

Constructing Informal Learning Method Guidebook for the Music Ensemble Course at Liupanshui Normal University, Guizhou Province, China

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Abstract

The objective of this research were (1) To study the informal learning method and the music ensemble course at Liupanshui Normal University of Guizhou (LPSNU), (2) To construct a guidebook on informal learning methods for the music ensemble course at LPSNU, (3) To experimental with the informal learning method guidebook for the music ensemble course at LPSNU, and (4) To study the efficiency of the inform learning methods guidebook for music ensemble at LPSNU. The research methodology is a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative research methods included interviews, conducted with three experts, and an academic study of informal learning methods. The quantitative research method involved testing the teaching effectiveness of the guidebook using statistical test score data. The purposive sample consisted of two ensembles from 3rd-year music major students, with five students in each group, totaling 10 students. Hypothesis: The learning outcomes from formative and summative assessments will not be less than 80/80 percent.

The research findings were as follows: (1) Informal Learning Method refers to the process through which individuals accumulate knowledge, skills, and understanding. This typically occurs through self-directed learning, observation, social interactions, and practical experiences. The objectives of the Music Ensemble course are: 1) Technical and Performance Skills 2) Ensemble Techniques 3) Musical Understanding 4) Music Composition and Arrangement 5) Team Collaboration, and 6) Performance Experience (2) the Guidebook consists of: 1) Informal Learning Methods and Principles. 2) Syllabus of the Instrumental Ensemble in LPSNU. 3) Lesson Plans with Informal Learning Settings. 4) Ensemble Guide, and 5) Music Score (7 songs from the band Beyond), and (3) The researchers applied the guidebook to teaching over 16 weeks, once with one 90-minute session per week. Four tests were administered: three formative tests and one summative test, and (4) The average score for the formative tests was 80.93, and for the summative test, it was 86.00—both higher than the hypothesized scores (80 for both formative and summative). This indicates that the informal learning method guidebook for the music ensemble course at LPNU was more effective than anticipated.

Keywords: Constructing; Informal Learning; Method; Guidebook; Music Ensemble Course; Liupanshui Normal University; Guizhou Province; China

Introduction

In today's field of learning science, informal learning has become a vital component of education. As the Chinese saying goes, “better to teach someone to fish than to give him a fish.” mean teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime. The same applies to learning; mastering the methods of learning equips individuals with lifelong benefits. By focusing on how to learn effectively, students can become independent, adaptive learners who can thrive in ever-changing environments, making informal learning an invaluable tool for lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning refers to the continuous, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional development throughout an individual's life. It extends beyond formal education and includes informal learning through work, hobbies, social interactions, and everyday experiences. Personal and professional success are deeply intertwined with the practice of lifelong learning. To excel in a career, individuals must continually update their skills and adapt to new knowledge. Lifelong learning fosters this growth, allowing individuals to stay competitive, innovate, and tackle evolving challenges. Without ongoing learning, personal development stagnates, limiting one's ability to achieve long-term success. In today's fast-paced world, lifelong learning is not just beneficial; it is essential for reaching and sustaining career achievements.

Informal learning plays a crucial role in lifelong learning by allowing individuals to learn through daily experiences, social interactions, and real-world applications (Robinson, 2012). This flexibility and adaptability make informal learning an essential tool for fostering the ongoing personal and professional development needed in lifelong learning. The authors of "How People Learn," John D. et al. (2000), summarized the time allocation between formal and informal learning: approximately 20% of a person's lifetime is devoted to formal learning, while approximately 80% is allocated to informal learning. With the advent of the digital age and the widespread use of mobile internet and smart devices, the value of informal learning in a person's lifelong learning experience has further increased (Ning & Hongwei, 2023). Therefore, uncovering the mechanisms of informal learning and its relationship with formal learning is significant for a comprehensive understanding of the rich and complex phenomena in student learning.

American educator Eduard C. Lindeman first used the term "informal learning" in the 1920s, and its origin can be traced back to John Dewey's theories on "learning from experience" and "learning by doing." The term was later introduced by Malcolm Knowles when he published his work, *Informal Adult Education* in 1950 (Messmann et al., 2018). The emphasis on learning in "informal contexts" outside of schools and classrooms has evolved in response to continuous reflection on formal school learning.

