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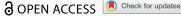
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ABSTRACT

Although music performance anxiety (MPA) is extensively studied in adult performers, there is limited research on its origins in childhood and it is crucial to address early MPA to prevent withdrawal from music performance. Predominantly quantitative work in this area can overlook varying perspectives and thought processes. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the perspectives, experiences, and psychological approaches of five experienced music teachers about children who exhibit MPA. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews; following interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), three experiential themes were identified: (1) managing MPA is part of being a musician: (a) acceptance of MPA and (b) adaptive MPA; (2) children who suffer from maladaptive MPA have perfectionistic concern: fear of failure; and (3) improving musical self-efficacy to build adaptive MPA strategies: (a) verbal persuasion and (b) vicarious learning. Overall, our findings suggest that perfectionism and self-efficacy are implicated in MPA, whereby increased anxiety – discussed as being linked to concern with perfectionism – triggers maladaptive MPA. This study suggests that a non-clinical positive psychological coaching intervention, such as solution-focused coaching (SFC), could be a manageable and effective approach to manage maladaptive MPA symptoms in children in a one-on-one teaching setting.

Music performance is an activity that is both physically and psychologically demanding (Papageorgi & Kopiez, 2018). Performance outcomes are influenced by the performer's skill level and preparation, alongside psychological factors, such as self-perception, self-efficacy, and the experience of performance anxiety (Papageorgi et al., 2013). Musical performance anxiety (MPA) is a condition that affects performers of all ages, abilities (Brugués, 2018; Casanova et al., 2018), and genders, and is indiscriminate of skill, experience, and hours of practice, affecting great performers such as Enrico Caruso, Luciano Pavarotti, and Pablo Casals (McGinnis & Milling, 2005; Salmon, 1990). Somatic, emotional, and cognitive domains are all affected by MPA, causing hyperarousal, fear, anxiety, a lack of concentration, and feelings of dread and worry (Kenny, 2011). The physiological and behavioral outcome of affected domains can be technical errors, mistakes, memory loss, shaking, increased heart rate, shortness of breath, missed performance opportunities, and withdrawal from musical engagement (Brugués, 2018; Kenny, 2011; Kesselring, 2006; Orejudo et al., 2018).

Researchers concur that the effects of MPA can be both negative and positive (Sarikaya & Kurtaslan, 2018; Spahn et al., 2021). Those who experience adaptive MPA can benefit from elevated performance, facilitated by engaging in anxiety-coping behaviors, while those who experience maladaptive MPA have higher perceived pressure, low confidence, and psychological distress (Kenny,

2011). Evidence suggests that experienced musicians do not necessarily demonstrate improved performance because they overcome MPA; instead, they learn to manage it, and pre-performance nerves improve focus and increase energy throughout their performance (Kokotsaki & Davidson, 2003).

Although MPA is prevalent in adult musicians, a self-reported study compared anxiety levels in performance in sports, written tests, and music in 9- to 14-year-olds (Simon & Martens, 1979) and anxiety was found to be highest in music. MPA-based research in 12-year-old pianists (Ryan, 1998) found similar physiological and physical symptoms to that of an adult, suggesting an early onset that can impact performance and wider opportunities. It is especially important to address MPA in childhood, as research has shown that MPA increases significantly in adolescent years (Dempsey & Comeau, 2019) and it can lead to young adults dismissing musical careers or experiencing even greater anxiety as adult performers (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023; Ryan, 2005). Teaching young musicians to effectively manage MPA could potentially reduce maladaptive behavior and psychological impacts (MacAfee & Comeau, 2020).

Perfectionism and MPA

There is an increasing body of evidence that undergraduate and professional musicians experience high levels of perfectionism and MPA (Cupido, 2018; Kenny, 2011; Patson & Osbourne, 2016; Stoeber & Eismann, 2007; Stoeber & Otto, 2006) and that perfectionism is higher among people who already suffer from anxiety disorders, such as MPA (Dobos et al., 2018; Sarikaya & Kurtaslan, 2018). Dobos et al. (2018) conclude that there is a strong interrelationship among MPA, social anxiety, and perfectionism, and, according to Kenny (2011), anxiety and perfectionism can have both positive and negative influences on performance, although in their extreme form, they can become debilitating.

