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CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION MUSIC FACULTY
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by

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ABSTRACT

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the risks of singing or playing instruments were identified as an obstacle concerning face-to-face instruction in university performing arts departments because of the respiratory droplets expelled while performing (Spahn & Richter, 2020). This study investigated the instructional and pedagogical challenges that music faculty at nine colleges within the University of Louisiana System encountered because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Using qualitative phenomenological research and individual interviews with faculty members, this study sought to identify challenges specific to music teachers in higher education and the ways in which they adapted to these obstacles. The results of this study revealed that online music lessons and virtual ensembles were implemented and proved to be successful to some degree, but music faculty asserted that these adaptations were inferior to the traditional collaboration characterized by in person vocal and instrumental lessons as well as instrumental and vocal ensembles (McCoy, 2020; Naunheim et al., 2020). Although all educators encountered challenges during the pandemic, the primary focus of this research was on the challenges that were unique to music faculty in higher education and the innovations that resulted from their experiences. This study provides insight into the unique instructional technique of music faculty as well as best practices used during the pandemic. As such, it is of particular interest to all higher education music faculty and performing arts administrators as to the benefits and disadvantages of online music instruction and should provide guidance in the assessment of online music classes and the implementation of online degree programs.

Keywords: COVID-19, challenges, music faculty, adaptations, music lessons, online

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my husband who encouraged me to begin this journey and supported me in numerous ways throughout the process. You have encouraged me even when I felt like giving up and inspired me to continue to press on. I will always be grateful for your sacrifice and loving support during this journey.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

The first cases of Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) were reported in China in December 2019 and shortly after spread worldwide (Jayaweera et al., 2020). Research is still ongoing, but there is evidence that COVID-19 spreads from person to person through expelled respiratory droplets (Almaghasla et al., 2020). Additionally, studies have indicated that these respiratory droplets travel further during more vigorous exhalation such as sneezing, coughing, and loud talking (Asadi et al., 2019). Emerging research has also found that normal speech may yield large quantities of aerosols that are not visible to the naked eye, but can carry respiratory pathogens (Asadi et al., 2019). However, there are contrasting opinions over how much of the COVID-19 virus is transmitted by these smaller particles or aerosols (Guo, et al., 2020). There is also controversy over how far aerosols travel, but most experts agree that aerosols and droplets can travel as far 2 meters (Abkarian, 2020; Asadi et al., 2019). Based on these findings, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have offered direction regarding preventative measures (CDC, 2020a, WHO, 2020) and studies confirm that these preventative measures have been effective in slowing the spread of the virus (Guo et. al, 2020).

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, researchers have tried to quantify the data associated with activities that are suspected to cause a greater risk of transmission (Frieden & Lee, 2020). Risk assessment and prevention regarding musicians are of specific concern as singing and playing of some instruments is suspected to produce large quantities of droplets and aerosols. However, experts assert this assumption is not conclusive as there are still several factors to be accounted for that may contribute to the transmission of the virus (Public Health Ontario [PHO], 2020). When considering that the CDC has affirmed that large indoor gatherings pose

the highest risk of spreading the virus (CDC, 2020b), it should be noted that musicians involved in large ensembles such as orchestras, bands, and choirs have been admonished to reorganize the structure of those groups (Spahn & Richter, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

During the COVID 19 Pandemic, the risks of singing or playing instruments were identified as an obstacle concerning face-to-face instruction in university performing arts departments because of the respiratory droplets expelled while performing (Spahn & Richter, 2020). Additionally, the reorganization of traditional teaching methods was also a challenge. Online teaching was implemented to reduce the threat of transmission for teachers and students. However, this format also created barriers among those in this field. Although college music faculty have considerable experience with online teaching and the use of technology to enhance teaching, other music faculty indicated that these teaching modalities were unfamiliar and difficult to navigate (Daubney, & Fautley, 2020).

Synchronous music lessons and virtual ensembles were implemented and proved to be successful to some degree, but music faculty asserted that these adaptations were inferior to the traditional collaboration characterized by in person vocal and instrumental lessons as well as instrumental and vocal ensembles (McCoy, 2020; Naunheim et al., 2020). Although all educators encountered challenges during the pandemic, the primary focus of this research was on the challenges that were unique to music faculty in higher education and the innovations that resulted from their experiences.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges that music faculty at colleges within the University of Louisiana System encountered because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, this research further explored their experiences adapting teaching methods to meet those challenges.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What were the perceptions of music faculty within the University of Louisiana System concerning the challenges of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did music faculty within the University of Louisiana System adapt their teaching methods to meet the challenges of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What were the experiences of music faculty within the University of Louisiana System concerning the use of adaptive teaching methods during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Significance

A phenomenological study of the experiences of music faculty among nine universities in the University of Louisiana System documented the challenges that were faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This information provided guidance in preparing educators for similar challenges in the future by studying the pedagogical methods and technological tools used during the transition from traditional methods of teaching to online modalities. Additionally, the examination of the experiences during the pandemic provided information about best practices employed by music faculty for online teaching and how these tools can be used beyond the pandemic which can also be applied across disciplines.

Assumptions

This study was guided by several premises that were assumed to hold true when the study

first took place. It is accepted that the participants will be able to recall their experiences during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and that music faculty faced challenges during the pandemic because of the transition to online teaching. Additionally, this transition is presumed to have presented barriers to traditional pedagogical approaches unique to music faculty. The argument is that music faculty also faced barriers transitioning traditional teaching methods to online teaching and that those obstacles navigated the development of new pedagogical approaches.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations of this study can be defined as the specific population included in the study. While experiences are common among higher education faculty, the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of music faculty. The population for this study comprised music faculty among nine colleges within the University of Louisiana System.

