

# The Role of Mentoring and Pedagogical Practices in the Formation of Performers and the Preservation of Musical Traditions

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## ABSTRACT:

The article explores the mentoring aspect of music education as an influence on performing musicians and as a medium through which traditions are upheld. The significance of the research topic is related to the demand to balance the preservation of the national cultural essence with creative adaptation within the era of globalization. The purpose is to understand in what ways mentoring supports the technical growth of students as well as their personal growth, in terms of artistic expression, and responsibility in the tradition of traditions. The methodological foundation relies on the mixed method: the quantitative part is a poll of 30 students from three art academies in Kyiv and the qualitative part is a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with six mentors. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software (correlation and regression analysis, t-tests). The results showed that mentoring as a phenomenon is multidimensional, with the interaction of instrumental support ( $M=4.12$ ), psychosocial support ( $M=3.98$ ), and role modeling ( $M=4.21$ ). Role modeling was the strongest predictor of cultural identity ( $\beta=0.41$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and commitment to traditional music ( $\beta=0.34$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Students who received high quality mentoring scored significantly higher on both technical development ( $d=1.58$ ),

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artistic development ( $d=1.44$ ), and cultural identity ( $d=1.52$ ) than students with low scores. Mentoring constitutes a space of culture transmission in which traditions are reproduced in personally meaningful interaction, though its effectiveness may be limited by institutional constraints and requires preparation of educators to work in the cultural context of Poland.

**Keywords:** mentoring in music education, pedagogical practices, preservation of musical traditions, performer development, cultural transmission.

## 1. Introduction

In a world that is globalized where everything is speeded up with musical influences intersecting one another at an exponential rate, maintaining the authenticity of a tradition without museumifying it is a difficult pedagogical balancing act. Music teachers live in this reality; they come across a wide variety of students, prospective goals, and without being stricken by the results, they observe traditional repertoire is sometimes displaced by standardized pedagogical solutions (McKoy & Lind, 2016).

Meanwhile, the world is waking up to the fact that musical traditions continue to exist as long as there is a living transmission of knowledge – “from mouth to mouth, heart to heart” (Seeger & Schippers, 2022). Mentoring in music is much more than teaching someone how to play. It’s an environment where a still-young musician is tasked with not only learning an instrument but also sharpening artistic sensibilities, establishing professional identity and, in doing so, connecting with a tradition.

As Menard (2024) points out, it is through the mentoring relationship that one experiences those unsayable meanings that make music a living art. By watching their mentors, students gain know-how important to the integration of technical competence and genuine expression, which is key in producing a holistic musician. Even though the significance of mentoring is acknowledged by the tradition bearers, the scholarly literature is still silent about what it means in relation to tradition transmission. A number of studies address learning outcomes or the preservation of cultural heritage,

thus they do not consider the living fabric of the pedagogical relationship (Zhukov & Barrett, 2025; Dong et al., 2025). And perhaps most crucially, the students’ own voices – the people 3D for body-length who this mentoring exists – are underheard in the literature.

The aim of the study is to investigate how mentoring in music education contributes to students’ technical development and personal meaning making in the tradition, the development of an own artistic voice, and a sense of responsibility to maintaining the tradition – in their work, in their teaching practice and as musicians.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The research was conducted with 30 undergraduate and graduate music students (18 women, 12 men; mean age 22) from three art institutions in Kyiv: National Music Academy of Ukraine, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, and Glier Kyiv Institute of Music. They represented a variety of specializations: performance (12), folk music (8), music education (6), and composition (4). The participants had been studying music for an average of over eight years, and had been working with their current instructor for approximately two and a half years. Moreover, a total of six seasoned mentors from the same universities (3 women, 3 men) who have an average of 18 years of teaching experience were invited to the interview. New staff teachers and visiting staff teachers in the fields of orchestral instruments, vocals, traditional music, composition and music education are among them.