Perfectionism is a complex concept that goes beyond simply striving for flawlessness (Frost et al., 1990). Studies have identified two key dimensions of perfectionism (Frost et al., 1993; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Perfectionistic striving involves an intrinsic motivation to achieve success and meet high personal standards. In contrast, perfectionistic concern is extrinsically linked and can have negative effects on musicians, such as mistake rumination, unrealistic performance expectations, and a fixed mindset (Stoeber & Eismann, 2007; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). In their multiple regression, Dobos et al. (2018) found that four out of six subscales of perfectionism significantly predicted MPA, which also had possible early onset.

As perfectionism and MPA are both highly prevalent in adolescent musicians, this area requires more research, especially as Patson and Osbourne (2016) found the trajectories for MPA and perfectionism in 10- to 17-year-old children were the same. Moreover, in a regression and correlation study (Sarikaya & Kurtaslan, 2018), perfectionism was found to have both positive and negative effects on MPA, while Hill et al. (2020) found that perfectionistic concern was related to decreases in positive feelings while studying music.

Musical self-efficacy and MPA

Self-efficacy is vital in the field of music performance (Zarza-Alzugaray et al., 2020), which is often subject to public or audience assessment. In achieving musical success, personal characteristics or musical abilities are important; however, self-efficacy is a central influence on musicians' way of thinking, behaving, and feeling (Carbonero & Merino, 2008). Bandura (2002) explains that self-efficacy is a core aspect of his social cognitive theory, and his proposed anxiety/self-efficacy relationship has been frequently studied in the music domain, where studies indicate that lower levels of self-efficacy are linked to higher MPA in adult (Orejudo et al., 2017; Robson & Kenny, 2017) and child musicians (Hendricks et al., 2015; McPherson & McCormick, 2006). More recent works have shown high self-efficacy beliefs can prevent maladaptive MPA (Zarza-Alzugaray et al., 2020). Through lived

experiences of MPA in children, the current study aimed to explore individual experiences to more clearly understand the complexities of self-efficacy and perfectionism pertaining to MPA.

Solution-focused coaching for MPA

Solution-focused coaching (SFC) is rooted in the strategies of solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT). This approach emphasizes individuals' personal strengths and successes as valuable learning experiences, rather than dwelling on past deficits and failures (De Jong & Berg, 2002; Grant, 2017). Techniques such as mastery, goal setting, modeling, encouragement, and challenging performance expectations – aligned with the principles of SFBT – have been shown to enhance self-efficacy (Grant & O'Connor, 2018; Solms et al., 2022).

Solution-focused intervention is a practice commonly used in schools, supported by teachers and psychologists (Abdulla & Woods, 2021). Its prevalence in education is highlighted by the widespread use of "Working on What Works" (Berg & Shilts, 2005). This intervention has improved teachers' confidence and has led to significant improvements in children's behavior and work habits (Lloyd et al., 2012). Furthermore, students have been encouraged to take positive actions and feel empowered to communicate freely with their teachers, while the teachers maintain authority (Kelly et al., 2008). SFC and acceptance and commitment coaching (ACC) are more effective for managing MPA than problem-focused interventions (BienAime, 2011; Koh, 2014; Shaw et al., 2020). SFC can be effectively used in individual music teaching, where discussions with students about their resources for managing MPA are collaborative. This approach allows students to retain autonomy in the process, avoiding the imposition of changes in the student-teacher relationship (Koh, 2014; Shaw et al., 2020). Research into ACC showed teachers can significantly benefit students with maladaptive MPA after completing a short training course (Mahony et al., 2022; Shaw et al., 2020) and as SFC parallels many principles of student-centered learning used by music teachers in a one-on-one setting, it is an accessible skill set for them to learn (Koh, 2014).

The current research aimed to better understand music teacher's perspectives on MPA, how they identify the condition in children, and the psychological strategies they employ to alleviate MPA in children in a teaching setting to provide material for appropriate training for music teachers in this area and share good practice within the profession. Although the teacher-student relationship can influence performance anxiety in children (Liu, 2016; Sarikaya & Kurtaslan, 2018), many music teachers have little or no MPA training (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023). Given that limited studies have focused on MPA in children from a teacher perspective, using qualitative methodology – in comparison to self-report research (Brugués, 2018; Cupido, 2018; MacAfee & Comeau, 2023) – interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) supported deeper exploration of this issue.

Method

Design

To complement the predominantly statistical and quantitative research into MPA (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023; Papageorgi & Welch, 2020), the current research explored experiences and perspectives of MPA by adopting a qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth understanding (Cupido, 2018).

