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## What's Up with Aural Training Using WhatsApp: Enhancing Student Well-Being Amidst Mobile Learning Obstacles

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### Abstract

The tertiary aural training environment provides a foundation for music students to understand, learn, and experience music through live interaction between lecturer and student. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the aural training lecturer at our university was compelled to move classes to an online platform accessible to all students, namely WhatsApp. This qualitative case study was conducted in 2020 to understand

better whether aural training students experienced well-being during mobile teaching and learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In the WhatsApp aural training environment, there was a lack of immediate aural transmission, and the lecturer was unable to assess students' instantaneous aural skills development. There were 11 participants representing two-year groups in this qualitative study. The participants were five first-year and six second-year music students who attended online aural training classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lecturer shared module content with students through WhatsApp using videos, voice recordings, and audio-visual material. Research data were collected through individual online interviews, WhatsApp voice and video recordings, and images. Thematic analyses revealed that the lecturer was able to facilitate an accessible online aural learning environment which enhanced the students' sense of belonging within their smaller groups, although not necessarily within the group as a whole. The students perceived the environment as inclusive, and—as they all had to endure similar circumstances—they were strengthened by a sense of compassion, togetherness, and understanding.

### **Introduction**

Within a time span of two months, teaching and learning at our tertiary institution in South Africa<sup>1</sup> were transformed from in-person classes to operating exclusively online. Music performances, ensemble practices, group classes, and one-on-one practical instrumental or vocal classes that were usually integral to the music students' teaching and learning environment were suspended for a while and then continued online. The sudden change in teaching and learning environments globally caused lecturers and students to think “outside-the-box, outside-the-classroom, and outside-the-physical boundaries of campus” (White & Ruth-Sahd, 2020, p. 294). Burns et al. (2020) explain that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the transition to online learning presented uncertainties to both lecturers and students. Moving to a remote learning environment meant that subject management, learning environments, tools, content, and assessments were only available online (Ali, 2020).

Most online staff meeting discussions resulted in feedback on staff and student challenges, and the authors realised that the subject most debilitated was aural training. Under normal face-to-face circumstances, aural training classes require musical activities that test audiation through individual and group performances (Dalby, 1999; Gordon, 2012), and one key to successful audiation is an immediate response from the lecturer followed by correction from

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<sup>1</sup> Our study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The first and third authors are faculty members in the music department at the site where the study was conducted.

the student (Clauhs, 2018). To accommodate immediate online interaction between lecturer and students, video conference applications such as Google Meet and Blackboard Collaborate were available, but in South Africa (the site of this study), limited internet access hindered successful online collaboration through video conferencing platforms. The limited internet connectivity (Gumede & Badriparsad, 2022; Motala & Menon, 2020) in many areas (location and contention ratio influences) compelled lecturers to use alternative ways of teaching. The available platform all participants in this study could afford and had access to, was the mobile application WhatsApp<sup>2</sup>. Krotov (2015) explains that mobile learning environments are “interactive, ‘anywhere, anytime’, condensed, compartmentalized, and contextualized,” and support learning in new ways (p. 107). Instant communication through WhatsApp allows for the easy distribution of quality learning material, group interaction (students and instructor), problem-solving discussions, and learning activities that increase critical thinking skills (Zulkanain et al., 2020). For this reason, WhatsApp was used as it enabled the aural training lecturer and students to communicate and share multimedia content. Unfortunately, immediate interaction, as required for successful aural training, could not be achieved using WhatsApp. According to Butnaru et al. (2021), a lack of direct interaction between lecturers and students reduced students’ well-being. Therefore, in our study, the aural training lecturer, as facilitator and guide, had to pursue a learning environment that not only added value to the development of students’ aural skills but also concurrently contributed to their sense of well-being. As a result, we conducted this case study to understand better whether students experienced well-being in their mobile aural training teaching and learning environment.

### **Literature Review**

Under normal circumstances, attending a higher education institution involves more than merely acquiring an academic education. In a study by Cheng (2004), New York students expressed their eagerness for a sense of campus community to freely share their individuality and celebrate academic and social life. Factors that generate stress amongst tertiary students originate from the subject of study or the environment (Kauts, 2016). The standard of undergraduate training in music remains demanding throughout the first two years of study, and music students tend to experience psychological and physical suffering (Burland & Pitts, 2007; Gaunt, 2011; Panebianco, 2017; Spahn et al., 2017). Indeed, music students often endure more psychological stressors than students from other disciplines (Parui & Ghosh, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> WhatsApp is a mobile application (free to download) used on mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, computers, and wearable devices (Grant, 2019). The application allows the user to send and receive text and voice messages, multimedia content, and voice and video calls with an active internet connection using Wi-Fi or mobile data (Dove, 2022).

