-centred, mixed-methods research approach. In this sense, I first chose a quantitative survey questionnaire to capture preliminary insights into undergraduate music education students' understanding, experiences, and strategies for learning expressiveness. This was followed by a qualitative method of video-stimulated recall interview, intended to capture in-depth insights into students' strategies for expressive learning. Given the subjectivity of expressiveness, I chose these methods because they helped capture the nuanced ways said students articulate and embody expressiveness based on their lived experiences. Apart from that, this methodological choice reflects my commitment to amplifying the voices of these non-Western Malaysian undergraduates and situating their experiences at the centre of my proposed pedagogical reform. My research rationale and processes are followed by a discussion of how I structure my thesis, which is explained in the next section.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into seven chapters, each contributing to a deeper understanding of how Malaysian undergraduate music education students conceptualise, experience, and develop strategies for learning expressiveness in music performance. Overall, these chapters build an argument for reconceptualising expressiveness by foregrounding students' voices beyond the confines of Western traditions.

Chapter Two establishes the historical, cultural, and educational background necessary for situating the study. It traces the evolution of music education in Malaysia from pre-colonial and colonial periods to contemporary higher education, with Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) as the research setting. This chapter also explores how Western classical traditions came to dominate curricula while local traditional, popular, and community-based practices remained marginalised. In response to Western dominance, this chapter traces the emergence of decolonial critiques through the revival of community-based, student-centred music-making and various decolonisation efforts in music and the arts, pedagogy, and culture. The overall contextual foundation in Chapter Two illuminates the sociocultural conditions that shape students' opportunities to learn expressiveness in music performance.

Chapter Three presents a critical review of the literature and theoretical frameworks on expressiveness in music performance. It interrogates Western and

non-Western perspectives, including expressionist aesthetics, communicative and technical theories of expressiveness, and research on embodiment, leading to psychological and pedagogical models and approaches in expressiveness. This further leads to the definition and rationale of my thesis title, as well as a brief introduction to the constructivist and phenomenological perspectives that frame expressiveness as a culturally situated, student-constructed phenomenon. These perspectives provide the conceptual lens for analysing Malaysian undergraduates' voices.

Chapter Four outlines the research design and methodology adopted for this investigation. It explains in detail the rationale for a mixed-methods approach grounded in constructivist and phenomenological frameworks, and further explains the procedures for Study 1 (Survey-Questionnaire) and Study 2 (Video-Stimulated Recall Interview). Sampling, quantitative, and qualitative analysis methods are also described, establishing a clear pathway for exploring students' understanding, experiences, and strategies.

Chapter Five presents the study's findings in relation to the three research questions. It demonstrates quantitative survey results alongside qualitative insights from open-ended responses and interviews. This chapter illuminates how students conceptualise expressiveness, how their diverse previous and current learning experiences shape that understanding, and how they employ strategies that blend technical, emotional, and contextual elements.

Chapter Six develops a critical discussion of the findings, positioning them within the literature and theoretical perspectives reviewed earlier. It reconceptualises expressiveness as a multidimensional, culturally embedded construct, shaped by students' emotional expression, technical mastery, embodied gestures, and adaptive strategies. The discussion highlights the influence of informal, participatory learning and formal higher education training, arguing for a hybrid, student-centred pedagogy that values both Western and Malaysian traditions in music performance.

Finally, Chapter Seven synthesises the research's conclusions and implications. It underscores the importance of amplifying Malaysian undergraduates' voices to challenge narrow, Western-centric definitions of expressiveness. The chapter outlines contributions to music performance pedagogy and to the Malaysian higher music education system, recommending curricular reform, culturally responsive teaching, and greater recognition of students' social and musical capital. Additionally, it identifies the study's limitations by considering the suggested methodological refinements and related research expansion, and recommends directions for future research. It also presents a final call to reimagine expressiveness learning as a pluralistic, student-driven, and globally relevant endeavour.

1.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has established the rationale and scope of the study by linking my professional observations with a broader institutional problem—the marginalisation of non-Western expressive practices within Malaysian higher music education. It has clarified the research focus on how undergraduate music education students understand, experience, and learn expressiveness. It has also explained why a student-centred, mixed-methods approach is appropriate for capturing the embodied and contextual nature of expressive learning.

Furthermore, the chapter also positioned the study within decolonial debates and national policy concerns, signalling that meaningful change requires curricular, pedagogical, and structural interventions. The remainder of the thesis follows the structure outlined above, moving from contextual and theoretical framing to empirical evidence. It concludes with practical recommendations to rebalance curricula so that students' cultural resources are recognised as assets in the development of expressive musicianship.

CHAPTER TWO

**THE HISTORY AND IMPACT OF WESTERN-DOMINATED MUSICAL
TRADITIONS IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER MUSIC EDUCATION:
IMPLICATIONS TO THE LEARNING OF EXPRESSIVENESS**

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter traces the historical evolution of music education in Malaysia and examines its implications for undergraduate students' learning of expressiveness in music performance. It begins with the pre-colonial period, where musical traditions such as *nobat*, *mak yong*, and *dikir barat* fostered expressiveness through oral transmission, embodiment, improvisation, and communal participation. Subsequently, this chapter explores the British colonial era, when formal schooling and extracurricular ensembles introduced structured, notation-based practices that gradually displaced indigenous modes of learning. Post-independence reforms expanded music education but consolidated a Western conservatoire model emphasising technical mastery, historical repertoire, and master-apprentice instruction.

Furthermore, using Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) as a case study, the chapter demonstrates how these historical forces continue to shape Malaysian higher music education. Although UPSI's Faculty of Music and Performing Arts integrates traditional and contemporary Malaysian musics

alongside Western art music, Western frameworks still dominate the curriculum and pedagogy. By critically examining these trajectories, the chapter argues for an inclusive, cross-cultural approach to the teaching of music performance skills that values technical proficiency while nurturing students' culturally grounded expressive practices.

Additionally, the chapter also introduces a decolonial framing that underpins the thesis. Drawing on comparative and decolonial scholarship (Smith, 2012; Hebert & McCollum, 2014; Chávez & Skelchy, 2019; Liu et al., 2024), it frames students' learning of expressiveness in music performance as both a pedagogical and structural project. In this sense, curricula, assessment, faculty development, and policy must be reconfigured so that plural cultural epistemologies and community-rooted practices are recognised as legitimate learning outcomes rather than peripheral add-ons. Empirical and policy literature from Malaysia (Beng & Chee, 2024; Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024; Ooi, 2017) is used to ground these claims and to indicate where institutional change is most needed.

2.2 Historical Foundations of the Music Education System in Malaysia

2.2.1 Pre-Colonial Traditions (Before 1511)

During the pre-colonial era, ranging roughly from 2500-1500 BCE through to the early 16th century, specifically before the fall of Malacca (a state in Malaysia) to the Portuguese invaders in 1511 (Leinbach et al., 2025), musical traditions of

various ethnicities had existed that eventually led to a diverse musical culture in Malaysia (Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024). According to Matusky and Beng (2017), Malaysian music is categorised into classical, folk, syncretic, indigenous, popular, and contemporary art forms. Within these categories, classical and folk music such as *nobat*, *mak yong*, and *dikir barat* emerged during the pre-colonial period. These musical traditions played a role in early informal learning of expressive music performance among people at that time (Matusky & Beng, 2017) in the Malacca Sultanate, Malaya (the former name of the early settlement in Malaysia before Malaysia was formed) (Malaysian Government, 2016).

Specifically, regarding the role of Malaysian early musical traditions in expressiveness, the *nobat*, or royal court ensemble, has been performed at Malay royal courts since the 15th century as part of ceremonial regalia for installations, birthdays, and other royal events. The music of *nobat* carries cultural and spiritual weight, conveying sovereignty, solemnity, and dignity through tonal nuance, precision, and ceremonial timing (Tajuddin et al., 2021). From this, the *nobat* music provides ways to convey emotional expression, embodied authority, and ritual communication, skills that were likely internalised by early musicians and learners.

Secondly, *mak yong* is a mystical dance-drama theatre originating in the Pattani region of Thailand and spreading into Kelantan, another Malaysian state, centuries ago. The *mak yong* fuses singing, dancing, improvisation, and ritual healing, historically performed by female ensembles with simple acoustic instruments (Alfan, 2020; UNESCO, n.d.). Performers of *mak yong* could learn and

convey expressiveness through embodiment, involving gestures, movement, voice, and emotional narrative, as well as through improvisatory dialogue with the spiritual being and the audience, in which acting and music are inseparable (Alfan, 2020). Therefore, to derive, *mak yong* offers a holistic model of expressive performance rooted in embodied presence rather than notation.

Thirdly, *dikir barat* is a collective, competitive traditional choral performance involving sung poetry, rhythmic vocal interplay, movement, and sometimes percussion. It originated from the northeastern Malay Peninsula (Matusky & Beng, 2017). The *dikir barat* involves verbal dexterity, wit, and embodied group dynamics (Matusky & Beng, 2017). In this sense, the ability to deliver clever lyrics, rhythmic responsiveness, and cohesive energy becomes the expressive focus in its performance.

During pre-colonial Malaysia, there were no formal music education institutions. Education at that time was almost exclusively religious and taught through informal methods such as the ‘sekolah pondok’ (village-style schooling) system, with no schools or colleges dedicated to music (Chassie et al., 2023). Therefore, music learning and performing were deeply embedded in the community, dominated by oral transmission and informal traditions (Abdul Rahim, 2014; Abdullah, 2021; Mohd Shah & Masumi, 2016; Wong & Augustine, 2017). Mohd Shah and Masumi (2016) demonstrated that traditional Malay music was typically taught through listening, observation, and play, and that formal notation-based instruction emerged later for expediency.

Another example is Wong and Augustine (2017) study of the community *gamelan* (a traditional ensemble consisting of percussive instruments) group “Rhythm in Bronze,” which reflects early traditions of music learning through communal engagement, shared practice, and social interaction that foster creativity, improvisation, and expression. Notably, formal institutions only emerged later (circa 1983), underscoring how early conceptions of expressiveness in music performance evolved through informal, embodied, and culturally embedded communal practices in Malaysia (Abdullah, 2021).

2.2.2 Colonial Era (1511–1957) and Post-Independence Developments (After 1957)

The transition from pre-colonial to colonial-era music education systems in Malaysia brought significant changes to how musical skills and expressiveness were taught and learned. During the British colonial rule, structured education systems were introduced. Beginning in 1824, colonial authorities established formal schooling streams based on ethnicity and language, namely English, Malay, Tamil, and Chinese, under the “Divide and Rule” policy (Sivalingam, 2020; Slide Share, 2004). As a consequence, education in Malaysia during this era became stratified along class and ethnic lines.

Moreover, within this stratified structure, Western-based education introduced by the British became dominant, especially in prestigious English-language schools in Malaya (Malaysia’s former name during the British colonial

era). These schools include Penang Free School (established 1816), Malacca High School, St. Xavier's Institution, King Edward VII School in Taiping, and Anglo-Chinese School in Klang (Slide Share, 2004). However, in music, formal instruction was still limited during this time. Musical activities, such as choirs, brass bands, singing, and dancing, were extracurricular and primarily Western in style. These activities were taught informally by individuals with private training (Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024).

On the other hand, in terms of Western structuring of different ethnic schools or institutions in Malaya and the origins of music education, this can be traced through several examples. Firstly, formal music teacher training began in the 1970s, when music was introduced as an elective subject, primarily to equip generalist teachers with basic musical skills for classroom instruction (Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024). Secondly, missionary and Chinese schools during that time had also played active roles in promoting music education through co-curricular music activities such as school bands, choirs, and recorder ensembles, which performed at school events including Speech Day, Sports Day, and Teachers' Day (Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024). Thirdly, elite schools had also developed marching-band traditions, often led by retired army brass-band personnel (Abdullah, 2007). Overall, Malaya still lacked a standardised, inclusive music education curriculum during the colonial period. Music remained peripheral to formal education, heavily shaped by Western traditions, and largely inaccessible to the broader population.

In transition, the colonial period marked a shift from pre-colonial, oral tradition-based, culturally embedded, and participatory music learning to a structured, Western-dominated education system. Nonetheless, while pre-colonial expressive music learning was deeply rooted in cultural, improvisational, and communal practices, British colonial education formalised learning, introducing structured curricula and Western classical music influences. However, music was not prioritised as a core subject, and its teaching remained informal and extracurricular until much later reforms. The lack of a standardised curriculum further reinforced ethnic and class-based educational divisions, shaping the trajectory of music education in Malaysia for decades.

Following more developments in music education in Malaysia post-independence (after 1957), music became part of the national curriculum and was first introduced as a subject in primary schools in 1983 (Abdullah, 2007; Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024). In 1996, the music curriculum expanded to selected secondary schools, and both the primary and secondary school curricula incorporated Western classical, world music, and Malaysian popular and traditional music. In this sense, students' learning of music and expressiveness in primary and secondary schools is based on diverse musical genres, rather than dominantly Western classical music.

Other than that, Mohd Shah (2016) argued that Malaysia's education policies are shaped by political and social priorities that favour science and technical subjects, thereby posing several challenges to the wider accessibility and

formal instruction in music education. While music is included in primary school education, there are limited music offerings in secondary schools and pre-university levels due to the emphasis on science-based subjects. Students at secondary schools are more commonly streamed into science, arts, technical, or vocational tracks, with few opportunities for music study. There is also a lack of standardised or formal music teacher training for secondary schools in Malaysia. Therefore, many students at this level have little to no formal exposure to music education, leading to difficulties when adapting to higher-level university music education courses, which are mostly Western-based (Mohd Shah, 2016).

Conversely, in higher music education in Malaysia, formal training at the university level did not develop until the late 20th century. During the 2000s, the introduction of undergraduate music degree programmes took place at major universities that include my research setting of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Sultan Idris Education University, or UPSI in short), Universiti Teknologi MARA (MARA Technological University or UiTM), and Universiti Putra Malaysia (University of Putra, Malaysia or UPM) (Mustafa, 2018).

2.2.3 Music Education at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) as My Research Setting

In my research context, UPSI has historically played a significant role as an early educational institution, with teacher training, including early efforts in music education. UPSI traces its lineage to the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC),

founded on 29 November 1922 by Richard O. Winstedt to train Malay teachers, hence a first milestone in Malay education (Sivalingam, 2020; Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 2017). SITC later became the Maktab Perguruan Sultan Idris (MPSI, 1957-1987), and Institut Perguruan Sultan Idris (IPSI, 1987-1997), before being upgraded to UPSI in 1997 (Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 2017). As a result of this continuous teacher-education lineage, UPSI positions itself as Malaysia's historic hub for preparing school educators.

Moreover, in terms of the formation and evolution of the music faculty, music at UPSI was initially housed within broader arts structures, namely the Faculty of Social Sciences and Arts, following UPSI's establishment in 1997. It was then restructured into the Faculty of Arts and Music in 2002. In June 2010, it became the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts (or the Malay name of Fakulti Muzik dan Seni Persembahan, FMSP), comprising the Department of Music and Music Education, as well as the Department of Performing Arts (*FMSP, UPSI, 2024/2025*). FMSP in UPSI officially frames its offerings across Malaysian ethnic or traditional, contemporary, Western art music, popular music, theatre, and dance, signalling an explicit cross-cultural stance in the training of performance skills (*FMSP, UPSI, 2024/2025*). FMSP UPSI is my workplace as a lecturer and provides access to Bachelor of Education (Music) (BMus Ed) students. At the same time, the faculty's commitment to both Malaysian and Western musical traditions makes it an ideal setting for study. It serves as a "living lab" to observe how students

negotiate Western conventions with Malaysian expressive practices, including oral transmission, embodied learning, and participatory and improvisatory strategies.

Additionally, in the development of higher music education in Malaysia, UPSI and other universities such as UiTM, UPM, and UM (Universiti Malaya) have played a crucial role by developing structured music degree programmes that fill gaps left by earlier, informal, and Western-centric approaches. UPSI, through FMSP, for instance, has introduced the BMus Ed with Honours programme that blends both Malaysian and Western traditions in its curricular identity (*FMSP, UPSI, 2024/2025*). Nonetheless, further reforms are needed to bridge the gap between early music education and tertiary-level training, as well as to make the curriculum inclusive for learning. This could be achieved by adding more diverse traditional, popular, and contemporary musical genres in Malaysia, reflecting the country's various ethnicities and cultures, rather than emphasising Western conventions of classical music in performance studies. Thus, addressing these challenges could ensure that the students' learning of expressiveness in music performance is more relevant based on their cultures, in addition to the Western ones, where both sides (non-Western and Western contexts) could be enhanced through structured learning opportunities.

2.2.4 Influence of the Western Conservatoire Model on UPSI and Other Institutions

Higher music education in Malaysia has been heavily influenced by the Western conservatoire model, which emphasises technical proficiency through rigorous instrumental and vocal training, the interpretation of historical repertoire, and one-to-one instrumental tuition under the *master-apprentice* system (Dalagna et al., 2020; Krivenski, 2018). This model, originating in European classical traditions, has shaped the structure and pedagogy of Malaysian undergraduate music degree programmes, particularly at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), University of Technology, Mara (UiTM), University of Putra, Malaysia (UPM), University of Malaya (UM), and the National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage (ASWARA).

In terms of the structure and pedagogy, the Western conservatory model and the classical traditions' framework in Malaysian higher music education can be observed as follows. Firstly, the emphasis on performance teaching is exemplified through the Western conservatoire approach. In detail, the approach prioritises technical excellence, mastery of instrument-specific techniques, and stylistic interpretation of European classical works (Dalagna et al., 2020). This performance-oriented approach is deeply ingrained in Malaysian higher music education, where students undergo specialised training in classical repertoire from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and 20th-century periods.

Secondly, the conservatoire model relies heavily on the *master-apprentice* system, where students receive individual lessons with an instructor (Krivenski, 2018). This one-to-one tuition, as the core of pedagogy, is intended to refine technical skills and interpretative abilities, limiting opportunities for student-centred learning and creative exploration.

Thirdly, regarding the terminology and cultural perception of ‘classical’ music, Western ‘classical’ music is commonly referred to as ‘Western art music’ (Krivenski, 2018). However, in the Malaysian context, the term ‘classical music’ is more widely recognised among undergraduate students and practitioners. This highlights how Western music terminology and frameworks dominate Malaysian music institutions, often overshadowing non-Western traditions in music and expressive learning.

2.3 Decolonisation as a Response to Western Dominance

2.3.1 Decolonisation: Conceptual Framing

Decolonisation in education is an umbrella term for efforts that resist and redress the historical and ongoing effects of colonisation and racialisation, and that seek to sustain modes of knowing and being marginalised by colonial systems. In music education, decolonial perspectives challenge Eurocentric conceptions of musical value, pedagogy, and excellence, and call for curricula and practices that reflect plural cultural epistemologies rather than a single canon of aesthetic worth

(Chávez & Skelchy, 2019; Smith, 2012). In particular, this conceptual framing foregrounds questions about whose knowledge is authorised in the academy and invites educators to consider how institutional practices reproduce or disrupt colonial hierarchies of taste and expertise (Smith, 2012; Hebert & McCollum, 2014; Liu et al., 2024).

Furthermore, David G. Hebert's scholarship on cultural pluralism and comparative music education reinforces the argument that decolonial work in music pedagogy must address institutional norms as well as classroom practice. Hebert and colleagues argued that *musical value and excellence are historically situated constructs* that reflect broader social and political formations. They further suggested that comparative, pluralist approaches reveal how conservatoire-style standards can marginalise other expressive grammars and learning ecologies (Hebert & McCollum, 2014; Liu et al., 2024). In their collaborative autoethnographic study, Liu et al. (2024) used disruptive autobiographical narratives to explore doctoral scholars' experience of alienation. They demonstrated that institutional definitions of excellence often privilege technical perfection and score fidelity over spontaneity, community-rooted practices, and culturally specific modes of expression. Thus, applying Hebert's comparative lens within a decolonial framework foregrounds two interconnected claims. First, institutional standards of excellence are not neutral but reproduce colonial hierarchies, and second, pluralising curricula and assessment requires both

pedagogical innovation and structural change across programmes and policy (Hebert & McCollum, 2014; Liu et al., 2024).

2.3.2 Perspectives on Decolonisation and Relevance to Malaysian Higher Music Education

Recent international scholarship frames decolonisation as a process of rethinking what counts as musical excellence and whose knowledge is legitimised in higher music education. Autobiographical and autoethnographic accounts in this literature demonstrate how institutional standards of excellence can marginalise musicians whose training, repertoire, or instruments fall outside dominant Western norms (Hebert & McCollum, 2014; Chávez & Skelchy, 2019; Liu et al., 2024). These critiques are directly relevant to Malaysia, where inherited colonial structures and conservative models continue to shape curricula, assessment and institutional prestige. A decolonial lens, therefore, requires higher music education to interrogate enduring colonialities, on what is valued, who is recognised as an “excellent” musician, and how pedagogical practices might be restructured to enable more inclusive and culturally responsive outcomes (Chávez & Skelchy, 2019; Liu et al., 2024; Smith, 2012). This perspective underpins the argument of this thesis, calling for the reconceptualisation of expressiveness as a culturally mediated, pluralistic skill.

2.4 Decolonisation within Malaysian Research in Pedagogy, Education, and Culture

Although Malaysian scholarship on music and education has expanded in recent decades, research that directly addresses expressiveness in performance at the tertiary level remains limited. Nevertheless, a growing body of work in pedagogy, community music, curriculum studies and cultural policy provides important foundations for understanding how Malaysian students learn, experience and enact expressiveness. The subsections below explain the key strands of Malaysian research and situate them within the decolonial debates outlined in Section 2.3.

2.4.1 Oral, Embodied and Community-Based Pedagogies

Several Malaysian studies emphasise the centrality of oral transmission, embodied practice and communal learning in local musical traditions. For example, empirical work on traditional Malay music illustrates that learning typically occurs through listening, imitation, and participation rather than through notation, and that expressive meaning is embedded in ritual, gesture, and social roles (Abdul Rahim et al., 2020; Abdullah, 2021; Mohd Shah & Masumi, 2016). Moreover, research on *gamelan* community and ensemble practice highlights how ensemble participation fosters improvisation, creativity and expressive communication through social scaffolding and shared performance vocabularies (Beng & Chee, 2024; Wong & Augustine, 2017). These studies collectively argue that community contexts embed

music within social life and thereby nurture expressive capacities that are not reducible to score-based criteria.

Therefore, in connection with decolonisation, efforts to foreground oral and embodied modes of learning as identified in Malaysian research (Abdul Rahim et al., 2020; Abdullah, 2021; Beng & Chee, 2024; Mohd Shah, 2016; Wong & Augustine, 2017) challenge the assumption that notation and score-based instruction are the only legitimate pedagogical routes. These approaches demonstrate alternative pathways for developing students' competence in music performance skills, including expressiveness. Hence, these findings align with decolonial aims to validate non-Western epistemologies and to expand the pedagogical repertoire of higher music education beyond Eurocentric norms (Beng & Chee, 2024; Smith, 2012).

2.4.2 Curriculum Development and Institutional Practice

Research on higher education provision documents the institutionalisation of undergraduate music degrees in Malaysia and the persistence of Western conservatoire structures within them (Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024; Mustafa, 2018). Analyses of programme development indicate that, while many institutions now include Malaysian repertoires in programme descriptions, assessment practices and one-to-one tuition often continue to reproduce Eurocentric hierarchies. Additionally, studies of musical identity demonstrate how students negotiate institutional curricula that privilege Western repertoire while maintaining strong

attachments to local genres, producing hybrid identities and adaptive learning strategies (Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024).

Furthermore, these studies focus on structural tensions within the Malaysian higher music education curriculum. Therefore, decolonial interventions require pedagogical change and curricular and assessment reform that legitimise local repertoires, reconfigure what counts as evidence of musical excellence (Liu et al., 2024), and create institutional mechanisms to support plural pathways to musical mastery (Chávez & Skelchy, 2019).

2.4.3 Cultural Identity, Community Music, and Advocacy

Malaysian scholars and practitioners, most notably those involved in community music and place-based pedagogy, have advocated for intercultural dialogue and curriculum reform that reflects Malaysia's plural society (Beng & Chee, 2024; Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024). Projects such as *Music of Sound (MOS)* demonstrate how experiential, collaborative, and site-based pedagogy can develop musical concepts, creative expression, and intercultural cohesion among participants; such advocacy foregrounds community engagement and the pedagogical value of local traditions (Beng & Chee, 2024).

Hence, these examples of Malaysian research contexts (Beng & Chee, 2024; Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024) emphasised that community-situated learning develops musical skills and contributes to social cohesion and cultural

sustainability. In this sense, advocacy for community music and intercultural curricula exemplifies decolonial praxis, in which it seeks to redistribute epistemic authority and centre marginalised knowledges. It also seeks to create learning environments where students' cultural identities are resources, rather than deficits (Atalay, 2012; Beng & Chee, 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024; Smith, 2012).

2.4.4 Policy, Access, and the Marginalisation of Music

Analyses of national education policy reveal how structural priorities, particularly the privileging of STEM subjects, limit access to sustained music learning in pretertiary education, producing uneven preparation for higher music study (Mohd Shah, 2016; Ooi, 2017). This policy context contributes to universities' tendency to default to Western models as normative frameworks, thereby reproducing inequities in who can access and succeed in higher music programmes (Mohd Shah, 2016).

Consequently, these inequities affect how undergraduate music students learn performance skills and expressiveness, as they find it challenging to adhere to Western conventional approaches rooted in classical music traditions that most of them are unfamiliar with. Therefore, addressing decolonial aims in Malaysian higher music education requires attention to policy and access. Furthermore, decolonisation is curricular and structural, involving resource allocation, teacher

training, and pathways that support diverse musical trajectories from school through to tertiary study (Ooi, 2017).

2.4.5 Malaysian Arts and Cultural Scholarship: Broader Context

In a broader context, various works in dance, museum studies, contemporary art, and cultural policy complement music education research. These studies interrogate how national narratives are constructed and whose cultural expressions are foregrounded in public culture (Santaella, 2014; Viray & Rann, 2023). Conversely, analyses of heritage narratives and cultural institutions indicate that decolonial concerns extend beyond music education into dance performance and education (Viray & Rann, 2023), museums, archives and cultural policy in Malaysia. They also proposed that meaningful curricular change in higher music education must be part of a broader cultural shift that recognises plural histories and practices (Santaella, 2014). Therefore, the broader arts scholarship also reinforces the idea that decolonial change in music education should be coordinated with shifts in public culture and heritage practice, so that institutional reforms in universities are supported by changes in how national cultural value is produced and recognised (Beng & Chee, 2024; Santaella, 2014).

2.4.6 Synthesis: What Malaysian Research Contributes to Students' Learning of Expressiveness in Music Performance and Decolonisation

Overall, the Malaysian research reviewed here offers three interrelated insights that inform how students learn to express themselves. Firstly, expressiveness is culturally situated, in which local traditions teach that expressive meaning is embedded in communal practice, ritual and embodied gesture. Secondly, expressiveness is hybrid and negotiated, where students routinely combine Western techniques with local expressive strategies to produce hybrid musicianship. Thirdly, expressiveness is pedagogically teachable and student-centred, and community- and learner-centred approaches demonstrate that expressiveness can be cultivated through reflective, embodied, and collaborative pedagogies. Therefore, these national insights align with international decolonial scholarship calling for pluralistic definitions of musical excellence and for pedagogies that centre students' cultural identities. They provide a Malaysian evidence base for reconceptualising expressiveness through students' voices and cross-cultural pedagogies (Beng & Chee, 2024; Chávez & Skelchy, 2019; Smith, 2012).

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter established the historical and institutional context for the study by depicting how Malaysia's expressive traditions and Western conservatoire legacies coexist uneasily within higher music education. Precolonial and

community-based practices foregrounded oral transmission, embodied gesture, and collective improvisation as primary means of learning expressiveness. Additionally, colonial and post-colonial developments introduced formal schooling, notation, and conservatoire pedagogy, which now dominate many university programmes. UPSI was presented as a research site where these dynamics are visible in curriculum design, applied teaching and student experience.

Furthermore, through a decolonial lens, the chapter argued that addressing students' struggles with expressiveness requires more than pedagogical tweaks. It requires structural change that legitimises local repertoires and learning ecologies, redesigns assessment to capture multimodal and culturally specific evidence of expressive competence. It also necessitates investment in faculty development and community partnerships (Smith, 2012; Hebert & McCollum, 2014; Chávez & Skelchy, 2019; Liu et al., 2024). Malaysian studies reviewed here (Beng & Chee, 2024; Mohd Shah & Masumi, 2016; Ooi, 2017) provide empirical support for multimodal, student-centred and community-engaged reforms.

Collectively, the chapter justifies a student-centred, mixed-methods inquiry into how undergraduate music education students understand, experience, and strategise their learning of expressiveness in music performance. This chapter also locates my research inquiry within a broader agenda of achieving musical excellence in ways that are culturally plural, pedagogically teachable and institutionally sustainable.

CHAPTER THREE
PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES, MODELS,
AND STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC
PERFORMANCE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter establishes the theoretical and conceptual foundation for my thesis by mapping competing aesthetic accounts of musical expressiveness and by evaluating pedagogical and psychological models that inform performance teaching. It begins with a philosophical framing that surveys Western debates over musical meaning, namely, the formalist/absolutist versus expressionist/referentialist positions. It also explains how these traditions have shaped conservatoire priorities such as score fidelity, technical virtuosity and end-product performance.

Subsequently, the discussion broadens to non-Western, cross-cultural, and multi-genre perspectives on expressiveness. In this context, expressiveness is culturally situated and genre-specific, acquired through oral transmission, ritual function, embodied movement, and communal participation in traditions such as *mak yong*, *dikir barat*, and *gamelan*, and enacted through community projects such as Music of Sound (MOS). The chapter also recognises diversity within Western practice (e.g., jazz, popular music and historically informed performance) to

problematise simple West/non-West binaries and to illustrate how different genres privilege distinct expressive grammars.

Building on the foundations, the chapter reviews influential models used in performance pedagogy and research. It summarises Swanwick's model of musical understanding, performer-centred perspectives that emphasise agency and interpretation, and psychological accounts such as Juslin's Generative rules, Emotional expression, Random variations, Motion principles, Stylistic unexpectedness (GERMS) model of emotional communication. For each framework, the chapter sets out core claims, pedagogical implications, and specific limitations when applied to repertoires and learning ecologies that fall outside notation-centred Western practice.

Additionally, a dedicated section examines hybridisation and learner agency. Drawing on empirical and practice-based examples, it demonstrates how students negotiate multiple repertoires and develop hybrid expressive strategies that combine technical control, prosody, ornamentation, and embodied staging. This analysis also explains why pedagogical scaffolding is required to support translational competence across idioms.

Moreover, this chapter integrates an epistemic and decolonial critique of institutional definitions of "musical excellence." It argues that assessment regimes and curricular norms can reproduce colonial hierarchies unless reconfigured to recognise vernacular knowledges and community expertise. Practical reforms are

outlined, including assessment redesign, faculty development and community partnerships, to legitimise plural expressive grammars.

From theory to practice, the chapter synthesises concrete pedagogical recommendations: multimodal teaching (aural modelling, movement work, improvisation labs), translational practice tasks, and multimodal assessment formats (portfolios, rehearsal footage, video-stimulated recall, and co-assessment with practitioners). It discusses implementation challenges, including workload, moderation, and the need for exemplars, and suggests staged approaches to institutional change.

Furthermore, this chapter emphasises methodological reflexivity throughout. It critiques common survey- and score-centred measures for privileging propositional knowledge and underrepresenting tacit, embodied, and communal modes of learning. This critique motivates the thesis's mixed-methods design (survey, video-stimulated recall, Thematic Analysis [TA]) and explains how each method addresses specific blind spots in capturing expressive learning.

Overall, the review asserts the need for a culturally embedded, student-centred pedagogy grounded in constructivist and phenomenological orientations. This chapter positions students' lived experience, interpretative autonomy, and embodied, community-situated learning as essential to any robust account of expressiveness in Malaysian higher music education. It provides the theoretical rationale that guides the empirical work in subsequent chapters.

3.2 Aesthetics and Philosophical Perspectives on Expressiveness in Music Performance

3.2.1 Western Perspectives on Expressiveness

Writing from the perspective of music education in the USA, Reimer (1989) argued that teachers should consider the concept of aesthetic education to be the most important in the history of music education. By focusing on aesthetics in music education, he believed that emphasising the central value of performance would provide an opportunity to exercise musical creativity, stemming from the relationship between a musician and the music they perform (Reimer, 1989). Additionally, the British theorist Swanwick (2012) further supported this by stating that music requires an aesthetic response through feeling, senses, and imagination. Collectively, Swanwick (2012) and Reimer (1989) provided a foundation upon which the performer's view of conveying expressiveness in music performance could be seen to contribute to aesthetic music education. This is meaningful for students as performers. On the role of performers in interpreting and communicating the music that is being learned and performed, Reimer (1989, p. 27) quoted that "performers must subsume their own subjective needs to the needs of the music; at the same time, the music's needs are dependent on the performers' own affective subjectivities".

Silverman (2007) asserted that there are two perspectives on performers and performing in relation to musical interpretation and expressiveness. First is the

objective or formalist view, where several scholars, performers, and teachers view performing as a situation in which a performer sounds out a notated score in strict accordance with a composer's instructions, thus conveying the composer's intentions (Silverman, 2007). This could be connected to where the interpretation of music lies in this formalist paradigm. For example, as Meyer (1956) stated, the formalists in the absolutist group perceive the meaning of music as intramusical, nonreferential, and primarily intellectual. In this sense, music's meaning lies in its internal structures, including melody, rhythm, and harmony, without reference to external emotions (Meyer, 1956; Silverman, 2007).

On the other hand, another perspective holds that performers have the right to interpret and realise a score based on their unique feelings and desires (Silverman, 2007). This could be connected to the expressionists' view of the meaning of music, in which music can evoke feelings and emotions in the listener through the performer's interpretation (Meyer, 1956). In addition, Cooke (1959) posited that the language of music is extra-musical, in a way similar to poetry being extra-verbal, and that both music and poetry have emotionally expressive connotations. Therefore, in this sense, music can communicate emotions, imagery, and narrative beyond the notes, and performers' personal interpretations and affective engagement are central (Cooke, 1959; Reimer, 1989; Swanwick, 2012).

Significantly, the overall philosophical and aesthetic perspectives on expressiveness contrast absolutist and expressionist views. These perspectives highlight the historical divide between conveying a composer's intention (absolutist

or formalist) and personal emotional expression (expressionist). It is also noteworthy that Reimer (1989) and Swanwick (2012) argued for performance as an affective and interpretative act, valuing both technical skills and emotional insights. However, these perspectives are rooted in Western music philosophy and aesthetics. As such, they offered limited consideration of how expressiveness is taught, perceived, or embodied in non-Western traditions that emphasise oral transmission and participatory learning, such as those in Malaysia. Moreover, the Western-based perspectives often focus on the end product, namely the performance, rather than on the learning process that students go through to achieve their expressive skills for the performance.

3.2.2 Non-Western, Cross-Cultural, and Multi-Genre Perspectives on Expressiveness

3.2.2.1 Expressiveness as Culturally Embedded Practice

In many Southeast Asian and Malay traditions, expressive meaning is inseparable from ritual, social function, and embodied practice. Ethnographic and pedagogical accounts of forms such as *mak yong* and *dikir barat* demonstrate that gesture, prosody, improvisation, and communal responsiveness are primary expressive resources learned through listening, imitation, and participation rather than through notation or isolated technical drills (Alfan, 2020; Mohd Shah & Masumi, 2016). These vernacular modes foreground *performative knowledge*,

referring to how bodies, voices, and social roles co-constitute meaning, so that expressiveness is learned as social competence as much as musical skill (Siu, 2020).

Community-based projects such as MOS illustrate how place-based, experiential pedagogy cultivates creative expression and intercultural cohesion by using everyday sonic materials and collaborative composition (Beng & Chee, 2024). Therefore, this suggests that expressiveness can be a site-specific, communal achievement rather than an individual attribute measured only against a notated score. Drawing on these studies (Alfan, 2020; Beng & Chee, 2024; Mohd Shah & Masumi, 2016; Siu, 2020), expressiveness is reframed as embedded in social practice and local ecologies of sound, and they provide empirical support for pedagogies that privilege embodied, participatory learning.

3.2.2.2 Genre Diversity Within and Beyond Western Traditions

In a broader context, it is crucial to recognise that Western music is not monolithic, as different Western genres privilege distinct expressive grammars. Jazz foregrounds improvisation, groove and interactive timing. Popular songs, on the other hand, rely on timbral nuance, vocal affect and mediated performance practices, while historically informed performance emphasises rhetorical gesture and period-informed articulation (Doğantan-Dack, 2014). These genre-specific grammars share affinities with many vernacular practices, such as embodied timing, idiomatic ornamentation, and dialogic interaction. Therefore, the simple opposition between “Western” and “non-Western” in terms of expressiveness is misleading.

Comparative scholarship argues that institutional conservatoire norms (technical virtuosity, score authority, individual virtuosity) can marginalise these other grammars unless curricula and assessment are pluralised to recognise genre-specific criteria (Hebert & McCollum, 2014; Chávez & Skelchy, 2019). In short, a cross-genre perspective reveals multiple legitimate ways to shape and communicate musical meaning in students' learning of expressiveness in music performance.

3.2.2.3 Hybrid, Negotiated Expressiveness, and Student Agency

Learners who traverse multiple repertoires frequently develop hybrid expressive strategies. In this sense, they may apply Western technical control over intonation and tone while using local movement vocabularies, prosodic inflexions, or communal staging to convey meaning (Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024). Specifically, Siu's concept of the *musical body*, developed in the study of the Malaysian 24 Festive Drums, illustrates how corporeal choreography and percussion technique fuse to create a distinct expressive idiom. This demonstrates that embodiment is itself a site of technical and aesthetic knowledge (Siu, 2020). Ooi's research on Malaysian higher education highlights how students' motivation, parental and community influences, and uneven pretertiary provision shape their capacity to translate vernacular expressive resources into assessed performance contexts (Ooi, 2017). Collectively, these studies foreground learner agency, in which students do not simply assimilate or reject Western norms. Instead, they negotiate, adapt, and translate expressive resources across repertoires, producing hybrid forms of musicianship that demand pedagogical scaffolding.

3.2.2.4 Epistemic Implications and Decolonial Critique

Decolonial analyses emphasise that institutional definitions of “musical excellence” are historically situated and often reproduce colonial hierarchies by privileging score-centred, individualistic virtuosity over communal, oral and embodied knowledges (Chávez & Skelchy, 2019; Liu et al., 2024; Smith, 2012). In this context, Hebert and McCollum’s comparative work and the disruptive autobiographical accounts collected by Liu et al. (2024) demonstrate how conservatoire-style standards can alienate musicians trained in other traditions. These standards also function as gatekeeping mechanisms in higher music education (Hebert & McCollum, 2014; Liu et al., 2024). Notably, these critiques invite a reevaluation of evidence and authority in performance pedagogy. Embodied gesture, communal responsiveness, and culturally specific ornamentation should be treated as legitimate indicators of expressive competence rather than as peripheral curiosities.

3.2.2.5 Pedagogical Consequences and Methodological Reflections

A cross-cultural, multi-genre account of expressiveness suggests several pedagogical shifts directly relevant to Malaysian higher music education. Firstly, assessment criteria should be broadened to include multimodal indicators, such as embodied communication, improvisatory responsiveness, culturally specific ornamentation and audience engagement, alongside technical measures (Chávez & Skelchy, 2019). Secondly, teaching strategies should be multimodal: aural modelling, movement work, dialogic reflection, and community-based projects

mirror how expressiveness is learned in vernacular contexts and support embodied learning (Beng & Chee, 2024; Doğantan-Dack, 2014). Thirdly, curricula should encourage translational practice, supporting students in experimenting with how timbre, gesture, and prosody function across idioms (Ooi, 2017). Fourthly, pedagogy must prioritise student voice and identity by treating cultural backgrounds as resources for interpretation and creativity rather than as deficits to be corrected (Beng & Chee, 2024).

Methodologically, these perspectives also highlight limitations in the survey instrument used in this study. Many survey items were framed using terminology derived from Western pedagogical discourse (phrasing, tone colour, stylistic nuance), which may not map neatly onto students' vernacular vocabularies or tacit embodied knowledge (Doğantan-Dack, 2014). Surveys tend to privilege propositional knowledge while underrepresenting the tacit, embodied, and performative aspects of expressiveness, which are better accessed through observation, practice tasks, or stimulated recall (Lyle, 2003). To mitigate these limitations, the study triangulated survey data with Video-Stimulated Recall Interviews (VSRI) and TA. This approach allows participants to reflect on concrete performance moments and to articulate culturally grounded meanings that the survey could not capture. Therefore, this mixed-methods design treats survey findings as one lens among several and privileges participants' situated narratives when reconceptualising expressiveness.

3.2.2.6 Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

Finally, a decolonial orientation requires ongoing reflexivity about how research instruments, categories and assessment practices may reproduce epistemic hierarchies. It also requires openness to reworking those instruments in collaboration with participants and community practitioners (Atalay, 2012; Smith, 2012). Specifically, implementing plural, multimodal assessment and pedagogy raises practical challenges related to workload, moderation, and the need for exemplars and faculty development. However, these are necessary investments if higher music education is to recognise and develop the full range of expressive competencies that students bring (Chávez & Skelchy, 2019; Ooi, 2017).

3.3 Pedagogical and Psychological Models of Expressiveness in Music Performance

3.3.1 Swanwick's (2012) Model of Musical Understanding

In terms of the pedagogical roots of expressive skills in music performance, Swanwick's (2012) model of musical understanding asserted the 'metaphorical change' that is essential in music learning. First, regarding *materials*, sounds are perceived as expressive shapes and gestures, symbolised by 'tones' which are heard as 'tunes'. In detail, Swanwick (2012) explained that hearing sounds as music requires a perception that incorporates mind, body, and senses, not "giving attention to separate sounds and experience but an illusion of movement, a sense of weight, space, time, and flow". This will next lead to *expressive character*, as Swanwick

(2012) referred to expressive shapes of music that form new relationships. Therefore, the musical tunes are now taking shape and flowing expressively and meaningfully as perceived. Moreover, expressive musical shapes will subsequently lead to form, where music is linked to past experiences, evoking feelings and memories when perceived meaningfully. Finally, this will lead to *value*, derived as the overall valuable and meaningful experience of music and learning once it is understood, embraced, and applied in terms of the process of understanding the *materials, expression, and form*.

On further explanation of the underlying metaphor process, as stated by Swanwick (2012), the aim is to transform tones into tunes or gestures, and then to transform these gestures into structures. These symbolic structures are then transformed into significant experience. Thus, these aims lead to the following guide that could be applied to meaningful learning of music, connected to students' learning of expressiveness in music performance:

- 1) Awareness and control of sound materials, demonstrated in distinguishing between timbres, levels of loudness, duration or pitches, and technical management of instruments or voices.
- 2) Awareness and control of expressive character, reflected in atmosphere, musical gesture, and the sense of movement implied in the shape of musical phrases.

- 3) Awareness and control of musical form are indicated in the relationship between expressive shapes and how musical gestures are repeated, transformed, contrasted, or connected.
- 4) Awareness of the personal and cultural values of music, shown in autonomy, independent critical evaluation, and sustained commitment to specific musical styles (Swanwick, 2012, p. 81).

Swanwick (2012) emphasised the importance of understanding and portraying the expressive character of music through musical gestures and the sense of movement in musical phrases. This understanding is intended to support meaningful musical learning among students and to inform expressiveness in music performance. Hence, this reveals the potential of using bodily gestures and movements to help students feel and convey the expressive shapes of music. For instance, students can demonstrate the shape of musical phrases by contouring the air with finger and arm movements. Furthermore, Swanwick's (2012) rules highlight that understanding and applying intra-musical and extra-musical factors, as well as the personal, cultural values, and historical backgrounds of different musical styles, are important for teaching and learning music. This understanding contributes to meaningful teaching and learning of expressiveness in music performance.