This research used IPA (Smith et al., 2022) as an effective tool to interpret the lived experiences and knowledge of the participants, specifically about music teachers' personal experiences and perspectives on MPA in children and the strategies they use to help improve negative symptoms. This experiential-based analysis allows participants who have had similar experiences and of similar characteristics (aligning with the homogeneous requirements of IPA) to provide personal accounts based on individual experiences of the event (Alase, 2017). IPA is a suitable methodology for this work given that teachers have experienced/observed MPA (the phenomenon) in students over several years and have experienced its impact on learners and implementation of strategies.

The analytical methodology (IPA) was complemented by an inductive approach that does not impose preconceived categories or frameworks, allowing for new insight into the topic of MPA to naturally arise through the semi-structured interview process (Moretti et al., 2011).

Finally, a phenomenological epistemology – integrated within IPA methodology – allowed for deeper understanding and interpretation of teachers' experiences, personal perspectives, attitudes, and reflections (Paley, 2017) through which to derive knowledge.

Participants

The research employed a purposive sampling technique and volunteer sampling for one-to-one discussions with music teachers (*N* = 5; three males & two females) between 34 and 49 years old with teaching experience (combined 102 years) in both primary- and secondary-age children (see Table 1 for details). All participants work full-time teaching instrumental music to whole classes, small groups, ensemble directing, and individual tuition. Participants one, two, and three primarily teach individual lessons in schools and privately.

Materials

Standardized question schedule

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a standardized question schedule (e.g., What do you understand musical performance anxiety to be, and what is your personal experience of it? Could you describe a situation in which musical performance anxiety impaired your performance as a musician; how did you feel physically and mentally? What coping strategies did you use?) that was informed by previous research on MPA (Kenny, 2011), including its effect on children (Burin & Osório, 2016; Kenny & Halls, 2018; MacAfee & Comeau, 2020; Papageorgi & Welch, 2020), self-efficacy (Carbonero & Merino, 2008; Hendricks et al., 2015; McPherson & McCormick, 2006; Zarza-Alzugaray et al., 2020), and perfectionism (Cupido, 2018; Patson & Osbourne, 2016; Stoeber & Eismann, 2007). The questions aimed to address key areas of MPA, such as experiences with and observations about how it manifests in students, perceptions of the impact of MPA, and reflections of trialed approaches and strategies that could effectively reduce MPA.

Procedure

The first author (an experienced instrumental and vocal teacher) conducted semi-structured interviews with participants, recruited through music tutor-based companies, using a series of standardized questions that were verbally asked to explore perspectives and experiences. Questions were rephrased, re-ordered, explained, and elaborated upon as appropriate to further encourage discussion and to explore novel insights. Discussions were audio recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to IPA principles (Smith et al., 2022).

Table 1. Participant details pertaining to professional role/expertise and years of experience.

Participant	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Professional Role/Expertise (teaching)	Years of experience	Location of Teaching
1	British	42	Male	Voice and Piano	23	Yorkshire
2	British	34	Female	Voice and Piano	18	North Hampton, Yorkshire
3	British	34	Male	Brass and Voice	14	Yorkshire
4	British	54	Male	Piano and Saxophone	24	County Durham, Czechia, Yorkshire
5	British	45	Female	Performers of all disciplines	23	Yorkshire

Analytical strategy

The first author followed the suggested stages of IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2014; Eatough & Smith, 2017) by reading each transcript multiple times and making comments about initial points of interest in the margin. By focusing on one transcript at a time, the participant's experience was kept in mind while generating more specific themes. To further reduce the data, connections were established between preliminary experiential themes and organized into a table in a Word document. Descriptive theme titles were then created to capture the conceptual nature of the themes. This process was repeated for each transcript, whereby themes were identified by cross-referencing representative quotations that captured the essence of each experiential theme and sub-theme. The final analysis used personal experiential themes to develop superordinate themes across transcripts, which were then organized into a table.

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by a Higher Education Institution Ethics Committee (ETH2223–2386) and followed BPS guidelines. Participants were provided with full study information and gave their informed consent to take part in the research and for their anonymized data to be used for publication purposes. Each participant reaffirmed their consent after partaking in an interview. The data in this research have not been used in previous works/published papers and pseudonyms have been used for anonymity.

Results

The analysis presents key reflections of music teachers' perspectives on children's MPA. Initial points of interest and experiential themes were identified in each of the transcripts, and these were reflected upon in accordance with the stages of IPA (Smith et al., 2022). The individual experiential themes devised for each transcript were then considered across other transcripts to develop broader themes that captured wider experiences and insight. This analytical methodology led to the development of three superordinate themes (with subordinate themes) as capturing the discussions in their entirety: (1) managing MPA is part of being a musician: (a) acceptance of MPA and (b) adaptive MPA; (2) children who suffer from maladaptive MPA have perfectionistic concern: fear of failure; and (3) improving musical self-efficacy to build adaptive MPA strategies: (a) verbal persuasion and (b) vicarious learning (see Table 2).