In order to gather some quantitative data, a 15-question survey was created, the full text of which can be found in Appendix A, and distributed as a

Google Form to students from the art institutions of Kyiv. The questionnaire included a number of key areas: demographic information (age, gender, institution, instrument); quality of the mentor relationship (technical support, promotion of creative exploration, role model, trust, overall satisfaction); self-evaluation of professional and personal growth (technical development, interpretive abilities, creative expression, stage confidence); and link to tradition and duty to protect musical heritage. All items were rated on a five-point scale.

The questionnaire had been pre-tested on five students to guarantee clarity and it lasted no more than ten minutes. Tentative questions for the mentor meetings to stay focussed (the list is not exhaustive): How do you see your vocation as a teacher? What's involved in teaching not just technique but musicianship, stylistic understanding and other elements essential to the art of playing? How do they invite students to traditional repertoire? What do they get most "joyful and challenging" from current climate? What do you think your students could do to improve mentoring practices?

The audio-recorded interviews ran from 45 minutes to 1 hour, conducted face to face or over the webkamera according to the convenience of the interviewees. After approval from the ethics committee, potential participants were invited by postings on social media, word among teachers, and personal invitations. Students completed the questionnaire anonymously for a period of one month. At a mutually convenient time interviews with the mentors were conducted, they were audio recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed verbatim. All the participants were genuinely grateful for their time and openness.

The quantitative data were analyzed with the use of SPSS software (version 20.0): descriptive statistics were performed, the association between mentoring quality and student development indicators was explored, and the responses of those giving a high rating to their mentor were compared with those giving a low rating.

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study: all participants provided written informed consent, could discontinue at any time without consequences, all names have been changed and the data were anonymized thoroughly. The research was conducted honoring each person's dignity, experience and right to be heard, and the principles of the Helsinki Declaration guided the work.

### 3. Literature Review

Current research literature suggests that mentoring in music education is a unique form of pedagogical relationship engagement and interaction beyond knowledge transmission. At the same time, young composers work with Menard (2024) not just to acquire techniques but to develop their creative voice, become a professional, and cultivate the personal attributes necessary for a sustainable commitment to their art. This holistic perspective, where a mentor contributes to the development of the individual behind the professional skills, truly separates mentoring from traditional teaching. Empirical research supports this notion.

Ward & Campbell (2025), Zhukov and Barrett (2025) explored the influence of full-scale mentoring programs in high school and found enduring mentoring relationships positively influence the quality of teaching, student participation in music and the establishment of a welcoming place. Yeo et al. (2022), in a study of the final projects of young musicians, found that the mentoring relationships formed during these projects become not just a supplement to formal learning for students, but its essence: one participant aptly noted that "the relationship itself was the project". Ilchuk et al. (2024), using the example of training future music teachers in Ukraine, showed that structured mentoring programs significantly increase students' pedagogical skills, reflexivity, and professional commitment, but the effectiveness of such programs depends on the systematic training of mentors and institutional support.

The issue of mentoring becomes especially acute when it comes to preserving musical traditions, which are increasingly under threat in the era of

globalization. As emphasized by Seeger and Schippers (2022), educational practices, both formal and informal, have the potential to support living heritage, though only if they “respect the integrity of traditional ways of transmitting knowledge”. This conclusion is confirmed by the study by Dong et al. (2025), who use the example of the ritual music of the Yao ethnic group in China to show that the inclusion of oral tradition in formal education is always a twofold process.

The investigation for particular transmission mechanisms in diverse traditions still has its place. Pu et al. (2024), with reference to Henanzhujia teaching in China, exposed complex folk pedagogical practices that integrate progressive learning, physical training, cooperative learning, and deep mentoring relationship. Song (2025), Yang et al. (2025) also studied Ebian Yi wedding song learning through oral tradition in community and its learning in school through musical notation and showed that the former exposes learners to deeper cultural understanding and authentic performance.