Informal Learning is defined as “learning from experience that takes place outside formally structured, institutionally sponsored, class-room based activities” (Watkins & Marsick, 1992, p. 288). Informal learning is characterized "by a low degree of planning and organizing in terms of the learning context, learning support, learning time, and learning objectives " (Kyndt & Baert, 2013). Informal learning is often self-directed and driven by personal interest or curiosity.

Informal Learning refers to the process in which individuals accumulate knowledge, skills, understanding, or applications without explicit courses or classroom education. This learning method typically occurs through self-directed learning, observation, social interactions, and practical experiences, and it is not bound by time or location. It can take place in various contexts and is often related to the interests and needs of the individual. As societal

and economic environments continue to change, the concept of lifelong learning becomes increasingly important. Informal learning is seen as a way to support lifelong learning, enabling individuals to adapt to evolving demands and skills. Research in this field contributes to promoting and supporting individuals' lifelong learning and skill development.

Related research indicates that informal learning methods have shown positive teaching effects on ensemble training, especially in pop band rehearsals. For example:

The study *Student Perceptions of Informal Learning Experiences in Instrumental Music Ensembles* by Brian Bersh (2011) explores how high school students experience informal learning within the context of their school music ensembles. It examines the impact of informal learning on students' practice, musical achievement, and self-perceptions. The research highlights how informal learning helps students develop independence, collaboration skills, and new learning strategies. Despite challenges, students reported increased confidence and productivity in their music ensembles.

The study *An Exploration of Band Students' Experiences With Informal Learning* by Sara Jones (2015) delves into how high school band students engage with informal learning practices. The research focuses on students' autonomy, collaboration, and creativity in band settings, where they learn through peer interactions rather than direct instruction. It highlights how informal learning fosters self-directed skill development, particularly in improvisation and musical interpretation, aligning with real-world band practices.

The researcher works at Liupanshui Normal University, where the university currently offers an undergraduate program in Music Education under the School of Arts. The music ensemble course for the Music Education major begins in the third year. Students have the flexibility to form diverse ensemble combinations based on their interests and proficiency in different instruments. These combinations may include Chinese traditional folk instrument ensembles, string quartets, pop ensembles, rock bands, and more. Different groups are guided by teachers specializing in their respective fields. Typically, pop ensembles or rock bands consist of 3-4 groups, with an average of 5 members in each ensemble.

This study constructs a teaching guide for the music ensemble course based on the theory and methods of informal learning. Through teaching practice, it explores the effectiveness of informal learning methods by using two pop bands with a total of 10 members as a sample.

Research Objectives

1. To study informal learning method, and music ensemble course at Liupanshui Normal University of Guizhou (LPSNU).
2. To construct the informal learning method guidebook for music ensemble course at LPSNU.
3. To experimental the informal learning method guidebook for music ensemble course at LPSNU.
4. To study the efficiency of the inform learning methods guidebook for music ensemble at LPSNU.

Research Methodology

This study mainly adopts a mixed research method combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative research method for: 1) Interview with three experts, 2) Academic study of informal learning methods. Quantitative research method for: 1) IOC test for the guidebook, 2) Formative test and summative test.

The study area of this study included students and teachers from Liupanshui Normal University.

1) Population: There are 102 third-year students majoring in musicology (music education) in Liupanshui Normal University of Guizhou .

2) Sample: There were 10 students Purposive Sampling(By 2 Pop Group).

3) Key information: This study will interview Three experts.

