

# Support for Professional Development of Studio Music Teachers in Malaysia: An Exploratory Survey

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## Abstract

Music teachers who work in institutions tend to have access to professional development (PD) opportunities when formal support structures mandate it, while studio music teachers often have to find their own avenues for PD, and little is understood about this, especially in contexts outside the global North. In Malaysia, most studio music teachers work in private settings that are unregulated, and in this research project we were interested in the support that these teachers are accessing. As part of a larger mixed methods study, we developed a questionnaire that asked about the respondents' history of training, current work situation, confidence levels, sources and availability of PD, and reasons for attending or not attending PD events. The survey was distributed using online survey management software and was advertised to various online teacher forums that have a combined membership of over 15,000. One hundred ninety-six studio music teachers responded to the invitation and completed the survey of which 194 provided usable data. Data were analysed using exploratory factor analysis. A 10-factor structure described 67.26% of the total variance in the data set. We have named the factors: music-technical motivation for development; support through personal contact; confidence levels of teaching; technology-mediated support; social and financial inhibitors of PD; institutional support; information seeking; time and priorities inhibit PD; public, in-person support; and professional organisation support. We discuss these findings in the light of the modes of support that studio music teachers' access, the motivators and inhibitors for seeking that support. We argue that the absence of formalised support and the lack of structured PD opportunities means that studio music teachers are likely to only choose opportunities that are directly relevant to their work and earning potential, while they primarily seek support from self-created and maintained networks of other teachers.

## Keywords

informal learning, informal support, instrumental pedagogy, Malaysia, motivation, professional development, quantitative, studio music teaching

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## Introduction

This article reports on a survey describing the support that studio music teachers in Malaysia access to further their professional development. With only very few, small professional organisations supporting private music teaching outside of schools in Malaysia, most studio music teachers are, therefore, responsible for their own professional development (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025). There is no government or other regulation of private music teaching in Malaysia (Okajima, 2023), nor mandated professional development for studio music teachers, meaning little is known about the professional development they access. Although there is a growing body of research concerning music education in schools in Malaysia (Abdullah, 2021; Mei et al., 2018; Sham et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2016), the little research that has been conducted on studio music teachers (Ang et al., 2019, 2020; Ang, Khoo, & Odendaal, 2025; Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025; Khoo et al., 2023) shows that they often work alone or in privately owned music schools; most are paid according to the hours taught, and therefore face precarious livelihoods that depend to some extent on their students' success in examinations and music competitions for continued income.

The examination boards of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity College London (TCL), and the London College of Music (LCM) began operating in Malaysia at the start of the 20th century while the country was colonised by the British (Abdullah, 2021). Historically, they offered primarily western classical syllabi, but have introduced popular and rock syllabi in the last 30 years or so.<sup>1</sup> Malaysia has developed into one of the largest markets in the world for these kinds of examinations and consumer-driven approaches have caused music learning outside of schools to become almost synonymous with examination certification (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025). As a result, studio music teachers commonly depend on the examination syllabuses as the basis on which to build their professional practice (McMillan, 2011). We have observed that studio music teachers frequently see these examinations as the only curriculum for instrumental music learning, and there is a widespread perception that receiving a Grade 8 certification signifies the end of official music study and acts as a licence to begin teaching work (Ang, 2019; Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025). For many, these examinations become definitive not only of what music teaching is but also of the accepted template for professional development (Cheah, 2012; Tye, 2004). However, depending on this certification alone implies being capable of performing only a handful of compositions selected from the repertoire lists provided, executing limited technical exercises, as well as showing some competency in aural training and sight-reading. Other aspects of musicianship—such as improvising, composing, playing wider repertoire, possessing broader knowledge of music theory, and overall exposure to live music and different genres—and pedagogical understandings and competences are not developed through these certifications (Ang, 2019).

The only study to have considered the professional development of studio music teachers in Malaysia is a qualitative companion article (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025) where we explored the meanings of professional development for 12 Malaysian piano teachers with varied backgrounds. Participants' perceptions of professionalism highlighted professional pride, which included a love and enjoyment of music and teaching as a fundamental starting point for their professional self-understanding. The teachers pointed out that professionalism requires flexibility and responsiveness, involves both teacher and student performing and understanding music, and necessitates relationality, communication skills, and positive character. These results highlighted the strengths and motivations of the teachers, positioning them as active agents in the development of their own careers, but also revealed that their self-defined roles