Paolantonio et al. (2022) in their investigation of Cantonese opera highlighted that a long, profound master-student relationship is a necessary condition for the transmission not just of technique but also of aesthetic sensibility and cultural significances and that any attempts to condense these into a limited series of classes invariably diminishes the process.

The processes of listening, memorizing and improvising were related to stronger motivation among students, as well as to their identity with the region, according to Fonseca and Sousa (2024) who discuss the integration of traditional Azorean songs in violin teaching via informal modes of knowing: listening, memorizing, and improvising. Listen in Subscription or Fee Access? Sunderland et al. (2024)

in a study of indigenous music practices observe that participating in intergenerational transmission as mentees contributes not only to cultural continuity but also to the health of the community, expanding conceptions of what music education can do. Deliyannis et al. (2024) and Arbain et al. (2022) demonstrated by the digital project MUSENSE that technology can support rather than substitute for traditional mentoring by offering materials for practice, yet the live human presence is the core of musical development.

Therefore, there are strong implications from the existing literature pointing to the importance of mentoring in music education and the increasing focus on cultural transmission amongst researchers. At the same time, these documents point as well to voids within the system. One gap relates to scarcity of attention given to students’ voices, how students themselves make sense of and are affected by mentoring in their engagements with tradition and cultural accountability. Another gap that can be identified is methodological: there is a need to better combine quantitative approaches, to assess the extent of the phenomenon, with qualitative methodologies, conducive to the in-depth exploration of cases. Lastly, the issue of how mentoring may contribute to a student’s technical mastery and cultural heritage preservation “when these commitments come to be viewed as antithetical” has not been thoroughly addressed. The present study is intended to address these deficiencies.

#### 4. Results

The summarized results of the student survey (N = 147) are presented in Appendix B. Figure 1 presents descriptive statistics for the key variables of the survey.

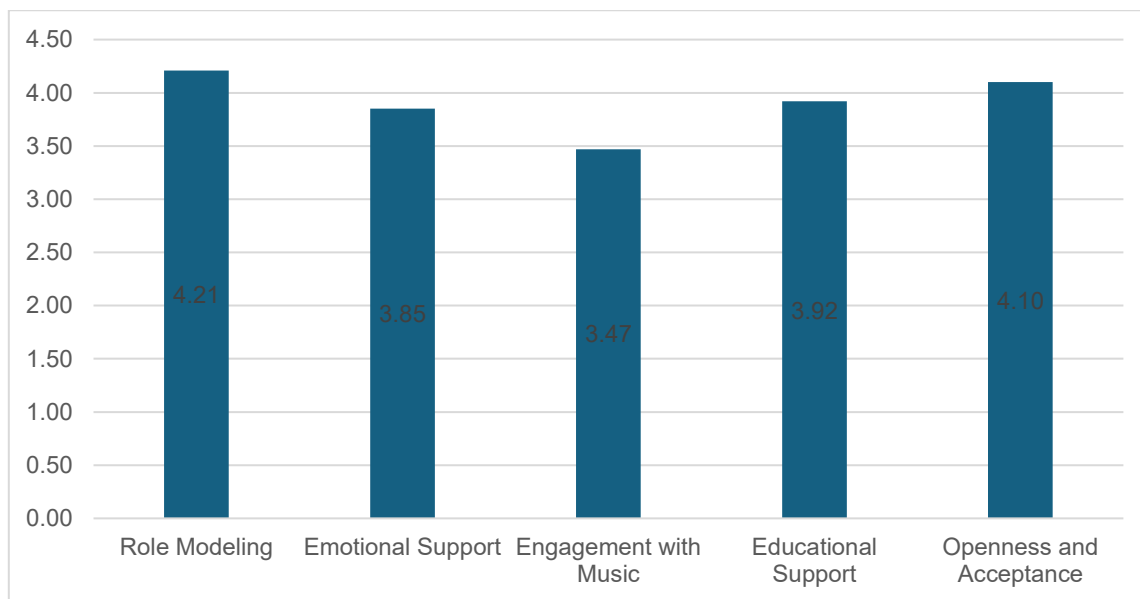


**Figure 1.** Descriptive statistics for key variables (N = 147)

Source: author's own development

Students were satisfied with their mentoring experiences, a finding that applied to both instrumental support ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) and psychosocial support ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) and role modeling ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ). Technical and artistic development indicators were also favorable ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ). Participation in traditional

music was more dispersed ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) which suggests that students differed considerably in the extent to which they were linked to traditional repertoire and practices.

