

# **DISTANCE LEARNING FOR MUSIC PRACTICE IN COLLEGE: BENEFITS, DRAWBACKS, AND CHALLENGES**

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## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all sectors of human life globally, including the world of education. The world of education is forced to adapt by implementing a distance learning system to limit the mobility of educators and students. Program Studi D4 Penyajian Musik ISI Yogyakarta is one of the educational institutions that conduct distance learning. As a vocational education institution, ISI Yogyakarta holds many music practice courses to support its students' skills. This research aims to determine the benefits, drawbacks, and challenges of the distance learning system in music practice courses. This research is a qualitative study with 2 methods of data collection, namely in-depth interviews and questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed to the respondents which are active students of the Prodi D4 Penyajian Musik, ISI Yogyakarta and will be confirmed by the results of in-depth interviews with the subject lecturers. The research results were formulated using the Miles & Huberman concept, namely: (1) data reduction; (2) data presentation; and (3) drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The results of the study are concluding sentences about the benefits, drawbacks, and challenges of the distance learning method. These conclusions will be the basis for developing recommendations for the most effective distance learning process for the form of music practice lectures.

**Keywords:** distance learning, courses, music, practice

## INTRODUCTION

For us humans, music learning is a creative process that has an impact on our self-development. Djohan (2003), in his writings says that music, as a part of art, is a unique form of human behavior and has a strong influence. To be categorized as music, a sound has to have various elements. These elements must be coherent and have their own harmonization. Learning music practice is very interesting to do because it aims to develop musical abilities.

Julia (2017) wrote in her book that humans were created with the ability to understand music although in reality they have different understandings. This statement is supported because since the day they are born, each individual is introduced to the sounds around them. Indirectly, humans learn many musical aspects along with their development. The more mature humans get, the more it affects various aspects, one of which is the psychological aspect.

In music learning, an individual is given the opportunity to express, to appreciate, to be creative, to form harmony, and to create beauty. (Sidiq, 2018). Rien (1999) said that the art of music has an important role in the life of an individual. Someone who participates in musical activities is able to develop creativity, support sensitivity, build a sense of beauty, express expression, provide challenges, practice discipline and learn history.

In order to achieve a healthy music education environment, there are three elements must be fulfilled: educators, students, and learning methods (educational environment). The harmony of these 3 elements will be the main criteria for maximizing the success of the music learning process.

Program Studi D4 Penyajian Musik (PSD4PM) ISI Yogyakarta relies heavily on the music practice learning system to hone students' skills, in accordance with the advantages of the Diploma 4 program (applied bachelor). To prepare students to become superior applied scholars, music practice courses are one of the keys to success in the PSD4PM learning system. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic situation that requires students and educators to conduct distance learning programs in lectures, there are adjustments that have to be made in music practice courses. Music practice courses held at PSD4PM include Soloist, Chamber Music, Orchestra, Ensemble, Improvisation and Complementary Instruments. The limitation of carrying out face-to-face lectures is a big challenge for practical courses because there are things that cannot be delivered optimally using the distance learning system.

The distance learning itself is actually not a new thing. This has become a rapidly growing area of research and practice after the first online classes were held in

1994 (Levy, 2003). After that until now, distance learning is increasingly getting support from the development of increasingly advanced communication technology.

Distance learning techniques and methods are also very flexible -- meaning that they can be adapted to the needs of teachers and students. At the primary school level, distance learning acts as a complement to the traditional learning methods, while at the middle school level there are more and more distance learning models that can be offered. Starting from the class system, assignments, to exams. At current university learning, distance learning is carried out to complement face-to-face learning. This is to reach students from abroad so that they can participate in lecture programs more flexibly and economically.

In fact, many things in the face-to-face learning process will be very limited when it is replaced by distance learning. In their research, Prosser & Trigwell (1990) concluded that a good learning process is about 3 things: The teachers; how they develop a good view of learning outcomes and how to achieve them. Secondly, it is how the teacher makes variations according to the learning context. Third, bringing students to be on the same page with their understanding and views on the learning material.

The topic of this research was chosen because it is driven by the anxiety of the researcher, who is an active lecturer at PSD4PM. Some students said that they were very overwhelmed with the distance learning system and felt that the learning system was not optimal, so that they could not develop their skills optimally. Interestingly, some students actually feel comfortable with the distance learning system. They feel very benefited because now they can attend lectures from wherever they are. In terms of timing, they are greatly helped by this learning system. Some students also support this statement by stating that they become more creative and critical in learning new things to support their personal skills development process.