However, the Swanwick's (2012) model has its limitations when applied to the non-Western Malaysian context of students' expressive learning. Firstly, the model is often operationalised using Western tonal repertoires and notated works,

which underplay Malaysian musical genres such as lyrics, ritual function, call-and-response strategies, microtonal inflexion, and timbral nuance. For example, in the music of *mak yong* (Hardwick, 2014; Khan et al., 2023), *dikir barat* (Silahudin, 2021), *ghazal*, and *gamelan* (Miller & Williams, 2008), expressiveness is driven by the genres themselves. Notably, *form* and *value* elements also risk being read through Western formalism, which includes phrase or period form and canon-led aesthetic value, thereby sidelining communal, ceremonial, and social values central to Malay and other ethnic groups' local musical traditions.

Secondly, it can be argued that Swanwick's model and its stages may be a weak fit for the Malaysian context's oral, aural, and improvisatory learning in music and expressiveness. Swanwick's stages do not account for oral transmission, heterophony, extemporisation, and cyclical time, which are common in Malaysian musical practices (Hardwick, 2014). Therefore, students with rich informal backgrounds in Malaysia may not see those skills validated within the spiral, which can re-privilege notated, score-centred paths to expressiveness.

Thirdly, Swanwick's model evokes "gesture" and "movement" but offers little guidance on embodied pedagogy. For instance, this can be seen in Dalcroze-inspired work, dance-linked gestures in Malaysian *zapin*, and ritualised motion in *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theatre and music performance). Without explicit movement tasks, students might just be limited to verbal or score-based learning, which can overshadow their embodied expressive strengths. In relation to gestures and movements that often involve performers' and co-performers' cues during

ensemble or group performance, Swanwick's model also emphasises individual expressiveness over collective voice. Therefore, the solo performer's meaning-making might be more privileged. In contrast, ensembles or choral antiphony, such as in *dikir barat* performance, are often overlooked, although groove, blend, and leader-chorus repartee serve as key expressive carriers.

Subsequently, the model's emotion coding also seems to assume 'near-universals' cues, in the sense that expressiveness is often taught via Western cues of faster tempo signifies 'happy', while slower tempo with legato playing, for instance, signifies 'sad'. However, Malaysian traditions may signal affect through ornaments, melisma, nasal timbre, syllabic prosody, and *pantun* (rhyme) as in *dikir barat*, or through religio-cultural gravitas, as in *nobat* (Matusky & Beng, 2017; Miller & Williams, 2008). In this situation, Swanwick's model might not help make sense of said culture-specific codes revealed in the Malaysian context of music and the learning of expressiveness.

3.3.2 Doğantan-Dack's (2014) and del Sol's (2020) Performer Agency and "Beyond the Score"

Doğantan-Dack (2014) recognised the difficulty in defining 'expressive music performance' due to ontological questions that depend on the nature of music and performance, which are impossible to standardise or generalise. This is because expressiveness in music performance is highly idiosyncratic and depends on whether it is discussed from the perspective of the performer, the listener, the

musical instrument, interpretation, or emotion (Doğantan-Dack, 2014). However, despite the general emphasis on music's structural features, Doğantan-Dack (2014) stated that research on the expressiveness in music performance should extend beyond the performer's manipulation of structural features. This can be attributed to the combined effects of the performer's structural interpretation of the music, the cultural-historical context of the music, and technological perspectives, such as the use of audio recordings to explore the expressiveness of music performance. As a result, other contexts, including body movement, gestures, aesthetics, and affective factors, have often been neglected.

Moreover, based on his research on the techniques of expressivity in music performance, Manuel del Sol (2020) stated that how the musical structure is communicated is essential. A performer's good understanding of the structure, whether theoretical or intuitive, is a prerequisite for a convincing musical performance. Elaborating on performers' use of musical structures, del Sol (2020) also stated that professional musicians nowadays use principles and mental techniques to convey the structures with personal ideas that refer to abstract references. Therefore, a relevant part of the technical performance should be made up of psychological strategies and philosophical ideas to be more expressive and to offer unity to the piece. Consequently, a performer needs to care for the historical and aesthetic values of the piece being performed (del Sol, 2020) while manipulating musical structures and effectively projecting their own interpretative ideas to achieve musical expressiveness. In reflection, a performance is a re-creative

act in which each musical interpretation is a realisation of the performer's conception of the music (del Sol, 2020), from the composer's original writing. Hence, del Sol (2020) emphasised that, in music performance, it is essential to understand exactly what the performer adds to a written piece of music.

Nonetheless, several limitations are evident in Doğantan-Dack's and del Sol's perspectives when applied to the Malaysian study context. Firstly, there is an overemphasis on Western structural paradigms. Both perspectives frame expressiveness in terms of musical structures, aesthetic values, and composer-performer relationships. This assumes a notation-centred culture where expressiveness flows from interpreting written scores. In Malaysia, however, students' learning depends on a fluid structure and context-driven approach, and is not always codified in notation, as in Malaysian traditional and popular musical genres. Thus, Doğantan-Dack's and del Sol's frameworks risk marginalising the students' intuitive, embodied expressive resources.

Secondly, del Sol stresses that performers must grasp the historical and aesthetic values of the piece to project expressiveness. Hence, this could be said to constitute an implicit hierarchy of repertoire. This aligns closely with Western classical traditions but risks devaluing local Malaysian genres, in which expressive value derives not from fidelity to an original score but from cultural symbolism, social commentary, or communal energy. As a result, undergraduate students in Malaysia may feel pressured to prioritise Western repertoire, even if their expressive fluency lies elsewhere.

Thirdly, both scholars emphasise performer autonomy “beyond the score”, but they remain tethered to Western philosophical notions of re-creation of canonical works. In contrast, Malaysian undergraduates negotiate hybrid expressive identities, blending traditional, popular, and Western musical genres. Doğantan-Dack’s and del Sol’s perspectives do not explain how agency works when students draw on non-Western cues that include ornamentation, timbre shifts, and text prosody to reinterpret Western works, or vice versa.

3.3.3 Juslin’s (2003) GERMS Model and Emotional Expression

The element of emotion is undeniably significant in the perception of expressiveness in music performance. Typically, the feedback received from the audience after watching a performer’s concert or recital is about the emotions elicited by the performance, for example, feeling happy or sad, as conveyed by the performer in each piece. Exploring the expressiveness of learning strategies that involve emotional expression in music performance leads to a psychological approach, as conveyed by Juslin’s (2003) GERMS model. This model conceptualises performance expression as a multi-dimensional phenomenon consisting of five primary components, as follows:

- 1) Generative rules that function to clarify the musical structure;
- 2) Emotional expression that serves to convey intended emotions to listeners;

- 3) Random variations that reflect human limitations concerning internal time-keeper variance and motor delays;
- 4) Motion principles that prescribe that some aspects of the performance, for example, timing, should be shaped in accordance with patterns of biological motion; and
- 5) Stylistic unexpectedness that involves local deviations from performance conventions (Juslin, 2003).

Specifically regarding emotional expression from the GERMS Model, Juslin (2003) stated that several studies in the 1990s demonstrated that professional performers can communicate discrete emotions to listeners by using many acoustic variables in their performances. In the empirical approach to emotional expression in music performance, Juslin (2019) further revealed that the degree to which the performer and listeners agree about the resulting emotional expression might pragmatically be seen as a measure of whether the communication is successful. Hence, when a performer conveys a sombre piece, and the audience experiences its sadness, the performance is deemed successful in communicating the performer's intended emotional expression.

Furthermore, Juslin and Persson's (2002) work, along with Juslin's (2019) examples of the GERMS model's application to emotional expression, illustrate how findings may be organised according to Brunswik's (1956) *lens model*. This theoretical framework describes the communicative process of emotional expression from the performer (as 'encoder') to the audience (as 'decoder').

Overall, these insights provide a scientifically grounded platform for identifying aspects of emotion that could be systematically or structurally taught to be applied to strategies for teaching and learning expressiveness in music performance. However, it is understandable that determining between perceived and felt emotion is subjective, since a musical piece might be communicated through a variety of emotions by the performer. It could further be perceived or felt by a different variety of emotions by the audience, or also, what is originally intended to be performed as an overall 'happy-sounding' piece might be perceived as 'sad' by the audience.

In relation to the GERMS model, another study of emotional expression was conducted by Van Zijl and Sloboda (2011), examining performers' experienced emotions in the construction of expressive musical performance. The study sheds light on the distinction between felt and performed/perceived emotions of musicians. Notably, the results indicated that differences emerged between performers' emotions related to the practice activity and those related to the music, with practice-related emotions prevailing over music-related emotions at the beginning. However, music-related emotions gradually came into play as the learning process developed in the expressiveness of musical performance (Van Zijl & Sloboda, 2011). In this research, a performer's emotional expression in music performance is considered in terms of whether the emotions are felt, perceived, or affected by practice-related or music-related emotions.

Nevertheless, limitations arise in Juslin's (2003) GERMS model when applied to the Malaysian context. Firstly, there is an overemphasis on the

universality of acoustic cues. The GERMS model assumes that emotions can be reliably encoded by performers and decoded by audiences through universal acoustic cues, including tempo, dynamics, and articulation. Nonetheless, in Malaysia, cultural coding of emotions in music is not universal. For example, a pentatonic-based *zapin* or *gamelan* piece may signal serenity or spirituality locally but might not map easily to Western categories like “sad” or “happy”. Thus, GERMS risks oversimplifying culturally embedded modes of expression.

Secondly, the generative rules conveyed in the GERMS model focus on clarifying musical structure, reflecting a Western, notation-based learning system. In Malaysia, however, many students’ previous experiences rooted in oral traditions convey flexible structure, as well as the communal negotiation of musical elements. This makes it challenging to apply GERMS’ structural assumptions directly to students who navigate fluid, participatory performance frameworks.

Additionally, deriving the limitations, much research on emotional expression (e.g., Van Zijl & Sloboda, 2011) focuses on Western empirical models and assumes universality in emotional cues. This poses challenges in the Malaysian context, where expressiveness may be conveyed through culturally specific gestures, timbres, or improvisational storytelling. Thus, there is a need for empirical work exploring how Malaysian students interpret, feel, and express emotions in performance within culturally meaningful frameworks.

3.3.4 Schubert's (2022) Knowledge-Performance-Affect (KPA) Model

Furthermore, David Schubert (2022) introduced the Knowledge, Performance, and Affect (KPA) Model of Musical Expressiveness, which conceptualises expressiveness as a dynamic cycle of three interrelated components. Firstly, Knowledge (K) refers to what the performer *knows* about expressing music, be it in terms of technique, style, structure, historical practices, genre conventions, and the performer's own interpretation of expressiveness. Secondly, Performance (P) is what the performer *does* in real time, whether shaping timing, dynamics, articulation, tone, gesture, or interacting with co-performers and the audience. The third one, which is Affect (A), is what the performance *does* to people, in terms of listeners', audience's, and performers' emotional responses, including perceived or induced emotions, and engagement with the music.

In practice, Knowledge first informs Performance, demonstrating where it could be applied before the performance begins. This step involves analysing the musical score to be performed, listening to examples of scores, deciding on expressive aims, planning parameter manipulations, including phrasing, dynamics, and tempo, and designing embodied cues such as gesture and posture. The cycle continues during the performance, in which the Performance elicits Affect that includes the execution of expressive strategies while adapting to context, for instance, acoustics, ensemble micro-timing, and audience energy. In this sense, embodied regulation, including breath, movement, and gaze, is applied to scaffold the timing or phrasing of the music and to foster audience connection. The cycle

then returns after performance when the observed or imagined Affect feeds back to update Knowledge. During this phase, ‘affect data’ could be gathered, such as peers’ or audience’s comments, self-reflection, video-stimulated recall activity, and quick audience polls. Consequently, one’s personal expressive schema, in terms of what works for which piece, space, or audience, could be updated. For example, involving a reflection activity such as “my crescendo read as ‘tense’ in this hall, thus I’ll rebalance tone versus loudness for next time” (Schubert, 2022).

On the other hand, in terms of its strengths and contributions, Schubert's (2022) KPA Model first promotes an integrative bridge from the cycle described, connecting technique, interpretation, and reception. It achieves this without reducing expressiveness to either “score fidelity” or “emotion talk”. Apart from that, it also supports iterative learning designs of planning, doing, and reviewing, which align with studio teaching, video-stimulated recall, and adjudicated recitals. Subsequently, it also validates performer agency, offering the chance for performer-led expressiveness that does not merely comply with the tradition of being faithful to the score and composer’s intentions.

However, when the non-Western context, particularly the Malaysian context of this study, is taken into account, limitations in the KPA Model remain. Firstly, KPA often presumes Western traditions and normed listening cues, treating the Affect or A element as broadly shared. In contrast, decoding expressiveness in the Malaysian context is culturally mediated, particularly through the distinct nature of Malaysian traditional or popular musical genres, exemplified by *mak yong*,

nobat, and *dikir barat*, which feature microtonal slides, heterophony, and ritual timing.

Following this, the Affect element seems to collapse diverse groups of audience into a single response related to Western-based recital or concert audiences, contrasting with the Malaysian context of community audiences, such as *dikir barat* circles, who value participation, wit, and call-and-response. Embodiment is also under-specified within the KPA model. This contrasts with the Malaysian context, where bodily or ritual knowledge involving dance-linked gestures in *mak yong* or ensemble swaying motion in *gamelan* is central to expressiveness but not foregrounded as knowledge domains in their own right. Lastly, the model relies on score-based planning and is therefore less explicit about oral or aural planning and about improvised co-construction to convey expressiveness.

3.4 Current Strategies of Learning Expressiveness, Limitations, and Application to the Malaysian Context

3.4.1 Aural Modelling

According to Woody (2000), expressive intentions and the resulting music are the responsibility of performing musicians. Hence, the emphasis is on the transition from expressive intentions to sounded music. Specifically, Woody (2000) addressed three scopes in his study: ‘learning expressivity’, concerning the

perception and incorporation of expressivity among the musicians, and ‘teaching expressivity’, concerning the musicians’ opinions on whether most instructions received are verbally-based or modelling-based, and the comparisons. The third scope, ‘practising expressivity’, relates to the musicians’ practice habits and the time spent in eliciting felt emotions in themselves to guide and communicate expressive performance. Therefore, Woody (2000) applied the ‘interview questionnaire’ method to obtain participants’ responses on the role of expressivity in their past musical development, in their current instruction and practice, and in music teaching and learning in general.

Notably, the results indicated that expressivity was highly crucial in music performance. However, most participants observed that their earlier learning led them to achieve greater expressivity in their music by varying articulations and dynamics. It was only in their later learning that they realised the significance of generating strong feelings to communicate expressivity, with ‘modelling’ identified as the most frequently used technique by their private music instructors (Woody, 2000). Conversely, modelling is used to communicate how to perform expressively and to describe the characteristics of a desired performance. For example, addressing the sound properties of a performance, including variations in loudness, tempo, and articulation, is indicated either verbally or symbolically by marking on the printed notation of the music (Woody, 2006).

Moreover, Woody (2006) further explored several methods in the teaching and learning of expressiveness in music performance. This led to a study comparing

the effectiveness of three approaches to elicit expressivity in music students' performances: aural modelling, verbal instruction focused on concrete musical properties, and verbal instruction using imagery and metaphor. Additionally, this quantitative study involved college pianists as participants, who worked with three melodies, one in each instructional condition (Woody, 2006). The results demonstrated that, overall, the college pianists could adapt to these various approaches, and none of the instructional modes asserted dominance as the most successful in facilitating the change from baseline performance or in producing more expert-like expression (Woody, 2006).

However, detailed examination revealed interesting trends, where firstly, aural modelling was relatively consistent in producing performances that 'duplicate' the expert model used in the instruction. Secondly, the concrete musical instruction led to more practice, which could be inefficient, but demonstrated good consistency in effecting change from baseline performance to result in more expert-like expression. Thirdly, the metaphor or imagery approach produced considerable change from the baseline performance, but not necessarily in the direction of the intended or accepted expert-like interpretation (Woody, 2006). Therefore, the approaches mentioned could be helpful for students when they manage to copy their expert instructors in producing the sounds and expressions desired for the performance of their pieces. Nevertheless, concern arises about their own deeper awareness, understanding, effort, creativity, and meaningful learning of expressiveness in music performance.

Notably, aural modelling, verbal instruction of concrete musical properties, and verbal instruction of imagery or metaphor each have their own strengths in helping music students develop or improve their expressiveness in performance. However, to what extent would these approaches help students engage more with their thoughts and senses to express themselves? Regarding Bachelor of Education (Music) with Honours (BMus Ed) students in the Malaysian context, most of them undergo modelling or aural modelling in their learning of Western-based musical pieces offered at the university, but encounter challenges in adapting to these instructions because they are not yet familiar with the pieces. Nonetheless, while studies by Woody (2000, 2006) confirmed the effectiveness of aural modelling in Western pedagogical settings, they overlook how non-Western Malaysian students, who often enter university with informal or non-classical training, perceive and internalise expressiveness. Aural modelling in this context may promote imitation over independent expressive exploration. This raises a gap in understanding how students from diverse musical backgrounds interpret modelled expressiveness and how culturally specific sound aesthetics influence their expressive learning.

Furthermore, given that most music education students in this targeted population lack formal musical training before entering the university. Hence, there is a need for learning strategies in music performance and expressiveness that engage students in a lifelong, meaningful learning experience, rather than simply doing what the instructors tell them to do. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of the Malaysian context of students' experiences in learning expressiveness in music

performance is urgently needed, as helpful pedagogical strategies could be derived from students' insights.

3.4.2 Dialogic Teaching

Meissner (2017) explored instrumental teachers' instructional strategies for facilitating children's learning in expressive music performance, which involved pre-teaching pupils' concert, 10 weeks of teaching, and, later, post-teaching pupils' concert. It was revealed that the teachers who participated in the study used various strategies to improve students' expressive performance, including teacher enquiry, discussion, explanation of expressive devices, gestures and movements, singing, imagery, modelling, projected performance, and listening to own recordings.

However, the analysis of students' performance assessments did not demonstrate a significant improvement in expressiveness, although the strategies were useful in lessons, as reported by the instrumental teachers (Meissner, 2017). Nevertheless, enquiry, discussion of musical character, and instruction on modifying expressive devices were reported to be the most helpful for students who improved their expressive performances (Meissner, 2017). Additionally, innovative methods for teaching expression emerged, such as improvisation to explore expressive devices, the notion of projected performance, and the idea that students should develop their own interpretations and own their performances (Meissner, 2017). Therefore, from the study, it is derived that the effectiveness of many strategies in the teaching and learning of expressiveness in music performance may

be subjective in helping students develop or improve their music performance. It would also be helpful for students to tap more into their potential and develop their own approaches and interpretations as they learn to express themselves in music performance.

In another study, Meissner and Timmers (2019) conducted an experimental study in which young students took an improvisation test and participated in either experimental or control group teaching sessions. In the students' improvisation test, expressive cues were used to convey basic emotions, which were later assessed by adjudicators. Results from the adjudicators' assessments of improvisations revealed that most students could convey happiness, sadness, and anger effectively, and this was further investigated in the experimental versus control teaching sessions. In the experimental group, dialogic teaching was applied in discussions of musical character to improve students' expressiveness regarding the basic emotions conveyed, while in the control group, focus was on accuracy and technical fluency.

Additionally, students' performances of 'happy' and 'sad' musical excerpts during pre- and post-teaching sessions were assessed by adjudicators, and outcomes were compared between the experimental and control teaching sessions. The results later demonstrated that the experimental teaching was significantly more effective at improving students' expressiveness in the 'sad' extract than the control teaching (Meissner & Timmers, 2019). This study suggests that a dialogic teaching strategy may be particularly effective in teaching and learning expressiveness in music performance. Such an approach emphasises structured discussions between tutors

and students regarding the use of expressive cues, including emotional expression. The combination of strategies could also help develop students' own interpretations and experiences as they express their musicality in performance.

Dialogic teaching, combined with other strategies, led to the study by Meissner and Timmers (2020). Dialogic teaching and learning were applied in detail in this participatory action research, with weekly teaching sessions incorporating these strategies into individual instrumental lessons. The study also involved in-depth investigations of tutors' perceptions of the usefulness of the dialogic teaching approach as well as other complementary strategies they wished to apply. Moreover, students' views on their learning of expressiveness and on the instructional strategies implemented were examined.

As a result, students reported that dialogic teaching was helpful and stimulating, as the tutors' questions and discussions with students helped improve students' reflection, awareness of musical meaning, and action in developing their communication of expressiveness in music performance (Meissner & Timmers, 2020). Meissner (2021) extended the importance of dialogic teaching by proposing a theoretical framework that encompasses 'analysis', 'imagined or felt emotion', 'gestures and movements', 'imagery', 'modelling', 'singing', 'projected performance', and 'listening to one's own record'. These elements lead to the overarching concept of dialogic teaching and learning (explained in two specific categories: 'dialogue about musical character' and 'dialogical explanation of the use of expressive tools'), which, in turn, leads to expressive music performance.

Within this theoretical framework, Meissner (2021) stated that dialogic teaching can be useful for scaffolding young musicians' learning of expressivity. In particular, open-ended questions can stimulate thinking about interpretation and help connect musical ideas to the learner's embodied experience. It follows that dialogic teaching leads to students' embodied experience of learning expressiveness in music performance, suggesting ways to communicate expressiveness through bodily movements or gestures.

Moreover, interviews conducted by Meissner and Timmers (2020) with young students to examine their perspectives on learning expressive performance revealed that students taught through dialogic teaching asked questions related to musical character and expressive tools, helping them understand the musicality of their pieces. These questions facilitated students' reflection on the works learned and supported their understanding of musical interpretation. Notably, dialogic teaching could be very helpful to students and lead to various strategies. This includes the communication of emotions and expressive body movements and gestures, which could be further explored for students' learning of expressiveness in music performance.

Research by Meissner and Timmers (2019, 2020) demonstrates that dialogic strategies foster students' autonomy in reflecting and developing their expressiveness. However, these studies are embedded in Western music education contexts and do not address how non-Western, Malaysian students, many of whom are shaped by hierarchical teacher-student relationships, navigate open-ended

discussion about musical character. Thus, the gap lies in understanding how dialogic methods might be adapted to suit local learning cultures and how Malaysian musical narratives can inform such dialogues.

3.4.3 Manipulation of Musical Parameters

Focusing on students as performers emphasises how they develop experiential, embodied, engaging, and meaningful learning when communicating expressiveness to the audience. In this context, students' perceptions of expressiveness and how this leads them to manipulate musical parameters to achieve it first relate to heuristics for expressive performance (Leech-Wilkinson & Prior, 2014). Furthermore, Leech-Wilkinson and Prior (2014) first stated that describing music in metaphorical language could better help performers communicate expressive musical performance to listeners. They also mentioned that the tacit knowledge, gained through experience, and drawn upon by musicians to perform effectively, still requires further investigation. Consequently, this has led to the study of heuristics or self-directed learning in relation to musical expression, drawing on empirical evidence from musicians' everyday teaching and performing experiences.

The first study involved musicians' nominations of words they felt meant 'shape' when talking about performance. Specifically, the results revealed the examples of words to include 'phrase or phrasing', 'form', 'structure', 'direction', 'contour', 'dynamics', 'line', 'melody or melodic', 'emotion', 'gesture', 'intensity',

‘tension e.g. tension and release’, ‘expression, expressive or expressiveness’, ‘feeling’, ‘colour’, ‘pattern’, ‘movement’, ‘flow’, ‘release’, ‘meaning’, ‘curve’, and ‘rhythm or rhythmic’ (Leech-Wilkinson & Prior, 2014).

On the other hand, the second study by Leech-Wilkinson and Prior (2014) involved interviews that consisted of musical demonstrations and discussion, focusing on an unfamiliar piece provided by the researcher and scores brought by the musicians. In detail, the musicians, as participants, were asked to play the unfamiliar piece, focusing on the musical shaping during the demonstration, and to describe their thinking. All interviews were audio- and video-recorded, and participants’ speech, gestures, and musical demonstrations were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The detailed methodological approach enabled the researchers to understand each participant's meaning from the data. Hence, the phenomenological and interpretative coding enabled links and observations of patterns and contradictions to be made from the emerging themes in participants' idiosyncratic experiences (Leech-Wilkinson & Prior, 2014).

Additionally, emerging themes from the in-depth IPA included elements or concepts that are very useful for applying to strategies for teaching and learning expressiveness in music performance. These themes include ‘shapes and direction’, ‘movement and dance’, ‘natural, breathing, singing’, ‘speech and emotion’, ‘composer and audience’, and ‘style’. Most themes overlapped, conveying the possible relationships among selected heuristics for musical expression, as discussed with the study participants (Leech-Wilkinson & Prior, 2014).

The multidimensional, complex construct of expressiveness in music performance is explored next, focusing on the performer's ability to manipulate dynamics, timing, articulation, pitch variation, timbre, and various musical parameters to convey expressiveness. These parameters serve as fundamental tools for conveying emotional and aesthetic meaning in music performance (Schubert, 2022; Sloboda & Juslin, 2001). Therefore, for students learning to develop expressiveness in music performance, the ability to understand, control, and intentionally modify these parameters is essential. This process involves both rule-based expressive conventions and individual creative choices that shape their interpretation and performance styles (Lehmann et al., 2007). Within the Malaysian higher music education context, students navigate both Western classical and non-Western expressive traditions. In this setting, an integrated approach to strategies for manipulating musical parameters is needed to foster both technical proficiency and personal expressivity.

Moreover, among the various musical parameters, dynamics (loudness and softness) have consistently been highlighted as among the most influential factors in shaping perceived expressiveness (Gabrielsson, 1999; Schubert & Fabian, 2014). The ability to control and manipulate volume levels, from subtle nuances to dramatic contrasts, is a primary way performers evoke emotion and engage listeners. Several studies have demonstrated the significance of dynamics in musical expressiveness. For example, Schubert and Fabian (2014) reported that variations in dynamics significantly influenced listeners' perception of emotional

expressiveness, suggesting that students must develop dynamic control to enhance their communicative power in performance. Apart from that, Sloboda and Juslin (2001) emphasised that performers deliberately manipulate dynamics to convey emotions, reinforcing the idea that expressiveness is not merely spontaneous but an intentional, learned skill. In addition, Gabrielsson (1999) demonstrated how dynamic variations contribute to the perceived expressiveness of a performance, particularly in relation to musical phrasing, tension, and emotional shape.

On the other hand, in the context of Malaysian music education, traditional and popular music forms often rely heavily on dynamic variations and vocal inflexions to communicate expressiveness. As a result, encouraging students to explore both Western and non-Western dynamic techniques can broaden their expressive range and enhance their interpretative flexibility.

Beyond dynamics, nuance plays a crucial role in expressive musical performance. According to Lehmann et al. (2007), nuance refers to the subtle manipulation of sound parameters, including attack, timing, pitch, loudness, and timbre, that make music sound human rather than mechanical. This personalised shaping of sound allows performers to infuse their interpretations with individuality and emotional depth. Key findings from Lehmann et al. (2007) firstly highlight that nuance is a subset of expression, encompassing small-scale variations in musical parameters that do not alter the identity of the piece but enhance its communicative effect. Secondly, expressiveness is closely linked to motor control and sensory perception, suggesting that students' ability to refine expressive nuances depends

on both technical training and embodied experience. Thirdly, musicians develop expressive strategies through structured learning and deliberate practice, debunking the myth that expressiveness is purely instinctive.

Building on these insights, Schubert (2022) suggested that musical expression emerges from a performer's ability to deviate from a standardised set of actions. For instance, deliberate changes in tempo, articulation, and loudness create expressive phrasing that captures the listener's attention. In the Malaysian context, undergraduate music students could therefore be encouraged to experiment with micro-level expressive choices rather than adhere to predetermined performance norms.

Furthermore, manipulating musical parameters is a cognitive or technical task, and a psychological and physiological process. Research has demonstrated that expressive performance is rooted in both controlled and unconscious variations. For instance, Palmer (1997) proposed that expressive variations in performance are shaped by cognitive processes that highlight structural elements of the music, such as phrase boundaries, metric emphasis, and tension-resolution patterns. Additionally, Juslin (2000) referred to these systematic expressive variations as performance expression, whereas timing, dynamics, articulation, and phrasing work together to convey meaning. Moreover, Crispin and Östersjö (2017) expand on this idea, noting that performers do not simply execute music but mediate between the written score, their own interpretations, and the audience's reception. In this regard, expressive performance is a constantly evolving interaction between learned

musical conventions, real-time physiological responses, and interpretative decisions. For students, developing expressive skills requires training both their technical control and their intuitive, embodied sense of musical communication.

Conversely, research by Schubert (2022), Sloboda and Juslin (2001), Gabrielsson (1999), and Lehmann et al. (2007) has reported that expressiveness is an active, intentional process that combines technical precision with artistic interpretation. Therefore, it can be inferred that Western conventions emphasise manipulating musical parameters such as dynamics, timing, and articulation to foster students' expressive development in music performance. However, in Malaysian traditional and popular music, expressiveness may stem from a range of parameters, such as vocal ornamentation, microtonal inflexions, and rhythmic flexibility. The gap here is the assumption that all students will connect with the same expressive parameters. Thus, a more culturally responsive approach is needed to help Malaysian students transfer expressive understanding across musical systems.

Building on the connection between manipulating musical parameters and interpreting musical intentions to convey expressiveness, Héroux (2016) offered further insights into how expert musicians develop expressive interpretations through structured yet creative processes. His study revealed several findings on how students could apply interpretative processes to convey expressive qualities in musical performance. Firstly, musicians engage in a blend of rule-based learning and creative experimentation when shaping expressiveness. Secondly,

interpretative choices are influenced by both the formal aspects of the score and personal aesthetic inclinations, demonstrating that expression is both structured and individualised. Thirdly, expressive strategies evolve through iterative practice, as musicians refine their use of dynamics, articulation, and phrasing to create a musical narrative. In the context of undergraduate music students' learning of expressiveness in Malaysia, this underscores the importance of integrating formal instruction with exploratory learning. It allows them to experiment with different expressive strategies and refine their interpretations through self-reflection and peer feedback.

Héroux (2016) described interpretative strategies as iterative and creative, yet this perspective is framed within a Western classical performance context. There is a lack of research on how students in the Malaysian context blend score-based interpretation with cultural or oral traditions that may not rely heavily on notation. Consequently, the gap concerns how interpretation is constructed in hybrid performance identities and how students' prior experiences influence their interpretive decisions.

3.4.4 Expressive Body Movements

In connection with emotional expression strategies, expressive body movements also play an important role in helping students convey their emotions clearly and meaningfully. According to Davidson (2012), several studies have reported that musically communicative and meaningful performances contain

highly expressive bodily movements, but enquiry into the development of expressive bodily movement has been limited. Hence, this indicates the need for further studies on expressive body movements and gestures.

In particular, an earlier study by Davidson (2007) first explored qualitative insights into the use of expressive body movement in solo piano performance. The study examines a single pianist's performances of a Beethoven bagatelle for similarities and differences within and across performances. Davidson (2007) aimed to identify the types of physical movements used and whether these movements are repeated during pianist performances. Notably, results from the observational analyses of the performance movements revealed that the pianist used movement shapes that were specific and identifiable 'expressive locations' within the context of the whole performance, derived from the overall 'swaying motion' he established. However, Davidson (2007) also states that these movement shapes cannot simply be categorised as either intention-specific or musical structure-specific. This is because certain movement shapes are common across locations in different performances and within a particular performance, with expressive movements being used flexibly across manner and time.

In another study of the pianist's communication and playing technique, James (2018) examined a pianist's upper-body movement in detail. He revealed that the constant head and trunk movements, along with flowing arm movements with frequent hand lifts and rotational elbow movements, played important roles in resonating with audience members. These movements are perceived as expressive,

resulting in empathetic engagement with the music. To derive, movements exemplified by pianists demonstrate the complexity of the study of expressive body movements. Nevertheless, further research could examine the expressive meanings conveyed by movements of instrumental music students and singers to discover the range of expressive meanings across a variety of movements.

Hence, subsequent studies involving different musicians are explored regarding expressive gestures and body movements in musical performance. Firstly, Ginsborg and King (2009) explored the effects of familiarity and expertise on singers' and pianists' bodily movements and eye contact in ensemble rehearsals. Additionally, regarding expressive gestures and bodily movements, the study indicated that singers used gestures to reflect and support the technical production of sound and to convey information about the lyrics' meaning or the songs' expressive content. In contrast, pianists' gestures and glances were primarily expressive and communicative (Ginsborg & King, 2009).

Conversely, two distinctive case studies by Davidson (2012) explored the expressive components of bodily movement in both solo and ensemble musical performance. The first study examined flute and clarinet performers in both solo and duo settings and identified that each performer had a distinct way of expressing musical goals through bodily movements. Focusing on the results from the solo musical performances of the flute and clarinet performers, notable expressive bodily movements included sideways leaning while bobbing (flute playing expressions) and raising the bell of the instrument (clarinet playing expressions).

However, similar types of bodily engagement were observed between the two types of instrumentalists: legs and torso movements related to rhythmic swaying or bobbing, and movements related to holding the instruments (Davidson, 2012). Interesting movement effects that coincide with musical contours are also drawn. These include the rising and falling of a phrase associated with knee bending, held notes associated with a crouched upper body position, and rhythmic passages associated with rocking, swaying, and toe-tapping (Davidson, 2012).

On the other hand, another study by Broughton and Davidson (2016) explored in detail the expressive bodily movement repertoire for marimba performance through two observational case studies of marimba players. By investigating a core repertoire of marimba performance bodily movements perceived by different observers as expressive, the study examined detailed aspects of body movements and gestures. These aspects were analysed using Laban Effort-Shape Analysis, applied from dance education, to determine the observer-participants' perception of expressive gestures of percussionists in music performances. Specifically, the types of body movements revealed by the Laban Effort-Shape Analysis, among others, include movements termed 'punch', 'float', 'rising', and 'dab', which relate to various expressive bodily movements and techniques of marimba players. Additionally, the observer-participants were asked to rate the expressiveness on a Likert scale from 'least expressive' to 'very expressive' (Broughton & Davidson, 2016).

Subsequently, a quantitative study by Dahl and Friberg (2007) investigated the perception of expressiveness in musicians' body movements, focusing on the emotional expression they could convey. Participants watched and rated silent video clips of musicians performing the emotional intentions of 'happy', 'sad', 'angry', and 'fearful'. The first experiment involved marimba performances, while the second experiment focused on bassoon and soprano saxophone performances. The results demonstrated that from the first experiment, the emotional expressions of 'happy', 'sad', and 'angry' were well communicated, whereas 'fear' was not, and the results were also similar from the second experiment. Therefore, based on Dahl and Friberg (2007), 'fear' emotional expression might be difficult to convey by body movements in music performances. However, given the diversity of expressive bodily movements across different instrumental performers, other studies may yield different results.

Moreover, the studies on expressive body movements discussed above have indicated that emotional expression in music performance is conveyed through sounds, bodily movements, gestures, and facial expressions. Lehmann et al. (2007) proposed that expressive movement patterns, derived from both natural motion and human emotional states, contribute to the "humanness" of musical expression. This also aligns with embodied cognition theories (e.g., Schiavio et al., 2019), which suggest that expressive sound and physical movement are inherently linked. Several key elements of body movement that influence expressiveness include posture and stance. Open and relaxed postures are often associated with more engaging

performances. Furthermore, the arm and hand gestures, in which smooth, flowing gestures can enhance the projection of emotions like sadness or calmness, while sharp, abrupt movements may convey excitement or anger. Facial expressions are another key element, as they help the performer connect with the audience.

Expressive body movements' strategies are also linked to embodied learning of expressiveness in music performance. For example, Fortuna (2017), based on Merleau-Ponty's embodied learning, stated that humans' active corporeal experiences lead to the creation of cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual meanings of motion and changes in surroundings, thereby emphasising the role of body movements in music learning. Additionally, Juntunen (2006) and Juntunen and Hyvönen (2004) stated that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspective corresponds to the specific empirical findings of Jacques-Dalcroze that facilitated the development of Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Thus, this offers students the opportunity to explore music and expression through bodily involvement and to learn through embodied experiences.

Conversely, studies by Davidson (2007, 2012) and Dahl and Friberg (2007) highlighted the role of movement in conveying expressiveness. However, expressive gestures in Malaysian musical traditions, such as dance-linked gestures in *zapin* or shadow-play movements in *wayang kulit*, have rarely been examined in relation to formal music training. The gap lies in the lack of integration of these cultural movement vocabularies in expressive pedagogy. Therefore, more exploration is needed to understand how Malaysian students use their bodies

expressively across musical genres. Overall, these gaps emphasise the need for a more culturally embedded, student-centred framework for the expressiveness of learning in music performance within Malaysian higher education. The current study aims to address these gaps by exploring students' learning strategies across multiple musical and cultural contexts.

In the Malaysian context of undergraduate music education, incorporating expressive body movements can enrich students' approach to expressiveness in music performance, integrating traditional movement-based expressions such as those observed in *wayang kulit* or *zapin* dance. In *zapin* dance, for instance, the music ensemble performance accompanying the dance is deeply tied to gesture and bodily coordination, making expressiveness a holistic, full-body experience. Another example, in traditional Malay *gamelan*, movement is an essential part of conveying expressiveness. Therefore, by bridging instrumental techniques with culturally ingrained expressive movements, students in Malaysia can develop a more natural, engaging, and communicative performance style in their learning of expressiveness in music performance.

3.5 The Need to Emphasise Students' Interpretative Autonomy and Strategies of Learning Expressiveness in Music Performance

Expressiveness is generally regarded as a crucial component of a successful musical performance, yet there is limited understanding of how it is addressed in instrumental music education. Hence, it deserves more attention (Laukka, 2004;

Lindström et al., 2003). In addition, the expressiveness of music performance has been discussed by philosophers, composers, musicologists, and psychologists. However, in the context of music education, knowledge of how music students approach this subject as performers and, arguably, the real experts on expressivity themselves, has also been lacking (Lindström et al., 2003). There are many informal discussions of performers' expressivity in various sources, such as biographies, but these comments are usually vague (Lindström et al., 2003). Therefore, it is unclear how performers acquire the rules or strategies of expressiveness in their performances (Woody, 2002).

Furthermore, Schiavio et al. (2019) reported that Western music education's emphasis on technical skills and analytical understanding for the correct performance of composed works has raised questions about the creative potential of both students and teachers. Many scholars have argued that, under this paradigm, students and teachers serve as reproducers of externally imposed criteria in music performance. Hence, insight into students' and teachers' creative potential in terms of learning and teaching strategies, perceptions, and experiences with expressiveness is also lacking. Notably, further research is needed, as expressiveness plays a critical role in music performance. Regarding the research focus, specific insight into students' experiences as learners and performers communicating expressiveness in music performance is crucial. This is because the information obtained could help improve the music education system by aligning

music performance pedagogy with a student-centred, experiential, and meaningful approach.

Although research still lacks in-depth insight into music students' experiences in learning expressiveness in music performance, several quantitative and qualitative studies presented here provide a platform for gaining preliminary insights. These studies provide insights into students' views, perceptions, perspectives, and experiences of expressiveness, as well as the implications for music performance pedagogy and the music education system. Tracing how young students learn and experience expressiveness in music performance, Meissner et al. (2021) conducted a study with musicians aged 9-16. The study revealed that instructional strategies involving discussion and questions about the musical character helped these students think about the musical meaning and convey it in their playing. According to the study, reflecting on the musical character and musicality of their instrumental pieces helped the students, as young performers, develop their ability to convey musical expressiveness.

Additionally, an earlier study of students' understanding, perceptions, and perspectives on expressivity in music performance was conducted by Lindström et al. (2003). In this study, 135 students from music conservatories in England, Italy, and Sweden completed a questionnaire addressing conceptualising expressivity, expressivity in everyday life, music teaching, and novel teaching strategies. The results revealed that most students associate expressivity with communicating emotions, specifically with playing with feelings, and that expressive skills are

regarded as very important by students, leading to a need to further practice expressivity. Conversely, Van Zijl and Sloboda (2011) further explored performers' experienced emotions in the construction of expressive musical performance, analysing in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight music students that revealed practice-related emotions that contrast with music-related emotions. This study, therefore, provides insight into students' felt and performed emotions related to emotional expressiveness in music performance.

Moreover, Bonastre et al. (2017) analysed factors related to conceptions and beliefs about expressivity in music among students and teachers. Factors identified from Likert-scale items in the study's questionnaire were expressive technique, emotional expression, and self-learning of expressivity. The study also revealed no clear consensus among students and teachers on the optimal way to improve expressivity, suggesting that students would benefit from explicit work on expressivity in music performance, which should be included in the music curriculum. Bonastre et al. (2017) also emphasised that more research is needed on expressivity, and that music curricula could consider critically varying beliefs and approaches among students and teachers to enhance expressiveness in music performance.

On the other hand, Schiavio et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study that explored and compared individual and collective music pedagogies from students' perspectives. The study applies theoretical tools from embodied cognitive science, yielding findings on instrumental technique, expressivity, and communication

factors in music performance. Findings from the study also revealed the students' emphasis on being acknowledged for their interpretative choices when conveying expressivity, as well as expressive body movements that influence the experiences of performers, audience members, and co-performers. In this sense, Schiavio et al. (2019) posited that bodily expressiveness in music performance should be explored and conceived as an important intersection between technique and expressivity.

Notably, findings from several studies cited above underscore the importance of understanding students' insights into their own learning. This includes their perceptions, perspectives, and experiences regarding the approaches, strategies, or reflections on strategies taught to them in learning expressiveness in music performance. Different strategies for expressing learning in music performance work differently for diverse groups of students with varying levels of musical education. Knowing students' subjective strategies could lead to greater insight and the development of student-centred music performance pedagogy that will help optimise their potential for communicating expressiveness. Moreover, Schubert (2022) reported that musical expressiveness is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that is not solely determined by rigid technical execution or adherence to performance traditions. Instead, it emerges from an interplay among the performer's knowledge, interpretation, affective engagement, and situational context.

In the Malaysian context, particularly in higher music education, it is crucial to acknowledge students' interpretative autonomy in their learning and performance

strategies. Nevertheless, while conventional Western classical music tradition and pedagogy have historically emphasised fidelity to the scores and composers' intentions, contemporary perspectives challenge this paradigm by advocating for performer agency and creativity (Crispin & Östersjö, 2017). Therefore, the ability to craft an expressive performance should be viewed as a constructivist learning process, phenomenologically grounded in students' experiences. In this process, students internalise, personalise, and reinterpret musical expression in accordance with their own artistic identity, cultural influences, and experiential understanding.

3.6 Defining “Reconceptualising the Learning of Expressiveness in Music Performance: Malaysian Undergraduate Voices Beyond Western Traditions”

Drawing upon the research gaps identified in the literature review, my research focuses on the Malaysian context of undergraduate music education students and their understanding, experiences, and strategies for learning expressiveness in music performance. It also examines how these insights could reconceptualise the learning of expressiveness by highlighting non-Western, Malaysian perspectives alongside the dominant Western conventions in music performance. Therefore, my thesis is entitled “Reconceptualising the Learning of Expressiveness in Music Performance: Malaysian Undergraduate Voices Beyond Western Traditions”.