The bivariate correlations between the mentoring quality indicators and student outcomes revealed significant positive relationships with both indicators (Figure 2).

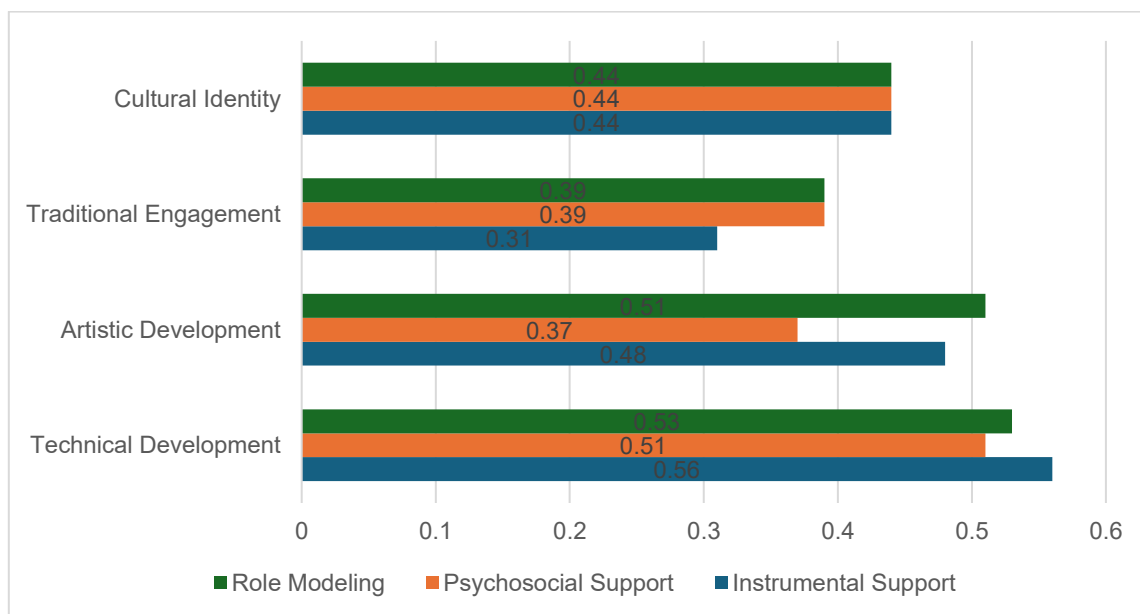


**Figure 2.** Correlations between the quality of mentoring and student performance

Source: author's own development

Instrumental support showed a positive strong association with technical development ( $r = 0.56$ ,  $p$

$< 0.001$ ) and moderate association with artistic development ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Psychosocial

support was most strongly associated with artistic development ( $r = 0.51$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and cultural identity ( $r = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Role modeling was significantly related to all outcomes, most strongly to cultural identity ( $r = 0.53$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and traditional music involvement ( $r = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Multiple regression analyses investigated whether each mentoring dimension uniquely contributed to student outcomes when controlling for years of study and primary instrument (Figure 3).

For the technical development, the best predictor was instrumental support ( $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and role modeling was also a significant predictor ( $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The model accounted for 41% of the variance in technical development. For artistic development, significant predictors were psychosocial support ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and role

modeling ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with instrumental support contributed less but significantly to the model ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

The model explained ~38 per cent of the variance. We found that traditional music participation was predicted by role modeling ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and psychosocial support ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) but instrumental support was not significant.

