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The Impact of Collaborative Learning in Music Education

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Abstract: As research on music teaching methodologies continues to deepen, collaborative learning has gradually gained recognition among a broad range of scholars. Most existing studies focus solely on the positive impacts of collaborative learning in music education, while lacking cross-national comparisons and adequate discussion of its negative impacts and improvement strategies. Employing a questionnaire survey method and incorporating personal experience, this paper summarizes the positive and negative impacts of collaborative learning on music education across different countries and proposes methods to mitigate the negative impacts. The study finds that collaborative learning helps develop communication skills and deepens musical understanding. However, it also encounters negative influences such as inaccurate peer perspectives and insufficient capacity for group-based collaborative learning. In response to these drawbacks, the study proposes countermeasures including enhanced peer communication and active supervision by instructors. This research deepens the understanding of collaborative learning as a teaching approach and fills a gap in the literature concerning methods to alleviate its negative impacts.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning; Positive Impacts; Negative Impacts; Music Education; Peer Learning; Vocal.

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, collaborating with peers has played an important role in music education. Teachers and students realized that learning with teachers in the class is not the only way to learn, hence they began to explore other learning strategies, and collaborating with peers is one of them. The overall goal of this essay is to study the positive and negative impacts of collaborative learning on music education, and explore how to improve the negative impacts.

To achieve this aim, I did a detailed study based on my personal experience of collaborating with peers in music education and Schipper's framework, which helped me analyze the impacts of collaborating with peers in music education. During my junior year at University, my teacher asked us to form a group and perform a famous opera in the University's annual Opera Festival, which would help us showcase and develop our performance skills. I formed a group with two of my friends. Moreover, we decided to perform a part of a popular Chinese opera called Chang Zheng. Chang Zheng narrates the story of a war, where I performed as the leader of an army. However, portraying this character wasn't an easy task for me, as I had no experience in playing as a main lead in an opera, that too of a famous one. Also, another problem that I faced while playing the character was acting as a 50-year-old man, who had a lot of experience in life, while I was just 20. Moreover, the main character had an injured arm, hence playing the character, I had to use some props to act as an injured man and singing like that was a new experience for me.

With numerous difficulties standing in my way of outstanding performance, I decided to look for strategies and ask the class teacher for some help, which would enhance my performance. However, the teacher only guided me with the rules mentioned in the textbook, while I was looking for something out of the ordinary. Therefore, I decided to discuss it with my friends, and find solutions. Together we watched numerous videos of famous singers performing the main character in the opera, to learn the tactics used by them to deliver mind-blowing performances and elevate my upcoming performance.

Table 1. Indicators for dimensions of interaction

Large power distance	Small power distance
• Teacher undisputedly directs the learning process • Formal words or ways of addressing teacher • Physical distance between teacher and learner	• Learners are valued as peers/equal participants • Colloquial forms of addressing each other • Learner and facilitator close and at same level of physical elevation

Moreover, we also had brief discussions about why and how the main character portrayed certain emotions while singing and acting as an injured man. We also looked for various strategies to upgrade my performance as an older character and get all the emotions and facial expressions correct. In addition, to have a better understanding of the main character, my friends and I also watched quite a few renditions of Cheng Zhang, which made it really easy for us

to grasp the intricacies of the performance. Apart from that, my friends also borrowed some props to recreate the situation as in the opera with the purpose of helping me to adapt to the situation quickly and have a better performance at the festival.

All of these, not only helped us have an outstanding performance at the festival, but also learn a lot of new strategies for a better understanding of characters, emotions, and performances. It also made me realize the benefits of collaborative learning on music education.

Furthermore, as shown in the picture, Schippers (2010, p 122) analyses the indicators for dimensions of interaction which are 'Large power distance,' and 'Small power distance'. Moving forward, both Long power distance and short power distance are differentiated based on certain points. For example in Long power distance, the very first thing that can be seen is that teachers undisputedly direct/follows the learning process, leaving room for no understanding of the student's individual learning abilities. Just like I had to look for improvisation strategies with my friends instead of finding them in the classroom as they are strictly based on textbook guidelines.

Another point worth mentioning is the physical distance between many teachers and their students. Sometimes, the students are introverts, or maybe the teachers are strict with their students, which prevents them from having effective communication with each other, thus affecting the learning process. Whereas collaborative learning on music education can solve some of these problems because peers share a more friendly relationship, they don't have to be formal with each other or use specific terms to talk with one another. This reduces the distance between one another, increases their interactivity and enthusiasm for learning music, also have a better understanding of each other's musical learning abilities. Just like I was able to deliver a better performance when I practiced with my friends and watched numerous videos together.