The nationwide lockdown in South Africa (from March 26 to April 16, 2020) forced students to evacuate campuses and return to their homes, where they had to study and concentrate on online lectures “in home environments that were not conducive to work” (Landa et al., 2021, p. 174). When the learning environment changed from face-to-face to online, individual students were confronted with various challenges (Kemp & Grieve, 2014; Mpungose, 2020) and may have experienced the transition quite differently. White and Ruth-Sahd (2020) maintain that of the various challenges, “[p]erhaps most challenging of all, however, were the emotional ones. Labile emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety, and frustration led to emotional exhaustion and difficulty adjusting to the current life and educational circumstances” (p. 294).

In a study by Mulrooney and Kelly (2020), students revealed that they experienced a reduction in their sense of belonging since all teaching and learning was moved online. The correlation between the belonging needs of university students and well-being was investigated by Karaman and Tarim (2018) who confirmed that feeling a sense of belonging influenced students’ well-being. The effect of the online environment on students’ well-being amid the absence of traditional support networks during the COVID-19 pandemic has been the focus of several research studies (Da Silva, 2020; Thomas, 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020). Dodge et al. (2012) researched various theoretical perspectives, attributes, and definitions of well-being (Diener & Ryan, 2009; McNaught, 2011; Seligman, 2011), and proposed a new definition of well-being as a multidimensional social construct which is “the balance point between an individual’s resource pool and the challenges faced” (pp. 229–230). During the global pandemic, student well-being was examined by Burns et al. (2020) with specific reference to the psychosocial effects, and they found that students’ perceived view of their competencies and capabilities either strengthened or worsened their well-being.

The impact of focussing on healthy interpersonal relationships while teaching music is that students learn to appreciate musicking<sup>3</sup> as an art and flourish as compassionate individuals (Steele Royston, 2017). Well-being and compassionate teaching are connected and can inspire students to create meaningful lives (Hendricks, 2018; Shairer, 2016). According to Shairer (2016), “compassion seems to buffer the effects of stress” (p. 208), and White and Ruth-Sahd (2020) maintain that compassionate teaching approaches can change students’ perspectives on academic life.

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<sup>3</sup> Musicking is a term coined by Small (1998). Boyce-Tillman (2016) explains the term ‘musicking’ as “a verb that encompasses all musical activity from composing to performing to listening-in-audience to singing in the shower” (pp. 3-4).

## Research Design and Methods

The research design for this study was a case study, which entails an in-depth analysis of a particular research problem within a real-life context (Yin, 2014). Our case study was conducted to explore whether aural training students experienced well-being during mobile teaching and learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Our participants (Table 1) were first- and second-year music students enrolled in the 2020 Bachelor of Music (BMus)<sup>4</sup> programme. They volunteered to participate in this study and were chosen through purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This case was bounded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) by time, namely, two lectures a week during the 2020 lockdown (22 weeks in total); place, which is WhatsApp (one WhatsApp group respectively for BMus I and BMus II students); and activity, that focused on aural development—including sharing WhatsApp text and voice messages, voice calls, and all audio-visual material. The five first-year participants shared valuable experiences to explain the WhatsApp environment. In 2020 they only had six weeks of contact classes, during which this module covered the introduction to performance-based core aspects including the singing of scales in canon, two-part intervals, and three and four part harmonic chords. The rest of the academic year (22 weeks) continued online where the students could only sing in canon with WhatsApp audio examples. Singing in three or four vocal parts was not possible. Only after these students returned to campus in 2021 were they able to participate in the holistic sound experience and performance of all three and four part harmonic material. The six second-year music students who volunteered experienced precisely the opposite. Their first-year aural training (2019) focused on the Gordon and Kodaly performance-based aural training methodology, and they used the online learning environment only in their second year (2020).

**Table 1**

*Meet our participants*

<b>2020 First-year students</b>
<b>Rose</b> , choral conductor and classical singer <sup>5</sup>
<b>Luna</b> , choral conductor, classical and jazz singer
<b>Shaylan</b> , classical singer
<b>Regina</b> , classical singer and music philosopher
<b>Anna</b> , classical singer, composer and aspiring music therapist
<b>2020 Second-year students</b>

<sup>4</sup> The Bachelor of Music is the most common type of music degree that is offered at conservatories and music schools or departments at universities worldwide (Lipman, n.d.). The following acronyms are used to indicate the different year groups in our study: BMus I (first year) BMus II (second year).

