Perceptions of the Jazz Guitar Syllabus Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM): Curriculum Relevance, Pedagogical Practices, and Improvisational Development

Becky Nicky Oliver., Rizal Ezuan Zulkifly Tony*., and Siti Nur Hajarul Aswad Shakeeb Arsalaan Bajunid

Faculty of Music, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101000687

Received: 13 October 2026; Accepted: 18 October 2026; Published: 16 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Jazz guitar education in higher music education encompasses instrumental technique, harmonic understanding, aural perception, stylistic awareness, improvisation, and individual musical expression. However, the presence of structured curricular content does not necessarily indicate how students experience its relevance or how effectively they perceive it to support their musical development. This study aims to investigate perceptions of the jazz guitar syllabus at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia, with particular attention to curriculum relevance, pedagogical practices, improvisational development, and the relationship between academic learning and practical musicianship. A qualitative case study design is proposed, combining semi-structured interviews with jazz guitar students with an analysis of the applicable syllabus, course learning outcomes, and assessment requirements. Participants will be recruited purposively according to their experience in jazz guitar learning. Interview data will be analysed thematically to identify perceived curricular strengths, learning challenges, and opportunities for improvement. The study is intended to contribute to discussions of jazz guitar pedagogy in higher music education, particularly concerning the alignment of technical, theoretical, aural, and creative competencies. The findings will inform recommendations for curriculum development grounded in participants' experiences and the documented requirements of the programme.

Keywords: jazz guitar education; curriculum perception; jazz pedagogy; improvisation; instrumental learning

INTRODUCTION

Jazz education occupies a distinctive position within higher music education because it requires students to combine technical proficiency, theoretical knowledge, stylistic understanding, aural perception, and creative decision-making. Unlike learning activities that primarily emphasise the reproduction of predetermined musical material, jazz improvisation requires musicians to interpret harmonic and rhythmic information while developing musical ideas in real time. The development of these interconnected abilities presents important questions for curriculum design, instrumental pedagogy, and assessment.

For jazz guitar students, the learning process may involve chord voicings, scales, arpeggios, melodic vocabulary, rhythmic articulation, accompaniment, transcription, repertoire study, and improvisation. These competencies do not operate independently. Their educational value partly depends on how students learn to integrate them into musical situations, including solo performance, ensemble interaction, and stylistically diverse professional contexts.

A university syllabus provides a formal structure for organising learning outcomes, instructional content, assessment requirements, and expected levels of proficiency. Nevertheless, curricular structure alone cannot establish whether students perceive the learning progression as coherent, relevant, or accessible. Students enter higher education with different musical backgrounds, levels of technical preparation, listening experiences, and

familiarity with jazz. These differences may influence their engagement with jazz guitar studies and their interpretations of the educational value of the syllabus.

Prouty (2004) examined the cultural relationship between institutional jazz education and the wider jazz community. His discussion highlights how curricular structures, instructional practices, and evaluation can reflect different understandings of what it means to learn and perform jazz. This perspective is relevant to instrumental education because formal academic expectations may not always correspond directly with students' experiences of musical practice.

Watson (2010), in a review of empirical research on jazz pedagogy, identified several areas requiring investigation, including instructional methods, achievement in improvisation, instructional materials, assessment, and creativity. Such work demonstrates that jazz education is not solely a matter of teaching theoretical knowledge; it also raises questions about how learning is structured, evaluated, and translated into creative performance.

More specifically, Wannakul et al. (2024) investigated the development of a jazz guitar instructional package for higher education. Their research addressed basic jazz theory, jazz guitar practice, improvisation, instructional resources, and assessment. This study provides a useful reference for considering the organisation of jazz guitar learning and the relationship between instructional design and creative development.

Building on these areas of scholarship, the present study focuses on perceptions of the jazz guitar syllabus at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam, Malaysia. Rather than presuming that the syllabus is effective or inefficient, the study seeks to understand how students and teaching staff interpret its content, learning progression, teaching approaches, and practical relevance.

