Application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in Studying the Intercultural Experience of Learning Jazz Improvisation

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ABSTRACT

Jazz studies and tertiary education in music are a "new culture" to Southeast Asian countries, however common they may appear to be. Low readiness for learning, knowledge and skill gap, lack of appreciation of subject learned, low self esteem, and unrefined pedagogy have been commonplace in music colleges in the past two decades in Malaysia. The need to examine and support the local students' jouney into the intercultural process of professional music training in a still developing music-social environment is urgent. Using Søren Kierkegaard's (year?) notion on subjectivity as a base, an application of Jonathan Smith style IPA were utilised to study the learning process of jazz major tertiary students in a Southeast Asian country. This paper elaborated the concepts and considerations made in the construct of this new methodological application with some early results obtained from the semi structured interview. Anything perceived within an individual was found to influence or determine by the particularity of the individual's background, and the perception of the object also cultivated an understanding of self. From these, the three parts of the methodological frame of phenomenology were laid, which were the object (which was the subject of study, i.e., jazz), Perceptions (the way the object was being grasped by the learners), and Self-image (the understanding of self, the evaluative aspect). The result revealed the student's particular views on the meaning of being a student, and her basis for value judgement and decision making along the learning process, which were insights that may enable a connection into her prior experiences and an explanation of the present outlook of her learning problems.

Keywords: Phenomenology, intercultural, music, methodology, perceptions, self-image

PHENOMENOLOGY AND IPA

This paper reports the construct of a methodological application of IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) in the study of experiences in learning music. It covers the background information of IPA, the considerations made in the construct, and the outlook of the result of analysis[i]. Phenomenology has long been associated with the artists' monologue, but its application in music education, especiallyin the learning process of music, is rare. According to Jonathan Smith (2010), the founder of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, "IPA (is) useful to music research but needs imaginative leap". We hoped to emphasize pedagogy as a form of *relationship* between the learners and the learning subject through which the unmediated truth inherent in the process of learning can be detailed.

Phenomenology has its primary focus on the inner perspective of a person, which is described with terms like "consciousness", "subjectivity", "experiential", and "lived experience". It concerns the immediate state of perception impacted by an object/matter before one applies any logical, descriptive thinking to it, hence experience "as it is", or in Dewey and Heidegger's terms, the "aesthetic world" in contrast to the "logical world".

The second preset of Phenomenology focuses on what a person does to the immediate perception mentioned. It looks into the question of how one makes sense of his/her experiences or perceptions. Phenomenology has its focus on meaning, or meaning making. It deals primarily with the issue of existence.

Heidegger's concept of Dasein (literally 'being-there', but used as 'being-here' in English) or *being-here* captures vividly the "who" that resides in us, that is aware of himself/herself engaging in his/her life and surroundings. It is the moment of awareness of being that is brought into examination. It questions *who* is the being, and *how* it comes into the state of particular being. Phenomenology differs from today's psychology research in its idiographic nature, that it values the uniqueness of a person.

The key operation in phenomenology as philosophy, is what is known as "phenomenological reduction (PR)", in which the meaning differs slightly among philosophers. PR aims at translating textual information concerning a personal perception into a form that brings out the immediacy of the experience. In Husserlian traditions, it means a process of stripping of anything that is non phenomenal in nature—the logical and physical components—in order to reveal nothing but the phenomenon itself, which is known as 'bracketing'. For Heidegger, in order for a textual information to be reduced from logical/interactive description to holistic/aesthetic realm, that is, to reveal the *Dasein* (or the individual qualitative whole), the logical terms must be destroyed once.

A typical example of this is in the usage of the word "I" in description. The word "I" is a detachment from the inner perspective, a logical, or the ordinary descriptive language. In order to get into the immediate experience, the word "I" is eliminated, for in immediate experience, there is yet the awareness that differentiates between "I", "you" and "we": what was there is existence itself. The destructed "I" is then replaced by a reduced concept which is "selfhood". Another example is where "self" is replaced by "who". The (destructed and reconstructed) terms are "whoness", "selfhood" or "mineness". This is a way of deconstruction to reveal the immediate experience from which the concept is derived.

Reflecting upon this, Heidegger's phenomenological concept of "whoness" invites a new focus on "who is learning"; while "mineness" relates to the issue of internalization of understanding, passion and skills in music learning. Both point towards revealing the world of experience of the music students along the learning process, a topic so crucial in the practical field of teaching and learning but are not attended to thus far.

One must consider the targeted outcome of a phenomenological research is not knowledge per se but insights, particularly insights of lived experience or lifeworld of person(s)-in-context. These insights are conveyed not in the usual scientific language that explicates the cause-effect of a matter/topic, but in a language that can best brings about the sense of *being-there* by means of analogy. Phenomenological writing is a result of, in Heidegger's words, meditative thinking. Phenomenological writing as philosophy is poetic, not representative (meaning not replacing an object with terms), and does not land in categorization. Heidegger called this way of "presenting the research data" as "formal indicative", which called for a "how of addressing and interrogating" (Heidegger 1999/1923:12-13). Peirce's words were illustrative to tell the way phenomenological writings and diagrams function. He refered to diagrams in phenomenology as "diagrammatic icon". The use of the word icon was apt in telling the nature of diagrams in this context, meaning, writing and diagrams were like icons, hints.

