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## Using a Transcendental Phenomenological Approach as a Model to Obtain a Meaningful Understanding of Music Students' Experienced Workload in Higher Education

Tuula Jääskeläinen  
University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland

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### Abstract

Enhancing our understanding of students' experiences during their studies in higher music education is essential to supporting them as they cope with their specific workloads in studying music. This study provides a detailed description of and model for how music students' lived experiences can be approached and analysed through transcendental phenomenology. The specific research goal was to explore what engaging in music means to music students in relation to their experienced workload. This research-based model may be utilised to inform developmental work and future research, such as processing and incorporating students' feedback into improvements in teaching and learning environments.

## Introduction

Music students' experiences of their study workload is a topic that deserves wider attention in higher education research. There have been many changes in higher education in recent years; for example, student demographics and learning needs have diversified, and at the same time teachers' dissatisfaction with their work-life balance has increased (Gooding, 2018). End-of-term course evaluations are used to collect evidence of students' cognitive development and their views on teaching, but there are reliability and validity concerns with these evaluations (Robison, 2021). Although these evaluations may give evidence on students' opinions about whether students enjoyed the courses (Braga et al., 2014), these opinions capture only a narrow part of students' experiences. A more efficient way to understand the students' experiences could be to investigate their total workload in their studies. For example, Kember and Leung (2006) investigated students' perceptions of workload as a complex construct which may be affected by several factors in the teaching and learning environment.

The higher education context for music students differs from that of students in other disciplines, as it entails specific field-related challenges, for example performance anxiety (e.g., Bernhard, 2007) and painful musculoskeletal conditions (e.g., Ginsborg et al., 2009). A considerable amount of research about music students' health is available, but there seems to be a dearth of research specifically about *music students' experienced workload* (see Jääskeläinen, López-Íñiguez, & Phillips, 2022). Therefore, it is important to enhance understanding of the stressors and resources associated with music students' workload in connection to their wellbeing in studying (Koops & Kuebel, 2021).

Research focusing on lived experiences in connection to musicianship has the potential to advance research methodologies in music education, and also in the social sciences and educational research (Bresler, 2005). In the present study I show how I conducted the analysis through the methodological framework of transcendental phenomenology to enhance the current research-based understanding of music students' experiences of studying music. The specific research goal was to explore what engaging in music means to music students in relation to their experienced workload in higher education.

## Framework

A literature review may support both the rationale of a study and the procedures used for data collection and analysis, and help to discover new connections between theory and phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Therefore, a systematic literature review was conducted as part of a larger research project, titled the Music Student Workload (MSW) Project, to gather research evidence about music students' experiences of workload in higher education (Jääskeläinen, López-Íñiguez, & Phillips, 2022). A total of 13 codes were identified in 29

qualitative, quantitative, and multistrategy studies related to music students' experienced workload in higher education: approaches to learning, burnout, experiences in the first year of study, flow, health, musculoskeletal problems, one-to-one tuition, performance anxiety, stress, structure of student workload, teaching and learning environments, time management, and work. These codes were further categorised and synthesised to overarching themes using the method of Extended Meta-Ethnography (Booker, 2010). The systematic review was informed by several theories in educational psychology research, such as the influence of the teaching and learning environment on students' perceived workload (e.g., Kember, 2004; Kember & Leung, 2006) and the constructivist approach to teaching and learning music (e.g., López-Íñiguez & Pozo, 2016). It was conducted as a deductive approach from theory to data, in order to build a theoretical framework for the theories applied in both the student workload research and the music education research.

Previous research indicates that the concept of students' workload may incorporate many factors, such as "the time needed for contact and independent study, the quantity and level of difficulty of the work, the type and timing of assessments, the institutional factors such as teaching and resources, and student characteristics such as ability, motivation and effort" (Bowyer, 2012, p. 240). The empirical studies conducted in the MSW Project show that music students' experienced workload may consist of diverse factors, depending on each student's individual circumstances (Jääskeläinen, López-Íñiguez, & Lehikoinen, 2022). These factors can include both the student's engagement with their studies (Jääskeläinen, in press) and the student's interactions with their teachers (Jääskeläinen & López-Íñiguez, 2022). Environmental factors can also have an impact on a student's workload; for example, the overall higher education culture (Jääskeläinen et al., 2020) or the amount of tuition fees that need to be paid in different countries (Jääskeläinen, 2021), which is then connected to pressures to secure funding and balance work commitments with studying (see also Beban & Trueman, 2018).