In definition, firstly, ‘reconceptualising’ means forming a new or different idea and understanding, as well as thinking about something in a completely new way to develop a fresh perspective. Furthermore, I adopt Katsara's (2023) definition of ‘reconceptualising’, which means pressing beyond established pedagogical forms and reshaping how teaching and learning are understood to fit new contexts better. I chose ‘reconceptualising’ to bring a different perspective on ‘learning expressiveness in music performance’ from non-Western Malaysian students’ experiences and strategies, rather than simply following the Western conservatory model of classical music conventions in performance and expressiveness.

Moreover, in defining my thesis title, ‘learning’ is adopted from Ambrose et al. (2010), where it refers to a process that leads to change, is driven by experience, and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning. This definition of ‘learning’ best suits my study, which brings forth the non-Western voice of my Malaysian undergraduate music education students-participants as they perceive, experience, and apply strategies of expressiveness. Additionally, Ambrose et al. (2010) stated that learning is a process that involves change in knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, or attitudes. It has a lasting impact on how students think and act, and it conveys my constructivist framework, in which learning is not something done to students, but rather something students themselves do.

Subsequently, ‘expressiveness in music performance’ refers to how students convincingly communicate their expressive interpretations of a work's

compositional structure and musical character to listeners or audiences, as adopted from Meissner (2018) and Meissner and Timmers (2019, 2020). This concept of ‘expressiveness’ considers students’ non-Western, Malaysian ways of learning and conveying expressiveness, grounded in their diverse, culturally informed musical backgrounds.

Additionally, ‘Malaysian undergraduate voices’ refers to the understanding and the previous and current experiences that shape this understanding. It also encompasses the application of strategies for learning expressiveness in music performance derived from the representative sample of BMus Ed students in my study. These students are from my workplace, the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts (FMSP) at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI). They represent the currently understudied ‘voices of expressiveness’ of non-Western Malaysian undergraduate students in music education in their learning.

Lastly, ‘beyond Western traditions’ implies that the students’ voices incorporate and integrate their culturally diverse non-Western musical backgrounds. It also includes the Western traditions of classical music and conservatoire training they receive, which have shaped their expressive learning. This approach seeks to highlight additional possibilities and strategies of expressiveness that extend beyond Western-centric conventions. Therefore, through this study, I aim to offer a different perspective on learning expressiveness in music performance, grounded in the non-Western Malaysian context of BMus Ed students’ understanding, experiences, and strategies, alongside the dominant

Western-centric perspective. My study employed constructivist (examining how students construct and apply their knowledge and strategies of expressiveness based on their experiences) and phenomenological (focusing on students' lived experiences in learning expressiveness) frameworks to bring forth these 'voices of expressiveness'. Notably, further details on frameworks, methodology, and methods are provided in Chapter Four.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter synthesised philosophical, pedagogical and empirical perspectives on expressiveness to create an analytic frame for the study. Western aesthetic and pedagogical models provide useful tools for understanding structure, technique and emotion. However, they are limited when applied in contexts where oral transmission, ritual function, embodied movement and communal performance are primary learning ecologies. Cross-cultural and multi-genre perspectives reframed expressiveness as plural, hybrid, and teachable, emphasising that students routinely negotiate expressive resources across traditions rather than conforming to a single standard.

Additionally, the chapter highlighted the epistemic and practical consequences of these insights: assessment and curriculum that privilege notation and individual virtuosity risk delegitimising vernacular knowledges. Meaningful reform, therefore, requires multimodal assessment, faculty development, and partnerships with community practitioners. Methodologically, the chapter justified

triangulating survey data with qualitative, practice-based methods to surface tacit and embodied learning. The theoretical and practical conclusions drawn here directly inform the research design and analytic lenses used in subsequent chapters. They also underpin the thesis recommendations for culturally responsive, pedagogically grounded reform in higher music education.

CHAPTER FOUR

**METHODOLOGY AND METHODS IN BRINGING THE “MALAYSIAN
UNDERGRADUATE VOICES”: BMUS ED STUDENTS’
UNDERSTANDING, EXPERIENCES, AND STRATEGIES OF
EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE**

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the methodological architecture used to foreground “Malaysian undergraduate voices” in expressiveness in music performance. The study begins by positioning itself within an ontological constructivist framework. It argues that knowledge of expressiveness is not transmitted as fixed truths but is actively built by learners as they draw on diverse musical histories and social contexts. This chapter articulates an epistemological commitment to phenomenology, which treats expressiveness as a lived, embodied, and culturally situated experience rather than a universally codified skill. These complementary stances justify a learner-centred, context-sensitive approach that can register how Bachelor of Education (Music) with Honours (BMus Ed) undergraduates at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) negotiate expressive meaning across Western classical, Malaysian traditional, and popular repertoires.

Moreover, guided by this framing, the chapter explains a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design comprising two linked studies. Study 1 employs

a survey questionnaire to generate both quantitative and qualitative data on students' understandings of expressiveness, their previous and current learning experiences, and the perceived influence of these experiences on their developing strategies. Descriptive statistics map broad patterns across the cohort, while open-ended items capture preliminary narratives and inflexions that matter in a Malaysian context. Furthermore, Study 2 follows with Video-Stimulated Recall Interviews (VSRI) to assess students' embodied, real-time decision-making as they comment on self-selected performance excerpts. This method centres participants' agency, reduces the imposition of the researcher, and renders visible the tacit interplay of musical parameters, emotional expression, and bodily movement that underpins expressive communication.

The chapter details purposive sampling of BMus Ed students across semesters and musical backgrounds, ethical procedures, instruments and protocols for each phase, and the analytic pathways used. In particular, quantitative survey responses are analysed using descriptive statistics to profile trends and variation. At the same time, qualitative materials from both studies are examined through a TA oriented to embodiment, situated learning, and strategy formation. Overall, the methodological choices are tied back to the study's aim: to elicit and legitimise Malaysian undergraduates' culturally embedded ways of knowing and doing expressiveness, which often exceed or reconfigure Western conservatoire expectations.

4.2 Research Approach

4.2.1 Ontology: Constructivist Framework

Ontologically, I apply a constructivist framework that positions my research within the understanding that knowledge is not transmitted as fixed truths but is actively built by learners through experience, reflection, and interaction. In music performance, expressiveness has often been approached through teacher-centred, prescriptive traditions that prioritise fidelity to the score, technical accuracy, and historically sanctioned interpretation (Crispin & Östersjö, 2017). However, while such approaches have contributed to technical discipline, they tend to portray expressiveness as a set of rules to be mastered rather than as an evolving, context-dependent process. A constructivist stance reframes expressiveness as something that students co-create by drawing on their own histories, values, and interpretative agency (Schubert, 2022; Woody, 2006). This orientation is particularly relevant in Malaysian higher music education, where Western conservatoire models dominate curricular structures (Dalagna et al., 2020; Lierse, 2014). Many students, however, also arrive with formative experiences in oral, participatory, and culturally embedded music-making.

Within this ontological frame, constructivism highlights that learning is an active process in which students assemble understanding through interaction with their environments and communities (Piaget, 1950; Vygotsky, 1978). For Malaysian undergraduates, the construction of expressive knowledge is shaped by

a mosaic of prior encounters, including *gamelan* rehearsals, school choirs, *dikir barat* competitions, church bands, social media tutorials, and informal jam sessions. Notably, these diverse pathways mean that expressiveness is not a uniform skill imported from the West but an assemblage of embodied, cultural, and social resources. Therefore, a constructivist pedagogy values meaning-making that begins from students' own experiences rather than relying solely on the reproduction of pre-set interpretative norms (Burnard et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Piaget's cognitive constructivism is particularly useful for understanding how students internalise expressive strategies. According to Piaget (1950), learning is a process of assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration. Students assimilate new expressive techniques into existing schemas, adapt those schemas to accommodate novel demands, and seek equilibrium between familiar and emerging practices (Chand, 2023). In the Malaysian context, this dynamic can be observed when students incorporate new phrasing, tone colour, or movement ideas encountered in conservatoire lessons into their pre-existing repertoires of oral or improvised expression. Additionally, Schubert's (2022) work on the Knowledge–Performance–Affect (KPA) model resonates with Piaget's perspective. It illustrates how learners refine expressive knowledge by experimenting with sound, reflecting on outcomes, and comparing strategies with peers or instructors.

Vygotsky's sociocultural constructivism adds a complementary lens, emphasising that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction with others. Specifically, Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning occurs within a Zone of

Proximal Development (ZPD) when students engage with more knowledgeable peers or mentors. Expressiveness, from this viewpoint, is a negotiated practice that thrives in collaborative contexts. Malaysian undergraduates often learn by observing and imitating ensemble leaders, exchanging cues within choir sections, or responding to a rebab's melodic inflexions in a *gamelan* setting. Abdul Rahim's (2014) study of student teachers' expressive communication illustrates how trainees developed gesture, voice modulation, and non-verbal cues by modelling mentors during ensemble conducting, thus an example of ZPD in action. Such processes affirm that expressiveness is an individual cognitive achievement and a social, culturally inflected practice.

On the other hand, Bruner's (1961) notion of discovery learning further illuminates how students engage with expressiveness as a problem-solving endeavour. For Bruner, learning entails active exploration and the formulation of new ideas from prior understanding. In music, discovery may involve testing out bodily gestures, experimenting with dynamics and tempo, or improvising melodic embellishments to achieve a desired expressive effect. This is especially salient in Malaysian traditions where improvisation, ornamentation, and call-and-response structures permeate genres such as *zapin*, *ghazal*, and *dikir barat*. Additionally, studies by Abdul Rahim (2014) demonstrated that students acquire expressiveness in *gamelan* and other traditional forms through written notation and participation, observation, and movement, methods that align naturally with Bruner's principles.

Across these perspectives, constructivism validates the plural, situated nature of students' expressive learning. It recognises that understanding and applying expressiveness is contingent on learners' personal meaning-making, social relationships, and opportunities for discovery. Nevertheless, despite its theoretical relevance, constructivism remains under-implemented in Malaysian music curricula, which still privilege transmissive models and Western repertoire. Strategies such as peer learning, improvisatory workshops, or cross-genre projects that integrate local musical practices are seldom embedded in formal instruction. Thus, this limits students' capacity to articulate expressive voices that reflect their cultural hybridity.

Therefore, this research aligns with constructivism by positioning knowledge of expressiveness as fluid, contextually grounded, and authored by students themselves. By interrogating how BMus Ed students at UPSI negotiate expressiveness across Western classical, Malaysian traditional, and popular musics, the study seeks to surface their "voices" that have been marginalised by Western-centric pedagogies. Moreover, through semi-structured interviews, video-stimulated reflections, and observation of rehearsals and performances, the research invites participants to narrate and demonstrate how they construct expressive understanding. It also examines how they adapt strategies across repertoires and integrate their bodily, social, and cultural resources. Accordingly, the inquiry positions Malaysian students not as passive recipients of imported expertise but as

active agents capable of bridging traditions and reimagining the learning of expressiveness in music performance.

4.2.2 Epistemology: Phenomenological Framework

Epistemologically, I apply a phenomenological framework that underpins this study. This approach is warranted because existing research on expressiveness in music performance has often been framed through psychological, cognitive, or pedagogical models, such as those that analyse acoustic cues or prescribe structural manipulation. However, while these approaches are valuable, they rarely capture the *lived*, culturally situated nature of expressiveness, particularly for students negotiating hybrid musical identities. Expressiveness is not an abstract, universally codified skill. It is inherently subjective, emerging from experience, environment, and personal meaning-making. In Malaysia, undergraduate music students often carry learning histories shaped by oral and participatory practices, call-and-response, heterophony, cyclical time, and embodied movement vocabularies. These resources are seldom accounted for in score-centred or universalist frameworks. Therefore, by adopting a phenomenological epistemology, this research seeks to illuminate how students themselves understand, experience, and strategise their expressiveness, allowing their voices to surface beyond Western-centric assumptions (Sokolowski, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2013a; Delmas & Giles, 2023).

Notably, the theoretical foundation for this stance is informed by two complementary perspectives in phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty and Smith's (1962)

philosophy foregrounds embodiment and perception as central to human experience. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not an accessory to thought but the primary site through which individuals know and interpret the world. Applied to music, this means that expressiveness is not merely a matter of intellectual planning or technical control. It is *lived* through breath, gesture, kinaesthetic awareness, and sensory attunement (Davidson, 2001). Hence, this idea resonates strongly with Malaysian traditions such as *mak yong*, *dikir barat*, and *wayang kulit*, where music, movement, and narrative are inseparable. In contrast, Western conservatoire pedagogy often privileges notated accuracy and abstract analysis, leaving little room for students to draw on bodily knowing in their expressive learning (Lierse, 2014). Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, therefore, provides a vital framework for examining how students embody their diverse musical pasts and integrate them into the study of expressiveness.

Additionally, Martin Heidegger's (1962) concept of *Dasein*, or being-in-the-world, expands the focus from the body alone to the relational and cultural dimensions of experience. Heidegger posited that individuals make sense of themselves through engagement with their environment, social relations, and practical activities. For Malaysian undergraduates, expressiveness is cultivated through solitary practice and interaction with peers, teachers, audiences, and community-based ensembles. Family music-making, collaborative rehearsals, public performances, and the acoustics of ritual or informal venues all shape how students perceive and communicate expression. Heidegger's view illuminates how

expressiveness is co-constructed within particular cultural, educational, and spatial settings, offering a counterpoint to approaches that conceptualise performance primarily as an individual act.

Furthermore, the methodological implications of this phenomenological stance are considerable. Since the aim is to access the students' lived worlds, the research design prioritises methods that foreground their voices, bodily awareness, and contextual references. Semi-structured interviews are used to explore formative musical histories, breakthrough moments in understanding expressiveness, and the bodily sensations, including breath, weight, and flow, that accompany expressive intentions. In particular, students are encouraged to describe how they learn and perform across Western classical, Malaysian traditional, and popular repertoires, as well as how they respond to different audiences or settings. Interviews allow participants to articulate how elements such as ornamentation, microtonal inflexion, *pantun* wit, or ritual gravitas inform their strategies for expression.

To further explore this phenomenon, video-stimulated recall is employed. Students view recordings of their own practice or performance and comment on their expressive decisions, including the reasons for particular gestures, tone colours, or phrasing choices, and how they perceived the audience's response. This technique makes the tacit dimensions of embodiment and decision-making visible, allowing students to narrate how they adapt and refine their expressiveness in real time (Crispin & Östersjö, 2017). Embodiment elicitation tasks, such as tracing phrase shapes, mapping bodily sensations, or mirroring musical contours through

movement, further invite participants to externalise their internal sense of expression, aligning with Merleau-Ponty's conception of the "lived body."

Moreover, purposive sampling was employed to include BMus Ed students at UPSI representing varied musical backgrounds, instruments, and years of study. Ethical procedures include obtaining informed consent and using pseudonyms. Analysis proceeds through TA with a phenomenological orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2013a), supported by idiographic vignettes to preserve the specificity of each student's narrative. Immersion in the data is followed by close coding of metaphors, bodily descriptions, and contextual cues. Themes are developed interpretatively, clustering around embodied know-how, situated expressiveness, translation across oral and notated systems, and the negotiation of agency within Western-dominated learning cultures.

By adopting this phenomenological framework, the study advances its central aim: to foreground Malaysian undergraduates' "voices of expressiveness" beyond Western traditions. In particular, students are positioned as experts in their own learning. Their culturally embedded expressive codes, such as melisma, heterophonic layering, or ensemble sway, are treated as legitimate knowledge rather than departures from an assumed norm. This approach illuminates how learners translate between oral-aural and written repertoires, how they bridge local aesthetics and conservatoire expectations, and how they shape unique strategies for expression. The findings are expected to generate a culturally responsive vocabulary for teaching expressiveness and to suggest movement-aware and

dialogic pedagogical approaches. They are also anticipated to offer a more holistic understanding of how expressiveness is lived, learned, and communicated by Malaysian undergraduate musicians. Nonetheless, while the focus on depth limits generalisability, the resulting thick description provides valuable insights for educators and researchers seeking to enrich performance training in Malaysia and similar Southeast Asian contexts.

4.3 Research Aim and Questions (RQs)

Drawing on Chapter Two's contextual information and Chapter Three's literature review, I focused on gaining insights into understanding, previous and current experiences, and learning strategies for expressiveness in music performance from the BMus Ed students' perspectives. To support this research, the students' views are an essential starting point for understanding how they actually understand expressiveness, given their diverse musical and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the students' understanding of expressiveness and their formative musical learning experiences, both previous and current, are crucial, as they shape their subjective, context-specific ways of learning expressiveness. Additionally, previous research indicates that manipulation of musical parameters, emotional expression, and expressive body movements are dominant Western-based approaches to expressiveness, and, in this sense, I questioned whether students in the Malaysian context also use similar approaches. Hence, I selected these three main approaches to explore within the Malaysian context and anticipated other approaches that might emerge.

Hence, my research project explored the targeted sampling of the BMus Ed student population at the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts (FMSP), UPSI, Malaysia, regarding their learning of expressiveness in music performance. Specifically, the aim was to bring forth “Malaysian undergraduate voices” by exploring how students’ diverse musical backgrounds and learning experiences can inform the strategies they use to convey expressiveness in musical performance. This includes creative approaches to musical parameters (such as tempo, dynamics, phrasing, articulation, and other elements), emotional expression, and expressive body movements. To achieve this, three Research Questions (RQs) were addressed:

RQ1: How do BMus Ed students in Malaysia first understand the concept of expressiveness in music performance?

RQ2: What are the students’ previous (before BMus Ed) and current (during BMus Ed) learning experiences that contribute to the learning of expressiveness in music performance?

RQ3: In what ways do the students apply their understanding of the concept, as well as previous and current learning experiences, into their learning strategies for expressiveness in music performance?

4.4 Research Design

Informed by constructivist and phenomenological frameworks, my research approach is inductive and cross-sectional, using a mixed-methods design. It is

derived from and applied to Williamon et al. (2021), Creswell and Poth (2018), and Bryman (2016). The details of the mixed-methods design and purposive sampling are elaborated in the following sections.

4.4.1 Mixed-Methods Design

In line with the mixed-methods design, my research involves two phases. Study 1 (Survey Questionnaire) consisted of quantitative data from closed-ended and Likert-scale responses and qualitative data from open-ended responses. Study 2 (Video-Stimulated Recall Interview or VSRI) consisted of qualitative data from the interviews.

Furthermore, in terms of the order and analysis, this study follows a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Study 1 provided initial quantitative and qualitative insights through a survey questionnaire, followed by Study 2, which offered in-depth qualitative data through VSRI. Each study contributed to answering the three research questions through descriptive statistics and TA as appropriate to the nature of the data and aligned with each research question. The quantitative and qualitative data from Study 1 were collected and analysed first, followed by the detailed qualitative data in Study 2.

Overall, the mixed-methods design offers a robust framework for understanding expressive learning in music performance among BMus Ed students

in the Malaysian context. The combination of breadth (Study 1) and depth (Study 2) ensures that my research captures what students believe about expressiveness and how they enact, embody, and reflect on expressiveness strategies that work for them. Hence, integrating quantitative and qualitative insights enables a more nuanced, contextually grounded exploration of students' expressiveness, which would be less complete if approached through a single method alone.

4.4.2 Purposive Sampling

Specifically, in my research, I used purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants based on characteristics relevant to the study's purpose (Williamon et al., 2021). Therefore, it can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Notably, purposive sampling was chosen as the most suitable technique due to my focus on the specific population of BMus Ed students enrolled at a Malaysian university.

Additionally, given the lack of research on undergraduate music and music education students in Malaysia and the need for preliminary yet detailed insights into students' perspectives on learning expressiveness, BMus Ed students from diverse musical backgrounds were selected as participants. These students could provide rich, context-specific, experience-based perspectives relevant to the focus of my study. As supported by Patton (2015) and Etikan et al. (2016), this sampling strategy is appropriate for exploratory, interpretive research aimed at gaining deep

insights from participants with relevant experience with the phenomenon under investigation.

Furthermore, purposive sampling was conducted among BMus Ed participants from my university's faculty, given their availability. The overall population of the understudied BMus Ed students in Malaysia is still small compared to those majoring in music performance. However, this sampling strategy for my specific, targeted BMus Ed student population still allows for diverse responses from students across different semesters and musical backgrounds. This aligns with Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological methodology, in which participants are selected based on their lived experiences with the subject matter, ensuring the collection of meaningful, contextually rich data.

In this study, the participants were male and female students aged 18 years or older from the BMus Ed student population at FMSP, UPSI. They are currently in Semesters 2, 3, 4, and 5, and are studying a major musical instrument during their programme at the university. Specifically, for Study 1 (Survey Questionnaire), 66 respondents ($n = 66$) volunteered to participate and completed the questionnaire, out of an overall total of 135 ($N = 135$) BMus Ed students from the semesters mentioned. For Study 2 (VSRI), 10 participants ($n = 10$) from Study 1's respondents volunteered to participate in the interview.

4.5 Study 1: Survey Questionnaire

4.5.1 Background and Rationale

For Study 1, the survey questionnaire method was chosen to collect structured, quantifiable data in the form of closed-ended and Likert-scale responses, as well as open-ended responses that further support the structured data by providing more detail. All of the close-ended, Likert-scale, and open-ended responses were focused on the BMus Ed students' perceptions and learning experiences of expressiveness before and during their music education degree programme at the university. Notably, both the quantitative and qualitative data in Study 1 allow for identifying broad trends, themes, and variations across a larger sample, which can then be further explored qualitatively in Study 2. As Dibben (2006) suggested in her study of music students' experiences in higher education, a survey-based method provides a valuable first step for identifying participation trends and student experiences in music learning. This can then be followed by interviews to gain deeper insights, enabling the experiences of individual students to be contextualised. Moreover, the combination of quantitative and qualitative survey items allows for a multi-strategy design, following Williamon et al. (2021) and Chin and Rickard (2012), where both numerical responses and open-ended questions provide complementary data.

Moreover, several studies have successfully used questionnaires to explore music students' learning experiences and perceptions of expressiveness in

performance. For example, Lindström et al. (2003) designed a questionnaire to investigate music students' definitions of expressivity, practice habits, and teaching experiences related to expressiveness. In addition, Woody (2000) used an interview-questionnaire approach to study how students develop expressivity through instruction, practice, and performance experiences. These studies guide the structure of my Study 1, which is explained in the following section.

4.5.2 Structure

Study 1 (Survey Questionnaire), consisting of 35 questions, is structured as follows (see **Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire**).

- 1) **PART A: DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION (Questions 1 – 7)**
 - This part contextualises the respondents' backgrounds, including their semester of study and previous academic qualifications. It also considers their musical backgrounds, including learning experiences in formal schools, private institutions, and/or participatory music-making groups, the first musical instruments they played and their current major instruments. Finally, it examines whether learning these previous and current musical instruments contributed to the BMus Ed students' approaches to expressiveness.
 - Questions are multiple-choice and closed-ended.

- The demographics information part was created with adaptations from questionnaires by Lindström et al. (2003), Juslin and Laukka (2004), and Van Zijl and Sloboda (2011).
- 2) PART B: UNDERSTANDING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE (Questions 8 – 15)
- Firstly, this part presents students' first-hand impressions of how they understand and define expressiveness in music performance through open-ended responses.
 - Subsequently, Likert-scale questions, created based on Graham (2011), Meissner (2021), Lindström et al. (2003), Juslin and Laukka (2004), Van Zijl and Sloboda (2011), and Volioti and Williamon (2017), explore the BMus Ed students' agree-disagree 6-scale ratings on what learning expressiveness in music performance relates to, in their opinions.
 - The factors in students' understanding of expressiveness, as reflected in Likert-scale responses, include natural talent, nurtured by learning, interpretation of musical structure, character, high technical skills, emotional expression, and expressive body movements. These factors were drawn from insights in the literature review.
- 3) PART C: LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE BEFORE BMUS ED PROGRAMME AT THE UNIVERSITY (Questions 16 – 22)

- This part first captures the BMus Ed students' previous learning experiences that shape their understanding and expression in music performance, via Likert-scale responses (Questions 16–21).
- The previous learning experiences of expressiveness are drawn from formal and informal settings, as explained in the background and context, as well as in the literature review chapters. These are also derived and adapted from Meissner (2021), Lindström et al. (2003), Juslin and Laukka (2004), Van Zijl and Sloboda (2011), Volioti and Williamon (2017), Bonastre and Timmers (2021), and Mohd Tahir and Hogenes (2024).
- Among others, Likert-scale responses to previous learning experiences in expressiveness include musical parameters, the form and structure of a musical piece, intuition, observation and imitation of how family and peers convey expressiveness, life experiences, and social media platforms. These responses indicate whether the students agree or disagree that these previous formal and/or informal learning experiences have helped shape their expressiveness.
- This part concludes with an open-ended question (Question 22) asking students to give an example from their own previous

learning experience (before the BMus Ed programme) that has helped convey expressiveness.

4) PART D: LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE DURING BMUS ED PROGRAMME AT THE UNIVERSITY (Questions 23 – 31)

- In overview, this part focuses on the BMus Ed students' learning of expressiveness as influenced by their current higher education training, linking to structured music curricula and teacher-student interactions.
- This part first captures the BMus Ed students' current learning experiences that shape their understanding and expression in music performance, using Likert-scale responses (Questions 23-30).
- These current learning experiences of expressiveness are drawn from formal settings explained in the literature review chapter, derived and adapted from Meissner (2021), Lindström et al. (2003), Juslin and Laukka (2004), Van Zijl and Sloboda (2011), Volioti and Williamon (2017), and Bonastre and Timmers (2021). The Likert-scale responses are drawn from the music courses that the BMus Ed students are currently taking at the university to better capture the experiences from those courses that have played a role in shaping their expressive learning.

- Among others, the Likert-scale responses on current learning experiences of expressiveness include factors of individual applied music, piano proficiency, ensemble, Western music history, music theory, and Malaysian traditional and popular classes, whether individual or group. These responses indicate whether students agree or disagree that experiences from these classes have helped shape their expressiveness.
 - This part concludes with an open-ended question (Question 31) asking students to give an example from their current learning experience (during the BMus Ed programme) that has helped convey expressiveness.
- 5) PART E: CONTRIBUTION OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES (BEFORE AND DURING BMUS ED) TO THE LEARNING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE (Questions 32 – 35)
- In overview, this part informs how previous and current experiences inform the BMus Ed students' approaches to expressiveness in music performance.
 - This part begins with Likert-scale questions (Questions 32–33) to capture the BMus Ed students' agree-disagree responses regarding whether, overall, their previous and/or current learning experiences have helped them understand and develop strategies of expressiveness in music performance.

- Next, this part concludes with open-ended questions (Questions 34–35) that ask students to provide examples of strategies from previous (before BMus Ed) and current (during BMus Ed) experiences that they apply to convey their expressiveness in music performance.

4.5.3 Procedure

Firstly in terms of ethics, approval for Studies 1 and 2 was received from the RCM Research Ethics Committee on 22 April 2024 (reference number 240307). Study 1 was conducted from 1–30 May 2024 during the summer term of the Royal College of Music (RCM). Of the 135 BMus Ed students from Semesters 2–5 targeted, 66 students ($n = 66$) responded and volunteered to take part as survey respondents. The respondents were asked to participate only once in the survey questionnaire phase. They answered the online Google Form for Study 1: Survey Questionnaire, which consists of 35 short questions divided into 5 parts. To access the questionnaire, respondents clicked the link ‘Study 1: Survey Questionnaire’ in their emails, after the information sheet and consent form. Notably, the questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The received responses were stored at the researcher’s secure Google Drive tool. These quantitative and qualitative data were also entered into Microsoft Excel for analysis.

4.5.4 Quantitative Data Analysis: Descriptive Statistics

Quantitative data from the multiple-choice, closed-ended, and Likert-scale responses in Study 1 were analysed using descriptive statistics. The analysis provided an overview of trends, frequency distributions, and response patterns among participants regarding their understanding, learning experiences, and perceived strategies related to expressiveness in music performance. Descriptive statistics are essential for summarising and organising raw data into meaningful patterns. It provides an accessible overview of participants' demographic information, musical backgrounds, and self-reported experiences of learning expressiveness. Following the procedures recommended by Bryman (2016) and Williamon et al. (2021), and aligning with the RQs, the analysis involved the following methods:

- 1) **Part A (Demographics, Questions 1–7)** provided contextual background and analysed responses to categorical and multiple-choice items using frequency counts and percentages. These items include the semesters they are in, previous academic qualifications, musical backgrounds based on formal and/or informal learning, previous and current musical instruments learned, and whether these backgrounds and instruments have contributed to students' development of expressiveness. These contextual insights illustrate the diversity of students' musical and educational backgrounds and how these backgrounds shape their expressive learning.

- 2) **RQ1:** Likert-scale responses from **Questions 9–15 in Part B (Understanding of expressiveness)** were analysed to identify students’ conceptual understanding and how these shaped their learning of expressiveness, by using measures of frequencies, means, and standard deviations. In the analysis, measures of variability, such as the standard deviation, were used to capture the degree of consensus or variation across students’ ratings.
- 3) **RQ2:** Data of Likert-scale responses from **Questions 16–21 (Part C: previous learning experiences)**, and **Questions 23–30 (Part D: current learning experiences)** were analysed to identify patterns in students’ reported exposure to formal, informal, and participatory learning settings from previous and current experiences, and how these shaped their learning of expressiveness.
- 4) **RQ3:** Data of Likert-scale responses from **Questions 32–33 (Part E: overall influence of experiences)** were analysed to identify patterns in how the overall previous and current experiences contributed to the students’ learning of expressiveness.

This statistical approach enables the identification of patterns across a broader participant group, forming a baseline from which more interpretive qualitative themes can be developed (Dibben, 2006; Lindström et al., 2003). According to Williamon et al. (2021), descriptive statistics capture learners' general attitudes and tendencies and highlight individual variation, warranting further

qualitative investigation. In a mixed-methods design, this helps ensure that survey results are not treated in isolation but are linked to deeper reflective accounts gathered through interviews or open-ended responses (Williamon et al., 2021).

Furthermore, descriptive statistics for Study 1 were processed using standard Microsoft Excel and Jamovi statistical software, allowing clear visualisations in tables and charts to support the interpretation of broad trends across the students' cohort. These data summaries also served as a foundation for triangulating with qualitative insights and enhancing the reliability of subsequent TA (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Additionally, these patterns across the students' cohort served as a basis for deeper exploration through qualitative analysis and guided the construction of follow-up themes in Study 2.

4.5.5 Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The open-ended responses in Study 1 were analysed using TA, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013b) and Terry and Hayfield (2021). This method was selected for its suitability in capturing students' subjective views and nuanced meaning-making processes around expressiveness.

The six-phase TA process was:

- 1) Familiarisation with the data (reading, re-reading, initial note-taking),

- 2) Generating open, inductive codes,
- 3) Searching for potential themes,
- 4) Reviewing and refining themes,
- 5) Defining and naming themes, and
- 6) Writing up the findings.

These phases were applied specifically to:

- 1) **RQ1:** Open-ended **Question 8 (Part B)**, where students described their personal understanding of expressiveness.
- 2) **RQ2:** Open-ended **Questions 22 (Part C)** and **31 (Part D)**, where students gave examples from their previous and current learning experiences that shaped their expressive development.
- 3) **RQ3:** Open-ended **Questions 34–35 (Part E)**, where students described strategies developed from previous and current experiences that they apply in performance.

This TA enabled the identification of emerging categories, such as emotional engagement, teacher modelling, cultural influences, and embodied learning strategies, which were later expanded and deepened through the interviews in Study 2.

4.6 Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview (VSRI)

4.6.1 Background and Rationale

Study 2 employed the VSRI method to gain in-depth insights into how the BMus Ed students develop and apply learning strategies of expressiveness in music performance. As a qualitative follow-up to the survey questionnaire in Study 1, VSRI in Study 2 aligns with phenomenological and constructivist frameworks by focusing on students' lived experiences, self-perceptions, and reflective learning regarding expressiveness.

Moreover, in terms of its justification and usefulness for Study 2, firstly, VSRI allows participants to view and reflect on their own recorded performances, facilitating real-time, self-led discussions of expressive strategies. Unlike traditional retrospective interviews, VSRI provides detailed, context-specific insights, as students can directly reference expressive choices made during actual performances (Meissner, 2021; Woody, 2006). Notably, examples from previous studies indicate that VSRI helps capture the expressiveness of action when students analyse specific moments in their performances, offering firsthand commentary (Woody, 2006). It enhances self-awareness and critical reflection among students when viewing their own videos, as this increases cognitive recall and accuracy in describing expressive strategies (Meissner & Timmers, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2013). In addition, the student-led format of VSRI gives students agency as participants and reduces interviewer influence (James et al., 2010), which could help reduce

researcher bias in my study. Conversely, giving students the freedom to select the video excerpts they believe best represent their expressive development could also foster their autonomy and encourage ownership of their learning, as supported by James et al. (2010).

On the other hand, several scholars have established the effectiveness of VSRI in music research, thereby supporting its use in my Study 2. For example, Williamon et al. (2021) advocated video-based reflection as a tool for enhancing expressive self-evaluation. Meissner and Timmers (2020) revealed that students become more aware of expressive nuances and can refine their strategies through video recall. James et al. (2010) further supported the use of student-selected video excerpts to elicit more personal meaning and insight, and Maas (2021) asserted that VSRI provides insights beyond what observation alone can yield.

Therefore, in practice, the use of VSRI in my Study 2 would first help reduce my researcher's bias by allowing students to freely select their video excerpts for the interview. Secondly, when students select excerpts that best represent their development and strategies for expressive learning, I could gain more meaningful insights from their detailed, rich descriptions. These insights also reveal how their understanding and learning experiences have helped them achieve their desired approach to conveying expressiveness, as demonstrated in their videos. Thirdly, gathering students' insights through guided interviews, prompts, and interactive conversations is more effective for obtaining a wide range of information about

their expressive strategies than relying solely on observations during this phase of the study.

4.6.2 Structure

The structure of my video-stimulated recall interview in Study 2 is as follows (see **Appendix B: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview Procedure**). The 10 participants (out of 66 respondents from Study 1), who volunteered to proceed to Study 2, were first informed of and went through their pre-interview task description sheet, explained as follows:

- 1) The participants selected 3 video excerpts of their individual practice, each demonstrating their preparation for a single piece from the applied music performance course they are taking this semester.
- 2) For each video excerpt's duration and criteria, participants selected 3 excerpts, each approximately 1–3 minutes, that they felt conveyed their approach to expressiveness in the piece's musical performance.
- 3) To help them choose their video excerpts, the guide to indicative interview questions for Study 2 was also attached to the pre-interview task description information sheet. The guide contains 6 tentative interview questions that relate to how participants used musical parameters, such as phrasing and dynamics, to portray their emotions, move their bodies to the music, and other possible

strategies they used to convey their approach to expressiveness in music performance. Therefore, areas of expressiveness and potential strategies could help guide participants in selecting their 3 video excerpts.

- 4) After selecting their 3 video excerpts, the participants shared them confidentially with me (the researcher) via a password-protected Google Drive. The researcher then contacted each participant to arrange an approximately 1-hour individual interview, which was conducted at each participant's convenience.

Conversely, Study 2's indicative interview questions were:

- 1) Looking back at your 3 video excerpts, could you tell me more about why you chose each excerpt, in terms of conveying your approach to expressiveness in the performance?
- 2) Could you tell me more about why you did your musical phrasing in a particular way for the piece that you played in your video excerpts?
- 3) Could you tell me more about how and why you changed your dynamics and/or tempo in a particular way for the piece that you played in your video excerpts?
- 4) Could you tell me more about the emotional expression that you conveyed, whether it was 'perceived emotion' (emotion that you intended to show from the piece but you did not feel it naturally), or 'felt emotion' (emotion that you felt naturally when performing the

piece), for the piece that you played in your video excerpts?
(Prompt: Did you find that you mostly applied ‘perceived emotion’ or ‘felt emotion’, and why?)

- 5) Could you tell me more about why you moved your body in a particular way when conveying your expressiveness from the piece that you played in your video excerpts?
- 6) Could you share how you handled your musical instrument when conveying your expressiveness from the piece that you played in your video excerpts?

4.6.3 Procedure

Leading up to the procedure, Study 2 was conducted from 24 May to 30 June 2024 during the summer term at the RCM. There was a slight overlap between Study 1 (towards the end of the phase on 30 May) and Study 2 (beginning slightly earlier on 24 May) because some respondents finished Study 1 and volunteered to proceed as Study 2 participants, becoming available earlier for individual interview sessions.

In detail, respondents from Study 1 who provided their email addresses as an expression of interest in participating in Study 2 were contacted and issued a separate participant information sheet for Study 2. The participants clicked on the link ‘Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview’ at the end of the information sheet to find and sign the ‘Consent form for Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall

Interview’ as an indication of giving their consent. Following the consent form, they identified the pre-interview ‘Task description for Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview’. Subsequently, each participant completed the detailed pre-interview tasks described in the Structure section. The ‘Indicative interview questions for Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview’ were included with the pre-interview task description, and full details are presented in the Structure section. Lastly, each participant went through an individual interview session arranged with the researcher, in which the procedures were as follows:

- 1) Each participant was asked to participate in one approximately 1-hour interview. The researcher first contacted each participant after receiving the 3 video excerpts, and the interview day and time were set according to each participant’s availability.
- 2) During each interview, both the participant and the researcher viewed the video excerpts to help the participant recall his or her expressive approach. Later, the participant was interviewed about strategies used to convey expressiveness in music performance as done in the video excerpts.
- 3) The interview consisted of indicative and additional questions, as needed, to gain further insight into the participant’s learning strategies.

- 4) The participant was encouraged to discuss any part of the 3 video excerpts that he or she identified as significant in conveying the expressiveness in music performance.
- 5) Each interview was audio-recorded for transcription and data purposes and was not shared with anyone except the researcher's supervisory team as necessary.

4.6.4 Thematic Analysis of Expressiveness Learning Strategies from Interview Transcripts

The qualitative analysis of Study 2 was guided by TA, following Braun and Clarke's (2013b) six-phase approach. This method was well-suited to exploring students' embodied, reflective, and strategic use of expressiveness, consistent with the study's constructivist and phenomenological frameworks. The analysis aimed to uncover how students applied their understanding of expressiveness, shaped by their prior and current learning experiences, to their performance strategies, thereby directly addressing RQ3.

The six phases applied were:

- 1) Familiarisation with the data

Interview transcripts were read and re-read alongside participants' selected video excerpts. Notes that captured expressive strategies, for example, phrasing, dynamics, gesture, and emotional intent, as

well as references to influential learning contexts such as teachers, peers, and participatory music-making.

2) Generating initial codes

Open, inductive coding highlighted key elements, including:

- a) Interpretation and manipulation of musical parameters
- b) Emotional engagement (both “felt” and “perceived” emotion)
- c) Expressive body movement and instrumental handling
- d) Influence of formal and informal learning experiences.

Codes emerged organically to reflect how students constructed and embodied expressiveness.

3) Searching for themes

Related codes were grouped into broader patterns addressing students’ learning processes, expressive techniques, and contextual influences. Themes such as *strategic control of tempo and dynamics*, *expressive movement*, and *autonomy in expressive choices* were identified.

4) Reviewing and refining themes

Themes were refined for clarity, distinctiveness, and relevance to RQ3, ensuring alignment with the study’s constructivist-phenomenological lens. Themes were tested for coherence across the dataset.

5) Defining and naming themes

Final themes were clearly defined to reflect their core meanings and connections to students' application of expressive strategies. Sub-themes (for example, under *Expressive Embodiment*: body movement, instrumental handling) provided further structure.

6) Writing up the analysis

Themes were integrated into the findings (Chapter Five), supported by direct participant quotations. Links were made to the theoretical framework, and the analysis was integrated with Study 1's findings (from the survey questionnaire's Part E, Questions 34-35) that addressed RQ3. This was further developed through TA, thereby enabling a more critical engagement with the literature and research questions.

Study 2 directly addressed my RQ3: 'In what ways do the students apply their understanding of expressiveness, as well as previous and current learning experiences, into their learning strategies for expressiveness in music performance?' Therefore, through video-stimulated recall and reflection, alignment with RQ3 was achieved through the ways students explained their expressive decisions, including shaping phrases and adjusting dynamics or tempo. They articulated emotional connections to the music and linked strategies to formal instruction, peer influence, cultural practices, and informal experiences. Additionally, students described how bodily movement and instrumental handling supported their expressive intent. The interviews added a reflective depth beyond

Study 1, revealing the strategies students used and why and how they applied them in real-time performance contexts. This captured the multi-modal, embodied, and culturally situated strategies students employ in learning and enacting expressiveness.

4.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter Four has established the logic and procedures of the inquiry, demonstrating how a constructivist ontology and phenomenological epistemology jointly inform the selection of methods that privilege students' meaning-making and lived experience. By combining a broad, exploratory survey with in-depth VSRI, the design first identifies cohort-level tendencies in how expressiveness is understood and learned, then probes the fine-grained, embodied strategies through which students enact expression in practice. Purposive sampling within the BMus Ed population ensures relevance to Malaysian higher music education while accommodating the diversity of backgrounds and repertoires. Analytically, descriptive statistics provide a baseline map of understandings and experiences, and TA integrates students' narratives, metaphors, and movement-aware reflections into coherent themes. Collectively, these choices operationalise the chapter's commitment to bringing forward Malaysian undergraduate "voices of expressiveness" beyond Western traditions, preparing the ground for the findings that follow. These findings reconceptualise the learning of expressiveness by examining how students construct, negotiate, and apply expressive strategies across

oral-aural and notated systems, and how their cultural and educational ecologies shape what counts as expressive performance.

CHAPTER FIVE

**FINDINGS ON THE “MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATE VOICES”:
BMUS ED STUDENTS’ UNDERSTANDING, EXPERIENCES, AND
STRATEGIES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE**

6.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study on Malaysian undergraduate music education (BMus Ed) students’ understanding, learning experiences, and strategies in developing expressiveness in music performance. Drawing on two complementary studies—a survey questionnaire (Study 1) and Video-Stimulated Recall Interviews (VSRI) (Study 2)—the chapter foregrounds students' voices and lived experiences in shaping expressive performance.

The chapter begins with an analysis of how students conceptualise expressiveness in music performance (RQ1), synthesising quantitative and qualitative responses from Study 1. It then explores students’ previous and current learning experiences (RQ2) and examines the influence of formal, informal, and culturally embedded pathways on their expressive growth. The chapter concludes with an in-depth discussion of the strategies students employ to integrate their understanding and experiences into learning expressiveness (RQ3).

Findings are presented thematically, supported by descriptive statistics, thematic analyses, and rich interview narratives. The chapter also highlights the

interplay between Western-oriented pedagogy and Malaysian musical traditions, illustrating how students negotiate technical mastery, emotional communication, and culturally resonant modes of expressiveness across diverse contexts.

6.2 Demographics

A total of 66 out of 135 Bachelor of Education (Music) (BMus Ed) students participated in the survey (Study 1), representing various stages of semesters 2 through 5. This diverse group of respondents offered a broad perspective on their “voices” as they learned to express themselves through music performance. Of these participants, ten students further volunteered for Study 2, which involved a detailed video-stimulated recall interview. This follow-up aimed to delve deeper into their responses and gather more nuanced insights into their experiences and perceptions. Notably, the interviewees’ diverse musical instruments and backgrounds provided a comprehensive understanding of students' viewpoints and enriched the study's qualitative findings.

In Study 1, the largest proportion of respondents came from semester 2, with 18 students (27.3%). There were 16 students from semester 3 (24.2%), and 15 students from semester 4 (22.7%). Additionally, 16 students were in semester 5, and one respondent did not provide information about their semester.