> "A great distinguishing property of the icon is that by the direct observation of it other truths concerning its object can be discovered than those which suffice to determine its construction" (123)

When the concepts and method of phenomenology, an ontological inquiry, were applied in empirical studies, changes were made, and additional component was added on. Fundamentally, an empirical study that employed phenomenology differed from philosophical writings in the way the discussion was made. While philosophers like Heidegger and others wrote phenomenological description as complete insights, empirical studies might lead the phenomenological data towards logical discussion. A phenomenological writing as philosophy would avoid drawing generalizable principles and factors in order to preserve the "individual qualitative whole", but an empirical study would be in the reverse position. As the application is still new, there is room for qualitative framework of phenomenology to develop.

Major trends in the application of phenomenology in empirical studies focused on analyzing textual information. Amedeo Giorgi (2009), among the pioneers to use phenomenology in psychology research in the 1970s, developed a "descriptive phenomenological method" in psychology that analyzed experiences through information obtained by interviews. Formally stated as a method in 1996, Jonathan Smith's (1996, 1999, 2007) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis had clear suggestions of procedures for data collection and analysis.

IPA was first applied in health psychology research, depicting the views of patients undergoing medical treatment, but is now widely applied across different disciplines.

As with any phenomenological applications, IPA focuses on extracting the past experiences of the participants. Smith was consistent in focusing on the fundamental aim of IPA was to explore "how participants make sense of their experiences" in going through certain period of their life. For him, research findings via IPA connected to the paradigm of health psychology which held the verbal responses, cognition and related physical problems. While taking stock from phenomenology and hermeneutics that are interpretative in nature, IPA contributes as an idiographic inquiry, in which it brings forth the totality of a case in depth without seperating the constituting components. It has "a theoretical commitment to the person" (54). A typical example is the experience of pain as "an assault on the self", which provides rare subjective account on pain.

In a chapter of his book, Smith (2007: 53-79), gave clear guidance on the steps for IPA, while researchers were strongly encouraged to work out the methods or ways that suit their study subject and condition. The underlying action involved in IPA basically consisted of 1) obtaining the views of participants which naturally involved the interpretation of their experiences, 2) conducting interpretations on the obtained views, which literally involved the researcher "questioning the participants' texts". These were consistent with Dave Trotman's (2006) statement; "to look and describe; and to look again and describe; and to look again and describe; always in terms of its textural features" (249).

IPA's features can be summarized as; 1) A small sample size, and preferably three for a beginner researcher; 2) Limited elements handled at a time, and preferably three elements; 3) Semi-structured interviews with well planned questions and prompts were recommended; 4) Word to word transcription of interviews, and the use of audio recording was recommended; 5) Analysis was centered on repeating interpretations of the text of respondents, searching for emergent themes and establishing connections between different interpretations.

Another stream of development that coincided with phenomenology offered different insights that were useful to education research. In 1979, Ference Marton and his research group at the Department of Education, Universty of Gothenburg, Sweden came up with a method called "phenomenography" which focused on investigating different ways of understanding reality. Marton's "phenomenography" was not inspired by phenomenology, but shared many ideas in common with it. In explaining phenomenography, Marton pointed out the basis for this approach:

> "When investigating people's understanding of various phenomena, concepts and principles, we repeatedly found that *each phenomenon, concept or principle can be understood in a limited number of qualitative different ways.*" (Marton 2001:143).

Marton gave an example in the teaching of science. In response to the question of what forces act upon a constantly moving car, two distinctive ways of understanding were gathered from the students. It was either in the Newtonian way that captured the balance of forces in creating the constant speed, or in the earlier period of science thinking which saw the phenomenon of moving as a result of one force greater than the other. Phenomenography had its primary interest in the multiple ways learners approached a study topic that had profound application in pedagogical studies. Marton stated phenomenographers made statements about "people's conception of the world" and they were also interested in "mistaken conceptions of reality" (145).

The Need for Methodology in Intercultural Music Pedagogy

In Malaysia, quantitative research in music education includes the studies on students' preference by Shahanum (2000), Yeoh (1999), Lee (2004), implementation of preschool music curriculum by Kwan (2006), instructional methods by Lim (2004), Mong (2004), effectiveness of curriculum by Mah (2002), music teachers' stress by Jurianni (2007) and others. Other than exceptions like Ramona Tahir (1996), Chan (2002) and Wong (2011), music education researches in Malaysia showed strong inclinations towards "technocratic conceptions" as if the sole purpose of music education research is to improve the effectiveness of teaching on the ground. The lack of qualitative inquiries such as the philosophical, ethnographical and phenomenological studies in music education in Malaysia implies matters pertaining to meaning and culture in music education are unattended. This weakness is serious for a Southeast Asian multicultural nation like Malaysia where its citizens (music students included) live in constant cultural exchange, and the identity of the people/nation is yet under the process of formation within the tension of traditions and change.

It was Yamaguti Osamu (2000) who provided theoretical ideas related to and discussed on the issues of transmission of music culture in the modern and post modern Asian context. Different from the Anglo-European countries, the short and acute process of modernization experienced in Asian countries for the past century had resulted in a state where the perceived formal/main music culture in the nation system was an 'imported' culture from the west.