<sup>5</sup> Classical singers receive training in Western classical vocal music

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**Isabel**, classical singer

**Lisa**, pianist and composer

**Marshall**, classical singer and composer

**Emily**, soloist (viola), violinist and ensemble player

**Barry**, choral conductor and contemporary drummer

**John**, symphony orchestra percussionist and violinist. He values music education.

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In our study, the applied aural teaching and learning approach originated from Gordon's (1999) framework for audiation development and music learning theory. Gordon broadly defines audiation as the ability to "think" in music and explains that "audiation is to music what thought is to language" (Gordon, 1991). Although Choksy (2001), Jacobi (2012), and Szőnyi (1973) are not Gordon (1991, 1999) scholars, they support his ideas on audiation and have referred to this phenomenon as the ability to internally hear written notation without sound being physically present. Gordon (1991) mentions several educational theorists who influenced the development of his theory, such as Heinrich Pestalozzi, Zoltán Kodály, Carl Orff, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and Sini'chi Suzuki, who applied similar sequencing principles in their methodologies. Gordon (2012) believes in aural-to-oral transmission as the initial step in facilitating audiation, followed by notation and theory only once these various steps have been achieved, and provides an outline of the skill learning sequences necessary to facilitate audiation and thereby learn and understand music.

Research data were collected through WhatsApp (including messages and videos with learning content, students' homework, lecturer/student feedback<sup>6</sup>, and individual, semi-structured online interviews). Analysis of WhatsApp communication<sup>7</sup> revealed how the lecturer communicated with the aural training students. The 20-30 minute interviews<sup>8</sup> (one interview per participant) were conducted online as a result of the legal restrictions and safety measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Self, 2021). Open-ended questions were used to guide participants to provide information in their own words (Ruel, 2019) and allow participants to clarify and elaborate on their answers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure anonymity throughout the analysis, the researchers transcribed the interviews using pseudonyms that participants chose. Data analysis processes included thematic data analysis

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<sup>6</sup> The WhatsApp data was provided by the aural training lecturer, the third author. The aural training lecturer was not involved in data analysis and discussion of the findings.

<sup>7</sup> Data analysis of WhatsApp communication, transcribing interviews, and discussion of the findings were performed by the first and second authors.

<sup>8</sup> The first author, the music education lecturer, conducted the interviews to avoid bias. The first and second authors transcribed the interviews and analyzed the data to discuss the findings.

and interpretation (Saldaña, 2013). The data describing the learning environment were analysed to explore if teaching with compassion as a meaning-making process was realised. The data were categorised, and the themes that emerged described the participants' experience of well-being when the learning environment comprised solely of mobile teaching and learning activities. Approval for conducting this study was received from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the university where this study was undertaken.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Individuals experience well-being “when [they] have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge” (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230). Barkham et al. (2019) define the well-being of students as their personal inner strength and positive emotions that enable them to manage day-to-day challenges during their academic journey. In an educational context, feelings of connectedness and belonging can enhance students' psychological well-being (Allen & Bowles, 2012). Peacock et al. (2020) investigated how online students experienced a sense of belonging within their postgraduate studies and identified three themes that encouraged belonging: lecturer support, meaningful group and peer interactions, and a culture of learning. A mutual focus of attention and a shared mood also enhance feelings of interconnectedness and belonging within a creative music learning community (Cruywagen & Joubert, 2021).

Lecturers would do well to strive to support student well-being through “good pedagogic practice” (Hughes & Spanner, 2019, p. 28) that enables students to “fully exercise their cognitive, emotional, physical and social powers, leading to flourishing” (p. 9). Good pedagogic music practice requires teachers and students to work side-by-side in a collective place called “humanity” (Hendricks, 2018, p. 3). Educators must guide and facilitate students through compassionate teaching that motivates and shares goals and values of musical and educational excellence (Hendricks, 2018). Cultivating compassion-based initiatives in higher education environments can positively affect students' mental state and well-being (Bunting & Hill, 2021; Gilbert, 2016; Gilbert et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2021; Maratos et al., 2019). Hendricks' (2018) qualities of a compassionate music teaching approach are most relevant to the aims of this study: “A dedicated music educator should be able to connect, inspire, guide and motivate every student through a teaching approach that reflects the qualities of compassion such as trust, empathy, patience, inclusion, community and authentic connection” (p. 8).