and responsibilities were limited to immediate music-technical concerns such as specific issues, challenges, and areas of skill development for proficient technical execution and musicianship. Broader issues such as child protection measures, safety checks, background checks, and avoiding abusive teaching practices did not enter our discussions. Participants pointed out that professional development required proactivity on their part due to a lack of institutional or organisational support. Furthermore, environmental and material factors, such as accessibility of development opportunities and possible losses of income, limited studio music teachers' access to professional development. For this reason, they primarily made use of professional connections to support their development, and while they felt that formal training was important, personal experience and mentorship were considered the most accessible avenues for informal learning. From this perspective, studio music teachers in Malaysia viewed themselves as proactive agents in their own professional development, who accessed support where it was available but were limited by the opportunities on offer and had a somewhat limited perspective on what professional development could mean. We designed the qualitative (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025) and, in this article, the quantitative sides of the study as complementary and were interested in the ways that the trends noted in the qualitative study would be represented in a wider sample of teachers.

### *Modes of Support for Professional Development*

Although there are calls for an expanded professionalism in music education (Westerlund & Gaunt, 2021), it seems from our previous research that such a call has not yet reached most studio music teachers in Malaysia. The isolated nature of studio music teaching practices globally (Burwell et al., 2019) and difficulty in recruiting such teachers for research (Barton, 2020; Boyle, 2020) means there is limited empirical evidence to draw on. Research in the global North has begun to investigate questions surrounding access to professional development, starting with the types or *modes* of support (which can range from informal conversations to structured qualifications) that are available to studio music teachers, and taking into consideration that it is not always necessary to have qualifications or prior pedagogical training to do this work (Boyle, 2020; Hallam, 2017; McMillan, 2011). The lack of regulation around training has led both to the haphazard nature of this professional field (Boyle, 2020) and to the assumption that musicians have enough knowledge about how to teach based on how they were taught (Norton et al., 2019), given the history of music learning as a form of apprenticeship (Gaunt et al., 2021).

Sharing of expertise and building a collective knowledge base are important facets of accessing communities of practice (Burwell et al., 2019) or professional learning communities (Bautista et al., 2021). Such informal and peer learning (Bautista et al., 2021; Kastner, 2014) can be the product of building wider networks of studio music teachers (Taylor & Hallam, 2011), who may work in isolation or begin their teaching work as an amateur musician. In general, social interactions are seen as important for teachers to flourish (Shaw, 2020) in their complex and multiple working environments. Furthermore, ongoing work experience is integral to a studio music teacher's development (Taylor & Hallam, 2011), and teaching itself can reinforce performance skills and musical understanding, which may improve teaching in an iterative process. Indeed, the importance of reflective practice and reflexive thinking have been posited as essential *self-guided modes* of professional support (Yau, 2019).

Seeking more structured, formalised, and external support has been conceived in a number of ways. Whether musicians are trained formally or informally, maintaining performance skills (Norton et al., 2019) and continuing lessons are deemed important aspects of professional

development both for performers *and* teachers (Barton, 2020), although it is noted elsewhere that singers are more likely than instrumentalists to continue one-to-one lessons beyond initial training (Gaunt et al., 2021). In the absence of initial training, attending workshops, seminars, short courses, and conferences organised by unions, music hubs, or other music organisations (Boyle, 2020) nonetheless provide formal routes for professional development (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025; Barton, 2020). Finally, and especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the more recent proliferation of online support provides both blended versions of formal support through webinars, but also digital tools for professional development (Upitis & Brook, 2017) and more informal learning possibilities through blogs, websites, forums (Barton, 2020), and social media such as Facebook groups (Rickels & Brewer, 2017). In addition to the modes of support for professional development that have been surveyed in the literature, it is important to contextualise these by further understanding the *motivators* and *inhibitors* for seeking such support in the first place.

### *Motivators and Inhibitors for Seeking Support*

Motivations for seeking professional development have been understood by some to develop internally from a studio music teachers' passion for music and lifelong learning (also reported in Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025). However, the need to access support is also driven by external factors such as precarious working conditions (Canham, 2021) which push musicians to be competitive to survive (Rowley et al., 2021), possibly leading to performative approaches among studio music teachers (Natale-Abramo, 2014; Regelski, 2012). Motivators to access professional development may also be driven by the need to overcome a sense of isolation (Bautista et al., 2021; Burwell et al., 2019) and thus becomes important for building social support and strengthening professional networks. Informal and online modes of support (Burwell et al., 2019; Rickels & Brewer, 2017) are likely used due to convenience and accessibility—another important factor affecting motivation. The lack of initial training and preparation of studio music teachers in Malaysia (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025) may also lead to a praxis shock (Ballantyne & Retell, 2020) and, therefore, a desire to overcome frustrations through developing more effective pedagogic practices. Overall, a lack of being formally qualified and socialised into the profession may motivate studio music teachers to independently develop human and social capital, including informal networks to counter the isolation of their working practices (Creech, 2010).

