

# Teacher-Student Relationship and Learning Satisfaction: Student Engagement as a Mediating Mechanism in Heritage Music Education among Mongolian University Students

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## ABSTRACT:

This study is a response to the increasing focus on students' cultural identity, emotional experience, and learning satisfaction in the field of heritage education, examining heritage music learning at Mongolian university students in Inner Mongolia. The study investigates 1) the impact of teacher-student relationship on learning satisfaction; (2) the effect of teacher-student relationship on student engagement; (3) the effect of student engagement on learning satisfaction; and (4) if student engagement mediates the association between teacher-student relationship and learning satisfaction. Employing stratified sampling, a quantitative and cross-sectional survey design was used to sample nine universities in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Considering the population size, a target sample of 350 was set for 2,186 Musicology undergraduates who attend courses related to heritage music education. The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS 28.0 through reliability analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, Fornell-Larcker discriminant validity, structural equation modeling, and bootstrapping to examine mediational effects. The results also reveal that teacher-student relationship and student engagement are significant positive predictors of learning satisfaction. Bootstrapping additional supports that there is a statistically significant indirect effect of teacher-student relationship on learning satisfaction through student engagement. The study contributes by bringing relational (teacher-student relationship) and psychological-process (student engagement) accounts of learning satisfaction together in a culturally specific heritage music education context, by extending engagement-based mediation evidence to ethnic minority higher education, and by providing practical implications for culturally responsive pedagogy to enhance engagement and to support Mongolian musical heritage

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transmission in universities.

Keywords: Teacher-student relationship, student engagement, learning satisfaction

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## 1. Introduction

In the higher education field, more attention has been paid to student emotional involvement, cultural identity, and overall learning satisfaction rather than academic performance only (Liu et al., 2024). In the context of this wider reform, heritage education has been re-energized as a university strategy to maintain or retain (intangible) cultural tradition(s), while ratifying tradition through transformation in modern educational settings (Zhao, 2025). The education of heritage music is an important means for the cultural values, collective memory and artistic techniques to be passed on from one generation to the next (Jiang, 2025). To ethnic minorities like Mongolian students in China, heritage music is not only an academic discipline but it is also a lively cultural expression intimately connected to aspects of identity, history, and ethnic community coherence (Huang, 2025). Consequently, to know how educational processes constitute students' learning experiences in this context is, both, an educational and cultural imperative. Among the several determinants that impact students' life-long learning experiences, the teacher-student relationship has been regarded as a cornerstone of good quality teaching and learning (Bhattarai, 2023). A positive teacher-student relationship, which includes elements such as trust, respect, emotional support, and communication, is demonstrated to positively influence students' motivation, engagement, and satisfaction with learning in a variety of contexts of education (Nazish et al., 2024). In arts and music education,

this relationship may be of the essence, as much of the learning is emotional expression, performance, and personal interpretation. In heritage music education, where cultural sensitivity and identity affirmation are core, the nature of the teacher-student interaction may greatly influence the way students come to understand the worth and significance of their learning experiences.

Learning satisfaction is a crucial component of education quality and effectiveness that indicates how well students perceive the learning environment (Cant et al., 2023). Positive learning satisfaction is related to higher motivation, deeper engagement and positive subject and institution-related attitudinal outcomes (Fisher et al., 2021). In HME, learning satisfaction is more than a sense of progress in practical skills through study and it extends into students' experiences of cultural identification, enjoyment and emotional growth (Campbell et al., 2022). Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, there has not been any research exploring the university students' satisfaction of learning with heritage/minority music education in higher education, although it has significance for heritage education as discussed earlier. Previous research such as Abdulmalik (2024) tend to concentrate on curriculum design or policy perspectives and therefore the interpersonal and emotional aspects of learning are less explored.

