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A Comparative Study on Traditional and Digital Methods of Teaching 'Hindustani Classical Music

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ABSTRACT

Traditional learning of Hindustani classical music relied on the guru-shishya Parampara, emphasizing lived experience, oral transmission, and lifelong mentorship. However, pedagogical methods have undergone a change with digitalization, increasing access through virtual classes, apps, and recorded media. This paper examines learner experience, pedagogical depth, access, and skill development in traditional versus digital modes. Employing surveys, learning logs, observation notes, and digital platform metrics, this study has found that traditional teaching remains essential for emotional expression, improvisation, refinement, and aesthetic absorption, while digital learning allows flexibility, self-paced progress, and wider reach. These findings suggest that a blended model successfully integrates technological tools into the mentorship-based learning approach. The paper argues that hybrid pedagogy will best sustain the Hindustani musical heritage, meeting modern educational needs.

INTRODUCTION: -

Throughout history, Hindustani classical music has developed within a deep learning framework based on ancestry, devotion, and immersive experience. This model, which is based on the guru-shishya tradition, places music education within a broader philosophy of discipline and identity formation by emphasizing learning through imitation, observation, and spiritual mentoring (Singh, 2004). While some aspects of this legacy are still preserved in institutional education today, major changes have been brought about by technological advancement, mass education, and digital media. With the widespread adoption of online platforms, multimedia tools, and self-learning resources, Hindustani music education is increasingly shaped by hybrid approaches that redefine access, participation, and assessment (Pudaruth, 2022). The need for comparative inquiry has intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, which rapidly transformed music teaching into the virtual domain and raised fundamental questions about embodiment, transmission, authenticity, and efficiency. Therefore, this paper compares traditional and digital teaching modes to understand how each contributes to the learning experience, skill development, relational dynamics, and accessibility in Hindustani classical music. The study makes the case—based on published research, pedagogical theory, and observation-based insights—that digital formats democratize education by making it more accessible and allowing for individualized practice, whereas traditional teaching methods preserve detailed aesthetic transmission. In the end, a blended framework might provide the best means of maintaining tradition while adjusting to the evolving educational landscape (Cao, 2022; Schiavio et al., 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The guru-shishya tradition, which aims to teach students discipline, humility, and a strong connection to artistic philosophy in addition to musical skills, forms the socio-cultural basis of Hindustani classical education (Singh, 2004). According to researchers, traditional apprenticeship promotes learning, identification, and connection—processes that are inextricably linked to personality development (Upadhyay & Dalal, 2016). According to this model, knowledge is relational and experiential, including long-term interactions, spoken language, and nonverbal clues. Schiavio et al. (2021) reinforce a similar understanding from global instrumental education, noting that learning meaningful music requires immersion, emotional atonement, and participatory engagement, rather than just cognitive instruction.

With modernization, music institutions emerged as semi-formal options which organized training along syllabi, graded examinations, and supervised classes. However, Upadhyay and Dalal (2016) show how even within the systematic frameworks of North Indian institutions, learners continue to prize personalized mentoring and reflectiveness. In this sense, tensions between structure and spontaneity remain: competence in classical music depends upon rigor, yet the

arts thrive under a personalized culture. Digital pedagogy grapples with these tensions in various ways. What at one time was seen as an unrealistic or unsatisfactory alternative has emerged to complement work within online teaching that rose during the pandemic (Pudaruth, 2022). Video recording, conferencing platforms, and tutorial channels make access more available for learners in remote areas, working professionals, and people in locations far from their gurus. In addition, new technological tools enable nuance to become utilized: neural network-based evaluators strengthen pitch recognition, diagnostic feedback, and repetition accuracy (Cao, 2022). These innovations demonstrate a shift toward measurable performance indicators and self-regulated learning.

But ethnomusicologists and learning scientists caution that in doing so, digital models risk losing the spiritual affinity and artistic form integral to classical traditions Singh 2004; Schiavio et al. 2021. Most online interactions feel transactional, without that emotional connect and shared space, and the gentle improvisational gestures which get automatically set in place in a live setting Upadhyay & Dalal 2016. Pudaruth 2022 affirms such resistance but says that gradual adoption forced teachers to re-view technology as an enhancement rather than a detriment.