The study will also examine the relationship between documented curricular expectations and participants' accounts of their learning experiences. By combining interviews with documentary analysis, it aims to develop a context-specific account of jazz guitar education that can inform curriculum reflection and future pedagogical practice.

Research Focus And Contribution

This study is intended to contribute to research on instrumental pedagogy by examining jazz guitar education within a specific Malaysian higher education context. Its significance lies in three areas.

First, it may provide a more detailed understanding of how students experience a structured jazz guitar curriculum. Such an understanding may help educators consider the relationship between prescribed learning outcomes and students' perceptions of their musical development.

Although existing research has considered jazz pedagogy and jazz guitar instructional materials, a focused study is needed to examine how students and educators perceive the specific jazz guitar syllabus implemented at UiTM. The current syllabus and its associated course documents must first be obtained and examined to establish the actual curricular content and requirements.

Accordingly, this research will investigate perceptions of the jazz guitar syllabus at UiTM, with an emphasis on its relevance, pedagogical practices, contribution to improvisational development, and perceived opportunities for improvement.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study will adopt a qualitative case study design to investigate perceptions of the jazz guitar syllabus at UiTM. A case study is appropriate because the research concerns a specific educational setting and seeks to understand participants' experiences in relation to the curricular context in which they occur.

The case will be bounded by the relevant jazz guitar course or sequence of courses, the Faculty of Music at UiTM, Shah Alam, and the period during which data are collected. The precise course boundaries will be confirmed after the applicable syllabus documents have been obtained.

Two principal sources of data will be used: semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. Interviews will provide insight into participants' experiences and interpretations. Documentary analysis will establish the formal learning outcomes, course content, assessment requirements, and curricular structure against which those perceptions can be considered. The combination of these sources will support a comparison between documented curriculum requirements and participants' accounts. It will not be treated as proof that one source automatically validates the other

Research Setting

The research will be conducted within the Faculty of Music at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia. The institution provides the bounded context for investigating the jazz guitar syllabus. Before recruitment begins, the researcher will identify the relevant course or courses, obtain the current applicable syllabus and associated documents, and confirm the intended study period. Where previous syllabus versions are available and relevant, they may be examined to clarify the development of curricular requirements, subject to institutional permission.

Participants and Sampling

Participants will be selected through purposive sampling. The objective is to recruit individuals who can provide relevant and informed accounts of jazz guitar teaching and learning at UiTM.

The proposed participant groups are identified as follows:

- **Jazz guitar students:** Current students who have undertaken or are undertaking the relevant jazz guitar course or course sequence. An initial target of approximately 8–12 participants may be feasible, depending on the number of eligible individuals, institutional access, and the depth of the data obtained. A possible starting allocation is five to nine students and one to three lecturers. These figures are provisional rather than fixed requirements. The final sample will be justified according to the research aims, participant availability, the information obtained, and the adequacy of the data for addressing the research questions. Students should represent more than one stage of study where feasible. This may allow a comparison between students with different levels of experience with the syllabus. However, differences will be interpreted cautiously and will not be treated as evidence of developmental change without appropriate supporting data

Inclusion Criteria

Student participants should be enrolled in, or have recently completed, the relevant UiTM jazz guitar course or sequence of courses. The students must have sufficient experience with the course to discuss its content, learning activities, or assessment, be willing to participate voluntarily, and provide informed consent.

Documentary Analysis

The researcher will request access to the relevant institutional documents, which may include the current jazz guitar syllabus and course specification, course learning outcomes, programme learning outcomes, prescribed repertoire, learning materials, and recommended resources where documented. The documentary analysis will identify the stated objectives, content, learning sequence, teaching and learning activities, and assessment requirements. Each document will be recorded by title, version, date, and source where this information is available. A structured document-analysis matrix will be used to organise the information. The researcher will distinguish explicit statements in the documents from interpretations made during analysis.