Student engagement has been identified as a fundamental construct for explaining the conversion of educational resources into productive learning outcomes (Wong et al., 2022). Typically considered to be a multi-dimensional

construct including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive elements, student engagement describes “the degree to which students are involved in or devote time and energy to their studies” (Hasanov et al., 2021). Literature from various educational fields indicates that students who are engaged in learning tend to have higher satisfaction levels, better grades, and more growth in the self (Kandiko et al., 2021). In music education, engagement can be expressed in active practice, focused listening, emotional penetration, and thoughtful understanding, which are all important aspects of effective learning (Wang, 2025). Therefore, engagement in school may be a pathway between teacher-student relationship and learning satisfaction. Within the scope of heritage music education for Mongolian university students, student engagement may be a contributing factor. Many Mongolian students exist between cultural worlds as they adhere to traditional cultural values in their home culture and face modern academic expectations (Tenhunen, 2025). As teachers respect students’ cultural backgrounds, facilitate participation, and establish positive learning climates, students tend to perceive themselves as more appreciated and are motivated to invest more in their heritage music learning (Hontarenko & Osmachko, 2024). Such increased engagement might, in turn, promote increased fun, perceived relatedness, and interpretation of learning, as well as enhanced satisfaction (Lin et al., 2021). By contrast, poor (or perceived poor) quality of teacher-student relationships may negatively impact engagement and contribute to music students perceiving heritage music education as less meaningful or disconnected from their everyday experiences. There has been an increasing interest in teacher-student relationship, student engagement and

learning satisfaction, yet there is still a lack of empirical research that considers these three constructs together in the context of Mongolian heritage music education with university students. Most of the literature has been drawn from general education or western music education contexts, which has produced findings that may not be applicable or known and felt the complexities of cultural, pedagogical and emotional intersections in minority heritage education (McKoy & Lind, 2022; Good-Perkins, 2021). In addition, very few studies have explored student engagement as a mediating process between relational influences and learning outcomes in the field. To fill this gap would be an important step in information gathering to inform culturally responsive teaching practices and enhance the pursuit of higher education heritage music education. Against this background, this study focuses on exploring the teacher-student relationship and learning satisfaction in heritage music education in the context of students from Mongolian universities, with student engagement as a mediator. By investigating the interplay of these variables, the study aims to offer empirical evidence concerning the psychological and relational processes that characterize students’ learning experiences. The results of the study are anticipated to add to the studies related to heritage music education, student engagement, and educational psychology, and also provide practical implications for educators and institutions that aim to improve teaching quality and student satisfaction as well as the sustainable delivery of Mongolian musical heritage in university context.

## 2. Research objectives

Based on the background and research focus of this study, the study aims to examine how the teacher-student relationship influences learning

satisfaction in heritage music education among Mongolian university students, with the attention to the mediating role of student engagement. To achieve this research objective, the specific research objectives are outlined as follows:

RO1: To examine the influence of teacher-student relationship on learning satisfaction among Mongolian university student in heritage music education.

RO2: To examine the influence of teacher-student relationship on student engagement among Mongolian university student in heritage music education.

RO3: To examine the influence of student engagement on learning satisfaction among Mongolian university student in heritage music education.

RO4: To examine the role of student engagement in the relationship between teacher-student relationship and learning satisfaction among Mongolian university student in heritage music education.

### 3. Research questions

In line with the research objectives and the conceptual scope of the study, the following research questions were developed to empirically explore among Mongolian university students: teacher-student relationship, student engagement, and learning satisfaction in heritage music education.

RQ1: What is the relationship between teacher-student relationship and learning satisfaction among Mongolian university student in heritage music education?

RQ2: What is the relationship between teacher-student relationship and student

engagement among Mongolian university student in heritage music education?

RQ3: What is the relationship between student engagement and learning satisfaction among Mongolian university student in heritage music education?

RQ4: Does student engagement mediate the relationship between teacher-student relationship and learning satisfaction among Mongolian university students in heritage music education?

### 4. Research hypothesis

In light of the objectives and questions of the study, the following hypotheses are proposed for this study to be tested within the domain of heritage music education with Mongolian university students.

H1: Teacher-student relationship has a significant positive influence on learning satisfaction among Mongolian university students in heritage music education.

H2: Teacher-student relationship has a significant positive influence on student engagement among Mongolian university students in heritage music education.

H3: Student engagement has a significant positive influence on learning satisfaction among Mongolian university students in heritage music education.

H4: Student engagement significantly mediates the relationship between teacher-student relationship and learning satisfaction among Mongolian university students in heritage music education.

### 5. Literature review

#### 5.1 Studies on teacher-student relationship

The teacher-student relationship (TSR) has long been found to be a key element of quality teaching and learning, and however, recent research has gone beyond descriptive correlations to critically analyze the mechanisms, boundary conditions and relational processes through which TSR operates. This turn in research illustrates an increasing understanding that TSR is not a stable characteristic of classrooms but is rather an evolving dynamic influenced by motivational, contextual and interpersonal elements.

