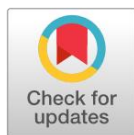


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Narrating Collaborative Music Learning: Teachers' Lived Experiences in Developing Students' Musical Abilities

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ABSTRACT

Background. Music education in junior high schools plays an important role in developing students' musical skills, creativity, character, and social abilities. However, teaching practices are often dominated by conventional teacher-centered methods, resulting in students' musical abilities not developing optimally. Therefore, this study aims to examine teachers' strategies in developing musical abilities through collaborative learning.

Purpose. The aim of this study is to determine the strategies used by teachers in developing students' musical abilities through collaborative learning in classroom practice.

Methods. This study employed a qualitative approach using a narrative inquiry design to explore teachers' experiences in designing and implementing collaborative music instruction at SMP Negeri 4 Taebenu. Data were collected through reflections, classroom observations, and interactions during the research process. Data analysis used narrative thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke and supported by Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry framework.

Results. Collaborative music learning at SMPN 4 Taebenu is implemented through planning, implementation, and evaluation stages integrated within the Lesson Plan (RPP) adjusted to student characteristics. Strategies are student-centered through group work, inquiry learning, and peer tutoring to increase participation and interaction. Learning activities include rhythmic exercises, music games, and ensemble practice that support experiential learning. Assessment is conducted through observation, interviews, and formative and summative evaluations covering process and outcomes. Challenges include differences in student ability, limited time, and lack of instruments, requiring adaptive strategies and better facilities.

Conclusions. Collaborative learning strategies support students' musical ability development through structured planning and active group participation. Teachers act as facilitators using interactive methods and varied learning media. Existing constraints require institutional support and improved management to strengthen learning effectiveness.

KEYWORDS

Colaborative Music Learning, Developing Students, Musical Ability, Teachers' Lived Experience

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INTRODUCTION

Music education at the junior high school level plays a crucial role in supporting the development of students' artistic abilities, creativity, communication skills, and character formation. Within the 21st-century educational paradigm, music learning is no longer viewed merely as the transfer of musical knowledge, but as a social space where students learn to interact, negotiate, and construct shared meaning through learning experiences (Oseremi Onesi-Ozigagun et al., 2024). Therefore, the success of music education is determined not only by the attainment of musical skills but also by how the learning process is designed, experienced, and interpreted by both teachers and students.

Teachers play a strategic role as facilitators, mediators, and designers of learning experiences that encourage students' active engagement. The teaching strategies employed by teachers include activity planning, method selection, classroom management, the use of instructional media, and assessment aligned with learning objectives (Halimatul Fijriah et al., 2024). However, music education in schools often takes place in complex situations. Teachers not only face curriculum demands but also facility limitations, variations in student ability, diverse levels of motivation, and social dynamics that emerge during the learning process.

One widely used approach in music education is collaborative learning. This approach emphasizes cooperation among students in groups to achieve shared learning goals through active social interaction. In the context of music education, collaboration can be realized through ensemble activities, vocal groups, group music performances, or creative projects that require coordination, communication, and joint decision-making (Creech et al., 2022). Various previous studies have shown that cooperative and collaborative strategies have the potential to enhance students' skills, creativity, and participation in music education (Gao, 2025).

Nevertheless, the assumption that implementing collaborative strategies automatically leads to improved musical ability should be viewed more critically. The collaborative process in the classroom does not always proceed ideally. In practice, group work can present challenges such as uneven student participation, the dominance of certain members, communication conflicts, or difficulties for teachers in managing the dynamics of heterogeneous groups. Teacher A, explained: "When I use collaborative learning in my music classes, I've noticed that not all students are immediately able to work together. Usually, there are a few students who are very active in organizing the group, but there are also those who just go along without really getting involved. In situations like that, I often have to adjust my teaching approach midway through the lesson, because the plan I've made doesn't always go according to the class dynamics."