Asian students go through the intercultural process in their daily life (including music and education) even if they are residing in their home nation. Our modern societies are ones that contain 'multi-emics', meaning components of multiple/different cultures being held simultaneously in one community as well as within an individual. In a more minute lens than 'multi-linguality' and 'multi-musicality', multi-emics points to the situation where a person's music making could be a hybrid of components that are based on different cultural roots. As such, when a Malaysian student plays jazz, for example, it could well be a mixture of different *emics* in display, owing to the background of the student and his/her understanding of jazz located in the time and space where the learning takes place, than a single pool of coherent *emics* of jazz.

In a jazz performance, except for the beginning tune and certain prearranged sections, the players are to develop their performance spontaneously according to the harmonic rules and stylistic norms. This central act in jazz playing is known as improvisation. Different from composed and arranged music (especially the western classical music), the outcome of a jazz performance is to a large extent unpredictable. In the case of a jazz ensemble (a trio, quartet or a big band), which is the usual form this genre is played on, jazz is a result of spontaneous interaction of a few individuals. As much as the sound of jazz—commonly described as "free", "unrestricted", "humorous", "accidental" and even "pleasantly disordered"—provides an alternative listening experience to the composed and arranged music, the process, value and meaning of jazz is difficult to be described in clear academic terms. The nature of jazz is mostly inward looking: clear features are perceived and shared by the cultural bearers of jazz but these features are personal, interconnected and not easy to be represented in lexical terms.

There is little wonder scholarly writing on jazz comes in the form of phenomenology or with strong phenomenological influence. The paradoxical nature of jazz performance between freedom and constraints is associated to the team dynamic in an organization (Zack, 2000). As improvisation is unplanned, the playing of jazz involves continuous decision making in doing; and this process is explained and rationalized using the idea of algorithm in information science (Johnson-Laird, 2002). Randall Groves (2006) illustrated the progress of mastering the art of jazz improvisation by analogizing the story of Cook Ting by ancient Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu. The unplanned nature of jazz leads to a rethinking of value placement in which orderliness and chaos may both be appreciated; and this aspect of jazz is discussed using keywords like 'imperfection' and 'non-conformism' by Lee Brown (2000).

In mastering the improvisatory art form of jazz, a learner is tasked to perform creativity. In a developing Asian country like Malaysia, this is done simultaneously with the learner acquiring the art form as a new culture. It is a desperate situation of immediate application or learn-and-use, giving little time for internalization. One would wonder how overwhelming is the traffic of information processing that happens within the learner, and the emotional strength needed to cope with the task. In actual cases, students experienced emotional break-downs, self-doubt and insecurity while barely managing the performance skills. This case study on jazz learning can be a reference for other cases that are intercultural in nature.

Considerations Made in Contsructing a Model

Phenomenology can be easily identified as a relevant concept and method for research in music learning due to its foci on inner experiences; on process; and its close relation with social and cultural context. Each actual application varies in its focus and the selection of methods. The strength of phenomenological account on music learning is in its ability to depict the experience of a learner on the receiving end of education. Phenomenological methods are most relevant when the entire process of receiving, internalizing, embodying and expressing music are studied as a whole; and in the case of performing arts where the entire enterprise is fully inward looking, interactions and struggles with personal characters and history has vital roles in determining the learning process and outcome.

Any learning areas involves the learner embracing a new set of culture, values or behaviors, and any subjects that requires the learner to utilize his/her person as a whole, as in the performing arts where the body is an instrument for expression, will be able to benefit from phenomenological inquiry. Jazz learning, within the Malaysian context, is one of the suitable topics for phenomenological approach. Other suggested topics are the

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learning of traditional instruments, the learning in theatrical performance, the learning of a new culture, and the mastering of a foreign language.

One issue for music learning in applying phenomenology is music learning comes with tangible output in the form of performance, which could be analyzed and evaluated by itself[ii]. To include the sound output / performance output of music as a data of experiential consciousness into phenomenological research is theoretically convincing but practically extremely challenging. The main issue of concern is the proportion of the design and the feasibility in time. As mentioned before, phenomenology has overlapping techniques with those used in ethnography.

The Constructed Model

Within the variants of phenomenology, this study chose to focus on the relationship of the learner and the learning subject (jazz) rather than focusing on the existence of the leaner in the broad sense. Hence, Søren Kierkegaard's notion on subjectivity was utilised which stated any thing perceived within an individual is influenced or determined by one's particularity of his/her background, and that the perception of an object also cultivates an understanding of self. From this the three parts of the methodological frame of phenomenology were laid, which was Object (which was the subject of study, i.e. jazz), Perception (the way the object was being grasped by the learner), and Self-image (the understanding of self, the evaluative aspect).

The understanding of Kierkegaard's theory of subjectivity as discussed by Louis Pojman (1978:1-11) was adopted. Written with the intention to connect Kierkegaard's thoughts to the field of education, Pojman (1978) described the notion of knowledge as how subjectivity could contribute towards the search of truth. Kierkegaard carefully differentiated between objective and subjective knowledge, and argued the truth that pertained to subjective area could only be established in the subjectivity of the relationship between an object and the individual. This was the basis of this study using phenomenology in approaching jazz learning because matters pertaining to fine arts (performing arts included) belong to the subjective domain.