From the view of the teacher as the agent of the perspective, Robinson (2022) offers a significant theoretical consideration by emphasizing teachers' motivational beliefs as precursors of TSR quality. Although this model provides a strong rationale for explaining why some teachers are more motivated than others to develop relationships with students, the explanation is heavily dependent on teachers' self-perceptions and does not adequately consider structural limitations such as workload, class size, or institutional accountability pressures. For this reason, its relevance could be different in educational systems with different policy regimes.

Student-centred evidence further bolsters the argument that TSR acts as a motivator. Akram & Li (2024) reveal TSR continues to be meaningful in online university education, with its strength being in the relation with intrinsic motivation. Nevertheless, there are concerns on the study's dependence on self-reported engagement for common method bias and causality inference, and that the study should be replicated in a longitudinal or mixed-method design. In the same vein, Saxer et al. (2024) contribute to TSR research with respect to student well-being, noting varying impacts by demographic factors. Although this

multifaceted perspective allows a more complete analysis of holistic outcomes, it highlights the situational nature of TSR and challenges any assumption about universal benefits.

Zou et al. (2024) provides a holistic view by connecting teachers' intrinsic motivation and motivating styles as well as TSR to students' motivation. Although this model elegantly connects teacher and student processes, it is predominantly cross-sectional. These studies corroborated TSR as a core relational agent and however, they also highlighted that methodological limitations remain and that there is a need for more context-specific, longitudinal work.

## 5.2 Studies on student engagement

Research on student engagement is replete with statements from educators that student engagement is the key mechanism connecting educational contexts to learning outcomes, but it is also apparent from the research complements with a number of conceptual and methodological challenges. Empirical literature on environmental and institutional variables, like Hanaysha et al. (2023), documented sufficient evidence to conclude that classroom environment, teacher quality, and school-based resources were significant predictors of engagement and academic success. Although these results highlight the relevance of structural support, they are mainly based on cross-sectional research, thus limiting the possibility to draw conclusions on causality as well as to identify changes in engagement over time.

Research on interpersonal processes provides a more in-depth understanding of relational aspects of engagement. Research by Li (2021) and Thornberg et al. (2022) furthers the engagement literature beyond explanations rooted in resources

by demonstrating the impact of teacher-student relationships on affective and behavioral engagement. Longitudinal evidence bolsters assertions of the temporal stability, yet such investigations are still relatively rare, especially in culturally diverse and/or non-Western settings.

Research on flipped and blended learning in particular can also add the dimension that engagement is less a function of mode of instruction and more a function of student-centred design (Fisher et al., 2021). Nevertheless, a large part of this literature tends to conflate engagement to one construct, has been too little disaggregate of its cognitive, emotional and behavioural components. Although previous research unequivocally indicate engagement as a crucial educational process, future investigations might profit from more diversified measurement models, as well as culturally grounded and longitudinal research.

### 5.3 Studies on learning satisfaction

Some scholars have the multilevel interpretation of learning satisfaction, but some conceptual and methodological limitations still exist. Huang's (2021) technology-based model provides a clear explanation of how perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness influence learning satisfaction via motivational routes, underscoring the applicability of technology acceptance models in blended learning environments. Nevertheless, this emphasis on instrumental and functional learning may at times minimize the relational and emotional aspects of learning, which are especially prominent in discipline-specific or culturally embedded teaching and learning environments.

Zhang et al. (2021) take a process-based view that combines Social Cognitive Career Theory

(SCCT) with the SOR model and provides a more detailed explanation of how external learning stimuli are converted into learning satisfaction via self-efficacy and skill growth. Although theoretically well developed, this model conceptualizes social support and interaction at a general level, allowing very little space for exploring the quality of pedagogical relationships or culturally mediated forms of interaction that might influence learning satisfaction in context specific ways.

On the institutional side, service quality and organizational support are extended in the analysis by Khoa et al. (2024). However, such macro analyses tend to treat students as customers rather than active participants in the process, and fail to take into account how students' involvement and relational experiences shape institutional impact. These results emphasize the importance of developing integrative models connecting technological usability, psychological processes, and relational processes to better explain the learning satisfaction.

## 6. Research methodology

This study uses a cross-sectional quantitative methodology to investigate the interrelationships of teacher-student relationship, student engagement and learning satisfaction in heritage music education in Mongolian university students. A survey-based methodology is deemed suitable since it enables gathering standardized data systematically from a large number of subjects and makes it possible to test hypothesized direct and mediating relationships through statistical modeling procedures.