Table 6.1: Respondents for Study 1 (Survey Questionnaire)

Semester	Total	Percentage
2	18	27.3%

Semester	Total	Percentage
3	16	24.2%
4	15	22.7%
5	16	24.2%
No information	1	1.5%
Total	66	100%

For Study 2, the ten participants who volunteered further came from Semesters 2, 3, and 5, with their pseudonyms and current major musical instruments at the university as follows:

Table 6.2: Participants for Study 2 (Video-Stimulated Recall Interview)

Pseudonym	Semester	Major Musical Instrument
Elia	3	Alto saxophone
Zamani	2	Hands percussion
Siti	5	Trumpet
Will	5	Alto saxophone
Yen	5	Flute
Ani	5	Violin
Nora	2	Cello
Carl	2	Drums
Arun	3	Gambus (Oud)
Liza	3	Modern piano

6.3 Findings for RQ1: Understanding the Concept of Expressiveness

6.3.1 Subjective Understanding of Expressiveness

Based on the open-ended, subjective responses to question Q8 (Study 1: Survey Questionnaire) from the BMus Ed students, this Thematic Analysis (TA) examines their understanding of expressiveness in musical performance. The students generally view expressiveness as a multidimensional concept that blends technical mastery with emotional communication. Many of them emphasised that expressiveness involves controlling musical parameters such as dynamics, tempo, and articulation, while also conveying personal interpretation and emotional depth. For some, expressiveness means connecting with the audience on a deeper level, using body language and phrasing to enhance the emotional impact of a performance.

Moreover, several students highlighted the importance of understanding the music's historical and cultural contexts, which they believe enriches their ability to interpret and perform pieces with greater nuance and meaning. Table 5.3 below presents the TA for Q8, based on open-ended responses to the subjective understanding of expressiveness in music performance.

Table 6.3: Thematic Analysis for Q8 (Open-Ended Responses to Subjective Understanding of Expressiveness in Music Performance)

Theme	Description based on Codes	Examples of Responses
Emotional Expression	Expressiveness is understood as the ability to convey emotions through music performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Can release our true emotion through emotion from the piece” (Resp.4) - “The way you put your emotion through your playing” (Resp.5) - “The ability of a musician to convey emotions through a piece of music” (Resp.14) - “The way we express our emotions” (Resp.25) - “Play with emotion” (Resp.18) - “Music is about feelings” (Resp.33)
Communication of Musical Message	Expressiveness is understood as the way to deliver and communicate the intended message of a song or piece through music performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Important part to bring or enhance the music experience and message” (Resp.11) - “The way to deliver a message through pieces” (Resp.23) - “The ability of showing emotion through a piece of song while performing and can deliver the message of the piece” (Resp.38)
Interpretation of Musical Character	Expressiveness is understood as how a musician or different musicians interpret musical character.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “How do you bring the music out, different persons with different emotions might give different vibes even when they are playing the same piece” (Resp.6) - “Conveying emotion and personal interpretation through dynamics, phrasing, articulation, and tone color” (Resp.34)
Visual Expression	Expressiveness is understood as how visual factors convey expressiveness in music performance, seen through expressive body movements and facial expressions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “A good body movement that suited the expression of the song” (Resp.1) - “...it is also a way for musicians to express in front of the audience through body language, especially by facial expressions, so that the audience can feel the musician’s expression” (Resp.59)
Manipulation of Musical Parameters and	Expressiveness is understood as the way musical parameters are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The articulation and dynamics in playing music” (Resp.22) - “Playing a song with good articulation” (Resp.37)

Theme	Description based on Codes	Examples of Responses
Mastery of Technical Skills	manipulated, e.g. through shaping the articulation, changing the dynamics, etc., and also the importance of good playing techniques.	- "Play the music, not just play the notes!" (Resp.44)
Personal Connection with Music	Expressiveness is understood as the importance of a personal connection between the musician and the music played.	- "Feel into the song that you are playing" (Resp.65) - "The way I can feel the beat and rhythm plus with soul when I play certain music genres" (Resp.54) - "Feel the story behind the music" (Resp.61)
Expressiveness as the Core of Musical Performance	Expressiveness is understood as being the most important element in music performance, making music 'alive' when communicated from the performer to the audience.	- "Expressiveness brings colors to the music performance" (Resp.9) - "Expressiveness is one of the most important things to grab our audience's focus during watching our performance" (Resp.57)
Integration between Technique and Emotion	Expressiveness is understood as the importance of integrating both technical and emotional aspects to be communicated from the performer to the audience.	- "Playing with expression to bring the music to life, giving some dynamics or the tone" (Resp.47) - ".. if we could express our feeling during performance ..people can feel our emotion by listening" (Resp.36)

6.3.2 Objective Understanding of Expressiveness

Table 5.4 depicts the frequency of objective responses to Likert-scale questions of Q9-Q15 from Study 1 (Survey Questionnaire). The item with the highest number of "strongly disagree" responses is Q9, which states, "being

naturally talented in music is important in learning expressiveness in music performance," with four respondents. This finding suggests that more respondents indicated 'strongly disagree' with the statement that "being naturally talented in music is crucial for learning expressiveness in musical performance", compared to their less 'strongly disagree' responses to other statements.

Table 6.4: Frequency of Responses for Items Q9-Q15

Item	Text	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q9	Being naturally talented in music is important in learning expressiveness in music performance.	4	4	6	12	22	18
Q10	It is possible to learn the strategies to convey expressiveness in music performance.	2	3	3	8	22	28
Q11	Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to the interpretation of musical structure.	2	1	1	4	21	37
Q12	Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to the interpretation of musical character.	2	1	0	4	27	32
Q13	Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to portraying high technical skills.	2	1	1	5	24	33
Q14	Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to conveying emotional expression.	2	1	1	3	23	36
Q15	Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to conveying expressive body movements.	2	1	2	1	27	33

On the other hand, the item with the most respondents indicating "strongly agree" is Q11, which states, "learning expressiveness in music performance is related to the interpretation of musical structure," with 37 respondents. Item Q14 has the second-highest number of "strongly agree" responses, with 36 respondents. This item reads, "learning expressiveness in music performance relates to conveying emotional expression." Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the respondents strongly agree that learning expressiveness in musical performance is related to interpreting musical structure and expressing emotions.

Table 6.5: Descriptive Statistics for Items Q9-Q15

Item	Text	Min	Max.	Mean	SD
Q9	Being naturally talented in music is important in learning expressiveness in music performance.	1	6	4.48	1.44
Q10	It is possible to learn the strategies to convey expressiveness in music performance.	1	6	4.95	1.28
Q11	Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to the interpretation of musical structure.	1	6	5.30	1.10
Q12	Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to the interpretation of musical character.	1	6	5.25	1.05
Q13	Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to portraying high technical skills.	1	6	5.22	1.10
Q14	Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to conveying emotional expression.	1	6	5.30	1.09
Q15	Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to conveying expressive body movements.	1	6	5.25	1.09

Aligning with the frequency data, the descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire statements also indicates that respondents gave the highest ratings to statements linking the learning of expressiveness in music performance with the interpretation of musical structure (Q11) and the conveyance of emotional

expression (Q14). Both statements recorded the highest average scores of 5.30. This implies that the majority of respondents strongly agree that understanding musical structure and conveying emotions are crucial aspects of learning to perform expressively.

Furthermore, statements about the relationships between learning expressiveness and interpreting musical character (Q12) and expressive body movements (Q15) also received strong agreement from respondents, with average scores of 5.25 each. This suggests that these aspects are also considered highly relevant in their understanding of expressiveness in music performance. Moreover, the statement regarding the connection between expressiveness and high technical skills (Q13) received an average score of 5.22, depicting that technical skills are also recognised as a crucial part of learning expressiveness, although slightly less so than the interpretation of musical structure and character.

Furthermore, the statement that strategies for conveying expressiveness can be learned (Q10) had an average score of 4.95, implying that most respondents agree that expressiveness in music performance can be taught and learned, though with greater variation in agreement. Lastly, the statement about the importance of natural talent in music for learning expressiveness (Q9) received the lowest average score of 4.48. This reflects that while natural talent is considered important by some respondents, the majority place greater emphasis on other aspects, such as musical interpretation and emotional expression, in learning to express oneself. Overall, these findings highlight that respondents tend to value interpretative and emotional

aspects more than natural talent when it comes to learning expressiveness in music performance.

6.3.3 Summary of RQ1 Findings

Based on students' understanding and perceptions of expressiveness, the quantitative results demonstrated that most students perceived expressiveness as central to emotional communication, audience engagement, and personal interpretation. Moreover, open-ended responses revealed deeper insights into how the students internalised and defined expressiveness. Therefore, the answers to RQ1 are as follows. The BMus Ed students in this particular Malaysian context understood expressiveness in music performance as, first, emotional communication to the audience, exemplified by common descriptors such as “feeling the music”, “making others feel”, and “conveying emotion”, among others. Secondly, the students also understood expressiveness as personal interpretation and meaning-making, conveying individual creativity and personality in their performance rather than simply replicating a teacher’s model.

Thirdly, the musical message was also perceived, with the story behind the music communicated to the audience as a means of expressiveness. Subsequently, the students have also understood expressiveness as the portrayal of good technical skills, including the manipulation of musical parameters (for example, dynamics, tempo, articulation, and others), and instrumental playing techniques. Finally, expressiveness was also understood as embodied expression through movements,

facial expressions, and gestures. This embodied perspective has also resonated with performative practices in Malaysian cultural traditions. Overall, the findings for RQ1 highlight the need to recognise culturally grounded, student-led definitions of expressiveness.

6.4 Findings for RQ2: Previous and Current Learning Experiences

6.4.1 Previous Academic Qualifications

Previous academic qualifications convey at which diverse stages of academic development the respondents have attained, providing insight into their musical or non-musical certificate backgrounds. The most common qualification among the respondents is a Diploma in Music from Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), held by 33 respondents. Additionally, 20 respondents hold the *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia* (STPM), also known as the Malaysian Higher Certificate of Education. There are also nine respondents with other qualifications, and three with a Diploma in Music from other universities. One respondent has dual academic qualifications: STPM and another qualification, and one person did not provide their semester information but indicated their academic qualification as STPM.

Table 6.6: Respondents' Previous Academic Qualifications by Semester

Academic Qualification	Semester					Total
	2	3	4	5	-	
Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM)	10	4	5	0	1	20
Diploma in Music (from Sultan Idris Education University) (UPSI)	5	9	3	16	0	33
Diploma in Music (from other universities)	1	0	2	0	0	3
Other qualifications different from the above	2	3	4	0	0	9
Double qualifications	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	18	16	15	16	1	66

Looking at the data by semester, in semester 2, the majority of students have an academic qualification of STPM, with 10 out of 18 respondents holding this qualification. However, in semester 3, the most common qualification is a Diploma in Music from UPSI, with nine out of 16 respondents. In semester 4, the majority again hold an STPM qualification, with five out of 15 respondents. Notably, all respondents from semester 5 have a Diploma in Music qualification from UPSI, totalling 16 students. Thus, this suggests that students in odd-numbered semesters are predominantly from UPSI with a Diploma in Music qualification background, while those in even-numbered semesters are mostly from an STPM background.

6.4.2 Previous Musical Backgrounds

Table 5.7 and Figure 5.1 display the frequency of responses to a question with four answer choices regarding the source of previous music learning as based on formal school syllabi. Respondents could choose 0 or 1 answer. In particular, 13 respondents (19.7%) did not select any answer, and 37 respondents (56.1%) chose

only one answer. Among the 16 respondents who selected only one answer, 18 selected primary school, 11 selected secondary school, 4 selected Malaysia Art School, and 4 selected an international school.

Table 6.7: Source of Previous Music Learning based on Formal School Syllabi

Source of Previous Music Learning	Learned only from this source	Learned from a combination of this and other sources	Total	Percentage
Primary school music syllabus	18	14	32	48.5%
Secondary school music syllabus	11	15	26	39.4%
Malaysia Art School music syllabus	4	4	8	12.1%
International school music syllabus	4	2	6	9.1%
Did not learn music from a formal school syllabus			13	19.7%

In terms of frequency, the most represented source of prior music learning according to the formal school syllabus is primary school, with 32 respondents (48.5%), followed by secondary school, with 26 respondents (39.4%). The Malaysia Art School was chosen by eight respondents (12.1%), and the international school by six respondents (9.1%). Thirteen respondents reported not having learned music through any formal school syllabus, as indicated by their selection of no formal educational institution.

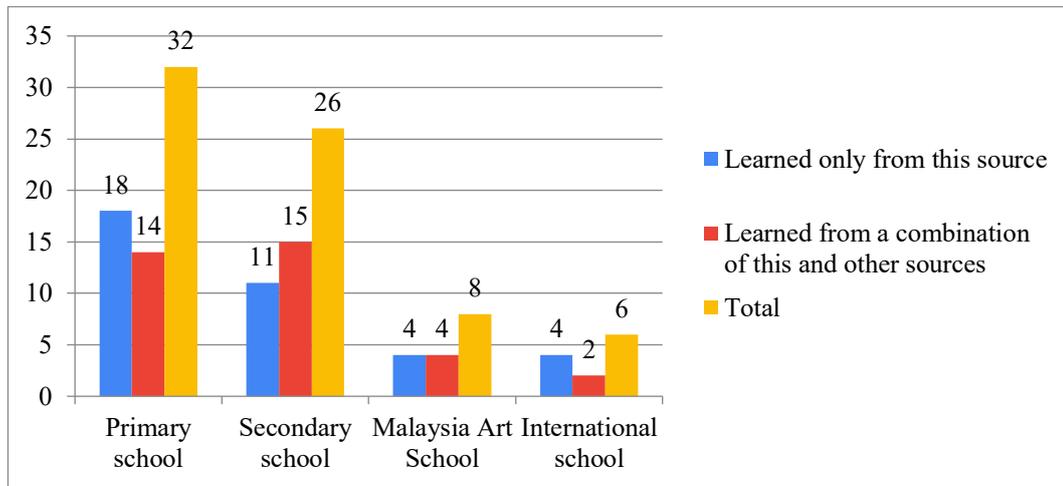


Figure 6.1: Source of Previous Music Learning based on Formal School Syllabi

Subsequently, Table 5.8 and Figure 5.2 depict the frequency of responses to a question with three answer choices about previous music-learning sources at private institutions. Forty-two respondents, or 63.6%, did not select any answer, and 19 respondents, or 28.8%, chose only one answer. The remaining five respondents selected more than one option. Among those who chose only one, 17 selected the Associated Boards of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), and two selected Trinity College London. No respondents indicated receiving private lessons solely from the London College of Music (LCM).

Table 6.8: Source of Previous Music Learning based on Private Institution Syllabi

Source of Previous Music Learning	Learned only from this source	Learned from a combination of this and other sources	Total	Percentage
ABRSM	17	4	21	31.8%
LCM	0	2	2	3.0%
Trinity College London	2	5	7	10.6%
Did not learn music from the private institution's syllabus	0	0	42	63.6%

Based on the frequencies, the most represented source of prior music learning in the private institution syllabus is ABRSM, with 21 respondents (31.8%), followed by Trinity College London with 7 respondents (10.6%). The LCM syllabus was learned by only two respondents (3.0%). However, the majority of respondents, totalling 42, did not learn music from any private institution syllabus.

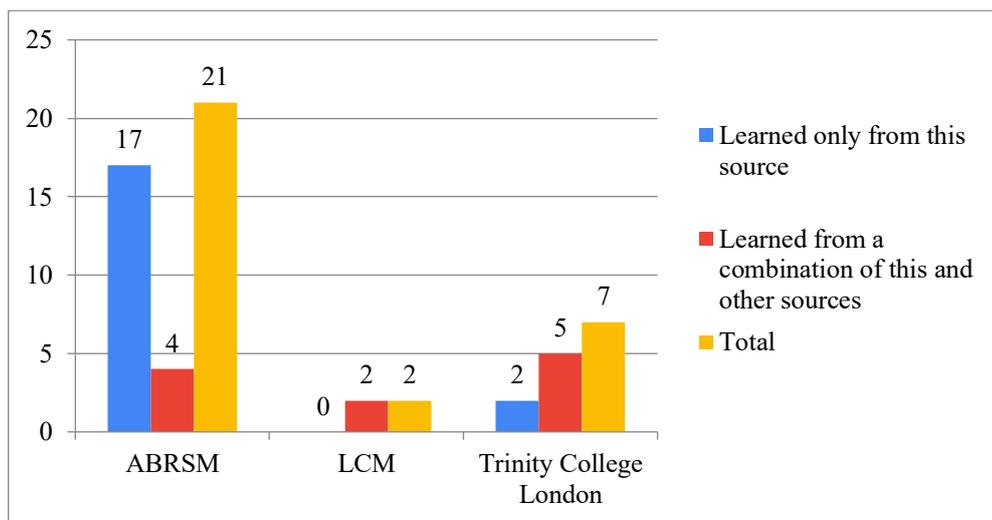


Figure 6.2: Source of Previous Music Learning based on Private Institution Syllabi

Moreover, Table 5.9 and Figure 5.3 present the frequency of responses to a question with five answer choices about previous music-learning sources from participatory groups. Only three respondents (4.5%) did not select any answer, while 25 respondents (37.9%) chose only one answer. The remaining 27 respondents selected more than one option. Among those who chose only one, one respondent selected ‘family’, three chose ‘friends’, 12 chose ‘YouTube and/or social media’, five chose ‘groups or bands’, and four chose ‘community music training’.

Table 6.9: Source of Previous Music Learning based on Participatory Groups

Source of Previous Music Learning	Learned only from this source	Learned from a combination of this and other sources	Total	Percentage
Family	1	23	24	36.4%
Friends	3	25	28	42.4%
YouTube and/or social media	12	30	42	63.6%
Groups or bands	5	26	31	47.0%
Community music training	4	20	24	36.4%
Did not learn music from any participatory group			3	4.5%

In terms of frequency, the most common source of prior music learning among participatory groups is ‘YouTube and/or social media’, chosen by 42 respondents (63.6%). This is followed by ‘groups or bands’, selected by 31 respondents (47.0%). ‘Friends’ are a learning source for 28 respondents (42.4%),

while both ‘family’ and ‘community music training’ are each chosen by 24 respondents (36.4%).

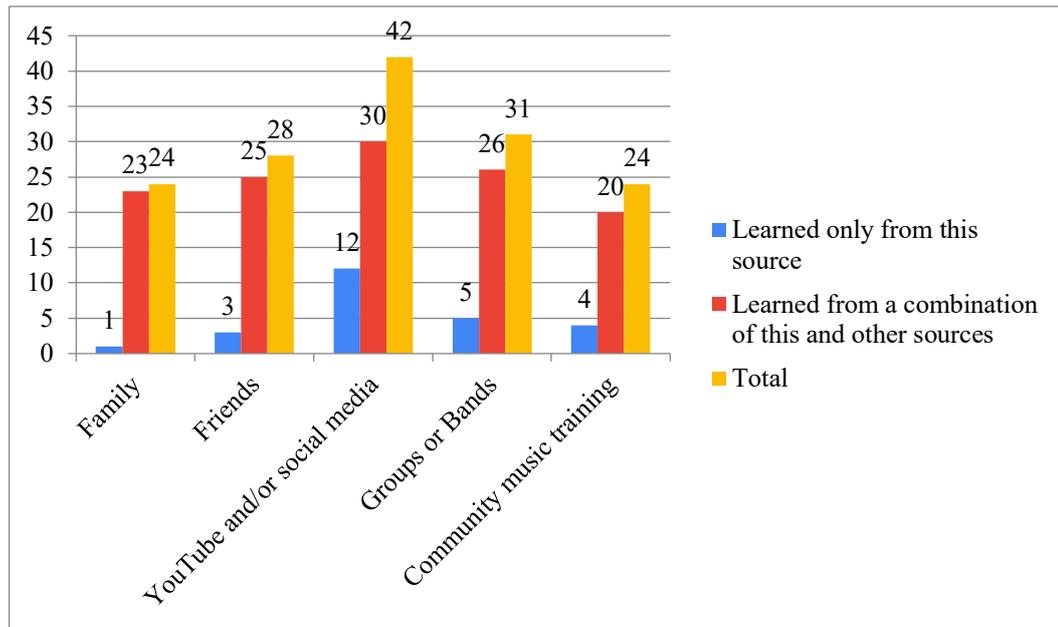


Figure 6.3: Source of Previous Music Learning based on Participatory Groups

The smallest group of respondents is those who did not learn music through any participatory group, with only three people in this category. Compared with respondents who did not choose a formal school (13 students) or a private institution (42 students), the participatory group category was the most commonly used learning source among respondents before entering and studying music education at the university level.

6.4.3 Previous Musical Instruments' Backgrounds

Information on respondents' previous musical instruments provides insights into their early exposure to playing instruments and their diverse choices of previously learned instruments. When asked to list musical instruments they had learned before entering university (Q4a), only one respondent did not answer. Of the 65 respondents who provided answers, 44 mentioned learning just one instrument, 10 mentioned two instruments, 5 mentioned three instruments, 4 mentioned four instruments, 1 person mentioned five instruments, and another person mentioned six instruments. The types of instruments learned by the respondents are demonstrated in the table below:

Table 6.10: Types of Musical Instruments Learned by Students Before Bachelor of Education (Music) Programme

Instrument	Total	Percentage
Guitar (guitar, acoustic guitar, modern guitar, classical guitar)	21	32%
Basses (electric bass, modern bass, bass)	5	8%
Piano and keyboard (piano, modern piano, classical piano, keyboard, modern keyboard, synthesiser)	31	47%
Flutes (flute, bamboo flute, recorder)	7	11%
Saxophone (saxophone, alto saxophone)	6	9%
Traditional and regional instruments, including the gamelan, Cak Lempong, gong, bamboo instruments, various traditional musical instruments, Sabah musical instruments, and the Cuk Cak.	9	14%
Drums and percussion (drum, mallet percussion)	5	8%
Trumpet	5	8%
Violin	6	9%
Vocal (including baritone)	4	6%
Ukulele	4	6%

Instrument	Total	Percentage
Clarinet	1	2%
Orchestration	1	2%

The most commonly learned instrument group among respondents is the piano and keyboard category, with 31 students (47%) mastering at least one type from this group. Within this group, 22 respondents play the piano, 8 play the keyboard, and 1 plays the synthesiser. The second most common group is guitar, with 21 respondents (32%) proficient in it. The third most common group consists of traditional and regional instruments, played by 9 respondents (14%).

When asked where and from whom they first learned to play a musical instrument, the respondents' answers can be categorised as depicted in the following table. The largest proportion of respondents, 27 (41%), learned from a teacher in a formal setting, either a specialised instrument teacher or a general music teacher at a regular school or a music school. The second-largest group learned from family members, including mothers, fathers, and siblings. One respondent mentioned learning from family because their family had a band that regularly performed at weddings and birthday celebrations. The third most common source of learning was school, with seven respondents mentioning learning through a school marching band or general school programmes. Additionally, two students learned from church, and three learned from other sources such as local music gigs, foundations, and neighbours.

Table 6.11: Sources of Musical Instrument Learning for Students Before the Bachelor of Education (Music) Programme

Sources	Total	Percentage
Learned from family	14	21%
Learned from teachers (formal instruction)	27	41%
Learned from friends	5	8%
Self-learned (online & independent study)	6	9%
Learned through a church or religious setting	2	3%
Learned through school (general)	7	11%
Other specific sources	3	5%

6.4.4 Contributions from Previous Musical Instrument Learning

When asked whether "learning to play the musical instrument stated in Question 4 helped you develop your approach to expressiveness" from three types of approach—(a) manipulating musical parameters (e.g., altering tempo, phrasing, etc.), (b) conveying emotional expression, and (c) conveying expressive body movement—the majority of respondents answered 'yes'. Specifically, 59 respondents, or 89.4%, answered 'yes' regarding their ability to manipulate musical parameters, 58 respondents, or 87.9%, answered 'yes' concerning their ability to convey emotional expression, and 58 respondents, or 87.9%, answered 'yes' about their ability to convey expressive body movement. One respondent did not answer questions (a) and (c), and two did not answer question (b). Additionally, one respondent answered both 'yes' and 'no' for all three questions.

Table 6.12: Frequency of Responses for Item Q5

Item	Text	Yes	No
Q5a	Did learning to play the musical instrument stated in Question 4 help you develop your approach to expressiveness in manipulating musical parameters (e.g. altering tempo, phrasing, etc)	59	5
Q5b	Did learning to play the musical instrument stated in Question 4 help you develop your approach to expressiveness in conveying emotional expression	58	5
Q5c	Did learning to play the musical instrument stated in Question 4 help you develop your approach to expressiveness in conveying expressive body movement	58	6

6.4.5 Current Musical Instruments Learned

Information on respondents' current musical instruments learned provides insights into their diverse instrument choices at the university. Two questions were asked about the current instrument learning experience: the type of instrument family being learned (Q6a) and the specific instrument most represented (Q6b). Two respondents did not provide an answer. Two respondents selected all six options, one respondent provided three answers, and one respondent provided two answers. The remaining 60 respondents gave only one answer each. The respondents' answers are summarised in the table below.

Table 6.13: Types of Music Instruments Being Learned by Students During the Bachelor of Education (Music) Programme

Music Instrument Family	Total	Percentage
Bowed strings family	20	30%
Brass family	10	15%
Keyboard family	14	21%
Percussion family	8	12%

Music Instrument Family	Total	Percentage
Plucked strings family	9	14%
Woodwind family	16	24%

Notably, the majority of respondents stated that they are currently learning instruments from the bowed strings family (violin, viola, cello, double bass), with 20 people or 30% of the total. The second-largest group is from the woodwind family, including flute, clarinet, oboe, and saxophone, with 16 respondents (24%). The smallest groups are the percussion family (drum set, xylophone, cymbals, tambourine), with only eight respondents (12%), and the plucked strings family (guitar, harp, mandolin, ukulele), with just nine respondents (14%).

The specific instruments mentioned by the respondents are quite varied. There are 26 different instruments, with the most common being violin (8 respondents), vocal (7 respondents), and viola (6 respondents). Additionally, five respondents mentioned alto saxophone, and five mentioned piano.

Table 6.14: Types of Music Instruments Currently Being Learned

Instrument	Frequency
Accordion	1
Alto Saxophone	5
Cello	3
Celli	1
Clarinet	2
Classical Piano	1
Classical Violin	1
Drum	2

Instrument	Frequency
Drum Set	1
Electric Bass	1
Electric Guitar	1
Flute	4
French Horn	1
Gambus (Oud)	1
Hands Percussion	1
Mallet Percussion	1
Modern Bass	2
Modern Piano	2
Percussion	1
Piano	5
Tenor Saxophone	1
Trombone	2
Trumpet	4
Viola	6
Violin	8
Vocal	7

Before entering university, the focus of musical instrument selection was mainly on guitar and traditional instruments, with 32% and 14% of respondents, respectively. After starting university, the focus on the plucked strings family (which includes guitar and ukulele) decreased to 14%, and traditional instruments were no longer explicitly mentioned. Additionally, before university, bowed string instruments like the violin and viola were chosen by only 9% of respondents. After starting their studies, this increased to 30%, making it the most frequently learned instrument group. Prior to university, the piano and keyboard group were highly

dominant at 47%. However, although it remained popular after starting university, its proportion declined markedly to 21%.

6.4.6 Contributions from Current Musical Instrument Learning

When asked, "Does learning to play the current major musical instrument help develop your approach to expressiveness?" from three types of approach—(a) manipulating musical parameters (e.g., altering tempo, phrasing, etc.), (b) conveying emotional expression, and (c) conveying expressive body movement—all respondents answered ‘yes’ to each question. This means that all 66 respondents (100%) agreed that learning to play their current musical instrument helps them develop expressiveness in manipulating musical parameters, expressing emotions, and conveying expressive body movements.

Table 6.15: Frequency of Responses for Item Q7

Item	Text	Yes	No
Q7a	Does learning to play the current major musical instrument help develop an approach to expressiveness in manipulating musical parameters (e.g. altering tempo, phrasing, etc)	66	0
Q7b	Does learning to play the current major musical instrument help develop an approach to expressiveness in conveying emotional expression	66	0
Q7c	Does learning to play the current major musical instrument help develop an approach to expressiveness in conveying expressive body movement	66	0

6.4.7 Previous Experiences of Learning Expressiveness

Table 5.16 depicts the frequency of responses for questions Q16-Q21. The items with the most "strongly disagree" responses are Q18, Q20, and Q21, each with three "strongly disagree" responses. Q18 states, "I could convey expressiveness in my music performance through my intuition on how the music felt and sounded." Q20 posits, "Thinking about significant life experiences is useful when learning to convey expressiveness in my music performance." Moreover, Q21 articulates, "YouTube music performance videos and other social media platforms provide helpful strategies to convey expressiveness in my music performance." Notably, an equal number of "strongly disagree" responses across these three items suggests that respondents generally do not believe that intuition, life experiences, or music performance videos help them convey expressiveness in their music performances.

Table 6.16: Frequency of Responses for Items Q16 – Q21

Item	Text	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q16	Understanding and mastering the notation, tempo, rhythm, melody, harmony, and other musical parameters is useful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.	2	2	1	3	11	47
Q17	Understanding the form and structure of the music piece is useful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.	2	1	2	3	11	47

Item	Text	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q18	I could convey expressiveness in my music performance through my intuition on how the music felt and sounded	3	1	0	7	22	33
Q19	When working on a particular music piece together with my family and/or friends, I could convey expressiveness in my music performance by observing and applying the same way my family and/or friends convey expressiveness.	2	1	2	9	20	32
Q20	Thinking about significant life experiences is useful when learning to convey expressiveness in my music performance.	3	0	0	9	20	34
Q21	YouTube music performance videos and other social media platforms provide helpful strategies to convey expressiveness in my music performance.	3	0	0	7	18	38

On the other hand, the items with the highest number of respondents selecting “strongly agree” are Q16 and Q17, with 47 respondents each. Q16 emphasises the importance of understanding and mastering notation, tempo, rhythm, melody, harmony, and other musical parameters to demonstrate expressiveness. Conversely, Q17 emphasises the importance of understanding musical form and structure to convey expressiveness. An equal number of "strongly agree" responses to these two items suggests that respondents generally believe that

mastering musical parameters and understanding musical structure help them convey expressiveness in their musical performances.

Table 6.17: Descriptive Statistics for Items Q16-Q21

Item	Text	Min	Max.	Mean	SD
Q16	Understanding and mastering the notation, tempo, rhythm, melody, harmony, and other musical parameters is useful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.	1	6	5.42	1.19
Q17	Understanding the form and structure of the music piece is useful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.	1	6	5.43	1.15
Q18	I could convey expressiveness in my music performance through my intuition on how the music felt and sounded	1	6	5.16	1.21
Q19	When working on a particular music piece together with my family and/or friends, I could convey expressiveness in my music performance by observing and applying the same way my family and/or friends convey expressiveness.	1	6	5.12	1.17
Q20	Thinking about significant life experiences is useful when learning to convey expressiveness in my music performance.	1	6	5.19	1.16
Q21	YouTube music performance videos and other social media platforms provide helpful strategies to convey expressiveness in my music performance.	1	6	5.28	1.16

In line with the frequency data, the descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire statements also demonstrates that respondents gave the highest scores to the statement linking expressiveness in music performance to an understanding of musical form and structure (Q17), with an average score of 5.43. Similarly, the second-highest score was given to the statement connecting expressiveness in their

musical performance to musical parameters such as notation and tempo (Q16), with an average of 5.42.

Additionally, the statements about the importance of YouTube music performance videos and social media (Q21) and reflecting on significant life experiences (Q20) to convey expressiveness also received strong support from respondents, with average scores of 5.28 and 5.19, respectively. This indicates that these aspects are also considered highly relevant to conveying expressiveness. In line with the frequency data, the descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire statements also reveals that respondents gave the highest scores to the statement linking expressiveness in music performance to an understanding of musical form and structure (Q17), with an average score of 5.43. Similarly, the second-highest score was given to the statement connecting expressiveness in their musical performance to musical parameters such as notation and tempo (Q16), with an average score of 5.42.

Furthermore, the statement that intuition can drive expressiveness in music performance (Q18) received an average score of 5.16, indicating that most respondents agree with this claim. However, agreement is more variable ($SD = 1.21$, the highest among the items). Lastly, the statement about the importance of observing and applying the expressive methods from friends or family (Q19) received the lowest average score of 5.12. This implies that while observing and applying expressiveness in a social context is considered important by some respondents, the majority place more emphasis on other aspects, such as

understanding structure and mastering musical parameters, in demonstrating musical expressiveness. Overall, these findings highlight that respondents place greater importance on musical form and parameters in expressing musical expressiveness than on social factors.

6.4.8 Current Experiences of Learning Expressiveness

Table 5.18 presents the frequency of responses to questions Q23-30. The items with the highest number of "strongly disagree" responses are Q24, Q28, Q29, and Q30, each with three "strongly disagree" responses. Q24 states, "Piano proficiency group classes have helped me in applying musical parameters (dynamics, articulation, etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance." Q28 posits, "Applying the music theory skills to musical intentions of a piece is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance." Moreover, Q29 describes, "Learning the Malaysian traditional and popular music styles is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance." Q30 specifies, "Listening to the recordings of the pieces that I learn is helpful to understand how to convey expressiveness in my music performance." An equal number of "strongly disagree" responses for these four items suggests a consistent pattern in respondents' perceptions. Specifically, respondents generally do not believe or agree that piano proficiency group classes, learning Malaysian traditional and popular music styles, applying music theory to musical intentions, and listening to recordings help them convey expressiveness in their music performance.

Table 6.18: Frequency of Responses for Items Q23-Q30

Item	Text	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q23	The individual applied music instrumental classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance	2	1	1	9	10	43
Q24	Piano proficiency group classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance	3	0	1	7	24	31
Q25	Strings, brass, or other ensemble classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance	2	1	1	9	21	32
Q26	Learning about the different musical eras and styles is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance	2	2	2	5	20	34
Q27	Learning about the composer's background and musical intentions of the piece is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance	2	2	1	9	19	32
Q28	Applying the music theory skills to the musical intentions of a piece is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance	3	0	2	7	15	39
Q29	Learning the Malaysian traditional and popular music styles is helpful	3	0	0	5	22	36

Item	Text	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	to convey expressiveness in my music performance						
Q30	Listening to the recordings of the pieces that I learn is helpful to understand how to convey expressiveness in my music performance	3	0	0	4	17	42

Conversely, the item with the highest number of respondents selecting “strongly agree” is Q23, with 43 respondents. Q23 states, “The individual applied music instrumental classes have helped me in applying musical parameters (dynamics, articulation, etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance.” The high number of "strongly agree" responses implies that respondents generally believe or agree that individual applied music instrumental classes help them convey expressiveness in their music performances.

Table 6.19: Descriptive Statistics for Items Q23-Q30

Item	Text	Min	Max.	Mean	SD
Q23	The individual applied music instrumental classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance	1	6	5.31	1.17
Q24	Piano proficiency group classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and	1	6	5.15	1.16

Item	Text	Min	Max.	Mean	SD
	using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance				
Q25	Strings, brass, or other ensemble classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance	1	6	5.15	1.14
Q26	Learning about the different musical eras and styles is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance	1	6	5.09	1.36
Q27	Learning about the composer's background and musical intentions of the piece is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance	1	6	5.03	1.35
Q28	Applying the music theory skills to the musical intentions of a piece is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance	1	6	5.24	1.22
Q29	Learning the Malaysian traditional and popular music styles is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance	1	6	5.28	1.13
Q30	Listening to the recordings of the pieces that I learn is helpful to understand how to convey expressiveness in my music performance	1	6	5.39	1.13

Unlike the frequency data, the descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire statements reveals that respondents gave the highest scores to the statement linking expressiveness in music performance to listening to recordings (Q30), with an average score of 5.39. On the other hand, the second-highest score was given to the statement connecting expressiveness in their music performance to individual applied music instrumental classes (Q23), with an average of 5.31.

Additionally, the statements about learning Malaysian traditional and popular music (Q29) and applying music-theory skills to convey musical expressiveness (Q28) also received strong support from respondents, with average scores of 5.28 and 5.24, respectively. This suggests that these aspects are also highly relevant to learning expressiveness in music performance.

The statements that string, brass, or other ensemble classes can enhance expressiveness in music performance (Q25) and piano proficiency classes (Q24) have the same average score of 5.15. This indicates that most respondents agree that expressiveness in music performance can be demonstrated through learning in piano, string, brass, or other ensemble classes. Lastly, the statements on the importance of learning diverse musical eras and styles (Q26) and understanding the composer's background and musical intentions in expressiveness (Q27) received the lowest average scores of 5.09 and 5.03, respectively. This implies that while knowledge of musical styles, eras, and composers' backgrounds is considered important by some respondents, the majority place greater emphasis on other aspects. Overall, these findings highlight that respondents place more emphasis on individual practice learning as a helpful factor in conveying expressiveness, rather than theoretical knowledge-based factors.

6.4.9 Previous Learning Experiences that Helped to Convey Expressiveness

A total of 48 respondents completed the open-ended section (Q22) asking about their past experiences before pursuing a BMus Ed at UPSI that contributed to their ability to convey expressiveness in music performance. Table 5.20 below presents the TA of item Q22, based on 48 textual, open-ended responses from data collected on previous learning experiences (before the BMus Ed programme) that supported students in conveying expressiveness in music performance.

Table 6.20: Thematic Analysis (TA) for Q22 (Open-Ended Responses to Previous Learning Experiences that helped Convey Expressiveness in Music Performance)

Theme and Sub-themes	Description based on Codes	Examples of Responses
Personal Experience in Music Performances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Performances in Concerts or Shows - Participation in Music Competitions and Forming Bands - Experience in Special Events such as Ceremonies or Weekly Performances - Experience in Music Examinations - Playing in Groups or Bands 	Direct experiences in various types of music performances, competitions, forming bands, special events, taking music examinations, and playing in groups or bands, as previous learning experiences, helped convey expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Solo part in musical performance” (Resp.1) - “..involved in few competitions and build up the band” (Resp.2) - “When we had to perform in an orchestra during a ceremony”(Resp.5); “During my weekly performance” (Resp.7) - “Playing piano exam” (Resp.13) - “Playing with the bandmates together” (Resp.12); “Playing in the group will be more helpful to play the song expressively” (Resp.32)

Theme and Sub-themes	Description based on Codes	Examples of Responses
<p>Learning from Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning from a Music Teacher - Learning by Imitation or Copying Others - Learning from Bandmates or other Musicians 	<p>Learning from other people, including teachers, tutors, bandmates, and other musicians, as well as imitating or copying others' style of playing, were previous experiences that helped convey expressiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "My music teacher trains me to be disciplined in dynamics, tempo, rhythm, and many other music techniques" (Resp.14) - "Copy and paste. For instance, the role model, like my lecturer, showed me how to play the piece" (Resp.38) - "I played with my band members during my Diploma" (Resp.36)
<p>Self-Study and Musical Exploration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning from YouTube or other Online Platforms - Investigating the Historical Background or Synopsis of a Music Piece / Song - Listening to and Interpreting Song Lyrics 	<p>Self-study type of learning and doing musical exploration to understand firsthand the music piece or song to be played and performed, as previous experiences that helped convey expressiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Learning chords, rhythm, and scales from YouTube" (Resp.27); "I listened to many piano performances on YouTube to find ways to express a piano piece" (Resp.63) - "Learning the historical significance of a piece" (Resp.29); "I try to find a synopsis or background of the piece to understand more about the song we are playing" (Resp.11) - "Listening to the lyrics and meaning of the music" (Resp.18); "Before continuing my studies in BMus Ed, I used to understand the lyrics and the meaning of the piece" (Resp.57)
<p>Developing Technical Skills and Musical Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refining Technical Skills through Musical Parameters 	<p>Developing and refining technical skills through musical parameters such as tempo, dynamics,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Learn the song repeatedly and understand the meaning" (Resp.3); "Play it with dynamics and add

Theme and Sub-themes	Description based on Codes	Examples of Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the Structure and Character of a Musical Composition - Applying the Understanding of Music Theory 	<p>rhythm etc., applying music theory, and cultivating a deep understanding of the music, are previous experiences that helped convey expressiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some vibrato on the violin” (Resp.31) - “The music composition and character/structure help me convey expressiveness in music performance” (Resp.9) - “The theory I learned and the experiences I gained during my diploma studies really helped me continue my studies in Bachelor of Education (Music)” (Resp.55)
<p>Emotional and Psychological Influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Life Experiences and Mood - Emotional Experiences while Playing Music - Expressing Personal Emotions through Music 	<p>Emotional and psychological factors related to the music piece or song, as previous experiences that helped convey expressiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Life history, surroundings, and my current mood” (Resp.6) - “Feel the song, understand more about the character of the song” (Resp.42) - “Despite my lack of formal music education, this experience taught me the power of music to communicate beyond words” (Resp.65)

6.4.10 Current Learning Experiences that Helped to Convey Expressiveness

The open-ended question about current learning experiences that have helped convey expressiveness (Q31) was answered by 43 respondents. Table 5.20 below depicts the TA for Q31, based on the 43 open-ended responses to the current learning experiences (during the BMus Ed programme) that supported students in conveying expressiveness in music performance.

Table 6.21: Thematic Analysis for Q31 (Open-Ended Responses to Current Learning Experiences that helped Convey Expressiveness in Music Performance)

Theme	Description based on Codes	Examples of Responses
Importance of Understanding Music Technique and Theory	Respondents' explanation that emphasised the importance of a solid understanding of music technique and theory, as a current learning experience that helped convey expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "The Tonal Harmony subject did help me in learning how to express my musicality through my performances" (Resp.55) - "Learning Western Music History really widen my knowledge about Western classical music" (Resp.24) - "Technicalities and picking the right song/repertoire help me to convey expressiveness in music performance" (Resp.9)
Impact of Applied Courses and Classes	Respondents' explanation that learning and participating in Applied courses and classes significantly enhanced their ability to convey expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Currently, during my Bachelor of Education (Music) program, one learning experience that has significantly helped me convey expressiveness in music performance is my participation in an advanced vocal techniques course" (Resp.64) - "During Applied classes, my teacher will teach me ways to convey the feeling and emotion in that piece" (Resp.48)
Role of Practice and Rehearsal	Respondents' explanation that consistent practices and rehearsals are important to help them convey expressiveness in music performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Make time to practice the piece at least 2 hours per day" (Resp.20) - "Practice and know the character of the song" (Resp.42) - "Playing with your accompaniment person" (Resp.43)
Personal Experiences and Inspiration from Other Musicians	Respondents' opinion that listening to music and observing other musicians' performances are crucial methods for developing expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I listen to a lot of songs, especially the soloist part. I started conveying expressiveness in music by listening to Arabic songs or orchestras like the National Arabic Orchestra" (Resp.59) - "Imitated other performers and guidance by instructor" (Resp.6)
Collaboration and Group Experience	Respondents' explanation that the experience of playing in music groups,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Playing in group, orchestra, and big band helps me a lot to convey expressiveness in music performance" (Resp.27)

Theme	Description based on Codes	Examples of Responses
	orchestras, big bands etc. is helpful for them to convey expressiveness.	- "Playing in orchestra as an alto saxophone player does help me to pick up faster because I need to know quickly and memorize what key I need to play based on the concert pitch" (Resp.54)
Role of Lecturers and Mentors	Respondents' description that guidance from lecturers and mentors is helpful for them to convey expressiveness.	- "The suggestion that my instructor gave me helped a lot" (Resp.29) - "Help from my fellow seniors and lecturers has helped me a lot, especially in terms of musicality and musicianship" (Resp.11)

6.4.11 Summary of RQ2 Findings

Based on the data analysis above, it can be concluded for RQ2 that before enrolling in the BMus Ed programme, students' music learning experiences were diverse, encompassing formal education, private institutions, and participatory groups. In particular, the majority of students received their music education in formal schools, primarily at the elementary and secondary levels: 48.5% of respondents learned in elementary school and 39.4% in secondary school. Additionally, some students learned from private institution syllabi, such as ABRSM (31.8%), from music-making in participatory groups on YouTube and social media (63.6%), and from friends and family. The most frequently studied instruments before BMus Ed were piano and keyboard (47%), guitar (32%), and traditional instruments (14%).