West et al. (2021) are critical of professional development research that only profiles success stories and does not pay attention to issues of attrition and demotivation, leading to skewed representation of positive perspectives on professional development in the literature. Inhibitors to professional development include a range of practical and accessibility issues that studio music teachers face. However, from the standpoint of their isolated teaching practice and its closed-loop system (Teachout, 2012), it has been argued that teachers may not recognise the need or relevance of professional development—even at the peak of their career they may not realise what they do not know (Durrant & Laurence, 2010). The insularity of studio music teachers' working worlds may lead to misunderstanding the need for support, lack of awareness of when it is available, or uncertainty in assessing and self-diagnosing what type of support may be required. For studio music teachers who are often not salaried, nor supported by unions, the issues of cost and location provide accessibility barriers (Boyle, 2020). Furthermore, taking time off and losing income to attend paid-for professional development events results in a double loss. Timings can also be a barrier, since these professional development opportunities may often occur outside of regular business hours when such studio music teachers are often

busiest teaching (Burwell et al., 2019) and their complex teaching schedules become otherwise difficult to re-organise and accommodate much spare time for professional learning (Uptis & Brook, 2017).

### *Research Question*

By describing the modes in which studio music teachers in Malaysia seek professional development, as well as the motivators and inhibitors for doing so, this research aims to provide understandings for developing better support systems and approaches. Given the preponderance of global North perspectives on this topic, it is also necessary to account for the context-specific factors that may influence studio music teachers working in Malaysia. Hence, this survey study set out to answer the following research question: *what support do studio music teachers in Malaysia access for their professional development, and what motivates or inhibits them in this process?*

### **Method**

This study is part of a larger mixed methods study that investigates the nature and meaning of professional development for studio music teachers in Malaysia. The qualitative results are published elsewhere (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025), and in this article, we focus on the results of a survey we conducted among studio music teachers in Malaysia.

### *Questionnaire Development*

We developed the questionnaire (Supplemental Appendix A) based on our understanding of the literature on teacher support globally, and our specific understandings of the situation in Malaysia. The questionnaire asked studio music teachers various questions regarding their training, experience, current teaching practice, and confidence levels. It further investigated the modes of support they access and their perceived effectiveness, the frequency of attending different professional development events, as well as motivators and inhibitors for seeking support. The questionnaire was made available in English, Mandarin, and Bahasa Malaysia. Translation to Mandarin and Bahasa Malaysia was undertaken by professional translators. Studio music teachers who were fluent in these languages and English were asked to translate the questionnaire back to English to ensure the faithfulness of the translations. The questionnaire was designed to take about 15 min to complete in electronic format using QuestionPro software and is available in English as an appendix to this article.

### *Respondents*

The respondents to the questionnaire were invited through several Facebook groups where Malaysian studio music teachers are linked, personal networks developed by the researchers in Malaysia, as well as professional groupings such as privately owned and operated music schools or franchises of music schools. A brief description of the nature and aim of the research was posted on the channels appropriate to each of these groups (in online groups, through phone messages, or through emails), together with a link to the online questionnaire. We estimate that we had the possibility of reaching somewhere in the region of 15,000 digital profiles across Malaysia, based on the sizes of the various groups to which we had access, although there is likely significant overlap between the groups. We regularly posted information about the study and a link to the online questionnaire on these various forums. Not everybody reads

all posts in these kinds of groups, and so the actual number of people who interacted with the invitation is uncertain. Furthermore, the relationship between sample and population is hard to establish, with no formal statistics regarding the prevalence of studio music teachers in the country. The only inclusion criterion for participation in the questionnaire was that the respondent should be an active studio music teacher. No exclusion criteria were applied. The questionnaire was available for completion between 1 December 2021 and 21 February 2022 and 196 respondents began the questionnaire. The study was approved by the Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the North West University with ethics number NWU-01120-21-A7. All participants were adults who gave informed, written consent to participating in the study.