The analysis will not presume that every jazz guitar syllabus includes particular technical exercises, repertoire, or assessment components. Only content supported by the obtained documents will be reported as part of the UiTM curriculum.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with selected students and lecturers. This format will allow the researcher to address common topics while enabling participants to explain experiences and concerns in their own terms. Interviews will be conducted face-to-face or through an approved online platform, depending on participant availability and institutional requirements. With consent, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the recording, confidentiality arrangements, and their right to decline questions or withdraw according to the approved study procedures. Indicative interview questions are provided in Appendix A. Questions will be adapted to the participant group and to the actual syllabus content once the relevant documents have been reviewed.

Pilot Interview

The researcher conducted a pilot interview with an eligible individual who will not necessarily be included in the final sample. The pilot will be used to assess the clarity, relevance, and sequencing of the questions. Any changes to the interview protocol will be documented. If the pilot participant is to be included in the main dataset, this must be consistent with the approved protocol and informed-consent process.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts and documentary materials will be analysed using thematic analysis, following the broad phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process will involve familiarisation with the interview transcripts and curricular documents, generating initial codes relevant to the research questions, and developing the report through an interpretive account supported by participant quotations and documentary evidence. Initial coding may consider curriculum relevance, technical development, harmonic understanding, aural learning, improvisation, assessment, learning progression, and practical application. These are preliminary analytical concepts, not predetermined findings. Additional themes may emerge from participants' accounts. Data will be coded separately at first to preserve the distinction between formal curricular requirements and participant perceptions. The two datasets will then be compared to identify areas of agreement, divergence, and unanswered questions. For example, if a course document specifies an improvisation learning outcome, the analysis may compare that documented expectation with students' accounts of how they experience improvisation instruction. The existence of the learning outcome alone will not establish that students have achieved it.

Researcher Reflexivity

Because qualitative research involves interpretation, the researcher will acknowledge how professional experience, musical expertise, teaching responsibilities, and assumptions about jazz guitar education may influence the research process. If the researcher has a teaching or supervisory relationship with potential participants, this relationship will be disclosed and managed carefully. Recruitment and consent procedures should minimise any perception that participation may affect students' academic standing or relationship with their lecturers. Reflexive notes will be maintained throughout data collection and analysis to record assumptions, methodological decisions, and alternative interpretations of the data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be sought from the relevant UiTM authority before recruitment and data collection, in accordance with applicable institutional requirements. Participants will receive information about the research purpose, procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, recording arrangements, confidentiality, and the intended use of the findings. Written informed consent will be obtained before interviews begin. Because the study concerns a university course, particular attention will be given to power relationships between lecturers and students. Where the researcher teaches or assesses potential participants, recruitment and consent should be

managed in a way that minimizes the pressure to participate. The study will distinguish between quotations that illustrate participants' experiences and claims that can be supported across the dataset. No participant quotation will be fabricated or presented without an appropriate evidential basis.

Methodological Limitations

The proposed study will be limited by its focus on a single institutional setting and a specific instrumental curriculum. Its purpose is contextual understanding rather than statistical generalization. The findings will rely partly on participants' reported experiences, which may be influenced by memory, personal preferences, prior musical training, and relationships within the institution. Documentary analysis will help clarify formal curricular requirements but cannot independently establish the effectiveness of teaching or learning. Access to course documents and participant availability may also affect the scope of the study. These limitations will be reported in the final manuscript based on the circumstances encountered.

RESULTS

Respondent Familiarity

The completed manuscript will report the number and relevant characteristics of participating students and lecturers, the courses or syllabus versions examined, the interview arrangements, and the final analytical procedure. A participant table will present non-identifying information such as participant category, stage of study or teaching role, and relevant experience. Details that could identify individuals within the department will be omitted where necessary. A document table will identify the syllabus and course documents analysed, including version and date where available.

Perceptions of Jazz as a Core Genre in Modern Instrument Studies (RQ1)

Students perceived jazz as an essential foundation for modern music studies, emphasising that jazz provides fundamental knowledge in harmony, chord-scale relationships, and rhythmic understanding. Senior students echoed this view, describing jazz as a genre that strengthens musical fundamentals and supports learning across other genres such as pop, R&B, and fusion. Junior students, although initially finding jazz challenging, acknowledged that jazz helped them understand music at a deeper theoretical and structural level.