The present study forms a part of the inductive approach that was utilised in the MSW Project in order to complement the abovementioned deductive approach (for an in-depth explanation of inductive and deductive research approaches, see Soiferman, 2010). The use of the inductive approach provided the possibility to balance the focus of the research between the theoretical approach utilized in the systematic review and one that could capture a deeper understanding of various music students' experiences. Fourteen new codes related to music students' experienced workload were identified through the inductive coding process, based on data that was collected during 2019 from interviews with 29 students who were studying in higher music education institutions across Finland and the United Kingdom. These 14 codes included assessment, competition, coping, curriculum, enjoyment, funding, group tuition, the

meaning of musicianship, career as a musician, practising, religion, social media, physical exercising, and student feedback.

Although the concept of engaging in music was not included in the original interview questions of the MSW Project, the interview participants discussed this concept alongside the other interview questions. In addition, at the end of the interviews the students were asked to explain what music and musicianship meant to them. The original purpose of placing this question after the other questions was to strategically balance the interview discussion, which often turned towards sensitive, stressful experiences in relation to overload, and even burnout (Jääskeläinen, López-Íñiguez, & Lehtikoinen, 2022). In this way, it was possible to obtain an overview of the diverse emotions and meanings that the students ascribed to music and musicianship (see Juslin & Sloboda, 2010) as they coped with their experienced workload. In addition to the cognitive aspects that affect the students' academic studies, emotional aspects can also be an important part of studying music (Lindström et al., 2003). Indeed, the question about the meaning of engaging in music seemed to be very important to the participants, as was seen in their intense and emotional reactions upon hearing the question and then speaking about it. The participants' responses confirmed the need for the MSW Project to undertake a more profound analysis of different nuances in music students' experiences, with a particular focus on how students construct their meanings of engaging in music.

### ***Aim of the Study and Research Question***

Creating strong links between research-based evidence and the development of pedagogical practices in higher music education may open new spaces for both teachers and administrations to understand and appreciate the students' diverse forms of knowing and the fluidity of their identities (Harrison, 2014). Building upon the earlier findings of the MSW Project, the present study focuses on presenting the procedure used to obtain an understanding of *students' experienced workload in higher music education in relation to their constructed meanings of engaging in music*. The quality of a data analysis procedure can be enhanced when researchers critically assess their own roles as researchers in connection with the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The present study consists of four parts: 1) presenting a thematic coding framework that was developed and used to delimit and define the concept of workload in the context of higher music education, which in turn informed the conceptualisation of *engaging in music* in the MSW Project, 2) explaining the use of transcendental phenomenology as a research method, 3) presenting an overview of the empirical findings, and 4) discussing the connection between the findings and the adopted methodology in light of the existing literature.

The aim of this study is to present a model that was used to gain a holistic understanding of 29 music students' experiences in Finland and the United Kingdom, by utilising the analytical

procedure of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, this study focuses on one specific research question:

In what ways can a transcendental phenomenological research approach offer insights into music students' lived experiences in higher education?

### **Method**

The transcendental phenomenology was chosen as the appropriate methodology for the MSW Project because the aim was to search for meaningful understanding of music students' experiences. Next, I present the adaptation of transcendental phenomenological approach which was employed in the present study.

#### ***Moustakas' Transcendental Phenomenology***

When considering how best to investigate music students' experiences, Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology offers an effective methodological qualitative approach to obtaining a meaningful understanding of the essence of human experience. Different approaches to phenomenology have their own profound understandings of the nature of the world and the life of human beings. Moustakas' approach is based on Husserl's (1931) transcendental phenomenology (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). In addition, when looking at students' lived experiences, the guidelines for hermeneutical phenomenology suggested by van Manen (1990) are often used, especially in health research (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Indeed, the common aim of these different phenomenological approaches is their search for the meaning of life experiences. According to Wongvatunyu and Porter (2005), the phenomenological approach is particularly useful when researching experiences of everyday life. This kind of research-based evidence of the essences of experiences can be utilised in practice as a source for developing interventions and more effective policies to support individuals or groups who have similar experiences. In phenomenology, researchers approach participants' experiences without preconceived assumptions of the phenomenon and elicit and exclude their own pre-definitions as much as possible (Creswell et al., 2007; Dell et al., 2014; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

#### ***The Human Experiences of a Defined Phenomenon***

According to Dell et al. (2014), Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology can be employed when a defined phenomenon and the human experiences of that phenomenon both exist and are accessible. In the present study, the phenomenon in question is *music students' experiences*, and the human experiences consist of *music students' descriptions of their workload*. Here, the interest was particularly in the excerpts, which were derived from the

interviews with 29 music students in the MSW Project (see Table 1) and coded as *meaning of musicianship*.

