



How does Performance Experience Influence Music Performance Anxiety among Student Musicians?

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Abstract

Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) is a common psychological challenge experienced by musicians, particularly students who are still developing their technical skills, confidence, and stage presence. This study investigates the relationship between performance experience and music performance anxiety among student musicians, examining whether increased exposure to performance situations influences anxiety levels, confidence, and coping abilities. A qualitative research approach was employed using interviews and participant testimonies from student musicians with varying levels of performance experience. Existing literature on music performance anxiety, self-efficacy, and performance psychology was also reviewed to support the investigation.

The findings suggest that performance experience generally contributes to greater confidence, emotional resilience, and improved management of performance-related stress. Participants who had performed more frequently reported feeling more comfortable in front of audiences and demonstrated stronger coping mechanisms when faced with nervousness or mistakes. However, the study also found that performance experience does not eliminate anxiety entirely, as factors such as perfectionism, fear of negative evaluation, and personal expectations continue to influence performers regardless of experience level. The results indicate that the relationship between performance experience and music performance anxiety is best described as a moderate negative correlation, where increased experience tends to reduce anxiety but does not completely remove it.

The study concludes that regular performance opportunities, combined with supportive learning environments and confidence-building strategies, can play an important role in helping student musicians manage music performance anxiety and develop both musically and psychologically.

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Introduction and Hypothesis

Student musicians with greater performance experience will generally report lower levels of music performance anxiety due to increased confidence, familiarity with performance environments and improved coping strategies. Music performance is an essential aspect of a student musician's artistic and academic development. Whether it's performing in recitals, competitions, classroom assessments or public concerts, student musicians are often expected to showcase both technical skill and emotional expression under pressure. Even though such opportunities are required for growth and confidence-building, they can work as reasons for psychological stress. Many student musicians experience nervousness, rapid heartbeat, trembling and fear before going up on stage, a condition commonly referred to as music performance anxiety or Music Performance anxiety, also known as MPA.

Music performance anxiety, or MPA, refers to the fear, nervousness, and stress that musicians experience before or during a performance, often affecting both their confidence and ability to perform effectively. A study conducted by Antonio González, Patricia Blanco-Piñeiro, and M. Pino Díaz-Pereira explored the relationship MPA, self efficacy, and performance quality among musicians.¹ The researchers found that performers who had stronger self-belief and confidence in their musical abilities experienced lower levels of anxiety and viewed their performances more positively. The study also revealed that anxiety is not always entirely harmful, as moderate nervousness can sometimes create a sense of excitement and focus that improves performance. However, excessive anxiety was shown to negatively impact both confidence and performance quality. Overall, the research highlights that MPA is a complex psychological experience influenced by confidence, emotional control, and pressure, emphasizing the importance of developing self-efficacy alongside musical skill. This study is particularly significant because it demonstrates that musical success is not determined solely by technical ability, but also by a performer's psychological mindset. Developing self-efficacy

allows musicians to approach performances with greater confidence, emotional stability, and resilience under pressure. In many cases, performers with stronger self-belief are better able to manage nervousness and transform anxiety into motivation rather than fear. This suggests that music education should focus not only on improving instrumental or vocal techniques, but also on supporting students' mental preparedness and confidence. By understanding MPA as a psychological response that can be controlled and managed, musicians may develop healthier coping strategies, leading to improved performance quality and overall wellbeing. Hence, performance experiences appear to play an important role in influencing music performance anxiety among student musicians. As students gain more experience performing in front of audiences, and improved emotional control, which can reduce feelings of anxiety. Therefore, repeated performance exposure may help student musicians manage MPA more effectively and improve their confidence and overall performance quality.

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate how performance experience influences music performance anxiety among student musicians. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires administered to student musicians aged 13–18 years. Participants were selected through convenience sampling from local music institutions and schools. Responses were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to confidence, anxiety, coping mechanisms and performance experience.