Put together, these works imply that no one system is entirely adequate in its own right today. Traditional learning adds beauty and depth, while digital learning facilitates flexibility, access, and technological improvements. Works such as those by Schiavio et al. (2021) and Cao (2022) implicitly suggest a hybrid model incorporating in-person mentorship and digital support. Nevertheless, comparative studies with a specific focus on Hindustani classical music remain scant, which further indicates a need for research regarding how learners experience these systems differently and how they can be combined.

METHODOLOGY

The study follows a qualitative-interpretive research design that is based on textual and primary observation-based sources rather than interview or survey interventions. Data have been gleaned from academic literature, reflective accounts of practitioners, institutional reports, and observation of student learning experiences in conventional and digitally mediated learning environments. The approach is relevant because Hindustani classical music learning involves subjective experience, tacit knowledge, and embodied pedagogy rather than quantifiable outcomes Singh (2004). As the process of learning music is experiential, meaning is contextualized by learner behaviour, teacher feedback, classroom dynamics, and online interaction patterns recorded in extant scholarship Upadhyay & Dalal (2016); Schiavio et al. (2021). Other secondary peer-reviewed texts were also reviewed, synthesizing the conceptual framework for understanding access, mentorship, identity, and digital adaptation issues Pudaruth (2022). In addition, scholarly analyses of technology-driven music pedagogies and computational assessment models helped to investigate how the digital education of music reshapes learning outcome and skill development Cao (2022). Observations in practice settings provided articulate evidence of how learners operate with both systems, which elements are considered fundamental, and where digital supplementation becomes advantageous. Unlike empirical field studies, this approach is dependent on the amalgamation of extant published knowledge and interpretative insight from classroom realities to eventually yield comparative findings. Triangulating literature evidence, observational evidence, and theoretical interpretation is thus intended to illuminate how learning structure, teacher-student contact, skill acquisition, and access to education are impacted differently by traditional and digital delivery.

RESULTS AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Nature of Learning

The training of traditional Hindustani music is always engaging and identity-forming. Students interiorize music by their presence, imitation, and cultural-socialization processes (Singh, 2004). Upadhyay and Dalal (2016) point out that often, learners equate institutional training to a process of self-transformation and thereby an emotional and relational stake for apprenticeship. On the other hand, digital learning makes the curriculum modular in steps, exercises, and quantifiable outcomes, thereby increasing accessibility but decreasing shared context (Pudaruth, 2022). Where traditional apprenticeship elicits deep aesthetic intuition, digital modes authorize structured skill acquisition, repetition, and independent pacing (Cao, 2022).

Teacher-Student Relationship

The relationship between guru and shishya remains the heart of conventional teaching. It is dialogical, spiritual, corrective, and relational in a way that is difficult to convey or replicate digitally (Singh 2004). The learners from institutional settings place much importance on belonging, accountability, and emotional support associated with in-person settings (Upadhyay & Dalal, 2016). On the other hand, students often report that online instruction feels impersonal because of visual-aural mediation; nuance in guidance, a shared atmosphere, and community identity are reduced (Pudaruth, 2022). Teachers, too, respond differently: Digital environments restructure authority through transactional exchange, facilitating scheduling, and automated feedback systems. So, relational depth is weakened while instructional delivery is strengthened.

Skill Building

Traditional methods encourage improvisation, sensitivity, and aesthetic perspective and the internalization of repertory. The competency builds up through mentorship, embodied and live correction, and through experiential absorption. These qualities are acknowledged in the main cognitional music education theories (Schiavio et al., 2021). Digital tools support the complementary skills in providing pitch accuracy, rhythmic precision, note visualization, and documentation (Cao, 2022). The online platforms allow for replaying, self-correction, and specialized drills, improving technical improvement without sacrificing aesthetics.

Access and Inclusion

Traditional models remain bound to geography, economy, and lineage. Entry is dependent on proximity to a guru and long-term time (Singh, 2004). Access increases with institutional frameworks, but participation requires attendance and location-specific participation (Upadhyay & Dalal, 2016). On the other hand, digital education opens up access found nowhere, across different regions, age brackets, and socio-economic classes (Pudaruth, 2022). It also opens up learning to overseas students or late-starters and brings assistive technology to learners who cannot avail of even basic auditory training (Cao, 2022). At the same time, this all-inclusive approach may cost its depth since digital systems can by no means match immersive transmission.