### **Findings and discussion**

Drawing on the scholarly literature and a thematic analysis of the data collected, the results of this study facilitated a richer understanding of the well-being of the aural training students

using WhatsApp as a learning tool during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following themes emerged from the analysed data: (a) compassionate teaching, (b) student well-being, and (c) the mobile learning environment.

### ***Compassionate Teaching***

It is the task of music educators to tailor and focus their teaching approach to help music students “flourish” as well-rounded individuals and musicians (Cruywagen, 2018). Steele Royston (2017) describes the interpersonal attitudes music students appreciate from their music teachers: receptiveness, trust, a sense of humour, an appreciation of students for who they are, willingness to listen to students’ ideas, and enthusiasm for the subject. Our study aligns with Steele Royston’s (2017) description of interpersonal attitudes in that behaviours that participants experienced from the aural lecturer were: an understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic learning environment challenges, trust, an appreciation of student contributions, willingness to help, and a passion for the subject. The challenges of the unfamiliar mobile learning environment induced shared experiences between the aural training lecturer and students, which resulted in mutual respect, trust, and affection. As two participants describe:

- “I see colours in people. Every person has a colour, and it depends on the mood of the person, the shade change, but [I see] mostly the natural colour closer to the core. In Dr Pentatonic<sup>9</sup>, I see a dark green, like a forest green, something that you can trust and lie in and be safe.” (Rose)
- “She’s amazing.” (Isabel)

The lecturer’s presence as an instructor may assist in improving the “quantity and quality of students’ participation” (Alenazi, 2018, pp. 6–7). Isabel noted that “her help helped me too.” Lisa added, “If she realised you can’t do better, she won’t push you unnecessarily, but she still motivated you to become better than you are.” In this study, the lecturer assigned the lecture topic, shared audio and notation examples, provided feedback on students’ voice and video examples, and supplied extra lectures when necessary. Participants felt that the aural lecturer included them in the learning process. Rose explained, “I always got feedback, so I always felt important, like I was there for a reason; so I always felt like I was home.” Dr Pentatonic’s patience was appreciated, and for this reason, she induced care and compassion from the students’ side. Marshall reasoned, “I could empathise with the situation as it was quite difficult. She’s also got a personal life. I can’t just assume that she’s there to help 24/7 and to focus on us solely. So I could empathise with that if I was in that same situation.” Lisa also took piano lessons from the aural lecturer. Their student-lecturer relationship made it possible for her to better understand the lecturer’s emotional fatigue due to the drastic increase in

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<sup>9</sup> Pseudonym chosen by the current aural training students



workload. Lisa observed, “and I personally think that that must’ve taken a toll on her.” Before COVID-19, the time spent on in-class lectures included preparation and immediate feedback during aural activities and usually consisted of four to six hours per week per group. During the COVID-19 pandemic, preparation, listening to assignments, recording of individual feedback, and extra lectures for each group devoured between 16-24 hours per week.

Participants agreed that they trusted and respected the lecturer because she was experienced and was a credible source of information. Marshall commented that Dr Pentatonic’s love and enthusiasm for the subject were highly evident. The students recognised the lecturer’s input and desire to help when they were struggling. Although Emily experienced the lecturer as “strict and sometimes quite intimidating” because of her skill, she found her always extremely fair. Barry echoed, “I never heard her making a mistake.” John entirely trusted Dr Pentatonic’s competence because “she’s a doctor; she knows what she’s doing.” The participants also agreed that the lecturer motivated them to reach their learning goals. Barry acknowledged, “she’s quite caring if you don’t get something right. She will spend almost two hours just trying to teach you and trying to make sure that you get it right.” Participants explained that Dr Pentatonic genuinely wished for everyone in the class to succeed and understand the work. John observed, “She’s very quick to say that you got it right.” He also exclaimed, “There’s one line that I wouldn’t forget that doctor really liked to say: sing in the shower, sing in the shower, sing in the shower! That’s motivating.”

Compassionate teaching comes alive when a lecturer motivates, inspires, and connects with the students (Hendricks, 2018). Our participants were inspired and motivated to reach their full potential in aural training by Dr Pentatonic’s enthusiasm, skill, punctual feedback, and trustworthiness.