Another teacher similarly reflected: "For me, the biggest challenge isn't teaching music theory, but ensuring that all students feel they have a role to play in the group. I often find myself in situations where confident students take the lead, while quieter students choose to stay silent. Experiences like these keep me constantly reevaluating the strategies I use and searching for ways to foster genuine collaboration, rather than just a routine division of tasks."

Teachers' experiences in dealing with such situations are often not reflected in learning reports that focus solely on the success of the strategies employed. In fact, subjective experiences, reflections, and even failures during the learning process are crucial for understanding how learning strategies actually function within the real-world context of the classroom.

This phenomenon is also evident in music education at SMP Negeri 4 Taebenu. Based on initial observations, students' musical potential has not yet developed to its fullest. Instruction still tends to be dominated by a theoretical approach, with limited opportunities for collaborative practical activities that could foster creativity and interaction among students (Johnson & LaGasse, 2022). On

the other hand, teachers face challenges in adapting teaching strategies to classroom conditions, the availability of resources, and the diverse characteristics of students. Another teacher explained: "Teaching music in a school with limited resources means I have to constantly adapt. Sometimes I want to do ensemble practice or collaborative projects, but there aren't enough instruments for all the students. In the end, I have to find alternatives, assign different roles to the students, or even adjust the learning objectives so that the activities can still take place." This situation indicates that the implementation of collaborative learning cannot be understood merely as a technical issue of teaching methods but must be examined as a pedagogical experience built through practice, reflection, negotiation, and social dynamics in the classroom.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze teachers' strategies in collaborative music learning at SMP Negeri 4 Taebenu, with a primary focus on teachers' experiences. This study not only describes the strategies implemented but also explores how teachers interpret the learning process, address obstacles, manage conflicts, and reflect on the successes and limitations of their teaching practices. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of music education that is more contextual, reflective, and aligned with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, particularly the values of collaboration and mutual cooperation in the learning process.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative narrative approach (narrative inquiry) to understand teachers' experiences in designing and implementing collaborative music instruction at SMP Negeri 4 Taebenu. This approach was chosen because the study does not focus on measuring the effectiveness of instructional strategies, but rather on how teachers' pedagogical experiences are constructed, interpreted, negotiated, and reflected upon within the context of daily teaching practices. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to examine human experiences as phenomena that exist within the dimensions of time, social relationships, and spatial context (Consoli & Darnault, 2025).

Epistemologically, this study is grounded in a constructivist–interpretive paradigm, which views social reality as something shaped through experience, interaction, and individual processes of meaning-making. In the context of this study, collaborative learning strategies are not understood as universal technical procedures, but as pedagogical practices influenced by teachers' professional experiences, classroom dynamics, institutional constraints, and the social relationships that develop during the music learning process.

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Taebenu, involving two music teachers as research informants. These participants were selected because, in reality, there were only two music teachers at the school. The study acknowledges the limitations of generalizing findings due to the small sample size; therefore, the findings are presented as contextual interpretations that illustrate the complexity of pedagogical experiences, rather than as a universal representation of music teaching practices.

In alignment with the reflexive nature of narrative inquiry, the researcher acknowledges their positionality and its potential influence on data collection and interpretation. The researcher enters this study as an educator/researcher in music education who possesses pre-existing conceptualizations regarding collaborative learning and the challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum. To mitigate bias and ensure that the teachers' authentic voices are not overshadowed by the researcher's preconceptions, a conscious effort toward reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process. The researcher established a collaborative, non-evaluative rapport with the two music teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Taebenu, positioning them not as mere subjects of scrutiny, but as co-constructors of knowledge whose lived experiences dictate the narrative outcomes of this study.

Research data were collected through in-depth narrative interviews, limited participatory observation, and analysis of instructional documents such as teaching modules, assessment tools, and classroom activity logs. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, encouraging teachers to reflectively share their experiences, including successes, challenges, classroom conflicts, changes in strategy, and moments of failure in collaborative learning. Observations were used to understand how teachers' narratives interacted with actual learning practices in the classroom, while document analysis served to enrich the context for data interpretation.

