

# Exploring the transformative landscape of music education in the post-pandemic era: a focus on Taiwan

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## Abstract

This paper examines the state of music education in Taiwan during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores government and school responses, adaptations in music education, teacher education and professional development, and challenges faced in music education during the pandemic. The findings highlight the need for further professional development in online teaching skills and a deeper understanding of diverse technologies. Despite efforts to support education, issues with internet connectivity and technical difficulties for students and teachers persist.

The pandemic has accelerated the growth of online teaching and learning in music education. Ongoing teacher education and technology integration are crucial for effective music instruction in the post-pandemic era. The adaptability and perseverance of teachers in overcoming pandemic challenges would remain essential in the ever-evolving landscape of music education. By embracing innovative strategies and leveraging technology, educators can create engaging and meaningful learning experiences for students in the post-pandemic era.

**Key words:** COVID-19, pandemic, music education, Taiwan

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, has significantly reshaped the landscape of teaching and learning across various domains, including music education. This unprecedented situation has prompted educators to adapt and explore new possibilities for music education (Chen, H. P. et al., 2021). This paper provides insight into the state of music education in Taiwan during the pandemic era and highlights emerging alternatives and novel approaches that have emerged in response to the challenges faced.

The study aims to explore important aspects of music education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on research questions related to the education policies implemented by governments and schools in response to the crisis. These policies have influenced school music curricula, guiding how music is taught and learned. Moreover, music teachers have demonstrated

their resilience and adaptability in navigating this challenging situation, employing various strategies to ensure continued music education for their students. By examining the experiences of music teachers during the pandemic, valuable insights into the challenges faced, new possibilities discovered, and lessons learned could be gained. These insights would also serve as a foundation for shaping the future of music education, enabling teachers to embrace innovative approaches and leverage the transformative potential of the post-pandemic era. Conversely, policymakers can draw upon these experiences and outcomes to inform decision-making processes, ensuring that education policies are responsive, adaptable, and inclusive for the future.

## Background

In Taiwan, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education has been distinctive. While online

instruction became a global trend in 2020, Taiwan initially maintained conventional face-to-face classes due to a relatively milder outbreak. Yet based on the idea of “preemptive preparation”, teachers at all levels of schooling were asked to practice and be familiar with various online teaching platforms (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, in May 2021, as COVID-19 cases surged, the government quickly implemented a comprehensive transition to online teaching. This sudden shift occurred within a short timeframe and caused anxiety among teachers, despite the fact that they had prior experience with online instruction in 2020. A secondary school music teacher fondly recalled this memorable event:

That afternoon, after my music class, students were called back to their classroom, and their homeroom teacher had something important to tell them: just during my music class, the government had announced that we would transition to online teaching starting the next day due to the pandemic. The suddenness of the announcement was overwhelming. Tomorrow! Since then, I did not have the opportunity to see my students for several months.

Nevertheless, the pandemic acted as an accelerator for online teaching and learning, prompting teachers to quickly acquire new teaching techniques and search for suitable materials to enhance their effectiveness in the online environment. By September 2021, schools and universities in Taiwan had resumed face-to-face classes. While in May 2022, a second wave of COVID-19 outbreaks led to the reinstatement of online instruction in most educational institutions. Unlike the previous outbreak, this time schools and universities adopted a “hybrid online instruction” approach. This meant that in a single class, some students learned online from home due to pandemic-related reasons, while others attended face-to-face classes in school classrooms. This unique classroom situation presented additional challenges and difficulties in teaching for educators.

Overall, the pandemic’s impact on education

in Taiwan has been characterized by a series of transitions between online and face-to-face instruction, challenging teachers to adapt quickly and navigate the complexities of hybrid teaching environments. As time passed, the pandemic became normalized, and schools gradually returned to the previous mode of in-person teaching. However, these experiences during the pandemic have inspired and brought about changes in music education within schools. The lessons learned during the pandemic have sparked inspiration and new approaches that have influenced the way music is taught and learned in educational settings.

## Research design

This study was conducted in two stages, addressing the aforementioned questions. In the first stage, the researcher observed the reactions of the government, schools, and music teachers to the pandemic. Additionally, the researcher communicated with several school music teachers to gather research materials, which were then summarised to obtain preliminary results.

In the second stage, the researcher and colleagues designed a series of semi-structured interview questions. These questions aimed to gather insights from school music teachers regarding their practices, strategies, needs, reflections, difficulties, and expectations in response to the severe pandemic. Each interview lasted 10 open-ended questions, and a total of four school music teachers, two from primary (P1 & P2) and two from secondary levels (S1 & S2), participated in this phase of the study.

## Findings and discussion

The findings of this paper consist of the researcher’s observations and the results of interviews conducted. Based on the issues mentioned earlier, this study will explore the results in four main aspects: Government and school responses and support; Adaptations in

school music education and music teachers' instructional approaches; Teacher education and professional development; and Challenges and implications of music education.