### ***Student Well-Being***

Increased self-esteem enhances subjective well-being (Padhy et al., 2011). Participants in this study explained that the way the aural training module was instructed added value to their musicianship and contributed to their well-being. The added benefit of developing aural skills to assist musicians in practice is undeniable (Hiatt & Cross, 2006; Johnson, 2013; Rawlins, 2006; Russell, 2017). Participants explained that aural training plays an essential part in becoming a musician. Barry said,

I can talk from the jazz and the more contemporary side – at a gig, they’ll tell you just play (a melody, certain chords) quickly. Call and response is such a big thing in jazz; if you can’t listen to the call, how are you going to respond?

Emily acknowledged that she could directly apply the acquired audiation skills to her instrumental playing. Marshall used the audiation skills to “adjust pitching in our heads.” John, an orchestra member, said, “it betters your musicianship and helps you to listen

critically while performing with others. [It] also helps me a lot in sight-singing and sight-reading.” John always had an excuse to avoid singing in front of aural class members, but he exclaimed that

I’m an instrumentalist, I don’t like singing. Dr Pentatonic encouraged me to sing, so I sing more often now than I used to; which I like. If I could go back, for a third year, it would have been exciting.

Rose shared her delight with aural training as a subject: “It’s difficult. It’s insane. And it’s exciting, but I think that’s what makes it that good.”

Compassionate music teachers share the “goals and values of musical and educational excellence” with their students (Hendricks, 2018, p. 7). Musicking is a celebration of all musical activities where the musicker and the music connect to the experience as a whole (Boyce-Tillman, 2016).

### ***The Mobile Learning Environment***

Characteristics of a mobile learning environment summarised by Grant (2019) describe the learner, device, and content as mobile; the lecturer as facilitator and coach as accessible; and engagement with the learning environment as formal, informal, or semi-formal. This description correlates with our study’s aural training learning environment. The student, device, and learning content were mobile, and WhatsApp was used as a teaching and learning tool. The lecturer—as facilitator and coach—was always accessible: John remembered that “When students were struggling, [Dr Pentatonic] made an extra effort to help us” and explained, “Well, that’s just being nice, like just taking [sic] the extra mile for your students.” The lecturer and student engagement with the online aural learning environment were formal, semi-formal, and, from time to time, informal. In the formal WhatsApp learning environment, the aural lecturer shared pre-recorded audio files and notation examples that emphasised a specific aural music skill to be learned in the lesson. The students shared their completed exercises (audio/video files) with the lecturer, and semi-formal and informal feedback was given to all students individually unless most of the group made similar mistakes. In this case, a general feedback video was sent to the applicable WhatsApp group.

### ***Challenges***

Students faced many challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic (Landa et al., 2021; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2020; White & Ruth-Sahd, 2020), of which the replacement of in-person learning with online-only teaching was just one (Burns et al., 2020). Using social networking sites such as WhatsApp also had negative consequences, such as technostress, “which refers to the stress individuals experience from their inability to cope with the demands of information technology (IT) use” (Whelan et al., 2022, p. 280).

Three participants expressed their challenges with the online aural learning experience as such:

- When aural classes moved to WhatsApp groups, it was a lot more difficult because we weren't exposed to that class environment. It was just an audio that you needed to listen [to]. I didn't feel motivated. And our grades were dependent on self-study and how you perceived [the content] by yourself. So I think that sense of belonging was missing...I didn't know if I was doing everything correctly or doing anything correctly, so that made it difficult. (Isabel)
- It was quite frustrating because I think your subconscious knows when you record something that you can record it again; there isn't the same amount of pressure. (Emily)
- Every video kind of felt like an examination. Even though it wasn't, you still felt you were putting yourself out on the line. (Rose)

The online learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic also challenged students to think outside the box and beyond the limits of life on campus (White & Ruth-Sahd, 2020).

Marshall explained,

I basically turned my room into an office and a place where I could practice easily. So I got rid of my curtains and replaced my tables and things so that it was easier for me to practice every day. And [I] moved my piano and chairs as well.

### *Inclusion and Belonging*

Kovač and Vaala (2021) conclude that “belonging is one of the most important ingredients found in inclusion” (p. 1216), but that inclusion in both social and educational settings should not necessarily be perceived simply as the creation of social bonds. However, they do agree that these two concepts have shared commonalities regarding a basic need to “get closer” (p. 1208) to one another. Although participants noted that compassionate teaching made them feel included in the online learning process, they did not always experience a strong sense of belonging. In our study, Barry explained, “although it is hard to have that sense of community just on a WhatsApp group,” most students felt included in the process because the lecturer sent messages to “everyone, and she followed up with everyone.” Marshall’s willingness to always be available “to help anyone,” gave him “a feeling of belonging to the group.”