The limitations of the study are those approaches that point to a need for further examination. While the participants included music faculty of all disciplines, vocal and instrumental, the percentage of responses was limited by the fact that there were no responses from faculty in the instrumental percussion discipline. In addition, while invitations to participate in this research were sent to music faculty within all nine University of Louisiana System, four of the nine universities participated in this research. While this study focused on a specific population, further research is needed to explore the experiences of students and administration. Additionally, this study was limited to those faculty in higher education. Further analysis of experiences of faculty, student, and administrators throughout all educational structures is warranted.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were first felt by music faculty in higher

education in March of 2020 with the closure of schools and the transition to online teaching; therefore, the responses to this study were limited by the ability of participants to accurately recall their experiences. The participants' responses at the time of the study may also have been influenced by the ability to adapt to the pandemic after a year.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of music faculty among nine colleges within the University of Louisiana System during the COVID-19 pandemic. This project also explored the challenges of music faculty and the ways in which they adapted to these challenges. The intended significance of the study is reflected in the research that points to potential risks of transmission of the virus for those who sing and play instruments as well as for those who teach music. Limitations of this study are that the intention was to examine a specific group in higher education. However, the implications can be applied to music faculty throughout the United States and abroad.

The following sections of this capstone will highlight the contemporary literature from this research area. These findings will illustrate how the research will guide future pedagogical innovations and advance the knowledge of music faculty concerning best practices for online instruction and the design of new pedagogical methods of instruction. These findings will guide music faculty as well as faculty across all disciplines of higher education.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Nearly a year after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no definitive evidence that singing or playing of instruments increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Still, the collaborative nature of applied lessons and performance ensembles did pose significant challenges for musicians and music educators during a pandemic (Public Health Ontario [PHO], 2020); Spahn & Richter, 2020). However, past research concerning the transmission of respiratory viruses, coupled with the knowledge and instincts of educators in the field, required that music programs move forward with plans to provide a safe and educationally fulfilling environment for their students (Naunheim et al., 2020; Spahn & Richter, 2020). The literature established ongoing research concerning the differentiation of aerosols and droplet production among various types of instruments and the perceived level of risk (He, et al. 2021; Spahn & Richter, 2020). Specific challenges related to online teaching platforms were also identified (McCoy, 2020).

COVID-19

The World Health Organization reported that over 9 million people in the United States have contracted COVID-19 and over 46 million worldwide (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). This disease, caused by the coronavirus, attacks the respiratory system which may lead to complete respiratory failure in adults over 60 and those individuals with compromised immune systems (Almaghaslah et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). Although older adults and immune-compromised persons are the most vulnerable, COVID-19 can be contracted by individuals in all age brackets (WHO, 2020) and is easily transmittable from person to person.

The coronavirus, which causes COVID-19, is transmitted through respiratory droplets that are commonly spread among those that are within approximately six feet of each other. The

transmission can happen when infected persons expel respiratory droplets which a person in close contact inhales through the mouth and nose (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2020a; WHO, 2020). The droplets of saliva can be passed from person to person during common activities such as speaking, singing, coughing, or sneezing particularly in spaces with inadequate ventilation (Asadi et al., 2019; CDC, 2020a). According to the Centers for Disease Control, a person may also contract COVID-19 by touching a surface or object with the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes; however, experts do not believe this is the primary way the virus spreads (CDC, 2020a; WHO, 2020).

Challenges for Educational Structures

The long-term effects of COVID-19 have not been fully realized and a vaccine was not yet readily available to all persons; therefore, early detection, treatment, and prevention were the recommendations (Almaghaslah et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). COVID-19 has had a global impact on health organizations, economic structures, and educational systems (Almaghaslah et al., 2020; Kamili-Chirani & Khalid, 2020; Viner et al., 2020). These systems have adapted and continue to adapt to face the challenges that COVID-19 has presented.

“Education is one of the strongest predictors of the health and wealth of a country’s future workers....” (Viner et al., 2020, p. 12.). Not since the Spanish Flu of 1918 has there been such a massive closure of schools in response to a pandemic (Morgan, 2020). On March 18, 2020, one hundred and seven countries implemented school closures to slow the spread of the coronavirus (Viner et al., 2020). While this response was appropriate, it called into question the impact long-term school closures would have on educational systems (Morgan, 2020; Viner et al., 2020). To minimize the setbacks that school closures would have on students, many academic institutions switched to online learning formats (Dhawan, 2020; Morgan, 2020)

including colleges and universities that had previously resisted distance education modalities (Dhawan, 2020).

Online Education

Online education provides many advantages including increased access to learning at a decreased cost compared to traditional education (Finkle & Masters, 2020; Vlachopoulos, 2020). The first online courses were launched in 1984 and the first fully online college was founded in 1993. Since that time, colleges and universities have increasingly adopted various modalities to address the needs of a diverse student population and as technology has steadily increased so have various methods of remote learning (Finkle & Masters, 2014). Before 2000, online content was delivered in an asynchronous format which allowed instructors to upload prerecorded content which could be viewed later. With technological advances, online education became more interactive with the delivery of content in synchronous lectures and forums. Interest in online learning has grown to the point that in 2018, 14% of college students were enrolled in online courses exclusively while 34% were enrolled in at least one online course (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). While the pandemic has increased the demand for online education, it is unclear if decision-makers in education have the resources to meet this demand (Vlachopoulos, 2020). The long-term implications of this demand have not been realized as online education has now become a necessity, not just an educational alternative (Dhawan, 2020).