### *Data Analysis*

The data were inspected and two incomplete responses were excluded from analysis, leaving 194 complete responses. Most of the responses came in the form of categorical data. Text answers to questions of where participants taught, which instruments and genres they taught, and other qualifications they held were translated from Mandarin or Bahasa Malaysia using freely available online tools, then analysed and coded. IBM SPSS 29 was used in the statistical analysis. Although the questionnaire was divided into sections, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted because the questionnaire was self-developed, and we wanted to find possible underlying factor structures that would fit the data. We calculated how many possible latent factors could be present and then considered the configuration of those possible factors. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to identify the number of possible factors: with Eigen-values  $> 1.00$ , it was found that there might be up to 12 factors present, explaining 67.26% of the total variance. Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) with Direct Oblimin Rotation was then used to assess the item loadings per factor. Items with low loadings were removed (cut-off value set at .30), and the two steps were repeated until all remaining items loaded onto a factor. In this analysis, 10 factors are included, providing a variable:factor ratio of 6:9, suggesting that the sample size is adequate for supporting the analysis (Mundfrom et al., 2009). The items that were removed were: Stuck: Trial and error; Stuck: Ask other teacher; and Seek support: Conference or workshop. One item (Teach Theory Advanced) cross-loaded on two factors; however, Factor 10 only contained this one item. It therefore made sense to remove that factor and retain the item under Factor 3.

## **Results**

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Table 1 describes the sample using several characteristics. Participants were principally from urban areas (87.2%). The majority of respondents taught in one-on-one situations (67.0%) and a considerable group of respondents did not include any theory (32.6%) or musicianship/aural skills (74.2%) in their day-to-day teaching. Teaching one or two instruments accounted for most respondents (88.0%). Studio music teachers operated in a wide range of contexts (at private music studios, at home, at pupils' homes), with no strong trend one way or another. Few studio music teachers specialised in only one genre, with the largest group of these teaching only Western classical music (31.4%). The majority of studio music teachers (66.5%) taught some combination of genres, with the largest group teaching a combination of Western classical and contemporary/pop/rock (20.6%). The results point to a strong reliance on the

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the Participants ( $n = 194$ ).

| Item                          | Category                                             | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Area                          | Rural                                                | 24        | 12.8       |
|                               | Urban                                                | 163       | 87.2       |
| The way I teach instruments   | One-on-one                                           | 124       | 67.0       |
|                               | In a group                                           | 0         | 0.0        |
|                               | Both                                                 | 61        | 33.0       |
| The way I teach theory        | I don't teach theory                                 | 63        | 32.6       |
|                               | One-on-one                                           | 68        | 35.2       |
|                               | In a group                                           | 19        | 9.8        |
|                               | Both                                                 | 43        | 22.3       |
| The way I teach musicianship  | I don't teach musicianship                           | 144       | 74.2       |
|                               | One-on-one                                           | 13        | 6.7        |
|                               | In a group                                           | 26        | 13.4       |
|                               | Both                                                 | 11        | 5.7        |
| Number of instruments I teach | 1                                                    | 127       | 66.5       |
|                               | 2                                                    | 41        | 21.5       |
|                               | 3                                                    | 14        | 7.2        |
|                               | 4                                                    | 5         | 2.6        |
|                               | 5                                                    | 3         | 1.6        |
|                               | 6                                                    | 0         | 0.0        |
|                               | 7                                                    | 0         | 0.0        |
|                               | 8                                                    | 0         | 0.0        |
|                               | 9                                                    | 0         | 0.0        |
|                               | 10                                                   | 1         | 0.5        |
| Where I teach                 | Students' homes                                      | 2         | 1.0        |
|                               | My home                                              | 9         | 4.6        |
|                               | Music school                                         | 27        | 13.9       |
|                               | Other school                                         | 6         | 3.1        |
|                               | Online                                               | 4         | 2.1        |
|                               | All of the above                                     | 1         | 0.5        |
|                               | Students' homes, My home                             | 4         | 2.1        |
|                               | Students' homes, Music school                        | 2         | 1.0        |
|                               | Students' homes, Other school                        | 1         | 0.5        |
|                               | Students' homes, Online                              | 2         | 1.0        |
|                               | Students' homes, My home, Music school               | 4         | 2.1        |
|                               | Students' homes, My home, Online                     | 7         | 3.6        |
|                               | Students' homes, Music school, Online                | 8         | 4.1        |
|                               | Students' homes, Other school, Online                | 2         | 1.0        |
|                               | Students' homes, My home, Music school, Other school | 26        | 13.4       |
|                               | Students' homes, My home, Other school, Online       | 2         | 1.0        |
|                               | Students' homes, Music school, Other school, Online  | 5         | 2.6        |
|                               | My home, Music school                                | 5         | 2.6        |
|                               | My home, Other school                                | 1         | 0.5        |
|                               | My home, Online                                      | 7         | 3.6        |
|                               | My home, Music school, Online                        | 19        | 9.8        |
|                               | My home, Other school, Online                        | 3         | 1.5        |
|                               | My home, Music school, Other school, Online          | 8         | 4.1        |
|                               | Music school, Online                                 | 34        | 17.5       |
|                               | Music school, Other school, Online                   | 3         | 1.5        |
|                               | Other school, Online                                 | 2         | 1.0        |