Table 2. Schippers (2010, p 122) analyses the difference between 'Long-term orientation' and 'Short-term orientation'

Long-term orientation	Short-term orientation
• Graded progession over years • Emphasis on long hours of practice to make small steps on long road	• Progress steered by quick results • Working toward tangible goals in near future (e.g., performances)

Based on Hofstede, "A Case for Comparing Apples with Oranges."

Moving forward, in the Table 2, Schippers (2010, p 122) analyses the difference between 'Long-term orientation' and 'Short-term orientation'. While 'Short-term orientation' focuses on setting smaller goals, 'Long-term Orientation' focuses on grading progression over years. Achieving progress with short-term goals is easier compared to long-term because with short-term goals progress is steered by quick results. Therefore, this is an effective strategy often used by teachers, but it is more effective if used in peer learning as well. For example, during my undergraduate years, I often made short-term goals with my friends, which aided us to keep a tab on each other's progress, help one another with difficult situations, and also achieve success together.

Nevertheless, there are also certain disadvantages to collaborative learning on music education. Like when collaborative learning on music education, it's easier to develop bad habits and steer away from one's goal if the friends are not serious about learning. Moreover, peers' knowledge about music is very limited as they are still learning and do not have much experience, which may sometimes hinder the learning process and not allow one to explore music in broader terms.

In short, this was a detailed study about my collaborative learning on music education and Schipper's study to understand the positive and negative impacts of collaborative learning on music education.

2. Literature Review

To gain a better understanding of the benefits of collaborative learning on music education, I selected 9 references. These references can be divided into two main categories, one based on analyzing the benefits of collaborative learning on music education and the other on the benefits of collaborative learning in vocal skills. These references analyzed peer learning of music in different countries like Norway, Netherlands, and Australia. In order to gain a better understanding of the impacts of collaborative learning on music education, I will compare the differences in collaborative learning on music education in these countries. And lastly, will provide a limitation of these references.

'If the shoe doesn't fit: A case and a place for collaborative learning for music practice in higher education' (Forbes, 2016) – This article explores the benefits of collaborative music learning in higher education. Forbes also reviewed other references that make a good theoretical foundation for using collaborative learning in university music courses at the Australian regional university. This study demonstrates that in collaborative learning students begin to take responsibility for their own learning and develop a better understanding of their own music and personal identity. Forbes also reviews (Hunter, 2006; Lebler, 2013)'s article which showed collaborative learning increased student satisfaction and encouraged self-initiated and self-directed learning. Moreover, collaborative learning peers also provide critical reflection and evaluation, which helps in a better understanding of music.

'Collaborative Learning in Music Education: A Review of the Literature' (Luce, 2001) – Luce's article is similar to that of Forbes as both of them review references on collaborative learning in music education and analyzed the benefits of collaborative learning in music education. Luce also demonstrates that collaborative learning in music

education not only solves the question about individual differences caused by cultural barriers, but also increases social capital and broadens the influence of music education.

''I owe it to my group members...who critically commented on my conducting' - Cooperative learning in choral conducting education' (Varvarigou, 2016) – In this study, Varvarigou explores the impacts of collaborative learning in conducting education and analyzes the benefits of five collaborative learning characteristics, such as enhancing learners' willingness to cooperate, building good relationships with other learners and learning how to provide some constructive and honest feedbacks to other learners.

'Peer learning in specialist higher music education' (Hanken, 2016) – This study by Hanken relies on the Norwegian music academy as an example to explore the impacts of peer learning in higher music education. Hanken focuses on advocating peer learning as a supplement to the regular curriculum, where peer learning can provide effective feedback to students when they are performing together.

'The value of collaborative learning for music practice in higher education' (Forbes, 2020) – Forbes who earlier provided evidence for collaborative learning in music practice courses in Australian universities' popular music programs and analyzed the value of it in their 2016 study, now indicated that collaborative learning can also help students develop new skills and promote personal development, allowing teachers to focus on students' contributions in music classroom.

'Student for student: Peer learning in music higher education' (Reid, Duke 2015) – Reid and Duke demonstrate that most peer learning can help students to enhance their exam grades and it also reduces the teachers' pressure.

In short, all the references mentioned above provide a viewpoint about the benefits of collaborative learning on music education.

To explore further the impacts of collaborative learning on vocal skills, I studied three more references.