The most common method of learning music practice at all levels of education known is the face-to-face method, where teachers and students meeting and practicing together. The learning processes include playing musical instruments, singing, performing solo or in ensembles, improvising or writing compositions. Learning music practice itself can be categorized based on age, level of education, nature of learning (formal, informal), genres, specific field, and methods (Koutsoupidou, 2013). These things can be criteria in determining the most suitable learning method. There are some learning materials that will eventually be more effective with the face-to-face method. Other learning materials are still able to achieve its learning goals with distance learning methods.

Groulx & Hernly (2010) concluded that distance learning system is an additional method that universities can use to reach and educate a growing community of people (*worldwide*). In another study, Kos & Goodrich (2012) concludes that although distance learning is not suitable for everyone, it can provide an accessible, appropriate, and transformative professional development.

The most important instrument for realizing distance learning practice is technology. In the last decade, technology has contributed greatly to the development of music through softwares that facilitates the creation of musical notation and composition. There are also many music softwares made for children's learning purposes. Some softwares can integrate music with children's play activities that support the development of their individual abilities. Technology has broadened the horizons of improvisation and musical composition, providing music as an activity that both children and adults can perform creatively (Koutsoupidou, 2009).

The researcher concludes that there are benefits, drawbacks, and challenges that arise from this distance learning system, so that the formulation of the problem in this study is the benefits, drawbacks, and challenges of distance learning as well as formulating an effective distance learning method for music practice courses at the Prodi D4 Penyajian Musik ISI Yogyakarta.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

Although distance learning is not something new to be researched, this research was developed to further explore the learning process that occurs in terms of constraints, benefits, and the suitability of targets that meet the expectations of both educators and students. Therefore, this research consists of 2 phases. Phase A is an in-depth interview involving lecturers as educators who carry out distance learning activities. Then, Phase B involves students, namely active students of the prodi D4 Penyajian Musik ISI Yogyakarta. This will provide a better understanding of the teaching and learning activities of music practice with a distance learning system. The selection of these criteria was based on the researcher's personal experience as a lecturer in one of the practical courses, namely Solois, and the challenges that she face in the distance learning process.

#### **a. Types of research**

This research is a qualitative research supported by quantitative data using questionnaires, which resulting in a descriptive sentence. The research was conducted at PSD4PM. The research subjects are active study program students who take at least 1 music practice course remotely and PSD4PM lecturer representatives who actively teach music practice courses using distance learning methods. This research was conducted in March – July 2021. The number of research subjects were 50 students and 4 lecturers.

#### **b. Data collection process**

Sources of data come from observations, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. Observations were made by looking at the reality on the ground regarding the implementation of distance music practice lectures. In-depth interviews were conducted on 4 lecturers who teach music practice courses to formulate their perspectives on distance learning. Meanwhile, questionnaires were distributed to 50 active students for the 2020/2021 academic year who met the research criteria.

#### **c. Research Stages**

The research process went through several stages to obtain accurate and valid data. The stages carried out in this research are: The planning and implementation stages. The planning stage begun with a literature study related to distance learning, especially at universities during this pandemic. Next is the collection of research journals that will be used as a reference as well as a comparison for the theme of this research. after that, the planning stage was continued to problem formulation, preparation of questionnaires and interview questions, and research methods. The implementation of the research began with the process of collecting data (in-depth interviews and distributing questionnaires). After that, the next stage is the data processing. Data processing is carried out using data reduction method by filtering which data is valid for this research.

#### **d. Data Analysis**

After the data from the questionnaire was collected, the researcher and team processed and analyzed the data by sorting out various responses from the respondents. In this stage, the data reduction process will also be carried out by sorting out valid and invalid data. The validity of the data can be determined from the consistency of the respondents in answering the questions in the questionnaire. This is done so that the data is easy to interpret and there are no errors in the conclusion-making process.

The answer provisions are divided using 5 response criteria: bad, poor, average, good, and very good. Data analysis was carried out by calculating all incoming responses according to the criteria. After that, to get a clearer visualization, the researcher described the results using diagrams.

The diagram interpretation process was also confirmed by the results of in-depth interviews. From these two data, conclusions will be interpreted to answer research questions. The researcher will conclude the answers from respondents regarding the advantages, disadvantages, and challenges of distance learning for music practice courses.