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

| Item                         | Category                                                                    | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Type of music                | Western classical                                                           | 61        | 31.4       |
|                              | Asian classical                                                             | 1         | 0.5        |
|                              | Contemporary/Pop/Rock                                                       | 2         | 1.0        |
|                              | Folk/Traditional                                                            | 1         | 0.5        |
|                              | All of the above                                                            | 15        | 7.7        |
|                              | Western classical, Asian classical                                          | 7         | 3.6        |
|                              | Western classical, Contemporary/Pop/Rock                                    | 40        | 20.6       |
|                              | Western classical, Jazz                                                     | 3         | 1.5        |
|                              | Western classical, Folk/Traditional                                         | 7         | 3.6        |
|                              | Western classical, Asian classical, Contemporary/Pop/Rock                   | 4         | 2.1        |
|                              | Western classical, Asian classical, Jazz                                    | 1         | 0.5        |
|                              | Western classical, Asian classical, Folk/Traditional                        | 1         | 0.5        |
|                              | Western classical, Contemporary/Pop/Rock, Jazz                              | 13        | 6.7        |
|                              | Western classical, Contemporary/Pop/Rock, Folk/Traditional                  | 13        | 6.7        |
|                              | Western classical, Asian classical, Contemporary/Pop/Rock, Jazz             | 4         | 2.1        |
|                              | Western classical, Asian classical, Contemporary/Pop/Rock, Folk/Traditional | 5         | 2.6        |
|                              | Western classical, Asian classical, Jazz, Folk/Traditional                  | 2         | 1.0        |
|                              | Western classical, Contemporary/Pop/Rock, Jazz, Folk/Traditional            | 10        | 5.2        |
|                              | Asian classical, Contemporary/Pop/Rock, Folk/Traditional                    | 1         | 0.5        |
|                              | Contemporary/Pop/Rock, Jazz                                                 | 2         | 1.0        |
|                              | Contemporary/Pop/Rock, Folk/Traditional                                     | 1         | 0.5        |
| Qualification in Performance | Not qualified                                                               | 6         | 3.1        |
|                              | Grade 8 Performance                                                         | 31        | 16.0       |
|                              | Diploma in Performance                                                      | 88        | 45.4       |
|                              | Undergraduate degree with Performance                                       | 40        | 20.6       |
|                              | Postgraduate degree with Performance                                        | 18        | 9.3        |
|                              | Other                                                                       | 11        | 5.7        |
| Qualification in Pedagogy    | Not qualified                                                               | 37        | 19.1       |
|                              | One-off training events                                                     | 42        | 21.6       |
|                              | Diploma in Pedagogy                                                         | 65        | 33.5       |
|                              | Undergraduate degree with Pedagogy                                          | 29        | 14.9       |
|                              | Postgraduate degree with Pedagogy                                           | 15        | 7.7        |
|                              | Other                                                                       | 6         | 3.1        |
| Years teaching experience    | Up to 10 years                                                              | 60        | 30.9       |
|                              | 11–20 years                                                                 | 49        | 25.3       |
|                              | 21–30 years                                                                 | 56        | 28.9       |
|                              | 31–40 years                                                                 | 26        | 13.4       |
|                              | More than 40 years                                                          | 3         | 1.5        |

qualifications offered by the examining bodies, with 61.4% of the respondents teaching with a Grade 8 or Diploma in performance and 33.5% with a pedagogical Diploma qualification as highest qualification. Fewer respondents qualified at universities either in performance (29.9%) or pedagogy (22.6%). Six studio music teachers claimed no qualification in performance,

19.1% of the sample indicated no pedagogical training, and 21.6% received all their pedagogical training through once-off workshops or seminars. Together, the groups that had this minimal pedagogical training accounted for 40.7% of the total sample.