Data analysis employed a narrative thematic analysis inspired by the approach of Braun and Clarke (Ahmed et al., 2025) and the narrative inquiry framework of Clandinin and Connelly (Wei, 2023). The analysis was conducted in several stages: (1) repeated reading of interview transcripts and field notes to gain a comprehensive understanding; (2) identification of experiential themes such as the meaning of collaboration, negotiation of teacher roles, pedagogical challenges, learning conflicts, and professional reflection; (3) interpretation of the relationships between themes within the school's social and institutional context; and (4) the development of an analytical narrative linking participants' experiences to broader discourses on music education and collaborative learning.

To enhance the credibility of the research, data triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and learning documents. Additionally, member checking was employed, which involves confirming the interpretation of interview results with participants to ensure that the meanings constructed by the researcher and participants align.

In qualitative research, researcher positionality plays a crucial role because data interpretation is inseparable from the researcher's background, experiences, and assumptions (Park, 2026). The researcher acknowledges that involvement in the field of education may influence how music learning practices are understood. Therefore, reflexivity is practiced continuously throughout the research process through reflective note-taking, evaluation of initial assumptions, and efforts to maintain openness to narratives that may contradict the researcher's expectations. This step is taken to minimize interpretive bias while strengthening the transparency of the research process.

With this methodological approach, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of teachers' strategies in collaborative music learning as a complex, dynamic, and contextual pedagogical experience.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Collaborative Music Learning as a Negotiation Between Curriculum Planning and Classroom Reality

The findings indicate that teachers positioned collaborative learning not merely as a teaching technique but as a pedagogical strategy embedded within lesson planning and classroom adaptation. Collaborative activities were integrated into lesson plans through small-group discussions, ensemble practices, and peer interaction activities intended to connect musical content with students' interests and everyday experiences. One teacher explained: "Students become more involved when the material relates to music they already know. When discussing rhythm or ensemble work, I allow them to bring examples from songs they listen to. Otherwise, participation tends to decline."

This finding suggests that collaborative music learning was strongly influenced by contextual responsiveness rather than strict procedural implementation. Teachers continuously negotiated between curriculum expectations, student preferences, and classroom constraints.

From an interpretive perspective, this result demonstrates that collaboration in music education functions as a socially situated practice rather than a universally transferable instructional model. This

aligns with recent scholarship arguing that collaborative arts learning emerges through relational interaction, identity negotiation, and contextual adaptation (Creech et al., 2022)

However, the findings also complicate dominant assumptions that collaborative learning automatically improves music achievement. Teachers reported that student engagement increased only when collaborative activities were perceived as relevant and accessible. In less familiar musical tasks, several students withdrew participation or relied heavily on more musically competent peers.

This contradiction supports recent studies showing that collaboration can simultaneously foster participation while reproducing unequal participation patterns inside creative learning environments (Bolden & DeLuca, 2022). Therefore, collaborative learning should be understood not as inherently democratic but as pedagogically mediated.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to narrative understandings of music pedagogy by showing that teachers enact collaboration through continuous negotiation between institutional curriculum demands and lived classroom realities.

Collaboration as Creativity and Pedagogical Tension

Teachers perceived collaborative learning as valuable because it created opportunities for creativity, peer learning, and social interaction. Group performance activities encouraged students to exchange musical ideas, coordinate rhythm patterns, and solve performance problems collectively.

One participant reflected: "In group practice, students who are usually quiet sometimes become more expressive. But at the same time, there are groups where only one or two students dominate while others simply follow."

This narrative reveals an important tension frequently absent from normative discussions of collaborative learning. While collaboration opened space for creative expression, it also generated unequal participation dynamics.