Consequently, these early experiences significantly contributed to students' ability to convey expressiveness in music performance. The majority indicated that

learning to play instruments before college helped them manipulate musical parameters, convey emotional expression, and display expressive body movements. Such diverse learning platforms laid the groundwork for technical proficiency, emotional awareness, and possible creative approaches, all of which are crucial for developing expressiveness in music performance. Moreover, many students reported that early exposure to music in informal settings played a crucial role in their development. Exposures, such as participatory music-making in community choirs, events, or family-led music-making, have contributed to their experiences in storytelling and emotional connection through music rather than technical mastery.

During the BMus Ed programme, the focus shifted to learning musical instruments. More students learned musical instruments from the bowed strings family (30%), such as violin and viola, and the woodwind family (24%), such as flute and clarinet. Nonetheless, while keyboard instruments remained popular, their percentage decreased to 21%. Furthermore, students reflected that their current instrument-learning experiences significantly helped them develop expressive abilities. All respondents stated that learning to play their current primary instrument enabled them to manipulate musical parameters, convey emotional expression, and exhibit expressive body movements.

This shift in focus to specific families of musical instruments during the BMus Ed programme reflects the programme's structured, targeted approach to music education. Students are exposed to more specialised techniques and strategies

for expressiveness, allowing them to continuously explore and refine their individual approaches. The transition from broader, more varied pre-university learning experiences to a more focused, in-depth exploration of strategies during their degree programme appears to be more effective in supporting the development of expressiveness in music performance.

However, while formal lessons provided structured, focused instruction in performance techniques, students often felt constrained by rigid expectations. Several noted that emotional and expressive aspects were not always explicitly addressed during lessons. In contrast, greater emphasis was placed on the technical details of handling their musical instruments and on conveying the musical structures and parameters of the compositions they learned, which mostly align with Western classical music performance pedagogical conventions. Due to differences between local musical traditions and Western conventions, students frequently navigated between the two, resulting in hybrid learning. This hybridity fostered adaptive strategies and created tension when institutional instruction failed to acknowledge or integrate non-Western expressive strategies in music performance.

Collectively, both pre- and in-BMusEd (Music) learning experiences contributed to the development of students' expressive abilities in music performance. Before university, learning was more varied, including elements of traditional instruments, group participation in music-making, and band or ceremonial performances. Conversely, during university, learning became more structured, with various music courses, the application of knowledge from music

performance pedagogical strategies, and performance opportunities at the faculty. These past and present music-learning experiences of the BMus Ed students have helped shape their understanding of expressiveness in music performance. Furthermore, the structured learning experiences at the university, alongside continued exploration of musical styles, have played a significant role in helping students convey emotion, creativity, and technical mastery in their performances. These experiences enable them to become more well-rounded and expressive musicians.

In conclusion, the combination of varied early learning experiences and specialised formal education has provided students with a rich foundation for expressive music performance. The students' ongoing progress in translating technical knowledge into emotional communication and connecting with audiences has been continuously nurtured and developed throughout both stages of their education. This development underscores the importance of combining broad and focused learning in the realm of expressiveness in music performance. However, the findings indicate that it is essential to integrate informal, culturally embedded experiences (based on students' prior experiences) into formal pedagogy (students' current experiences at the university). Thus, acknowledging students' prior experiences allows for more meaningful engagement and the development of expressive strategies that are both personal and culturally resonant.

6.5 Findings for RQ3: Learning Strategies for Expressiveness

6.5.1 Analysis Approach and Triangulation for RQ3 Data

To address RQ3, a TA was performed across two complementary datasets: (a) Study 2 VSRI interview transcripts and (b) the parts of the Study 1 survey that speak to RQ3 (Q32–Q35). In particular, TA was selected because it is well-suited to surfacing patterned meaning across participants’ accounts while remaining sensitive to nuance and context, which are the key concerns in this phenomenological–constructivist study (Braun & Clarke, 2013b; a; Terry & Hayfield, 2021). Given the study’s aim to foreground Malaysian undergraduate “voices” and expressive know-how beyond Western prescriptions, TA also enabled culturally situated practices, such as *dikir barat*, *zapin*, *gamelan*, and *takṣīm*, to be treated as legitimate analytic material rather than deviations from a Western norm.

Furthermore, in terms of data corpus and orientation, the primary analytic corpus comprised the 10 VSRI interviews, in which participants narrated and demonstrated their strategies while viewing self-selected performance videos. In parallel, I analysed Study 1 survey items that map onto RQ3: Q32–Q33 (Likert items on the overall influence of previous/current experiences on expressive strategies) and Q34–Q35 (open-ended accounts of strategies from previous and current learning). My epistemic stance was phenomenological–interpretivist (attending to lived experience and meaning-making), and my ontology was constructivist (treating strategies as co-constructed within social–cultural contexts).

Additionally, in explaining the coding and theme development conducted here, the analysis followed the Braun and Clarke approach. It proceeded through several steps: (1) immersion in the transcripts and open-ended survey responses, (2) open, inductive coding of action-focused segments (e.g., “breath sets phrasing,” “ghost notes carry mood,” “cueing band via eye contact,” “ornamentation as feeling”), and (3) patterning and clustering of codes into candidate themes. This was followed by (4) iterative review and refinement against the whole corpus, and (5) definition and naming of final themes with clear inclusion criteria and boundaries. Although coding was predominantly inductive, I used abductive moves, namely moving between data and literature on expressiveness (e.g., dynamics, embodiment, social learning), to test and sharpen theme boundaries. Throughout, I memoed analytic decisions, noted culture-specific terms in Malay or Arabic where participants used them, and kept an audit trail linking exemplar quotes to codes and themes.

To integrate survey and interview evidence, triangulation was performed at two levels. First, quantitative–qualitative convergence: descriptive results from Q32–Q33 (Table 5.24–5.25) indicated strong agreement that *current* BMus Ed experiences shape expressive strategies, which informed the weighting of institutional/ensemble influences when interpreting VSRI accounts. Second, qualitative–qualitative integration: open-ended responses to Q34–Q35 were coded using the *same codebook* as the interviews, enabling code merging and theme confirmation across methods. As a result, this integration produced five cross-

source themes—Technical Proficiency, Contextual Understanding, Dynamics Control, Emotional Resonance, and Adaptive Practice—mapping participants and exemplar evidence to each theme.

6.5.2 Analysis of Expressiveness Learning Strategies from the Participants' VSRI Interview Transcripts

The VSRI is the methodological tool used in Study 2 of this research to capture and analyse the students' reflective processes. In this study, the VSRI involved participants (pseudonyms were used) selecting their recorded practices and performances to be shared with the researcher (interviewer) earlier. During the individual interview sessions, they were asked to review and discuss their recorded performances. Notably, the primary goal is to provide students with the opportunity to recall, reflect, and articulate their approaches and strategies for conveying expressiveness in music performance.

During the VSRI, students recalled from their performance videos. They responded to guided prompts about their strategies for conveying expressiveness, including manipulating musical parameters (such as dynamics, tempo, articulation), emotional expression, and expressive body movements. Therefore, the VSRI in this study enables a deeper understanding of how students perceive their own expressiveness in music performances by integrating technical skills and expressive aspects.

Additionally, the VSRI indirectly captured nuances of student musicianship, revealing insights into their self-awareness and the impact of their expressive choices. By reflecting on their performances, students can identify strengths and areas for improvement, leading to more nuanced and personalised feedback. This technique aids self-reflection and contributes to the study's exploration of various approaches to expressive learning in music performance.

Participant 1: Elia (Alto Saxophone)

Elia's experiences, strategies, and creative approaches to expressiveness in her music performance reveal a deep engagement with both the technical and emotional aspects of playing the alto saxophone. As an undergraduate student, Elia mentions that her lecturers expect her to surpass the technical skills she demonstrated during her diploma education. This includes mastering the technical aspects of saxophone playing, which she considers the foundation for expressing emotion in music. She understands that technical proficiency allows her to perform pieces more effectively and convey emotions expressively.

Elia faced the challenge of interpreting the piece "Song for Helena" with little background information, as it lacks a widely known description or context. She had to rely on her intuition and emotional interpretation to create a narrative for the piece. She approached this by guessing the music's emotional content, which she imagined as sad and emotional, possibly involving unrequited love or longing.

Moreover, Elia's practice videos illustrated her use of different dynamics and expressions to convey emotions. She explained how she tried to express various emotions through dynamics, such as transitioning from soft to loud dynamics to indicate emotional changes in the music. Elia also noted that she had to interpret the dynamics and emotions herself because her sheet music lacked explicit dynamic markings.

In particular, a key element of her strategy involves controlling her breathing and phrasing to match the emotional tone of the music. Since "Song for Helena" requires continuous breath support, she focuses on maintaining stable breath control throughout the different phrases to ensure that each part of the piece conveys the desired emotional narrative.

Furthermore, Elia discussed the difference between perceived emotion and felt emotion in her playing. Initially, she relied more on perceived emotion, attempting to interpret and mimic the emotions conveyed by others who have performed the piece. However, she expressed a desire to reach a point where she can integrate her felt emotions into her performance, making her music more personally meaningful and potentially more impactful for the audience.

Elia also explained how her body movements during performances are usually spontaneous and influenced by the melody and dynamics of the piece. For instance, she might move her body just slightly to reach high notes in her playing,

or physically express the emotional content of the music. These movements are performative and serve practical purposes in her performance.

However, despite external challenges such as background noise, Elia managed to focus on her practice by using earphones to block out distractions. Her ability to maintain concentration in a noisy environment reflects her adaptability and commitment to enhancing her expressiveness.

In summary, Elia's approach to expressiveness in her music performance involves a combination of technical mastery, creative interpretation, emotional engagement, and adaptive strategies to overcome external challenges. Her journey highlights the importance of blending technical skills with emotional depth to create her musical narratives.

Participant 2: Zamani (Hands Percussion)

Zamani's experience with hand percussion is deeply rooted in traditional and Latin rhythms, as he has studied *rebana*, *darbuka*, congas, and traditional drums. His musical expressiveness is greatly influenced by his understanding and practice of these instruments across different musical genres. Zamani's choice of the song "Idam Laduni," which blends traditional and modern elements, reflects his appreciation for cultural heritage while engaging with contemporary expressive approaches.

Additionally, he demonstrated a strategic approach to balancing sound and rhythm with his bandmates, particularly through eye contact and cues during performances. He emphasised the importance of not overpowering fellow musicians, which requires careful control of dynamics. To him, sensitivity to balance and teamwork is essential for maintaining the flow of performance, especially in live settings where spontaneity and improvisation play a significant role. His strategy involved spontaneously adapting to changes in rhythm and dynamics and improvising to maintain a harmonious, expressive sound.

Moreover, Zamani's expression was largely spontaneous, driven by his understanding of the song's emotional content and the collective vibe of the performance. His body movements, though unplanned, were a natural response to the musical atmosphere, enhancing visual and emotional connection with the audience. Notably, his approach to conveying emotion in his performance was greatly influenced by the piece's inherent mood, which he internalised and expressed through his playing and physical presence on stage.

Furthermore, Zamani's emotional expression was closely tied to his interpretation of the song's mood. For example, in "Idam Laduni," he identified the piece as lively and joyful, which was reflected in his performance. The emotional tone of the music was conveyed through the percussion's rhythmic patterns and through his interactions with the band members and the audience. In particular, Zamani's ability to transition from initial nervousness to a more confident and

joyous performance demonstrates his adaptive emotional expressiveness, which is crucial for engaging the audience and delivering a meaningful performance.

Other than that, he revealed that practising with the band significantly enhanced his ability to express the music compared to practising alone. The collaborative environment of band rehearsals allowed him to engage more fully with the music, benefiting from his fellow musicians' support and eye contact. This collective dynamic is vital for Zamani, as it fosters a deeper connection with the music and enables a richer, more expressive performance.

Conversely, in terms of physical performance, he mentioned that his style is shaped by whether he is sitting or standing while playing. He stated that sitting can limit his body movements, potentially restricting his ability to express the music fully. In contrast, standing offers more freedom of movement, allowing him to move his body in various expressive ways. Zamani's physical engagement with his instrument and the surrounding space is integral to his expressiveness, as it reflects the energy and emotion of the performance.

Over time, Zamani has seen significant progress in his ability to express himself musically. Initially unfamiliar with "Idam Laduni," he has come to understand and enjoy the song more through practice, thereby helping him develop his expressiveness. Thus, this development highlights the importance of familiarity and practice in fostering emotional and expressive connection with music.

For Zamani, the key to expressiveness lies in understanding the mood and essence of the song. His ability to convey emotion through his playing depends on this understanding, as it guides how he manipulates his instrument and body to reflect the desired mood. Therefore, Zamani's approach underscores the importance of emotional intelligence in musical performance, where the artist's connection to the music is as vital as technical ability.

Notably, Zamani's musical expressiveness blends cultural appreciation, strategic musicality, spontaneous creativity, and emotional engagement. His journey from learning traditional rhythms to mastering expressive performance in a contemporary context reflects a deepening of his artistic skills and emotional expression. Through his experiences, strategies, and creative approaches, Zamani demonstrates the importance of understanding, practice, and emotional connection in delivering an expressive musical performance.

Participant 3: Siti (Trumpet)

Siti chose "Konzert-Polka" by W. Brandt, a lively and fast-paced piece, as it contrasts with slower-tempo classical works and aligns with her preference for energetic music. She is particularly drawn to pieces with tempo changes, as they allow her to explore different expressions within a single performance. The transition from the pianist's vocal-like melody as accompanist to the trumpet's main tempo is a key focus of her expressiveness.

In her video, Siti manipulated the musical phrasing, articulation, and dynamics to convey the piece's character. For example, she mentioned playing with light staccato and softer dynamics in certain sections to create a vocal-like quality, which she associated with gentle and subtle expression. As a trumpeter, she finds it challenging to achieve soft dynamics because the instrument is inherently loud. Hence, to overcome this, she practised controlling her emotions to soften the piece's sound. Loud dynamics came more easily to her, but achieving smooth transitions between loud and soft required careful control and practice. However, Siti did not face significant breathing challenges, as the piece provides rest moments during the pianist's solo passages, which Siti used to catch her breath and prepare for the next entry.

Moreover, Siti associated different tempi with different emotions. She described the beginning of "Konzert-Polka" as a gentle and soft introduction, like getting to know someone before dancing. This reflects her ability to interpret and convey the piece's emotional narrative. While Siti acknowledged the emotions suggested by the piece, she also integrated her personal feelings into her performance, particularly emphasising happiness as the primary emotion.

On the other hand, regarding her body movements, such as swaying or moving to the side, Siti mentioned that these were spontaneous and helped her feel more relaxed and connected to the music. Therefore, these movements were not premeditated but were a natural extension of her emotional state during her playing.

Specifically, one of the biggest challenges Siti faced was controlling the trumpet to produce soft dynamics without losing its sound, a challenge that required extensive practice. Siti adjusted her practice routine based on her lecturer's advice, often using a metronome to maintain a consistent tempo, which she revealed as crucial for conveying expressiveness. She also closely coordinated with her piano accompanist to ensure they were in sync, which helped her balance the sound and convey expressiveness during their performances. Over time, she had noticed an improvement in her ability to play difficult sections of the piece, which she attributed to continuous practice and analysing other players' interpretations.

Additionally, Siti also mentioned that she still has much to learn about expressing emotion in music. She viewed her progress positively but acknowledged the need for ongoing practice to refine her expressiveness further. Siti's approach is characterised by a blend of technical precision, emotional insight, and spontaneous physical engagement with her instrument. Her willingness to adapt, learn, and refine her skills reflects a deep commitment to developing her musical expressiveness.

Participant 4: Will (Alto Saxophone)

Will's approach to musical expressiveness was deeply tied to his emotional connection to the music. He chose the song "Missing You" by T-Square because its universal theme of loneliness and longing resonated with him, something he translated into his playing. For him, feeling the music is far more crucial than simply

replicating the notes. In his solo practice, he focused on internalising the emotions conveyed by the song and then expressing them through his performance. He began by listening to the original version of the song to understand the emotion it conveyed, then built his own interpretation, transitioning from perceived emotions to those he genuinely felt.

In his performance of “Missing You”, Will carefully applied phrasing and articulation to match the emotional depth of the song. He mentioned drawing inspiration from the drummer’s phrasing in the original version of the song, thereby aligning his breathing and phrasing when he played it to maintain the intended mood. In particular, he varied his phrasing between verses and choruses, using breathing techniques to shift dynamics and emphasise certain parts of the song when needed.

Furthermore, dynamics play a crucial role in Will’s approach to expression. He incorporated techniques taught by his mentor, Che’ Fahmi, such as gradually shifting dynamics from soft to loud in a single breath. This practice allowed him to convey more emotions and variations in his playing, particularly in distinguishing the energy levels between verses and choruses. Will’s body movements are also integral to his expressiveness. He naturally swayed and moved with the music, which he felt deepened his connection to the song and helped him convey its intended emotions clearly. These movements were especially noticeable during his solo practice sessions, where moving his body in time with the music helped him internalise and express the song's emotional content more effectively.

Additionally, Will also discussed the physical aspects of playing the alto saxophone and how these contributed to his expressiveness. He mentioned the challenges of handling the instrument, especially when hitting high notes (altissimo), which required specific techniques and adjustments to the instrument's position. His approach, including the angle at which he held the mouthpiece, was personalised to enhance both his comfort and expressive ability.

Other than that, Will also described his expressiveness as varying across practice environments. He felt greater freedom and comfort when practising alone, which allowed him to focus deeply on expressing his emotions. However, when playing with a band, he discovered that the collaborative environment added a new dimension to his expressiveness, requiring him to adapt and balance with other musicians.

Over time, Will had observed significant growth in his musical expressiveness, particularly as he transitioned from solo performances to playing with a band. He acknowledged that playing live with a band enhanced his expressiveness, offering a more dynamic and powerful experience than practising alone. Interacting with other musicians led him to explore improvisation and new possibilities in expressiveness, driving continuous growth in his musical journey.

Notably, Will's musical expressiveness is a multifaceted process that involves emotional engagement, technical mastery, and physical expression. His strategy reflects a deep understanding of the music, a commitment to continuous

learning, and a personal connection to the pieces he plays. Consequently, through these elements, Will delivers a unique and heartfelt expression in his alto saxophone performances.

Participant 5: Yen (Flute)

Yen transitioned from playing the oboe, an instrument with a small reed and mouthpiece, to the flute, which has a larger embouchure hole. This shift required her to adjust her embouchure and posture, which was initially challenging but improved over time with support from her family and friends. She highlighted the differences between practising alone and playing with an accompanist, noting that she had to adapt her expressiveness to balance sound, tempo, and dynamics. This collaborative practice enhanced her expressiveness by requiring constant adjustment and refinement.

Specifically, Yen began her practice preparation by listening to performances of the piece “Tico tico no fuba”, which she was working on, using platforms like YouTube to observe how other musicians played it expressively. Initially, she mimicked these performances, which helped her establish a foundation for her own expressiveness. From there, she gradually developed her unique style. Her approach to dynamics was methodical. She first focused on understanding the music's phrasing, then applied dynamics by following the melody's natural flow. For instance, she used a crescendo as the melody grew louder, emphasising the importance of breath control to maintain phrasing and to make dynamic changes.

At first, Yen relied on the emotions conveyed by other performers or her tutor. Gradually, however, she connected with the piece on a deeper level, allowing her own feelings to contribute to her expressiveness. This gradual transition from perceived emotion to felt emotion was a key aspect of her expressive development. She also incorporated spontaneous body movements into her performances, which she identified as helpful for relaxation and improving her expressiveness. For example, moving her body forward during a crescendo or pulling back during softer sections of the piece helped her embody the music physically, enhancing her overall expressiveness.

Moreover, Yen adapted her approach to expressiveness based on the practice environment. In smaller rooms, she revealed it was easier to control sound projection and expression. In larger spaces, like the KM4 room at the faculty, she modified her playing style to balance her sound with the piano accompanist, demonstrating her ability to adapt to different acoustic environments. She also kept detailed notes during her practice sessions, particularly after receiving feedback from her tutor. She carefully applied these notes to her score, ensuring that every aspect of the performance—dynamics, articulation, and emotional expression—was executed thoughtfully and in great detail.

Additionally, Yen's approach to musical expressiveness blends imitation, methodical practice, and gradual emotional engagement with the music. Her experience underscores the importance of adaptability, both in technique and emotional connection. Her creative strategies, such as adapting to different

environments and taking detailed notes, highlight her thoughtful, reflective approach to mastering musical expressiveness. This journey is marked by continuous learning, adaptation, and refinement, all aimed at developing a deeper connection with the music and effectively conveying it to her audience.

Participant 6: Ana (Violin)

Ana chose the transcribed version of "Young and Beautiful" by Lana Del Rey for its expressive nature and themes of love, beauty, and the fear of ageing. She discovered a personal connection to the song's message, which helped her convey genuine emotions and made her performance feel more authentic. However, Ana experienced stress due to the demands of her violin class, especially as performance week approached. Nonetheless, despite the pressure, she recognised the importance of consistent practice and of pushing through moments of lack of practice. Over time, her practice evolved from struggling to balance dynamics and tempo with her quartet to achieving a performance that she felt was emotionally resonant and well-balanced. This progression highlights her growth and adaptation throughout her practice.

Before performing, Ana studied the song's lyrics to understand its themes deeply. She shaped her musical phrasing and articulation to align with the song's narrative, emphasising the importance of storytelling in her performance. In particular, Ana applied dynamic changes, such as crescendos and decrescendos, to add emotional depth to her playing. She carefully adjusted her expression to

maintain comfort while conveying emotion through accents and tempo changes. Ana stressed the importance of felt emotion over perceived emotion, believing that sincere feelings help create a stronger connection with the audience. She drew on her emotional experiences to inspire and inform her performance, aiming to make her music impactful for the audience.

Additionally, Ana's body movements were a natural extension of her emotional connection to the music. She described how her body responded to the piece's dynamics, using movement to enhance her self-expression during the performance. Through repetitive practice, Ana developed muscle memory, allowing her to play the violin more naturally and expressively. This approach demonstrated how she internalised the music and technique, making her performance smoother and more instinctive. Ana also adapted to different practice environments, including practice rooms with air-conditioning issues and poor acoustics. Notably, she overcame these challenges by focusing on the acoustic feedback and imagining performing in a better venue, demonstrating her ability to maintain her expressiveness despite external difficulties.

In summary, Ana's approach to musical expressiveness is deeply rooted in her emotional connection to the music, her strategic manipulation of musical parameters such as phrasing and dynamics, and her creative adaptation to challenges. Her journey reflects a commitment to conveying sincere emotions and achieving a strong connection with her audience.

Participant 7: Nora (Cello)

Nora shared that she began her cello journey without prior experience. However, through her lessons at the university, she gained a solid foundation in basic techniques, including posture, bowing, and fingering. This experience reflects the technical proficiency strategies she employed to enhance her skills. She acknowledged the challenges of adapting to fast tempi and complex fingering techniques, highlighting the ongoing learning required to master these skills.

Furthermore, Nora also emphasised the importance of understanding musical parameters such as phrasing, tempo, and dynamics to convey expressiveness. She applied musical phrasing by paying close attention to slurs and bowing, allowing her to play the notation more accurately. In this regard, Nora demonstrated a strong grasp of contextual understanding and dynamic control, as well as adjusting the tempo to reflect the emotions in her chosen piece, “Air (from the Peasant Cantata)”, composed by Johann Sebastian Bach.

Specifically, she mentioned that her facial expressions change spontaneously with the dynamics and tempo of the music, indicating how she relies on felt emotions to mirror the mood of the piece without deliberate planning. This response enables her to communicate the emotions in the music authentically.

Additionally, Nora’s body movements, such as swaying and relaxing her posture, helped reduce tension and enhance the expressiveness of her musical

performance. This approach reflects her adaptive practice and creative methods in responding to various musical parameters, including tempo and dynamics, in her cello technique.

Nora also noted a difference in how she expressed the music when practising alone, when she was more at ease, versus when playing with an accompanist or in front of an audience, where she felt slightly nervous. Consequently, this challenge affected how she conveyed musical expressiveness, underscoring the importance of adaptive practice across different performance settings.

On the other hand, she highlighted that studying and understanding the music's background, along with overcoming technical challenges, had helped her find a deeper way to convey expressiveness. Her learning process and experiences underscore the role of technical proficiency and contextual understanding in delivering more expressive performances.

Overall, Nora has made significant progress in expressing emotion and conveying expressiveness through the techniques and approaches she has applied during her training. By focusing on technical understanding, musical parameters, emotional responses, and continuously adapting to various practice environments, she has succeeded in conveying expressiveness in her musical performances. This approach highlights the importance of continuous practice, reflection, resilience, and ongoing adaptation in different practice environments to achieve significant progress in conveying expressiveness in music performance.

Participant 8: Carl (Drum)

Carl's experience learning drumming techniques such as "rudiments" and "ghost notes" emphasises his focus on foundational elements that enhance musical expressiveness. These basics, involving different note values like eighths, triplets, and sixteenths, are crucial for creating "fill-ins" that bridge various parts of a song. Notably, these "fill-ins" connect musical sections while maintaining the flow and conveying the song's emotional message.

In particular, the concept of "ghost notes" is particularly important to Carl, as they help maintain the rhythm while ensuring the emotional continuity of the song. By strategically placing ghost notes within musical phrases, Carl ensures the song's overall feel continues, allowing him to convey its message to the audience without disrupting the mood.

Moreover, for his piece, Carl chose Dewa 19's "Satu," a song he felt conveyed a deep relationship between humans and the Creator. His choice was based on a personal connection to the song's message, which resonated deeply with him. This connection allowed him to immerse himself in the song, understand and interpret its emotional intentions, and use his drumming techniques to convey expressiveness in his performance.

Additionally, Carl's approach to dynamics to convey his emotional expression, especially from the contrast between soft "ghost notes" and powerful,

loud “snare hits”, illustrates his understanding of how dynamics influence the emotional impact of a performance. He recognised that maintaining the right dynamic balance is crucial to accurately portray the intended emotions of the song, whether in the calm, moderate sections of "Satu" or its more intense, energetic parts.

Conversely, Carl’s emphasis on "playing with soul" and his emotional expression through his manipulation of musical parameters, such as dynamics, indicate that he was following technical rules and was deeply engaged with the music on a personal and emotional level. To him, this emotional involvement is important for his performance to resonate with the audience.

According to the tempo described, "Satu" has a relatively fast pace at 142 beats per minute (BPM). Nevertheless, Carl carefully managed the tempo to ensure the song’s message was effectively communicated. He understood that the tempo needed to align with the song’s mood—neither too fast to disrupt its calmness nor too slow to diminish its emotional impact. His attention to the song's tempo demonstrates his thoughtful approach to expressive performance.

Subsequently, Carl experienced a mixture of felt and perceived emotions during his practice and performances. Initially, he struggled to connect emotionally with the song’s message and relied more on the information he had about the song. However, through repeated practices, both individually and with his band, he began to internalise the song's message, shifting from a mostly cognitive understanding to a deeper emotional connection. This transition highlights his process of moving

from intellectually understanding emotions to truly feeling them, a key element of expressiveness in music performance.

Specifically, Carl's body movements during practice and performance—such as nodding, leaning forward, and shifting to the side—were physical responses and were closely tied to his expression. He mentioned that these movements were spontaneous and reflected his engagement with the music, helping him to "play with soul" and communicate rhythm and emotional expression to the audience. His ability to adapt to performance situations, as seen in a humorous moment when he missed a "fill-in" but continued without demonstrating it to the audience, reveals his flexibility and his ability to maintain his flow and expression even when things did not go as planned.

Collectively, Carl's journey as a drummer is marked by a deep engagement with both the technical and emotional aspects of musical performance. His focus on fundamental techniques, careful song selection, dynamic control, emotional expression, and spontaneous expressive body movements contributes to his ability to convey expressiveness to the audience. Notably, his approach emphasises the importance of consistent, detailed practices that integrate technical and expressive aspects. It also highlights engaging in multiple stages of emotional immersion to fully understand a song or piece, as well as developing adaptability across practice and performance situations to convey expressiveness in musical performance.

Participant 9: Arun (Gambus, or “Oud”)

Arun’s journey with the gambus began after he became involved in traditional Malay music and other instruments. His transition to the gambus was driven by a desire to explore a less common instrument with unique musical qualities. The initial challenges he faced and his dedication to mastering the instrument reflect his commitment to developing a deep understanding of the instrument's technical and expressive potential.

Arun described in detail the technical demands of performing “Atmaca,” a piece characterised by intricate rhythms and time signatures, including a meter change from 9/8 to 3/4. Notably, he emphasised the importance of repetitive practice to internalise the piece's rhythms and expression. His ability to perform well with such complex time signatures demonstrates his dedication to mastering the musical parameters and technical aspects of the gambus. Arun also indicated a willingness to experiment with different rhythmic patterns and tempi, pushing himself and his band members to exceed their limits.

On the other hand, in terms of his detailed approach, Arun began by mastering the rhythm, which he said was a crucial first step in shaping the musical phrases. His focus on rhythm helped him define the phrasing for each part of the song “Atmaca”. Arun revealed spontaneous, expressive body movements to reflect dynamic changes, such as leaning forward to indicate softer sections and rising back to a sitting position, to signal louder moments in the music. He also applied specific

techniques to manipulate his musical parameters, such as slurring and note sliding, to enhance his expressiveness, believing that ornamentation can significantly impact the emotional depth of a performance.

Other than that, Arun mentioned that he appreciated the interactive aspect of live performances. During these performances, he used specific gestures, such as making eye contact, nodding, and bending forward, to cue the band and help synchronise the song's rhythm and mood. Thus, by observing and responding to fellow musicians, such as the percussionist Arun, he balanced the sounds well and maintained the flow throughout his performance.

Furthermore, he often nodded or moved his upper body to the beat, especially on strong downbeats or during significant sections of the song. Arun and his band members synchronised their movements to elevate the overall performance, particularly when working with challenging meters such as 9/8. This collective effort contributed to the expressive impact of their performance.

Additionally, Arun described his emotional experience with the song “Atmaca” as primarily technical, given its complexity and fast tempo. However, he also drew inspiration from other works, for example, “Taksim”, which he discovered was more emotionally engaging. His experience with “Taksim” influenced his approach in conveying emotions through the gambus, emphasising the role of ornamentation and personal expression in enhancing the emotional impact of a performance.

Notably, Arun navigated the challenges of adapting his playing style to different musical genres and picking patterns. He noted the difficulty of switching between styles, such as Zapin and Arabic patterns, which require different techniques and adaptations. Thus, his experience highlights the importance of flexibility and practice in mastering various styles and musical genres to achieve expressive versatility on the gambus.

Overall, Arun's approach to expressiveness in gambus performance combines technical proficiency, interactive performance, and emotional depth. As a result, his experience reflects a deep engagement with the instrument's rhythmic and dynamic complexities, as well as a commitment to exploring and adapting his playing techniques to convey his expressiveness meaningfully.

Participant 10: Liza (Modern Piano)

Liza applied a methodical approach, emphasising the importance of reading and understanding the music score first and foremost, as exemplified by her chosen song, "Sway". She identified key sections of the score which include manipulation of musical parameters, including dynamics, tempo, and articulation, that were essential for conveying expressiveness, hence marking these areas on the score to focus on during practice.

Therefore, Liza could effectively highlight specific parts of the score to portray specific elements of expression, and she also adjusted these elements based

on her understanding of the score. For instance, Liza adjusted the dynamics by playing the main melody from soft to loud to ensure it stood out during her practice with her band members. Projection of the main melody also enabled Liza to convey the emotional expression intended by the song.

Furthermore, Liza also applied tempo adjustments, along with other band members, in the performance practice of "Sway." She slowed the tempo, along with the other band members, to cue the drum solo sections. Later, she and her band members increased the tempo during the livelier parts of the song. She mentioned that tempo changes were technical and intended to evoke specific emotions, from a calmer part to a livelier one, to communicate them to the audience.

Conversely, in terms of emotional expression, Liza distinguished between perceived emotions (derived from the mood inherent in the song) and experienced or felt emotions (her own emotional response during the performance). For "Sway," she mostly felt the song's fun, engaging rhythm, but she also incorporated her own emotions into the performance, especially through body movements that matched the piece's lively nature.

Additionally, Liza integrated body movements into her performance to communicate expressiveness. She explained that gestures such as nodding, moving to the side, and maintaining eye contact with other band members help coordinate transitions and keep the performance flowing smoothly. She also mentioned that

these movements could enhance the performance's visual and emotional impact, making it more engaging for the audience.

Moreover, Liza acknowledged the impact of the practice environment on musical performance expression. Practising in a small room allowed her and her bandmates to hear each instrument clearly and carefully, facilitating better coordination and more nuanced performances. Hence, this setting helped them refine their dynamics and other musical parameters, ensuring that their expression translated well into a live performance.

Collectively, Liza also demonstrates creativity in solving performance challenges. For example, she suggested that the second keyboardist play a counter-melody to avoid redundancy with the main melody and enhance the song's harmony, thereby conveying expressiveness. Her ability to collaborate and adapt to the needs of the performance highlights her strategic thinking and commitment to delivering a captivating musical experience, technically and expressively.

6.5.3 Thematic Analysis of Expressiveness Learning Strategies from the Participants' VSRI Interview Transcripts: Emerging Themes

From the interviews with the ten students, several recurring themes surfaced. Each interviewee underscored the vital role of emotional engagement in their musical expressiveness. They spoke about how their own emotional states (felt

emotions) or the emotions they aimed to convey (perceived emotions) significantly shape their performance style and delivery. Furthermore, the interviewees demonstrated a remarkable capacity to adjust to both technical and environmental challenges. This adaptability was evident in their responses, whether it involved mastering a new instrument, addressing technical constraints, or tailoring their expressiveness to varied acoustic environments. They all approached these challenges with considerably inventive solutions, reflecting a shared resilience.

Moreover, in discussing their development, every interviewee recognised the essential role of practice. They highlighted how consistent, repetitive practice was crucial for refining their techniques and expanding their approaches to expressiveness. They manipulated various musical parameters—such as dynamics, phrasing, and articulation—to enhance their emotional interpretation of the music. This focus on technical precision was matched by their efforts to deepen their emotional expression.

Additionally, connecting with the audience has also emerged as a central theme in their performances. The performers made concerted efforts to engage their listeners through nonverbal cues, expressive body movements, and the selection of pieces with personal significance. They aimed to make their performances meaningful and impactful, ensuring that their music resonated with their audience on a personal level.

Other than that, the impact of the practice environment on their performance is another shared insight. Whether they practised in solitude or in a group, the performers were acutely aware of how their surroundings influenced their expressive capabilities. They adjusted their techniques and approaches to align with their practice settings, demonstrating an awareness of how the environment shapes performance. Overall, despite their diverse musical instruments learned and personal approaches, the integration of emotional and technical aspects, adaptability to challenges, and the need for a deep connection with the audience are fundamental to their musical expressiveness.

6.5.4 Insights from Study 1's Q32 and Q33 Findings: Agreeableness on the Contributions of Previous and Current Learning Experiences to Strategies of Expressiveness in Music Performance

Table 5.22 depicts the frequency of responses to questions Q32 and Q33 of Study 1 (survey questionnaire). Both items received the same number of "strongly disagree" responses, which is 2. Q32 states, "My past learning experiences (before the Bachelor of Education in Music) have helped me understand and develop my learning strategies on expressiveness in music performance." In contrast, Q33 described, "My current learning experiences (during the BMus Ed) have helped me understand and develop my learning strategies on expressiveness in music performance."

Table 6.22: Frequency of Responses for Items Q32 and Q33

Item	Text	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q32	My past learning experiences (before the Bachelor of Education in Music) have helped me understand and develop my learning strategies for expressiveness in music performance	2	2	5	12	21	23
Q33	My current learning experiences (during Bachelor of Education in Music) have helped me understand and develop my learning strategies on expressiveness in music performance	2	2	1	6	17	38

On the other hand, the item with the highest number of "strongly agree" responses was Q33, with 38 respondents selecting "strongly agree." Hence, this finding suggests that more respondents strongly believe their current learning experiences have helped them understand and develop learning strategies for expressive music performance than their experiences before entering the university.

Table 6.23: Descriptive Statistics for Items Q32 and Q33

Item	Text	Min	Max.	Mean	SD
Q32	My past learning experiences (before the Bachelor of Education in Music) have helped me understand and develop my learning strategies on expressiveness in music performance	1	6	4.80	1.26
Q33	My current learning experiences (during the Bachelor of Education in Music) have helped me understand and develop my learning	1	6	5.24	1.20

Item	Text	Min	Max.	Mean	SD
	strategies on expressiveness in music performance				

In line with the frequency data, the descriptive statistical analysis for Q32 and Q33, illustrated in the table above, also indicates that respondents gave the highest ratings to the impact of current learning experiences (Q33), with an average score of 5.24. This is notably higher than the score for past learning experiences (Q32), which reached only 4.80.

6.5.5 Insights from Study 1's Q34 and Q35 Findings: Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses: Previous and Current Learning Experiences that helped convey Expressiveness in Music Performance

Study 1's survey questionnaire also obtained students' learning strategies through open-ended questions Q34 and Q35. Firstly, Q34 requested examples of strategies from previous learning experiences (before BMus Ed) that were applied to convey expressiveness in music performance, and why they identified these strategies as beneficial. In particular, 44 respondents answered this open-ended question out of 66. Table 5.26 below presents the TA for Q34, based on 44 open-ended responses from participants on strategies from their previous learning experiences that were applied to convey expressiveness in music performance and why they identified these strategies as beneficial.

Table 6.24: Thematic Analysis for Q34 (Open-Ended Responses to Strategies from Previous Learning Experiences that helped Convey Expressiveness in Music Performance)

Theme	Description based on Codes	Examples of Responses
Learning through Imitation	Respondents' explanation that they learned about expressiveness by watching and imitating others' performances through platforms like YouTube etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Learned from the other performance video through YouTube that can help me to know the expression I need to perform well" (Resp.1) - "Watch and hear the song, then imitate it" (Resp.37)
Understanding and Analysing Music	Respondents' explanation that they learned about expressiveness from understanding of musical scores, analysing music, and applying theoretical knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Understand each term stated in the score and apply" (Resp.5) - "I always learn and identify the piece first. I think it's so useful because as a singer, we need to understand the piece so we can deliver it well" (Resp.57)
Emotional Connection and Visualization	Respondents' explanation that strategies involving emotional connection with the music, or visualizing the music to convey emotions, helped them in expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I try to relate my emotions or memories because that is important" (Resp.6) - "Visualizing vivid imagery and fostering emotional connection with the music enhances expressiveness in my performances" (Resp.65)
Repetition and Practice	Respondents' explanation that consistent practices, repetitions, and routines, helped them in developing and conveying expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Practice and practice, so when the day comes, our minds will be ready" (Resp.23) - "Practice same routine until you get it perfect" (Resp.19)
Learning from Others	Respondents' emphasis that learning from peers, seniors, or mentors, have importantly helped them to develop and convey expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Learning from senior musicians. Ask for their advice when performing" (Resp.17) - "Practices with friends because they can help to solve the problem if you have been stuck with the piece" (Resp.20)
Instrument-Specific Techniques	Respondents' sharing that strategies specific to their musical instruments, focusing on technical adjustments, helped them convey expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "For violin, I think it is a must to know how to play the dynamics with bowing placing" (Resp.31) - "A strategy I used before my formal education in music was focusing on breathing techniques to enhance expressiveness" (Resp.64)

Conversely, Q35 asked for examples of current learning strategies (during BMus Ed) that students use to enhance expressiveness in musical performance and why they find these strategies beneficial. A total of 42 respondents answered this open-ended question out of 66. Table 5.27 below presents the TA for Q35, based on 42 open-ended responses from participants about the strategies they use in their current learning experiences to convey expressiveness in music performance and why they discovered these strategies beneficial.

Table 6.25: Thematic Analysis for Q35 (Open-Ended Responses to Strategies from Current Learning Experiences that helped Convey Expressiveness in Music Performance)

Theme	Description based on Codes	Examples of Responses
Contextual Understanding and Analysis	Respondents' emphasis that understanding the historical background, cultural context, and composer's intentions of the piece helped them in conveying expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "During my Bachelor of Education in Music, one strategy I've adopted is analysing the historical and cultural context of a piece to inform my expressiveness in performance" (Resp.64) - "Learn the culture or characteristic of music from different era such as Renaissance & Baroque" (Resp.1)
Effective Practice and Planning	Respondents' emphasis that structured, effective, and consistent practice helped them in conveying expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Having a good quality of practice. Practice the whole part of a piece of song and mark parts that need to be given more attention" (Resp.38) - "I always do a performance planning to make sure I deliver and show my expressiveness towards the piece that I'm going to perform" (Resp.57)
Technical and Theoretical Approach	Respondents' emphasis that understanding musical parameters including dynamics, phrasing, etc. techniques including intonation, and music theory, helped them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Utilizing dynamic shaping and phrasing techniques enhances expressiveness in my performances by sculpting musical phrases with tension and emotional depth" (Resp.65) - Focusing on the notes' pitch. When playing the violin, the left-hand

Theme	Description based on Codes	Examples of Responses
	in conveying expressiveness.	placement is important to ensure the right intonation” (Resp.14)
Consultation and Collaboration with Teachers and Peers	Respondents’ explanation that seeking input from instructors, friends, band members and others, ensured that the way of conveying expressiveness aligns with expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Asking the opinion of my instructor on how to convey the expressiveness of a piece” (Resp.29) - “Keep asking and sharing with friends” (Resp.12)
Using References and Other Resources	Respondents’ explanation that it was important to listen to music from various genres or using platforms like YouTube to gain inspirations in conveying expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Listen to YouTube” (Resp.63) - “Listening to multiple choice of genres to find and explore different styles and feels” (Resp.51) - “Need a lot of listening to all types of music” (Resp.17)
Developing Emotional Connection	Respondents’ explanation that connecting personal emotions with the music performed, helped to convey expressiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Vocal. I can sing with emotions” (Resp.39) - “Try to feel the song rhythm and always listen to the song” (Resp.43)

6.5.6 Thematic Analysis to integrate Study 2’s Emerging Themes from Participants’ VSRI Interview Transcripts and Study 1’s Q34 – 35 Findings: Key Strategies for Learning Expressiveness in Music Performance

TA was conducted to thread together the findings from Study 2’s emerging themes in the participants’ VSRI interview transcripts, with Study 1’s emerging themes from the previous TA of the Q34-35 open-ended responses. Specifically, the aim was to identify the main themes of strategies for learning expressiveness in music performance among the respondents and interview participants. The analysis

revealed five key strategies: ‘Technical Proficiency’, ‘Contextual Understanding’, ‘Dynamics Control’, ‘Emotional Resonance’, and ‘Adaptive Practice’.

In explanation, firstly, ‘Technical Proficiency’ involves mastering both basic and advanced techniques necessary to play an instrument effectively. This includes skills like breath control, hand technique, articulation, and intonation accuracy. Technical proficiency allows students to execute musical notation with precision and clarity. Notably, mastery of these techniques gives students the freedom to express emotional nuances without being hindered by technical challenges. A solid technical foundation also enables students to experiment with interpretive variations, adding depth and variety to their performances.

