

# **A Model for Performance Assessment: A Case of Professional Music Training Program**

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**Abstract** – The goals of a professional music training program are designed to prepare students to present performances of music as a featured soloist, educational content of programs in alignment with the requirements of the professional world. Ideally, a professional music training program fosters high quality skills in playing the instrument with preferences and capabilities towards a more musician oriented career or more pedagogical career regarding their qualities and skills. To measure the efficacy of a professional music training program, the use of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) Performance Assessment based on nationally recognized assessment principles and procedures to evaluate student skills in university music training courses in regards to literature, musical styles, playing technique, or eventually operational contexts relative to a music education. The achievement criteria presented generally accurate contrasting performances, demonstrating a range of technical skills, and appropriate musicianship and presentation skills. The assessment procedure will be accompanied by the on-going development of exemplar material for all standards, and opportunities for teacher professional development and dialogue to assess and refine music-inquiry processes of course content. The procedure resulted in an assessment system for benchmarking accumulate evidence of performances in students’ work and offered insights into the effect of professional music training courses on student knowledge and understanding of the musical style. The findings demonstrate a true assessment of music performance in summative contexts is realized by raising the quality of practice, defined as meeting learning objectives in performance, that conform to the criteria of academic and performance requirements.

**Keywords** – Music Assessment, Performance Assessment, Standards.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Researchers from the National Association for Music Education (NAME) in America, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) in New Zealand, and Shepard (2000) conducted many studies on education assessment. The results indicated that the education assessment process should be seated in the middle of the teaching and learning process, and that feedback should scaffold expert tutoring techniques (Parkes, 2010). NAME’s current assessment trends emphasizes student reflection, tracking progress over time, and formative as well as summative measures (Simon, 2014). Professional educational assessment provides essential “information that is used for making decisions about students, curricula and programs, and educational policy” (Nitko, 2004, p. 5) and provides information to assist policy makers to “become competent in selecting and using assessments” (p. 6). Assessment helps improve the value of the

decisions made and outcomes produced.

Since 1990, assessment in higher education has been under scrutiny, and music assessment can be included in the area “identified by those in the measurement community as prime examples of unreliable measurement” (Guskey, 2006, p. 1) in the teaching and learning setting (Parkes, 2010). Without doubt, the Tainan University of Technology’s (TUT) seven-year program for music students has faced many unprecedented challenges in the past decade. The challenges include promoting good communication between faculty, fostering a desire to remove the secretive or subjective nature of assessments, developing a willingness to embrace new methodologies, and ultimately, testing and refining for teachers the methodologies’ effectiveness in the teaching and learning setting.

## **II. SEARCHING FOR MUSICAL STANDARDS IN THE TUT**

The development of individual performance skills occupies a significant place in the Western classical music traditions that have dominated Taiwan’s music education. Since 2005, the Ministry of Education Advisory Office (MOEAO) has begun to develop a four-year program to improve the pedagogy and curriculum of the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). There are many sub-programs under this strategic plan (2007-2010). The Innovative Teaching Program of Performing Arts is one of them. This is reflected in the weighting given to solo performance achievement standards in the SSH (Ministry of Education, 2010). The American National Board for professional teaching standards (NBPTS) was used as a guide: “Professional competences” (Chen, Song, & Zhen, 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to provide a review of noteworthy developments at the Tainan University of Technology (TUT), Taiwan, Music Department’s seven-year program from high school directly to a bachelor’s degree in vocational education. A performance assessment process at the TUT has been selected to discuss criteria and guidelines for measuring the effectiveness of both student assessment and the ongoing process of program evaluation. Two research questions and their rationales guided the focus of the study:

RQ1: What were the main challenges that performing arts studios faced when implementing teaching and learning methods, and what dilemmas emerged?

RQ2: Were the standards that emerge to resolve these challenges reliable and valid for Taiwan’s situation and the TUT’s version of “structured quality judgments,” or

were the weaknesses exposed inherent in the performance-based assessment model itself?

Selected areas for consideration are the following:

- The selection and/or development of instruments,
- Alignment to existing programs,
- Student rights and responsibilities,
- Prevention of bias,
- Instructor and administrator responsibilities,
- Student achievement,
- Accommodations, and
- Issues in developing, selecting, scoring, and interpreting student results.

Ensuring schools have access to recent and multiple forms of assessment has contributed to the development of “assessing concept understanding at a deeper level” (Nitko, 2004, p. 203). The first research question (RQ1) encouraged participants to focus on various goals and strengths, as well as the opportunities that are important for making recommendations for improvement, while meeting the expectations of alignment with selected areas and processes.

Additional creative measures are required for schools to rise to the challenge of “a strong rationale for periodic and systematic program evaluations, ranging from refinement of services to justification of one’s existence” (Hackney, Gilbride, & Scarborough, 2003, p. 3). Equally important is ensuring participants are provided the newest supplementary information to enhance results and conclusions. The second research question (RQ2) was designed to help participants consider the validity of transparent criteria based on cognitive complexity and content quality as resources for the performance assessments. Many factors influence the success of methods and strategies. In the educational field, teachers regularly confront problems, whether academic or practical, requiring solutions (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003).