### *Factor Structure*

We defined the final 10 factors as follows (item loadings are provided in Supplemental Appendix B):

Factor 1 (*Music-technical motivation for development*) consists of six items that describe music-technical motivations of respondents to participate in professional development events. The items describe reasons for attending such events, including being musically or educationally inspired, developing their performance, teaching, and/or musicianship skills, developing their understanding of music theory, and learning how to prepare students for practical examinations.

Factor 2 (*Support through personal contact*) consists of six items that involve contacting other teachers to seek support, including conversations in-person, via phone/video call, SMS/email, and online forums/chat rooms with teachers either known to them, and/or studio music teachers they have not personally met.

Factor 3 (*Confidence levels of teaching*) reflects the respondent's sense of confidence in their musical and pedagogical skill. Seven items describe teachers' confidence in teaching theory and performance from beginner to advanced levels, and their confidence in their own performance skills to demonstrate the music of their most advanced students.

Factor 4 (*Technology mediated support*) consists of three items measuring whether teachers felt supported through technological means—phone/video calls, SMS/email, and/or online forums/chat rooms.

Factor 5 (*Social and financial inhibitors of professional development*) consists of four primarily social items that describe reasons for not attending professional development events: not having someone to accompany them, being scared to go, not knowing anyone there, and being unable to afford the event.

Factor 6 (*Institutional support*) consists of three items where respondents indicate the perceived levels of support (in the form of information or skill development) they receive from institutional sources such as private/international schools, privately owned music schools, and/or universities/colleges.

Factor 7 (*Information seeking*) consists of three items where respondents indicate they seek information when feeling stuck with a student: books, training sessions/courses on the issue, and/or relevant information on the internet.

Factor 8 (*Time and priorities inhibit professional development*) consists of five items that describe teachers' reasons for not attending professional development events. These include little support from their institution, inability to rearrange their teaching schedule, and feeling the event to be unnecessary, not suited to their needs, or inconvenient in timing.

Factor 9 (*Public, in-person support*) consists of four items where respondents rate the effectiveness of different means of support available to them. The items describe attendance of conferences/workshops/lectures, finding or attending demonstration lessons/masterclasses, and/or in-person conversations.

Factor 10 (*Professional organisation support*) consists of three items where respondents indicate whether they receive support in the form of information or skill development from professional organisations such as teacher support groups, music teacher/performing arts associations, and/or international examination boards.

For most of these factors, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient is acceptable ( $>.70$ ). Factors 6 (Institutional support) and 9 (Public in-person support) have lower reliability coefficients (.64 and .68, respectively) and would need to be re-evaluated for future use. Unfortunately, due to the small sample size, the proposed factor structure could not be confirmed.

### *Factor Correlations*

After the evaluation of the data through an EFA, the presence and strength of relationships between the factors were established. The results are reported in Table 2. The strongest relationships were found between three sets of factors. There was a positive significant relationship between Institutional support and Professional organisation support ( $r = .46^{**}$ ) with a medium-to-large effect, as well as between Social and financial inhibitors of professional development and Time and priorities inhibitors of professional development ( $r = .42^{**}$ ). A significant positive relationship was also identified between Technology mediated support and Public in-person support ( $r = .40^{**}$ ) with a medium effect. These three significant relationships were expected, as the factor pairs were theoretically strongly linked.

A few relationships were found to be significant but with only small effects, such as Technology mediated support and Institutional support ( $r = .14^*$ ), and Confidence levels of teaching and Technology mediated support ( $r = .20^{**}$ ). Support through personal contact as a factor had positive significant relationships with four other factors, all with medium effects: Technology mediated support ( $r = .37^{**}$ ), Institutional support ( $r = .31^{**}$ ), Public in-person support ( $r = .34^{**}$ ), and Professional organisation support ( $r = .37^{**}$ ). This might indicate the centrality of personal contact for the participants in this data set.

## **Discussion**

We will highlight three features of this data set emerging from the descriptive data, followed by a discussion of the results of the EFA through the lens of motivators, modes, and inhibitors of support.

First, of the studio music teachers who responded, just over 40% indicated that they had minimal pedagogical training. Although this is technically a minority, and most teachers had some training in pedagogy, it is still a worrying finding, given the likely concomitant lack of awareness about issues outside of the normal examination syllabus requirements, such as professional practice and safeguarding, or the implications of an expanded professionalism (Westerlund & Gaunt, 2021; see also Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025).