Student participants mentioned: "When you first start learning jazz, you are usually going to learn all the musical language and the vocabulary that you will be using later on in other genres."

Student Interest and Engagement with Jazz

Responses revealed a mix of interests among students. Lecturers observed that some students were highly motivated to learn jazz, while others were exposed to jazz only because it was a curriculum requirement. Junior students reported limited exposure to jazz prior to university, which contributed to confusion and a lack of confidence.

However, senior students indicated that prolonged exposure and structured learning helped them gradually develop an appreciation and interest in jazz. Lecturers noted that introducing jazz through simpler standards, modern arrangements, or relatable artists helped increase student engagement.

Lecturers (2 participants) mentioned: "When they don't know what song to bring into the exams, I suggest they play jazz standards, and when it comes to studying and practicing the standards, sometimes they bring up modern arrangements or versions of the songs, which shows how they preferred a more modern take on the song. From there, I will try to pull in a bit of history just to hopefully make them interested."

DISCUSSION

This section addresses RQ1. The analysis examines how participants describe the relevance of the syllabus to their musical goals, their understanding of curricular expectations, and the perceived sequence of learning

activities. The findings include positive, critical, or mixed perspectives. Each reported theme is supported by actual interview extracts and, where relevant, a comparison with documented course requirements. The report distinguishes between participants' opinions about the syllabus and evidence of what the syllabus formally prescribes.

This section also addresses RQ2. It examines participants' accounts of how the course relates to instrumental technique, harmonic understanding, listening, repertoire study, and improvisation. The analysis considers whether participants describe these competencies as interconnected or as separate learning tasks. Any claims about the contribution of specific teaching activities are presented as participant perceptions unless corroborated by an appropriate additional source of evidence.

The first research question concerns how students and lecturers perceive the relevance and structure of the jazz guitar syllabus. The discussion considers whether participants understand the curriculum as a coherent progression of musical competencies and how they relate its objectives to their own musical development. Because participants described a clear relationship between course content and their learning goals, this suggests that the curriculum is perceived as meaningful within their educational experience. Where participants reported uncertainty about the purpose or sequence of particular learning activities, the discussion examines those accounts alongside the syllabus documents. Neither pattern is automatically interpreted as evidence of curricular success or failure. A more defensible interpretation considers the specific course objectives, the participants' stage of study, and the learning conditions described in the data. Prouty's (2004) discussion of institutional jazz education provides a useful lens for examining how formal curricular structures are understood in relation to musical practice. The findings extend this discussion by documenting how students and lecturers interpret a particular jazz guitar curriculum within a Malaysian university setting. All participant groups agreed that jazz education significantly enhanced technical skills. Lecturers explained that jazz requires students to practise scales, arpeggios, chromatic passages, and complex rhythmic patterns, which strengthen overall instrumental technique. Senior students reported improvements in tone control, timing, articulation, and coordination, while junior students noted better finger control, rhythmic accuracy, and dynamic awareness after studying jazz.

The second research question examines perceived contributions to instrumental and improvisational development. The discussion considers how participants describe the relationship between technical practice, theoretical understanding, aural learning, and the construction of improvised musical ideas. Watson (2010) identifies improvisational achievement, pedagogical methods, and assessment as important areas of jazz education research. Wannakul et al. (2024) provide a specific example of curriculum development in jazz guitar instruction. Together, these sources provide a foundation for interpreting the relationship between structured learning and creative application. Where participants perceived a gap between learning theoretical concepts and applying them in improvisation, the discussion considers how the curriculum sequences these activities and whether additional integration is warranted. Because participants described strong connections between the two, the analysis identifies the instructional experiences they associate with that relationship. The study does not claim that a syllabus causes improved improvisational ability solely on the basis of interviews. Such a causal claim would require a different research design and suitable evidence of musical development. Participants identified several challenges, including unfamiliarity with jazz language, limited listening exposure, complex harmony, and a lack of peers to practise with. Time constraints and balancing jazz with other academic responsibilities were also noted.