**Table 1**

Demographic characteristics of the interview participants (N = 29).

| Demographic characteristics | Item             | Participants | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------|------------|
| Country                     | Finland          | 20           | 69         |
|                             | United Kingdom   | 9            | 31         |
| Gender                      | Female           | 21           | 72         |
|                             | Male             | 8            | 28         |
| Level *                     | Undergraduate    | 11           | 38         |
|                             | Postgraduate     | 18           | 62         |
| Group **                    | Classical music  | 12           | 41         |
|                             | Music education  | 8            | 28         |
|                             | Other programmes | 9            | 31         |

\*Undergraduate level includes bachelor's degree students, and postgraduate level includes both master's degree students and doctoral degree students.

\*\*In the questionnaires, there were respondents from study programmes in *Classical music* (including different classical music instruments, vocal music, and opera), *Music education* (including only music education), and *Other programmes* (including church music, composition, conducting, folk music, global music, music technology, popular music, and arts management). Regarding the organisation of the interview data, instead of providing details of participants' instruments and study programmes or categorising them by countries, these larger groups such as "Classical music," "Music education," and "Other programmes" have been formulated to protect the students' anonymity.

The selected excerpts were analysed through Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach. However, I did not exactly follow the original approach, as my analysis was also based on Creswell's (2007, pp. 60–62) procedure, which presents shorter steps for using Moustakas' approach. In addition, I combined other practical examples of using this analysis procedure, such as presented by Creswell et al. (2007), Dell et al. (2014),

and Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004). These examples served as my preliminary analysis models, through which I aimed to find a compact and practical research-based analysis procedure for processing and incorporating students' feedback into administrative and teaching developments in higher music education institutions, such as addressing music students' experiences in relation to their teaching and learning environments. In my case, the content of the analysis procedure focused on the *music students' constructed meanings of engaging in music*.

### ***Research Design***

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), a “research design should include reflection on one’s identity and one’s sense of voice and perspectives, assumptions, and sensitivities” (p. 117). Figure 1 shows a detailed description of how I applied the transcendental phenomenological approach across six phases to the present study’s methodology. These six research phases formed the first two stages (*Research plan* and *Data collection*) of the research design, prior to the data analysis procedure.