Challenges for Higher Education Faculty

Even with the increased interest in distance education and technological advances, the transition to online learning formats during COVID-19 was challenging for traditional institutions of higher education (Dhawan, 2020). Technology made the transition to online

learning possible, but many schools faced a deficiency in infrastructure and resources needed to support a fully online program (Dhawan, 2020; Vlachopoulos, 2020).

Many instructors in higher education lacked the training to keep up with technological advances to properly deliver course content in an online format whether asynchronous or synchronous (Daubey & Fautley, 2020; Gorgoretti, 2019; Vlachopoulos, 2020). Studies revealed that faculty desired training in technology and other modalities to enhance their teaching and were often motivated by students' learning needs (Baran, 2011; Shingledecker, 2017). However, a 2010 survey reported that 19% of higher education institutions did not provide training for online teaching (Allen et al., 2010).

It was reported the percentage of higher education faculty who had previously taught at least one online course increased from 39% in 2016 to 46% in 2019 (NCES, 2020). While technological advancements have enhanced teaching and provided faculty with new pedagogical techniques (Shingledecker, 2017), many of those approaches were vastly different from face-to-face teaching methods. Therefore, higher education faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic were still reluctant to change their style of teaching and preferred face-to-face instruction over online teaching (Dhawan, 2020).

Challenges for Music Faculty

The COVID-19 pandemic created unique challenges for higher education music faculty. Compared to their colleagues in higher education, many music faculty had some experience with online teaching, but still preferred traditional methods (McCoy, 2020). Advances in music technology have been integrated into music education classrooms for more than a decade which encouraged music faculty to become more innovative and creative in their teaching (Gorgoretti, 2019). Still, the lack of training for teaching staff was a challenge, and training that existed did

not keep up with the advances in technology (Daubney & Fautley, 2020; Gorgoretti, 2019). Additionally, many students lacked the resources, such as a personally owned instrument or laptop, to continue their music education online (Daubney & Fautley, 2020).

National music organizations gathered to analyze data from medical experts and offer recommendations for music educators (Bumgarner, 2020). These recommendations offered guidelines for the virtual delivery of instrumental and vocal lessons as well as the creation and production of virtual instrumental and vocal ensembles (Galván & Clauhs, 2020). Although there were many success stories, there were also obstacles and faculty struggled to find the most effective learning environment for their music students (He, et al., 2021; McCoy, 2020). Still, faculty and students reported a sense of achievement and satisfaction in being able to continue making music using video conferencing tools (Daubney & Fautley, 2020; McCoy, 2020). For musicians, collaboration during rehearsals and the sharing of ideas has been an important part of the musical experience. Yet, these traditional face-to-face collaborative experiences were not possible and caused uncertainty for what the future held for musicians and teachers of music (Galvan & Clauhs, 2020; Garrett, 2020).

The online technology available at the onset of the pandemic was not yet sophisticated enough to allow instructors and students to collaborate in an online synchronous platform without dealing with latency issues (Garrett, 2020; McCoy, 2020). Zoom was a very popular platform for many music instructors during this time, but in addition to issues with latency or lagging, the typical online meeting between teacher and student was filled with the audio cutting out due to highs and lows in frequency. The audio in many of these video conferencing platforms could not handle the extremes in frequencies produced by experienced singers as well as the sound produced by instruments (McCoy, 2020). The use of virtual ensembles was a creative

method used to continue to perform, but this layering of instruments and/or voices was a tedious task and required a great deal of skill in producing a precise recording with perfectly layered tracks (Galván & Clauhs, 2020; Garrett, 2020). While many were successful and delivered a product that was gratifying to the audience, this virtual creation could not match the satisfaction of collaboration that musicians, instructors, and conductors desired (McCoy, 2020; Garrett, 2020).

The Centers for Disease Control's recommendations for institutions of higher education maintained that the virtual online learning environment presented the lowest risk of contracting the virus. While Hybrid learning environments presented *some* risk, the CDC suggested that fully in-person classes held in larger spaces although employing safety protocols still presented a greater risk than fully online or hybrid learning (CDC, 2020b). While educational administrators were discussing ways to reopen schools, college music programs were trying to address the specific challenges that music faculty and students would encounter in attempting to teach their discipline face-to-face. Because much was still unknown about the transmission of aerosols during musical activities, such as the playing of wind instruments or singing, there were concerns about reopening schools of music for in-person classes (He, et al., 2021).

Studies have suggested that the magnitude of aerosols produced varied from instrument to instrument (He, et al. 2021). Experienced wind players allow minimal air to escape from the mouth and players of reed instruments had a disruption of excessive airflow because of the reed in the mouthpiece (Spahn & Richter, 2020). The size of the instrument, dynamic changes, articulation, and breathing techniques also contributed to the number of aerosols released and how far they traveled (He, et al., 2021). However, playing the flute had a higher production of droplets because of the position of the mouthpiece and the player's mouth which blows over the

mouthpiece and into the environment. Even so, with social distancing protocols in place, it was asserted that transmission by droplets from distances of 6 ½ feet was improbable (Spahn & Richter, 2020).

Some national music organizations suggested that there was not an environment that proved safe for singers; however, the research did not support such a conclusive statement (Naunheim et al., 2020). When considering phonation (singing or speaking), experts made a distinction between respiratory droplets and aerosols. Droplets are heavier and can quickly fall to the ground while aerosols are lighter and, with louder production, can travel further (Asadi et al., 2019; Sjoerdsma, 2020). Additionally, research indicated that, unlike droplets, aerosols build with increased volume of speaking or singing (Asadi et al., 2019). There is still no definitive research regarding how far aerosols travel or how long they stay suspended in the environment (Spahn & Richter, 2020).