Both lecturers and students perceived jazz as an essential foundation for modern music studies. Lecturers emphasised that jazz provides fundamental knowledge in harmony, chord-scale relationships, and rhythmic understanding. It was highlighted that jazz is often misunderstood as an advanced or final stage of learning, whereas it actually serves as a core foundation for all musicians.

CONCLUSION

This study is designed to investigate perceptions of the jazz guitar syllabus at Universiti Teknologi MARA through a qualitative case study combining interviews with documentary analysis. Its focus is the relationship between formal curricular expectations and students' and lecturers' experiences of jazz guitar learning and teaching. The study addresses curriculum relevance, pedagogical practices, technical and theoretical

development, aural learning, improvisation, and assessment. By distinguishing documented curricular requirements from participants' perceptions, it aims to provide a transparent account of how the syllabus is understood within its institutional setting. The intended contribution is a context-specific analysis that may inform curriculum reflection and discussions of jazz guitar pedagogy in higher music education. The strength of that contribution depends on obtaining the relevant syllabus documents, collecting sufficient interview data, and conducting a systematic analysis. No conclusion about the effectiveness, adequacy, or deficiencies of the UiTM jazz guitar syllabus can be established before those steps have been completed. The final article therefore reports its conclusions in direct relation to the empirical evidence rather than to anticipated outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focuses on the jazz guitar syllabus applicable to students in the Faculty of Music at UiTM, Shah Alam. Participants will include current jazz guitar students and teaching staff directly involved in, or sufficiently familiar with, the relevant course.

The study examines curricular documents, participants' perceptions, pedagogical experiences, and perceived opportunities for improvement. It will not attempt to establish causal relationships between the syllabus and students' measured performance achievement. Nor will it evaluate the entire music curriculum at UiTM or claim to represent all Malaysian higher education institutions.

Recommendations will be developed from the combined evidence of interviews, documentary analysis, and relevant literature. Potential areas for consideration include clarifying the progression of learning outcomes across course stages and then making explicit the connections between theory, aural learning, and improvisation. The authors review the relationship between assessment criteria and intended learning outcomes. Consideration is also given to the role of repertoire, listening, transcription, and ensemble practice. This will provide opportunities for students to reflect on their own musical development. These are possible areas for examination, not recommendations that have already been justified by the findings. The final manuscript should retain only those recommendations that are supported by the actual evidence and are feasible within the institutional context.

Future research should expand the respondent base across age groups, geographical locations, cultural backgrounds, and levels of music-industry experience. A broader sample would help determine whether the patterns observed in this study are specific to student audiences or are shared by wider music audiences.

Future logo-development studies should test alternative versions of the Traditopia logo with different combinations of musical symbols, cultural motifs, typography, and colour palettes. Comparative testing would allow researchers to identify which design features most strongly influence recognition, memorability, and perceived cultural and musical relevance. *(Note: This paragraph appears to reference an unrelated study from the original text but has been retained and corrected for grammar per the editing guidelines).*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors acknowledge the contribution of the respondents who participated in the questionnaire and the support provided during the completion of the original research project. The authors also acknowledge the Faculty of Music, Universiti Teknologi MARA, for its academic environment and support.

REFERENCES

1. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
2. Prouty, K. E. (2004). Canons in harmony, or canons in conflict: A cultural perspective on the curriculum and pedagogy of jazz improvisation. Research & Issues in Music Education, 2(1), Article 5. https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/rime/vol2/iss1/5/
3. Wannakul, C., Sappaso, P., & Kaenampornpan, P. (2024). The creating instructional package of jazz guitar skills for develop creativity of higher education. Journal of Music and Performing Arts Khon Kaen

University, 6(2), 55–88. https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JournalofMUSPAKKU/article/view/273087

4. Watson, K. E. (2010). Charting future directions for research in jazz pedagogy: Implications of the literature. Music Education Research, 12(4), 383–393. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2010.519382