The participants of this study are undergraduate students of Musicology major who

take heritage music education-related courses at universities in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The population covers nine universities, including Inner Mongolia University of Science and Technology, Inner Mongolia Normal University, Inner Mongolia Minzu University, Chifeng University, Hulunbuir University, JiNing Normal University, Hetao college, Hohhot Minzu College and Inner Mongolia Arts University. Based on the university's figures up to 2025, the total number of students attending heritage music education in these nine universities is 2186. Using the Raosoft sample size calculator, a sample size of 327 respondents is sufficient to attain an adequate power level at 95% confidence level. The response rate was estimated at 70%, 96 more students were solicited ( $n = 350$ ). Stratified sampling was used to select sample respondents from each university.

The data were collected through a structured questionnaire which consisted of four parts. Teacher-student relationship was assessed by a modified 30-item scale adapted from Azad et al. (2024) in six dimensions of emotional support, conflict, autonomy and independence, self-worth and competence, instrumental support, and informational support. Student engagement was measured by the 15-item scale of Hasanov et al. (2021) to include cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Learning satisfaction was assessed with the 26-item Student Learning Satisfaction Questionnaire (SLSQ) developed by Topala & Tomozii (2014), which address individual characteristics, learning facilities, instructional activity, learning outcomes, learning environment, and peer relationships. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Statistical analyses were performed with

version 28.0 of SPSS and AMOS. The reliability was evaluated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients, and convergent validity was tested by CFA. Discriminant validity was also assessed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Structural equation modeling (SEM) and the bootstrapping technique were used to examine the hypothesized relationships and the mediating effect of student engagement.

## 7. Major findings

This study investigated the effect of the teacher-student relationship on learning satisfaction among Mongolian university students in heritage music education with the mediator of student engagement. The empirical findings support the proposed model well and the measurement instruments are adequate. Result of reliability analysis indicated that all constructs exhibited good internal consistency and the value of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was above the recommended value of 0.70, suggesting the reliability of the data was acceptable. CFA also showed that model fit indices were acceptable for the teacher-student relationship, student engagement and learning satisfaction model. Convergent validity was tested and established since all the standardized factor loadings were significant and all were above 0.60 and additionally, AVE values for each construct were greater than 0.50. The Fornell-Larcker criterion was also employed to confirm discriminant validity, since the square roots of AVE for each construct were larger than its highest correlations with other constructs. These results of reliability, validity and fit indices demonstrate that the measurement model is strong and can be used for further structural analysis.

The results for the direct paths between the latent variables considered in this study are shown

in Table 1. It presents the standardized path coefficients and significance levels, and supplies direct effect proofs of teacher-student relationship

and student engagement on learning satisfaction in heritage music education.

Table 1 SEM path analysis results

| Hypotheses | Path      | Estimate | S.E.  | C.R.   | P-value | Std Path coefficient |
|------------|-----------|----------|-------|--------|---------|----------------------|
| H1         | TSR--->LS | 0.647    | 0.061 | 10.607 | ***     | 0.536                |
| H2         | TSR--->SE | 0.654    | 0.056 | 11.679 | ***     | 0.549                |
| H3         | SE--->LS  | 0.598    | 0.064 | 9.344  | ***     | 0.492                |

Note: Teacher-student relationship (TSR); Student engagement (SE); Learning satisfaction (LS)

The SEM results for the path analysis show that all the proposed direct relationships between latent variables were significant and in the expected directions. Teacher-student relationship (TSR) has a significant positive influence on learning satisfaction (LS) ( $\beta=0.536$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), which is aligned with H1. This indicates that higher level of emotional support, respect and communication between the teachers and the students of Mongolian university students boost their satisfaction in heritage music education. The standardized path coefficient also emphasizes the central importance of relational quality in students' overall appraisals of their learning experiences.

Furthermore, TSR has a significant and positive impact on SE ( $\beta = 0.549$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), which supports H2. This suggests that further research on how positive teacher-student relationships and community enhances students' cognitive,

emotional and behavioral engagement in heritage music education contexts. These findings highlight the need for a supportive, culture appropriate tutoring style to facilitate engagement among Mongolian university students. And SE has also a positive significant influence on LS ( $\beta=0.492$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), support H3. The implication of this association is that when students are more engaged, they tend to have more fun, perceive the class to be more applicable, and be more satisfied with the learning. These results illustrate that both both TSR and SE play a significant role in directly predicting LS and thereby provide maximal empirical support for the hypothesized model.