There was also a significant effect for primary instrument category ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with folk/traditional performance majors being the most engaged. Cultural identity and engagement were also significantly predicted by role modelling ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and psychosocial support ( $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as well as years of study ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The model accounted for 44% of the variance (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Multiple regression analysis for predicting student performance

| Independent Variable | Technical Development | Artistic Development | Traditional Engagement | Cultural Identity |
|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Role Modeling        | 0,63***               | 0,47***              | 0,28**                 | 0,05              |
| Instrumental Support | 0,32***               | 0,42**               | 0,19*                  | 0,02*             |
| Psychosocial Support | 0,42***               | 0,09                 | 0,28**                 | 0,03*             |
| Instrument Category  | 0,02**                | 0,04*                | 0,02*                  | -0,01             |

Source: developed by the authors

Based on their total mentoring scores, the participants were split into high mentoring quality (upper quartile,  $n = 38$ ) and low mentoring quality (lower quartile,  $n = 36$ ) groups. t-Tests for independent samples revealed statistical significance for all dependent variables. Students who receive high quality mentoring report much stronger technical ( $M = 4.52$  vs.  $3.61$ ,  $t = 6.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.58$ ) and artistic growth ( $M = 4.48$  vs.  $3.54$ ,  $t = 6.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.44$ ), participation in traditional music ( $M = 4.03$  vs.  $2.98$ ,  $t = 5.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.24$ ), and cultural identity ( $M = 4.41$  vs.  $3.32$ ,  $t = 6.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.52$ ).

Based on a thematic analysis of interviews with mentors and student surveys, this study invites us to rethink mentoring in music education. Four

themes: “Mentor as cultural mediator” “Holistic development through connection”, “Interaction of tradition and innovation”, and “Challenges of the contemporary context” are intertwined rather than mutually exclusive. Rather than being seen as separate and distinct items, they emerge as connected and at times paradoxical aspects of which the mentor is represented as a complex character. Nevertheless, a paradox appears, as the image of a multidimensional partner confronts hierarchical expectations from all sides, is to humanize education.

The findings illustrate that successful mentoring is far more than the development of technical skills and can be described as a process of culture transmission, personal growth of the participants

and the mutual negotiation of creative tension. The survey of students and mentors at music conservatories, supplemented by a thematic analysis of interviews with open-ended questions, allows to draw an overall picture of mentoring as a phenomenon that is rooted in the lived, personally mediated experience of educational interaction.

The mentor is conceived, then, primarily as an agent living medium between generations. She or he doesn't simply instruct in repertoire; he or she bestows all that is unnotatable: phrasing, history, values and cultural context. That is what makes study participation in a living tradition, allowing the student to be part of a semantic whole that turns the classroom experience into something much bigger than that. This methodology is enabled by a different, no less salient axis: relationships that exceed the instrumental. A mentor who considers a student as a person, who speaks not only about technique, but also about anxieties, doubts and senses of life, is not breeding a performer, but a human for whom music becomes as natural as breathing.

Mentoring now had its own backstage intrigue. Tempo! is an honor. We each find ourselves caught between honoring tradition and having the right to 'have our say'. Bittner further explodes with his and his people's identity now that He is every bit a Lamen. The mentor reaches the highest level of artistry when he or she does not simply choose between these poles but finds a way to walk in both directions: First a profound immersion in tradition, followed by a tentative, pro-active quest for one's own voice in relation to tradition or in dialogue with it. This is not a technical but a finely nuanced pedagogical and human wisdom. But even the best good intentions of mentors must confront systemic constraints. Strict curricula, time limits, and formal obligations frequently overwhelm what the research subjects find to be the most important elements of deep cultural transmission, relaxed conversation, and trusted bonds.

It is in this cultural context that the pain of imparting knowledge truly bites: "I am ashamed to have to tell to my students that they must lose part of their tradition when facing this work" wrote 28-year-old and Able player, Dheera. In essence good

mentoring for music is found where culture, relationships and expressive freedom converge. Its power comes from its humanity, from being both steward of tradition and guide to the uncharted. And to be vulnerable is to need more support, not less.