### **III. THE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT - AN EXISTING STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM EVALUATION PROCESS REVIEW**

Performance assessment is a form of “*performance task*” (Nitko, 2004, p. 203) and “a clear *rubric for scoring*” reviews (p. 238). Performance assessment is a measuring assessment based on performance tasks such as “the product the student produces” or “the process a student uses to complete the product” (p. 238). Performance assessments provide learning targets that enable examiners to make credible and unbiased judgments about the value of rubrics for the scoring of “a coherent set of rules” (p. 238).

According to Reynolds, Livingston and Willson (2006), “The Joint Committee on Testing Practices (JCTP, 1998) noted that probably the most fundamental right of test takers is to be evaluated with assessments that meet high professional standards and that are valid for the intended purposes” (p. 424). Student assessment provides “students and parents with feedback about achievement” (Nitko,

2004, p. 9); students communicate their learning via activities by “showing them [students and parents] what you want[ed] them to learn” (p. 10). Student achievement can be evaluated “for formative or summative purposes” (Nitko, 2004, p. 9). As Nitko (2004, p. 9) noted, “Formative evaluation of students’ achievement means we are judging the quality of a student’s achievement while the student is still in the process of learning.” Nitko also suggested, “Summative evaluation of students’ achievement means judging the quality or worth of a student’s achievement after the instructional process is completed” (p. 9). In other words, the instructor uses formative (vertically aligned) and summative (horizontally aligned) assessment data to modify future instruction.

In his analysis of formative and summative evaluation of programs or materials, Nitko (2004, p. 9) made a distinction between spontaneous decision making in the classroom and using assessment “during the design or development of instructional materials, instructional procedures, curricula, or educational programs” and “already-completed instructional materials, instructional procedures, curricula, or educational programs.”

There are six approaches to student assessment final goals; these are profiling content strengths and weaknesses, identifying prerequisite deficits, identifying objectives not mastered, identifying students’ errors, identifying student knowledge structures, and identifying competencies for solving word problems (Nitko, 2004, p. 301).

Program evaluation final goals are the following:

- To revisit “lessons or learning materials based on information obtained from their previous use” (Nitko, 2004, p. 9) by the teacher; and
- To summarize strengths and weaknesses of “stated goals and objectives” (p. 9) as they are “implemented program or procedure” (p. 9) within classroom decision making and from using assessments.

Student evaluation is the detailed and basic evaluation, whereas the program evaluation is the overall general evaluation. These are interdependent processes: Feedback for program evaluation comes from students, and student evaluation comes from teachers.

### **IV. ASSESSMENT HOALS**

The main goals of the TUT Music Department’s performance assessment processes for solo instrument performances are the following:

- Hone skills and challenge playing abilities,
- Clarify performance in a given domain and to construct valid assessment devices (Bergee, 2003, p. 140),
- Enhance the quality of practice (meet learning objectives in performance) (Bergee, 2003, p. 140),
- Provide “interjudge reliability” (Bergee, 2003, p. 140) for the TUT’s students “with good construct and content validity” (Bergee, 2003, p. 141) for solo performance domains, and
- Provide “performance knowledge and skills” allowing the TUT’s students to meet “foundational content standards” (Bergee, 2003, p. 138).

## V. STRENGTHS OF SEVEN-YEAR PROGRAM AT TUT

As Bergee (2003) noted, “Assessment of music performance in authentic contexts remains an under-investigated area of research” (p. 137). Bergee (2003) also developed an assessment process to evaluate performance aspects, using criteria-specific rating scales, which “are more comprehensive, encouraging attention to all aspects of the performance and providing balanced feedback to performers” (p. 147). Performance assessment should be seen as a meaningful task for enhancing student presentations (Nitko, 2004). As Nitko (2004) noted, “Performance assessment is sometimes called alternative assessment or authentic assessment” (p. 248). At the TUT’s Music Department, performance assessments are seen to have their own set of strengths, and Nitko (2004, p. 249) cites several researchers’ summaries as follows:

1. *Performance tasks clarify the meaning of complex learning targets.* Performance assessment helps students “apply skills and knowledge gained through instruction to musical problems within the context of this instruction” (Scott, 2004, p. 4).

2. *Performance assessment is consistent with modern learning theory.* When a teacher gives instruction in music, he/she should also encourage students to become involved in meaningful related activities, such as contributing to interdisciplinary curriculum design, and constructivist approaches that “require exploration and inquiry” (Nitko, 2004, p. 249).

3. *Performance tasks require integration of knowledge, skills, and abilities.* Performance assessments require students to demonstrate their learning outcomes through complex performance tasks. For example, the TUT’s music appreciation competency evaluation assesses for inspiration, rhythm, melody, harmony, and tone color, and students are asked to demonstrate their music appreciation ability by showing measurable knowledge about what to listen for in music.