Second, the preponderance of studio music teachers who taught either Western classical music or combined it with Western popular music in a country with several indigenous musical styles and genres points to the effects of British colonialism and its later iteration, commercial globalisation, on musical taste (Chong, 2023; Kok, 2011). In this context, colonialism is expressed through the influence of examination bodies that legitimise these styles and have, over time, established them as the most important.

Third, the respondents tended to come from urban areas, despite our efforts to distribute the questionnaire as far as possible. It is likely that the channels we used, such as the Facebook

**Table 2.** Reliability Coefficients and Factor Correlation Matrix.

| Variable                                                       | $\alpha$ | 1                    | 2                    | 3     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                    | 7   | 8    | 9     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----|------|-------|
| 1. Music-technical motivation for development                  | .91      | —                    |                      |       |                       |                       |                      |     |      |       |
| 2. Support through personal contact                            | .79      | .11                  | —                    |       |                       |                       |                      |     |      |       |
| 3. Confidence music or teaching                                | .81      | .07                  | .02                  | —     |                       |                       |                      |     |      |       |
| 4. Technology mediated support                                 | .85      | .18*                 | .37 <sup>†, **</sup> | .20** | —                     |                       |                      |     |      |       |
| 5. Social and financial inhibitors of professional development | .74      | .30 <sup>†, **</sup> | -.01                 | .28** | .11                   | —                     |                      |     |      |       |
| 6. Institutional support                                       | .64      | .09                  | .31 <sup>†, **</sup> | .03   | .14*                  | -.12                  | —                    |     |      |       |
| 7. Information seeking                                         | .76      | .30**                | 0..                  | -.03  | .20**                 | .17*                  | .01                  | —   |      |       |
| 8. Time and priorities inhibit professional development        | .71      | .15*                 | -.11                 | -.01  | .02                   | .42 <sup>†, ***</sup> | -.14                 | .07 | —    |       |
| 9. Public in-person support                                    | .68      | .32 <sup>†, **</sup> | .34 <sup>†, **</sup> | .13   | .40 <sup>†, ***</sup> | .15*                  | .13                  | .12 | .05  | —     |
| 10. Professional organisation support                          | .71      | .13                  | .37 <sup>†, **</sup> | .01   | .21**                 | .04                   | .46 <sup>†, **</sup> | .06 | -.06 | .28** |

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; <sup>†</sup> $r > 0.30$ .

groups or contact lists of examination bodies, were skewed towards more urban centres, and also likely that rural areas support fewer studio music teachers, who may also be more isolated than their urban peers.

### *Motivators for Seeking Support*

The strongest factor indicated music-technical motivation for development (Factor 1), pointing to the importance of this area for the studio music teachers in this study. Comparing this result with findings from our qualitative study suggests that the interest in music-technical motivation arises from a needs-based and *ad hoc* approach to the type of support required (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025). The strong need for music-technical development may be emphasised due to the general lack of prior pedagogical training or minimum qualifications that the findings demonstrate, which is also a trend more globally (Boyle, 2020; Hallam, 2017). However, while a third of the sample had some form of teaching qualification, the high need for music-technical development also suggests a narrow pedagogical focus of professionalism that is driven by preparing students to take music examinations and to teach specific pieces and skills (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025). The environmental demand in Malaysia for certification shapes the competitive framework within which these studio music teachers operate, and therefore the external factors that motivate them to seek professional support. Although confidence levels in music or teaching (Factor 3) were not a strong indicator for seeking support, the necessity to prepare students well and effectively to pass music examinations remains a determining factor in accessing support (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025). The teachers in this study worked in precarious conditions (many were not aligned with a music school or other institution, and even those that were, were mostly paid according to hours taught). The need for students to pass exams emphasises the performative nature of music teaching (Canham, 2021; Natale-Abramo, 2014) and contradicts what might initially be assumed as altruistic purposes for being a music educator (Regelski, 2012) and pursuing professional development.