Superordinate theme 1: MPA is part of being a musician

In concurrence with research (Dempsey & Comeau, 2019; MacAfee & Comeau, 2020), participants discussed MPA as a prolific issue for children (particularly adolescents) they have taught. Participants observed that MPA increases from childhood to adolescence and was observed to be higher in girls than boys, aligning with previous findings (Coskun-Senturk & Cırakoglu, 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Iusca & Dafinoiu, 2012; Papageorgi et al., 2013).

Table 2. Superordinate and subordinate themes, and participant (pseudonymized) convergence/divergence.

Superordinate and Subordinate Themes	Joseph	Barry	Scott	Anna	Charlotte
Managing MPA is part of being a musician	*	*	*	*	*
• Acceptance of MPA	*	*		*	*
• Adaptive MPA					
Children who suffer from maladaptive MPA have perfectionistic concerns	*	*	*	*	*
• Fear of Failure					
Improving musical self-efficacy to build adaptive MPA strategies	*	*	*	*	*
• Verbal Persuasion		*	*		*
• Vicarious Learning					

Although seen as prolific across performance settings, it was acknowledged by all participants that examination pressure negatively impacted student MPA. Joseph recalls a school that referred to the exam recording process as, "the red light of doom," because of the striking difference it made to students' negative MPA responses and the negative impact of the perceived "life event importance" of exams. Anna felt, "Knowing that someone's going to be marking you, it's got to add another layer of pressure." According to Kenny (2011), evaluative threat plays a role in exacerbating maladaptive symptoms of MPA during exams for most children. This is due to the pressure they feel from external sources and their motivation being driven by outside factors out of their control. In agreement with Zarza-Alzugaray et al. (2020), Joseph observed that specific individuals could influence children's levels of MPA when observing their performance, and that teachers, parents, and peers can cause differing effects of MPA and performance outcomes, and mentioned, "She was nervous in front of one adult, but not another adult."

Acceptance of MPA

While all participants accepted MPA as a performance necessity, Scott took a more philosophical stance on the phenomenon, describing that music performance is a creative process, and anxiety was at the heart of it all, an "ever silent friend" with you always. Scott mentioned, "If you take a leaf and you put it in acid and then you just get . . . that skeleton that holds the leaf together. That's anxiety. . . . It's the framework on which everything's on."

The importance of normalizing "nerves" to help children accept the concept of MPA was a thread across all transcripts. Some teachers acknowledged that children who suffer from MPA can assume they are alone in their condition or perceive the often-uncomfortable feelings MPA arousal brings as a reason for concern. This was outlined in different ways. Anna discussed how, "it's OK to be nervous, it's a nerve-wracking thing. It's a scary thing." She also explained that the absence of nerves was equally acceptable. Barry took a more personal approach to divert attention from the student's anxiety, stating, "I'll always relate it to me; I'll try and tell a little story about when I'm performing." Joseph, despite not suffering from MPA himself, acknowledged and advises children that MPA coping strategies are key to success (Kenny, 2011). Joseph stated, "It's normal and it happens to absolutely everyone and it's how we cope with it, that is the measure of whether we're professional, essentially or not."

In group lessons, Charlotte will ask, "On the thermometer, how did that feel?," raising awareness of MPA and thereby challenging students' perceptions of how common MPA is. This approach also helps to normalize discussions surrounding anxiety and has been used in math anxiety work (Petronzi et al., 2018, 2023).

Adaptive MPA

Many observations and perceptions about MPA in this research come from a stance that MPA is not something that can be eradicated but rather is seen as a useful tool to improve performance, with participants advising students on how to interpret the arousal that MPA can bring. Charlotte and Anna referred to talking to children about using the energy to get through performance and "channeling nerves" and "being in the zone" as adaptive MPA strategies, grounded in raising awareness of the arousal and using it to their benefit.

As a child, Anna would get nervous; however, she would "get such a thrill and exhilaration from it, especially if my performance went well," displaying a positive interpretation of arousal. Barry outlined how he perceives MPA arousal as a challenge to overcome to improve his performance (Guyon et al., 2020) and said, "It's amazing how in that moment I felt even more anxious. And actually . . . I played really, really well. . . . The bigger the barrier that I went over, the better I did."