## Research plan

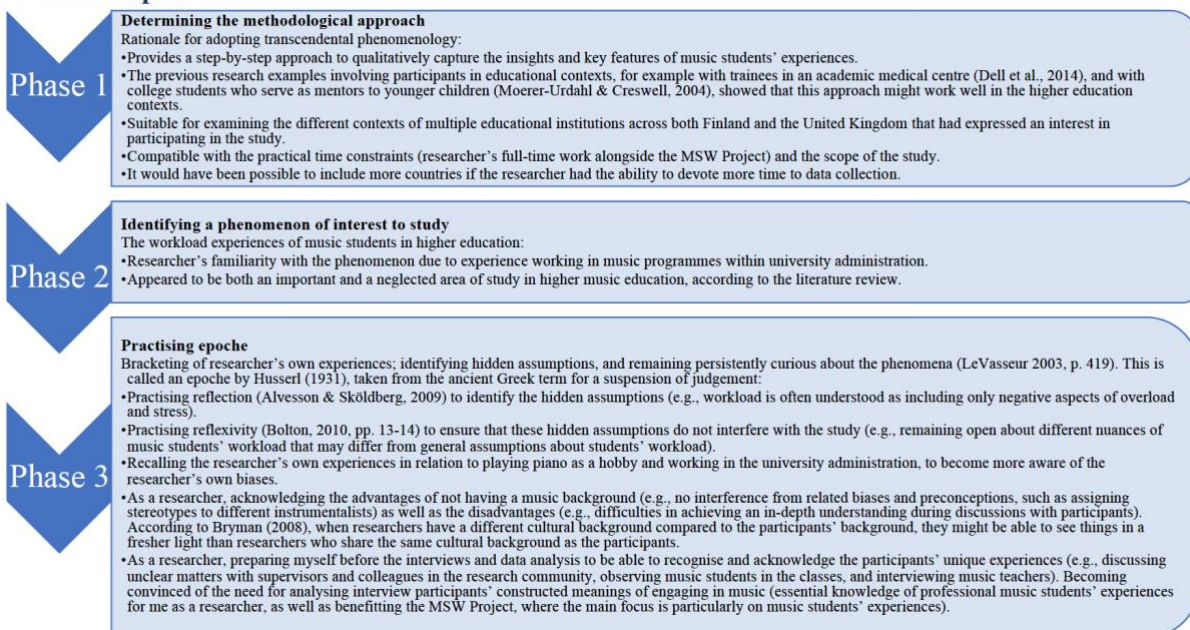


Figure 1. The six phases of the present study's transcendental phenomenological approach, employed prior to the data analysis procedure, as adapted to the combination of procedures (Moustakas, 1994; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Creswell, 2007; Creswell et al., 2007; Dell et al., 2014).



## Data Analysis Procedure

Next, I will present how I applied the combination of procedures (Moustakas, 1994; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Creswell, 2007; Creswell et al., 2007; Dell et al., 2014) for using the transcendental phenomenological approach across a third stage of the *data analysis procedure*, and unpack each of the seven phases in further detail.

### *Phase 1: Horizontalisation*

The Atlas.ti software program (Version 9.0.7) was used to support the systematic analyses of the transcripts with the coding, grouping, and categorising of the themes (Friese, 2012). Because the MSW Project has produced several studies, the software was useful for identifying recurrent themes across several of these studies, as well as in formatting the data for each individual study. The analysis was performed by the author in collaboration with a researcher who specialises in the psychology of music education, who coded 5% of the qualitative data in order to enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the research process. The inter-rater agreement of the two independent coding choices was calculated by using Holsti's (1969) method and Krippendorff's (1980) alpha, and were favourably calculated as 0.924 and 0.918 respectively, with both values indicating very high levels of reliability. In addition, the study emphasised transparent research practices, drawing from Odena's (2013, p. 358) recommendation to provide "a more detailed explanation of the researchers' analyses processes [in order to] better support their claims." The practice of transparency was especially important during the systematic analyses of the interview transcripts, in order to trace how the analysis led to the development of "substantiated claims" (Odena, 2013, p. 366). As a first step, a thematic coding framework was built based on the 13 codes, four categories, and three overarching themes that were derived from the deductive systematic review (Jääskeläinen, López-Íñiguez, & Phillips, 2022). Next, an additional 14 themes that were extracted from the interview data using inductive analysis were added to the framework, to contextualise the music students' responses relative to the existing literature on workload experiences in higher music education. The analysis continued through the process of horizontalisation, in which all the students' responses that are relevant to their workload were listed, grouped, and coded for each individual participant's data. For the purpose of the present study, the analysis of the interview data was extended to take a closer look at the excerpts coded with *meaning of musicianship*, which included students' responses regarding their constructed meanings of engaging in music. The Finnish participants' quotes were translated from Finnish into English by the author, who speaks both languages, and refined in English by a native language editor. The thematic coding framework is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Thematic coding framework in the MSW Project

| 13 literature-based codes *   |   | 14 interview-derived codes  |   | Four categories of different workload meanings drawn from columns 1 and 2 | Three overarching themes of proposed recommendations for good practice related to music students' workload in higher education   |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| Structure of student workload<br>Work   | + | Competition<br>Funding<br>Musician career<br>Social media                   | → | Structure of workload   | Music students' ability to cope with their workload (including excerpts related to 'the student' in four of the categories to the left) ***<br><br>Tools for teachers to support music students to manage and cope with workload (including excerpts related to 'the teacher' in four of the categories to the left) ****<br><br>Developing learner-centred environments in higher music education (including excerpts related to 'the environment' in four of the categories to the left) ***** |
| Approaches to learning<br>Experiences in the first year of study<br>Flow<br>Time management   | + | Coping<br>Enjoyment<br>Meaning of musicianship **<br>Practising<br>Religion | → | A student's individual workload   |  |
| One-to-one tuition<br>Teaching and learning environments  | + | Assessment<br>Curriculum<br>Group tuition<br>Student feedback               | → | Workload relating to teaching and learning environments                   |  |
| Burnout<br>Health<br>Musculoskeletal problems<br>Performance anxiety<br>Stress  | + | Physical exercise   | → | Psychological and physiological issues                                    |  |
| Results reported in *Jääskeläinen, López-Íñiguez, & Phillips, 2022 **Jääskeläinen, in press, and present study, ***Jääskeläinen, López-Íñiguez, & Lehikoinen, 2022, ****Jääskeläinen & López-Íñiguez, 2022, and *****Jääskeläinen et al., 2020. |   |   |   |   |  |