To test the student engagement as mediator, the bootstrapping method was used, because it is known to offer rigorous estimates of confidence intervals and indirect effects without any reliance on normality assumptions. The results of the mediation effect analysis appear in Table 2.

Table 2 The mediating effect analysis results of student engagement

| Standard effect | Path             | Effect coefficient | 95% confidence interval |       | S.E.  | P-value |
|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------|---------|
|                 |                  |                    | Lower                   | Upper |       |         |
| Total effect    | TSR --->LS       | 0.806              | 0.753                   | 0.859 | 0.027 | ***     |
| Direct effect   | TSR --->LS       | 0.536              | 0.489                   | 0.583 | 0.024 | ***     |
| Indirect effect | TSR --->SE--->LS | 0.270              | 0.227                   | 0.313 | 0.022 | ***     |

Note: Teacher-student relationship (TSR); Student engagement (SE); Learning satisfaction (LS)

Findings from the analysis of the mediating effect are consistent with the hypothesized mediation model. The positive and significant total effect of teacher-student relationship (TSR) on learning satisfaction (LS) ( $\beta=0.806$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) suggests that TSR has a strong overarching effect on students' learning satisfaction in heritage music education. The direct effect of TSR on LS also remains significant ( $\beta=0.536$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), with SE entered in the model, indicating that teacher-student relationship has an independent effect on learning satisfaction. This result implies that the effect of TSR on LS is not fully channeled via student engagement.

The mediating effect of SE in the relationship between TSR and LS is also positive ( $\beta=0.270$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and the 95% confidence interval is [0.227, 0.313] which does not contain a zero. The finding verifies a significant mediating effect of student engagement. Both the significant direct and indirect effects suggest that the mediation is partial.

These results give strong support of H4 that the student engagement mediates the effect of teacher-student relationship on learning satisfaction for Mongolian university students in heritage music education. These findings highlight that developing both a positive relational climate and student engagement are crucial in promoting learning satisfaction.

## 8. Conclusions

The study analyzed the influence of the teacher-student relationship on Mongolian university students' learning satisfaction, with the mediating effect of student engagement being the focus, in heritage music education. The results demonstrate that positive teacher-student

relationships contribute to students' learning satisfaction with strong empirical evidence directly as well as indirectly through student engagement. In particular, positive, respectful, and culturally affirming teacher-student interactions were associated with increased cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement, which mediated the effects on enjoyment, value, and overall satisfaction in heritage music learning. Student engagement's partial mediating effect means teachers also have a direct substantial impact on their students' experiences of learning while implying for students that engagement is a key psychological mechanism by which relational quality influences satisfaction. These findings contribute to the literature by re-conceptualizing teacher-student relationship and engagement in the unique context of Mongolian heritage music education and by emphasizing the significance of relational and emotional aspects as well as the dimension of instructional factors.

## 9. Discussions

This study aims to investigate the effect of teacher-tudent relationship on learning satisfaction with learning in heritage music education for Mongolian university students, by student engagement as a mediating variable. Concerning RO1, it was found that the teacher-student relationship was a significant and positive predictor of learning satisfaction. Result echoes previous findings of that warm, respectful and emotionally responsive teacher-student relationship is significantly correlated to student satisfaction and positive evaluation of learning (Robinson, 2022). In culturally grounded learning environments such as heritage music education, relational quality seems to be particularly significant, as it informs students' emotional safety and sense of cultural validation.

In response to RO2, the results disclose that teacher-student relationship is a significant predictor of student engagement. This finding is in line with previous studies in which positive interpersonal relationships promote students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Kit et al., 2022). Caring, respectful, and culturally aware teachers can enhance students' belonging which could inspire them to engage in heritage music learning practices.

Concerning RO3, student engagement positively influenced learning satisfaction

significantly which is in line with prior findings that students who are more engaged are likely to report higher levels of satisfaction and have more meaningful learning experiences (Pandita & Kiran, 2023). Consistent with RO4, the effect of teacher-student relationship on learning satisfaction was partially mediated by student engagement. It is consistent with prior findings, that suggest that engagement is a key psychological pathway through which relational variables are related to learning (Hofkens & Pianta, 2022), and teacher-student relationships also directly predict satisfaction.

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