

## Experiential Learning in Music Education: Insights from Educational Literature

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**Abstrak.** Pembelajaran musik pada dasarnya berkembang melalui keterlibatan langsung dalam pengalaman musikal, namun kajian konseptual mengenai experiential learning dalam pendidikan musik masih tersebar dan sering dibahas secara parsial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mensintesis dan memperjelas posisi experiential learning sebagai kerangka konseptual dalam pendidikan musik. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dengan menganalisis dua belas artikel ilmiah terpilih yang diterbitkan pada periode 2019–2025, diperoleh melalui basis data Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, dan Google Scholar, dengan kata kunci utama experiential learning dan music education. Analisis dilakukan melalui sintesis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola konseptual, bentuk pengalaman belajar, serta hubungan antara pengalaman, refleksi, dan pemahaman musikal. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa experiential learning secara konsisten menempatkan pengalaman musikal, refleksi, dan interaksi sosial sebagai elemen inti pembelajaran. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi konseptual dengan merumuskan experiential learning sebagai lensa terpadu dalam pendidikan musik, serta mengimplikasikan pentingnya perancangan kurikulum dan strategi pembelajaran musik yang secara sadar mengintegrasikan pengalaman, refleksi, dan praktik kolaboratif.

**Kata Kunci:** pengalaman belajar, pengalaman musikal, pendidikan musik, refleksi belajar.

**Abstract.** Music learning is inherently grounded in direct musical experience; however, conceptual discussions of experiential learning within music education remain fragmented and are often addressed in a partial manner. This study aims to synthesise and clarify the position of experiential learning as a coherent conceptual framework in music education. Employing a qualitative literature-based approach, the study analyses twelve selected scholarly articles published between 2019-2025, retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar using the primary keywords experiential learning and music education. Data were examined through thematic synthesis to identify conceptual patterns, forms of musical learning experiences, and the relationships between experience, reflection, and musical understanding. The findings indicate that experiential learning consistently positions musical experience, reflective processes, and social interaction as core elements of music learning. This study contributes conceptually by articulating experiential learning as an integrative analytical lens in music education and highlights practical implications for curriculum design and pedagogical strategies that deliberately integrate experience, reflection, and collaborative musical practice.

**Keywords:** experiential learning, musical experience, music education, reflective learning.

## INTRODUCTION

Music education can be understood as a learning process in which students engage directly with musical activity through listening, performing, creating, and interacting with others in musical contexts (Babazadeh et al., 2022; Bond & Russell, 2021; Savage, 2021). Across formal and nonformal settings, music learning extends beyond the acquisition of theoretical knowledge to include instrumental performance, singing, active listening, and participation in ensembles or musical communities (Liu et al., 2021; Vaizman & Harpaz, 2023).

These practices highlight the central role of experience in shaping students' musical knowledge, skills, and attitudes at various educational levels (Holochwost et al., 2021; Isabirye, 2021).

Experiential learning, as conceptualised by Kolb, refers to a learning process in which knowledge is generated through the transformation of experience, involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2022). Within educational research, this framework has been widely used to explain how learners connect theory and practice through reflective engagement with experience (Bell & Bell, 2020; Kong, 2021). Due to the process-oriented nature of arts learning, experiential learning has been increasingly applied in arts education, including music education, where learning is inherently grounded in action, perception, and reflection (Jacobs, 2022; Maroungkas et al., 2023).

In music education, experiential learning has long been embedded in everyday pedagogical practices across formal and nonformal contexts. Activities such as repeated practice, ensemble performance, improvisation, sound exploration, and reflective listening function as experiential processes through which students construct musical understanding. However, research in music education has often examined these experiences in fragmented ways, focusing separately on areas such as instrumental instruction, ensemble learning, or musical creativity, without consistently framing them within an explicit experiential learning perspective (Heinrich & Green, 2020; Jiang, 2024).

Previous studies have demonstrated that experience-based learning contributes to the development of technical skills, musical appreciation, emotional engagement, and broader musical growth. Research on ensemble learning, for instance, emphasises the importance of shared musical experiences and social interaction in fostering emotional and interpretative understanding of music (Bussu & Mangiarulo, 2024; Sætre & Zhukov, 2021). Other studies have highlighted reflection and self-evaluation as essential components of meaningful music learning, particularly in relation to practice and performance (López-Íñiguez & McPherson, 2020; Osborne et al., 2021). While these studies offer valuable insights, they tend to address experiential elements implicitly rather than positioning experiential learning as a central analytical framework.