According to research, other instrumentalists such as keyboard players, string players, and percussionists did not present an increased risk of playing their instruments other than the common risk factors associated with gathering in large groups for common social situations (Spahn & Richter, 2020). Experts agreed that risks among these groups could be lowered by decreasing the size of the ensemble group; however, enhancement of ventilation in indoor rehearsal spaces was also suggested as a preventative measure (He, et al., 2021). Pianists and organists were admonished to reduce the risk of contact transfer by thoroughly washing hands and disinfecting instruments that were used by multiple players. This was true for the sharing of instruments among string players and percussionists as well (Spahn & Richter, 2020).

The challenge to balance the increased risk factors for musicians against the desire to return to traditional performing required teachers and conductors of higher education music

programs to gather advice and guidance concerning the return to campus (Satalof et al., 2020).

The research was still ongoing; therefore, experts agreed that a return to college music programs should be balanced with risk management strategies (Naunheim et al., 2020; Satalof et al., 2020; Spahn & Richter, 2020).

The efficacy of risk management and preventions was unknown, but experts agreed the transmission could be reduced with specific guidelines in place (Naunheim et al., 2020; Spahn & Richter, 2020). These preventative measures included using outdoor rehearsal space whenever possible, specialized face masks for singers and instrumentalists, reducing the size of rehearsal groups, and shorter rehearsal times (Naunheim et al., 2020). Participant pre-screening for symptoms and temperature checks before entering a rehearsal space was also suggested to decrease the risk of transmission within ensemble groups (Spahn & Richter, 2020). To reduce the risk of the spread of aerosols in applied lessons, some faculty used plexiglass shields which provided a barrier between the student and instructor in a small teaching space. However, experts agreed that future studies are needed to examine exactly how much protection these types of shields and even masks can provide in this teaching environment (Naunheim et al., 2020). Experts asserted that instructors and students should continue to have lessons digitally if preventative measures were not in place or participants belonged to an at-risk group (Spahn & Richter, 2020).

Summary

The onset of COVID-19 forced higher education institutions to transition to online education to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Although online learning was not a new concept many traditional campuses were not prepared as the infrastructure did support the full implementation of an online learning environment. In addition, some faculty did not have the

technical training to keep up with the task presented by online teaching platforms. Faculty in higher education music programs faced the challenge of transitioning to online teaching. However, they faced additional obstacles as aerosols produced by singing and the playing of wind instruments presented a possibly greater risk for the transition of the coronavirus (He et al., 2021; McCoy, 2020). Additionally, online teaching did not meet the pedagogical standard required for applied lessons and ensembles; therefore, music faculty had to adapt and innovate to create a suitable learning environment for college music students. Although these changes produced challenges for music faculty and music students, higher education music faculty confronted these obstacles and discovered new and innovative teaching methods (Alam, 2020; Gorgoretti, 2020).

CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of music faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the objective was to explore music faculty practices in adapting pedagogical methods to meet the challenges faced during the pandemic. The setting for this study was the music faculty from nine institutions within the University of Louisiana System.

The researcher developed an interview guide and gathered data through interviews conducted through Zoom. The data were collected and analyzed for themes that identified specific obstacles that music faculty faced because of protocols implemented during the pandemic. Additionally, the data were used to explore how those obstacles affected participants' teaching methods. In addition, the interview guide allowed participants to reveal the best practices they learned for teaching music through online platforms and new teaching tools developed to adapt to the challenges they faced. The following sections specify the research questions, research design, participants, instrumentation, and procedures utilized to complete this study.

Research Questions

The interview guide was created by the researcher and aimed at collecting responses to address the following research questions:

1. What were the perceptions of music faculty within the University of Louisiana System concerning the challenges of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did music faculty within the University of Louisiana System adapt their teaching methods to meet the challenges of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What were the experiences of music faculty within the University of Louisiana

System concerning the use of adaptive teaching methods during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Design

This phenomenological study was designed to document the experiences of a specific group of music faculty within the University of Louisiana System during the COVID-19 pandemic. Phenomenology can be defined as the shared experiences of a specific group of people who experienced a similar event (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative approach was used to document these experiences by conducting online interviews. The researcher chose the qualitative approach for collecting data to not only explore participants' shared experiences, but to gather their individual perspectives concerning this shared experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher sought to collect the most thorough information by allowing participants to recall experiences from the onset of the pandemic in March 2019 through the time of their participation in the interview. The purpose was to identify challenges specific to music teachers in higher education and the ways in which they adapted to these obstacles. However, the overarching goal of this research was to provide guidance and best practices for adapting pedagogical methods for teaching music during a pandemic.

Setting, Population, and Participants

The setting for this study was The University of Louisiana System which is made up of nine public institutions of higher education within the state of Louisiana. These nine institutions consist of a diverse group of schools which include Grambling State University, Louisiana Tech University, McNeese State University, Nichols State University, Northwestern State University, Southeastern Louisiana University, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, University of Louisiana at Monroe, and the University of New Orleans. The University of Louisiana System is the largest

education system in the state with a current enrollment throughout the nine institutions of more than 91,500 students. The goal of the UL system is to provide quality public higher education to the residents of the State of Louisiana.

Music faculty within these nine public institutions comprised the population for this phenomenological study. The researcher recruited a maximum of 30 participants from this population. Participation in this study was voluntary and open to all music faculty teaching within the UL system.