4. *Performance assessments may be linked more closely with teaching activities.* Performance assessments include solo and ensemble performances, using a Single Focus rubric for

5. Instructional outcome to assess a “single skill or element of performance,” and using a Multiple-Foci rubric for instructional outcomes to examine “several skills or aspects of performance” (Scott, 2004, p. 5).

6. *Performance tasks broaden the approach to student assessment.* Reynolds et al. (2006) asserted, “Performance assessments require test takers to complete a process or produce a product in a context that closely resembles real-life situations” (p. 23). At the TUT, students in the Music Department’s seven-year program are required to take both academic credits and performing credits. How can staff at the TUT make sure learning outcomes are effective? Some types of evaluation used are derived from Hackney et al. (2003, p. 16) such as, Needs Assessment (paper-pencil tests), Formative Evaluation (expert consultation, vertically aligned), Summative Evaluation (the jury performance, horizontally aligned), “norm-

referencing (relative standards),” and “criterion-referencing (absolute standards)” (Nitko, 2004, p. 343). A score of 60 is required to pass.

7. *Performance tasks let teachers assess the processes students use as well as the products they produce.* At the TUT, for example, solo piano performance assessments are “focus[ed] on key points of instruction” (Scott, 2004, p. 6) and include such areas as “Interpretation/Musical Effect, Rhythm/Tempo, and Technique” (Bergee, 2003, p. 143).

The greatest strengths of the seven-year program as the TUT Music Department are its instructional programs use multiple measurement/assessment tools in its performing requirements (see Table 1). For example, a critical listening audience, not only a professional panel, assesses music students in public. Performance assessment at the TUT has continued to expand beyond only learning outcomes to include learning processes. After five years, staff at the TUT’s Music Department want to know in what areas students have developed to meet learning goals (skills and knowledge). After seven years, staff in the Music Department wants to know ‘how’ students have grown in their professional development.

Music Department students have teamwork opportunities in which to participate, such as orchestra, choir, and chamber music ensembles. The opportunities provide students with experiences of working collaboratively, thus enhancing cooperative learning and progressing towards a “complex thinking target” (Nitko, 2004, p. 203). All of the students are involved in ‘Master Classes’ (guest musician instruction), performance activities (concert events), academic conferences, and music festival activities. The descriptions in Table 1 demonstrate the TUT’s tight program efficiency and effectiveness, rather than a “drift from its mission and from its clientele” (Hackney et al., 2003, p. 1). It should be noted the relationship with ‘the real world’ is more intimately direct for music students than for students of most other disciplines.

## VI. CONCLUSION

How can the increased reliability and validity of performance-based assessment be effected? Is the practical solution for evaluating performance arts such as music reducing validity and reliability problems associated with the secretive or subjective nature of assessments for faculty in performing arts departments? This does appear to be the case with respect to the TUT, although the structured quality judgments (SQJ) model also proved to have limitations: Applied music performance faculty use their ‘subjective’ evaluation in music ‘performance assessment’ to evaluate performances. To exclude the possibility of developing criteria that would make what was previously of a secretive nature would not be a desirable solution. The nature of musical performance assessment includes both “cognitive complexity and content quality, and [must] be comprehensive” (Parkes, 2010, p. 101); therefore a case can be made that the ‘subjective’ criteria should be formalized and included in

evaluation models for the performing arts. In this paper, the quality of learning outcomes as part of an assessment strategy that supports the vision of effectiveness in the teaching and learning setting at the TUT and applying the

principles of the SQJ model to the TUT’s practices to help address some of the TUT’s effective assessment and implementation issues was described.

Table 1. Strengths Guidelines in TUT

The assessment regime	Teacher assessment	Performance examinations	Accountability	Penalties	Failure of Performance Examinations	Appeals
1. Teacher assessment, jury examinations, and recitals. 2. The fifth year is a barrier exam; a student must pass to be admitted to the upper classes 3. Semester assessment	1. Holistic judgments capture the overall quality (Thompson & Williamon, 2003, p. 26)	1. Preparation 2. Scheduling 3. Exam structure for B.Mus. performance principal study 4. Repertoire requirements 5. The provision of scores to examiners 6. Marking guidelines for performance examinations 7. Membership of examination and recital panels 8. Conduct during performance examinations 9. Marking procedures 10. Procedures for resolving conflict 11. The report	Staffs are accountable for all grading decisions.	1 Penalties may be applied if performances fall short of or exceed the allowed time limit. 2. Changes in program incur a penalty.	If student failure occurs in the semester jury, the student can retake the class during the following year along with his/her current credits, or delay his/her graduation one year to complete the requirement.	Under TUT policy students have right to appeal on the basis of procedural fairness or final result.

Note. From *Undergraduate performance assessment: A guide to requirements and processes*, by the Academic Board, 2004, p. 1-7.

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