Moreover, performance experience cannot be understood only in terms of the number of years a student has studied music. It also incorporates the frequency of public performances, the variety of places the performance has taken place, the kind of audience and the psychological demands associated with each experience. Student musicians may encounter different forms of performance exposure, including competitions, solo recitals, band performances and informal MPA is recognized as one of the most common problems faced by musicians across all levels of experience. However, student musicians may be

especially vulnerable due to academic expectations, first-time or limited stage exposure, parental pressure and fear of negative evaluation. In utmost severe cases, performance anxiety can negatively affect concentration, confidence, memory and overall musical performance. It may also discourage students from participating in future performances or pursuing long-term goals in this field.

That said, performance experience is often considered a significant factor in shaping a musician's response to anxiety. Through repeated exposure to audiences, evaluations and high intensity performance settings, student musicians may gradually develop familiarity with the emotional and psychological demands of performing. This very experience can interpret that these student musicians interpret stress, regulate emotions, react to mistakes in a performance and prepare mentally for future ones. For some students, continuous performance opportunities contribute to greater confidence and emotional control, while for others, increased expectations may continue to reinforce the feelings of anxiety despite growing experience.

Hypothesising this, the relationship between performance experience and music performance anxiety does not directly correlate. Instead of completely eliminating anxiety, performance experience may alter the ways in which anxiety is even perceived, managed and expressed by student musicians. Factors such as personal confidence, preparation habits, teacher support, previous outcomes and individual coping mechanisms can all shape this relationship. Understanding how these elements co-exist and interact is important in identifying why some musicians become more resilient over time through experience while others still struggle with performance-related stress.

This research paper investigates how performance experience influences music performance anxiety among student musicians. It examines the psychological and behavioral changes associated with continuous performance exposure and explores how experience affects confidence, stress management and overall performance responses.

By analysing this relationship, the study aims to provide deeper insight into the experiences of student

musicians and contribute to more effective approaches for supporting their musical and emotional development.

Research

To investigate how performance experience influences music performance anxiety among student musicians, we conducted primary research using qualitative methods, primarily through interviews and questionnaires. This approach allowed us to collect detailed personal experiences, gain insight into participants' emotions and perceptions, and explore how they interpreted and managed performance-related anxiety. The flexibility of interviews also enabled follow-up questions, providing a deeper understanding of individual experiences.

Our participants consisted of student musicians with varying levels of performance experience and musical backgrounds. Some regularly participated in solo performances, while others primarily performed in ensembles, school events, recitals, competitions, or public concerts. The participants differed in age, musical training, performance frequency, and confidence levels, allowing for a broader understanding of the relationship between experience and music performance anxiety.

In addition to primary research, secondary research was conducted through the analysis of existing academic literature on music performance anxiety, self-efficacy, performance psychology, and musician development. Studies by researchers such as Dianna Kenny, M. S. Osborne, J. Franklin, Antonio González, Patricia Blanco-Piñero, and M. Pino Díaz-Pereira were examined to provide theoretical support and context for the investigation.

The combination of participant responses and established research allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of how performance experience affects confidence, emotional regulation, coping strategies, and overall responses to performance anxiety among student musicians.

Participants were asked the following questions:

- What instrument do you play, or what form of music do you perform?
- How long have you been studying or performing music?
- How often do you perform in front of an audience?
- How anxious or nervous do you typically feel before a performance on the scale of 1-5?

- What physical or emotional symptoms do you experience before performing?
- Do you think your performance anxiety has changed as you have gained more experience? Why or why not?
- Can you describe a memorable performance experience and how it affected your confidence?
- What strategies do you use to manage nervousness before or during a performance?
- How important is audience reaction in influencing your confidence as a performer?
- Do you believe that performance experience has helped you become a more confident musician? Why or why not?

Findings

The responses collected from the participants revealed several recurring themes regarding the relationship between performance experience and music performance anxiety.

Performance Experience and Confidence

- Most participants reported that increased performance experience contributed to greater confidence while performing.
- Rehaan Kumar explained that positive audience feedback during his early performances encouraged him to continue performing and gradually reduced his anxiety.
- Sheldon Prior stated that regular performance experience not only improved confidence in musical settings but also increased confidence in other situations, such as speaking in class and participating in group discussions.