Subsequently, ‘Contextual Understanding’ focuses on learning expressiveness by interpreting music within a broader context, including its historical background, musical style, and role in the overall composition. This strategy involves understanding the structure of the music, its genre, and the emotional or thematic message conveyed by the song or piece. With a strong contextual understanding, students can interpret music more meaningfully and authentically, effectively communicating the piece’s message or story to the audience. This helps create a stronger emotional connection between the performer and the listener.

Significantly, ‘Dynamics Control’ emerges as a strong factor in the manipulation of musical parameters, emphasising the management of changes in

volume and intensity during musical performance. In particular, this includes changing and controlling dynamics from soft to loud and vice versa, applying crescendo (getting louder) and decrescendo (getting softer), and other methods of dynamic change. Dynamics control is key to expressing emotional nuances and adding depth to the music. The ability to control dynamics allows students to create contrast and give a musical piece a clear shape. As a result, it adds an emotional layer to the performance, as changes in dynamics often reflect shifts in the music's mood or emotions.

On the other hand, 'Emotional Resonance' focuses on conveying and connecting emotions through musical performance. This involves integrating personal experiences, feelings, and emotional interpretation into the music. Emotional resonance helps students create an authentic and profound experience for the audience by expressing emotions that align with the music's message or mood. When students emotionally connect with the music, they can transmit those feelings to the audience, transforming a technical performance into an emotionally charged experience.

Finally, 'Adaptive Practice' refers to flexible and adaptable practice methods that cater to individual challenges and needs. This includes adjusting practice routines based on feedback, environmental conditions, and technical development. Adaptive practice enables students to respond efficiently to changing situations, improving overall musical performance and contributes to expressiveness. It also teaches students to adjust to different environments, such as

varying acoustic settings, collaborations with other musicians, or changing physical and mental conditions. This ability is essential for maintaining expressiveness across different conditions, enabling musicians to remain responsive to dynamics and interactions during performances and enriching the overall musical experience. Table 5.28 below exemplifies the five themes of key strategies for learning expressiveness in music performance, as applied by the ten participants in Study 2's VSRI.

Table 6.26: Learning Expressiveness in Music Performance: Example of VSRI Participants' Application of Five Key Themes as Strategies

Student	Technical Proficiency	Contextual Understanding	Dynamics Control	Emotional Resonance	Adaptive Practice
Elia (Alto Saxophone)	Mastery of saxophone technique, including breath control and phrasing. Dynamics exercises that cover transitions between soft and loud sounds:	Interpreting the piece "Song for Helena," which lacks explicit description, using intuition to create an emotional narrative	Utilising dynamics to express emotional shifts in the music, even though there are no explicit dynamic markings in the score	Striving to integrate personal emotions into the performance, distinguishing between perceived and felt emotions	Using earphones to block external distractions and adjusting practice in noisy environments
Zamani (Hands Percussion)	Mastery of rhythm and dynamics on various hand percussion instruments, including the rebana, darbuka, congas, and traditional drums.	Understanding of both traditional and modern rhythms, as well as adapting to the context of contemporary music.	Maintaining balance in dynamics and rhythm with band members, and adapting spontaneously during live performances.	Adjusting the expression to the music's mood and atmosphere, while enhancing both visual and emotional connections with the audience.	Collaborative practice with the band to improve expressiveness, as well as adjusting body position, whether seated or standing, while playing.
Siti (Trumpet)	Mastery of dynamic control on the trumpet, including the ability to achieve the challenging soft dynamics.	Selecting pieces with tempo changes to explore different expressions and coordinating with the accompanist.	Controlling dynamics from soft to loud with clean transitions, using a metronome to maintain tempo.	Integrating personal feelings into the musical interpretation, with an emphasis on expressing happiness.	Adjusting practice routines based on feedback and rehearsing with the accompanist to ensure synchronisation.
Will (Alto Saxophone)	Emphasising breathing control and phrasing techniques to	Using the song "Missing You" to explore themes of loneliness and	Controlling dynamics through gradual volume changes as	Internalising the song's emotions and conveying them through saxophone	Solo and collaborative practice with the band to enhance expressiveness,

Student	Technical Proficiency	Contextual Understanding	Dynamics Control	Emotional Resonance	Adaptive Practice
	add emotional depth to saxophone playing.	longing, while understanding the emotions of the original version.	taught by the instructor.	playing, adapting to both solo and band performances.	adjusting techniques based on the practice environment.
Yen (Flute)	Adjusting embouchure and posture when switching from oboe to flute, along with breathing and dynamic control.	Listening to other performances and imitating different styles to build a personal expressive foundation.	Using crescendos in dynamics changes according to musical phrasing, with special attention to breathing control.	Connecting personal emotions to the music through a process of transitioning from imitating to genuinely feeling the song's emotions.	Adapting playing style based on acoustic environments, as well as taking notes and applying feedback from the tutor.
Ana (Violin)	Using appropriate phrasing and musical articulation in line with the song's theme, along with dynamic changes like crescendo and decrescendo.	Studying the lyrics and theme of the song "Young and Beautiful" to understand and express its emotional message.	Adjusting dynamics and tempo to add emotional depth to the performance, focusing on accents and tempo changes.	Using personal emotional experiences to enhance musical expression and create an authentic connection with the audience.	Overcoming practice challenges such as poor room acoustics by focusing on acoustic feedback and imagining performances in better venues.
Nora (Cello)	Focusing on improving bowing, fingering, and posture techniques to ensure proper notation playing, especially at fast tempo and with complex technical demands.	Studying the background of the music to understand its emotional context. For example, "Air (from the Peasant Cantata)" reflects the joy of rural life, and she strives to reflect	Adjusting the tempo from 120 to 80 or 90 to manage the musical feeling and adjusting dynamics to reflect desired emotions. She notes how changes in tempo affect musical expression.	Experiencing and naturally conveying emotions derived from the music. She adjusts facial expressions and body movements to reflect the emotions in the music, particularly as	Adapting to various practice situations, whether practising alone or with an accompanist. She notes different challenges and works to overcome discomforts like stage anxiety.

Student	Technical Proficiency	Contextual Understanding	Dynamics Control	Emotional Resonance	Adaptive Practice
		these emotions in her performance.		tempo and dynamics shift.	
Carl (Drum)	Learning rudiments, including 8th note, 6th note, and 16th note, to develop more tonal variation, especially when filling in.	Choosing the song "Satu" by Dewa 19 and learning to understand its message, which depicts the relationship between humans and God. This influences how he plays the drums, ensuring the message reaches the audience.	Utilising dynamics between soft ghost notes and louder snare hits to create nuance and maintain emotional balance in the song.	Emphasising the need to truly feel the song and convey deep emotions, going through individual and band practice to internalise the song's message and express it better during performances.	Learning to adapt based on suggestions and feedback from seniors, helping him adjust his playing style to match the genre of the song.
Arun (Gambus or "Oud")	Showing a deep understanding of complex meters such as 9/8 and meter changes in the song "Atmaca." He practices intensely to master the correct rhythm and phrasing.	Adapting his gambus playing style by studying Middle Eastern music, including solo elements and "Taksim". This helps him understand and apply a broader musical context in his performance.	Using body movements, such as bending and standing, to signal dynamic changes in the playing. This helps communicate shifts from soft to loud to the audience.	Using ornamentation and special techniques in gambus playing to express emotions in the music. He feels that ornamentation helps convey the song's emotions.	Frequently experimenting with tempo and rhythmic patterns during different practice environments. He enjoys challenging himself by trying faster tempi or different patterns to find what works best.
Liza (Modern Piano)	Learning how to adjust fingering and voicing for various chords, as well as	Emphasising the importance of understanding the background and genre	Using dynamic control by adjusting the volume of supporting	Identifying emotions stemming from the song's rhythm as perceived emotion,	Liza and her band identify performance issues and solve them through

Student	Technical Proficiency	Contextual Understanding	Dynamics Control	Emotional Resonance	Adaptive Practice
	understanding tension notes appropriate for different musical genres.	of the music before playing, such as the Latin style in the song "Sway," which shapes how she expresses it.	instruments so that the main melody stands out, such as lowering the volume of other instruments when vocals or brass sections play the main melody.	and creating felt emotion through body movements synchronised with the rhythm.	communication and coordination, such as nodding to signal musical transitions.

6.6 Summary of RQ3 Findings

Based on the TA of interview responses and open-ended questionnaire answers, the findings for the third research question, RQ3: “In what ways do students apply their understanding of concepts, as well as previous and current learning experiences, into the learning strategies for expressiveness in music performance?” firstly outline the learning strategies identified from the interviews.

After identifying the learning strategies for expressiveness in music performance from the interviews, the following step is to understand the three key determinants: understanding of concept, previous learning experiences, and current learning experiences. As outlined earlier, a survey of 66 students revealed that personal experiences, emotional and contextual approaches, self-directed learning, and a focus on real-life musical experiences marked their past learning experiences. On the other hand, their current learning experiences are characterised by formal education, technical and theoretical knowledge, collaboration and guided learning, and academic and professional development. Upon further analysis, previous learning experiences can be summarised as personal and emotional engagement, while current learning experiences can be encapsulated in technical skills. The students' understanding of concepts is closely tied to the competencies and learning they have acquired. This understanding can be seen as the result of an interaction between prior and current learning experiences, blending technical skills with personal and emotional engagement.

Moreover, additional analysis of the key themes identified reveals that the five strategies of learning expressiveness in music performance can be grouped into three categories: those dominated by past experiences, those shaped by current experiences, and those that blend both. Technical proficiency and dynamics control are strategies largely driven by current learning experiences. In particular, dynamics control relies on formal education and collaborative learning, while technical proficiency relies heavily on formal education, academic, and professional growth. These two strategies are considered emerging factors of expressiveness as students continuously progress in their undergraduate music education. In contrast, contextual understanding is largely influenced by past learning experiences, relying on emotional and contextual approaches and personal experiences. Similarly, emotional resonance is strongly rooted in emotional and contextual approaches and personal experiences, making these two strategies more traditional and reflective of what students used before entering their formal music education. Finally, adaptive practice bridges both past and present learning experiences. Nonetheless, while it draws on personal experience, it also requires collaboration and guided learning, making it a hybrid strategy that surfaced once students began their music education programmes.

Additionally, in response to the question, "In what ways do students apply their understanding of concepts, as well as previous and current learning experiences, into their learning strategies for expressiveness in music performance?", the findings reveal that students draw on both their past and present

learning experiences. This understanding is applied to enhance technical proficiency, contextual understanding, dynamic control, emotional resonance, and adaptive practice. Students achieve this by drawing on personal experiences, emotional and contextual approaches, self-directed learning, real-life musical experiences, formal education, techniques and theory, collaboration and guided learning, and academic and professional development.

A schematic representation of the relationships between these concepts, as identified through TA of the interviews and questionnaire responses, can be observed in Figure 5.4 below:

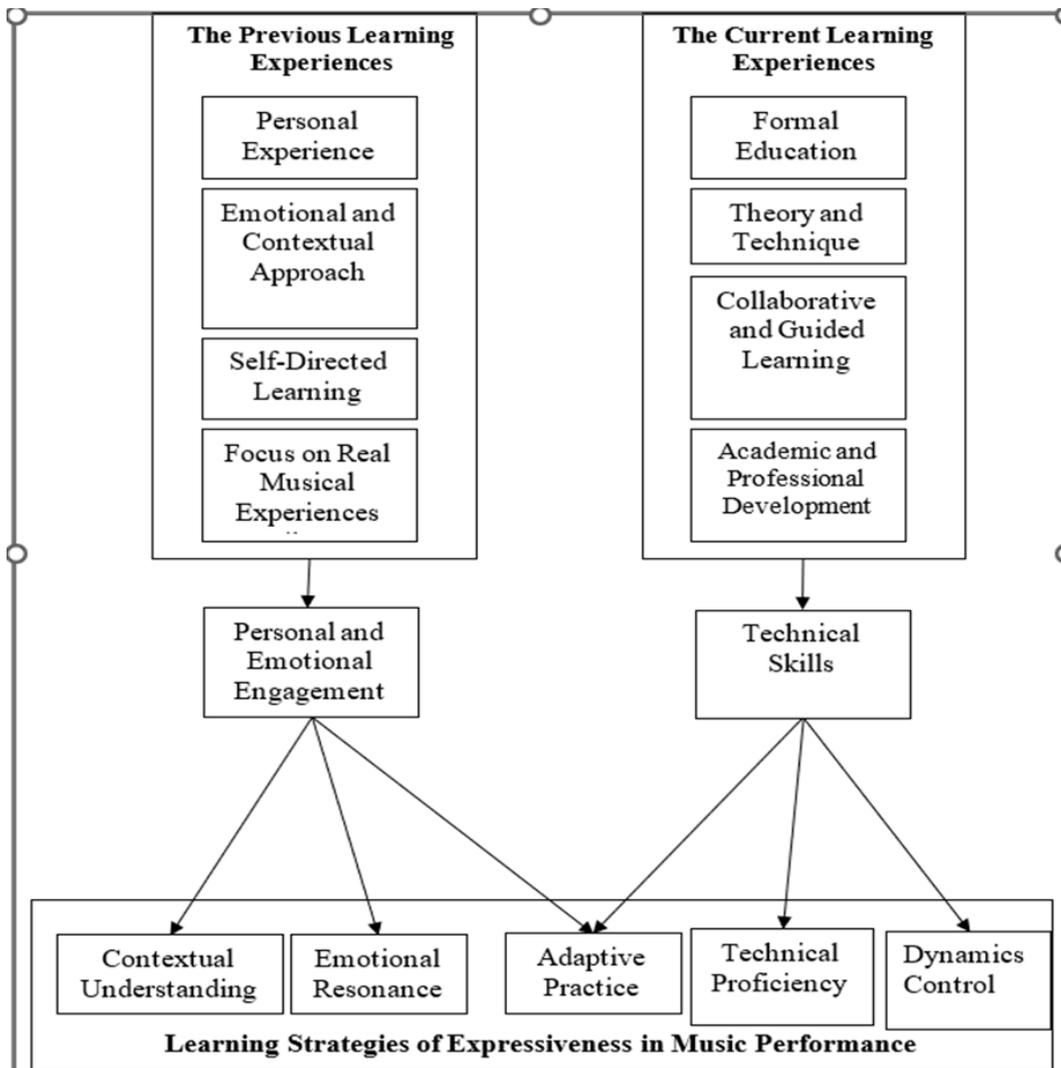


Figure 6.4: Conceptual Framework for the Learning Strategies of Expressiveness in Music Performance for Bachelor of Education (Music) Students

6.7 Overall Summary of RQ1 – RQ3 Findings

In summary, RQ1 examines how students conceptualise expressiveness in their musical performances. The findings reveal that BMus Ed students in this Malaysian context perceive expressiveness as a combination of emotional expression, musical communication, personal interpretation, and technical support. This conceptual understanding provides insights into which elements students prioritise in their expressive strategies, shedding light on how they translate subjective concepts into practical approaches.

Specifically, students are exposed to various forms of music education, whether formal, informal, or participatory, which help them to build their personal definitions of expressiveness. They come to understand expressiveness as a blend of emotional communication, personal interpretation, and the application of musical techniques, which subsequently guides their approach to performance. Furthermore, this foundation enables students to be more intentional in their use of musical elements, tailoring their interpretations to emotional or contextual considerations.

On the other hand, RQ2 explores the impact of students' previous and current learning experiences. The findings demonstrate that students' diverse backgrounds, including formal education, private instruction, and participatory learning (such as through platforms like YouTube, social media, or family music-making), play a significant role in shaping their ability to express themselves

musically. The transition from pre-university experiences, which are often varied and less structured, to the more formalised training within the BMus Ed programme reveals how these experiences shape expressive abilities at different stages of development. Therefore, understanding these backgrounds is key to identifying the specific skills and knowledge students bring to the programme and how they are further honed to enhance their expressiveness.

Moreover, prior experience provides students with a solid technical foundation, while ongoing learning within the programme allows them to further refine these skills. Through early exposure to music education, such as learning an instrument in school or receiving private lessons, students acquire the technical skills necessary to manipulate musical parameters. These parameters—such as tempo, dynamics, phrasing, and articulation—are crucial tools for conveying emotional and artistic ideas through music. As they progress through the BMus Ed programme, their learning becomes more focused and structured, helping them fine-tune these technical abilities. Notably, this refinement heightens their precision and deepens their capacity to express musical nuances more effectively.

In addition to enhancing technical skills, these experiences also nurture emotional and contextual awareness. Students' accumulated learning experiences deepen their emotional connection to music, allowing them to engage with the emotional content of the pieces that they perform. Exposure to a variety of musical styles and contexts—both before and during their formal education—broadens their emotional understanding of music, enabling them to convey emotions more deeply

in their performances. Furthermore, as they engage with different genres, cultures, and historical contexts, students begin to grasp the broader meanings behind the music that they perform, enriching their interpretive decisions and making their performances more expressive and nuanced.

In contrast, RQ3 explores how students apply their conceptual understanding and learning experiences to develop their expressive strategies. The findings indicate that students employ a range of strategies—such as improving technical proficiency, developing contextual understanding, mastering dynamics control, deepening emotional resonance, and adopting flexible approaches in their practice. These strategies draw from a mix of personal experiences, emotional and contextual approaches, self-directed learning, real-world musical experiences, formal education, and guided collaboration. Collectively, they illustrate how students integrate theoretical understanding and practical experience to achieve musical expressiveness.

In their practice, students experiment with different strategies, often exploring various emotional approaches, adjusting their technical methods for different pieces, or employing creative ways to enhance their expressiveness. These practices allow students to internalise and personalise their expressive strategies, thereby making them more effective at conveying the music's emotional and artistic content. Both individual and collaborative learning experiences play crucial roles in this development. Guided instruction, such as teacher feedback, helps refine their

expressive abilities, while self-directed exploration, such as experimenting with different interpretations, encourages creative growth.

Other than that, students employ strategies that integrate experiences from their diverse musical, educational, and cultural backgrounds. This is because the students' understanding and application of strategies in expressive learning extend beyond technical execution and include personal, emotional, and embodied dimensions. Exposure to formal music training alongside informal learning, such as through media or personal exploration, equips students with a broad set of influences for their expressive development. However, informal and non-Western musical experiences are underrepresented in formal instruction. Consequently, the students incorporate diverse cultural and pedagogical influences from their informal and formal experiences by employing creative and adaptive strategies to navigate their learning of expressiveness in music performance, with a need to acknowledge more of their informal backgrounds.

6.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has detailed the findings on how Malaysian BMus Ed students understand and learn to express themselves musically, as well as the strategies they employ to cultivate expressiveness in performance. For RQ1, students defined expressiveness as a multidimensional construct, combining emotional communication, personal interpretation, technical mastery, manipulation of musical parameters, and embodied gestures. They emphasised connecting with audiences,

interpreting musical structures and messages, and infusing performances with personal and cultural meanings.

Furthermore, for RQ2, findings revealed that students' previous learning experiences were shaped by a blend of formal schooling, private syllabi (e.g., ABRSM), participatory groups, and informal sources such as social media. These experiences laid the foundations for technical skills, emotional awareness, and storytelling through music. During their BMus Ed studies, students reported a shift towards structured and specialised learning—through applied instrumental lessons, ensembles, and exposure to music theory, stylistic studies, and traditional/popular repertoires—which further deepened their expressive capacities. However, some noted that formal instruction tended to prioritise technical precision over explicit guidance on emotional expression, leading to hybrid strategies that combined institutional expectations with culturally grounded practices.

Finally, for RQ3, the TA of interviews and selected survey items identified five key strategies for learning expressiveness: 'Technical Proficiency', 'Contextual Understanding', 'Dynamics Control', 'Emotional Resonance', and 'Adaptive Practice'. Specifically, these strategies highlight how students draw on both their understanding and their prior and current learning experiences to craft expressive performances. They integrate technical command with emotional depth, situational flexibility, and awareness of cultural repertoires, enabling them to develop authentic, contextually meaningful approaches to expressiveness.

Overall, Chapter 5 underscores the importance of recognising students' diverse experiential backgrounds and hybrid strategies when fostering expressiveness in Malaysian higher music education. As a result, the findings emphasise that expressive performance is nurtured through technical training and opportunities for emotional engagement, cultural dialogue, and adaptive learning.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSING AND INTERPRETING THE FINDINGS ON “MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATE VOICES” TO RECONCEPTUALISE THE LEARNING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

7.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter Six discusses and interprets the findings on “Malaysian undergraduate voices” to reconceptualise the learning of expressiveness in music performance. Drawing on data from both the survey questionnaire and the Video-Stimulated Recall Interviews (VSRI), it explores how students understand expressiveness, how their previous and current learning experiences shape it, and which strategies they employ to develop and convey it.

The chapter begins by positioning students’ concepts of expressiveness within global discourses that often prioritise Western pedagogical traditions, such as score fidelity, technical precision, and stylistic authenticity. Against this backdrop, it demonstrates how Malaysian students describe expressiveness as a multidimensional, culturally embedded construct that integrates emotional communication, interpretive agency, technical mastery, and embodied gestures.

Subsequent sections examine how diverse previous learning experiences, ranging from family ensembles, community music, and religious activities to

informal digital learning, provide an affective and participatory foundation for expressiveness. These experiences are contrasted with the structured training of the Bachelor of Education (Music) with Honours (BMus Ed) programme, which refines students' skills through applied music lessons, ensembles, music theory, and courses in Malaysian traditional and popular music.

Following this, the discussion analyses three interrelated categories of learning strategies derived from the findings: contextual understanding and emotional resonance (strategies shaped by students' previous experiences); technical proficiency and dynamics control (strategies developed through current formal training); and adaptive practice (strategies integrating past and present learning). Collectively, these themes demonstrate how Malaysian students negotiate Western and local practices to build expressive agency, challenging Western-centric assumptions and advocating for a hybrid pedagogy that validates both notated and oral/embodied traditions.

Overall, this chapter positions students as active constructors of meaning whose expressiveness is shaped by culture, emotion, technique, and environment. By foregrounding their voices, it calls for music performance pedagogy in Malaysian higher education to embrace more inclusive, student-centred approaches that balance conservatoire skills with culturally situated resources.

7.2 Concept of Expressiveness in Music Performance: Perceptual Insights from “Malaysian Undergraduate Voices”

The concept of expressiveness in music performance has long been framed through Western pedagogical and aesthetic traditions. Much of the existing literature foregrounds students’ perceptions within conservatoire-based settings, where expressiveness is often linked to interpreting the composer’s intentions, adhering to stylistic norms, and applying technical control to articulate character and phrasing (Meissner et al., 2021; Woody, 2006). However, while such perspectives offer valuable insights, they largely reflect students who have been immersed in Western classical or art music repertoires. Their learning trajectories are shaped by score-based study, historical knowledge, and dialogic engagement with teachers around compositions from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and modern eras.

Nevertheless, students whose formative musical experiences are grounded in non-Western traditions may conceptualise expressiveness differently. For learners familiar with Malaysia’s traditional genres, such as *mak yong*, *dikir barat*, *zapin*, *nobat*, or popular music and improvisatory practices, expressiveness is often cultivated through aural transmission, embodied learning, and contextual responsiveness rather than strict adherence to written notation. These students may draw on hybrid repertoires that combine local idioms and Western materials, developing expressive resources that respond flexibly to the structural or affective affordances of diverse genres (Burnard et al., 2015; Schippers, 2010, p. 5).

In particular, findings from my RQ1 regarding the understanding of the expressiveness concept reveal that Malaysian undergraduate music education students position expressiveness as a multidimensional, negotiated construct rather than a fixed skill inherited from a single tradition. Their narratives highlight the integration of emotional communication, personal interpretation, and cultural references with technical mastery and manipulation of musical parameters such as dynamics, articulation, and phrasing. Students described drawing equally on Western classical models, Malaysian traditional and popular music, and informal learning—such as YouTube tutorials or peer collaborations—to shape their own expressive language. Consequently, they emphasised agency in creating musical meaning, rather than passively reproducing notated directions or pre-determined expressive “rules.”

These insights resonate with Bonastre and Timmers (2021) argument that educational systems shape beliefs about expressive performance and can influence practice behaviour, motivation, and students’ sense of ownership over learning. In the Malaysian context, students’ beliefs reflect a negotiation between institutional expectations (often privileging technical accuracy and Western stylistic authenticity) and the affective, embodied, and culturally situated ways of knowing cultivated through earlier or parallel musical encounters. The capacity to combine these resources suggests that expressiveness is learned through prescriptive instruction, self-directed exploration, and cultural hybridity, supporting Lindström

et al.'s (2003) call to consider creativity and interpretation as central to expressive learning.

Notably, the evidence also underscores an urgent need to reconceptualise the learning of expressiveness in music performance within Malaysian higher education. Music performance courses, modelled after Western conservatoire systems, often prioritise precision, technique, and historical fidelity (Crispin & Östersjö, 2017). Nonetheless, while these dimensions remain essential, they may not adequately support students whose musical biographies encompass oral traditions, improvisation, or popular repertoires that foreground storytelling, ornamentation, or rhythmic vitality (Schippers, 2010). As Schiavio et al. (2019) argued, learning should recognise students as creative agents who construct meaning through both technical and experiential processes, rather than positioning them solely as reproducers of canonical works.

Bringing Malaysian undergraduate voices into the conversation, in terms of their understanding, previous and current experiences, and strategies, offers a pathway toward more inclusive, student-centred pedagogies. Their accounts suggest that expressiveness is best nurtured through opportunities to integrate cultural references, embodied practice, and personal emotional narratives alongside formal skills training. This reconceptualisation, therefore, invites educators to design curricula that blend Western and non-Western repertoires, encourage reflection on expressive intent, and validate the diverse strategies students employ to make music meaningful. Hence, such a shift could foster greater artistic

autonomy, affirm local musical identities, and expand the expressive horizons of music performance education in Malaysia.

7.3 Emotional Expression: Malaysian Undergraduates' Dominant Understanding of Expressiveness

Findings from RQ1 indicate that emotional expression is the most prominent way in which undergraduate music education students in Malaysia understand and approach expressiveness in performance. Thematic Analysis (TA) of Study 1 (Q8) highlighted “expressiveness as the ability to convey emotions through music performance,” reflected in responses such as: “Can release our true emotion through the piece” (Resp. 4); “The way you put your emotion through your playing” (Resp. 5); and “The ability of a musician to convey emotions through a piece of music” (Resp. 14). This emphasis was corroborated by Q14, which received the highest mean score ($M = 5.30$). Across formal, informal, and participatory backgrounds, and regardless of dominant exposure to Western or Malaysian repertoires, respondents identified affective communication as central to expressiveness.

Notably, this focus resonates with cross-context research in expressiveness. Lindström et al. (2003) revealed that students in England, Italy, and Sweden linked expressiveness chiefly to communicating feelings, and Bonastre and Timmers (2021) reported similar priorities among Spanish undergraduates. Thus, such parallels suggest that emotional expression functions as a cross-cultural anchor in

students' concepts of expressiveness. Drawing on my study, Malaysian students, however, nuance this consensus by framing emotions as responses to the score and as personal narratives shaped by cultural memory, local genres, and hybrid listening practices.

Additionally, in contrast to Woody's (2006) experimental design, in which learners addressed emotional content only *after* focusing on musical parameters, my study prioritised students' own perspectives, revealing affective meaning as an initial and enduring concern. The difference demonstrates how instructional framing can shape the salience of emotion, raising pedagogical questions about whether teacher or student priorities dominate the learning process. Based on my study, positioning emotional expression at the centre of Malaysian students' understanding aligns with expressionist aesthetics (Cooke, 1959; Schubert, 2022) and the GERMS model—Generative rules, Emotional expression, Random variations, Motion principles, Stylistic unexpectedness (Juslin, 2003). It also invites educators to integrate reflective dialogue (Meissner & Timmers, 2019) and culturally situated repertoires to help students articulate and refine their emotional depth beyond mere replication of stylistic conventions.

7.4 Musical Message and Personal Interpretation: A Dialogic

Understanding of Expressiveness

Beyond emotion, students conceptualised expressiveness as a dialogue between communicating a musical message and asserting personal interpretation.

Open-ended responses described expressiveness as “the way to deliver the message through pieces” (Resp. 23) alongside recognition that “different persons with different emotions might give different vibes even when they play the same piece” (Resp. 6). Likert-scale data supported this duality: *interpretation of musical structure* (Q11; M = 5.30) and *interpretation of musical character* (Q12; M = 5.25) ranked among the highest items. Students negotiated two intertwined orientations, namely respecting a piece’s inherent message, often associated with notated or historically grounded works, and shaping that material through individual insight, imagination, and cultural sensibility.

Furthermore, patterns mirrored musical training histories. Those with stronger Western classical grounding tended to foreground the composer's intention, structural fidelity, and stylistic authenticity (cf. Holmgren, 2022; Woody, 2006). Conversely, students whose backgrounds included Malaysian traditional or popular repertoires often prioritised personal agency, reflecting improvisatory, orally transmitted practices such as *zapin* and *gamelan* music. Nevertheless, even classically trained respondents acknowledged the need for interpretive freedom, echoing Holmgren's (2022) observation that outstanding performers balance fidelity with individuality.

Consequently, these findings affirm Bonastre and Timmers’ (2021) claim that educational culture mediates beliefs about expressiveness. They also extend Chapter Two, which discusses the historical and curricular dominance of imported conservatoire models by demonstrating how those legacies privilege fixed meaning.

Chapter Four, in turn, clarifies how students actively construct and embody expressive intent through a constructivist and a phenomenological lens. Collectively, these insights suggest that a pedagogy that negotiates between respecting a piece's message and fostering individuality can promote interpretive ownership while maintaining respect for musical texts.

7.5 Technical Mastery as an Enabler of Expressiveness

Students also linked expressiveness to technical fluency and manipulation of musical parameters. Open-ended responses frequently referenced articulation, dynamics, phrasing, and tone shaping—for example, “Play the music, not just play the notes!”—Resp. 44). Notably, Q13 “Learning expressiveness relates to portraying high technical skills” ranked third overall ($M = 5.22$). For many, reliable command of instrument and score was the scaffold that liberated expressive risk-taking, therefore resonating with Schubert's (2022) “knowledge” component of expressiveness.

Additionally, the students' reflections align with work that emphasises technique as a platform for expression (del Sol, 2020; Lehmann et al., 2007). However, students also framed technique as inseparable from emotion, supporting Doğantan-Dack's (2014) claim that authentic performance exceeds technical precision, encompassing bodily gesture and aesthetic nuance. In Malaysian practice, this integration often extends to rhythmic freedom and ornamentation in

folk or pop idioms, suggesting that technical mastery is culturally inflected rather than purely mechanical.

7.6 Embodiment and Expressive Body Movements

Although fewer respondents explicitly named expressive body movements in open responses, Likert results (Q15; $M = 5.25$) indicate that embodiment is tacitly valued. Narratives hinted at posture, gesture, and kinesthetic flow as implicit media for emotion and interpretation, even if students lacked the vocabulary to separate these from sound production. This aligns with Western literature, which documents gesture as a vital expressive channel (Broughton & Davidson, 2016; Davidson, 2012). Malaysian students, however, appeared to enfold movement into a broader process of emotional-technical coordination, reflecting the embeddedness of gesture in local music–dance traditions. Phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962; Juntunen & Westerlund, 2001) helps explain this, where embodiment is not an optional add-on but the medium through which performers inhabit sound. Thus, recognising this dimension can enrich pedagogy, especially for students whose traditions integrate music and movement.

7.7 Reconceptualising Expressiveness in Music Performance: Insights from Malaysian Students' Understanding (Overall Implication from RQ1 Findings)

Synthesising the strands discussed, my study therefore reconceptualises expressiveness through the voices of Malaysian undergraduates. Expressiveness

emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing emotional communication rooted in personal and cultural experience, interpretive agency balancing fidelity to musical material with individual insight, and technical mastery as a resource for expressive shaping. It also involves embodied practice, where gesture and sensorimotor awareness animate sound.

Therefore, by articulating these elements, students challenge the assumption embedded in much Western pedagogy that expressiveness is a uniform set of techniques or stylistic cues. Instead, they portray it as constructed, situated, and relational, aligning with constructivist and phenomenological perspectives set out in Chapter Four (Piaget, 1950; Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective also responds to Chapter Two's call for culturally responsive curricula that integrate oral, participatory, and hybrid musical traditions alongside conservatoire skills.

Notably, this reconceptualising of expressiveness invites Malaysian higher music education to shift from transmission-based models toward dialogic, student-centred approaches. Teachers can scaffold technique and stylistic literacy while legitimising students' affective, cultural, and bodily resources as sites of learning. Such hybridity promises to enhance expressiveness while nurturing performers capable of bridging global repertoires with local identity, namely artistry that is technically secure, emotionally resonant, and culturally grounded.

7.8 The Influence of Diverse Previous Learning Experiences on Students' Expressiveness

RQ2 examined how students' previous experiences shape their learning of expressiveness in music performance. Within this Malaysian cohort, pathways into music were strikingly diverse, spanning both formal qualifications and rich informal or participatory routes. Some students have prior structured training, such as a Diploma in Music or Malaysian Higher Certificate of Education (STPM), which offers contrasting levels of prior preparation. Others drew on experiences in family ensembles, religious or community groups, school bands and choirs, or self-directed learning via social media platforms. Aligning with the constructivist stance articulated in Chapter Three, students actively built their expressive knowledge from these experiences. Simultaneously, the phenomenological perspective underscored how expressiveness was grounded in embodied, lived practices rather than in abstract rules or prescriptive techniques.

Furthermore, survey data indicate that many respondents encountered music formally during primary or secondary school. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion reported receiving little or no formal school music education and instead relied on informal means such as YouTube tutorials, peer groups, family ensembles, and community activities. A relatively small number pursued private Western syllabi (Associated Boards of the Royal Schools of Music [ABRSM], London College of Music [LCM], Trinity College London), while a much larger group developed musicianship through participatory settings, including *gamelan*, *cak lempong*,

kompang, bands, and church or mosque youth groups. This pattern resonates with Folkestad's (2006) argument that most musical learning worldwide occurs outside school, and with Green's (2002) findings that popular musicians learn through peer-led, imitation-based, and emotionally invested practices. Students entering the programme with a Diploma in Music generally demonstrated stronger score literacy and technical fluency than their peers with STPM backgrounds, yet across all pathways, students converged on a shared conviction that emotion lies at the heart of expressiveness. Hence, this convergence supports Chapter Two's argument that Malaysia's musical ecology cannot be reduced to imported conservatoire norms (cf. Lierse, 2014). Instead, affective, culturally embedded practices constitute an equally significant, often primary resource for expressive development.

Additionally, students' participatory histories cultivated a range of capacities that later informed their approaches to expressiveness. They developed an affective focus, prioritising "playing with feeling" and communicating emotion to audiences. They also honed ensemble awareness, learning to coordinate through non-verbal cues, timing, balance, and groove, for instance, interlocking patterns in *gamelan* or call-and-response textures in *kompang*. Agency and improvisation flourished through ornamentation, flexible forms, and adaptive use of dynamics and tempo, skills that could later be repurposed when approaching notated Western works. These affordances help explain why emotional expression emerged as the students' dominant concept of expressiveness (see Section 6.3) and why many regarded technique as a means of supporting affect rather than replacing it.

Consequently, this pattern also echoes Bonastre and Timmers' (2021) observation that less formalised learning pathways tend to foster intuition- and metaphor-driven conceptions of expressiveness.

Although fewer respondents had undertaken an extended private-syllabus study, survey data indicate that prior experience also contributed to technical and structural awareness. Most students agreed that their backgrounds helped them manipulate musical parameters such as dynamics, tempo, and articulation and enabled them to integrate expressive movement. Simultaneously, Likert-scale responses (Q16–Q21) reveal that students valued the usefulness of notation, form, and structure, suggesting hybridity rather than a strict opposition between formal and informal learning modes. This complexity mirrors Juslin and Laukka's (2003) view of expressiveness as both emotional and technical, highlighting the need for pedagogical approaches that recognise how these dimensions interrelate rather than compete.

Therefore, the present findings from my study recognise informal and participatory capital as pedagogical assets rather than deficits. Thus, it aligns with Chapter Three's call for student-centred, culturally responsive approaches to music performance learning. Reconceptualising expressiveness requires curricula that validate and mobilise students' informal and traditional resources, such as oral transmission, improvisation, and movement, alongside conservatoire skills, rather than attempting to overwrite them.

7.9 Transition to Current Learning: From Broad Exposure to Focused Development

Students in BMus Ed studies channelled their diverse previous experiences into a more focused, structured development of expressiveness. The programme provided a multifaceted curriculum, including Applied Music (individual lessons), ensembles, music theory, aural skills, harmony, arranging and composition, and courses in Malaysian traditional and popular music. Instrumental profiles encompassed both Western instruments, such as strings, woodwinds, and piano, and non-Western options, including *gambus* and hand percussion. This range required students to refine instrument-specific expressive control, including breath and bowing, as well as articulation, tone, and phrasing. Notably, every respondent agreed that studying their current major instrument had supported their expressiveness across parameters, emotion, and movement.

In particular, descriptive statistics revealed high mean ratings for several curricular components perceived as central to expressiveness, including listening to recordings of repertoire, Applied Music lessons, Malaysian traditional and popular music classes, music theory, ensemble participation, and piano proficiency. Qualitative accounts from surveys and interviews enriched these findings. Students highlighted the value of aural modelling and dialogic teaching in lessons, where they imitated lecturers' demonstrations, then reflected on and personalised their interpretations (Meissner, 2021; Woody, 2006). This process was reinforced through collaborative attunement within ensembles, further sharpening their sense

of balance, cueing, timing, and dynamic contouring. Many students also described using theoretical analysis not as an end in itself, but as a resource for shaping expressive intent.

Additionally, these trajectories exemplify the constructivist and phenomenological frameworks introduced in Chapter Four, in which students co-constructed expressive knowledge and articulated it through embodied, situated practice. They also answer Chapter Two's call to pluralise performance training by integrating Malaysian genres into the university curriculum—not as peripheral “add-ons,” but as co-equal sites of expressive learning (cf. Abdul Rahim, 2014; Crispin & Östersjö, 2017). The programme appears most effective when it bridges students' prior informal and participatory strengths with targeted technical and analytic scaffolds. It transforms hybridity from an incidental background condition into a deliberate principle of learning design.

7.10 Integrating Hybrid Traditions: Overall Implications from RQ2

Findings

Synthesising findings from previous and current experiences, RQ2 demonstrates that students develop expressiveness through hybrid learning ecologies. Informal learning emerges as a vital cultural asset, as family, community, and religious music, peer groups, and self-directed online exploration foster emotion-first, collaborative, and improvisatory practices (Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2002). These are not remedial pathways but fertile grounds for expressive agency.

Formal instruction provides focused scaffolding through technique, analysis, and repertoire-specific literacies. However, when delivered as correctness-first, it risks muting students' interpretive ownership—a tension already highlighted in Chapters Two and Three. Conversely, when teaching is grounded in aural modelling, dialogue (Meissner, 2021; Woody, 2006), and the inclusion of Malaysian repertoires, it amplifies students' expressive resources.

The overall implication is the need for a hybrid pedagogy that deliberately integrates Western and non-Western learning approaches (Burnard et al., 2015; Campbell, 1991; Wong, 2017). Such pedagogy would treat oral and embodied practices—movement, cueing, improvisation—as assessable learning outcomes alongside notation-based skills. It would use local genres to teach expressive timing, texture, and gesture, and to transfer these insights between notated repertoires and local genres. Additionally, it would also embed reflective tasks, such as VSRI, peer feedback, and journaling, to legitimise students' felt and embodied knowledge as evidence of learning.

Furthermore, across RQ1 and RQ2, Malaysian undergraduates describe expressiveness as emotional, interpretive, technical, and embodied, co-constructed through diverse previous experiences and refined in focused study. Listening carefully to these voices shifts the centre of gravity from a transmission model of “correct style and structure” to a student-centred model in which affect, culture, and embodiment are integral to learning. This reconceptualisation operationalises the critique of conservatoire dominance outlined in Chapter Two and the constructivist

and phenomenological commitments elaborated in Chapter Four. It offers a hybrid pedagogy that is both rooted in the Malaysian context and conversant with global practices.

7.11 BMus Ed Students' Strategies of Learning Expressiveness in Music Performance (RQ3 Findings)

My RQ3 findings on the respondents' learning strategies for expressiveness in music performance have revealed several significant themes, derived from both my survey questionnaire and interviews. The undergraduate music education students' learning strategies for expressiveness in music performance can be categorised into those shaped primarily by previous and current learning experiences, and those that integrate both. Strategies rooted in previous learning experiences are influenced by personal experiences, emotional and contextual approaches, self-directed learning, and a focus on real musical experiences grounded in their largely participatory music-making backgrounds. Collectively, these foster personal and emotional engagement in expressive learning, thereby highlighting contextual understanding and emotional resonance as key contributions of prior learning.

In contrast, strategies shaped by current learning experiences emerged largely from formal education at the university, including instruction in theory and technique, collaborative and guided learning, and academic and professional development within the BMus Ed programme. These, in turn, contribute to the

development of technical skills that shape students' strategies for expressiveness, with technical proficiency and dynamic control emerging as key themes. Lastly, the students' strategies that integrate both previous and current learning experiences can be summarised by the significant theme of adaptive practice. Overall, these strands illustrate student agency within cultural and institutional constraints. Learners assemble expressive know-how by drawing on family or community traditions, popular and traditional Malaysian musics, and focused conservatoire-style training, before adapting their approaches to different venues, ensembles, instruments, and audiences. A discussion of these three categories of strategies in students' learning of expressiveness is as follows.

7.12 Strategies Shaped by Previous Learning Experiences

7.12.1 Contextual Understanding

From my study, the undergraduate music education students' diverse prior formal and informal backgrounds have significantly influenced their understanding of expressiveness in music performance. These backgrounds include formal music education and training received through schools and private institutions, as well as informal participatory music-making, including self-directed learning from social media and family-led musical activities. These environments have helped the students to learn various musical skills, handle different types of instruments, and interpret a variety of musical genres within broader non-Western and Western cultural and historical contexts. Consequently, the students could connect

personally with the music they learned and shape their subjective understanding of expressiveness in music performance as either intuitively driven, which relates to emotional expression, or theoretically driven, which relates to musical parameters and structures.

Additionally, the students' previous context-rich learning of traditional ensemble music such as *gamelan*, *cak lempong*, and *kompang*, community bands, religious music, and self-directed online study, have cultivated their sensitivity to genre histories, performance roles, cueing practices, and audience relationships. Therefore, my findings on students' contextual understanding, as one of the strategies shaped by their diverse previous experiences, resonate with Burnard et al. (2015), who discussed the role of non-Western pedagogies, such as oral tradition, in developing authentic interpretative skills of expressiveness in music performance.

Subsequently, my students' strategy of contextual understanding resonates with Crispin and Östersjö's (2017) emphasis that formative experiences in culturally rich contexts foster individuality in musical expression. This perspective is reflected in their assertion that the development of a performer's voice is not merely a solitary affair but emerges through a complex interplay of sustained guidance from various teachers, extensive listening, and collaborative music-making. Such an interplay, they argue, also influences personal development, making expression a concept deeply and almost instinctively embedded in musicians' experience of their practice (Crispin & Östersjö, 2017, p. 300).

In terms of examples from my findings demonstrating how students' contextual understanding is shaped by their previous experiences, the participants in Study 2 (interview), such as Arun and Siti, provided detailed accounts. They described how learning traditional Malaysian music through oral traditions deepened their connection to cultural narratives, enhancing their ability to convey expressive meanings.