In constructing the framework, the pair concept of object and subject were first established. In this study, object referred to the aim of the study, the target the students worked on, whichwas the desired and expected skills and knowledge of jazz. Subject referred to the students, who were university students in Malaysia.
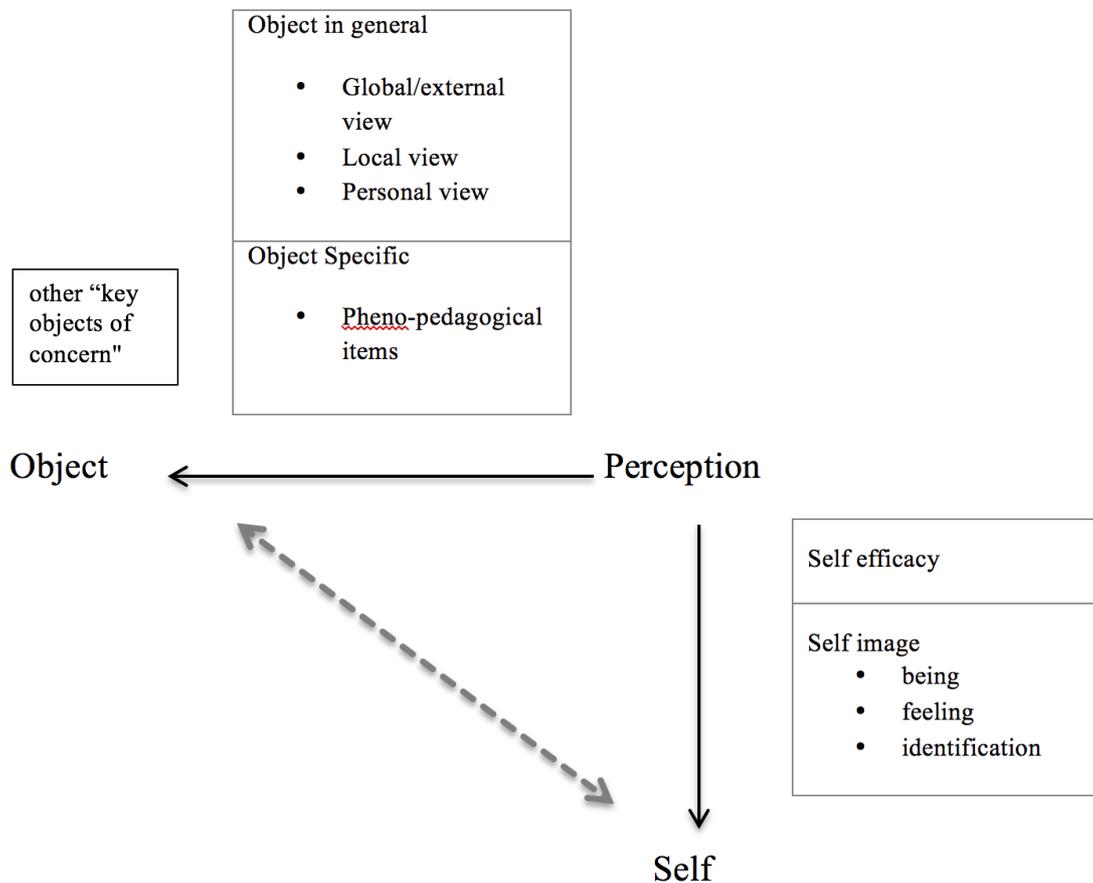
The basic mechanism in which the subject is related to the object is when one comes to know the object, which is the process of acquiring knowledge. One of the essences of phenomenology is in the way of 'seeing' the object, which is subjective in nature.

> For Kierkegaard all knowledge involves volition. It does so in as much as in every act of knowing interpretation is necessary and every interpretation involves, at some level, decision. There is no such thing as purely neutral perception. All perception involves interpretation, seeing something as 'something' and from a particular perspective. (Pojman 1978:3)

Following the above statement by Pojman (1978), we could identify with the music students where each of them would see their tasks of study differently. The common misunderstanding is when an assigned learning task in music is objective and invariable according to learners. The truth is even the first impression varies according to learner's perspective of 'seeing'.

The constructed conceptual framework (PheLEM) in Table 2 depicts the dimensions and their variants in researching leaners's inner experience in going through a music training program. It provides a conceptual understanding of intercultural learning focusing on the learner as a person-in-context. This table is the reference for the formation of interview questions as well as a scheme used in grouping and interpreting the respondents' texts. Unlike quantitave studies, the items in the framework are not mutually exclusive, neither are they equal in portion. The sequence of arragement of the items are not significant as well. These are but different dimensions of a single or plural phenomenon/phenomena of the respondents. They interact organically in which one respondent's statement could integrate two or more variants. The framework does not stand alone and must be used together with the philosophical premise of phenomenology that defines its own ideas about lived experiences, self consciousness, impression, relationship, knowledge, interpretation and sense making.