Instrument and Data Collection

The researcher created the interview guide to obtain information concerning experiences specific to music faculty. Although the nine public universities within the UL system are diverse, they all offer attending students the opportunity to pursue a music degree. Therefore, the music faculty within these schools had experiences that were common and specific to faculty in that discipline. Additionally, decisions and policies made by the UL system during the pandemic affected all nine institutions. The interview guide was created to obtain insight into their specific teaching experiences from the onset of the pandemic until the time of their participation in the interview. The interview guide consisted of 11 questions that were created to elicit discussion concerning the comparison of teaching methods before, during, and after the pandemic. The questions also encouraged participants to discuss their experiences teaching online and their prior knowledge of online teaching platforms before the pandemic including the challenges they experienced. Additionally, the interview questions prompted discussion concerning lessons learned and best practices beyond the pandemic.

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), the researcher contacted the music department heads within the nine universities via email and

requested that they forward the invitation to the music faculty within their department. Emails of music faculty members and department heads were publicly available through links on the UL system website as well as on the website for each of the nine universities. Participants were asked to agree to a consent form which was attached to the email invitation. Interviews were conducted during the fall 2021 semester from September 30, 2021, until November 1, 2021.

The researcher conducted interviews through Zoom. Each invited participant made the choice to participate in either one interview, one focus group, or both. Each interview lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. All interviews were individual and were audio recorded. To protect the participant's identity, all names of participants and other persons mentioned in interviews and focus groups were pseudonymized in the transcripts.

Data Analysis

Data was collected from interviews with eighteen participants using eleven open-ended questions created by the researcher to address the three research questions. Each private interview was conducted through zoom and audio recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Word online. Each transcript was analyzed and coded manually for common themes. Each theme was categorized according to the research question addressed as well as the regularity of similar responses.

Summary

The method of research for this study was guided by a phenomenological examination of experiences of music faculty within nine public universities within the University of Louisiana System. This qualitative approach used a questionnaire created by the researcher for the purpose of analyzing experiences that were recalled by the participants from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic up until the time of their participation in the study. The participants for this study were

limited to music faculty within these nine UL system institutions; however, the findings and implications presented in the remaining chapters of this study can be applied to pedagogical practices of other music faculty in higher education.

CHAPTER IV – FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of music faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher developed an interview guide and obtained data through interviews conducted over Zoom. The data were analyzed for common themes that addressed the perceptions of music faculty regarding the challenges faced during the pandemic, how they adapted to those challenges, and their perceptions of those adaptive teaching methods. It is the hope that the findings obtained in this study will provide guidance in preparing educators for similar challenges in the future by studying the pedagogical methods and technological tools used during the transition from traditional methods of teaching to online modalities. Additionally, the examination of the experiences during the pandemic will provide information about best practices employed by music faculty for online teaching and how these tools can be used beyond the pandemic.

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from interviews with 18 music faculty teaching within institutions in the University of Louisiana System during the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges they faced as well as the ways they adapted. The interview participants who volunteered for this study represented the following schools within the UL System: McNeese State University, Northwestern State University, Louisiana Tech University, and Grambling University. The participants from those four universities represented a number of music disciplines at the undergraduate and graduate levels including applied studies in Euphonium, Trombone, Trumpet, Tuba, Clarinet, Flute, Oboe, Saxophone, Piano, Voice, Violin, Viola, and Cello. Participants also reported having taught Music Theory, Aural Skills, Conducting, Music Appreciation, Music Technology, instrumental and vocal methods courses, and a variety of vocal and instrumental ensembles.

Thematic Findings

The results of this study revealed the following themes in connection to faculty perspectives on the challenges of teaching, adaptations of teaching methods, and experiences adapting during the COVID-19 pandemic (1) transition to online teaching and mental health (2) faculty experience with online platforms and availability of equipment (3) compatibility with online formats for the delivery of synchronous music content (4) guidance and protocols during the return to campus (5) outcomes as a result of teaching during a pandemic.

Transition to Online Teaching and Mental Health

When asked about the transition to online teaching at the onset of the pandemic, the participants were unanimous in the view that it was a difficult adjustment. It was suggested that faculty and students struggled with mental health issues. One interviewee suggested that “faculty became counselors, but we were all struggling with our own mental health” (Participant #2). This view was echoed by other faculty members who mentioned that both faculty and students were frustrated and scared of not only the virus, but of not knowing what the future held. Additionally, one interviewee suggested that the lack of in-person interaction took a toll on mental health. To adapt, some faculty recounted adding a mental health component to their teaching. One interviewee suggested that students needed some time each week to talk and think about what they had been experiencing or were feeling due to the pandemic. Two other participants created weekly videos to keep students encouraged and engaged. Another participant suggested that they “kept the assignments high so their [students’] minds were on task instead of on the problem” (Participant #12).

The transition to online teaching also created uncertainty and doubt concerning teaching a discipline that involves physicality in a virtual setting. One interviewee suggested that it was

difficult to adapt to teaching something that is “very physical in a non-physical way” (Participant #8). Others reported figuring out ways to deliver educational content through formats unfamiliar to both teacher and student as problematic. The participants overall echoed the sentiment of one interviewee who reported “the difficulty was making the mental change that I needed to make this transition” (Participant #12).

Faculty’s Prior Experience with Online Platforms and Availability of Equipment

Participants overall described having very little experience teaching music courses online prior to COVID-19. A small number of the interviewees had rarely used online resources at all. Additionally, several participants suggested that trainings offered through the University of Louisiana System and through their own university IT departments were helpful for management of asynchronous online teaching but were rarely applicable to music disciplines. When asked about prior teaching experience with online platforms, one interviewee stated “I mean I’ve never taught an online class (before COVID-19). I’m not a big fan of it honestly” (Participant #7). The majority of the interviewees agreed that learning to teach applied lessons in a virtual format was primarily through trial and error. Others also mentioned getting advice from other colleagues concerning best practices through social media platforms or YouTube videos. “I had never taught online. So, I had to learn and adjust pretty quickly, but it was good because I had some really great colleagues to bounce some ideas around with” (Participant #16). One participant reported taking advantage of webinars offered by professional music organizations. A small number of those interviewed reported having experience with technology, especially in the area of sound and video; however, they had not used that technology to the degree that was required during the pandemic.