Persistence of Performance Anxiety

- Despite regular performance exposure, some participants continued to experience symptoms of music performance anxiety.
- Achal Mishra reported experiencing physical symptoms such as trembling, sweaty hands, shaking, and an increased heart rate before performances.
- These findings suggest that performance experience does not completely eliminate anxiety, particularly its physiological symptoms.

Importance of Audience Response

- Positive audience reactions were consistently identified as an important factor in reducing

anxiety and building confidence.

- Participants reported feeling more comfortable and motivated when performances were met with encouragement and appreciation.
- Supportive audience responses appeared to help musicians recover from mistakes and maintain confidence during performances.

Coping Strategies

- Participants identified regular practice, preparation, and emotional support from family and friends as important methods for managing performance anxiety.
- Several responses suggested that musicians gradually develop personal coping mechanisms through repeated exposure to performance situations.

Overall Relationship Between Experience and Anxiety

- The findings indicate a generally negative relationship between performance experience and music performance anxiety.
- Increased performance experience was associated with greater self-confidence, stronger coping abilities, and improved emotional regulation.
- However, individual factors such as perfectionism, personal expectations, and fear of negative evaluation continued to influence anxiety levels regardless of experience.

Their Responses are Summarised in the Data below

Performance experience cannot be understood only in terms of the number of years a student has studied music. It also incorporates the frequency of public performances, the variety of places the performance has taken place, the kind of audience and the psychological demands associated with each experience. Student musicians may encounter different forms of performance exposure, including competitions, solo recitals, band performances and informal presentations, each of which present unique emotional and cognitive challenges. Solo performances, for example, often place greater individual responsibility on the performer and may intensify feelings of vulnerability, whereas ensemble performances can create a sense of belonging and collective support which reduces individual pressure. At the same time, competitive environments may heighten self-consciousness and fear of judgement due to evaluation and comparison with peers.

Moreover, the type of music performed also plays a key role. Finding 1 clearly showcases that increased experience improves confidence. In a qualitative response collected for this investigation, Rehaan Kumar, a student of classical music, explained that during his first performance when he was 7 years old was scared to sing not because he had to go on stage but because he had to perform classical music which the audience would not be very familiar with. However, the positive feedback and applause he gained from the audience and especially people his age, helped him perform in front of 100-150 in another school. So in crux, he says, the more he performed, the less anxious he got. Thus, we contrived that the dopamine released as a result of reward and motivation obtained from the audience in this case helped Rehaan perform even more in the future. To corroborate this, another participant, Sheldon Prior, said in their interview, “performing has made me confident in other areas too...whether it be speaking in class or speaking up in groups. It has taught me that you can be nervous and still do well.”

However, the influence of experience is not always uniform. Finding 2 suggested that anxiety persists irrespective of experience. While some musicians become increasingly confident like Rehaan and Sheldon, others may continue to experience heightened anxiety due to perfectionism, fear of failure or increased personal expectations. To prove this, in another participant's response, Achal Mishra reported continuing to experience noticeable symptoms of music performance anxiety despite performing approximately one to three times each month. The participant described experiencing physical manifestations of anxiety before performances like sweaty hands, trembling, shaking and rapid heartbeat while rating overall performance confidence at a moderate level of 3 on a scale of 1 to 5. This suggests that regular exposure to performance situations does not necessarily eliminate anxiety entirely, particularly it's physiological symptoms.

However, the participant's responses also demonstrated that performance experience may influence the emotional interpretation of anxiety rather than remove it completely. When describing a memorable performance, the participant recalled making mistakes during a solo performance in front of a large audience, yet receiving encouragement

and support from the audience afterward. Rather than reinforcing fear or constant embarrassment, the participant channelled this experience to contribute positively to their self-confidence and self-perception as a performer. Additionally, the participant emphasized that regular practice and encouragement from friends and family played a significant role in managing nervousness and regulating motivation.

These findings further support the idea that the relationship between performance experience and music performance anxiety is highly individualized and impacted by external emotional support systems along with internal coping mechanisms. Research by Dianna Kenny² suggests that constant performance exposure may influence the way musicians perceive and respond to anxiety-provoking situations. Rather than removing anxiety entirely, experience can contribute to the development of coping strategies.