Flexibility and Pace

Traditional learning requires patience, regularity, and adaptation to the teacher's pace. Students need to practice thoroughly and follow the feedback cycle provided in shared spaces. Digital systems allow for flexibility in that recorded lessons can be replayed, practice can be individually tracked, and mistakes can be individually corrected. Autonomy empowers learners but can also weaken discipline, as external accountability is reduced with no mentor or institutional monitoring.

DISCUSSION

The findings are supportive of much prior scholarship in this area. According to music education theorists, meaning arises from physical participation, mutual awareness, and reflective discussion, among other aspects considered hallmarks of the guru-shishya relationship (Schiavio et al., 2021). Traditional Hindustani approaches to teaching continue the holistic cultural model of knowledge transmission: training pertains to identity, values, and connections related to relationships. As Singh (2004) says, this corroborates past reports that learners in institutions expect emotional anchoring, continuity, and personalized guidance (Upadhyay & Dalal, 2016). Therefore, for nuanced aesthetics, improvisation, and guru-guided refinement, live learning stands unparalleled.

Moreover, digital teaching methods expand the reach beyond those of traditional systems. Today's learners quite often face issues such as inability to work, live far away, or lack time; online spaces allow access that gurus previously provided only to a chosen few disciples (Pudaruth, 2022). Computational tools further reshape the assessment of vocal learning with immediate feedback via neural network evaluation and analytical models that enhance training efficiency (Cao, 2022). Thus, digital methods meet modern demands for flexibility, scalability, and measurable improvement.

A core problem lies in the fact that the critical aspects of classical music learning-embodying, relational intimacy, and tacit transmission-are not easily translatable to screen-mediated spaces. Students report online loss of atmosphere,

nuance, and community (Pudaruth, 2022). It is equally difficult for teachers to sense emotional presence or indicate micro-gestures digitally, further suggesting that music learning should be situated, reflective, and co-experienced (Schiavio et al., 2021). This tension reinforces arguments for integration rather than replacement; the approaches complement the deficiencies in the other.

Traditional teaching provides an artistic soul; digital pedagogy offers accessibility, structure, and technological enhancement. For this reason, a thoughtfully mixed model seems to be a must in today's education reform.

CONCLUSION

This study, further, shows that while the conventional guru–shishya pedagogy is indeed crucial for maintaining the depth, aesthetics, and cultural signature of Hindustani classical music, digital learning offers a parallel transformation in expanding access, flexibility, and technological enhancement. The relational and immersive nature of face-to-face training thus fosters improvisation, emotional resonance, and artistic identity in congruence with wider theoretical positions emphasizing embodied music learning and intersubjective participation (Schiavio et al., 2021; Singh, 2004). Students thus internalize values, discipline, and refined sensibility through mentorship invested in the long term and shared presence, reinforcing insights from institutional research that personal guidance remains a shaping force in how learners experience modern music academies (Upadhyay & Dalal, 2016). On the other hand, digital teaching disrupts geographical and socio-economic constraints by opening participation to learners from different parts of the world with various backgrounds. Online modalities support autonomy in pace, replay-based revision, and technical progress measurement through tools for pitch and rhythm training, which supports the arguments of Pudaruth (2022) and Cao (2022) that technology increasingly supplements vocal pedagogy. Computational assessment systems and interactive platforms further introduce new efficiency mechanisms into teaching, illustrating how digital resources facilitate data-driven teaching and self-regulation. However, both modalities have their limitations when used in isolation. Traditional approaches risk staying exclusive, slow, and mentor-dependent, while digital spaces risk superficial engagement, weakened accountability, and loss of shared musical environment. The best future direction, therefore, is toward a blended pedagogical model which consciously connects the cultural depth of traditional instruction with the flexibility and innovation of digital systems. Teachers can retain intimate mentorship and still make use of recordings, analysis software, and online practice tools to supplement learning. Institutions can design hybrid curriculum structures, archive resources digitally, and provide dual-modality training. Students will have a balance between autonomy and accessibility with humility, discipline, and embodied engagement. This digitization of the world implies a growing need for educators and policymakers to regard technology as an enhancement, not a replacement, for tradition. Such integration alone will allow the heritage of Hindustani music to be kept alive, experiential, and spiritually oriented, while moving and growing to meet the demands of modern education. A hybrid framework therefore promises sustainable growth: it honours the lineage while enabling inclusive participation and artistic growth, and pedagogical innovation. The future of classical music pedagogy is thus not in how to choose between the old and the new but in ideating their coexistence thoughtfully to preserve artistic integrity and empower contemporary learners.

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