As a basis for drawing conclusions from the existing data, the author uses the concept of data analysis by Miles and Huberman. Based on the concept of data analysis, there are several components, namely: (1) sorting the main things from the amount of data obtained from the field (data reduction); In this process, the answer points for the first problem formulation can be formulated.

(2) The results of the reduction are presented descriptively and are equipped with supporting diagrams: the results of the questionnaires distributed. From the diagram, there are many conclusions can be drawn regarding the data needed by researchers (data presentation, and (3) drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Conclusions are drawn based on the diagram of the results of the questionnaire. From the conclusion of the diagram, the data was reprocessed and compared with the interview data. From the two data, recommendations for distance learning will be formulated to answer the second problem formulation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to comply with the government's recommendation to limit activities as an effort to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, the lecturers at PSD4PM mostly carry out distance lectures. There is almost no lecture process takes place in the campus building, especially for courses with a large number of students. All theoretical and practical courses are conducted remotely using video conferencing media or discussion via chat messenger. Of course there are many adjustments that must be made by both lecturers and students in order to keep learning activities running smoothly and optimally, especially for music practice courses. Some of the practical music courses conducted remotely include *Solois*, *Ansambel Musik*, *Chamber Musik*, *Resital*, *Improvisasi*, and *Sight Singing* courses.

Based on field observations, the author can conclude the main points that need to be considered in the implementation of distance learning music practice at PSD4PM. The implementation of distance learning for music practice courses requires adequate techniques and supporting facilities since most of the activities are hands-on practice. Additional facilities such as speakers, metronomes, devices for playing music, microphones and even soundcards/audio interfaces need to be worked out. In addition to the many supporting tools, internet connection is also one of the things that determine the smooth process of learning music practice.

In-depth interviews were conducted with PSD4PM lecturers who taught music practice courses and held distance lectures during the pandemic. The following lecturers were the resource persons in this research:

**Table 1. Resource persons**

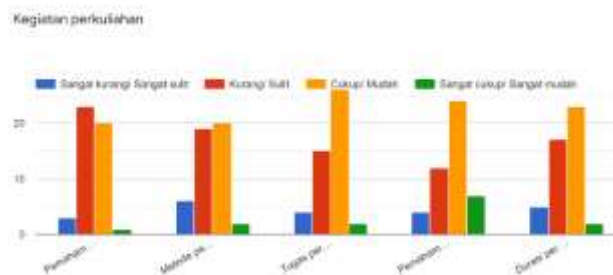
NO	Lecturer Name	Courses
1	Stevanafenti Asriuni Minar Pradipta, S.S	Solois Vokal Popjazz
2	Drs. Josias T. Adriaan, M. Hum	Solois Piano Popjazz, <i>Sight Singing</i>
3	Dr. Singgih Sanjaya, M. Hum	Solois Saxophone, Improvisasi Popjazz, Aransemen Popjazz
4	Mardian Bagus Prakoso, M. Mus	Solois Gitar Klasik

Source: personal documentation

The in-depth interview method was carried out as an initial description of how distance learning activities took place. The responses from the lecturers in in-depth interviews will be compared with the questionnaires distributed to students as learners.

### A. Distance Learning Music Practice at PSD4PM

the participants of the distance learning process of music practice are PSD4PM lecturers and students. For small classes, there are less than 10 students, while for large classes, there are more than 20 students. The learning process with Zoom application requires adaptation for a long time, until finally both lecturers and students get used to it and start to enjoy this process. The distance learning process can be carried out with the cooperation of two parties, both lecturers and students. Both parties have an important role in achieving effective and efficient teaching and learning activities in the midst of the limitations of not being able to meet face to face. The music practice distance learning process that has been held in PSD4PM so far is considered to be going quite well. This can be seen from the results of the questionnaire from the question section of lecture activities (Figure 2), which are dominated by the "average/good" answers in learning method, lecture assignments, lecturer mastery in operating online learning media, and duration of lectures question categories.



**Figure 1. Lecture activities**  
 Source: personal documentation

"Bad/poor" answers only appear in the 'understanding of lecture material' question category. The responses from the students are supported by the statements of the lecturers who said that the majority of students continued to participate in the online learning process cooperatively. Mardian Bagus said, "apart from careful preparation from the lecturers, the students' preparation are also important, such as preparing supporting learning media up to mastering song material for practice, which is expected to be done independently. So far, the majority of students are encouraged to prepare themselves well,". This statement from Mardian Bagus can also represent the answers of other sources who have the same opinion.

