

How Violin Teachers Handle Students With Language Barrier: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract- This research addresses the issue of language barriers in violin education, focusing on the experiences of Filipino violin teachers and the strategies employed to overcome these challenges. Employing a phenomenological research design, the study conducts in-depth interviews with Filipino violin teachers. Thematic analysis is applied to the collected data to identify patterns and themes, guided by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes language's role in cognitive development and the significance of social interactions in learning. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, a central theme of difficulty in communication emerges, encompassing sub-themes such as limited English vocabulary and inflection in words. Teachers express challenges related to students' language limitations. Eight key themes surface as strategies employed by teachers: social interaction, language exchange, word simplification, demonstration, imitation, and repetition; tactile instruction, instruction through singing and movement, use of a translator, and use of teaching tools and games. In conclusion, the findings underscore the intricacies of teaching the violin in the presence of language barriers, emphasizing the need for inventive and flexible teaching strategies. Recommendations stemming from the study include urging violin teachers to equip themselves with effective strategies and innovative teaching tools. Moreover, the study advises music teachers to recognize the universality of effective teaching strategies across various musical domains. Future researchers are encouraged to explore language barriers in varied educational contexts, emphasizing potential impacts on special needs education and proposing specific areas for further investigation.

Keywords: language barrier, violin education, teaching strategies, communication challenges, social interactions

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization is a term used to describe the process of the world becoming more interconnected through the exchange of goods, ideas, and information. Because of a more globalized world, language barriers are one of the major problems that most people face (Buarqoub, 2019).

Teaching in a globalized world has its own set of challenges. Language barriers hinder effective communication and understanding between people with different languages. Students may face challenges such as difficulties in understanding lectures (Patience, 2016), expressing their thoughts, and expressing themselves (McConville, 2019), which may lead to stress and hinder their ability to learn. Language barriers can also affect their grades negatively (Sato and Hodge, 2015), which in turn damages their self-esteem. The challenges of students studying in a place that doesn't speak their native language are more complicated because of various emotional stressors associated with cultural transition, including learning fluency in another language (Peters and Yu, 2019). With a more globalized world, music learning encounters similar challenges, both for the music classroom and for studio settings. Teachers encounter foreign students who don't speak their language, or at least are not fluent, and the language barrier presents a challenge during class or lessons.

While there are studies available that deal with language barriers in the classroom, there are no studies that tackle the challenges and strategies associated with teaching instruments, particularly the violin, in a one-on-one setting. Understanding how violin instructors manage the language barrier during private lessons would be extremely helpful for those who teach students from diverse language backgrounds.

This study, using a phenomenological approach, was conducted to find out the experiences and strategies used by violin teachers in teaching students with language barriers and to answer the questions, "What are the experiences of teachers teaching violin students with language barriers?" and "How do teachers teach students with language barriers?" The study concentrated primarily on one-on-one violin instruction. The findings of this study hopefully will help improve the field of music education and instrument instruction and offer educators guidance as they seek to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to obtain and benefit from a high-quality music education.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language barriers usually occur when two people who speak different languages cannot understand one another, and breakdown in communications become present. People who travel often or have lived in an area that has a significant presence of foreigners might experience

language barriers. This can cause misunderstandings, which can be frustrating for parties involved, and can even lead to conflict.

Language barriers limit the knowledge of individuals (Oi, 2017) as they lack comprehension and ability to communicate because it limits the free flow of information. According to Buarqoub (2019), language barriers can make it difficult for people to communicate effectively.

Numerous studies have described the various challenges of the language barrier that international students face. Sato and Hodge (2015) interviewed international Japanese students attending an American university and found that the language barrier impacted the students' grades negatively. The negative impact on the students' grades in turn led to damaging effects on the self-esteem of these students, as academics are considered one's identity in Japanese culture. Additionally, in a study conducted by Phan (2009), international Vietnamese students in the Puget Sound area of Washington State face several challenges to their academic success because of difficulties with listening, speaking, writing, social relationships, communication styles, and the education process. The challenges that international students face are complicated and compounded by many possible variables, such as emotional stressors associated with cultural transitions, the tedious and exhausting experience of studying in a second language, and navigating unfamiliar academic expectations (Peters & Yu, 2019).

