Spoken Paper

Out of love for music? Motivational attitudes of music students in the Sultanate of Oman

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Under the patronage of Sultan Qaboos, numerous “new contexts for musical education, performance, and connoisseurship, alongside efforts to preserve and stimulate traditions of indigenous music and dance” (Rasmussen, 2012, p. 7) flourished in the Sultanate, leading to an “increasing “musicalization” of Oman” (ibid.). Since 2008, (music) interested students have the opportunity to attain a bachelor’s degree in music offered at the Department of Music & Musicology at the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in Muscat. However, although the dissemination of European cultural assets is supported by many, the promotion, appreciation and study of (Western) music and musical culture are often frowned upon by a large – mostly the deeply religious – part of the Omani society. These circumstances not only have a considerable effect on students’ motivational attitudes towards their studies but can also pose (pedagogical) challenges for instrumental teachers.

This study aims to shed light on the motivational attitudes of Omani music students from the theoretical perspective of Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and is guided by following principal research questions: Which motivational attitudes are characteristic among Omani students with regards to the pursuit of a university degree in music? Which motivational attitudes are characteristic among Omani music students towards instrumental practice?
A questionnaire was composed, utilising validated measures from existing Self-determination theory research, including scales inquiring into the students’ motivation to study (AMS-C 28) and to practice (SRQ-A), their perceived competence (PCS), autonomy support (LCQ) as well as satisfaction of basic psychological needs (BPNS) in the study context. The data collection was conducted in May 2017, surveying the entire population of registered students in the Department of Music & Musicology at SQU (N=95). Results indicate that although Omani students attend college for extrinsic reasons, their motivation to practice their instruments is nevertheless characterised by more self-determined forms of regulation, displaying high scores on intrinsic motivation and identified regulation. However, some responses on the BPNS scale yielded contradictory results: around 30% of the students in some ways feel out of place and forced to study music and report that their studies cause arguments with their families.

In order to attain an integrated description and interpretation of the quantitative data, a subsequent qualitative research phase was conducted in February 2019, whereby four alumni (3 female and 1 male) were interviewed. The interview schedule was based on the items and results of the questionnaire.

Besides discussing the quantitative results in connection with findings from the interviews, also pedagogical implications will be considered.