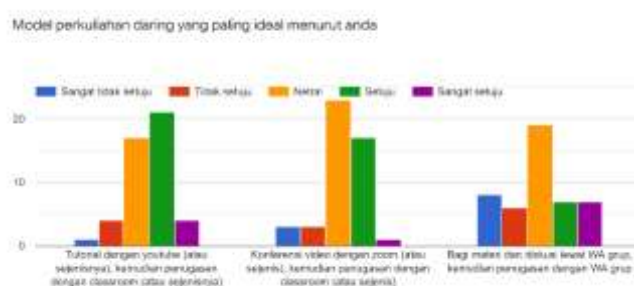
### B. Practical Problem

Based on the compiled analysis map, several factors that must be considered in interpreting the distance learning process are: **(1) participants, (2) lecture facilities, (3) internet connection, (4) supporting facilities, and (5) learning methods.**

Distance learning music practice certainly emphasizes the learning process to play a musical instrument or sing. There is not much theory is learned in this activity. Students need to regularly pay attention to how the lecturer plays musical instruments and sings, understands the technique, pays attention to body or hand movements when strumming/bowing the strings/hitting the snare drums, practicing it themselves, and interpreting the musical sentences. The practical

aspect of learning music requires not only picture/video conferencing but more importantly verbal communication and pictures in real time.

To achieve this, in terms of learning methods, PSD4PM lecturers have tried a lot to utilize the available virtual conference technology, in collaboration with increasing references from various sources, such as YouTube. The conclusion of the distance learning method can be reviewed from the questionnaire questions about the lecture method. The one that received the highest response was the tutorial method using YouTube or the like, then assignments with Google Classroom or the like, plus discussions with virtual conferences (Figure 3). This is already in accordance with the lecture method carried out by the resource lecturers to maximize this teaching and learning activity.



**Figure 2. Material delivery method**

Source: personal documentation

The lecturers conduct online music practice lectures using Zoom meeting application. Asriuni Pradipta said, “The main problem is that lecturers and students cannot play music/singing together, even though music playing skills are the main thing that PSD4PM wants to develop. Playing music together in real time is the key so that students can really understand good intonation, rhythm, phrases, and ensembles. This cannot be done considering that delays always occur,”

To get around the delays that occur due to the poor internet network coverage, the lecturers advise students to record the progress of music practice exercises and share them so that they can be discussed together. This is the most reasonable solution to do.

### C. Benefits of Distance Learning

After confirming and analyzing the results of questionnaires and in-depth interviews, there are conclusions that can be drawn about the benefits of the distance learning process for music practice courses at PSD4PM. The results are concluded from the statements of the lecturers and the questionnaire submitted to the students. Of the 47 respondents, 17 people stated that there were no benefits obtained from lectures with this distance learning method. The rest of the others gave a different response, here are the conclusions:

The first benefit is that students are harder in practicing individually to understand the lecture material. This distance learning process inevitably requires students to maximize themselves by practicing individually, not being able to rely on a lot of help from lecturers and other friends. The lecturers believe that distance learning opportunities allow students to develop individually in their playing of musical instruments and their singing skills. Graduation targets and

standards must be adjusted, but they really appreciate the hard work of students who are responsible for practicing independently.

This distance learning process also yields technology literacy to the lecturers and students. All limitations become triggers to increase personal knowledge so that they can take advantage of technology as much as possible. They learn many new things related to technology to support the smooth process of distance learning.

From the student's perspective, one respondent wrote that distance learning makes students more creative in doing assignments and learning independently. "Creativity is something that is tested to do assignments and learn independently, especially to maximize distance lecture sessions and record progress in playing musical instruments and singing skills. One of the factors is how to take advantage of each individual's facilities to get maximum results," he said.

The benefit that is clearly felt by all members of the distance learning process is time and cost savings because they can attend lectures from wherever they are. This flexibility of space and time is recognized by lecturers and students as one of the biggest benefits of the distance learning system. They can carry out lectures from wherever they are, as long as they have prepared facilities and an internet connection. This allows each individual to use time more effectively, so that more activities can be done in a day.