**Phase 2: Reduction and Elimination**

After coding the data, a total of 704 quotations were chosen by filtering the coded data for the analysis. Further data sampling was then performed on this data set, from which 60 quotations that had been assigned the code *meaning of musicianship* were selected. Due to their length and the inclusion of other topics, these 60 quotations underwent another round of analysis to identify statements related to the students’ constructed meanings of engaging in music. These identified 182 significant statements, which were organised according to the individual participants who had provided them. Two questions were used to select these 182 significant statements: 1) Does this quote illuminate the student’s experiences of workload? and 2) Does this quote highlight any connections between the student’s experiences of workload and their constructed meanings of engaging in music? These questions served to refine the data set by eliminating all irrelevant, repetitive, and overlapping statements.

**Phase 3: Clustering and Thematizing**

In phase three, these 182 significant statements were clustered into six groups according to the content of experienced workload, and each group was then assigned a theme describing this content. Through this process, six thematic groups were formulated based on the participants’ experiences of their workload in relation to their constructed meanings of engaging in music: intense and complex experiences, development as a musician, creative self-expression, interaction with others, personal growth and coping approaches, and transcendental experiences. These thematic groups, with examples of the participants’ quotes and the corresponding number of significant statements, are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3**

Six thematic groups, with examples of the participants’ quotes and the corresponding number of significant statements.

| <b>Thematic group</b>           | <b>Example of a significant statement</b>  | <b>Total<br/>182</b> |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Intense and complex experiences | Well that’s a hard one [laughing], there’s so many answers I could give, this is hard to put into words.                                 | 33                   |
| Development as a musician       | I guess music has always been there with me. So when I made the choice to be a musician, I realised that I can’t really live without it. | 25                   |
| Creative self-expression        | It’s a chance to create something that you can share with everybody.   | 28                   |

|                                       |  |    |
|---------------------------------------|--|----|
| Interaction with others               | To connect with other people, both through performing, playing with them, and meeting other musicians.                                 | 24 |
| Personal growth and coping approaches | In a way, for me music is my own therapy method.   | 52 |
| Transcendental experiences            | Music is expansive, it's healing, I think the world revolves around it, to be honest; without it the world would be a very dull place. | 12 |

#### ***Phase 4: Validation***

In the validation stage, the thematic groups were compared with the original transcripts to ensure that these themes had adequately captured the participants' experiences of their workload in relation to their constructed meanings of engaging in music. There was no need to amend quotations. Some titles of the six thematic groups were refined during this phase. When considering the validity of the present study, it was important to remember that the theme of *engaging in music* was not a pre-defined question in the MSW Project's interviews. Thus, the six thematic groups could not be organised according to the pre-defined interview questions.

#### ***Phase 5: Individual Textural and Structural Descriptions***

The fifth phase involved the process of transforming each of the thematic groups (and their significant statements) into textural and structural descriptions. Textural descriptions are narratives of what the participants have experienced, while structural descriptions are narratives of the contexts that have influenced the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In the present study, the textural descriptions consisted of music students' experiences of their workload (because examining experienced workload is the main focus of the MSW Project), and the structural descriptions consisted of those contexts in which their constructed meanings of engaging in music were connected to their workload. Individual textural and structural descriptions were created for each participant from the selected significant statements (see the two questions that were used to select the statements in Phase 2).

#### ***Phase 6: Composite Textural and Structural Descriptions***

Phase six entailed synthesising the textural and structural descriptions to produce a composite expression for each thematic group, including the students' experiences of their workload as textural descriptions of *what* occurred, and their constructed meanings of engaging in music as structural descriptions of *how* it occurred. This process involved combining the textural and structural descriptions from all 29 participants together and distilling them into two

expressions for each of the six thematic groups. During this process, I considered the students’ different perspectives by using “imaginative variation” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35) to envision how the students’ experiences (textural descriptions) created structures (structural descriptions) (see Creswell, 2007, p. 61). I also considered how my personal experiences, the different interview contexts in Finland and the United Kingdom, and my position as a researcher may have influenced the participants’ responses. The composite textural and structural descriptions are shown in Table 4, in which the thematic groups in the left column represent textural descriptions, and all of the longer expressions in the right column are structural descriptions.