TABLE 1
Phenomenological Framework for Learners' Experience in Music (PheLEM)

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │ Object in general           │
                    │                             │
                    │   •  Global/external        │
                    │      view                   │
                    │   •  Local view             │
                    │   •  Personal view          │
                    │                             │
  ┌───────────┐     ├─────────────────────────────┤
  │ other "key│     │ Object Specific             │
  │ objects of│     │                             │
  │ concern"  │     │   •  Pheno-pedagogical      │
  │           │     │      items                  │
  └───────────┘     └─────────────────────────────┘


  Object  ◄─────────────────────────  Perception
                                           │
                                           │     ┌─────────────────────────┐
                                           │     │ Self efficacy           │
                                           │     ├─────────────────────────┤
              ╲                            │     │ Self image              │
                ╲                          │     │   •  being              │
                  ╲                        │     │   •  feeling            │
                    ╲                      ▼     │   •  identification     │
                      ╲                          └─────────────────────────┘
                               Self
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Object

The determination of the subject of learning as object within the phenomenological framework has its relevance in intercultural learning. In mastering a foreign culture/language/skills, it is common that there exist several perspectives of how this new culture/language/skill set is understood. Very often, problems in learning a new culture is complicated by mistaken conception of what the culture is, or by the conflict/difference/gap between how the culture is understood in its original place, in the new local place and in the individual perspective. Music learning is situated at the juncture of this mixture of perspectives, because for every music culture that one learns, there exist a sense of otherness which a learner would need to embrace and internalize before the skills can be mastered.

Object is clarified by answering the question of what is jazz (or the epistemology of jazz), and this covers both the global/common and the local/particular perspectives. The local perspectives of jazz, to a Malaysian student, would be affected by and deciphered through the view of music in general within a society that is examination oriented, as well as the sense of elitism associated to importation of modern cultures. More importantly, jazz as a learning subject possess the quality that is similar to a second language in the non (or little)-jazz social environment of Malaysia.

Perception

Perception involves two variants. First is the learners' understanding of jazz as a genre and subject of study (which is Object), which is associated with the local views of jazz mentioned in the Object section. Here, in their interview, the learners may reveal other "key objects of concern" which set the context of their learning. Larkin was clear in the object-subject relationship when he said phenomenology depicts two aspects in

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explicating the relatedness of participants to a topic of interest, they are the "key 'object of concern' in the participants world, and the 'experiential claims' made by the participants". (111) The key 'object of concern' here involves "the world of objects", particularly "the bodies and bodies-of-knowledge" that define the topic like "marriage", "love", "divorce", etc. In analyzing the interview about divorce, for example, the researcher found "money" and "fidelity" were objects of concern. In this study, the other "key objects of concerns" are yet to be discovered. They could well be, for example, family expectation, examination grades, and so on.

Second, and more crucially from pedagogical viewpoint, is the different ways the learners understand or conceptualize certain operational component in jazz, which is by itself a specific learning task, for example, the swing feel, comping of chords, extended tonality, phrase shapes, and so on. This is based on the central notion of 'phenomenographic enterprise' by Ference Mortan that 'each phenomena/concept/thing has a limited different ways of understandings'.

Self

This dimension deals more with the "experiential claims" (Larkin, 2006), and is not unlike the laymen's term of feedback and reflection. The first variant focuses on the achievement of the learners' skill acquisition, which can come in the form of self evaluation obtained in various occasions (through dialogue, interview or even a formal self evaluation), but maintained as the form of opinions, descriptive terms. Numeric evaluation can be used as a peripheral source to reflect self-image. The purpose of self evaluation is not so much on evaluation of the skill level but to obtain the perception of self. Self evaluation can also be complimented by field observation conducted on the learners during lessons, rehearsals, assessments and concerts, and presented as a form of ethnographic description. Again, the purpose here is not for the sake of evaluation but to gauge the gap between the self-image and the actual output of learning.

The second variant focuses more on the matter of existence, that is the students' 'beings' as a learners who go through the program of intercultural learning, which covers the common component in phenomenology of feeling, perception, meaning, remembrance and projection to the future. This variant would be key to unveil the learners' journey in their learning.

The Constructed Procedures

Practical steps for operations are described here, mainly based on Jonathan Smith's guide on IPA. It however owes to the theoretical understanding and interpretative ability of the researcher to be able to accomplish a phenomenological research. Trotman (2006:248) highlighted Kvale's saying in phenomenological study the researcher himself is the research instrument. Generally speaking, the main activities in phenomenological study involve skillful questioning in gathering data in interviews, and rigorous interpretations over the respondents' text.

Forming Research Questions

To begin with, a research question for IPA would be one that is open and broad, and those that concern "complexity, process or novelty" (Smith 2007:55) will be relevant. The list of questions provided suggested those that question the process, relationship, sense of identity, way of thinking, influences, impact, way of accepting conditions (coming to terms), among others. Inspired by them, the questions below are interesting and relevant to this study.
• How is learning jazz as a major study for Malaysian students?
• How do Malaysian students come to terms with the gap of expected learning level and their actual ability in music learning?
• How do Malaysian students think about themselves as music students?
• How does studying jazz music impact on students' self image and identity?

Sampling size

IPA utilizes small sample size and a number of three is recommended as an "extremely useful number for sample" for a beginner researcher. Small sample size enables "specific statements" in analysis and contributes in "theoretical generalizability" in that it stimulates, links, inspires and prescribes further research. George Kelly further suggested considering three elements of personal construct at a time, "allowing the individual to focus closely on the relationship between the elements in considering a way in which two were similar to and different from the third" (Simth, 2007:57).

