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## Managing Instrumental Practice and Part-Time Employment for Music Students

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### Abstract

Student-musicians must divide time between academic commitments and practising their instruments. As a result, many may be discouraged from having part-time work as it means a lack of hours available for practice. Through a survey, this study aims to find how performance students at Universiti Teknologi MARA who worked during the term coped with their training. The findings reveal that while they can manage their time well, work is not a disadvantage and can boost their prospects. However, students may have to acquire effective practice methods, as many believe they need more than three hours of daily practice.

**Keywords:** part-time work; student-musicians; professional development, student attitudes

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### 1.0 Introduction

It is common for university students to engage in part-time jobs. The employment trend among university students has increased rapidly in the last decade (Richmond, 2013; Muluk, 2017). In addition, the physical demands of some courses, such as music performance, require the allocation of time for practice apart from other commitments. Although there is no policy against part-time or term-time employment, some lecturers may discourage students from working too much. However, students may pursue work due to financial needs and personal choices.

At Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia, music performance students have had jobs during the term. Time management is essential to meet the demands of a music student. Music students must balance allocating time for their practice or rehearsals with ensembles and take up opportunities to perform in gigs. In addition, musicians demand participation in social interactions to create a presence (Henderson, 2020). The increase in online performances due to the COVID-19 pandemic requires a different type of engagement and time. Online presence is essential where musicians tune elements of their live streams to facilitate feelings of physical and social presence (Onderdijk et al., 2021). With the demands of supporting oneself and allocating time for practice, the study investigates if performance students can cope with instrumental training while having part-time jobs. This study's objectives are to find out if music performance students who work part-time can manage time for instrumental practice, and secondly, if the students regard part-time work as a disadvantage to their studies and affect their grades.

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## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Conflicts of having a part-time job

A job affects academic success because academic activities such as homework become displaced due to working time (Singh, 1998). Past studies (Patton-Saltzburg et al., 1994) discovered that students who worked part-time accomplished less good marks than those who did not. Other recognized consequences include missed lectures, reduced study time, fatigue (Leonard, 1995), and conflicts of interest between employers and academic responsibilities (Watts & Pickering, 2000). However, the outcomes of term-time employment are uncertain (Choo et al., 2019; Creed et al., 2015). Rather than education performance, part-time work affects primarily decisions such as continuing education (Neyt et al., 2018). Studies found that working undergraduates perceive working part-time positively (Canabal, 1998; Hood, Craig, & Ferguson, 1992; Kane, Healy, & Henson, 1992). They acquire good teamwork attitudes and time management and provide a direct route to future employment (Richardson et al., 2014). In addition, a part-time job made students acquire confidence, skills, and information about work-life (Curtis & Shani, 2002).

### 2.2 Practice hours and engagement

Violinist Leopold Auer supports the perception that practising using one's mind would take one and a half hours compared to all day of practice merely with the fingers. If one can practice deliberately (Ericsson et al. 1993), one only needs to practice no more than four hours a day, as propagated by renowned pianist Rubenstein (Kageyama, n.d.). Excessive practice is just as bad as practising too little (Rosenbaum, 2013). There is less brain activation and, therefore, less engagement with repeated stimuli, which causes less brain activation. Constant repetition bores the brain while new data is processed more than repeated details. Thus, concentration increases when receiving further or new information (Collins, 2022).

## 3.0 Methodology

This research project involved students from the performance program who took part-time jobs during their studies. A survey to find out who had part-time jobs was distributed to 60 performance students to locate the respondents during a Tuesday lunchtime Forum class. Fifty forms were returned, in which twenty students (33% of the programme's population) indicated they were employed during term time. The twenty students were given questionnaires through a link via Google online in December 2019 and turned in early February 2020. The return rate was 100%. The questions comprised demographic data, types of work, the duration of hours in employment, and the reasons for having jobs. In addition, section B contains the division of time for practice; in section C, the questions are about the division of time for a part-time job. Finally, for section D, the questions are about the benefit of a part-time job while studying. The small number of samples may be due to some students not reporting that they were employed. During the study (Dec 2019 until February 2020), lecturers expected students not to be distracted due to the programme's demands.