E1: Professor Dr. Sakchai Hirunrux

E2: Assoc Professor Xu Shuning

E3: Assoc Professor Cui Youchang

Conceptual Framework

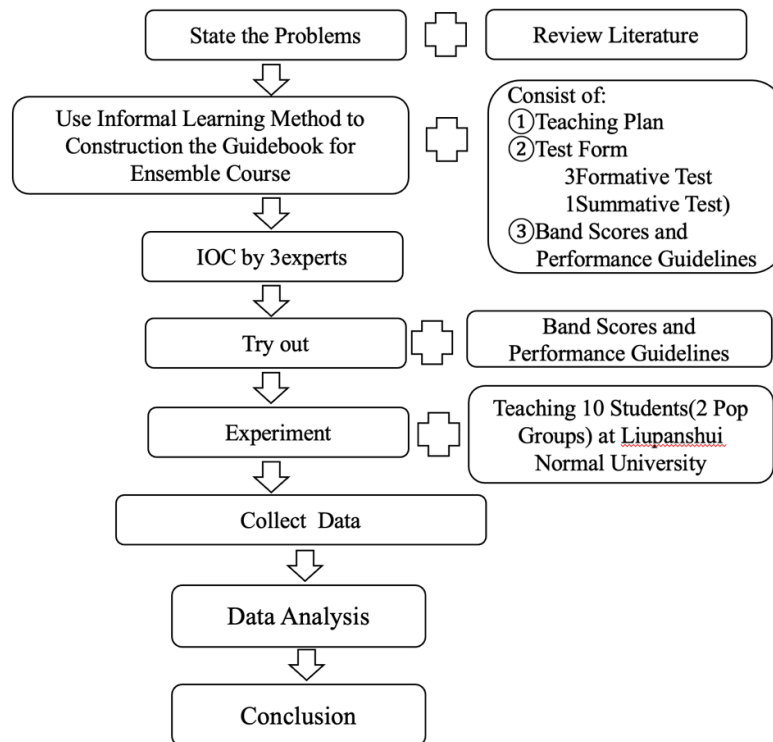


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Findings

1. To study the informal learning method and the music ensemble course at Liupanshui Normal University of Guizhou (LPSNU)

This study first delved into the informal learning methods, focusing on their theoretical foundations and practical applications in music education. Through a comprehensive literature review and expert interviews, the research explored how these methods can enhance students' autonomous learning abilities and creative thinking. Specifically, in the context of the music ensemble course at Liupanshui Normal University of Guizhou, informal learning methods were identified as a promising instructional strategy that can address some limitations of traditional teaching models. The study also examined the current state of the music ensemble course and its educational goals, analyzing how informal learning methods align with the course's needs, thus laying the groundwork for the subsequent instructional design and experimentation.

Informal Learning Method refers to the process through which individuals accumulate knowledge, skills, and understanding. This typically occurs through self-directed learning, observation, social interactions, and practical experiences. The objectives of the Music Ensemble course are: 1) Technical and Performance Skills 2) Ensemble Techniques 3) Musical Understanding 4) Music Composition and Arrangement 5) Team Collaboration, and 6) Performance Experience

2. To construct a guidebook on informal learning methods for the music ensemble course at LPSNU

Building on the insights gained from studying informal learning methods, the researcher designed and constructed a teaching guidebook tailored for the music ensemble course at Liupanshui Normal University. This guidebook was developed to serve as an effective instructional tool, helping instructors facilitate students' learning through self-directed study and collaborative practice. The development process took into account the specific needs of the university's students, ensuring that the guidebook was both theoretically sound and practically relevant. By setting clear educational objectives, structuring the course effectively, and incorporating detailed teaching strategies, the guidebook provides comprehensive support for instructors in delivering the music ensemble course.

The Guidebook consists of: 1) Informal Learning Methods and Principles. 2) Syllabus of the Music Ensemble in LPSNU. 3) Lesson Plans with Informal Learning Settings. 4) Ensemble Guide, and 5) Music Score (7 songs from the band Beyond)

3. To experimental with the informal learning method guidebook for the music ensemble course at LPSNU

To validate the effectiveness of the constructed teaching guidebook, the research team conducted a 16-week teaching experiment at Liupanshui Normal University. The experiment involved implementing instructional activities based on informal learning methods and assessing students' performance in the music ensemble course. Throughout the experiment, formative and summative evaluations were conducted, collecting extensive data on student learning outcomes. The results indicated that the use of informal learning methods significantly improved students' musical understanding, technical skills, and teamwork in ensemble settings. Additionally, the experiment highlighted some challenges that may arise in real-world teaching and provided valuable insights for refining the instructional approach.

The researchers applied the guidebook to teaching over 16 weeks, once with one 90-minute session per week. Four tests were administered: three formative tests and one summative test,

4. To study the efficiency of the inform learning methods guidebook for music ensemble at LPSNU.

According to the formative evaluation results, we can see that the average score of the 3 test results of the 10 students in the class is 80.93, which is at a good level. 6 out of the 10 students had an average score from the three formative tests higher than the overall average score of the 10 students. Additionally, the average scores of the three formative tests were as follows: test1: 39, test2: 40.9, and test3: 41.5, indicating that the students are making continuous progress. There is no big difference in the test results of each unit, which shows that the students' learning effect in this teaching experiment is relatively stable, and they are all at a good level.