Semi-Structured Interview

Smith recommended semi-structured interviews as a way of collecting information. A semi-structured interview has the following features:

- An attempt to establish rapport with the respondent
- The ordering of a question is less important
- The interviewer is free to probe interesting areas that arise
- The interview can follow the respondent's interests of concerns (Simth, 2007:57)

He featured a chart of interview questions called "interview schedule" that grouped some 17 questions into three elements. For example, the interview schedule for a patient's experience of renal dialysis covered the three issues of, a) dialysis: the personal history, the process, the feeling, and so on; b) identity: how experiences changed identity, self image and others as perceived by the participants; c) coping: participants' personal coping relating to "illness", involving the view of "illness", self evaluation of health status, coping strategies, projection into the future. Some questions may be prepared with prompts, to be used in order to open more imagination for the respondents in answering.

Interpretative Analysis of Text

As IPA is basically a repeated interpretation of text, it is important to obtain as complete as possible the view of the participants in textual form. In this regard, Smith suggested the use of audio recorder and word to word transcription of the interview. The transcribed text will undergo multiple times of analysis and sorting out while searching for emerging themes. The early stage is to find "expressions which are high level enough to allow theoretical connections within and across cases but are still grounded in the particularity of the specific things being said." (Simth, 2007:68). At the next level, the emergent themes are examined in a way their connections are studied and these themes are grouped into clusters. These clusters are formed in order to establish a meaningful structure. This process, from initial notes to emergent themes, and to themes under clusters are to be repeated for a number of participants, upon which the participants' texts are compared and an inter-participants' structure is created.

Writing up

The writing up of the analysis of IPA is basically a thematic description interjected by selected examples. The skills of writing, not unlike that of ethnography, creatively use different forms of language in order to attract the reader and create a sense of "being there" with the participants, and to lead from the personal inner perspectives into a more third person, scientific or logical discussion.

The Actual Application

IPA is most relevant for intense middle-long term experience surrounding a specific issue that defines the respondent's life for that period. Life in a music programme is not unlike that of monastry, being confined in a campus for four years to hone skills through meticulous and persistent self quest, as the challenge is placed inwardly, to the self, one of the many looming obstacles to overcome.

The three respondents selected for this study were from the few whose study time marked a significant development of the jazz program of the institution. New initiatives in teaching jazz were launched, prominent figures in the scene were involved as instructors, trophies of student competitions were won, and a study or performance trips were made to almost all major jazz events in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. These students were among the high performers in this school, as they commented, "the highlight of my teaching career" by one instructor. They lived closely as a community and their activities were mostly identical. At the same time, struggles and breakdowns were common features in their journey to become professionals - a career path so under-established in the Malaysian music scene. As one of the many practical music programs placed within a university set up, students were caught in discrepancies between academia and conservatoire, and were left alone to cope with the immense culture shock as a consequence of a gigantic but unprepared leap from an "ordinary" piano students (in general sense) into a crash course grooming professionals in a field that was new to them. Students were given all but a short time (only four years), to meet an expectation that seemed unreasonable for jazz beginners. The process was extremely tough. Underneath the bright outlook of the students, there were signs of anxiety and real incidence of depression. The analysis-in-progress based on the text

of Fang (pseudonym) represented the voices of recipients at the end of a mismatched training system in music performance that did little with the learning gaps inherent in the background of the students.

Fang completed her four-year undergraduate program majoring in jazz piano performance from a research university in Malaysia in 2015. There is no standardised syllabus specifically for jazz majors in Malaysia, and teaching methods used varies according to the instructors. Unlike in advanced countries, it was not possible for Fang to receive prior training in jazz piano as instructors were hard to find and the normal Malaysian life environment did not have jazz as part of its regular landscape. Fang's prior music training since her childhood was mainly through Yamaha Music School, a private but extremely well developed education system (with clear steps in learning and thoughtfully designed materials). There she learned to play the electronic organ called *electone*, which is different from the piano. She had taken additional lessons in classical piano before entering college for a few years, but again it was not in the genre of jazz. Fang had a confident outlook, outspoken in nature, was an all rounded achiever who maintained good academic records with awards and scholarships. The four years of jazz major study was a journey of her venturing into a "new specialty", to play a new instrument in a new style, and expected to perform professionally after completing the course. Fang stated,

> *"because when I first enter uni, I didn't expect I will take Jazz, because I don't have the knowledge of um, oh we have Classical and Jazz, the two departments"*

No doubt the information gathered was specifically personal, but the interest was never on the person, but on extracting higly applicable themes based on the particulars of Fang's experience. Understanding of the *object*, meaning the understanding of what was jazz and what wasn't, formed the platform on which Fang developed her study. It was the conceptual foundation from which inspiration and aspiration of learning were derived.

Understanding of the *object* calls for the ideals of the *object*, and in turn calls for the teachnical skills required in order to fulfil the ideals. These common three steps sequence, of understanding to learning targets, and to learning methods do not seem to apply. Instead, flat convergences are between the three components that give the impression the learning tasks determine the understanding and not the other way round. In other words, the understanding of the respondent is centered on the *how to* perspective of jazz, or from the perspective as a performer or a *doer*. Coming from this prior environment, the difference between a score reading music student (her past, so to speak) and the new learning task of jazz shapes the character of Fang's understanding. Jazz is understood as improvisation, and improvisation as a task, in which one tells "different stories" everytime one plays, and this is to be done in groups. Reversing this statement, this reflects the state of the past in which the respondent has been living in: music is about playing to the precision of the notation, and to be played mainly alone[iii].

Although the respondent mentioned improvisation was crucial to jazz, the more ecological view of this art, its spirit, subgenres, musicians and styles included, were absent except for some general comments that jazz is about "how they (African Americans) express themselves". Acknowledging the link with the Civil Rights Movement and the history of African Americans, the particularity of the historical background matters little in her perception of jazz and jazz learning altogether.