Rather than treating this as implementation failure, the present study interprets such tension as an inherent characteristic of collaborative pedagogy. Recent international studies in music education similarly report that collaborative creativity often develops alongside conflict, disagreement, unequal contribution, and role negotiation (Park, 2026)

Compared with prior studies emphasizing positive outcomes of collaborative music education, the present findings highlight a more ambivalent reality. Students did not uniformly experience collaboration as empowering. Some learners perceived group work as supportive, whereas others experienced pressure, dependency, or reduced individual learning opportunities.

This divergence has important conceptual implications. Collaborative learning in music education should not be evaluated solely through visible indicators such as participation frequency or group performance outcomes. Instead, educators must examine the quality of interaction, power relations inside groups, and the distribution of creative agency among students.

Structural Constraints and the Limits of Collaborative Pedagogy

The study further identified several structural constraints affecting collaborative music learning implementation. These included limited musical instruments, diverse student competence levels, restricted instructional time, and teacher difficulty managing heterogeneous groups.

A teacher stated: "Collaborative learning sounds ideal, but in practice, limited equipment changes everything. Some groups must wait their turn, and keeping everyone equally active becomes difficult." This finding invites a more critical reading of collaborative pedagogy. The challenge was not merely technical but structural and institutional.

International literature increasingly recognizes that successful collaborative arts education depends on material conditions, teacher professional agency, and institutional support systems

(Creech et al., 2022). Thus, difficulties encountered in this study should not be interpreted solely as teacher limitations.

Importantly, the presence of obstacles did not negate the pedagogical value of collaboration. Instead, constraints became sites of pedagogical improvisation. Teachers modified group composition, simplified musical tasks, and adjusted performance expectations according to available resources. This adaptive process resonates with narrative inquiry perspectives emphasizing teachers as meaning-makers who construct pedagogical responses through experience rather than through rigid method application (Wei, 2023)

Nevertheless, the findings caution against overly celebratory interpretations of collaborative learning. Without adequate infrastructure, pedagogical support, and critical facilitation, collaborative music learning risks reinforcing participation inequality, superficial engagement, or dependency among learners.

Therefore, the contribution of this study lies not in confirming that collaborative learning is universally effective, but in revealing its complexity as an experiential, negotiated, and context-dependent pedagogical practice.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that teachers' strategies in collaborative music learning at SMP Negeri 4 Taebenu cannot be understood merely as the application of teaching methods, but rather as pedagogical practices developed through experience, negotiation, and adaptation to classroom realities. Teachers develop collaborative learning through lesson planning, managing group activities, adapting materials to students' interests, and modifying strategies based on students' conditions and the limitations of the learning environment.

The research findings indicate that collaborative learning has the potential to foster student engagement, creativity, social interaction, and peer-to-peer learning in music education. However, this study also found that collaborative practices do not always result in uniform or entirely positive learning experiences. Disparities in participation, the dominance of certain members, differences in musical ability, resource limitations, and difficulties in group management indicate that collaboration is a complex and tension-filled pedagogical process.

These findings make a conceptual contribution by expanding our understanding of collaborative music learning as a practice that is contextual, relational, and not universal. The success of collaborative learning is greatly influenced by teachers' ability to mediate social dynamics, respond to institutional conditions, and create learning spaces that enable a more equitable distribution of participation and creativity.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the narrative inquiry perspective, which positions teachers' experiences as a crucial source for understanding music education practices. Rather than affirming the assumption that collaborative learning is always effective, this study demonstrates that the pedagogical value of collaboration lies in the complexity of the negotiation, reflection, improvisation, and decision-making processes that teachers engage in when facing daily learning challenges.

This study has limitations regarding the limited number of participants and the research context focused on a single school; therefore, the findings are not intended to be broadly generalized. Consequently, future research is recommended to involve more diverse school contexts, a broader range of participants, and to explore in greater depth students' experiences as the primary actors in collaborative music learning.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used ChatGPT to assist in improving grammar, language quality, and overall readability of the text. After using this tool, the author(s) carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

Author 5: Supervision; Validation; Resources; Visuali-zation; Writing - original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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