According to Kim et al. (2022), ELL (English Language Learner) students have difficulties in incorporating their first language or native tongue into the classroom because of the language barrier. ELLs are often still learning English and may struggle to understand the teacher and their peers. They also struggle to communicate their thoughts and ideas effectively. This can lead to frustration and a lack of engagement in the classroom and negatively impact their participation and learning.

Learning a new language can be a challenging task, especially for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. According to Sua and Raman (2007), the ability of the child to cope with learning through their second language, poses the risk of language barrier as this is their weaker language. Furthermore, Sua and Raman (2007) added that the use of a second language for learning in the early stages leads to difficulties arising out of the language barrier problem.

The research results illuminate the challenges faced by violin teachers in communicating with students who have language barriers. Despite initial struggles, perceptions of difficulty diminish over time, aligning with research by Watkins, Razee, and Richters (2012) that underscores the substantial impact of language barriers on well-being, especially in educational contexts. The specific communication challenges are revealed in the research results, notably in terms of "Limited English Vocabulary," where students' restricted vocabulary creates obstacles, as highlighted in Amalia and Anggraeni's study (2021). This struggle is grounded in learners' difficulties in remembering vocabulary, adding complexity to effective communication. Furthermore, the research results shed light on the sub-theme "Inflection in Words," exploring how changes in word form, such as accent or intonation, can impede communication. This finding is

supported by Jahara and Abdelrady's study (2021), indicating that divergent pronunciations or pronunciation mistakes can lead to misunderstandings.

Violin teachers utilize various strategies to address language barriers and improve the learning experience for foreign students. One key aspect is the emphasis on social interactions in teaching, aligning with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Pianta et al., 2003). Building strong connections with students, engaging with parents, and fostering peer learning contributes to effective teaching practices. The "Language Exchange" approach (Ahn, 2016) involves actively shaping interactions to facilitate language learning, creating a two-way exchange that benefits both students and teachers. Teachers simplify language using the "word simplification" strategy, aligning with text simplification studies (Alva-Manchego et al., 2020; Crossley et al., 2011) to enhance communication clarity. The multifaceted strategy of "demonstration, imitation, and repetition" draws from instrumental education literature (Bulut, S, 2012; Simones et al., 2017, Bulut M., 2024), ensuring a comprehensive learning experience. "Tactile Instruction" (Harrison, 2008) leverages touch to address language barriers, offering a kinesthetic approach to learning violin techniques. "Instruction Through Singing and Moving" (Kilpatrick, 2020) prioritizes experiential learning, enhancing the understanding of musical dynamics beyond linguistic constraints. The "Use of Translator" approach (Kane, 2020) incorporates real-time translation, emphasizing collaborative learning and parental involvement. Lastly, "Use of Teaching Tools and Games" integrates tangible cues and gamification into lessons (Ismaizam et al., 2022), providing an engaging and effective learning environment. These strategies, rooted in educational theories and research, collectively demonstrate the commitment of violin teachers to inclusivity and effectiveness in diverse educational settings.

With all of these in consideration, this study uses the sociocultural theory of cognitive development established by Lev Vygotsky as a framework. This theory asserts that learning is a mostly social process whereby development occurs through interactions with people who possess more knowledge or skills than the learner (Cherry, 2022). This entails a particular view of how language and social interaction are involved in the process of human development and learning (Goodman, 2003). This theory also believes that parents, teachers, peers, caregivers, and society at large influence an individual's cognitive development. Moreover, Vygotsky also asserted that learning was a cultural phenomenon, with children from different cultures embracing different styles of learning.

This theory emphasizes communication and its importance in teaching and learning process. Therefore, teachers must find ways to communicate well in a way that is understandable to their students. On top of that, teachers must understand the cultural background of the students, to make the teaching much more effective. Furthermore, teachers can properly assess whether the learning material provided to the students is appropriate for their level of comprehension.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Materials and Methods section outlines the steps and approaches used to identify, select, process, and analyze information ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. It contains research design, participants/data sources, tools, procedure, and analysis technique used in the study.