'Collaborative learning in two vocal conservatoire courses' (Rumiantsev, Maas, Admiraal, 2017) - This article explores how collaborative learning is used and the impacts of using it in classical and jazz/pop vocal lessons at a conservatoire in the Netherlands. In the classical course, collaborative learning was organized into a master class, with one student performing and the other students listening. In the jazz/ pop vocal class, collaborative learning includes a number of aspects, such as critical reflection and active interaction with peers. Here, the teacher plays the role of guiding students and promoting processes within both courses. The results of the survey revealed that collaborative learning in the classical curriculum encountered some problems like students did not learn how to be an ensemble singer at all and they only focused on how to become a soloist the singer. However, the result in jazz/pop curriculum is very different, it demonstrates that students find collaborative learning very useful because they can have more opportunities to discuss music with each other and give feedback or share ideas. The authors state that the main reason for analyzing the differences in the results is that classical teachers focus more on making their students to become soloist singers, but jazz/ pop teachers emphasize on the importance of mixed practice in a variety of activities. Although the final findings showed that students in both majors realized the value of collaborative learning to be quite high, the idea of how to improve the negative impacts of collaborative learning in classical voice lessons should still be continued to be researched.

'Peer learning and reflection: strategies developed by vocal students in a transforming tertiary setting' (Latukefu, 2009) – This study explores the impacts of peer learning on classical and non-classical singers in some Australian conservatoires. Peer learning is mainly manifested as each student sings by themselves and then other students provide comments on their performances. Latukefu explains this with Cleo's example, which shows that peer learning helps students to construct a better understanding of singing by absorbing the opinions of others and analyzing their performances. Upon further research, one can see that these learning strategies can be very effective if the classroom environment is designed in a way that encourages peer learning, which helps students to solve vocal problems through peer learning. Moreover, it also talks about how teachers encourage students to solve problems by themselves and take responsibility for their own development.

'The role of peer directed learning on the journey toward becoming a vocal artist; a case study of two graduate-level voice majors' (Jung, 2014) – This particular study provides two partners' peer learning experience to demonstrate the importance of peer learning in vocal skills. Here, both the graduate level voice majors have been learning classical music for fifteen years, and have been providing feedback on each other's performances throughout the years. Jung also reveals that teachers are always busy, and they only appear at a fixed time. Hence, when students want to solve their doubts related to singing, asking for feedback from friends is a suitable choice. More importantly, there is a big professional gap between teachers and students, so students may often misunderstand teachers' feedback.

However, because of a better understanding of each other, students may understand their peers' feedback quite easily. Jung also indicates the importance of peer learning to learn vocal skills.

Nevertheless, at the end of analyzing these three studies, one can notice that the conclusions of the second and third references differ from the first one which indicates that collaborative learning or peer learning may not be very helpful to students of vocal skills. In addition, cooperative learning in different countries may vary based on quite a lot of factors, which leads to the results obtained from these three references. Therefore, I will compare and analyze these differences in collaborative learning in different countries.

In order to compare and analyze, I did some further detailed reading based on peer learning or collaborative learning in classical vocal classes or instrumental classes in the conservatory of music in Dutch, Australia, and Norway. In Dutch, Rumiantsev, Maas, and Admiraal (2017) demonstrate that collaborative learning in classical vocal classes is the form of master classes, and the number of students is more than thirty. The main aim of this class is to provide a stage for students and the teacher strictly controls the boundaries of feedback.

Whereas in Australia, Latukefu (2009) reveals that collaborative music in classical vocal classes is conducted where each student singing is provided feedback on their performance by other students. The teachers only provide assistance at necessary moments. Students learn how to solve vocal questions by themselves.

While in Norway, Hanken (2016) demonstrates that peer learning in the instrumental classroom is conducted when the professor makes the students of the violin class and that of the vocal class play together as a group, finding and solving

problems with each other in their performances. Peer learning in classical vocal classes is conducted when two students perform and the others discuss the performance, while the teacher guides the students to express meaningful content and questions in the performance. According to these references, it can be seen that in Dutch conservatories, teachers have strict control over the students in cooperative learning, thus the students' development is limited. However, in Australia and Norway, the role of teachers is the opposite, the teachers mainly play a guiding role. Students learn how to self-direct and provide useful feedback on performances. The reason for this result is the teachers' different attitudes toward feedback in peer learning or collaborative learning. Furthermore, although students can have many benefits from the feedback, the accuracy of feedback in peer music learning or collaborative learning has scanty attention in the research literature. These articles show that when teachers encourage students to provide feedback, collaborative learning or peer learning is useful for students' music development. However, students may not have a comprehensive understanding of music, I mean they may provide some wrong feedback to the performer, which may lead to negative impacts. For example in classical singing classes, some wrong feedback may cause a performer to develop a bad habit or learn the wrong way of singing. This forms as one of the first limitations when considering the papers studied above.

The second limitation is that about which very little has been discussed. It is about the negative impacts of collaborative learning on music education and how to improve these negative impacts. And this has been noted in and very well demonstrated by William and Harvey's 2014 article *'The* collaborative *learning behaviours middle primary school students in a classroom music creation activity.'* The article also demonstrates that gender and the relationship of the peer may cause unsatisfactory result of collaborative learning on music education, but it is not enough to create a strong point.

