

PRACTITIONER-LED ACTION RESEARCH ON FOSTERING INTRINSIC
MOTIVATION AND MUSICAL ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH SELF-DETERMINATION
THEORY STRATEGIES IN A HONG KONG PRIVATE MUSIC STUDIO

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Abstract

Intrinsic motivation is widely recognized as a critical determinant of sustained engagement, persistence, and achievement in learning. However, within the context of instrumental music education in Hong Kong, student participation is frequently driven by extrinsic pressures, including parental expectations, examination requirements, and credential-oriented goals. These factors often contribute to declining motivation and high dropout rates, particularly as students progress through increasingly demanding academic environments. Addressing this issue requires pedagogical approaches that move beyond performance outcomes and instead cultivate meaningful, self-determined engagement in music learning. This study investigates how motivation-supportive instructional strategies, grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), influence students' intrinsic motivation and musical achievement within a private instrumental music studio context.

This practitioner-led study adopts a mixed methods action research design, conducted over an eight-week intervention at a private music studio in Hong Kong. The research is guided by three primary questions: (1) How does intrinsic motivation affect students' musical achievement? (2) What changes occur in students' motivation and achievement following the implementation of targeted instructional strategies? and (3) What pedagogical practices emerge as most effective in fostering intrinsic motivation in this context? The study integrates

theoretical perspectives from SDT, Dewey's progressivism, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and the praxial philosophy of music education to construct a comprehensive, student-centered framework for instructional design.

Participants included a small cohort of instrumental music students with diverse backgrounds, ages, and levels of musical proficiency. Data collection employed a convergent mixed methods approach, combining quantitative measures—such as adapted Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) surveys and musical achievement rating scales—with qualitative data derived from student interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and teacher reflective journals. Data were collected concurrently and analyzed independently before being triangulated to generate integrated findings and meta-inferences.

The intervention consisted of six motivation-supportive instructional strategies aligned with the core psychological needs identified in SDT: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These strategies included providing students with meaningful choices in repertoire and learning processes, implementing scaffolded instruction to support skill development, incorporating collaborative and dialogic learning opportunities, connecting musical tasks to students' personal interests, offering structured and formative feedback, and creating opportunities for reflection and performance. Instructional practices were iteratively refined throughout the action research cycles, allowing for responsive adaptation to student needs and classroom dynamics.

Findings from the study indicate a consistent positive shift in students' intrinsic motivation across the intervention period. Quantitative data revealed increases in students' reported enjoyment, perceived competence, and engagement in music learning. These changes were accompanied by measurable improvements in musical achievement, including enhanced technical accuracy, expressive performance, and practice consistency. Qualitative data further

supported these findings, with students reporting greater sense of ownership over their learning, increased confidence, and stronger emotional connection to music-making. Notably, the integration of student choice and relevance emerged as particularly influential factors in sustaining motivation.

The study also identified several key pedagogical practices as effective in fostering intrinsic motivation in instrumental music education. First, autonomy-supportive teaching—characterized by offering meaningful choices and encouraging student voice—was found to significantly enhance engagement. Second, structured scaffolding and feedback contributed to students’ sense of competence, enabling them to experience success and progress. Third, fostering a supportive social environment through teacher–student relationships and peer interaction strengthened relatedness, further reinforcing motivation. Finally, aligning musical learning with students’ personal interests and lived experiences increased the perceived value and relevance of instruction.

These findings have important implications for music educators working in examination-oriented and high-pressure educational contexts. They suggest that intrinsic motivation can be systematically cultivated through intentional pedagogical design, even within environments traditionally dominated by extrinsic goals. By adopting student-centered, motivation-supportive practices, educators can promote not only improved musical outcomes but also more sustainable, lifelong engagement with music.

Methodologically, this study contributes to the field by demonstrating the value of practitioner-led action research as a tool for bridging theory and practice. The iterative and reflective nature of action research enabled the development of context-sensitive strategies that are directly applicable to real-world teaching settings. While the study is limited by its

small sample size and short duration, it provides a foundation for future research exploring intrinsic motivation in diverse music education contexts.

In conclusion, this study highlights the transformative potential of integrating motivation theory with student-centered pedagogy in instrumental music education. By shifting the focus from external achievement to internal engagement, educators can better support students in developing meaningful, self-directed relationships with music, ultimately fostering both musical excellence and lifelong learning.