John appreciated that his friends supported him throughout the year in the aural training module. He said, “we didn't have classes, and if it wasn't for them [his friends], then I would definitely have felt inferior. I think I would've even failed the module if it wasn't for them.” Lisa explained that many students communicated with each other for support and remembered how the students motivated each other through WhatsApp messages. Being included in a shared online group positively affected some participants as they gained a feeling of

solidarity. John reflected, “I thought, we are all in this together. So let’s make the best of it.” Emily said, “It was comforting to know everybody was in the same position,” while Rose felt less isolated, and Shaylan acknowledged that she did not “feel alone in the whole process.” In the interviews, participants who usually struggled with aural training the most particularly welcomed the collaboration with other group members. This collaboration appeared to increase student self-confidence as Luna described, “it felt good to communicate with people who understood what I was going through.” For Regina, it was reassuring that she was not alone in battling with certain tasks but that her close friends would “get together and try and solve it together.” Aural training as a practice can be challenging (Van Zyl, 2020), and the participants who felt uncomfortable singing in front of their class members commented that they were relieved, and Emily exclaimed that she was even “quite thrilled about the idea of not having to sing in front of anyone.”

Participants noted that online communication also strengthened a sense of compassion, togetherness, and understanding as the students experienced similar feelings, such as loneliness, fear, anxiety, and isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. They knew that their peers were all in the same situation. Barry commented that “everyone was just kind of on their own,” and Rose remembered, “we went through WhatsApp classes together, but we went through it together apart.” Anna said: “I didn’t feel alone, because it’s not just me.” Shaylan experienced a feeling of empathy with the group because “I also understood that a lot of people had different situations that they needed to deal with.” For Isabel, participation in the online learning environment was so time-consuming that she could not support anybody other than herself: “I think time was just an issue for me. I didn’t have enough time.”

WhatsApp as a learning tool caused participants to experience a disruption in their sense of community. Isabel noted, “I think the main thing for me is you lose connection with people; I don’t like online classes. I struggled to concentrate; sitting in front of a screen for two hours is not very fun.” Emily said, “I did miss singing in class together as a group,” while Barry felt, “I know that, obviously, I do like in-person communication, but, for me, the academics were not too bad.”

The findings of Mulrooney and Kelly’s (2020) study link student engagement positively with a sense of belonging to benefit a sense of community. Students in our study did not always feel a strong sense of belonging when the learning environment moved online. A sense of belonging was created by smaller support groups that motivated and shared mutual difficulties. Barry said, “I never really felt like belonging to the group, but I felt a really good belonging with my four best mates in class.”

## Conclusion

The current study suggests that it was still possible to facilitate music aural training compassionately, despite many challenges that included (a) transforming the learning environment from in-person to mobile learning, (b) changing immediate interaction and feedback to asynchronous learning, (c) sharing learning content through WhatsApp messages, and (d) spending extra hours on preparation and feedback. White and Ruth-Sahd (2020) explain that compassionate teaching strategies (i.e., recreating learning spaces, accepting the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, focussing on the positives, and taking care of self and others) can change the students' perspectives of loss and assist students in re-evaluating academic life.

The productive aural training environment enabled the students to find new ways to be creative, communicate successfully, understand the learning content, and recapitulate shared content. Students trusted the lecturer to give them the skills they needed to become quality musicians. The online learning environment allowed students to remain dedicated to their academic performance by spending more time on achieving aural training learning goals. The students experienced support and patience from the lecturer as she offered guidance and feedback whilst being actively involved in music-making with her students. Her teaching approach reflected the qualities of compassion identified by Hendricks (2018), such as trust, empathy, and inclusion. These acts of compassion encouraged students to feel confident enough to share challenges with her. The study revealed that the accessible online aural learning environment enhanced participants' sense of belonging within their smaller groups, although not necessarily within the larger group. They perceived the environment as sheltered and inclusive, and—as they all had to endure similar circumstances—they were strengthened by a sense of compassion, togetherness, and understanding. Both lecturer and students were passionate about music which, in turn, acted as a “sparkle” that brightened their lives and helped maintain a healthy experience of well-being (Bonneville-Roussy & Vallerand, 2020, p. 266). Despite COVID-19 and the sudden shift to an online-only learning environment, participants experienced a strong sense of motivation, inspiration, success, trust, purpose, and collaboration that enhanced their well-being.

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