3. Methodology

In this part, I will demonstrate my research objective, the research questions and the content for the interview.

Research objective:

Interviewing students can help me to have a better understanding of the impacts of collaborative learning on music education. And more importantly, some references do not provide the viewpoints on the negative impacts or how to improve the negative of collaborative learning on music education, so I can rely on my research results to gain some useful viewpoints to fill in these blanks.

Research questions:

1. Do you have the experience of collaborative learning on music education?
2. What is the environment of collaborative learning on music education?
3. What are the positive impacts of collaborative learning on music education?
4. What are the negative impacts of collaborative learning on music education?
5. How to improve the negative impacts?

Interview:

The interview was conducted with 12 students who have experience of learning music from different countries, basically belonging to diverse music education systems. While some of them are my undergraduate classmates, some of them are my classmates at Kingston University and others are foreign students.

The interview was conducted in the form of a questionnaire. These questionnaires were sent to participants by some social applications on our mobile phones.

Participants were given one day to answer these questions and the questionnaire did not collect any personal information from the participants.

Research limitation:

I only interviewed 12 students, the sample size is too small. Moreover, I did not do some detailed research about the strategies to improve the negative impacts.

Result:

The experience of collaborative learning on music education;

I interviewed 12 students, only one student did not have the experience of collaborative learning on music education, while the rest of them did. I have summarized the results in the form of a table for clearer understanding.

Table 3. Summarized the results in the form of a table for clearer understanding

No. of Candidates		12
Experience of collaborative learning on music education	Yes	11
	No	1

91.6% of students have the experience of collaborative learning on music education. According to the results, majority of the students have this experience.

The environment of collaborative learning on music education:

Table 4. The environment of collaborative learning on music education

Total Students	11
In the practice room	7
In the class	4

63.6% of students choose the practice room to learn music with peers, while 36.3% of students choose to learn with peers in the music classes, and only one out of the total candidates choose not to answer this question.

The positive impacts of collaborative learning on music education:

I interviewed 12 students, and every student provided 1-3 viewpoints about these questions and I summarized the result in the form of a table below.

Table 5. Summarized the result

Total students	12
Learn some communication skills	2
Supervise each other and progress together	4
Have a better understanding of music	3
Provide or absorb feedback with each other	3

While 16.6% of students think peer learning helps them learn communication skills; 33.3% of students think they can supervise each other and progress together; 25% of students think peer learning helps them to have a better understanding of music; and 25% of students think peer learning helps them

to provide or absorb feedback with each other.

The negative impacts of collaborative learning on music education:

I interviewed 12 students, every student provided 1-3 viewpoints about this question and I summarized the result in a table below.

Table 6. The result (1)

Total Students	12
Different viewpoints cause contradiction	6
Lose the important points in learning	4
The team members lack the necessary	2

Here, 50% of students think they may have different viewpoints in collaborative learning which causes some contradiction; while 33% of students think students may lose the important point in collaborative learning and 16.6% of students think the team members lack the necessary

How to improve the negative impacts:

I interviewed 12 students, and every students provided their personal viewpoints about this question and I summarized the result in a table as shown below.

Table 7. The result (2)

Total Students	12
Teachers serve as supervisors	3
Provide targeted feedback	3
Spend more time on communicating	6

25% of students think teachers serve as supervisors in their collaborative learning; while 25% of students think they should provide targeted feedback in collaborative learning; and 50% of students think they should spend more time communicating with their peers to improve the negative impacts.

4. Discussion

This interview focuses on the impacts of peer learning and how to improve negative impacts. The majority of the students have the experience of collaborative learning in music education, so the impacts of this learning strategy is very important. According to the interview, many students think they can learn communication skills or have a comprehensive understanding of music. And more importantly, they can provide and absorb peers' feedback to learn more musical knowledge. For the negative impacts, like some different viewpoints may cause contradiction or lose the important points in peer learning. However, the students also provide some strategies, such as respecting each other or focusing on how to be well-communicated with peers to improve the negative impacts of peer learning.

5. Conclusion

The learning strategy of collaborative learning on music education is frequently used in music education. This learning strategy can have many positive impacts on students, such as allowing them to learn how to provide effective feedback to performers and allowing them to take responsibility for their own learning. More importantly, students can learn more about vocal skills through the feedback of their peers when the teacher is busy. Apart from that, collaborative learning in music education can reduce the working pressure of teachers and extend the influence of music education.

I have also been impressed by these positive influences in my personal learning experience. My friends have helped me to solve many of the problems I have encountered while performing the main character in the opera. However, there are also some negative influences, such as conflicts over different opinions or lose main point in studying. Furthermore, based on my research I have found that enhancing students' communication skills or teachers serving as supervisors may improve these impacts. However, I have not investigated the results of using this method, hence more researches are required in this area in the future.

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