The majority of the participants reported having the equipment in place to teach online. A small number of respondents recalled upgrading their internet connection at home and others bought external microphones and cameras to increase the sound and video quality for students. The interviewees unanimously suggested that students did not have sufficient internet access or were not using the right equipment to connect. One participant stated that “some students had better Wi-Fi than others during this time. Most everybody got their Wi-Fi improved and their connectivity improved and became certainly a lot more savvy at these things but there were still limitations” (Participant 11). Another participant suggested that “I think that’s probably the biggest problem with it is having good equipment on the student side” (Participant #16). Other faculty reported that some students did not have their own instruments or keyboards to continue musical studies off campus. One interviewee recalled “We had to scramble to get laptops and audio equipment” (Participant #7). However, a few respondents indicated that students were able to borrow or check out equipment such as laptops, instruments, and keyboards through the university library or their music department. One participant recalled “We didn’t have problems having students get digital keyboards, not necessarily anything fancy” (Participant #9). Another interviewee mentioned that students primarily used their phones to join online lessons or classes, “so mainly they were using their phones, so no, they didn’t have the best setups, but after trial and error we found the best thing that worked” (Participant #10).

Compatibility with Online Formats for the Delivery of Synchronous Music Content

The transition to online teaching for music disciplines was problematic not only because as one interviewee suggested “the kind of teaching that musicians do requires responses to subtle difference in playing and sound, body language...” (Participant #5). In all cases, the interviewees reported that problems with sound in online platforms was the biggest challenge to overcome. In

all cases, the participants identified problems with sound regardless of the platform. Even with the most effective program and stronger bandwidth, the majority of the faculty reported issues with sound lagging. These delays in sound and video prevented real time collaboration between teacher and student as is typical in most applied lessons. Faculty shared that addressing problems while the student played or sang was no longer possible because of these delays. One participant argued that “in the teaching process you’re reading body language and with Zoom, even at the highest qualities, you still lose a lot of that information because of time delays” (Participant #4). For most interviewees, demonstrating during the lesson or class was replaced with more descriptive explanations. One participant echoed this sentiment and reported the use of more “graphs and diagrams to explain concepts” that had been previously demonstrated. Others sent pre-recorded videos demonstrating specific concepts that would have previously been done in real time in response to a student's performance in the lesson or class. Because of this, the majority of the respondents mentioned that the delivery of education material slowed down. One participant echoed this sentiment by describing the process as

But it felt like slowing down to me because I would have to have them play, let the sound clear for a split second, then talk about it and have them play again whereas the typical lesson we would do a lot of echoing and playing together” (Participant #3).

Another often reported problem was the sound cutting out during high and low frequencies. One participant suggested that the digitizing of sound caused the signal to not only be cut off during high and low frequencies, but on sustained tones as well. Other interviewees also suggested that the quality of the tone was hindered in that the subtle variations in dynamic range could not be heard. One participant stated, “there’s a whole dimension of their sound that’s missing because you hear it transformed through a computer and you can’t really hear the live

quality of the sound” (Participant #11). Another described the quality of tone as “hollow and you couldn’t really detect the beauty of the sound” (Participant # 17).

During the onset of the pandemic the above-mentioned issues were specifically detrimental to the continuation of ensembles. A few ensemble directors suggested that their creative work stopped. Singing and playing online for groups was impossible and although a small number of respondents indicated that they restructured their ensemble meetings to include the viewing of online videos and even the invitation of guest artists through online meetings, students did not respond favorably. One participant reported that “it was frustrating because it was not the experience, they [the students] signed up for” (Participant #1). Two of the participants reported creating a virtual ensemble recording but indicated that this project took weeks to coordinate and assemble to get an acceptable product. Nevertheless, one participant recounted when recalling making a virtual ensemble recording, “we spent countless hours putting it together, but we ended up with something that made kids smile” (Participant #2).

Despite connectivity issues, one faculty reported “we made some adjustments” (Participant #11). A majority of the participants suggested that pre-recording videos of performance video solved the issues with connectivity for private lessons and any other class setting that required live playing or singing. Others reported two virtual platforms, Zoom and WebEx, became more responsive and adapted some functions of the sound settings to allow for less echo reduction. A small number of respondents suggested these adjustments helped a little, but still did not resolve all issues with the sound quality.

Guidance and Protocols during the Return to Campus

In all cases, the participants reported that in the fall of 2020, their music departments reopened for some form of in-person teaching with strict protocols of sanitization, social

distancing, and masks mandates. A small number of faculty shared that their institution purchased some form of air purifier for use in classrooms and private teaching studios. A majority also reported that institutions resumed with multiple options for teaching. The participants overall taught a combination of face-to-face, hybrid, and online courses. In addition, most interviewees revealed that in-person classes sizes were reduced, and larger spaces were provided for large in-person classes.

When asked about experiences concerning the return to campus, respondents indicated that campus administrators were very flexible and allowed faculty and students to choose options for teaching and learning that was comfortable. While a majority of participants reported teaching in a hybrid manner, alternating in-person teaching with online teaching, a small number of faculty recalled that they continued to teach all classes including applied lessons online. Another group took advantage of outdoor spaces to continue in-person classes and applied lessons.