## 4.0 Results

Those who worked part-time indicated that they needed extra income to provide for tuition fees (65%), rent (70%), and to engage an accompanist (55%). In addition, 50% of respondents worked in music as a music teacher, a performer, or a freelance musician in a band, playing for weddings and concerts. The number of working hours averaged between four to five hours per day, making up twenty-eight to thirty hours per week. 85% of the respondents agreed that working part-time did not affect their academic performance.

Table 1 illustrates the results of this study. The result shows that the respondents have enough time for daily practice. Eight (40%) of the respondents agreed, and 7 (35%) agreed strongly. The remaining 5 (25%) were neutral. Therefore, it indicates that the respondents managed to spend their time for practice despite having a busy schedule.

In their belief that investing more time will improve their instrumental skills, 45% of respondents said they agreed that practising for a long time can develop many skills related to their instrumental skills. However, 35% of the respondents strongly agreed, 15% remained neutral, and 5% strongly disagreed.

Table 1. N=20

	Categories	Frequency		Percentage
Gender	Female	15	5	75
	Male			15
Age	20-22	7		35
	23-25	13		65
Types of Job	Music teacher	8		40
	Cashier	3		15
	Products promoter	3		15
	Wait tables at an F&B	2		10
	Baker	1		5
	Book reviewer	1		5
	Performer- soloist or in a band	2		10
Part-time work Increases my experience in performing and teaching	Strongly disagree	0		0
	Disagree	1		5
	Neutral	3		15
	Agree	7		35

I can divide time between practice and other activities	Strongly agree	9	45
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Neutral	0	0
	Agree	8	40
I prioritize practising my instrument over other subjects	Strongly agree	7	35
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Neutral	6	30
	Agree	11	55
I have enough time for instrumental practice every day	Strongly agree	3	15
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Neutral	5	25
	Agree	8	40
I believe practising for extended hours (more than 3 hours a day) will help to improve my skill	Strongly agree	7	35
	Strongly disagree	1	5
	Disagree	0	0
	Neutral	3	15
	Agree	9	45
I have a schedule for instrumental practice	Strongly agree	7	35
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	2	10
	Neutral	4	20
	Agree	6	30
My job does not affect practising	Strongly agree	8	45
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Neutral	4	20
	Agree	7	35
I am satisfied with how I managed my time	Strongly agree	9	45
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Neutral	8	40
	Agree	5	25
Working part-time does not affect my instrumental grades	Strongly agree	6	30
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	3	15
	Neutral	0	0
	Agree	17	85
	Strongly agree	0	0

Data examination for time management and instrumental practice for students in part-time employment

## 5.0 Discussion

### 5.1 Promoting Growth

With at least half of the respondents engaged in jobs related to their field of study, they can immediately enhance and put their skills to practice. For example, engaging in music or instrument work allows for practical experience relevant to their discipline. At the same time, develop critical career skills such as listening (Salopek, 1999), professionalism (Wiseman & Page, 2001), proficiency in technical tasks, and improved social skills (Bartkus, 2001). Such characteristics enhance the prospect of their career as performers and musical competency.

### 5.2 Becoming a professional

95% of the respondents agreed that working part-time means having to manage their time. The need to be more effective means students will be more disciplined, thus requiring them to acquire a professional attitude. They become focused as time for study is limited and divided by their job. The experiences of working part-time enhance and improve their academic knowledge, motivation, and employment prospects.

### 5.3 Prioritizing practice during the available time

The time spent on their instrument becomes a priority over other areas. A majority (55%) of the respondents agreed, with 15% strongly agreeing that they prioritized practising over other matters, and 30% were neutral. Due to the demands of presenting their work for recitals and exams as a performance major, students dedicate time for practice daily to reach a performable standard. Practising music incorporates four steps. The first is obtaining a comprehensive picture or overview of the work. The next follows with technical exercises to overcome problems, achieve automation and memorization, polish the piece for a performance, and maintain the music (Chaffin et al., 2002; Zhukov, 2009). Investment of time and transitioning from one level to another is essential to be able to perform pieces. Apart from self-training, they need to have sessions with their accompanist, which may lead to prioritizing time on their instruments and perhaps giving up time for rest or leisure.