## Government and school responses and support

The study examines how the government and schools have responded and provided support during the pandemic regarding policies and administrative measures. In response to the outbreak, the government swiftly suspended in-person classes and implemented a transition to online teaching, encompassing synchronous and asynchronous modes of instruction. To support students who faced difficulties accessing IT devices for online learning at home, schools provided borrowing options. Additionally, on May 20th, just one day after the first wave of the nationwide shift to online teaching, the government launched a TV channel dedicated to online learning for primary and secondary schools. As well, the local governments encouraged expert teachers to record various instructional videos and make them available online for teachers to use in distance teaching or for students to engage in remote learning at home. In the 2022 outbreak, the government resumed the production of online teaching resources to support learning. During the pandemic, the government made every effort to provide maximum assistance to schools, teachers, and parents, with the goal and slogan of "suspension of classes, but not of learning" (Ministry of Education, 2021).

## Adaptations in school music education and music teachers' instructional approaches

This part focuses on the adaptations made in school music education and the instructional approaches adopted by music teachers in response to the pandemic. It explores the innovative strategies, techniques, and tools used to deliver effective music education in

both online and hybrid learning environments. According to the Ministry of Education, classrooms were encouraged to conduct online teaching in synchronous or asynchronous formats based on their specific needs and conditions. As a result, diverse online teaching styles emerged. Initially, many music teachers opted for asynchronous online learning, recording and assigning the teaching materials (video, YouTube, and other media) to students for a music class. As the extended school closures persisted, asynchronous teaching appeared its limitations and an increasing number of music teachers tried to shift their classes to a synchronous teaching method. Some music teachers also adopted a blended approach, combining synchronous and asynchronous learning. In this model, students would study music concepts prior to the online class and engage in synchronous discussions, reflecting a flipped learning approach.

In addition, online teaching during this pandemic provides an enriched environment for integrating technology media as teaching materials.

During online learning, the students all have IT devices in hand; they can practice on their devices and do not need to share or wait for the devices with other classmates...In addition, students can share their individual work with others via sharing the screen. These were not easy to make in the previous real face-to-face school music class. (P1)

In the online learning environment, students have found creative ways to demonstrate their answers, such as using gestures or flashcards or utilising online tools like Google Forms or the interactive response systems (IRS) like *Kahoo* or *Quizzi* for assessments. Teacher S1 and S2 in this study were particularly impressed by high school students' quick adoption and application of various IT resources. Technology, including computers, laptops, and mobile devices such as iPads or smartphones, ceased to be mere toys for games and became powerful tools for acquiring knowledge through teacher demonstrations and online learning experiences. The use of technology in online teaching has provided both teachers

and students with more opportunities to explore various technologies that facilitate teaching and learning. Even upon returning to face-to-face music classrooms, technology integration continues to be widely embraced.

Technology integration in music instruction has been advocated for several decades, and its positive impact on students' learning motivation and performance has been well-documented (Acker & Nyland, 2015; Burton & Dekaware, 2016). In the Asian region, the rapid development of media and technology has also brought forth numerous possibilities for music teaching (Chen, H. P. et al., 2020). This study's findings further underscore the adaptable utilization of technology, which has provided novel instructional models for teaching and learning during and after the pandemic.

Another important issue of online instruction is the classroom management. Without face-to-face contact and interaction, music teachers face the challenge of ensuring active classroom engagement to facilitate the ongoing learning process for all students. One music teacher expressed that:

Regardless of the teaching environment, whether it be face-to-face or online, those music teachers who lack sufficient teaching and classroom management skills, may still struggle to deliver successful lessons. This highlights the importance of honing these skills to create an effective and engaging learning experience for students. (P2)

For instance, teacher P1 encouraged her students to share their study environment at home, fostering a sense of connection and engagement. Another music teacher, P2, suggested that young children embrace their stuffed toys during online learning to alleviate anxiety. Teachers S1 and S2 emphasised the importance of teacher-student and student-student interaction in the online environment, particularly for middle school students who are more tech-savvy and crave peer interactions.

Furthermore, all four interviewees had to adapt their teaching content and materials for

online instruction, including modifying learning activities, tasks, homework, and assessments. This demonstrates their ability to leverage the advantages and mitigate the disadvantages of online teaching. The experience of online teaching also influenced their pedagogical thinking. Upon returning to face-to-face instruction, they became more flexible in their teaching approaches, placing greater emphasis on classroom interactions, and refining, clarifying, and simplifying the content of their lessons.