While faculty suggested that online teaching had become more familiar and therefore easier, there were other challenges that were noted during the return to campus. A few interviewees indicated that the wearing of masks for singers and instrumentalists presented a new list of obstacles. Two participants suggested that the wearing of masks hindered vocal production for the singer reporting “It’s like putting a sock over the mouth. They had to adjust how to breathe, how to produce sound, which is very different from the way we normally train our singers (Participant #1). In contrast, others considered the wearing of masks while singing as a positive tool for training the singer on the proper technique for inhalation. One participant recalled turning the requirement of wearing a mask into a benefit by asking students to wear the masks even while practicing alone. This respondent likened this application to a runner who

trains with heavy shoes and when those shoes are removed, the activity becomes suddenly easier, “it will be like the runners....they’re wearing lead shoes [which are] very heavy to practice with, but when you take off those heavy things, then suddenly your legs or feet just become very light and you can run very, very fast” (Participant #15). Some instrumental faculty emphasized that playing with a mask even with a specialized opening for the mouthpiece was problematic because the player’s peripheral vision is hindered by the mask. Others mentioned that students playing while wearing glasses and a mask also faced problems with fogged glasses.

Outcomes as a Result of Teaching During a Pandemic

When asked about their perceptions concerning the effects of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic on their future teaching, the majority participants held the view that the experiences they faced made them a better teacher. One participant suggested that “although it was forced, it was a great pedagogical reset for me” (Participant #3). There was a consensus among faculty that they became more comfortable with technology and the use of technology to support their in-person teaching.

Although connectivity issues were reported as a challenge for online teaching for music disciplines, participants also suggested that students became more responsible for their own education and became more independent learners. Faculty also revealed that students’ musicianship skills increased because pre-recorded videos of themselves gave them instant feedback that they could perfect before sending to the professor.

Three participants reported getting to know their students more and in different ways because they met with them online in their homes. Faculty recalled their students opening up more and sharing struggles with them which made them more empathetic to students. As one of the participants expressed:

I feel like I got to know students differently and a lot better in some ways because I got to see them in their environments. I got to meet their pets, I enjoyed that, and I think it really helped them to feel closer to me as well (Participant #3).

Another participant echoed the sentiment of the respondents by stating that learning to be flexible is very important and that education can continue even under challenging circumstances. The participant added:

I mean there could be more variants, more hurricanes, or worse pandemics, so I know now there is an option, and that gives me a little bit of peace of mind to know that we can continue (Participant #17).

Summary

During the COVID-19 pandemic synchronous music lessons and virtual music ensembles were implemented and proved to be somewhat successful, but music faculty asserted that these adaptations were inferior to the traditional collaboration characterized in-person vocal and instrumental lessons as well as instrumental and vocal ensembles. The challenges included a decline in mental health for both faculty and students as summarized by one interviewee “spring 2020 was possibly the most difficult semester of my whole career and I’m going back to when I started 20 years ago” (Participant #1). The attempt to teach music online was met with additional challenges that included inadequate sound and picture quality because “most of the platforms don’t address what we need as musicians. You don’t get a true sound” (Participant #7). Other challenges expressed were the lack of familiarity with online teaching as well as inadequate resources and equipment available to students.

Faculty adapted to these challenges by adjusting their teaching methods to fit online platforms and later adjusted again to face-to-face teaching under strict protocols. Some of these

adjustments were upgrades in equipment and seeking advice or training concerning the most effective online platforms for music lessons. Many faculty added a mental health component to their teaching plan and implemented innovative ways to remain connected to their students. Overall, music faculty expressed that these experiences made them better teachers and gave them a chance to reexamine their teaching techniques. Additionally, when recalling their experiences during the pandemic, the participants expressed a sense of accomplishment and felt more confident about their ability to face future challenges.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

In March 2020, 107 countries faced school closures (Viner et al., 2020) in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus, a respiratory disease that is highly transmittable among persons in close contact (CDC, 2020a; WHO, 2020). To avoid possible educational gaps caused by school closures, academic institutions transitioned to online learning (Dhawan, 2020; Morgan, 2020). Although online education has steadily increased in popularity since 1984 (Finkle & Master, 2014), the transition to online teaching at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic presented problems for traditional college campuses which were not prepared with the infrastructure and resources to support fully online programs (Dhawa, 2020; Vlachopoulos, 2020). Additionally, students lacked the resources for online instruction (Daubney & Fautley, 2020) and faculty had little experience or training using online teaching platforms (Gorgoretti, 2019; Vlachopoulos, 2020).

The purpose of this research was to examine the experiences of music faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic through a phenomenological study conducted through interviews with 18 music faculty teaching within institutions in the University of Louisiana System. Specifically, the researcher sought to explore the perceptions of the challenges these music faculty faced and the ways they adapted to these challenges during the onset of pandemic in March of 2020 until the time the researcher conducted the interviews in September 2021.

As mentioned in the literature discussed in Chapter II of this study, the findings indicate that music faculty encountered unique challenges because of the personal nature of teaching applied lessons and vocal and instrumental ensembles (He et al., 2021; McCoy, 2020; Spahn & Richter, 2020). The transition to online teaching was particularly difficult for music faculty because although they adapted to online teaching methods, the interviewees expressed that these

methods were inferior to traditional in-person teaching methods. It is interesting to note that most faculty interviewed had never taught online, but felt they adapted quickly, through “trial and error” and through seeking the advice of colleagues in the field who had more experience with technology which pointed directly to the literature (Daubney & Fautley, 2020; Galván & Clauhs, 2020). Even so, the findings pointed to the assumption that regardless of their success, music faculty preferred face-to-face teaching methods. This study also supported the notions of Garrett (2020) and McCoy (2020) that although technology adapted in an effort to meet the demands brought on by online teaching, the interviewees unanimously agreed that even with updated software, online platforms could not duplicate the same experience as in-person teaching because of lagging and drops in the sound due to high and low frequencies.