While 40% strongly agreed that they created a schedule to practice their instrument, a management planner, which categorizes daily and hourly activities, can assist in keeping track of the estimated time for the different tasks. Therefore, it is a valuable mechanism to become efficient and dedicate time to the various functions and course requirements. In addition, estimated time for multiple activities will be necessary to allow sufficient time for other subjects requiring attention (Clark, 2014).

#### *5.4 Organized Time*

While having different commitments, student workers managed to arrange a time between jobs and practising. 40% of respondents agreed, and 35% strongly agreed that they were able to divide time between practice and other activities. Having jobs forces one to develop work organization and time management (Steinberg et al., 1981; Steinberg & Greenberger, 1986).

#### *5.5 Time constraints and lacking strategy for practice*

While the majority of the student of music can manage their time well, in terms of their understanding of practice needs, only a few understand that having a strategy when practising is advantageous. A high percentage (80%) believe in investing long hours for practice, with at least 35% firmly believing so. However, 15% were neutral, and one respondent (5%) strongly disagreed with the need for long hours of practice.

The result reveals that while students understand the number of hours contributes to upgrading their skills, they also lack an efficient and systematic approach to training. The respondents partially practice time-management strategies for effective practice. Commitment to self-regulated learning (Allingham & Wollner, 2022) and completion of practice goals are essential to prioritizing blocks of time for training.

#### *5.6 Perceptions of academic performance of working students*

Students who worked part-time were more likely to miss lectures and feel that they may have achieved higher grades had they not worked (Curtis & Shani, 2002). Nevertheless, there was no conclusive relationship between the students' marks and their academic performance perceptions.

However, working part-time has positive outcomes (Curtis 2002, Barron & Anastasiadou 2009). For example, one positive effect of part-time students' GPAs was that they received slightly higher GPAs than students who did not work (Manthei & Gilmore, 2005).

#### *5.7 Types of job and support from the employer*

Not all students have the opportunity to work in music. Low-skilled careers, such as cashiers, waitressing at an F& B or product promoters, are regarded as low-skilled. Although 45 % worked outside the music realm, 5% stated they did not gain experience or that the work contributed to their growth. Such positions or the choice of work may be detrimental to increasing growth through employment. Higher-quality part-time employment tends to improve career-related skills. The choice of work influences the degree of flexibility and working around student schedules (Healy, O'Shea & Crook, 1985; Anderson & Kelliher, 2009). Cooperative employers would be a significant factor for students to continue employment.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

Most students pursuing part-time work possess a positive attitude and perception. They perceive the need to work as an opportunity to better themselves and build connections and skills in their study area. However, it is essential to have a life-work balance. Therefore, acquiring sufficient hours for work that are not excessive can avoid harming their grades. Furthermore, progress in music performance requires upskilling and different practice strategies at specific milestones. Hence, the recommended job related to one's instrumental study provides a positive experience through performing or teaching and enhances career opportunities (Harvey, 2000; Devlin, James & Grigg, 2008; Turmin et al., 2020).

Besides, part-time employment will help students develop their time management skills to become more effective. Furthermore, parents and educators support work among students as employment helps to construct one's character (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986). Moreover, studies regarding exposure to the right profession acknowledged the positive effect of the student's GPA, where working students achieve higher than those who did not work (Manthei & Gilmore, 2005, Reminick & Bergman, 2020). This result, in turn, is a revelation in recommending a review of a university's practice and lecturer's perceptions of where they can support their working students.

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## **Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study**

This research contributes to filling the gap in the existing literature related to the study of engaging in part-time jobs, particularly concerning music students and practitioners.

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