Amid the common notions, a more localised version of "understanding (jazz)" stands out. There is a concern on the ability to decipher the musical structure, particularly the aesthetic components in listening to a piece of jazz music. Expressed as one of the concerns in her learning journey, she stressed the importance of "how to listen to jazz", "the method or the technique to listen to jazz recording", which is the ability to do "analysis of the chord progression" and to "overcome weird chord changes". Within the respondent's system, these belong to "understanding" and "to interpret" jazz pieces. The concept of understanding, and to analyse are closely linked to technical details, the *how to*; however, this understanding is not linked to idioms. To the respondent, to understand, was to be able to play. Understanding, at least to this learner, was not a question of *what* (jazz is) but rather about *how* (to play jazz). The method oriented mindset seemed to be a more prominent concern over expression, feeling, emotion and preference.

> *"Jazz is actually more than that."*

To the respondent, jazz was always something "more" than what she had already achieved. The journey was one of transformation in stages, where once a higher stage was achieved, her identification was extirpated with the previous stage. The early impression of jazz, upon hearing a bop recording shown by her instructor, was "annoying". Despite of her perceiving her first year as "progressing well" where she attempted her first improvisation and ensemble playing, her current sentiment was "I think the first year..I did *nothing* about jazz".

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The first challenge for her was that jazz required improvisation, something that was new to her, and ever since then improvisation became the core item in her understanding jazz. In the second year, the respondent seemed more ready to grow in learning as "the lessons were more fruitful". Soon her awareness grew that jazz playing was not about attending lessons but to be in line with the practice of the jazz musicians in the music scene. In the third year of study she perceived she was unable "to use" Real Book[iv] as a failure. Competency in the workplace, meaning to be able to play on par with musicians outside the campus, became her concern. Her year of preparation for graduation recital was the "most struggling" and viewed as "OK and depressed" at the same time, as she was struggling with "articulation", a long term piano technique issue which had surfaced in sharp contrast during the lessons. Piano skills turned out to be the huge concern in the process of instruction, and became a barrier for smooth progress. At the time of interview, where the respondent had since graduated and been working as a pianist and keyboard player for close to a year, she denied the identity as a jazz musician even though she had been playing jazz for work, and considered herself "still as a student". The respondent's growth could be traced as a line of continuos growth, from the basic requirement to improvise, to smooth learning, to competency to play with practionners, to instrumental habits and now further to a higher ground of her self expectation.

"I didn't really do my responsibility as a student"

For many, school is a transition to career life. One takes pride in graduation because he/she is able to complete training and moves on to the professional world. This way of identification may not be the case for the respondent. As the researcher examined the respondent's text, a localised identity called "student" emerged, showing a strong attachment to the identity as a student, as is said in the quoted text below, "the student name…can't.. leave us" even after one had successfully graduated from the study program. Note from the text below, the respondent was aware of the surrounding's urge for her to be independent. Understanding this expectation from the surroundings, the respondent proceeded to reveal a perspective of "student" that was beyond a mere transition to the professional.

> *Mm..that time I will still think that I'm a jazz student. The student name is like, the student word can't..how to say, can't leave us aa. Mm. Actually after graduation there is a period that I always think that I am still a student, mm. So, that period actually some of my friends, like seniors or other friends in the scene, they will say mm, you, you have to throw away this student..this student identity. So that you can improve from there, if you, if you still think that you are a student, then, you can't really work towards the professional way, so..but I still, I still think that I learn, because as I told you, I have the, I have the thoughts of the..skill and what is it, skill and the quality, aa, of a student graduate.*

This particular perception of student identity came with a set of the ideals, as in ". but I still..have the thoughts of the skill and quality of graduate". The respondent proceeded with repeated statements of "I can't achieve that level", raising a string of reasons defining herself as student. These came as a series of self imposed target of challenges, they were 1) not knowing much how music was being played and learnt in other music colleges; 2) not on par with senior and coursemates who were perceived as better than her; 3) not on par with the skills of the instructors; 4) not on par with comtemporaries who were perceived as better than her. In her own words, these could be summed up as having "not enough healthy comparisons".

Besides these external parameters, "student" comes with a unrestrictive set of desired skills and qualities. It is desired that upon graduation, a "student" shall be able to,

- play jazz standards
- has extensive number of songs in the repertoire
- lead in an ensemble, knowing how to que and deal with others
- play as an ensemble
- analyse chord progression
- play scales
- memorise the chord progression
- memorise the melody
- sight transpose a music in twelve keys
- be punctual at classes and rehearsals
- plan program and prepare score for rehearsal with short notice

- know the history of jazz music very well
- to conduct jazz appreciation very well
- be familiar with at least several jazz records
- have extensive knowledge and experience in listening to jazz records, particularly,
    - to be able to talk for a few hours about jazz musician, for example, Miles Davis
    - to have read enough CD commentaries to obtain background information of a recording
- the use Real Book

As long as one could not fulfil these perceived requirements, one would not be a real qualified "student" who has reached the perceived graduation goal point. While these are sensible from the curriculum point of view, note that these were part of the respondent's self-imposed imagination rather than a carefully drafted list: it represented her sentiments towards the notion of being a student, the ideal she was reaching for. The image as a "student" were so strong it could even be implied as a sense of destiny in itself for this student identity, instead of an identity in transition towards the professional.