Although several literature reviews in music education have examined topics such as pedagogy, creativity, motivation, or performance learning, few have explicitly synthesised research through the lens of experiential learning as a unifying conceptual framework (Massy & Sembiente, 2023; Woody, 2021). As a result, the ways in which experiential learning is conceptualised, articulated, and connected to musical understanding across different educational settings remain insufficiently clarified. An integrative review that brings together

theoretical perspectives and empirical findings can therefore provide a more coherent understanding of how experience functions within music learning (Benjamins et al., 2022).

In response to this need, the present article aims to analyse and integrate educational literature that addresses experiential learning in music education across formal and nonformal settings. Using a qualitative literature review approach, this study examines how experiential learning is framed within music education scholarship, identifies the types of musical learning experiences most frequently discussed, and explores how these experiences are related to students' musical knowledge and development. By synthesising these perspectives, the article seeks to clarify the conceptual role of experiential learning within music education research and contribute to a more focused understanding of experience-based music learning.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted an integrative qualitative literature review design to examine how experiential learning is conceptualised and discussed within music education scholarship. This approach was selected because the study aims to synthesise and interpret both theoretical and empirical literature in order to develop a coherent conceptual understanding of experiential learning in music education, rather than to aggregate empirical findings or provide a purely descriptive summary. Narrative synthesis was employed as an analytical strategy; however, the overall methodological orientation of this study is explicitly positioned as an integrative literature review to avoid methodological overlap between different types of review (Huyler & McGill, 2019; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2021; Vårheim & Skare, 2022).

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected through a focused literature search of peer-reviewed journal articles related to experiential learning in music education. The search was conducted using Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar, with publication years limited to 2019–2025 to capture recent developments in the field. Search terms included combinations of experiential learning, music education, musical experience, music pedagogy, and learning through experience, adjusted according to each database's indexing system. Titles and abstracts were screened to identify studies relevant to experiential learning within music education contexts. Articles that met the inclusion criteria were subsequently reviewed in full text. Based on conceptual relevance and analytical contribution, twelve articles were selected for in-depth qualitative analysis. This targeted selection approach aligns with the purpose of an integrative literature review, which prioritises conceptual coherence and interpretative depth over exhaustive coverage.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

To ensure transparency and replicability, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to analysis and applied consistently throughout the selection process. Studies were included when they focused explicitly on music education or music learning in formal or nonformal contexts, engaged substantively with experiential learning or experience-based pedagogical concepts, were published in peer-reviewed journals, academic books, or refereed conference proceedings, and were available in full-text English versions. Studies were excluded if they discussed musical experiences without a clear educational or pedagogical orientation, referred to experiential learning only superficially without analytical engagement, addressed general educational issues without specific relevance to music learning, or consisted of non-refereed materials such as opinion pieces or editorials.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis with an inductive thematic approach. Each selected article was read repeatedly to ensure familiarity with its conceptual focus and analytical orientation. The analysis proceeded through open coding to identify key concepts and discussions related to experiential learning in music education, followed by thematic grouping to organise codes into broader conceptual categories. These themes were subsequently refined and synthesised to inform the Results and Discussion section.

### **Trustworthiness of the Analysis**

The trustworthiness of the analysis was enhanced through source triangulation by examining literature from diverse educational contexts and research traditions. In addition, iterative coding and theme refinement supported analytical reflexivity and internal consistency, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the reviewed literature rather than isolated sources (Blackwell et al., 2023; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Örtengren, 2022).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Conceptualising Experiential Learning in Music Education**

The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates that experiential learning in music education is consistently grounded in direct musical engagement, where listening, sensory attention, and embodied interaction function as primary means for constructing musical understanding (Benjamins et al., 2022). Across studies, musical experience is not positioned as a supplementary element of instruction but as the core of educational activity, emphasising

awareness, attentiveness, and personal engagement with sound as foundational to learning (Hadjikou, 2021).

However, when examined comparatively, the literature reveals differences in how experiential learning is conceptualised. Some studies emphasise experiential learning as a philosophical orientation that foregrounds perception and consciousness in musical engagement, while others frame it primarily as a pedagogical response to the limitations of transmission-based instruction (Han & Augustine, 2025). This distinction suggests that experiential learning in music education operates at both conceptual and pedagogical levels, rather than functioning solely as a teaching technique. By integrating these perspectives, the present review advances a more cohesive understanding of experiential learning as a framework that connects musical action, reflection, and meaning making within educational contexts (Maina, 2024).