Secondary Research

Even studies conducted by M.S. Osborne and J.Franklin³ found that student musicians with greater performance exposure often demonstrated improved confidence and reduced cognitive interference during performances.

Performance experience plays a significant role in shaping how student musicians respond to psychological demands of public performance. For many musicians, early performances are more often accompanied by fear of judgement, uncertainty and heightened self-consciousness due to unfamiliarity with stage setting, audience response and evaluations as seen in the testimonies aforementioned. As many students become accustomed to these very settings over time, it reduces the unpredictability attached with performing on a public platform and allows them to approach their future performances with greater preparedness. A well-known example of this phenomenon can be observed in the experiences of Adele, who has openly spoken about experiencing severe stage fright despite her global success in many interviews. She described feeling intense nervousness before performances because she feared disappointing her fanbase. However, she also explained that these live performances helped her develop greater control over these emotions and become more comfortable interacting with large audiences. Her experiences demonstrate that performance anxiety can persist even amongst highly accomplished musicians. Likewise, Yo-

Yo Ma has publicly talked about the importance of repeated performance experience at numerous platforms. Despite being internationally recognized for his technical mastery, Ma acknowledged that vulnerability and nervousness remain natural aspects of performing for every artist. Rather than viewing this anxiety as negative, he emphasized the role of experience in helping musicians channel nervous energy into concentration, expression and artistic communication. These examples then reinforce the idea that performance anxiety does not necessarily eliminate anxiety but rather influence how performers respond to performance-related stress over time.

Another important influence of performance experience is the development of self-efficacy or a musician's belief in their ability to perform successfully under pressure. Repeated exposure to performances may strengthen confidence by formatting memory retention, helping with maintenance of stage presence and audience engagement and capacity to continue irrespective of mistakes or unexpected challenges. As musicians gain more experience, they begin to trust their preparation and interpret performances less as threatening judgements and more as opportunities to cultivate trust and reach new heights.

Research conducted by Antonio Gonzalez, Patricia Blanco-Pinerio and M. Pino Diaz-Pereira⁴ identified a relationship between stronger self-reliability and lower levels of music performance anxiety among musicians. Their findings hypothesized that performers with greater confidence in their abilities were more likely to retain their performances positively and maintain emotional stability in demanding situations.

Performance experience may additionally influence how musicians regulate emotional and physiological responses associated with anxiety. Student musicians who regularly encounter performance situations often develop personal strategies to manage stress more effectively. These may include structured practice routines, breathing exercises, mental preparation, positive self-talk and reliance on support from teachers, friends or family members.

As noticed in the testimony above, one participant involved in this investigation reported continuing to experience symptoms such as trembling, sweaty

hands and rapid heartbeat despite performing regularly throughout the month. However, the participant also described a significant performance experience in which audience encouragement following errors during a solo performance contributed positively to their confidence. This response suggests that supportive audience reactions and emotional reassurance may influence how performers interpret mistakes and recover from stressful situations.

Recently, in a school assembly that we sat through, one of the skit actors forgot their lines and as a result the entire cast lost track of their own performance. Instead of mocking or booing them, the audience decided to hoot and clap loudly for the actors on stage due to which the entire play came back to order. This stands as a true testament to the theory that the behaviour of the audience strongly impacts how the key actors, dancers, singers and basically all sorts of performers perceive their own execution on stage.

Although repeated exposure to performance situations may strengthen confidence and coping abilities, experience does not necessarily eliminate music performance anxiety entirely as addressed before. In some cases, increased performance experience may cause new types of pressures. As musicians become more advanced and gain recognition, expectations surrounding precision and quality of performance may become more demanding. This can intensify self-awareness and fear of mistakes, especially in competitive or highly criterion based settings.

Research has consistently shown that there is a relationship between a musician's level of experience and their performance anxiety. In general, musicians with more experience tend to report lower levels of anxiety when performing, although this relationship is not always straightforward. One reason for this is that experienced musicians have had more opportunities to perform in front of audiences, making them more familiar with the pressure of public performance. According to researchers Kenny and Osborne (2006), repeated exposure to performance situations help musicians become more comfortable and confident, reducing feelings of fear and nervousness over time. Similarly, Papageorgi et al. (2010) found that younger and less experienced musicians often reported higher levels of music performance anxiety than older and more experienced performers. This suggests that

experience may help musicians develop the skills needed to manage stressful performance situations.