> " four years is just the start of your journey. But for me I think, we really need to think about that. Like four years, but we need to have um..really very good um..how to say, very good skill"

CONCLUSION

In this paper, it was proposed the use of phenomenology as a research approach to foster pedagogy of empathy in mastering (inter-) cultural skills. By empathy, it referred to a focus on the receiving end of an education system, the learners. It is a nightmare for many learners today, under the name of modern, rational, and comprehensive curriculum, to have to take in the teaching content which was designed top down and in impersonal way. Particularities of the learners, largely shaped by their up bringing, culturual systems, geographical particulars and their personal uniqueness are strikingly not being considered, until the learners come face to face with the teachers in class. A standardised arithmetic progress may be possible, but this view that puts everyone on a single rail of progress is detrimental to the training for the fine arts, where personalities are inseparable with skills in its learning outcomes. Putting the outcome aside, the modern education system seems blind to the fact that it is the learner, an individual human being, *who* learns and not the instructors, the materials or anything else. Jazz studies, set within a multicultural, Southeast Asian, and still developing country context, gives a relevant case in representing (in idiographical manner) a good number of countries and regions alike, and also to problems in other teaching subjects that is intercultural in nature, cases that essentially resemble teaching language as second language. It is important to grasp what transpires in the learners' mind, in responding to a foreign materials of which they are tasked to embrace, internalize and apply all within the short time frame in an institutionalized setting.

The actual application of IPA presented above, first of all, implies a call for Object within the phenomenological discourse, that recognizes the localised view of learning subject held by the learners themselves. An Object is tied closely with the perceiver's characteristics and prior experience and background. Take for example, in the learners' lived experience point of view, there is no one subject that can be universally, identically called "English". Similarly, Music for one is not the same as another. Learning Jazz, likewise, does not mean the same to students in European, East Asian and Southeast Asian countries. In other learning subjects, (say, Economy) we understand the common defining components of it across regions, and there is a set of content of a subject that is not bound to the context of the learners. However, in actual operation of teaching and learning, it is the phemenological Object that is in the center of a learner's mind. How one understands jazz will decide how the student will feel comfortable or otherwise with the subject itself, its content and the delivery methods used. The Object could be the key to a series of responses and reactions of the learners in the learning process, and it shapes the learner's *being* as a learner in the process.

An analysis of the respondent's text revealed her particularity in understanding the Object, her aspirations in learning, but also the learning gaps and her other key objects of concern. It also showed the background where the student's problem came from and how it shaped her current understanding on jazz. Fang found the sound of jazz music "annoying" in her freshmen class. Jazz, was a new culture to her, foreign, and not familiar. She did not deliberately choose to major in jazz as choices were not available: she had to choose classcial or jazz at her orientation weeks. Jazz, as an Object, was not so much a music "to express the African Americans' feeling" as said by the respondent, but something different that kept her to continue to invest herself into it despite her lack of understanding and familiarity. It was found at this point of analysis-in-progress, the Object called jazz was related more closely with a keen interest to acquire structural commands, a *how to*, set within her identification

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of *being as student*, that prioritised excellence and comprehensive in handling a matter rather than the matter itself. In this, the more global discourse of non-conformism spirit of jazz, the neo-classiscm of jazz, and the like fell far away outside the radar of the the respondent's view. This had profound implications in pedagogy. It opened a curious question whether the instructor shared the same view with the student. And, what had actually been communicated, miscommunicated, or not communicated in the music lessons were all usually deemed ignorable as ordinary events in an education institution.

In many cases, music educators need not only utilise a better technique in teaching, but inspiration and insights of profound case-experience could motivate them to devise new strategies of teaching of their own. It is hoped through the proposed methodological frame, these different ways of understanding of the same subject, (conceptualised as Object in phenomenological terms) by the students can be revealed, and self-efficacy, resulted from the perceived gap between the learners' understanding of the object and their actual ability in realizing those understanding, could be examined with depth. We look forward to an education practice that recognises the needs of the invidual learners' particularities integrated empathetically into the delivery methods in the class.

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[i] A proceedings paper published prior to this article, that carries the same intention, contains more general discussions on research methodology for music pedagogy, and has more detailed tables of the pedagogical elements involved in the conceptual framework of the application. Readers who are new to phenomenology as well as research in music in general may find the article useful.The present paper has a clearer focus and is complete with analysis results.

[ii] The performance output, which comes in audio and visual form, provides valuable information to complement the study of the process of learning. It can be taken as a confirmation, a physical proof to what is being felt and said by the respondents. More than that, if poetic and analogous language in phenomenological writing can bring the reader into the *being-there* of the respondents, artistic expression like the non verbal musical sound itself is already valid *formal indication* of the existence. Musical expression, together with the musical sound, can have the same status as a form of data to reveal the consciousness of a person-in-context. This is even so with the case of jazz that has improvisation as its core performance output of which its actual musical content is highly individual and instantial (meaning at that moment in time).

[iii] Learning to play solo piano and the solo eletronic organ called *electone* has been the most common private music instruction mode in Malaysia. Majority of the local music undergraduate have their prior music learning as solo player.

[iv] The Real Book is a common compilation of jazz scores which is used for jam sessions worldwild