Finally, the average score for the formative tests was 80.93, and for the summative test, it was 86.00—both higher than the hypothesized scores (80 for both formative and summative). This indicates that the informal learning method guidebook for the music ensemble course at LPSNU was more effective than anticipated.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to design a teaching guide based on the Informal Learning Method for teachers' reference and use in the third-year music ensemble course for undergraduate music education majors. Therefore, the key issues involved in this study, the proposed teaching suggestions, and the summarized teaching experiences all require in-depth discussion.

Through interviews, experts believe that informal learning helps to 1) Stimulating Students' Interest and Creativity. 2) Enhancing Students' Self-Learning Abilities. 3) Promoting Collaboration and Social Interaction. 4) Diverse Learning Experiences. 5) Practical Application. 6) Respecting Individual Differences. Experts provided teaching recommendations for applying the informal learning method in music ensemble courses. The key is to create an informal learning environment, focusing on six main aspects: 1) Clarify Goals and Expectations. 2) Emphasize Self-Learning and Exploration. 3) Encourage Collaboration and Team Learning. 4) Organize Live Performances and Practical Activities. 5) Incorporating digital tools and resources. 6) Regular Evaluation and Adjustment.

Based on the experts' recommendations for the Informal Learning Method for Music ensemble courses, combined with teaching practice and evaluation, (Ning & Hongwei, 2023) a good teaching guide should have the following characteristics: 1) Clear Learning Objectives: Clearly define the skills and knowledge students should achieve at each stage. 2) Flexible Learning Methods: Support self-directed learning and collaboration to meet diverse learner needs. 3) Practicality: Integrate content with real-world performance and music production to develop practical skills. 4) Diverse Resource Support: Incorporate digital tools and apps to foster independent learning. 5) Assessment and Feedback Mechanisms: Provide effective assessments to help students continuously improve. The Guidebook consists of: 1) Informal Learning Methods and Principles. 2) Syllabus of the Instrumental Ensemble in LPSNU. 3) Lesson Plans with Informal Learning Settings. 4) Ensemble Guide, and 5) Music Score (7 songs from the band Beyond)

Recommendation

1. Practical Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, researchers suggest that Chinese music teachers should deeply understand and adopt informal learning practices. They should set clear teaching objectives, utilize personalized teaching methods, design diverse learning activities, and provide timely feedback and evaluations. Furthermore, ongoing professional development is essential. These strategies can enhance teaching effectiveness, stimulate students' interest and passion for music, and support their comprehensive development of musical skills and literacy.

First, music teachers need to deeply explore and understand the core concepts and methods of informal learning. This involves attending training courses, workshops, reading relevant literature, and connecting with other educators to share experiences. By engaging in continuous professional development, teachers can better grasp the principles and implementation strategies of informal learning, equipping them to effectively integrate these methods into their teaching practice. This approach allows for more adaptive and creative music education that aligns with students' needs.

Secondly, the focus of the teacher's work should shift from how to teach to setting learning goals for students and sparking their interest, while allowing them to engage in self-directed learning. Teachers should curate or create a repository of online and digital learning resources, establish an informal learning environment, and provide students with opportunities for performance. The goal is to give students the stage, allowing them to take ownership of their learning journey and apply their skills in real-world settings.

Lastly, teachers should focus on cultivating students' self-directed learning methods. For example, students can learn to analyze a popular song's rhythm, mode, harmony, and structure by ear without sheet music. Teachers can also introduce digital tools to separate song tracks by instrument, allowing students to transcribe and create ensemble scores. Additionally, teaching students how to copy, cover, or reinterpret songs helps deepen their skills. Through the philosophy of informal learning, educators can inspire lifelong learning goals and help students build extraordinary futures.

2. Recommendation for future research

Based on this study, we recommend further research in the following areas related to the application of the Informal Learning method in China:

- 1) The integration of informal learning practices into formal music education at different levels.
- 2) The role of digital tools in facilitating informal learning in music and their effectiveness.
- 3) Long-term impacts of informal learning on students' creativity, collaboration, and independent learning abilities.
- 4) Strategies for overcoming challenges faced by teachers when incorporating informal learning into traditional classroom settings.

5) Integration with China's extracurricular teaching system: Explore how informal learning can seamlessly fit into the extracurricular teaching framework in Chinese universities, where certain skill-based courses can be moved into this system. Reform evaluation methods by implementing project-based assessments and certifications. Promote curriculum reform to reduce students' heavy course load, improving teaching efficiency and effectiveness, while easing their academic burden.

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