1. **Research Design:** The study used a qualitative approach, specifically, a phenomenological research design to identify the challenges and strategies employed by violin teachers when teaching students who have a language barrier. It has the objective to condense individual experiences of a phenomenon into a description of its universal essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
2. **Participants/Data Sources:** There were six participants, as recommended by Creswell (2013), were purposively selected from various institutions in CALABARZON and NCR region with students who have language barrier. The participants have at least five years of teaching experience and lack the same shared language with their students. The participants' students' country of origin is from China, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Japan.
3. **Tools and Instruments:** The study used a semi-structured interview in collecting the data. An interview guide was used allowing necessary flexibility for spontaneous and in-depth responses for elaboration, deliberation, clarification. The researchers also utilized additional tools such as voice recorders and other recording equipment necessary to facilitate easy data collection for subsequent analysis.
4. **Procedures:** Several steps were followed in the collection of data making sure it is accurate and reliable. First, a letter of request and an informed consent were given to the participants to secure their voluntary participation in the interview. Confidentiality was made sure by keeping participants' anonymity and mentioning that the collected data will be for research purposes alone. Next, the researchers built rapport in the beginning of the interview. Any unfamiliar terms were also clarified to ensure that the participants could answer the questions to the best of their knowledge. After conducting the interview, the researchers transcribed the information gathered during the interview. Upon completion of the transcribed data, results were sent back to the participants to ensure the data credibility and reliability.
5. **Analysis Techniques:** The study utilized seven steps of Colaizzi's Method of data analysis as suggested by Wirihana et al. (2018). The method guarantees the accuracy and dependability of the findings. First, the researchers read the transcript to understand and be familiarized with the interview; second, found and extracted sentences from the transcript that relate to menopausal stigma; third, formulated meaning(s); fourth, divided all meanings into categories, theme clusters and themes; fifth, defined all emergent themes in an exhaustive description; sixth, described the basic structure of the focal phenomena; seventh, returned the results of the study to the participants to determine their accuracy.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Experiences of teachers teaching violin students with language barriers include difficulty in communication. This difficulty is broken down into two sub-themes: limited English vocabulary and inflection in words.

Difficulty in Communication

Teachers initially grappled with the difficulty of effectively communicating with students who had language barriers. However, over time, they realized that the perceived difficulty was not as challenging as initially thought.

"Even a single English word, they don't really know. There are so many challenges and hardships I have when I teach them." – R1

"There's a language barrier, and why is it tough? Because when we teach, we have to be specific." - R4

"I'm walking between a fine line from being their friend and their teacher because it's hard, especially with the violin thing or with music in general." - R2

"I have a Chinese student; it's really hard to communicate." - R3

"It's only really hard the first time." - R5

"It's a bit hard to tell stories due to language barriers." – R6

1). Limited English Vocabulary

The first sub-theme presents that communication becomes challenging due to the students' limited vocabulary. A study conducted by Amalia and Anggraeni (2021) highlights that learners face difficulties in utilizing the English language when they lack an adequate vocabulary.

"They have a hard time speaking English. They don't have any knowledge in English." - R1

"I have a Chinese student, and it's really hard to communicate because she can only say one English word at a time." - R3

"I have experienced it once; I had an online Korean student who didn't really know English."-R6

2). Inflection in Words

The second sub-theme explains that changes in the form of words, such as accent or intonation, can alter their meanings, thereby hindering effective communication (Jahara and Abdelrady, 2021).

"Sometimes we have different accents." -R1

"Their tone concept is so different from ours. Like even how they speak, right?"

- R4

"They have different conjugations, and sometimes it's hard to understand."

- R2

The question of how teachers instruct students with language barriers reveals eight key themes: social interaction of teacher-student, teacher-parents, and peer-learning; language exchange; word simplification; demonstration, imitation, and repetition; tactile instruction; instruction through singing and movement; use of a translator; use of teaching tools and games.