A significant finding of this study that was not discussed in the literature was the mental health challenge experienced by music faculty during the pandemic. Most of the participants revealed not only their own challenges with mental health, but also the challenges their students faced with being isolated and uncertain of the future. Also significant was that music faculty indicated a motivation to include mental wellness as an aspect of their teaching during the pandemic and indicated they would continue that beyond the pandemic. One unanticipated finding was that music faculty indicated a slowing down of every aspect of their teaching in that they had to take more time giving feedback to the student to avoid overlapping sound issues. Interestingly, this slowing down forced re-examination of their teaching techniques. Additionally, the findings revealed that the challenges of the pandemic gave faculty a renewed sense of accomplishment in their teaching. The interviewees all indicated they were better teachers because of the challenges of teaching during and pandemic and felt confident they could overcome obstacles that could appear in the future.

Implications

These findings have implications for all music faculty in higher education and reveal that challenges can expose not only weaknesses, but strengths. Nevertheless, these challenges can lead to creativity and can motivate faculty to find new methods of reaching the objectives. Further, this research may help administrators understand the distinctiveness of the music discipline. While this study pointed to the fact that music faculty were able to adapt to challenges faced during the pandemic, specifically related to online teaching and were ultimately successful, some of their challenges were unique and more difficult to overcome.

The overarching implication in this research is connected directly to the collaborative nature of teaching applied music lessons and music ensembles. These types of courses are more personal in nature in that the instructor and students work together to adjust and fine tune the work being done. In this type of educational environment, whether in an applied music lesson which involves one instructor and one student or an ensemble which involves one instructor/director and a group of students, the student receives feedback immediately and can make adjustments to their performance. This interplay of feedback and adjustments continues throughout the lesson or ensemble class toward the final musical product. This type of instruction is very effective and music instructors in higher education spend years perfecting this skill of collaborative teaching. While the majority of the interviewees reported that Zoom was the best web-based platform to teach online lessons, Zoom could not duplicate the educational environment to which students and teachers were accustomed. Therefore, major adjustments to this collaborative learning style had to be made. Unfortunately, musical ensembles could not collaborate at all in a synchronous platform. Lecture-based music classes were able to transition more easily in both synchronous and asynchronous settings and many applied lesson teachers

and ensembles directors adjusted their teaching to a more lecture-based platform, but overwhelmingly agreed that this was an inferior way of teaching.

This adjustment in teaching resulted in mental health issues among students and faculty. Many faculty in this research study adapted their classes to include a mental health component during the pandemic. It is suggested that this continue to be a part of the educational plan in all areas of higher education. Universities must ensure the appropriate staff are in place to support both faculty and students' mental health as the long-term effects of the pandemic have not been fully realized.

Music faculty in higher education had to learn new methods of teaching very quickly using an online platform that was not suitable for the traditional teaching environment and often did not have the equipment or training to make these adjustments immediately. Therefore, it is important for administrators to understand the unique environment of music education and that the personal nature of teaching music is as much a part of the educational experience as the knowledge shared. This experience cannot be duplicated in an online environment, and it is imperative that administrators work to provide support that will meet the very specific needs of this group. This approach may include providing the best platform for teaching synchronous music lessons without passing the cost on the faculty and students.

It is important to note that higher education music faculty faced some obstacles that were more difficult to overcome than their colleagues. However, they were also creative at adapting to these challenges by combining synchronous and asynchronous teaching to create a hybrid teaching experience. Other faculty took a fresh look at their teaching methods and made adjustments that they reported made them a better teacher. Some felt more connected to their

students and realized a desire to have more empathy for their students. This finding suggests that educators can be successful in the most difficult circumstances.

This study carries additional implications for higher music programs beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. With the growing trend of online education, schools of music are feeling the pressure to provide online music degrees. While this study did outline many successes of music faculty teaching in online platforms, it is the researcher's recommendation that universities proceed with caution concerning online music degrees. The results of this study directly point to not only challenges experienced, but also the fact that adaptation resulted in an inferior form of teaching applied lessons and performance ensemble classes. Therefore, universities must balance the need to provide online educational platforms with the risk of providing an inferior educational experience. While there is value to both universities and students in providing alternative educational experiences such as a fully online degree, this research provides guidance as to what may work and what may be too much of a challenge to overcome for online music education.

Limitations and Recommendations

The scope of this study was limited to the experiences of music faculty in the University of Louisiana System of Colleges and Universities. Further research in other regions may reveal additional significant findings unique to that educational system. Additionally, this study was limited in that not all music disciplines were represented in the research and further research in those disciplines may promote even greater understanding of the unique challenges presented to music faculty during a pandemic. Further, this research only included music faculty. It would be interesting to assess the challenges that music department administrators faced during the

pandemic given the fact that the literature and the findings pointed to a lack of resources and infrastructure among educational systems.

Conclusion

Although all educators encountered challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary focus of this research was to examine the challenges that were unique to music faculty in higher education and the innovations that resulted from their experiences. This study investigated the instructional and pedagogical challenges that music faculty faced and the ways in which they adapted to meet these challenges. This study revealed significant findings related to not only teaching music online, but the mental health aspect associated with a complete shift in teaching and learning. However, in keeping with the literature, this study also revealed that music faculty faced these challenges and were successful because they were motivated by the need to provide their students with the best educational opportunities.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

Office of
Research Integrity



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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-21-126

PROJECT TITLE: Challenges and Adaptive Teaching of higher education music faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic

SCHOOL/PROGRAM: Educational Research and Admin

RESEARCHER(S): Terrie Sanders, Masha Krsmanovic

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

CATEGORY: Expedited

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: July 29, 2021

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board Chairperson