



Faculty of Music  
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THE DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING MUSIC THEORY AMONG  
MUSIC STUDENTS IN UITM

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study discusses the difficulties in learning music theory among music students in UiTM. The objectives of this study are to identify the topic of music theory that students are weak in, to find out factors that music students are weak in learning music theory and to identify which method that could enhance their understanding of music theory. The method of instruments used for this study is interview which is in qualitative method. There are 6 students (2 males, 4 females) was selected to involved in these interviews. All the students was from Bachelor Degree in Music Education UiTM Shah Alam from semester 2, 3 and 4. The interview consist of 3 section which was the first section require the respondent to answer the simple test of Music theory question. The purpose of the test was to observe student's current knowledge of simple music theory questions. The result shows that none of the respondent are able to answer all question correctly. The data gathered from the interviewed able to prove that students are indeed are having difficulties in learning music theory inside and outside class sessions.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background of the study

Music learning involves many areas of knowledge including the learning of music theory and the skills of playing a musical instruments. Theory and practical learning in music will help students to produce and perform new music or any music that exist in this world. To play a musical instruments, student needs to learn on how to read the musical notation at the first place. Learning music theory and playing a musical instruments has a connection to each other. In order to play a song, student need to read the written music notation then interpret it by using their instruments. Harnum (2001) states that learning theory is like learning another languages, with this language, you can reproduce any songs and play it. If the songs written down, with music theory, you can understand and able to play it.

As a music students, they need to understand the important of music theory and know how it works. According to Huntington (2013),

“Music students often view music theory as a chore, and some musicians wear their lack of music theory knowledge as a badge of honor. There is a reason that all music students generally take at least four semesters of basic music theory. It is because otherwise, we cannot communicate musical ideas to each other. While in school we learn how to read and write English, but when it comes to music, most of us only know how to read it and have little to no idea how it works. That is the point of music theory: to explain how music works”. (Huntington, 2013. Introduction section, para. 1)

The statement above explain how music students accept music theory in their studies. Music students probably lack of understanding on how music theory can help them improve their knowledge in music and their skills of playing a musical instruments. Music theory give students the idea what they want in music and become a creative musicians.

Music theory is compulsory to all music students in UiTM Shah Alam. Some of the students taking a music course might have a basic learning in music theory while they in secondary school. Unfortunately some of them did not had to take music and art subject instead.



In Malaysia, not all secondary school offered music subject. Music theory in secondary schools level are basic to the ones in university. Besides, all the secondary school need to follow the Ministry of Education specific curriculum called KBSM which stand for Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah which translates to Integrated Secondary School Curriculum. KBSM was created to synchronize the secondary schools education system in Malaysia and at the same time it give teachers a teaching guideline for syllabus. Students who had a basic music learning have an advantage at university level. They can easily grasp and develop the subject. Meanwhile students who are taking music course and started from zero might find it hard to catch up. Music theory is an important subject because it helps music students to give an idea on how to create, feel and express their thought in different ways such as playing a musical instruments and compose a music. It can be considered as a main knowledge to learn music. Without theories, we would not understand and develop music.

According to Harnum (2001, p.3) “Music theory is a language that is used by all Western instruments. Whether you play the kazoo or krumhorn...you get the idea, whatever instruments you play reading music will be a useful tool in your study”. Music theory is like learning a different language and required an exercises. This subject give a good start for the beginner in order to gain a knowledge in music for example know how to get the correct pitch, tempo, rhythm and reading notes. According to Temperley (1999, p.66) “...a theory is more general account of some aspect of musical structure, which guides analyses and is also motivated and informed by them”. There are many definition about music theory for example according to Benward, and Saker, (2003, p. vii) “...music theory might be defined as the study of the artful designs, ingenious proportions, and inventive patterns in music that are transformed by the mind into aesthetic experience”. Music theory is about learning the theoretical part of music like rhythm, pitch, melody. Students who are learning music will be able to analyses any kind of music and make a new music based on their interest and music