**Table 4**

Composite textural and structural descriptions that connects the participants’ workload to their constructed meanings of engaging in music.

| <b>What are the students’ experiences of workload (textural)</b> | <b>How the students’ constructed meanings of engaging in music are connected to their workload experiences (structural)</b>  |
|--|--|
| Intense and complex experiences                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music students’ reactions to the interview questions show that it is not easy to express in words their experienced workload in relation to their constructed meanings of engaging in music, indicating the latter’s complex associations with <i>inexpressible</i> emotions and thoughts.</li> <li>• Music students associate intense and mostly positive emotions with their constructed meanings of engaging in music, which appears to provide a <i>source of vitality</i> for the students.</li> </ul> |
| Development as a musician  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For music students, musicianship is an everyday and lifelong developmental process, where “making art happen” is the point of being a <i>musician</i>.</li> <li>• When music is regarded as a profession instead of a hobby, these <i>reality</i>-based aspects change the music students’ experiences of engaging in music.</li> </ul>   |
| Creative self-expression   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressing creativity through music is experienced as a personal <i>challenge</i> by music students.</li> <li>• Music students’ personalities deeply influence how they construct their meanings of engaging in music, and music is regarded as a coping method</li> </ul>  |

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
|                                       | for expressing <i>emotions</i> during stressful times.  |
| Interaction with others               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Communication</i> with other people comprises one of the most important aspects of the meaning of engaging in music for music students; this can happen, for example, by transporting people into different realities through music.</li> <li>• For music students, building a <i>community</i> with other musicians, and even a better society, forms an essential part of the students' constructed meanings of engaging in music.</li> </ul> |
| Personal growth and coping approaches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The music students' constructions of engaging in music are conjoined with their sense of <i>self-development</i> from learning through life experiences.</li> <li>• The music students' constructed meanings of engaging in music are tied deeply to their individual <i>personalities</i>, and function as the students' personal coping method for stress.</li> </ul>  |
| Transcendental experiences            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Healing</i> effects are connected to something profoundly positive in the transcendental experience of music, and help music students to overcome their challenges with musicianship, and life in general.</li> <li>• Music students describe the meaning of engaging in music as a source of <i>infinite</i> resources and seemingly divine qualities that cannot be perceived by the senses.</li> </ul>                                       |

### ***Phase 7: Intuitive Integration of Composite Textural-Structural Descriptions***

Using intuitive integration (Moustakas 1994, p. 100), the composite structural descriptions (e.g., the two expressions for each thematic group in the right column of Table 4) and the composite textural descriptions (e.g., the six thematic groups in the left column of Table 4) were synthesised together to create a universal description of the phenomenon. However, this description of the phenomenon is not then totally exhausted, because it represents an individual researcher's point of view, in a particular time and place, of the meanings that were captured for the textural and structural descriptions in the research process (Moustakas 1994, p. 100). In the present study, determining the essence of this phenomenon by combining those captured meanings led to the realisation that the music students' experiences of workload in higher education in relation to their constructed meanings of engaging in music comprise a multifaceted pattern that can be best understood as a holistic experience. The synthesis process and findings are presented and discussed in more detail in Jääskeläinen (in press).

## **Discussion**

Music students' experiences in higher education are influenced by a wide variety of specific workload-related issues, including their musical studies, teaching and learning environments, and psychological and physiological issues such as performance anxiety and musculoskeletal problems (Jääskeläinen, López-Íñiguez, & Lehikoinen, 2022). The present study has shed light on the workload experiences of 29 music students in higher education across Finland and the United Kingdom and examined how these experiences have informed the students' constructed meanings of engaging in music. Producing research-based evidence on the different aspects of music students' experienced workloads, which are different from the workloads found in other fields, may bring to light new knowledge that may better inform future administrative, teaching, and curriculum developments in higher music education.