### *Modes of Support for Professional Development*

The second most salient factor showed that support networks for studio music teachers tend to be informal in nature (Factor 2), with event attendance primarily sustained through personal connections. Previously, we found that individuals who actively sought personal support were also more likely to attend events and maintain contact with other teachers using various online platforms to discuss teaching-related matters (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025). This observation aligned with findings in the literature, where social networks of information sharing are identified as crucial in enabling teachers to navigate their multiple, complex working environments (Shaw, 2020). Formal modes of support may entail attending workshops, seminars, short courses, and conferences (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025; Barton, 2020) organised by unions, music hubs, or other music organisations (Boyle, 2020). However, three factors from our findings (Factors 6, 9 and 10) suggest that formal modes of support from institutions and professional organisations were lower in importance than support from personal contact or informal modes (Factor 2). The lower emphasis on formal modes of support may stem from the fact that studio music teachers are not supported within policy frameworks in Malaysia. Consequently, many teachers seek support by affiliating with institutions such as privately owned music schools to broaden their range of professional interactions, as opposed to teaching exclusively from home. This strategy can serve as a via-

ble pathway to accessing formal support, provided that the institutions involved actively foster supportive environments (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025).

### *Inhibitors of Support*

Two factors describe the inhibitors of professional development as closely related to each other. This is not surprising, given what is understood about the linked financial and time pressures that studio music teachers face (Boyle, 2020; Burwell et al., 2019). Social and financial inhibitors point to training events as socially difficult places for some. To an extent this confirms our suspicions that, for some people, the culture of saving face in Malaysia (Rose et al., 2007) makes it difficult to join such events due to the fear of exposing ignorance on a given topic (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025). Time and priorities inhibitors add to this by lowering incentives for teachers to participate due to the pressure to keep on teaching, either because the institution requires it, or because they cannot afford to take time off. The precarious nature of studio music teaching in this environment (see also Canham, 2021) translates into behaviour that prioritises contact time over other endeavours. We found (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025) that studio music teachers spoke of a strong business-minded approach among their peers, which created competition between teachers. Although this might inspire teachers to be the best they can be to attract more students, narrow definitions of what it means to be the best (e.g., good examination/competition results) means that teachers are less likely to invest in knowledge or skill that lies outside the perceived music-technical core of the subject.

### **Conclusion**

This article set out to describe the support for professional development that studio music teachers in Malaysia access, through conducting a questionnaire survey. We show that, when considering the data together with earlier published qualitative work, teachers were most likely motivated by music-technical factors, which included helping their students pass examinations. The primary mode of support seemed to be informal networks, and even when formal opportunities were offered, studio music teachers were inhibited from attending these kinds of events by financial and time constraints. We conclude from this that the absence of mandated and structured professional development opportunities means that studio music teachers are likely to only choose opportunities that are directly relevant to their work and earning potential, while primarily seeking support from self-created and maintained networks of other teachers. This fits well with the perspectives and findings we detailed elsewhere (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025), which specifically illustrate studio music teachers' personal and self-determined conceptions of professionalism.

The implication for professional development in Malaysia is that moving existing studio music teachers towards an expanded professionalism (Westerlund & Gaunt, 2021) will require encouraging the formation and maintenance of these self-created networks. Some teachers already gravitate towards communities of practice or professional learning communities to address their needs for professional development in the absence of formalised or regulated training. Publicly encouraging and highlighting such communities may address the motivational factors and some of the inhibitors for accessing professional development, and may involve identifying key contributors who can point others towards development opportunities. In this regard, a national studio music teachers association may play an important role. It would be important that such an association is perceived as neutral, not supporting a specific organisation, examination system, or faction of teachers (Ang, Lewis, & Odendaal, 2025).

Ideally the association should *not* have stringent entrance requirements, thus allowing teachers who are underqualified to make their way into this community. Although there remains no regulatory framework in place, we conclude that such a framework is unlikely to be supported by many studio music teachers—especially those who are teaching without qualifications—as externally mandated regulations may impede their ability to legally earn a living.

There are some limitations to the study we conducted—since we do not know the full population of unregulated studio music teachers in Malaysia and therefore cannot statistically calculate the representativeness of the sample. Although the sample size was adequate, it could have been larger to allow for confirmatory factor analysis. Furthermore, there is an urban skew in the data, and it is not clear if this was a product of our sampling approach, or an accurate reflection of the distribution of studio music teachers in Malaysia.

Future research would need to investigate informal teacher networks, attempting to understand the ways they operate, organise, and communicate. It may also be necessary to confirm the findings through further use of the questionnaire, and compare results in other similar countries, such as Singapore or Hong Kong, since this area of concern is not unique to the Malaysian context alone.

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## Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the North West University with ethics number NWU–01120-21-A7. All participants were adults who gave informed, written consent to participating in the study.

## Author Contributions

**Albi Odendaal:** Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Methodology; Software; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

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## Data Availability Statement

Anonymized data is available on request from the corresponding author.

## Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

## Note

1. <https://www.rslawards.com/about-rsl/>

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