### **Teacher education and professional development**

The implementation of online teaching in Taiwan was abrupt, requiring teachers to quickly acquire the skills of operating online meetings and utilising various technological devices, as well as re-organising their teaching content within a limited timeframe. An online Facebook group called the "Taiwan Asynchronous Online Learning Community" quickly attracted more than 100,000 teachers who joined to learn and share relevant skills and knowledge. This organisation also invited teachers from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia to share their experiences in online teaching. Some teacher education programs in universities have incorporated online teaching skills and classroom management into their syllabi. Furthermore, prior to the outbreak, the student-teachers in this program would typically visit schools to observe or apprentice in classrooms. In response to the pandemic, the aforementioned government launched teaching channels that allowed student-teachers to observe and participate in teaching activities remotely.

### **Challenges and implications of music education**

While the government and schools have made efforts to provide support during the pandemic, the interviewees in this study expressed dissatisfaction with the level of support received. Students faced challenges such as unstable internet

connections and technical issues with IT devices, particularly for families with multiple students at home. A similar situation has also been observed in higher education in Taiwan. Chen, C. C. et al. (2021) highlighted the problems of internet connectivity and efficiency in online courses offered by universities during the pandemic, emphasising the need for further improvement. These findings indicate that addressing internet connectivity issues in online education remains a priority in both K-12 and higher education sectors.

Teachers also struggled with monitoring the progress of students with low learning motivation or poor internet connectivity in the online setting. Moreover, all four participants emphasised the need for further professional development in online teaching skills and a deeper understanding of diverse technologies that can be used in instruction. This finding aligns with the study by Cheng et al. (2023), emphasises the importance of curriculum reform and teacher training to prepare music teachers for future challenges in digital music education. Al-Qaysi 2023 also points out that after the pandemic, both teachers and students need to enhance further their information compatibility to understand the advantages of using digital tools in the renewed post-pandemic situation.

Another challenge highlighted in this study is the teaching of musical instruments, which is consistent with the findings of Sever (2021) regarding the difficulties faced in online instrument instruction. In other Asian regions, such as Hong Kong and South Korea, teaching musical instruments like recorder or instrumental ensembles have also been perceived as challenging by teachers during the pandemic, and in some cases, schools have even prohibited such activities (Kang, 2022; Tang, 2022). Internet connection issues made it difficult for students to play instruments together in real-time. In response, some music teachers in this study turned to mobile or computer applications as alternatives for recorder instruction in their classes. Perhaps with the future advancement of technology, particularly with the

widespread adoption of 5G network technology, these challenges can be mitigated. However, regardless of the technological improvements, all participants expressed that the use of technology during the pandemic, as well as the changes in teaching materials and methods, continue to impact face-to-face instruction after the pandemic, shaping a new teaching landscape. This finding is also consistent with Cheng et al.'s (2023) current research on the effects of the pandemic on music education in Hong Kong.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in Taiwan has accelerated the adoption of online teaching and learning. Teachers quickly developed their technology and online teaching skills, recognising that online learning has its own unique characteristics, advantages, and challenges. They have learned to leverage the advantages and mitigate the disadvantages of online teaching. Furthermore, after experiencing multiple transitions between face-to-face and online instruction, teachers have gained flexibility in their teaching approaches in this pandemic era. They have adapted to the changing circumstances and are making the best use of online teaching methods to ensure effective learning for their students.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a catalyst for the rapid growth of online teaching and learning in Taiwan's music education landscape. Music teachers have swiftly developed their technology and online teaching skills, recognizing that online learning is not simply a substitute for face-to-face instruction, but rather a unique approach with its own advantages and challenges. Teachers have demonstrated their ability to leverage the advantages of online teaching while mitigating the disadvantages, adapting their instructional approaches and content to suit the online environment. The pandemic experience has led to a greater emphasis on technology integration, with teachers and

students exploring various technologies to enhance teaching and learning.

Despite the progress made in online teaching, challenges such as the students' unstable internet connections and technical issues persist, necessitating further support from schools and the government. The experiences during the pandemic have underscored the importance of ongoing teacher education and professional development in online teaching skills and technology integration. Teachers have sought opportunities for learning and sharing knowledge through online communities and professional development programs. Teacher education programs have also recognised the need to incorporate online teaching skills and classroom management into their curriculum.

Looking ahead, the transformative landscape of music education in the post-pandemic era will be shaped by the lessons learned during this challenging period. Teachers and policymakers alike must consider the experiences and insights gained from online teaching and learning to inform decision-making processes and ensure that music education remains effective, inclusive, and adaptable. The flexibility and resilience demonstrated by teachers in navigating the challenges of the pandemic era would continue to be valuable in the evolving landscape of music education. By embracing innovative approaches and leveraging the transformative potential of technology, educators can create engaging and impactful learning experiences for students in the post-pandemic era. This study also supports the conclusions drawn by Bozkurt et al. (2022) in their bibliometric analysis of 1150 publications on COVID-19 and education. Their findings highlight the heightened need for developing effective strategies and digital pedagogy, as well as fostering resilience and flexibility in future education.

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