Interestingly, Joseph felt his lack of MPA arousal would lead to less successful performances, again indicating the perceived performance function of MPA that could be considered as an example of eustress and stated that, "I'm desperately waiting for the adrenaline to kick in . . . because If I'm not buzzing, I feel like I'm not giving it 100%."

Superordinate theme 2: Children who suffer from maladaptive MPA have perfectionistic concerns

Where perfectionistic striving involves the drive to achieve success and meet high personal standards, perfectionistic concern causes a focus on mistakes, socially prescribed perfectionism, and unrealistically high-performance expectations (Stoeber & Eismann, 2007; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Anna felt that being a musician brought more criticism, judgment, and comparison than in other occupations, causing perfectionistic concern (Cupido, 2018; Kenny, 2011; Patson & Osbourne, 2016), and Scott acknowledged that over-criticism is a negative factor that causes the proliferation of perfectionistic concern among musicians, stating that, "We're in an awful place now where more criticism is doled out than at any other point in history."

Furthermore, Scott cited the internal conflict between striving for unachievably high standards and not reaching them as the cause of MPA and mentioned, "The anxiety is wanting to be a perfectionist, but also having to like deal with the reality that music and art isn't perfect."

In concurrence with the literature (Damian et al., 2017; Patson & Osbourne, 2016), participants reported observation of an increase in perfectionism as children moved into adolescence, implicating the role of various factors such as puberty, becoming more self-aware, and peer evaluation.

Fear of failure

The fear of failure is a perfectionistic concern comprising unachievable high standards, a strong focus on imperfections, and unrealistic expectations of one's ability (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). The fear of making mistakes was noted by all participants in their practice, alongside that of the children they taught showing a strong focus on imperfections causing negative behavioral MPA symptoms (Damian et al., 2017; Patson & Osbourne, 2016; Stoeber & Eismann, 2007). Barry described how as a child, he experienced pre-performance anxiety: "I would feel scared about going on stage, be worried about any consequences that might happen through me messing up or making any mistakes."

Similar to their own experiences, the participants witnessed behavioral symptoms in response to imperfections in students, such as crying, storming out, and getting cross. Several factors underpin perfectionism, including psychological factors (e.g., low self-esteem) as well as cognitive factors surrounding setting high standards that reflect an irrational importance of being perfect (Frost et al., 1990). When a musician performs well, perfectionistic concern may impair their judgment and ability to acknowledge accomplishments, leading to rarely obtaining a "perfect" performance from their judgment. Anna described the behavior of a teenage student in lessons, sharing that, "If she does one note wrong . . . or . . . she doesn't think she's done well, she's like, 'Oh, that's awful. The whole thing was rubbish.'"

This demonstrates catastrophizing, whereby one imperfection is deemed as performance failure that can lead to performance refusal. Anna, Charlotte, Barry, and Scott all had students say, for example, "I'm not doing this anymore. I'm sick of making mistakes and making myself feel stupid," outlining feelings of shame and embarrassment triggered by imperfect performance. In these cases, it seems that emotion regulation and reappraisal strategies would be beneficial for students to address the bi-directional relationship between anxiety and performance that can lead to a performance decline.

All teachers in this study discussed how some students naively believed that innate talent was the main factor in musical ability and performance quality, disregarding the importance of consistent practice. Additionally, the expectation of these students to perform perfectly despite a lack of practice was identified as a hindrance to their progress and aligns with core findings in this area of work (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023). Charlotte spoke about how "people will often think singing is something you can just do. It's not something you learn to do," describing the negative effects of a fixed mind-set that successful music performance is purely talent driven (Stoeber & Eismann, 2007; Stoeber & Otto, 2006) and how a lack of mastery experience can negatively affect self-efficacy (Bandura, 2002).

Superordinate theme 3: Improving musical self-efficacy helps to build adaptive MPA strategies

Musical self-efficacy is significantly related to performance anxiety and plays a central role in musical training (McPherson & McCormick, 2006; Spahn et al., 2021; Zarza-Alzugaray et al., 2020). Similar to previous findings (Carbonero & Merino, 2008), participants expressed that self-efficacy exerts a profound influence on thinking, behaving, and feeling and was low among children who displayed negative MPA behaviors. The importance of self-efficacy was outlined by one participant as central to managing MPA regardless of performance outcomes, therefore combatting perfectionistic concern and reflecting key findings in this area (Hendricks et al., 2015; Orejudo et al., 2017; Robson & Kenny, 2017). Barry noted, "If you have that belief that you're going to do it . . . and if that's super strong, you will do it . . . regardless of if it's the most perfect performance or not."