Based on the contextual understanding learning strategy of undergraduate music education students, as obtained from my survey questionnaire and interview findings, I suggest that this strategy acts as a bridge between cultural identity and expressive performance. Specifically, students' contextual understanding of non-Western musical compositions across various genres will influence how each student conveys different forms of expressiveness in their musical performances, thereby portraying their cultural identities. For example, Zamani conveyed expressive hand gestures and body movements, along with cues and balance, with his co-performers to present the expressiveness of Malay traditional music through their hands-on percussion performances. Ana, on the other hand, used specific phrasing and articulation in her violin performances to convey the expressive flow of the traditional songs she was working on. Therefore, contextual understanding equips students with interpretative depth that enriches their ability to connect with audiences.

7.12.2 Emotional Resonance

Emotional resonance emerges as the significant theme from the TA of my survey questionnaire and interview findings. Particularly, emotional resonance describes my respondents' emphasis on conveying emotions and feelings to the audience in their musical performances, as documented in my Study 1 survey questionnaire. It also encompasses the interplay between felt and perceived emotions in expressiveness, as revealed in my Study 2 interviews. Notably, my respondents' diverse prior, personal, and subjective experiences have shaped their connections to different musical genres and instruments, and their perceptions of expressiveness in musical performance, leading students to emphasise emotional expression. My respondents' experience of emotional expression during practice and performance, and their attempts to convey this expressiveness to evoke similar feelings in their audience, demonstrates a two-way emotional resonance. This resonance operates both internally, through their own felt or perceived emotions, and externally, in the emotions communicated to the audience.

In specific examples from the findings that demonstrate how respondents apply emotional resonance as a strategy for learning expressiveness (Chapter 5, pp. 79–83), one interviewee, Ana (violinist), provided a detailed account. She described how performing her selected song, “Young and Beautiful,” resonated with her emotional experiences of sorrow and joy, stemming from her life events, because the song's narrative closely mirrored those experiences. Therefore, Ana was able to feel her emotions strongly and communicate them effectively to the audience.

Another example is Zamani (hand percussionist), who worked with his co-performers to achieve the desired emotions, mood, and atmosphere in the music they performed and conveyed their emotional expression, as well as expressive cues and gestures, to the audience. Moreover, in a uniquely traditional musical instrument-related example in approaching emotional resonance, Arun (gambus or “oud” player) used ornamentation and special techniques in gambus playing to express emotions in the music that he played, as well as communicated his techniques and emotions to the audience.

Hence, these students’ accounts demonstrate that expressiveness is the reproduction of stylistic cues prescribed by a score and a dialogic process, in which performers inhabit, embody, and project emotions, inviting audiences into shared affective experiences. The voices of Malaysian students enrich this perspective by illustrating how cultural and personal histories shape their capacity for resonance. Consequently, these examples affirm that emotional resonance is inseparable from cultural embeddedness, as it is learned in rehearsal rooms and through belonging to musical worlds where emotion, story, and gesture intertwine.

Notably, the strategy of emotional resonance from my respondents’ learning of expressiveness in music performance firstly resonates with Van Zijl and Sloboda's (2010) dynamic progression of felt emotions during the construction of expressiveness. In particular, findings from Van Zijl and Sloboda (2010) revealed that the performer’s own emotions “seemed to be divided into practice-related emotions (for example, frustration at not being able to master technical difficulties),

and music-related emotions (for example, aesthetic delight)”. Therefore, the findings suggested that “a distinction needs to be made between emotions present in the music (or perceived emotions) and one’s own emotions (or felt and induced emotions)” (Van Zijl & Sloboda, 2010, p. 18). Furthermore, aligning with Van Zijl and Sloboda (2010), the interplay between practice-related and music-related emotions, as well as between felt and perceived emotions, was observed in the cycle of emotional resonance from the performer to the audience among several of my respondents in my interview study (Chapter 5). For instance, Elia (alto saxophonist) navigated between her perceived and felt emotions through her playing, striving to convey her personal emotions to the audience. In another example, Yen (flautist) explored perceived emotions by imitating how her selected piece sounded in other performers’ videos and in her instructor’s performance. Later, she transitioned to her own personal emotions put to music, conveying her emotions convincingly to the audience.

Other than that, my respondents’ strategy of emotional resonance also aligns with Juslin’s (2003) notion of GERMS theory in musical expression, taking specifically the component of ‘E’ that states ‘Emotional expression that serves to convey intended emotions to listeners’ (Juslin, 2003). Based on the interview findings (Chapter 5, pp. 173–197), the ten interviewees’ different approaches to emotional resonance, involving the interplay between felt and perceived emotions and emotional communication to the audience, have contributed to Juslin’s (2003) notion of emotional expression. In addition, the themes of ‘emotional connection

and visualisation' based on previous learning experiences, and 'developing emotional connection' from current learning experiences, as identified from my survey questionnaire findings for items Q34 and Q35 (open-ended responses; Chapter 5, pp. 203 & 205), have indicated the implementation of the emotional resonance strategy. These findings also contributed to the concept of emotional resonance, as proposed by Juslin (2003). Specifically, the students' emotional resonance strategy aligns with Juslin's (2003) discussion of emotions as tacit knowledge that performers gradually refine. Moreover, the students' strategy of emotional resonance has also drawn a similarity with, and contributed to Van Zijl and Sloboda's (2010) findings that revealed the importance of emotional engagement of the students during the process of constructing an expressive performance.

Thus, such findings invite a reconceptualisation of how expressiveness is learned in Malaysian higher music education. They suggest that emotional resonance is not an optional "extra" after technique but a primary pathway through which students construct expressive knowledge. This challenges curricula that privilege Western conservatoire norms, where expressiveness often appears as an interpretive layer applied after technical mastery. Instead, students' testimonies support a pedagogy that treats emotion as tacit, embodied knowledge, refined through reflection, experimentation, and cultural fluency (Juslin, 2003; Van Zijl & Sloboda, 2010). Within this framework, expressiveness is understood as co-

constructed, and it grows from the performer's inner life, their cultural inheritance, and the situated act of performance.

Critically, Malaysian undergraduates' accounts expand the discourse on emotional expression by foregrounding repertoires and practices rarely visible in Western studies of performance. *Gamelan*, *kompang*, *cak lempong*, and popular music scenes teach emotional nuance through groove, gesture, and call-and-response dynamics, often prioritising audience connection and spontaneity over fidelity to a written score. These modes of learning invite students to locate their own emotional agency, positioning them as interpreters rather than mere transmitters of pre-defined meanings. Therefore, by affirming these voices, the research calls for a hybrid pedagogy that integrates local and global traditions, legitimising non-Western affective knowledge alongside technical precision.

In summary, emotional resonance, rooted in students' lived experiences and shaped by Malaysia's diverse musical ecology, signals a need to broaden the epistemic foundations of music performance pedagogy. It reconceptualises expressiveness as an embodied, culturally situated dialogue between performer and listener, where technical skill serves, rather than eclipses, emotional communication. By centring Malaysian undergraduates' perspectives, this study advocates for curricula that honour their heritage, creativity, and affective insight as integral to the learning of expressiveness.

7.13 Strategies Shaped by Current Learning Experiences

7.13.1 Technical Proficiency

The transition from diverse past learning experiences to a more structured university education has shaped students' reliance on technical proficiency as a means of achieving expressiveness in their musical performance. This study revealed that students developed expressiveness through a combination of disciplined technical execution and personal engagement with music, ultimately challenging the notion that technique and emotion are separate entities.

Through their experiences with different instruments, students adopted specific learning strategies to refine their articulation, phrasing, and dynamics. For example, Zamani (a hand percussionist) and Carl (a drummer) explored rhythmic contrast and tempo flexibility to enhance expressiveness, while Elia and Will (both alto saxophonists) prioritised breath control and phrasing to shape expressive melodies. Similarly, Nora (a cellist) and Liza (a pianist) focused on posture and hand placement to optimise their tone.

Additionally, examples that depict the students' application of the technical proficiency strategy could be observed from the interview, where the interviewees mostly emphasised overcoming technical challenges when handling their musical instruments, in addition to more details on bringing up the musical parameters from the songs or pieces that they learned (Chapter 5, Table 5.26, pp.79–83). For

instance, Elia and Will (alto saxophonists) emphasised mastery of saxophone techniques, including breath control and phrasing, to achieve the flow of the melody. Conversely, Zamani (hands percussionist), Carl (drummer), and Arun (gambus or ‘oud’ player) underscored the importance of mastering complex rhythm patterns, fill-ins, and changes in time signature to improve their expressiveness and communicate with the audience. Other than that, Nora (cellist) and Liza (modern pianist) highlighted posture techniques, such as improving fingering, with Nora focusing on bowing fingering to manage note changes and Liza on adjusting fingering to voice out chords and tension notes.

Subsequently, examples of technical proficiency could also be observed in the open-ended responses to items Q34–Q35 of the survey questionnaire. From Q34 examples of previous learning strategies, respondents’ indication that strategies specific to their musical instruments that focused on technical adjustments have helped them to convey expressiveness in music performance, as illustrated from the ‘instrument-specific techniques’ theme obtained from the findings (Chapter 5, Table 5.24, pp.74). Although these findings are from previous learning strategies, the preliminary stage, which demonstrates how the students explored and made sense of their diverse instrument-specific techniques, is an important starting point before transitioning to the technical proficiency shaped by the current learning experiences. Moving on to Q35’s findings of current learning strategies, the students undertook a more refined technical and theoretical approach. They emphasised that understanding musical parameters such as dynamics and phrasing,

as well as techniques including intonation, and applying knowledge from music theory contributed to conveying expressiveness (Chapter 5, Table 5.25, pp. 75).

Furthermore, the strategy of technical proficiency derived from my findings has resonated with several Western-contextual previous studies of learning expressiveness in music performance. For example, my respondents' and interviewees' emphasis on achieving technical proficiency to convey expressiveness aligns with Juslin and Laukka's (2003) emphasis on the role of technical precision in enabling performers to execute expressive cues effectively. The manipulation of musical parameters applied by the interviewees has also resonated with Lehmann et al.'s (2007) notion of nuance. It describes how performers use these parameters, including attack, timing, pitch, loudness, timbre, and other elements that make music sound alive and human rather than mechanical.

On the other hand, my interviewees' handling of their musical instruments to convey expressiveness aligns with Schubert's (2022) emphasis on musically expressive performance. According to Schubert, expressiveness emerges from the way a performer manipulates the instrument, converting carefully controlled and coordinated physical actions into musical or psychophysical signals that translate into expressiveness in musical performance. Consequently, technical proficiency, as evidenced by my findings, enables performers to transcend mere mechanical reproduction of music by manipulating their instruments and musical parameters to convey expressiveness, individuality, and emotional depth.

However, the interviewees' accounts indicate that technique is not an isolated domain but a resource for meaning-making, developed in dialogue with personal histories, cultural repertoires, and embodied knowledge. By approaching technical mastery as a pathway toward interpretative depth, Malaysian undergraduates challenge the assumption, embedded in much Western pedagogy, that technical work and emotional communication belong to separate stages of study.

In the findings, the students described how the refinement of articulation, phrasing, and dynamics was inseparable from the cultural and affective contexts in which they had first encountered music. For Zamani (hands percussionist) and Carl (drummer), rhythmic contrast and flexible tempo were not merely exercises in precision. They reflected habits nurtured in community drumming circles and informal bands, where expressive timing and "groove" were prized. Conversely, Elia and Will (alto saxophonists) linked breath control and melodic shaping to stories about playing for school ensembles and church groups, contexts where tone and phrasing were expected to convey warmth and vitality. Nora (cellist) and Liza (pianist) explained how posture, hand placement, and fingering strategies were animated by memories of teachers encouraging them to "make the sound speak," whether in Western repertoire or in arrangements of local songs.

As a result, these narratives point to a need for music performance pedagogy in Malaysia to reconceptualise technical proficiency as culturally mediated. Students' voices suggest that technical work becomes meaningful when framed as

a means of unlocking expressive possibilities across genres, rather than merely as an obligation to replicate canonical standards. In their accounts, ornamentation in *gambus*, subtle dynamic surges in Malay percussion, and flexible voicing of popular ballads were as important to expressive growth as mastering bow control or piano fingering in Western art music. Recognising this hybridity resists the tendency identified in Chapter Two to privilege Western-centric “legitimate” skills while relegating oral, improvisatory, and participatory techniques to the margins.

Moreover, the data indicate that students develop proficiency through *adaptive practice*, negotiating between formal instruction and the improvisatory sensibilities of their earlier learning. They reported adjusting their approaches to suit acoustics, ensemble balance, or the affordances of their instruments, often drawing on strategies they had absorbed from local mentors or peers. This blending of aural modelling, experimentation, and bodily movement echoes research on dialogic and embodied learning (Meissner, 2021; Woody, 2006). It exemplifies the constructivist stance in Chapter Three, in which learners actively assemble expressive techniques from multiple cultural and experiential sources.

By foregrounding Malaysian undergraduates’ testimonies, this study positions technical proficiency not as a universal checklist of skills but as an evolving, culturally situated practice. Their accounts make visible forms of expertise, such as dynamic cueing in *kompang*, syncopated phrasing in contemporary Malay pop, or the tactile subtleties of *gamelan* mallet work, that extend the vocabulary of expressiveness beyond what is commonly codified in

Western conservatoire syllabi. Thus, incorporating these practices into formal training would allow students to cultivate dexterity and artistry in ways that affirm their identities and broaden the expressive horizons of higher music education in Malaysia.

Finally, the reconceptualisation implied by these findings is both pedagogical and theoretical. If expressiveness is to flourish, technical instruction must remain open to the textures of students' musical lives, namely their familial repertoires, community rituals, digital resources, and hybrid ensembles. Rather than treating these as extracurricular, educators can integrate them into curricula as valid sites for cultivating touch, breath, rhythm, and sound quality. Such an approach transforms technical proficiency from a narrow, style-specific objective into a living bridge between tradition, innovation, and the personal voice of each Malaysian undergraduate performer.

7.13.2 Dynamics Control

Dynamics control emerges as a significant sub-factor within technical proficiency, representing one of the most consistently applied strategies among students to shape the expressiveness of their musical performances. Beyond its technical role, dynamics control functions as a creative resource through which students sculpt emotional contours, lending shape and vitality to sound. In particular, dynamics enabled participants to project emotional contrasts across a piece, helping them to communicate intensity, serenity, suspense, or release. This

was vividly evident in Elia's nuanced use of volume shifts to articulate emotional transitions. Similarly, Ana's and Nora's flexible manipulation of dynamics and tempo to colour phrasing with depth, and Carl's subtle deployment of "ghost notes" to create balance and emotional poise on the drum kit (Chapter 5, Table 5.26, pp.79–82).

Notably, the centrality of dynamics in students' expressive practice resonates with research in Western contexts. Schubert and Fabian's (2014) factor analyses confirm that dynamic contour is a principal cue for perceived emotional expressiveness, while Sloboda and Juslin (2001) and Gabrielsson (1999) emphasise the performer's manipulation of intensity as key to affective communication. However, the Malaysian students' testimonies suggest a richer, more situated understanding, in which dynamics are about notational precision and the embodiment and release of emotions in dialogue with genre, space, and audience. Their descriptions of "feeling the rise and fall" of sound, or of "letting the softness invite the listener," point to an embodied, relational knowledge often underexplored in purely technical models.

Moreover, the interviewees' accounts reveal that dynamic control rarely stands alone. It integrates instrumental techniques, bodily gestures, and ensemble coordination. Zamani and Liza, for instance, described how they balanced volume and rhythmic clarity with their band members, treating dynamics as an interactive process rather than an individual parameter. Yen emphasised how breath control when playing the flute underpinned her ability to produce dynamic nuance, while

Arun linked the ebb and surge of tone on the *gambus* to the arc of his torso, bending forward or rising upright to signal expressive inflexions. These embodied strategies align with Davidson's (2012) discussion of performers' use of movement and gesture to support dynamic shaping, suggesting that expressiveness in performance is inseparable from corporeal awareness.

Critically, these findings reconceptualise the learning of expressiveness by revealing how Malaysian undergraduates embed dynamics within culturally situated practices. For many participants, shaping loudness and softness was a matter of obeying score markings and an extension of habits formed in participatory music-making, whether guiding the swell of a *kompong* ensemble, calibrating intensity in a *gamelan* group, or adjusting projection in popular-music jam sessions. This suggests that the pedagogical value of dynamics lies in its codified role in Western notation and in its capacity to translate social and affective energies from local traditions into formal study. When students applied dynamics to Western repertoire, they often drew on bodily and communal memories from these traditions, creating hybrid interpretations that honour multiple expressive lineages.

From a pedagogical standpoint, this hybrid sensibility invites a shift away from framing dynamics as a purely technical parameter. Instead, it should be approached as a bridge between students' cultural resources and institutional expectations. Incorporating reflective tasks, such as asking students to articulate how dynamic shaping in Malaysian genres informs their treatment of classical works, could legitimise these embodied knowledges and foster more holistic

learning. Such an approach supports Chapter Four's constructivist and phenomenological orientations, where expressiveness is co-constructed through lived practice rather than passively acquired as external rules.

Therefore, the students' engagement with dynamics control illuminates the potential of reconceptualising expressiveness as a culturally mediated synthesis of technique, emotion, and bodily presence. By foregrounding Malaysian undergraduates' voices, this study depicts how they resist a narrowly Westernised view of dynamics as mere compliance with written indications. Instead, they position it as a flexible, relational tool, one that connects the sonic detail of performance with memory, identity, and audience connection. Recognising this complexity is vital for music performance pedagogy in Malaysia, as it calls for teaching that celebrates dynamics as technical mastery and as a means for students to craft expressive narratives that speak from and to their diverse cultural worlds.

7.14 Strategies that Integrate Both Previous and Current Learning Experiences

7.14.1 Adaptive Practice

Adaptive practice emerges as a crucial strategy that bridges students' previous and current learning experiences, enabling them to negotiate diverse environments, expectations, and repertoires as they refine their expressiveness. Rather than being a peripheral skill, adaptability represents a form of agency

through which students actively curate their own pathways for learning expressiveness. The interviews revealed that students were not passive recipients of techniques but active experimenters, modifying rehearsal methods, spatial setups, and interpretive choices to meet the demands of each context. This capacity to “work things out” aligns with constructivist perspectives (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978), where knowledge is constructed through situated problem-solving, and with phenomenological insights that emphasise the role of lived experience in shaping performance meaning (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962).

Examples from the study illustrate how adaptive practice operates at multiple levels. Elia’s use of headphones to block distractions and concentrate on tone projection demonstrates how students protect expressive focus in less-than-ideal conditions. Zamani’s and Will’s adjustments of body position when shifting between solo and ensemble roles reveal a sensitivity to the relational demands of different performance settings. Ana’s mental rehearsal of an ideal concert hall while practising in a dry room demonstrates how imagination can compensate for environmental limitations, sustaining the emotional quality of her playing. Collectively, these cases point to an emerging pedagogy of flexibility, where students learn to integrate physical, cognitive, and affective resources to maintain expressiveness across circumstances.

Additionally, a deeper layer of adaptive practice is its dialogic dimension, in which students use feedback from peers, instructors, and accompanists as catalysts for refining their expressiveness. Zamani, Will, and Carl described how

collaborative discussion within bands helped them balance technical precision with emotional intent. Simultaneously, Arun used rehearsals to test tempi and rhythmic nuances with fellow *gambus* players, refining how expressiveness could unfold in live settings. Liza and her ensemble developed a shared vocabulary of cues and solutions to address performance challenges. In contrast, Yen, Siti, and Nora leveraged lecturers' advice and accompanists' comments to align technical delivery with expressive aims. Thus, this iterative process reflects Meissner and Timmers' (2020) conception of dialogic teaching, where interpretive insight is co-created through questioning, negotiation, and reflective talk.

Crucially, the Malaysian students' accounts invite a reconceptualisation of adaptive practice beyond a narrow focus on technical resilience. For them, adaptability is also cultural, as it encompasses the blending of expressive codes from local traditions with formal conservatoire expectations. Several students described how experience in participatory musics such as *cak lempong* or contemporary worship bands taught them to read audience reactions, modulate intensity, and collaborate dynamically. These tacit competencies enriched their engagement with Western scores, enabling them to infuse notated phrases with the vitality of communal musicking. Adaptive practice, therefore, becomes a space where hybrid expressive repertoires are tested and legitimised, rather than suppressed in favour of a singular "correct" style.

On the other hand, this perspective also challenges the notion that expressiveness is fixed in the score or transmitted exclusively through teacher

modelling. Instead, expressiveness emerges as an evolving negotiation between self, others, and environment. Students' willingness to adjust phrasing to the room's acoustics or to adjust expressive gestures in response to the ensemble's flow demonstrates an embodied understanding of music as an event rather than an object. Such findings echo Crispin and Östersjö's (2017) argument that artistry depends on the performer's capacity to remain responsive to context while sustaining a personal voice.

Pedagogically, recognising adaptive practice as central to learning expressiveness has significant implications for Malaysian higher music education. It suggests that curricula should teach students to replicate established interpretations and cultivate the skills and confidence to adapt expressively across cultural, physical, and social settings. Assessment criteria might, for instance, value how students navigate unpredictable rehearsal conditions or integrate feedback creatively into performance preparation. Hence, by foregrounding Malaysian undergraduates' voices, this study positions adaptability as more than a practical necessity. It is a culturally inflected form of musicianship that legitimises students' agency and diverse heritage as resources for expressive growth.

Ultimately, adaptive practice reframes expressiveness as a dialogic, situated, and culturally mediated achievement. It highlights how Malaysian students construct meaning through an interplay of reflection, experimentation, and collaboration, moving fluidly between Western and non-Western traditions. Supporting this mode of learning requires a pedagogy that honours

experimentation, community-based rehearsal practices, and embodied knowledge alongside formal instruction. Consequently, educators can foster musicians who are technically competent, artistically resilient, culturally aware, and capable of crafting expressive performances that resonate across audiences and traditions.

7.15 Integration of Personal Agency and Contextual Adaptation: An Overall Implication of RQ3 Findings

The findings on students' strategies, namely contextual understanding, emotional resonance, technical proficiency, dynamics control, and adaptive practice, demonstrate that expressiveness in music performance is not a single, prescriptive skill. Rather, it is a dynamic process in which learners exercise personal agency as they respond to cultural, social, and institutional contexts. Malaysian undergraduates demonstrated the ability to integrate imagery, personal storytelling, improvisation, peer feedback, and bodily engagement into their learning, suggesting that expressiveness is constructed at the intersection of cognition, emotion, and environment. Thus, this perspective challenges the dominant view, embedded in Western pedagogical traditions, that positions expressiveness as a fixed set of stylistic rules to be transmitted by instructors.

Notably, personal agency was evident in students' willingness to reinterpret repertoire in terms of personal meaning, drawing on the composer's intention and their own histories and emotions. By weaving their biographies and cultural references into interpretative decisions, students enacted a constructivist stance in

which musical knowledge is actively built rather than passively received (Bruner, 1996). Their practices support a reconceptualisation of expressiveness as an evolving dialogue between individual identity and musical text, mediated by reflection, experimentation, and feedback.

Moreover, observation and embodiment also emerged as key elements of this reconceptualisation. Strategies such as listening to recordings, mimicking gestures, and using physical movements illustrate how students learn expressiveness through a blend of vicarious learning (Bandura, 1977) and embodied cognition (Schiavio et al., 2019). These processes align with Juslin's (2003) GERMS model, where motion, nuance, and emotional intent are core to expressive communication. For Malaysian students, such embodiment often extends beyond Western models, as expressive gestures drawn from *gamelan*, *kompang*, or popular music rehearsals infuse their performances with culturally situated meaning, enriching how they inhabit the music.

Equally important is the students' emotional and cultural intelligence in shaping expressive choices. They learned to adapt expressive tools to genre, audience, and social setting—whether employing subtle inflexions from Malay folk songs, integrating rhythmic gestures from drumming traditions, or tempering Western phrasing conventions with improvisatory flair. This flexibility illustrates that expressiveness is a culturally mediated competence, not a universal aesthetic measured solely by Western-centric standards.

Overall, these findings argue for a pedagogical shift in Malaysian higher music education. Reconceptualising expressiveness means valuing the processes through which students build expressive agency from diverse cultural resources, rather than confining them to a Western canon of “good” performance. A curriculum that celebrates experimentation, embodiment, and emotional authenticity can enable students to navigate multiple traditions with confidence and to articulate expressive voices that are both technically assured and culturally grounded.

7.16 The Need to Acknowledge and Integrate Non-Western, Culturally Diverse Malaysian Context of Students’ Expressive Strategies

The evidence from my study underscores a persistent gap in current music performance education. However, while Malaysian students’ expressive strategies are deeply informed by their cultural backgrounds, institutional practices often privilege Western models of expressiveness, with limited room for local and hybrid practices. Although participants demonstrated mastery of Western cues such as phrasing, articulation, and dynamics, many also described expressive approaches embedded in oral traditions, participatory musics, and embodied rituals. In particular, techniques from genres such as *wayang kulit*, *mak yong*, *dikir barat*, or traditional *gamelan*, where gesture, rhythm, narrative, and audience interaction are inseparable from sound, were integral to their expressive vocabulary.

Consequently, these insights compel a reconceptualisation of expressiveness as a culturally contingent phenomenon. Rather than treating Western interpretive conventions as neutral or universal, music performance pedagogy in Malaysia must recognise that students' expressivity is shaped by a plural heritage that includes traditional arts, popular music, religious performance, and social media-driven creativity. Thus, validating these influences would affirm students' identities and broaden the expressive possibilities available to them, fostering performances that resonate authentically with local audiences while remaining intelligible in global contexts.

Constructivist and phenomenological perspectives provide a strong foundation for this shift. Students' learning is rooted in lived experience and embodied practice, as it is dialogical, negotiated through rehearsal, feedback, and improvisation. Embedding non-Western expressive models into university curricula can therefore transform learning environments into laboratories of cross-cultural artistry. Practical measures might include designing modules that place Malaysian repertoires on an equal footing with Western works; inviting practitioners of traditional or contemporary local genres as co-teachers; and encouraging reflective tasks such as journals, peer critiques, and video-stimulated recall, that legitimise students' tacit, embodied knowledge.

Collectively, such integration does not diminish the value of Western classical training but reframes it as one of many tools for developing expressive agency. When students can draw freely on both notated discipline and oral or

embodied traditions, they acquire a hybrid musicianship capable of negotiating diverse audiences and settings. The reconceptualised pedagogy thus becomes technically rigorous and culturally responsive, allowing Malaysian undergraduates to articulate expressive identities that honour their heritage while engaging with broader musical discourses.

7.17 Chapter Summary

Chapter Six has offered a detailed discussion of how Malaysian undergraduate music education students conceptualise, experience, and learn expressiveness in music performance. Findings from RQ1 demonstrate how students primarily associate expressiveness with emotional communication, with interpreting a musical message, developing personal insights, and employing technical and embodied resources. They regard expressiveness not as a fixed repertoire of stylistic cues but as a negotiated, context-sensitive practice shaped by their histories and aspirations.

Furthermore, RQ2 highlights that students' previous musical experiences, both formal and informal, form a powerful foundation for expressive learning. Informal and participatory settings such as *gamelan*, *kompang*, school bands, or social-media-led study cultivate emotion-first, collaborative, and improvisatory skills. Current training within the BMus Ed curriculum strengthens these foundations by refining technique, theoretical understanding, and ensemble awareness, particularly through applied lessons, Malaysian repertoire courses, and

dialogic feedback. Overall, these trajectories produce a hybrid learning ecology in which Western conservatoire skills and Malaysian oral, embodied, and popular traditions inform one another.

RQ3, on the contrary, reveals how students operationalise these resources through distinct strategies. From previous learning, they derive *contextual understanding* and *emotional resonance*; from current study, they develop *technical proficiency* and its salient sub-factor, *dynamics control*; and through *adaptive practice*, they integrate past and present experiences, adjusting expressiveness to different performance spaces, ensemble roles, and cultural expectations. These strategies confirm that expressiveness is co-constructed through emotion, embodiment, technique, and social dialogue.

Therefore, by synthesising these insights, the chapter reconceptualises expressiveness in Malaysian higher music education as a culturally mediated, student-centred process. It argues for pedagogies that legitimise students' affective and traditional resources alongside formal instruction, enabling them to craft performances that are technically assured, emotionally authentic, and grounded in their diverse musical worlds.

CHAPTER SEVEN

**RECONCEPTUALISING THE LEARNING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN
MUSIC PERFORMANCE THROUGH MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATE
VOICES: A CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD**

8.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter synthesises the study's empirical findings and theoretical arguments to reconceptualise how expressiveness is learned in Malaysian higher music education. It begins by restating the research aims and questions, then summarises the mixed-methods evidence from Study 1 (a survey questionnaire) and Study 2 (video-stimulated recall interviews). The chapter draws connections between students' reported beliefs and practices, the pedagogical models reviewed earlier, and the institutional contexts described in Chapter Two. From this synthesis, practical contributions are developed for curriculum, classroom practice, assessment, and institutional policy, and an implementation roadmap is set out for piloting and scaling reforms. The chapter closes with a candid appraisal of the study's methodological limitations, an agenda for future research, and final reflections on the study's theoretical and practical significance.

8.2 Reflections on My Research Pathway

My study was grounded in a recognition that Malaysia's higher music education has long inherited Western-centric conservatoire logics: a focus on notation, composer intent, and narrowly codified notions of "expressive" authority. As discussed in Chapter Two, these frameworks have tended to sideline oral, improvisatory, and participatory practices embedded in Malaysia's diverse musical cultures. Chapters Three and Four provided the literature review and conceptual scaffolding for this research, engaging constructivist and phenomenological perspectives and psychological models such as Generative rules, Emotional expression, Random variations, Motion principles, Stylistic unexpectedness (GERMS). These frameworks position expressiveness as a co-constructed, embodied, and culturally mediated phenomenon rather than a fixed stylistic rule set.

In this context, my research sought to illuminate how students themselves make sense of and learn about expressiveness. Through Study 1 (survey-questionnaire) and Study 2 VSRI, students' voices revealed how non-Western and hybrid histories, including family and community musicking, traditional and popular genres, informal and social-media learning, interact with their current formal training. Specifically, three research questions guided this pathway: how students conceptualise expressiveness (RQ1); how previous and current learning experiences shape that understanding (RQ2); and what strategies they adopt to cultivate it (RQ3). Collectively, these questions clarified students' agency in

negotiating Western and Malaysian practices and signalled the need for a pedagogy that validates both.

8.3 Concluding Implications from RQ1 – RQ3 Findings

Findings for RQ1 demonstrate that students primarily conceptualise expressiveness as the ability to communicate emotions to listeners, echoing cross-cultural research while foregrounding tensions between musical message and personal interpretation. Those with stronger Western classical training often emphasised fidelity to a piece's intended message, whereas students rooted in Malaysian traditional or popular musics privileged interpretative freedom. Technical mastery was understood as an enabler rather than a substitute for meaning, and embodied gestures, although less often verbalised, were recognised as part of performance expressiveness. These insights support the constructivist view that students build expressive meaning from their lifeworlds and training, and resonate with phenomenological emphases on lived musical experience.

Furthermore, RQ2 revealed that previous informal and participatory experiences, including family ensembles, religious and community events, social-media learning, and exposure to traditional or popular repertoires, provided intuitive, affective, and embodied resources for expressiveness. Current university study refined these foundations through technical and theoretical development, ensemble work, and dialogic or aural modelling. Notably, the most robust learning

occurred through hybridisation, in which students integrated non-Western and Western resources, developing a balance among emotion, structure, and technique.

Additionally, RQ3 highlighted three families of strategies. Contextual understanding, derived from previous experience, encompasses knowledge of genre histories, performance roles, cueing, and audience connection and emotional resonance, involving the interplay of felt and perceived emotions projected to listeners. From the current study emerged technical proficiency that includes instrument-specific control of tone, phrasing, intonation, and timing, as well as dynamics control, a particularly salient parameter often linked with bodily gesture. Finally, adaptive practice combined prior and present learning, encompassing feedback, experimentation, acoustic management, and the blending of oral, improvisatory strengths with formal technique. Collectively, these strategies reflect students' personal agency and contextual adaptation, advancing a blended, cross-cultural model of learning expressiveness.

8.4 My Research Contributions to Pedagogy, Practice, and Policy

8.4.1 Expressiveness Learning as an Explicit Curricular Strand

Drawing on my professional expertise as a lecturer at the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts at Sultan Idris Education University (FMSP UPSI), I argue that the development of expressiveness in music performance should be taught explicitly. This argument also represents a central contribution of my study,

challenging the assumption that emerges implicitly from repertoire study and practice. The empirical findings depict that students acquire expressive resources from multiple sources, including family ensembles, community rituals, popular media, and formal tuition. However, higher education programmes commonly treat expressiveness as an unarticulated by-product of technical training.

To address this gap, I propose a curricular strand or named module, ‘Expressiveness in Performance’, that foregrounds expressive skills as teachable competencies. This strand would combine analytical tasks (score affordances and rhetorical shaping), embodied practice (breath, gesture, and movement vocabularies), aural modelling (teacher and peer demonstration), and culturally situated projects (community placements, site-based composition). Learning outcomes are suggested to be explicit and multimodal, in which students demonstrate technical control (intonation, timing, dynamic range), interpretive reasoning (stylistic and cultural rationale), embodied communication (gesture, stage presence, cueing), and translational competence (ability to adapt an expressive idea across Western and Malaysian idioms). As a result, making expressiveness explicit in this way aligns curriculum design with constructivist and phenomenological perspectives that treat musical meaning as co-constructed and situated (Reimer, 1989; Swanwick, 2012).

8.4.2 Classroom Practices drawn from My Professional Experience in UPSI

The pedagogical strand above can be operationalised through classroom activities, such as my Piano Proficiency group classes, and adapted for broader use. In application, I suggest scaffolded tasks that could potentially be effective. First, ‘Musical Storytelling’ asks students to present a short passage, articulate an interpretive narrative, such as the emotions they feel and the story they wish to convey, perform the passage, and then receive peer aural modelling and feedback. This sequence externalises tacit interpretive choices and creates a shared grounding process between performer and listeners (Amin, 2025; Clark & Brennan, 1991).

Second, ‘Structured Improvisation Labs’ use simple chord progressions or modal frameworks drawn from local genres. In this practice, students improvise with constraints (e.g., a prosodic contour or a rhythmic motif) and then reflect on how timbre, articulation, and gesture shape the communicative effect. The third strategy, ‘Aural + Theory + Practical’, integrates short analytical tasks (identifying expressive affordances in a score), immediate aural modelling (teacher or peer demonstration), and embodied enactment (mapping phrasing to breath and movement).

8.4.3 Multimodal Pedagogy and Assessment Reform

If expressiveness is multimodal, pedagogy and assessment must also reflect this. Traditional single-event juries emphasise technical accuracy and score fidelity,

thereby rarely capturing embodied, improvisatory, or community-situated competencies. Therefore, I recommend *multimodal assessment portfolios* that combine: (a) a live or recorded performance; (b) rehearsal footage showing process and interaction; (c) a stimulated-recall transcript in which the student explains moment-by-moment choices; and (d) a reflective journal linking practice strategies to cultural context. In particular, assessment rubrics should balance four domains: technical, expressive (musical shaping), embodied (gesture, cueing), and cultural (idiomatic ornamentation, community appropriateness), with narrative feedback emphasising developmental trajectories rather than single-event judgement. When culturally specific repertoires are assessed, *co-assessment panels* that include invited community practitioners alongside academic staff provide legitimacy and guard against decontextualised evaluation (Chávez & Skelchy, 2019). Notably, formative cycles that include video journals and peer coaching should be weighted to encourage iterative learning and to make tacit knowledge visible (Nowell et al., 2017).

8.4.4 Faculty Development, Co-Teaching, and Institutional Incentives

Curricular and assessment reform requires faculty capacity. Many university teachers are trained in conservatoire traditions and may lack pedagogical tools for embodied, community-situated teaching. Sustained professional development is therefore essential, including accredited short courses and microcredentials in embodied pedagogy, movement-based teaching, community engagement methods, and culturally responsive assessment. Equally important is

institutional recognition: promotion and workload models must reward community-engaged teaching, co-teaching with cultural practitioners, and curriculum innovation. Without such incentives, faculty will be reluctant to invest the time required to build reciprocal partnerships and to pilot new assessment models. Mentorship networks that pair conservatoire-trained staff with community practitioners can accelerate capacity building and reduce hierarchical dynamics (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

8.4.5 Community Partnerships, Ethics, and Repatriation

A decolonial approach to curriculum demands ethical, long-term partnerships with cultural bearers. Rather than episodic workshops, institutions should formalise reciprocal relationships through memoranda of understanding that specify co-teaching roles, intellectual property arrangements, and benefit-sharing. Research and teaching outputs that draw on community repertoires should be co-authored where appropriate, and archived materials should be repatriated or made accessible to source communities in usable formats (Atalay, 2012; Smith, 2012). Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methods (as derived from Beng & Chee, 2024) ensure that curricula and resources are co-designed and that communities derive tangible benefits, such as workshops, teaching packs, and recordings, rather than merely being researched. These ethical practices guard against extractive research and align institutional practice with decolonial commitments.

8.4.6 Curriculum Pathways and School-to-University Continuity

A systemic barrier identified in this study is the discontinuity between limited pretertiary music provision and university expectations. National policy priorities that privilege STEM have reduced sustained music learning in many schools, leaving students entering higher education with uneven preparation (Mohd Shah, 2016; Ooi, 2017). In particular, universities can mitigate this by offering bridging modules that teach multimodal expressive literacies and aural skills to students from non-annotated backgrounds, and by recognising community-based learning as valid preparation. Additionally, outreach programmes that partner with schools and community ensembles can create pipelines that sustain diverse musical trajectories and reduce attrition.

8.4.7 Pilot, Evaluation, and Scaling: An Implementation Roadmap

To translate recommendations into practice, I propose a staged pilot model. **Phase 1 (Design, Year 1 – Semesters 1 and 2):** co-design an *Expressiveness* module at UPSI with faculty, students and community practitioners, develop multimodal rubrics and ethical agreements. **Phase 2 (Pilot, Year 2 – Semesters 3 and 4):** implement the module with mixed cohorts, collect mixed-methods evaluation data (performance coding, stimulated recall, student reflections), and refine pedagogy. **Phase 3 (Replication, Year 3 – Semesters 5 and 6):** adapt and replicate pilots at other Malaysian institutions (UiTM, UPM, UM, ASWARA) with cross-site moderation panels to build shared exemplars. **Phase 4 (Institutionalisation, Year 4, Semesters 7 and 8):** embed the strand into degree

requirements, advocate for accreditation updates, and secure national funding for scaling. This pilot→evaluate→scale pathway mirrors successful curricular reforms in other post-colonial contexts and provides evidence for policy uptake.

8.4.8 Comparative Lessons from Other Post-Colonial Contexts

Comparable reforms in Aotearoa New Zealand, South Africa, parts of India, and the Caribbean offer instructive precedents. In New Zealand, integrating indigenous music and co-teaching with Māori practitioners underscores the importance of genuine community leadership and curriculum co-design. Furthermore, in South Africa, community-engaged curricula and multimodal assessment have legitimised vernacular practices, underscoring the need for equitable resources and institutional commitment. These international examples demonstrate that change is feasible when pilots are evidence-based, community-led, and institutionally supported. They also caution that tokenistic inclusion without structural incentives and ethical protocols risks reproducing colonial dynamics (Chávez & Skelchy, 2019; Smith, 2012).

8.4.9 Research and Evaluation Agenda

To consolidate and extend the present study, a research agenda should prioritise multi-site comparative studies, longitudinal cohort tracking, and intervention evaluations of revised Applied Music modules. Longitudinal designs will reveal developmental trajectories and the durability of hybrid learning strategies (Menard, 2002; Singer & Willett, 2003). Methodologically, combining

qualitative stimulated recall with immediate think-aloud protocols, gesture coding and computational audio analysis will triangulate subjective reports with observable performance features and strengthen causal inference (Ericsson & Simon, 1993; Lyle, 2003). Notably, participatory evaluation methods that include community partners as co-evaluators will ensure that impact measures reflect local values and priorities.

8.4.10 Anticipated Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Resistance to change, resource constraints and ethical complexities are predictable obstacles. Mitigation strategies include starting with small, well-evaluated pilots to build evidence and secure faculty champions; leveraging external grants and community resources to offset costs. They also involve embedding clear ethical protocols (including data ownership, repatriation, and co-authorship) to prevent extractive practices. Cross-site moderation panels and shared exemplars will help address concerns about assessment standardisation while preserving cultural specificity.

8.5 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

In terms of limitations, I appraise the methodological and time-frame constraints of my study and outline ways in which future research could address them. I aim to demonstrate how methodological refinements could increase the credibility, transferability, and practical impact of findings on how Malaysian undergraduate music students learn expressiveness in music performance.

Moreover, suggestions for methodological refinements could also help future expansion of research on expressiveness learning, whether in Malaysia or beyond.

8.5.1 Sampling, Scope, and Generalisability

My study focused on a single institution (my university workplace) and specific cohorts of Bachelor of Education (Music) with Honours (BMus Ed) students (from Semesters 2, 3, 4, and 5, as these cohorts are currently taking the Applied Music courses at my university). However, while this allowed in-depth, contextually rich analysis, it limits the extent to which my findings can be generalised across Malaysia's diverse higher music education landscape or to other performance streams such as conservatoire-based, popular, or traditional music programmes.

Therefore, to strengthen and expand beyond the scope of this research and enhance generalisability, future work could first adopt a multi-site sampling strategy (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1986) that includes universities with different curricular emphases. For instance, it could be programmes that involve conservatoire traditions, community music, and Malaysian popular or traditional music, as well as different performance streams, whether classical, contemporary, or traditional. Additionally, stratified purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1986) across regions, ethnic groups, and programme types would enable comparative analysis on different Malaysian universities' shaping of expressive learning. Other than that, increasing

sample diversity could also improve external validity and help researchers identify which findings are context-specific and which are more widely applicable.

8.5.2 Mixed-Methods and Triangulation

Although my study's mixed-methods design combined a survey questionnaire and VSRI, it lacked classroom observations and educators' perspectives, thereby limiting triangulation of pedagogical practices and insight into instructional intent and assessment practices.

Therefore, drawing on Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) regarding the need for mixed-methods frameworks that integrate qualitative depth with quantitative breadth, future related studies could incorporate classroom observations and the collection of lesson artefacts such as syllabi and assessment rubrics. They could also include semi-structured interviews with instructors, lecturers, and curriculum designers. For more context-specific purposes, adding ethnographic fieldwork in community music settings and participant observation during rehearsals would help capture the situated practices through which expressiveness is taught and negotiated. Additionally, triangulating students' self-reports, observed teaching practices, and teachers' rationales would also help produce a fuller picture of how pedagogy mediates expressive learning outcomes. This is because triangulation increases credibility and reduces method bias (Denzin, 2012, p. 5; Patton, 2015).

8.5.3 Instrument Design and Cultural Translation

Regarding my survey questionnaire's limitations, the instrument used terminology and constructs drawn largely from Western pedagogical discourse, given the lack of non-Western discourse on expressiveness. Hence, this framing risked partial misalignment with students' vernacular conceptualisations of expressiveness (Willis, 2005) and may have under-represented tacit, embodied knowledge.

To strengthen this, future instruments could be co-designed with local practitioners and students using participatory methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) to ensure cultural resonance. Furthermore, cognitive interviewing and pilot testing (Willis & Artino, 2013) with diverse student groups could reveal ambiguous items and improve the translation of embodied concepts into survey language. Additionally, including multimodal tasks, for example, short performance tasks and video prompts as part of the quantitative instrument would capture embodied and tacit dimensions that surveys alone cannot access.

8.5.4 Video-Stimulated Recall Interview Constraints and Performance Context

My VSRI provided rich, situated reflections, but they are subject to retrospective reconstruction and social desirability (Gass & Mackey, 2016; Lyle, 2003). Notably, the selected performance excerpts may not represent students'

typical practice contexts, and the interview setting can shape what participants choose to disclose.