Furthermore, several studies conceptualise musical experience itself as a form of knowledge. Personal musical histories, practical engagement, and social interaction are not merely contextual factors but shape how music is understood, interpreted, and taught (Howe & Baumgartner, 2024). This synthesis extends previous literature by clarifying experiential learning as an epistemological stance in music education, rather than limiting it to a methodological approach.

### **Forms and Variations of Musical Learning Experiences**

Across the reviewed studies, experiential learning is characterised by active learner participation, though its manifestation varies considerably across contexts. In higher education, composition workshops highlight experiential learning as a creative process in which learners generate, test, and reflect on musical ideas through iterative practice and dialogue (Salleh & Mohamed Razali, 2020). In contrast, studies focusing on technically oriented instruction, such as music mixing, emphasise experiential learning as a cycle of practice, evaluation, and refinement aimed at developing procedural and technical understanding (Stoll, 2024).

This comparison indicates that experiential learning in music education is not uniform but adapts to the epistemic demands of different musical domains. While creative contexts prioritise exploration and interpretative decision making, technical contexts foreground precision and procedural awareness. Additionally, research situated at the intersection of music and tonal language learning demonstrates that experiential musical engagement can support perceptual and cognitive development beyond strictly musical outcomes, highlighting the transferability of experience-based learning across disciplines (Howe & Baumgartner, 2024). By bringing these findings together, this review moves beyond descriptive categorisation and underscores

experiential learning as a flexible pedagogical framework that accommodates diverse forms of musical knowledge, rather than prescribing a single model of instruction.

### **Experience, Reflection, and Musical Understanding**

A central point of convergence across the literature is the role of reflection in transforming musical experience into learning. Studies in music performance education consistently position reflection as an integral component of experiential learning, enabling learners to interpret complex musical situations, recognise limitations, and make informed adjustments to their practice (Benamins et al., 2022; Tembrevilla et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the emphasis placed on reflection varies across contexts. In performance-focused studies, reflection is closely tied to self-evaluation and artistic identity formation, whereas in curriculum-oriented studies, reflection functions as a mechanism for structuring learning progression and consolidating conceptual understanding (Xiaoya et al., 2025). In music appreciation contexts, reflection is less explicitly articulated but emerges through embodied listening and emotional engagement, allowing learners to construct meaning through aesthetic experience rather than analytical discourse alone (Jiang, 2024).

This comparative synthesis highlights reflection as a unifying yet context-sensitive element of experiential learning in music education. Rather than treating reflection as a uniform process, the present review clarifies its multiple functions in supporting musical understanding across performance, instruction, and appreciation.

### **Experiential Learning in Formal and Social Contexts of Music Education**

The reviewed literature also demonstrates that experiential learning in music education is shaped by social and institutional contexts. Studies situated in specific cultural settings conceptualise experiential learning as a social process emerging from interactions among learners, educators, and the surrounding musical culture (Nugraha et al., 2021). In formal school contexts, experiential learning is associated with increased student engagement and more meaningful participation in instrumental performance, particularly when learning activities emphasise direct involvement and collective practice (Nugraha, 2022).

Comparatively, studies on curriculum and module design suggest that experiential learning can be systematically embedded into instructional structures, positioning musical experience as the foundation of learning rather than as an auxiliary activity (Boucher & Moisey, 2019). This contrast points to a key implication for practice: experiential learning is most effective when it is intentionally designed at the curricular level, rather than relying solely on isolated activities or individual teacher initiative. Taken together, these findings suggest that experiential learning in

music education has practical implications for curriculum development and instructional design. By foregrounding experience, reflection, and social interaction, educators can create learning environments that support sustained musical engagement and understanding across formal and nonformal contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This integrative literature review clarifies experiential learning in music education as a conceptual framework that positions musical experience, reflection, and social interaction as interconnected foundations of musical understanding. The main contribution of this article lies in synthesising fragmented literature into a coherent account that demonstrates how experiential learning operates across creative, technical, performative, and appreciation-oriented music education contexts. Practically, the findings indicate that music educators and curriculum developers can strengthen learning design by intentionally aligning musical experience, reflective processes, and collaborative practice within curricular and assessment structures. This study is limited by its reliance on selected literature and the absence of primary empirical data, which constrains the generalisability of its conclusions. Future research should therefore focus more specifically on critical dimensions identified in this review, particularly the role of reflection and assessment within experiential learning across educational levels. In the context of contemporary music education that increasingly emphasises learner engagement and contextual relevance, experiential learning remains a crucial framework for understanding how musical knowledge and meaning are developed through experience.

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