To encourage higher musical self-efficacy, Anna advises her pupils to, "Trust yourself. Trust your practice, trust . . . your ability. Have faith in that, have confidence in that," using solution-focused approaches (Grant & Gerrard, 2019; Grant & O'Connor, 2018; Solms et al., 2022). Charlotte also uses verbal persuasion as a source of improving self-efficacy and explains that some students need their efficacy bolstered by her to step up to perform in front of an audience. The findings further highlight self-efficacy as a concept that requires nurturance around musical performance (and preparation) and matches work pertaining to other debilitating performance-based anxieties, such as math anxiety, whereby work is now addressing resilience (e.g., Johnston-Wilder et al., 2015), emotion regulation, and normalizing talk of concerns (Johnston-Wilder & Lee, 2024; Petronzi et al., 2023). These solution-focused approaches can also be trialed/adopted to reduce MPA and promoting self-efficacy. The findings also suggest that self-efficacy is not fixed or rigid and may exist on a continuum whereby it can be increased over a short period through exposure to positive messages from an instructor. This was similar to findings from Petronzi et al. (2023) in response to a targeted storybook approach for math anxiety.

Verbal persuasion

Verbal persuasion, in the form of meaningful and appropriate praise, was seen as very important to build musical self-efficacy (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023) by some participants. For example, Charlotte stated, "I'll tell them that I was so proud of them," while Barry considered, "Praise is probably the most important thing we can give as teachers because that's what keeps the kids enthused and gives the confidence that the kids need."

Praise was, however, viewed with skepticism by some as "fake praise" that can be harmful and cause unrealistic perceptions of performance outcomes, tying in with the mastery experience facet of building self-efficacy (Salmon, 1990). Anna outlined, "I do give them praise, but I want it to be founded in stuff." Anna shared the same thoughts as Scott, that over-praise of a superficial nature may lead to fixed mindset perceptions about talent, ultimately damaging musical progress. This perception mirrored research into SFC by Grant and O'Connor (2018), who found that just making the student feel good was unhelpful and should be backed up with solution-focused coaching questioning for a truly effective process.

Corresponding to findings by BienAime (2011) and Kvarme et al. (2010), participants discussed that highlighting student progress was a useful tactic in increasing self-efficacy (a SFC strategy of focusing on the positives (Grant & Gerrard, 2019), and it was noted that students are not always aware of their progress, which can adversely impact self-efficacy. Barry outlines, "They need to know instantly when they've done something good," to see short-term progress. Further comments indicate that emphasizing progress over a longer term can build resilience and a good practice ethic. For example, Scott reflected, "Can you remember what you felt like when you jumped up and down and said you couldn't play that six months ago and how easy that is now?"

Verbal persuasion was also used to help students re-frame their beliefs about the significance of mistakes and negative audience perceptions, reflecting previous work in this area (BienAime 2011; MacAfee & Comeau, 2023). Barry discussed how he aims to help children see the bigger picture of

performance as a holistic experience, instead of focusing on errors, whereas Scott helps students gain perspective on making mistakes by using analogies to the same effect, using an SFC approach (Grant & Gerrard, 2019; Grant & O'Connor, 2018; Solms et al., 2022) in a teaching setting.

Joseph and Charlotte recognized that students often have negative perceptions of their audience, which can lead to a decrease in self-efficacy due to evaluative threat (Kenny, 2011) and can increase MPA. To combat these negative perceptions, they use reframing techniques by asking questions that help performers recognize evidence of audience motivations beyond just being judged. Joseph talks about "the tap test," whereby he encourages students to look for audience members tapping their toes as a sure way to know they are enjoying themselves, while Charlotte asks them, "Look at that audience. Look, did you see them smiling?" Joseph adds that a performance of any kind is "an opportunity to make someone happy for a few minutes," thus helping students focus on the joy of music making, which has been acknowledged in a recent literature review (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023).

Vicarious learning

According to Ryan's (2005) theory of self-efficacy, vicarious learning centers on an observer learning through the behavior of others and incorporating that knowledge into their behavior. Participants expressed the importance of modeling making mistakes in front of children, so they have a realistic expectation of performance outcomes. For example, Scott said that "I'll sing a wrong note, and I'll see how they react about that," therefore normalizing errors and modeling acceptance of mistakes without anxiety.