However, given the ongoing pandemic situation, distance learning is one of the solutions that can be chosen so that lectures can continue while preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

#### D. Drawbacks of Distance Learning

Weaknesses in the implementation of distance lectures can be concluded from questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The conclusions are as follows:

The limitation of not being able to meet face-to-face makes distance learning is not as optimal as direct learning. This was conveyed by the lecturers who agreed to adjust the achievement standards and lecture targets in order to make it easier for PSD4PM students. However, there are many things that cannot be replaced when direct learning is shifted to distance learning. Josias Adriaan said, "I really appreciate students who keep trying to attend lectures, do assignments, and practice independently, so whatever the result, their progress is an important point that I pay attention to,"

In addition, the different levels of skills and abilities of students make lecturers unable to force an understanding of the lecture material. Singgih Sanjaya said, "since it requires good preparation from lecturers and students, students who have the skills and prepare themselves seriously can develop their skills optimally, while those who are less proficient and attend lectures as a formality will be left behind," said Singgih Sanjaya.

Changes in learning methods make lecturers apply a lot of tolerance and leniency because of the different conditions of students. This is a separate obstacle for lecturers to be fair when giving an assessment. In fact, many students are isolated in areas with minimal facilities and internet coverage, which makes them unable to follow the lectures optimally. Lecturers must carefully implement policies to avoid gaps between students.



## E. Challenges in Distance Learning

Challenges in conducting distance lectures can be concluded from questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The conclusions are as follows:

Internet connection which causes voice lagging issues. Internet connection is the biggest challenge in distance learning practice. An unstable internet connection will result in a voice lag/latency. *Lag/latency greatly hinders the ongoing learning process.* Lecturers cannot clearly identify students' musical playing skills so this triggers errors in giving directions to students. Meanwhile, students themselves are not able to understand the lecturer clearly during the course.

It takes effort and good preparation as well as adequate supporting facilities so that distance learning activities can run optimally. Good preparation can be interpreted as preparing students to master the material for practice, laptops/smartphones/tablets/PCs (technology literacy), as well as lecture venues. A strategic place for lectures can be interpreted as a comfortable and quiet place, away from noise disturbances and with a stable internet connection. The students found it quite difficult to find a supportive place to attend lectures.

In practical lectures, students need to practice playing musical instruments, so they need musical instruments and a quiet place. Ideally, places for practice and lectures can be studios, soundproofed rooms, or rooms with a quiet atmosphere and not disturbed by people around. The majority of students have their own musical instruments, but they often still need facilities from the campus, such as piano for vocal students. Since learning is done remotely, many students do the exercises at home. It turned out that a conducive place for learning music practice became the highest challenge factor felt by students regarding the facilities that support the distance learning process.

The next challenge is that lecturers and students need to be more creative in utilizing the available communication technology. This factor is proven to have a significant effect on the smoothness of the distance learning process. Despite their limitations, lecturers still try their best to help students carry out practical lectures well. Respondents who think that lecturers have carried out their role to a maximum are 59.6%. However, there are also 34% of respondents who think that lecturers do not carry out their roles, and the remaining 6.4% think that lecturers are not supportive in their lectures. It can be seen that most of the lecturers have carried out their obligations in helping practical lectures online to the maximum. From the lecturers' side, the students have sufficiently accommodated the challenges in the distance learning process by cooperatively following the course of the lecture process with good preparation.

## CONCLUSION

The distance learning process for practicing music in the PSD4PM during the pandemic has been going well so far. Of course, several things can be improved to further maximize the achievement targets of learning activities with this method. Despite all the obstacles and challenges found in the process, the benefits formulated can also be a consideration why this method needs to be applied and developed during the pandemic, even if it is possible to become an alternative method after normal conditions. The biggest benefit of this learning system is the flexibility of space and time which allows lecturers and students to have access to attend lectures from anywhere as long as there is an internet connection. Meanwhile, the biggest drawback of the distance learning system is the limited learning process because there are no face-to-face meetings. This limitation makes the details of learning music practice such as tone intonation, rhythm, dynamics, phrasing, and song interpretation, and ensembles are not achieved optimally. The biggest challenge of the distance learning system is that it really requires the lecturers and

students to be well-prepared as well as developing knowledge about technology that supports and practice individuals so that they can actively contribute to achieving optimal learning targets.

Distance learning music practice is proven to be growing day by day to become better and more effective. This progress can open new opportunities for members of the learning process, both lecturers and students, to learn many new things that can support music playing skills, one of which is in terms of music technology. Another opportunity is to hold a virtual workshop with competent resource persons. With the development of the method, the distance learning process can also be one of the promotional strategies for PSD4PM to open learning opportunities for prospective international students. This last point will be one of the opportunities for PSD4PM to open up to a wider range of musical partners, thereby supporting student learning progress in terms of music presentation.

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