Teacher-Student Interaction

Building strong connections with students, cultivating friendly relationships, and creating a welcoming atmosphere have been widely recognized as essential components of effective teaching (Pianta, 1999).

Teacher-Parent Interaction

Engaging with parents is a crucial aspect of creating a supportive learning environment. Early childhood authorities (Gollopini, B., & Baruti-Sylejmani, M., 2025, Berger, 2015; Honig, 1979) emphasize that the happiest and most successful teachers are those who regard parents as partners and friends in the educational journey of their children. This perspective aligns with the concept of teacher-parent partnerships, as discussed by Jeffrey I. Gelfer (1991).

Peer Learning

Incorporating group lessons as a strategy for peer learning is supported by collaborative learning literature. Johnson and Johnson (1999) argue that cooperative learning structures, such as group lessons, foster positive interdependence among students, enhancing their ability to learn not only from the teacher but also from their peers.

"The good thing with their environment is they can help each other." - R1

"I always talk to the mom... and I've explained to them that because she has to know my vocabulary in teaching or my teaching language." - R2

"You have to connect with your students." - R2

"When you make eye contact, you have their attention." - R3

"Sometimes I also become a comedian in front of them. I also need to incorporate elements of drama to catch their attention." - R5

"I'm extra understanding with them. I really make friends with them, making them comfortable during lessons." - R6

"From three years old until about seven, parents should be present. It is with them that I really talk." - R6

Language Exchange

As highlighted by Ahn (2011), this method involves educators actively shaping interactions to create opportunities for language learning. Teachers learn fundamental words in the native language of their students, such as "down," "up," "whole note," "quarter note," and basic numbers, to enhance communication during violin lessons. Simultaneously, teachers take on the role of instructing their foreign students in English vocabulary, fostering a two-way language exchange.

"I ask my other students to teach me their words. So that when they speak or try to explain, I can understand a little." - R2

"Over the years, I've been trying to learn their words—Korean words." - R3

"I would write it down and exchange; I provide them with the English words, and they, in turn, give me the Korean words." - R5

Word Simplification

Rather than using continuous and complex English, teachers streamline their speech by employing concise and simplified language. Word simplification, as demonstrated by studies such as those conducted by Alva-Manchego et al. (2020) and Crossley et al. (2011), aims to enhance the comprehension of foreign students by delivering information in a clear, concise, and accessible manner.

"I had to chop my words and present or display more, rather than just keep on talking and talking." - R2

"You have to simplify the language." - R3

"I'm using as simple words as possible." - R5

"I would explain to the kids using as few and simple words." - R6

"The sentences should be simplified; I think that as one of the strategies, simplify the sentences." - R6

Demonstration, imitation, and repetition

The teachers demonstrate the desired action, illustrating techniques such as playing staccato on the violin or adjusting bow weight for variations in volume and speed. Supporting this pedagogical approach, Seyhan Bulut in the article "Value of Demonstration in an Instrumental Course" (2012) underscores the importance of demonstration in instrumental education. Research by Simones, Rodger, and Schroeder (2017) indicated that students submitted to interleaved observation demonstrated greater proficiency in the learned task.

"I think demonstration is one of the most perfect strategies for them to understand because they can see you and then they'll copy. We tend to copy what we hear."
- R1

"If they cannot understand me, they'll copy what I demonstrate. So more on imitation." - R4

"If they cannot understand, you really have to demonstrate." - R2

"You demonstrate, they copy, and then repetition, just like the Suzuki method." - R3

"Faced with a language barrier, singing comes into play, along with demonstration, and they'll copy me." – R6

Tactile Instruction

As noted by Harrison (2008), touch is considered an essential instructional tool by many instrumental music teachers. This method involves teachers physically guiding the student's hands, elbow, shoulder, and fingers, providing direct and kinesthetic experience of the playing technique.

"If they cannot understand me, I'll make sure to do it visually, or I'll hold their hands." - R1

"I touch them so they can understand." - R2

"Let them physically know the weight of their arm or let them feel it." - R3

Instruction through singing and moving

This immersive strategy, as highlighted by Kilpatrick (2020), integrates elements such as singing, gestures, dance, and occasionally exaggerated movements to effectively address language difficulties.