Joseph also uses modeling mistakes to teach and boost self-confidence while considering students' evaluative threat (Kenny, 2011), sharing that "They will hear me make mistakes . . . and I'll say . . . that would have got a reasonable mark, even though I made fistfuls of mistakes."

Charlotte also explains how she models making mistakes and continues playing or acknowledges the mistake with a smile or a laugh, thereby challenging perfectionistic concern. Similarly, she will state, "Sorry . . . but we're all gonna go wrong at some point . . .. Hands up. Who went wrong then? . . . Next time, we'll try to go a bit less wrong." In a group setting, she aims for peers to also be models for mistake-making by talking openly about errors and normalizing them to build resilience. Again, this reflects recent intervention work in math anxiety (Petronzi et al., 2023) to normalize talk of a perceived stressor and to limit peer negative judgment, instead cultivating a supportive learning environment.

Participants all modeled managing MPA and performing confidently for students by deliberately making mistakes while playing/singing and not letting it interrupt the flow of music or their emotional state. To further vicarious reinforcement (Ryan, 2005), participants felt it was imperative to be liked and respected by students to build self-efficacy and therefore manage MPA. Showing care and making a safe and nurturing environment was seen as the starting point from which self-efficacy can be fostered.

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore teacher perspectives, experiences, and psychological approaches surrounding musical performance anxiety in children. An IPA generated experiential themes and then clustered patterns of meaning in participants' perceptions and experiences, uncovering the prevalence and perceived impact of MPA that has similarities to education and performance-based anxieties. Pertinent findings and implications are considered regarding (1) precipitating factors of MPA and the role of perfectionism and self-efficacy and (2) implemented approaches. We end the discussion by considering limitations and future directions and outlining concluding points.

Precipitating factors of MPA and the role of self-efficacy and perfectionism

Participants explained how the fear of failure (comprising unachievable high standards, strong negative bias toward mistakes [both real and perceived], and unrealistic expectations of

performance outcomes) had negative effects on students' musical self-efficacy and performance quality and was cited as the main reason for high MPA levels in children. These perceptions are similar to the perfectionistic concerns that are prevalent in musicians and contribute to maladaptive MPA (Cupido, 2018; Kenny, 2011; Patson & Osbourne, 2016; Stoeber & Eismann, 2007; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Participants explained that some perfectionists believe being a naturally talented musician is more admirable than putting in the effort to improve their skills. This unrealistic expectation can harm the process of mastering music by creating a false belief that a flawless performance can be achieved without effort and dedication. Perfectionistic concern was also noted by participants as the cause of emotional dysregulation in child performers, especially through adverse emotional responses to making mistakes. As described in previous studies (MacAfee & Comeau, 2020; McPherson & McCormick, 2006; Orejudo et al., 2017; Robson & Kenny, 2017b; Zarza-Alzugaray et al., 2020), low levels of self-efficacy are linked to higher MPA in children and adults. According to Bandura's (1977) four sources of self-efficacy, participants discussed the experience of fear of failure (perfectionist concern) as the reason behind low self-efficacy whereby it adversely impacts both mastery experience and physiological/affective state. Given previous findings that the trajectories for MPA and perfectionism in adolescents are concurrent (Patston & Osborne, 2016) that negative perfectionism is a key marker for MPA (Cupido, 2018), and that high self-efficacy is a buffer to MPA (Sarikaya & Kurtaslan, 2018), this study presents further insight pertaining to the discussed and observed relationship between perfectionism, self-efficacy, and MPA. This suggests that increased anxiety caused by perfectionistic concern is adversely linked to self-efficacy and can be responsible for a shift from adaptive to maladaptive MPA.

Teacher experience of MPA strategies

Similar to previous works (Kenny, 2011; Kokotsaki & Davidson, 2003; Spahn et al., 2021), participants expressed that MPA should be accepted as a reality of music performance to manage and mentally prepare for, rather than irradicate. To help manage MPA, the participants focused on promoting children's musical self-efficacy. They accomplished this by addressing perfectionist concerns and promoting acceptance of the condition. Without any formal training in solution-focused intervention, they highlighted methods such as re-framing, praise, positive questioning, modeling, peer modeling, and referencing past successes to effectively alter negative perceptions of MPA and perfectionism and build musical self-efficacy. As these strategies are a basis of SFC and are the principles of SFBT (DeJong & Berg, 2002; Grant, 2017; Grant & O'Connor, 2018; Solms et al., 2022), this study advocates the implementation of SFC in teaching settings, where positive conversations about both musical progress and a student's MPA would be appropriate and aim to motivate and give students autonomy in the coaching process (Kelly et al., 2008; Lloyd et al., 2012). This approach aligns with math anxiety-based research that has aimed to normalize math talk to support emotion regulation in children (e.g., Petronzi et al., 2023). Although SFBT has shown improvements in maladaptive symptoms in MPA BienAime, 2011 (Koh, 2014), SFBT has been shown to build self-efficacy in children and adolescents (Bond et al., 2013; Franklin et al., 2001), and SFC has been widely used by teachers in educational settings (Abdulla & Woods, 2021; Berg & Shilts, 2005), SFC has not been typically implemented in individual music teaching settings as a framework for managing MPA. Indeed, teachers are not normally trained in managing the MPA (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023).