Thus, to mitigate recall bias, future research could combine stimulated recall with immediate think-aloud protocols (Ericsson & Simon, 1993) during practice sessions and with longitudinal video diaries that capture iterative development. Using multiple performance contexts, such as studio lessons, ensemble rehearsal, and public performance, would reveal how expressiveness is adapted across settings. Additionally, employing independent raters and inter-rater reliability checks (Ericsson & Simon, 1993; Gass & Mackey, 2016; Lyle, 2003) when analysing performance excerpts would strengthen the objectivity of coded expressive behaviours.

8.5.5 Absence of Educators' and Community Voices

My study foregrounded students' voices but could not include input from educators, such as university lecturers and instructors who teach Applied Music, Traditional Music, and other courses, community practitioners, and cultural bearers. This was due to the time frame challenge I faced in completing my PhD, as required by my government sponsors and university workplace regulations. Hence, this limited input narrowed the interpretative frame and reduced opportunities to examine how institutional constraints and community expectations shape learning.

To strengthen this, future projects could adopt a participatory action research approach (Israel et al., 1998; Reason & Bradbury, 2008) that includes teachers, instructors, or lecturers, master practitioners of traditional forms, and community stakeholders as co-researchers. Co-designing pedagogical interventions (Smith, 2012) with these partners would both validate findings and produce implementable curriculum changes. Moreover, including community perspectives would also address ethical considerations around representation and the repatriation of musical knowledge.

8.5.6 Temporal and Developmental Limitations

My cross-sectional design captures students' strategies at a single point in time. It therefore cannot track developmental trajectories or the long-term impact of hybrid learning strategies on professional practice. Thus, to strengthen longitudinal designs (Menard, 2002), following cohorts across their undergraduate years and into early professional life would reveal how expressive strategies evolve and which pedagogical experiences have lasting effects. Notably, repeated measures, such as surveys, performance assessments, and reflective journals, would allow the modelling of growth patterns and the identification of critical learning moments (Singer & Willett, 2003).

8.5.7 Analytical and Interpretive Boundaries

In limitation, the Thematic Analysis (TA) conducted provided depth but is interpretive and shaped by the researcher's positionality in my context. My study's

conceptual framework guided coding and theme development, potentially foregrounding certain constructs over others.

Hence, in future analyses, collaborative coding with local researchers and participant validation, such as through member checking, should be incorporated to reduce interpretive bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Nowell et al., 2017). Using mixed analytic techniques, combining TA with discourse analysis, performance gesture coding, or computational audio analysis would triangulate interpretive claims and link subjective reports to measurable performance features (Nowell et al., 2017).

8.5.8 Ethical and Epistemic Considerations

Working within institutional settings raises ethical questions about power, representation, and the potential for research to exoticise or instrumentalise community practices. My study's design did not fully operationalise mechanisms for repatriating knowledge or for shared ownership of outputs.

Therefore, future research could embed ethical protocols for community benefit, namely agreements on data ownership, co-authorship with community practitioners, and mechanisms for returning findings in accessible formats, for example, through workshops and curriculum resources. Explicitly adopting decolonial methodologies such as CBPR, collaborative ethnography, and repatriation practices would also align research processes with the study's theoretical commitments (Atalay, 2012; Smith, 2012).

8.5.9 Practical and Policy Translation

Nonetheless, although this study offers pedagogical recommendations, it does not pilot curricular interventions or test assessment reforms, thereby limiting evidence of practical efficacy. Therefore, subsequent work could include intervention studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) that implement and evaluate student-centred, culturally responsive pedagogies, for example, revised Applied Music modules tailored to the local context. These studies could also incorporate community-embedded practices and multimodal assessment rubrics. Randomised or quasi-experimental designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) would, where feasible, provide stronger causal evidence about the effectiveness of proposed pedagogical changes. Engaging institutional leaders and policymakers early in research design would facilitate uptake and scalability.

Collectively, to summarise my limitations section, I clarify that my study's contributions are robust within its chosen scope. However, multiple methodological refinements would strengthen claims, validity, and practical impact. Hence, future research that combines multi-site sampling, richer triangulation, participatory instrument design, longitudinal tracking, educator and community partnerships, and intervention testing could yield more generalisable, ethically grounded, and policy-relevant knowledge. This could deepen understanding of how Malaysian undergraduates learn expressiveness, providing actionable models for decolonising performance pedagogy in higher music education.

8.6 Overall Conclusion

This study concludes that expressiveness in music performance is a multidimensional, culturally situated, and pedagogically teachable capacity. Malaysian undergraduates construct expressive meaning by weaving together technical control, interpretive reasoning and embodied, community-rooted practices. Specifically, their strategies reflect hybrid trajectories, with family and community musicking, informal and social media learning, and formal conservatoire training each contributing distinct resources that students translate and recombine in performance. Institutional practices that privilege notation, single-event juries and narrow definitions of excellence risk marginalising these resources. To support authentic, transferable expressive competence, higher music education must therefore adopt multimodal pedagogy and assessment, recognise community knowledge as legitimate curricular content, and create institutional incentives for faculty development and ethical community partnerships. Consequently, these changes do not displace Western traditions. Instead, they rebalance curricula so that students' lived musical ecologies are visible, valued and teachable.

8.7 Final Remarks

By centring undergraduate voices, this research reframes expressiveness as plural, negotiated and embodied. The study demonstrates that students learn expressiveness through listening, imitation, movement, storytelling, experimentation and social interaction as much as through score study. Practical

reforms involving an explicit curricular strand for expressiveness, scaffolded improvisation and translational tasks, multimodal portfolios, and co-assessment with community practitioners. Targeted faculty development also offers feasible pathways to make these learning processes visible and accessible. Ethically grounded community partnerships and repatriation practices are essential to avoid extractive research and to sustain reciprocal benefits. Implemented thoughtfully, these reforms will cultivate performers who are technically capable, emotionally authentic and culturally agile, able to engage both local communities and global stages.

8.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter synthesised the study's empirical and theoretical contributions and translated them into actionable recommendations for pedagogy, assessment and institutional reform. The evidence indicates that expressiveness is not a single, culture-neutral skill but a culturally situated and hybrid capacity, as students draw on family, community and formal training to develop expressive strategies that blend vernacular practices and Western techniques. In practice, this means that expressive competence often emerges from embodied, participatory, and social learning ecologies as much as from score study. Students, therefore, construct meaning by weaving together affective, contextual, and technical resources rather than simply reproducing a canonical performance ideal.

Nonetheless, if expressiveness is learnable, teaching must be reconfigured to make tacit, embodied skills teachable. Multimodal pedagogy, combining aural modelling, movement work, improvisation laboratories and translational practice tasks, enables students to externalise interpretive choices, experiment across idioms and develop transferable expressive strategies. Thus, these classroom practices should be scaffolded so that students can move between informal, community-based ways of knowing and the analytic, technique-focused demands of formal study. Consequently, it supports both interpretive autonomy and technical reliability.

Notably, assessment and institutional structures must change in parallel. Single-event juries and score-centred rubrics capture only a narrow slice of expressive competence. In contrast, multimodal portfolios, including performance recordings, rehearsal footage, stimulated recall transcripts, and reflective journals, provide a richer, process-oriented picture of development. When culturally specific repertoires are assessed, co-assessment with community practitioners and narrative feedback that emphasises developmental trajectories will guard against decontextualised judgement. Hence, to sustain these practices, universities need curriculum redesign, targeted faculty development, recognition of workload for community-engaged teaching, and clear ethical agreements with cultural partners.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates that surveys are useful for baseline mapping but underrepresent tacit, embodied, and communal dimensions of expressiveness. Triangulation with stimulated recall, observation, and participatory

instrument design improves validity and cultural resonance. The research's single-site, cross-sectional scope and limited educator and community input constrain generalisability, so future work should pursue multi-site, longitudinal, and participatory designs and evaluate piloted interventions. Collectively, these conclusions support a culturally responsive, student-centred model of expressive learning that integrates technical mastery with embodied, communal and translational competencies. They also provide a practical roadmap for curriculum pilots, evaluation studies and policy advocacy aimed at decolonising and strengthening higher music education in Malaysia.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A1: Survey Questionnaire (Ethics Application Layout Version)



**RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE - “LEARNING EXPRESSIVENESS IN
MUSIC PERFORMANCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY WITH
UNDERGRADUATE MUSIC EDUCATION STUDENTS IN A
MALAYSIAN CONTEXT”**

STUDY 1: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire has a total of 35 questions and is divided into five parts:

PART A: DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION

**PART B: UNDERSTANDING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC
PERFORMANCE**

**PART C: LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC
PERFORMANCE BEFORE BMUS ED PROGRAMME AT THE
UNIVERSITY**

**PART D: LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC
PERFORMANCE DURING BMUS ED PROGRAMME AT THE
UNIVERSITY**

**PART E: CONTRIBUTION OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES
(BEFORE AND DURING BMUS ED) TO THE LEARNING OF
EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE**

**This questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to be completed. All
answers are strictly confidential and for the purposes of research only. Thank
you very much for your kind participation.**

PART A: DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION

For Questions 1 – 7, please fill in the blanks where required, tick (✓) on any box in multiple-choice questions as required, and choose either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ as required.

- 1) Which semester of study are you in? _____.
- 2) Which previous academic qualification that you have obtained to enrol for the Bachelor of Education (Music) with Honours (BMus Ed) programme at the university? Please tick (✓) on all that apply.

Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) (Malaysia Higher Certificate of Education)

Diploma in Music (from Sultan Idris Education University)

Diploma in Music (from other universities)

Other qualification different from above

(Please specify: _____)

- 3) What was your musical background before studying BMus Ed programme at the university?

Please tick (✓) on all that apply. You can leave any box blank if it does not apply to you.

a) Learning from formal school syllabus

Learning from primary school music syllabus

Learning from secondary school music syllabus

Learning from Sekolah Seni Malaysia (*Malaysia Art School*) music syllabus

Learning from international school music syllabus

b) Learning from private institutions

- Learning from private institution music training of Associated Boards of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) syllabus
- Learning from private institution music training of London College of Music (LCM) syllabus
- Learning from private institution music training of Trinity College London syllabus

c) Music making in participatory groups

- Making music with my family
- Making music with my friends
- Learning music from YouTube video tutorials and/or other social media platforms
- Making music with the groups or bands that I participated in
- Learning from community music training

4) Please share an example of a musical instrument that you have learned before studying BMus Ed programme at the university: _____ . From whom and where did you first learn the musical instrument stated? _____ .

5) Did learning to play the musical instrument stated in Question 4, help you develop your approach to expressiveness, in terms of:

- a) Manipulating musical parameters (e.g. varying the dynamics from loud to soft, altering tempo, phrasing and articulation etc.)? (Yes / No)
- b) Conveying emotional expression? (Yes / No)
- c) Conveying expressive body movements? (Yes / No)

- 6) What is your major musical instrument that you learn during BMus Ed programme at the university? Please tick (✓) on the instrument family, and specify your major instrument.

- Keyboard family (Instrument: _____)
- Bowed strings family (Instrument: _____)
- Plucked strings family (Instrument: _____)
- Woodwind family (Instrument: _____)
- Brass family (Instrument: _____)
- Percussion family (Instrument: _____)

- 7) Does learning your major musical instrument during BMus Ed as stated in Question 6, help you develop your approach to expressiveness, in terms of:

- a) Manipulating musical parameters (e.g. varying the dynamics from loud to soft, altering tempo, phrasing and articulation etc.)? (Yes / No)
- b) Conveying emotional expression? (Yes / No)
- c) Conveying expressive body movements? (Yes / No)

PART B: UNDERSTANDING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

For Question 8, please write down your opinion.

8) What I understand about expressiveness in music performance is _____

For Questions 9 – 15, please rate by ticking (✓) on a scale of 1 to 6 as explained below that best represents your answer:

- 1 – Strongly Disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Somewhat Disagree
- 4 – Somewhat Agree
- 5 – Agree
- 6 – Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree		
9) Being naturally talented in music is important in learning expressiveness in music performance.						
10) It is possible to learn the strategies to convey expressiveness in music performance.						
11) Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to the interpretation of musical structure.						
12) Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to the interpretation of musical character.						
13) Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to portraying high technical skills.						
14) Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to conveying emotional expression.						
15) Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to conveying expressive body movements.						

PART C: LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE BEFORE BMUS ED PROGRAMME AT THE UNIVERSITY

For Questions **16 – 21**, please rate by ticking (√) on a scale of 1 to 6 as explained below that best represents your learning experience:

- 1 – Strongly Disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Somewhat Disagree
- 4 – Somewhat Agree
- 5 – Agree
- 6 – Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree		
16) Understanding and mastering the notation, tempo, rhythm, melody, harmony, and other musical parameters is useful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.						
17) Understanding the form and structure of the music piece is useful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.						
18) I could convey expressiveness in my music performance through my intuition on how the music felt and sounded.						
19) When working on a particular music piece together with my family and/or friends, I could convey expressiveness in my music performance by observing and applying from the similar way my family and/or friends convey expressiveness.						
20) Thinking about significant life experiences is useful when learning to convey expressiveness in my music performance.						
21) YouTube music performance videos and other social media platforms provide helpful strategies to convey expressiveness in my music performance.						

For Question **22** below, please write down your opinion.

- 22) Please share an example of your own past learning experience (before BMus Ed) that has helped you to convey expressiveness in music performance.

PART D: LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE DURING BMUS ED PROGRAMME AT THE UNIVERSITY

For Questions 23 – 30, please rate by ticking (√) on a scale of 1 to 6 as explained below that best represents your learning experience:

- 1 – Strongly Disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Somewhat Disagree
- 4 – Somewhat Agree
- 5 – Agree
- 6 – Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree		
23) The individual applied music instrumental classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance.						
24) Piano proficiency group classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance.						
25) Strings, brass, or other ensemble classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance.						
26) Learning about the different musical eras and styles is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.						
27) Learning about the composer’s background and musical intentions of the piece is helpful to convey Applying the music theory skills into musical intentions of a piece is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.expressiveness in my music performance.						
28) Learning the Malaysian traditional and popular music styles is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.						

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree		
29) Listening to the recordings of the pieces that I learn is helpful to understand how to convey expressiveness in my music performance.						

For Question **31** below, please write down your opinion.

- 31) Please share an example of your own current learning experience (during BMus Ed) that has helped you to convey expressiveness in music performance.

PART E: CONTRIBUTION OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES (BEFORE AND DURING BMUS ED) TO THE LEARNING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

For Questions 32 – 33, please rate by ticking (√) on a scale of 1 to 6 as explained below that best represents your answer:

- 1 – Strongly Disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Somewhat Disagree
- 4 – Somewhat Agree
- 5 – Agree
- 6 – Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree		
32) My past learning experiences (before BMus Ed) have helped me understand and develop my learning strategies on expressiveness in music performance.						
33) My current learning experiences (during BMus Ed) have helped me understand and develop my learning strategies on expressiveness in music performance.						

For Questions 34 - 35 below, please write down your opinions.

34) Please provide an example of a strategy from your past learning experiences (before BMus Ed) that you apply to convey expressiveness music performance. Why do you find it useful?

35) Please provide an example of a strategy from your current learning experiences (during BMus Ed) that you apply to convey expressiveness in music performance. Why do you find it useful?

Thank you very much for sharing the insight of your understanding, experiences, and strategies on your learning of expressiveness in music performance. Your valuable insights will greatly contribute to my research and potentially helpful future pedagogical strategies of learning expressiveness in music performance for BMus Ed and other music students.

Are you interested in sharing more of your learning strategies? Would you like to reflect on, and learn more from your own pre-recorded practice video of your preparation for this semester's individual applied music performance? If so, you are invited to participate in my Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview.

Kindly fill in your email here to indicate your interest and permission to be contacted: _____ . I will be in touch with you for further details on Study 2.

Thank you very much!

Appendix A2: Survey Questionnaire (Online Google Form Layout Version)

Link to online google form copy of this questionnaire: [Copy of Copy of RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE - “LEARNING EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE MUSIC EDUCATION STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA”. - Google Forms](#)

LEARNING EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY WITH UNDERGRADUATE MUSIC EDUCATION STUDENTS IN A MALAYSIAN CONTEXT.

nurezlin.azib@fmosp.upsi.edu.my [Switch account](#)



Not shared

STUDY 1: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE



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LEARNING EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY WITH UNDERGRADUATE MUSIC EDUCATION STUDENTS IN A MALAYSIAN CONTEXT.

nurezlin.azib@fmosp.upsi.edu.my [Switch account](#)



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This questionnaire has a total of 35 questions and is divided into five parts:

PART A: DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION

PART B: UNDERSTANDING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

PART C: LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE BEFORE BMUS ED PROGRAMME AT THE UNIVERSITY

PART D: LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE DURING BMUS ED PROGRAMME AT THE UNIVERSITY

PART E: CONTRIBUTION OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES (BEFORE AND DURING BMUS ED) TO THE LEARNING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

***Note: BMus Ed = Bachelor of Education (Music) with Honours**

This questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to be completed. All answers are strictly confidential and for the purpose of research only. Thank you very much for your kind participation.

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PART A: DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION

For Questions 1 – 7, please fill in the blanks where required, tick (✓) on any box in multiple-choice questions as required and choose either 'Yes' or 'No' as required.

1) Which semester of study are you in?

Your answer

2) Which previous academic qualification that you have obtained to enrol for the Bachelor of Education (Music) with Honours (BMus Ed) programme at the university? Please tick (✓) on all that apply.

- Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) (Malaysia Higher Certificate of Education)
- Diploma in Music (from Sultan Idris Education University)
- Diploma in Music (from other universities)
- Other qualification different from above

3a) What was your musical background before studying BMus Ed programme at the university? Please tick (✓) on all that apply. You can leave any box blank if it does not apply to you.

a) Learning from formal school syllabus:

- Learning from primary school music syllabus
- Learning from secondary school music syllabus
- Learning from Sekolah Seni Malaysia (Malaysia Art School) music syllabus
- Learning from international school music syllabus

3b) What was your musical background before studying BMus Ed programme at the university? Please tick (✓) on all that apply. You can leave any box blank if it does not apply to you.

b) Learning from private institutions:

- Learning from private institution music training of Associated Boards of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) syllabus
- Learning from private institution music training of London College of Music (LCM) syllabus
- Learning from private institution music training of Trinity College London syllabus

3c) What was your musical background before studying BMus Ed programme at the university? Please tick (✓) on all that apply. You can leave any box blank if it does not apply to you.

c) Music making in participatory groups:

- Making music with my family
- Making music with my friends
- Learning music from YouTube video tutorials and/or other social media platforms
- Making music with the groups or bands that I participated in
- Learning from community music training

4a) Please share an example of a musical instrument that you have learned before studying BMus Ed programme at the university:

Your answer

4b) From whom and where did you first learn the musical instrument stated?

Your answer

5a) Did learning to play the musical instrument stated in Question 4, help you develop your approach to expressiveness, in terms of:

a) Manipulating musical parameters (e.g. varying the dynamics from loud to soft, altering tempo, phrasing and articulation etc.)?

- Yes
- No

5b) Did learning to play the musical instrument stated in Question 4, help you develop your approach to expressiveness, in terms of:

b) Conveying emotional expression?

Yes

No

5c) Did learning to play the musical instrument stated in Question 4, help you develop your approach to expressiveness, in terms of:

c) Conveying expressive body movements?

Yes

No

6a) What is your major musical instrument that you learn during BMus Ed programme at the university? Please tick (✓) on the instrument family.

Keyboard family

Bowed strings family

Plucked strings family

Woodwind family

Brass family

Percussion family

6b) Please state your specific major musical instrument that you learn during BMus Ed programme at the university (e.g. piano, violin, flute etc.)

Your answer



7a) Does learning your major musical instrument during BMus Ed stated in Question 6, help you develop your approach to expressiveness, in terms of:

a) Manipulating musical parameters (e.g. varying the dynamics from loud to soft, altering tempo, phrasing and articulation etc.)?

Yes

No

7b) Does learning your major musical instrument during BMus Ed as stated in Question 6, help you develop your approach to expressiveness, in terms of:

b) Conveying emotional expression?

Yes

No

7c) Does learning your major musical instrument during BMus Ed as stated in Question 6, help you develop your approach to expressiveness, in terms of:

c) Conveying expressive body movements?

Yes

No

PART B: UNDERSTANDING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

For Question 8, please write down your opinion.

8) What I understand about expressiveness in music performance is

Your answer

For Questions 9 – 15, please rate by ticking (✓) on a scale of 1 to 6 as explained below that best represents your answer:

1 – Strongly Disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Somewhat Disagree

4 – Somewhat Agree

5 – Agree

6 – Strongly Agree

1 –
Strongly
Disagree

2 –
Disagree

3 –
Somewhat
Disagree

4 –
Somewhat
Agree

5 –
Agree

6 –
Strongly
Agree

9) Being naturally talented in music is important in learning expressiveness in music performance.

10) It is possible to learn the strategies to convey expressiveness in music performance.

11) Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to the interpretation of musical structure.

12) Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to the interpretation of musical character.

13) Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to portraying high technical skills.

14) Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to conveying emotional expression.



15) Learning expressiveness in music performance relates to conveying expressive body movements.

PART C: LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE BEFORE BMUS ED PROGRAMME AT THE UNIVERSITY

For Questions 16 – 21, please rate by ticking (✓) on a scale of 1 to 6 as explained below that best represents your learning experience:

1 – Strongly Disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Somewhat Disagree

4 – Somewhat Agree

5 – Agree

6 – Strongly Agree

1 – Strongly Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Somewhat Disagree	4 – Somewhat Agree	5 – Agree	6 – Strongly Agree
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16) Understanding and mastering the notation, tempo, rhythm, melody, harmony, and other musical parameters is useful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

17) Understanding the form and structure of the music piece is useful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

18) I could convey expressiveness in my music performance



through my intuition on how the music felt and sounded.

19) When working on a particular music piece together with my family and/or friends, I could convey expressiveness in my music performance by observing and applying from the similar way my family and/or friends convey expressiveness.

20) Thinking about significant life experiences is useful when learning to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

21) YouTube music performance videos and other social media platforms provide helpful strategies to convey expressiveness in my music performance.



For Question 22 below, please write down your opinion.

22) Please share an example of your past learning experience (before BMus Ed) that has helped you to convey expressiveness in music performance.

Your answer

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PART D: LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE DURING BMUS ED PROGRAMME AT THE UNIVERSITY

For Questions 23 – 30, please rate by ticking (✓) on a scale of 1 to 6 as explained below that best represents your learning experience:

1- Strongly Disagree

2- Disagree

3- Somewhat Disagree

4- Somewhat Agree

5- Agree

6- Strongly Agree

1 – Strongly Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Somewhat Disagree	4 – Somewhat Agree	5 – Agree	6 – Strongly Agree
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23) The individual applied music instrumental classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

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24) Piano proficiency group classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics,

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articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

25) Strings, brass, or other ensemble classes have helped me in applying the musical parameters (dynamics, articulation etc.), conveying emotional expression, and using body movements to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

26) Learning about the different musical eras and styles is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

27) Learning about the composer's background and musical intentions of



the piece is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

28) Applying the music theory skills into musical intentions of a piece is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

29) Learning the Malaysian traditional and popular music styles is helpful to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

30) Listening to the recordings of the pieces that I learn is helpful to understand how to convey expressiveness in my music performance.

For Question **31** below, please write down your opinion.

31) Please share an example of your own current learning experience (during BMus Ed) that has helped you to convey expressiveness in music performance.

Your answer

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PART E: CONTRIBUTION OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES (BEFORE AND DURING BMUS ED) TO THE LEARNING OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

For Questions 32 – 33, please rate by ticking (✓) on a scale of 1 to 6 as explained below that best represents your answer:

1- Strongly Disagree

2- Disagree

3- Somewhat Disagree

4- Somewhat Agree

5- Agree

6- Strongly Agree

1 – Strongly Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Somewhat Disagree	4 – Somewhat Agree	5 – Agree	6 – Strongly Agree
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32) My past learning experiences (before BMus Ed) have helped me understand and develop my learning strategies on expressiveness in music performance.

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33) My current learning experiences (during BMus Ed) have helped me understand and develop my learning strategies on expressiveness in music performance.

<input type="radio"/>					
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For Questions 34 - 35 below, please write down your opinions.

34) Please provide an example of a strategy from your past learning experiences (before BMus Ed) that you apply to convey expressiveness in music performance. Why do you find it useful?

Your answer

35) Please provide an example of a strategy from your current learning experiences (during BMus Ed) that you apply to convey expressiveness in music performance. Why do you find it useful?

Your answer

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Thank you very much for sharing the insight of your understanding, experiences, and strategies on your learning of expressiveness in music performance. Your valuable insights will greatly contribute to my research and potentially helpful future pedagogical strategies of learning expressiveness in music performance for BMus Ed and other music students.

Are you interested in sharing more of your learning strategies? Would you like to reflect on, and learn more from your own pre-recorded practice video of your preparation for this semester's individual applied music performance? If so, you are invited to participate in my Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview.

Kindly fill in your email here to indicate your interest and permission to be contacted. I will be in touch with you for further details on Study 2. Thank you!

Your answer

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Appendix B: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview Protocol

Task description for Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview



RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE - “LEARNING EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY WITH UNDERGRADUATE MUSIC EDUCATION STUDENTS IN A MALAYSIAN CONTEXT”.

STUDY 2: VIDEO-STIMULATED RECALL INTERVIEW

PRE-INTERVIEW TASK DESCRIPTION

Thank you for participating in Study 2 of my research project. This study aims to explore BMus Ed students’ learning strategies of conveying expressiveness in their music performance in a greater detail by interviewing the students based on their recall and reflection on their performance videos. Before the interview, here are the tasks to be prepared first:

- 1) Please select 3 video excerpts of your own individual performance practice. This practice video shows your preparation of one music piece for your individual applied music performance in the current semester.
- 2) For the video excerpts’ time duration and criteria, you can **choose any 3 video excerpts of approximately 1-3 minutes’ duration for each excerpt**, that you feel have **shown how you conveyed your approach to expressiveness in music performance of the piece**.

- 3) To help in choosing your 3 video excerpts, please find the **‘Indicative interview questions for Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview’** on the next page after this task description sheet. This is a pre-interview guide that contains 6 tentative interview questions. These questions relate to how you used the musical parameters including phrasing and dynamics for instance, portrayed your emotions, moved your body and other possible strategies that you might have done to convey your approach to expressiveness in your music performance. **Feel free to use these tentative interview questions as a guide to choose your 3 video excerpts too.**

- 4) **After you have selected your 3 video excerpts, please share these with me confidentially through a password-protected Google drive. I will then contact you to arrange for our approximately 1-hour interview, that will take place during your available free time. Thank you very much!**

**Indicative interview questions for Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall
Interview**



**RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE - "LEARNING EXPRESSIVENESS IN
MUSIC PERFORMANCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY WITH
UNDERGRADUATE MUSIC EDUCATION STUDENTS IN A
MALAYSIAN CONTEXT"**

STUDY 2: VIDEO-STIMULATED RECALL INTERVIEW

Thank you for participating in Study 2 of my research project. This study aims to explore BMus Ed students' learning strategies of conveying expressiveness in their music performance in a greater detail by interviewing the students based on their recall and reflection on their performance videos. Below, you will find indicative interview questions as a guide for you to prepare the selection of your 3 video excerpts as explained in the task description. This is followed by the procedure of interview to inform you of the flow of our interview.

A) INDICATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Looking back at your 3 video excerpts, could you tell me more about why you chose each excerpt, in terms of conveying your approach to expressiveness in the performance?
- 2) Could you tell me more about why you did your musical phrasing in a particular way for the piece that you played in your video excerpts?
- 3) Could you tell me more about how and why you changed your dynamics and/or tempo in a particular way for the piece that you played in your video excerpts?

- 4) Could you tell me more about emotional expression that you conveyed, whether it was ‘perceived emotion’ (emotion that you intended to show from the piece but you did not feel it naturally), or ‘felt emotion’ (emotion that you felt naturally when performing the piece), for the piece that you played in your video excerpts? (Prompt: Did you find that you mostly applied ‘perceived emotion’ or ‘felt emotion’, and why?)
- 5) Could you tell me more about why you moved your body in a particular way when conveying your expressiveness from the piece that you played in your video excerpts?
- 6) Could you share about how you handled your musical instrument when conveying your expressiveness from the piece that you played in your video excerpts?



B) PROCEDURE OF INTERVIEW

- 1) You are asked to participate for **one interview**, approximately of **1 hour** duration. I will firstly contact you after receiving your 3 video excerpts, for us to arrange the interview as according to your available free time.
- 2) During this interview, both of us will view your video excerpts and you will be interviewed about the strategies to convey expressiveness in your performance that you did in your video excerpts.
- 3) The interview could include the tentative questions as well as additional questions as necessary, to gain more insight of your learning strategies.
- 4) Feel free too, to talk about any part of your 3 video excerpts that you feel significant in showing how you conveyed your expressiveness.
- 5) This interview will be audio-recorded for transcription and data purposes, and will not be shared with anyone else except my supervisory team for research purposes.

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Participant information sheet

Research project title:

Learning Expressiveness in Music Performance: An Exploratory Study with Undergraduate Music Education Students in a Malaysian Context.

Study 1: Survey Questionnaire Summer 2024

Invitation

I am inviting you to take part in Study 1: Survey Questionnaire from my research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why this study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. You will be given this information sheet to keep. Thank you for reading this.

Project

My research project is entitled “Learning Expressiveness in Music Performance: An Exploratory Study with Undergraduate Music Education Students in a Malaysian Context”. It aims to explore ways in which learning experiences can inform the strategies students use for conveying expressiveness in music performance, including creative approaches to musical parameters (such as tempo, dynamics, phrasing, articulation etc.), emotional expression, and expressive body movements. In overall, this project will be carried out in two phases: Study 1 (Survey Questionnaire) and Study 2 (Video-Stimulated Recall Interview). This invitation is only for Study 1. A separate invitation will be issued for Study 2.

Characteristics of participants

I have asked for you to take part in Study 1 because I am looking for participation from undergraduate music education (BMus Ed) students aged 18 years old and above, who are currently studying in a Malaysian university. To the best of my knowledge, research that explores BMus Ed students’ experiences and strategies in the learning of expressiveness in music performance are still lacking in a Malaysian context. Therefore, because you are enrolled as the BMus Ed student of Faculty of Music and Performing Arts at Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia, I am interested to explore with you about your own understanding, experiences, and strategies of learning expressiveness in your music performance. Apart from that, you are also learning a major musical instrument and are in Semester 2, 3, 4, or 5,

representing the intermediate years of BMus Ed programme, thus eligible for Study 1. There will be approximately 60 participants involved in Study 1.

Voluntary participation

It is up to you to decide if you want to take part in my project or not. If you do decide to take part, after reading this information sheet and consent form, please click on the link 'Study 1: Survey Questionnaire' provided. However, if you change your mind when answering the questionnaire and decide not to proceed further, you can exit the questionnaire. In this case, your data will not be included in my Study 1, and you will not be affected in any way. If you decide not to take part after reading this information sheet and consent form, please don't click on the link 'Study 1: Survey Questionnaire'. Again, you will not be affected in any way. If you have clicked on the link and have completed the survey questionnaire but decided to withdraw after that, please do not click 'submit' on the online google form of the questionnaire. You can exit the questionnaire and your data will not be included in my Study 1. Similarly, you will not be affected in any way by withdrawing at this stage.

Nature of participation

Study 1 is anticipated to be conducted from mid-April to early May 2024. You are asked to participate only once as a respondent to the survey questionnaire. As a respondent, you will be asked to answer an online Google form of Study 1: Survey Questionnaire, that consists of 35 short questions, divided into 5 parts. To access the questionnaire, please click on the link 'Study 1: Survey Questionnaire' provided after this information sheet and consent form. By clicking the link to the questionnaire, you have indicated that you consent to take part as a respondent. The questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to be completed.

Lifestyle restrictions

Respondents are not likely to experience any lifestyle restrictions as a result of taking part in my Study 1.

Potential risks to respondents

Respondents are at no risk of being offended, shocked or harmed by my Study 1.

Potential benefits to respondents

While respondents taking part in my Study 1 are unlikely to experience any personal benefits as a result, I hope that my Study 1 will contribute to your understanding of expressiveness in music performance and being aware of how your past (before BMus Ed) and current (during BMus Ed) music learning experiences could play a role in shaping your understanding and learning strategies. From this, you could reflect on learning strategies that are useful in helping you to convey your own

performer's expressiveness in music performance. Reflecting on helpful and clear strategies in the learning of expressiveness in music performance could also potentially benefit you when pursuing your career as a future music educator, contributing to your future students' music learning.

Possible termination of Study 1

If my Study 1 has to be terminated for any reason and respondents and/or the contribution that the respondents have made are no longer required for the research, all respondents will be informed via email announcement from the faculty. All respondents will be explained on what happens and why. Any already-collected data would be destroyed.

Confidentiality and anonymity

If you agree to take part in my Study 1, when you tick (✓) each statement box after reading the 'Consent form for Study 1: Survey Questionnaire' provided, this indicates that you have given your consent to participate as a respondent. You can save and keep the consent form given to you in this email. Information that is collected about you, for the purposes of the research, will be kept strictly confidential between me and my supervisory team, and not shared to other academic staff members and the public. Apart from that, I reassure that your participation or non-participation in my Study 1 will not affect your grades in the music courses that you are taking, as well as your overall studies at the university. Your contribution or non-contribution to the data are solely for my research purpose and not related to, or affecting your assignments, tests, and examinations of the music courses that you are taking at the university.

The only instances when confidentiality would be broken are either in the event that you disclose risk of immediate harm to yourself or others (in which case I may need to discuss this with somebody else), or where we have a legal obligation to do so. I will also guarantee your anonymity by assigning a participation identification code for each respondent. I will not ask for your names and personal identifiers for your participation in my Study 1.

Storing personal data and information

Information provided by you in this study will be handled in a confidential manner under the policies and procedures of the Royal College of Music. Your personal data and any information that you provide for the purposes of the research will be stored securely on a password-protected RCM drive for 10 years. At the end of the period it will be destroyed. Please be aware that publications arising from this research will remain available beyond this period (see 'Outputs' below.)

Outputs

The contribution that participants make to my project will be shared in my PhD thesis. The final dissertation will be shared internally at the RCM and will normally be made publicly available to anyone with an internet connection through [RCM Research Online](#). Apart from that, there will also be possible conference presentations and publications resulting from the research work.

Ethical approval

The Royal College of Music Research Ethics Committee has reviewed my project and granted ethical approval for it to be carried out.

Thank you for reading this Participant Information Sheet and for considering your participation in my Study 1 of this research project. Please let the researcher know if you have any questions.

Contact details	Name of supervisor/manager/head of department: Dr. Mary Stakelum
Institutional email: Mary.Stakelum@rcm.ac.uk	Institutional Affiliation: Royal College of Music
Name of researcher: Nurezlin Mohd Azib	Institutional email: Nurezlin.Azib@rcm.ac.uk
Institutional Affiliation: Royal College of Music	

Any questions regarding this study should be directed at the researcher in the first instance.

For questions that cannot be answered by the researcher, please contact the [Representative of the RCM Research Ethics Committee](#). [The Royal College of Music Research Ethics Policy is available here](#).

Consent form for Study 1: Survey Questionnaire

Name of Researcher: Nurezlin Mohd Azib

Participant identification code:

Please read each statement carefully and please tick (✓) each statement box if you agree.

I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated Summer 2024 for Study 1: Survey Questionnaire of the research project in which I have been asked to take part and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and by clicking on the link to 'Study 1: Survey Questionnaire', I consent to take part as a respondent and answer the questionnaire given.	
I give the researcher permission to collect information about me and from me for the purposes of the research project provided all information about me will be kept confidential between the researcher and her supervisory team only, not shared to other academic staff members and the public, stored securely on a password-protected RCM drive, and destroyed after 10 years.	
I understand that my participation or non-participation in Study 1 will not affect my grades in the music courses that I am taking, as well my overall studies at the university. My contribution or non-contribution to the data are solely for the research purpose and not related to, or affecting my assignments, tests, and examinations of the music courses that I am taking at the university.	
I understand that the final dissertation arising from this research will normally be made publicly available to anyone with an internet connection via RCM Research Online.	
I agree to take part in Study 1: Survey Questionnaire.	

Please click on this link: '[Study 1: Survey Questionnaire](#)'.

Participant information sheet

Research project title:

Learning Expressiveness in Music Performance: An Exploratory Study with Undergraduate Music Education Students in a Malaysian Context.

Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview

Summer 2024

Invitation

I am inviting you to take part in Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview from my research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why this study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. You will be given this information sheet to keep. Thank you for reading this.

Project

My research project is entitled “Learning Expressiveness in Music Performance: An Exploratory Study with Undergraduate Music Education Students in a Malaysian Context”. It aims to explore ways in which learning experiences can inform the strategies students use for conveying expressiveness in music performance, including creative approaches to musical parameters (such as tempo, dynamics, phrasing, articulation etc.), emotional expression, and expressive body movements. In overall, this project will be carried out in two phases: Study 1 (Survey Questionnaire) and Study 2 (Video-Stimulated Recall Interview). This invitation is only for Study 2. A separate invitation has been issued for Study 1.

Characteristics of participants

I have asked for you to take part in Study 2 because you have completed Study 1 and are eligible for Study 2. You have also expressed your interest to participate further by kindly giving your email and permission to be contacted about Study 2. Apart from that, you also have your own pre-recorded practice videos of your preparation for this semester’s individual applied music performance. There will be approximately 6 to 10 participants involved in Study 2.

Voluntary participation

It is up to you to decide if you want to take part in my Study 2 or not. If you do decide to take part, please click on the link ‘Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview’ provided at the end of this information sheet. This link will take you to the consent form to be signed, followed by a task description for the video excerpts selection,

and a guide of indicative interview questions for Study 2. If you don't want to take part, or you change your mind about taking part, please do not click on the link 'Study 2: Video- Stimulated Recall Interview'. You will not be affected in any way. If you have clicked on the link, proceeded with Study 2, and have completed taking part in Study 2, but decided to withdraw after that, please inform me via email that you wish to withdraw from the study. Your data will not be included in my Study 2, and you will not be affected in any way.

Nature of participation

Study 2 is anticipated to be conducted in May 2024. Firstly, you will be contacted by email and given this information sheet. After you have decided to take part in Study 2, please click on the link 'Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview' at the end of the information sheet. You will firstly find the 'Consent form for Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview', thus please read and sign this consent form. Following the consent form, you will find the 'Task description for Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview'. This task refers to what you will need to do before the interview. To explain the task, you will select 3 video excerpts with the duration of approximately 1 to 3 minutes each excerpt, from pre- recorded videos of your own individual performance practice sessions. These practice sessions showed your preparation of one music piece for your individual applied music performance in the current semester. You can choose any 3 video excerpts of the music piece practiced, that you feel have shown how you conveyed your own performer's expressiveness in your music performance.

To help in choosing your 3 video excerpts, you will also find the 'Indicative interview questions for Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview' as a guide that contains 6 tentative interview questions. These questions relate to how and why you used the musical parameters including phrasing and dynamics for instance, portrayed your emotional expressions, moved your body, and other possible strategies that you might have done to convey your own performer's expressiveness in your music performance. Feel free to use these tentative interview questions as a guide to choose your 3 video excerpts.

After you have selected your 3 video excerpts, please share these with me confidentially through a password-protected Google drive. I will then contact you to arrange for our interview, that will take place during your available free time. You are asked to participate for one interview, approximately of 1 hour duration. During this interview, both of us will view your video excerpts and you will be interviewed about the strategies to convey your own performer's expressiveness that you did in your video. The interview could include the tentative questions as well as additional questions as necessary, to gain more insight of your learning strategies. Feel free too, to talk about any parts from your 3 video excerpts, that you feel significant in showing how you conveyed your own performer's expressiveness. This interview will be audio-recorded for transcription and data purposes, and will not be shared with anyone else apart from my supervisory team, and solely for the purpose of my research project.

Lifestyle restrictions

Participants are not likely to experience any lifestyle restrictions as a result of taking part in my Study 2.

Potential risks to participants

Participants are at no risk of being offended, shocked or harmed by my Study 2.

Potential benefits to participants

While respondents taking part in my Study 2 are unlikely to experience any personal benefits as a result, I hope that my Study 2 will contribute to your understanding of expressiveness in music performance and being aware of how your past (before BMus Ed) and current (during BMus Ed) music learning experiences could play a role in shaping your understanding and learning strategies. From this, you could reflect on learning strategies that are useful in helping you to convey your own performer's expressiveness in music performance. Reflecting on helpful and clear strategies in the learning of expressiveness in music performance could also potentially benefit you when pursuing your career as a future music educator, contributing to your future students' music learning.

Possible termination of research

If my Study 2 has to be terminated for any reason and participants and/or the contribution that the participants have made are no longer required for the research, all participants will be informed via email announcement from the faculty. All participants will be explained on what happens and why. Any already-collected data would be destroyed.

Confidentiality and anonymity

If you agree to take part in my Study 2, when you sign the 'Consent form for Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview' provided, this indicates that you have given your consent to participate. You can save and keep the consent form given to you in this email. Information that is collected about you, for the purposes of the research, will be kept strictly confidential. The 3 video excerpts that you share for Study 2 are also kept strictly confidential between you, me, and my supervisory team only. I will not share your video excerpts in any of my research presentations during seminars, talks, conferences and all events, or with other academic staff members and the public. Apart from that, I reassure that your participation or non-participation in my Study 2 will not affect your grades in the music courses that you are taking, as well as your overall studies at the university. Your contribution or non-contribution to the data are solely for my research purpose and not related to, or affecting your assignments, tests, and examinations of the music courses that you are taking at the university.

The only instances when confidentiality would be broken are either in the event that you disclose risk of immediate harm to yourself or others (in which case I may need to discuss this with somebody else), or where we have a legal obligation to do so. I will also guarantee your anonymity by assigning a participation identification code for each participant. I will not include your names and personal identifiers for your contribution of data to my Study 2. Information you provide will only be attributed to you by name with your explicit permission.

Storing personal data and information

Information provided by you in this study will be handled in a confidential manner under the [policies and procedures of the Royal College of Music](#). Your personal data and any information that you provide for the purposes of the research will be stored securely on a password-protected RCM drive for 10 years. At the end of the period it will be destroyed. Please be aware that publications arising from this research will remain available beyond this period (see 'Outputs' below.)

Outputs

The contribution that participants make to my project will be shared in my PhD thesis. The final dissertation will be shared internally at the RCM and will normally be made publicly available to anyone with an internet connection through [RCM Research Online](#). Apart from that, there will also be possible conference presentations and publications resulting from the research work.

Ethical approval

The Royal College of Music Research Ethics Committee has reviewed my project and granted ethical approval for it to be carried out.

Thank you for reading this Participant Information Sheet and for considering your participation in my Study 2 of this research project. Please let the researcher know if you have any questions.

Contact details	Name of supervisor/manager/head of department: Dr. Mary Stakelum
Institutional email: Mary.Stakelum@rcm.ac.uk	Institutional Affiliation: Royal College of Music
Name of researcher: Nurezlin Mohd Azib	Institutional email: Nurezlin.Azib@rcm.ac.uk
Institutional Affiliation: Royal College of Music	

Any questions regarding this study should be directed at the researcher in the first instance.

For questions that cannot be answered by the researcher, please contact the [Representative of the RCM Research Ethics Committee](#). [The Royal College of Music Research Ethics Policy is available here](#).

Please click this link to the consent form, task description, and interview questions for the video- stimulated recall interview.

[‘Study 2: Video-Stimulated Recall Interview’](#).