According to Bresler (2005), "The fluidity of sound and music, without having to attend to objects, sensitises us to the ephemeral quality, to the ebb and flow of lived and researched experience" (p. 180). Similarly, the analytical steps in transcendental phenomenology that have been presented in detail in the present study could serve as a model for music institutions to gather and analyse this kind of very specific knowledge of music students' engagement in music and the nuances of their workload experiences during their studies. This model could be a useful tool for such institutions to meaningfully analyse their collected student feedback by following a clear procedure. Even more importantly, the students' experiences, and the valuable time that they use to fill in feedback surveys and participate in interviews, will be shown to be appreciated and can be fully utilised in the institutions' quality assurance processes and developmental work. It is nevertheless not realistic to expect that higher education programme administrators or teachers will have the time or resources to adopt the methodology detailed in the present study to better understand their students' experiences, because they might have "a desire to conduct more research but [are] frustrated with the lack of time to fulfil this aspiration" (Chandler & Russell, 2012, p. 87). Thus, the institutions should consider employing a researcher to undertake these lengthy and often tedious research processes, which can then produce accurate findings to contribute to the developmental work in the faculties and study programmes.

Because there has been practically no previous research on music students' workload experiences in higher music education, more research is needed on this specific topic to guide and inform curricular decisions (Koops & Kuebel, 2021). The detailed example of how to use the methodology of transcendental phenomenology illustrated in the present study will hopefully provide a compact model for higher music education institutions to follow. This may help to foster an academic culture that encourages more positive learning environments that can meet the specific needs of music students (Papageorgi et al., 2010). Similarly, Blackwell et al. (2020) argue that research-based evidence on teaching conditions that

increase students' experiences of well-being may be an efficient way to improve teaching and learning environments in higher music education. This knowledge may then result in practical implications for administrators and teachers, such as holding workshops which could concentrate on themes related to music students' meaningful engagement in music, including: (1) the students' intense and complex experiences, (2) their development as musicians, (3) their creative self-expression, (4) their interactions with others, (5) their personal growth and coping approaches, and (6) their transcendental musical experiences (see detailed descriptions in Jääskeläinen, in press). For example, Wongvatunyu and Porter (2005) used phenomenological analysis in their study of mothers' experiences of helping their young-adult children with traumatic brain injury, and the researchers suggest that practitioners could use these findings to raise topics for one-on-one or support-group discussions. Similarly, findings by Sims and Cassidy (2019) concerning experienced impostor feelings in music education faculty show that the individuals felt relief when they were provided opportunities to openly discuss, recognise, and share their feelings of the impostor phenomenon. Likewise, the findings of the present study show that workshops concentrating on music students' experiences of workload in relation to their constructed meanings of engaging in music could train and encourage students to focus less on perfection and tradition in their musical practice and more on maintaining mental and physical sustainability for the long-term, as well as diverse approaches to finding their own meaningful future careers.

### ***Limitations***

The present study is a part of a larger research project, and the findings gained through the inductive approach provide essential deeper-level knowledge for that purpose. However, the lack of any contextual information about the participants can be considered to be a significant limitation of the present study. On the other hand, following the ethical committees' strict anonymity requirements for the small sample data set, which included sensitive details about the participants connected to their health issues, may also be considered as a strength. This may also encourage music students to participate in future research, when they see that they can trust that they cannot be identified, for example by their instruments being revealed in the quotes. The second limitation is that the transcendental phenomenology process may require institutional resources to recruit a researcher, as the deeper level data analysis procedure takes much more time compared to a superficial data handling process relying only on administrative student feedback survey data.

### ***Conclusions***

In the present study, the aim was to show how the analysis was conducted through the methodological framework of transcendental phenomenology to enhance the current research-based understanding of music students' experiences of studying music. The specific research



goal was to explore what engaging in music means to music students in relation to their experienced workload during their studies in higher education. Acquiring this kind of qualitative knowledge helps to construct visions for equity (Jääskeläinen, 2021), because when music students' unique and meaningful experiences are heard and appreciated, these experiences can inform research in higher music education, as indicated in the present transcendental phenomenology study. It is also hoped that the detailed steps illustrated here can provide a practical model for addressing music students' experiences in relation to future administrative and teaching developments in higher music education institutions, such as processing and incorporating students' feedback into improvements in teaching and learning environments.

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### **About the Author**

**Tuula Jääskeläinen** (M.Ed.) has twenty years of working experience at the University of Helsinki and the University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland. She is currently working as a planning officer at the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Finland, in the Master's Programme of Urban Studies and Planning and in Transdisciplinary Arts Studies. She is a doctoral researcher in music education at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland, and in the ArtsEqual Research Initiative associated with the CERADA research center. As a teacher, Tuula is specialised in arts university pedagogy and human rights education.

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