While clinical therapy is the most effective method for treating dysfunctional attitudes such as MPA (Kenny, 2011), it can be difficult to access, expensive, and may evoke feelings of shame. Music teachers are in a unique position to positively influence students' levels of MPA (Zarza-Alzugaray et al., 2020) and serve as a first line of defense against its negative symptoms (Liu, 2016). Research has shown that teachers can significantly help students with maladaptive MPA after completing a short training course in ACC (Mahony et al., 2022; Shaw et al., 2020). Moreover, various strategies, such as SFC, have

been widely implemented by teachers in different subjects, making it an attainable skill set for experienced music teachers to acquire (Abdulla & Woods, 2021; Sarikaya & Kurtaslan, 2018).

Current research suggests that equipping teachers with SFC tools for teaching would enhance their confidence in supporting MPA in children and would increase awareness of this performance-based anxiety among music teachers, leading to better teaching and development of coping strategies for children to prevent attrition and avoidance.

Limitations and future directions

This study involved experienced teachers from different settings across a UK county with diverse instrumental disciplines and personalities. The qualitative findings build on previously reported results in this area and further implicate the underlying role of self-efficacy and perfectionism in MPA, highlighting the range of strategies adopted by music teachers. However, the results of this study are not without limitations. None of the participants had any formal training in non-clinical psychological intervention and participants' understanding of MPA varied, leading to some responses based on inferred behavior rather than observed behavior. Like other findings in this area of study (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023), the music teacher participants had not received any formal training or education on MPA, which could further influence perceptions. To increase the scope of this research, a multi-study approach could be initiated whereby qualitative methodology is used to explore children's experiences of MPA, perceived underlying factors, and consequences to subsequently inform the development of a Likert-scale measure to support the identification of children who may be at risk of MPA. Such scales are effective in, for example, math anxiety research (e.g., Petronzi et al., 2018) and more widely adopted in educational settings. Further quantitative research could measure the efficacy of targeted approaches to reduce MPA and support performance. Considering findings in this research area, specific self-report data could be obtained on perfectionistic striving, self-efficacy, motivation, and self-compassion. Moreover, in using a mixed methods approach, qualitative feedback would be beneficial to determine which features were considered most useful by children and teachers (using triangulation), to inform the development of a specific MPA-targeted strategy that could also be measured for efficacy in a pre/post-study design. Taking a more solution-focused approach, knowledge from this work could also inform the development of age-appropriate resources to ensure that research information is not held within an academic sphere and moves into the public domain in an accessible format to further support children. Finally, research in this area may also address the issue of anxiety transference from educator to student, as evidenced in math anxiety research.

Conclusion

Given that MPA is a significant factor in students' withdrawal from music and that adolescents are particularly susceptible to maladaptive perfectionism, low self-efficacy, and MPA, it is crucial to address these issues at an early age. The current research outlines a new correlation between negative perfectionistic tendencies, low musical self-efficacy, and maladaptive MPA in children, whereby perfectionistic concern (fear of failure) negatively affects both the mastery experience and physiological state facets of self-efficacy, thus leading to MPA. The increased anxiety brought by perfectionist concern may be the tipping point between adaptive and maladaptive MPA. Despite this, musicians can learn to build anxiety coping strategies to use MPA adaptively. Alongside psychoeducation for music educators, this study advocates the use of a non-clinical positive psychological coaching intervention, such as SFC, which could provide a manageable and effective tool kit for teachers to build musical self-efficacy and reduce perfectionist concerns in children.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Author contributions

We note that AB is the lead author, and DP is the second author. Contributions are as follows: AB and DP conceived the project, and AB was the principal investigator. DP was the research supervisor. AB and DP sought ethical approval and worked on material setup. Study administration and data collection were led by AB. Manuscript writing was led by AB with input/amendments from DP. All authors provided approval for the final paper submission.

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