"I can just sing the notes." - R4

"Chop the words...and also incorporate singing." - R2

"Sometimes I make them dance." - R3

"Since I don't speak Korean, the singing comes in." - R6

"I use my hand gestures." - R6

Use of a translator

As highlighted by Kane (2020), when faced with language barriers, teachers facilitate communication by encouraging students to write down English words, which are then translated using applications on their devices, such as Google Translate, or by asking family members, such as parents or friends, to act as translators during the lesson. Aligning with the findings of Good, Masewicz, and Vogel (2010), who emphasize the significance of parental involvement as a key asset for student success.

"I have my personal translator. They come to our house to assist our students." - R1

"I used Google Translate because the piece she was using was in Korean." - R4

"It's very helpful to have a translator." - R4

"In rare cases, I do have a translator, but that's very rare." - R2

"Sometimes we still use a translator. We have a teaching partner or someone who understands English with us to help with translation." - R3

"There's a mom or someone else who translates. If they can't understand well, there must be a translator available." – R5

Teaching tools and gamification

To impart essential techniques, teachers utilize tools such as tapes, wooden clips, sponges, springs, and pencils, providing tangible cues for proper bow and violin positioning, bow hair usage, and finger placement. These tools serve as visual and tactile aids, offering clear guidance despite language differences. In Ismaizam et al.'s (2022) findings, teachers turn music concepts and techniques into interactive games. This approach not only facilitates a more engaging and enjoyable learning experience but also effectively imparts musical knowledge while overcoming language challenges.

"I will devise a game for them that will force them to play properly." - R1

"I use more practical tools like tapes." - R1

"I thought I really had to use tapes for the bow." - R4

"I bring toys for them. If they want the proper technique to form, like proper muscle movement, I use springs." – R4

"I put stickers on their bow and thumb to help them feel where to place it. Sometimes, I also use tapes." - R3

"As for tools and markings, I use the usual ones, including the same tapes." – R6

V. CONCLUSION

The primary theme that emerged from the teachers' experiences was the difficulty in communication. Within this theme, two sub-themes were identified: limited English vocabulary and inflection in words. Teachers highlighted the challenges posed by students' limited vocabulary and differences in word inflections, impacting effective communication during violin instruction. This underscores the impact of language limitations on effective communication, reinforcing Vygotsky's perspective on the importance of language in the learning process.

Teachers teach violin to students with language barriers using social interaction of teacher-student, teacher-parents, and peer-learning, language exchange, word simplification, demonstration, imitation, and repetition, tactile instruction, instruction through singing and movement, use of a translator, and use of teaching tools and games. The identified strategies employed by teachers to overcome language barriers also find support in the theoretical framework. For instance, the emphasis on "Social Interaction of Teacher-Student, Teacher-Parents, and Peer Learning" aligns seamlessly with Vygotsky's view that meaningful relationships enhance learning outcomes. Likewise, the strategy of "language exchange" reflects the sociocultural aspect of learning, emphasizing the reciprocal nature of language development.

To the violin teachers, it is greatly beneficial to be knowledgeable about various teaching techniques that can be used to teach students with language barriers. This opens an opportunity to teach cross-culturally. To the music teachers, although this study is focused on violin, it can be worthwhile to investigate these and possibly apply them in other areas of music education as well. Parental support and a good parent-teacher relationship have been shown to be crucial in many ways. Recognize the challenges faced by the student, and fostering an encouraging attitude may be helpful in the learning journey. Encourage further exploration of language barriers in diverse educational contexts, including students with disabilities. Highlight the potential impact of the study on enhancing effective teaching for students with special needs and propose specific areas within language barriers for future investigation.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Each researcher played a vital role in the research and writing process. Each author has helped not only in one chapter, but in all sections of each chapter's content. The adviser and other research consultants have helped validate interview questions and made sure that the researchers have followed the design and process to reach the trustworthiness of the study.

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