Another factor linking experience and lower anxiety is confidence. As musicians gain more years of training and practice, they usually improve their technical abilities and become more confident in their performances. According to Bandura's (1997) theory of self efficacy, individuals who have greater confidence in their abilities are more likely to cope effectively with stressful situations and experience lower levels of anxiety. This idea has been widely applied in performance settings, including music, where musicians who feel better prepared and more confident in their abilities often experience lower levels of anxiety before performances. In addition, experienced musicians often develop coping strategies such as mental rehearsal, breathing exercises and positive self-talk, which can help them control anxiety and maintain focus while performing. These strategies are often learned through years of performing and dealing with challenging situations.

However, experience does not completely eliminate performance anxiety. Studies have shown that even highly skilled professional musicians can experience significant anxiety before important performances. Kenny (2011) explains that factors such as perfectionism, fear of negative evaluation, personality traits, and the importance of the performance can all contribute to anxiety regardless of experience level. For example, an experienced musician performing at a major competition may still feel nervous because the stakes are high and the outcome is important. This suggests that while experience can reduce anxiety, it is the only one of the several factors that influence how a musician feels before performing.

Overall, existing research indicates a generally negative relationship between experience and performing anxiety, meaning that anxiety tends to decrease as experience increases. Greater experience allows musicians to become more familiar with performance situations, build confidence in their abilities, and develop effective coping strategies. However, because anxiety is influenced by many personal and situational factors, experience alone cannot fully prevent it. Therefore, the relationship between experience and performance anxiety is best described as a moderate negative correlation rather than a perfect one.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insight into the relationship between performance experience and music performance anxiety among student musicians, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, which may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized to the wider population of student musicians. Second, the study relied heavily on self-reported experiences and reflections from participants. As a result, responses may have been influenced by personal bias, memory recall, or individual interpretations of anxiety and performance experiences.

Additionally, participants came from similar educational and musical backgrounds, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of student musicians across different age groups, cultures, training systems, or musical genres. The study also focused primarily on qualitative responses, meaning that the findings emphasize personal experiences rather than measurable changes in anxiety levels. Future research could address these limitations by including a larger and more diverse sample, incorporating quantitative measures of music performance anxiety, and examining how factors such as musical genre, personality traits, and educational environment influence the relationship between performance experience and anxiety.

This study investigated how performance experience influences music performance anxiety among student musicians. The findings suggest that performance experience generally plays a positive role in helping musicians manage the psychological and emotional challenges associated with public performance. Through repeated exposure to audiences, evaluations, and performance environments, many student musicians develop greater confidence, self-efficacy, and familiarity with the demands of performing. As a result, they often become better equipped to regulate anxiety, recover from mistakes, and maintain focus under pressure.

The experiences shared by participants in this study demonstrated that increased performance exposure can contribute to improved confidence and emotional resilience. Positive audience feedback, supportive social environments, and successful performance experiences were found to strengthen motivation and reduce fear of judgment. However, the findings also revealed that performance experience does not eliminate

music performance anxiety entirely. Some musicians continued to experience physical symptoms such as trembling, rapid heartbeat, and nervousness despite performing regularly. This suggests that factors such as perfectionism, personal expectations, fear of failure, and individual coping abilities also play an important role in shaping performance anxiety.

The research therefore supports the hypothesis that greater performance experience is generally associated with lower levels of music performance anxiety, although the relationship is not absolute. Rather than completely removing anxiety, performance experience appears to influence how musicians interpret, manage, and respond to it. Ultimately, music performance anxiety should be understood as a complex and highly individual experience that is affected by both external influences and personal psychological factors.

These findings highlight the importance of providing student musicians with regular performance opportunities alongside emotional support, confidence-building strategies, and effective coping techniques. By fostering both musical competence and psychological resilience, educators and institutions can help students develop healthier relationships with performance and achieve greater success both on and off the stage.

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