## 5. Discussion

The results of the investigation support the conclusion that successful mentoring in music education is a combination of instrumental support, psychosocial support, and role modeling (Figure 4). Particularly, role modeling plays a significant role: the tradition is conveyed more on the basis of the mentor's personal example and lived-musical experience than through didactical means. This aligns with research on informal learning (Fonseca & Sousa, 2024; Green, 2002) and adds to existing theoretical frameworks (Menard, 2024; Yeo et al., 2022).



**Figure 3.** Scheme of effective mentoring

Source: author's own development

The qualitative data indicated mentoring is holistic. Teachers who contribute not only to the technical but also the personal, emotional, and ethical growth of students assist in shaping a musician as a whole person. It is this marriage of technical skills with emotion and cultural information that defines the unique essence of music mentoring (Zhukov & Barrett, 2025).

A major finding was that mentors are consciously attuned to the balancing act between holding tradition and children's innovation. They do not invert these poles but combine them: innovation is

founded on a robust understanding of tradition, and tradition is maintained through creative renewal. This is a theoretical framework which parallels, aligns or resonates with the pedagogy of culture (ie. cultural pedagogy) (Rector, 2025; Paris & Alim, 2017; Pizarro et al. 2025).

Yet there were major obstacles: institutional constraints, a lack of time to build deep relationships, and generational cultural gaps. To break down such barriers, education policy needs to be revisited to allow space for the relational aspects of learning, for expanded forms of mentoring, and for specialized preparation of educators to work in culturally diverse contexts.

The theoretical contribution of the study is to empirically substantiate the multidimensionality of mentoring and to confirm the key role of role modeling for cultural transmission. Limitations include: cross-sectional design, which does not allow for causal conclusions; sampling within one national context; use of self-reports, which should be supplemented with observations.

Further prospects include cross-cultural and longitudinal studies, the study of programs to increase the cultural competence of mentors, and the analysis of institutional conditions that promote holistic mentoring.

## 6. Conclusions

The results of the study show that in productive mentoring in the field of music education, instrumental support, psychosocial support, and role modelling do not exist in isolation, but are intertwined in the living fabric of interaction between the mentor and the student, forming a holistic space of professional and personal development. Each of these aspects, being more or less manifested, influences the formation of both a young professional musician and a personality in general. They acquired technical and artistic knowledge, exposure to the traditions of performing literature for traditional instruments,

and an understanding of their own cultural identity. From this standpoint, mentoring does not seem to be a matter of carrying out certain functions but distancing oneself in the same living space in which professional development is structurally linked to personal and cultural self-determination.

Professional growth is nurturing: as a facilitator of musical development, mentorship has been demonstrated to be an all-encompassing experience in that mentoring is more than the imparting of knowledge and skills, it also involves personal development of the musician.

Mentors, as cultural mediators, are both active partners in living the tradition, and through their presence and commitment to it, offer their experience and vision of the tradition to the students, not simply outside of it. In this way, they learn how to keep the tradition alive without becoming creative vandals.

Yet they are constrained by institutional obstacles, by the time necessary to develop trust, and by cultural chasms between generations. To redress such barriers, concerted efforts and consistent institutional policies, adaptable curricula, and systematic training of mentors to operate in a multicultural context are needed.

There are few studies of mentoring in music education, mostly of a quantitative nature. The use of a mixed methodology allowed us not only to measure the impact of mentoring, but also to understand how the participants – mentors and students – experience these relationships and what content they contain.

The findings confirm that musical traditions do not exist in archives, but in a living, bodily assimilated practice that is reproduced every time a teacher and student meet in person. Mentoring relationships-with their trust, professional sincerity, and capacity for renewal-become the environment where this continuity becomes possible. Sustaining a relationship like this is supporting future musicians, and what they are going to be told.

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