

Reframing Musical Expressivity: Cognitive, Relational, and Pedagogical Dimensions

Dedi Setyawan

Universitas Dr. Soetomo Surabaya, Indonesia

Correspondent: dedi.setyawan@unitomo.ac.id

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ABSTRACT: This narrative review explores the determinants of musical expressivity in performance, focusing on attentional focus, accompaniment quality, and mindfulness-based strategies as critical factors influencing perception and evaluation. The study aimed to synthesize empirical findings across music psychology, pedagogy, and performance studies to develop an integrative understanding of expressivity. Literature was collected systematically through Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using targeted keyword combinations and applying rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria. The review incorporated diverse methodologies, including experimental, cohort, and case study designs, to capture the multidimensional nature of expressivity. Results revealed that attentional focus significantly shapes audience evaluations, demonstrating that perception is mediated by cognitive framing and cultural orientation. Accompaniment quality was shown to enhance interpretive cohesion, emphasizing the relational dimension of performance. Additionally, mindfulness practices improved expressive depth by helping musicians manage stress and sustain emotional engagement, yielding benefits for both performers and audiences. Discussion highlighted systemic barriers such as narrow pedagogical frameworks and biased evaluative practices that undermine expressive development. Potential solutions include embedding mindfulness programs, fostering collaborative rehearsal strategies, and integrating attentional framing into curricula. The findings affirm the urgency of reconceptualizing expressivity as a central component of music education and performance evaluation. Future research should expand beyond Western classical contexts, adopt multimodal approaches, and address structural barriers to expressive development. By advancing these perspectives, this review contributes to a holistic understanding of musical expressivity and its vital role in creating meaningful and resonant performance experiences..

Keywords: Musical Expressivity, Performance Evaluation, Accompaniment Quality, Attentional Focus, Mindfulness In Music, Music Education, Audience Perception.



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INTRODUCTION

The concept of expressivity in music performance has long occupied a central place in musicological, pedagogical, and psychological discourse. At its core, musical expressivity may be

understood as the capacity of performers to convey emotions, ideas, and interpretive nuance to their audiences, thereby transforming sound into meaningful experience (Kegelaers et al., 2022). Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that this phenomenon extends beyond the mere execution of technical precision, encompassing complex interactions between artistic intention, bodily movement, contextual awareness, and listener perception. Conceptually, expressivity combines aesthetic, psychological, and social dimensions, while operationally it may be quantified through measurable features such as tone quality, phrasing, articulation, and evaluative judgments by listeners. This dual framing underscores both the interpretive richness and the methodological challenges inherent in studying expressivity within performance.

Recent global research trends indicate a heightened interest in the multidimensionality of expressive performance, particularly in relation to non-verbal communication and collaborative interaction. For instance, D’Amario et al. (2022) have demonstrated that bodily gestures during ensemble performance directly shape audience perception of cohesion and quality. Similarly, Springer and Silvey (2018) explored the role of accompaniment in solo performance, revealing that audience evaluations are strongly influenced by the emotional engagement and collaborative context in which the music is presented. These insights suggest that expressive performance cannot be disentangled from the interplay of visual, auditory, and social factors. Moreover, pedagogical approaches have also begun to reflect this shift, as Meissner (2021) argues that constructivist methods in music education promote deeper student engagement with expressivity by encouraging learners to develop personal interpretive frameworks, moving away from strictly prescriptive traditions.

The growing scholarly attention is reinforced by empirical evidence demonstrating the importance of expressivity for both performers and audiences. Research has consistently shown that expressive performance enhances listener experience, supports emotional communication, and fosters musicians’ own psychological development. For example, Kegelaers et al. (2022) reported that many evaluative difficulties in music performance assessment stem from the complex and often subjective nature of expressive interpretation, signaling the need for systematic approaches to teaching and evaluating expressivity. Furthermore, Bishop et al. (2023) revealed that higher levels of mental effort during ensemble interaction can strengthen expressive quality, thereby linking cognitive and social dimensions of performance to its aesthetic outcomes. These findings confirm that expressivity functions not only as an artistic trait but also as an essential skill shaping both individual musicianship and collective performance.

Statistical and qualitative data underscore the urgency of addressing expressivity in performance contexts. A consistent theme is that expressive skills are underdeveloped in many educational systems, where emphasis remains on technical accuracy. The result is a gap between the functional training of musicians and the experiential richness expected in professional practice. Empirical work by Bishop et al. (2023) demonstrated that expressive interaction directly influences perceived cohesion and artistry, while evidence from evaluative frameworks highlights that audiences and juries often prioritize expressive qualities over technical mastery when judging performance outcomes. This dual recognition—expressivity as both an educational gap and a professional expectation—further validates the necessity of systematic inquiry into the phenomenon.

Despite its importance, several challenges complicate the teaching, practice, and evaluation of musical expressivity. First, expressivity is often described as an intangible or elusive quality, making it difficult to codify within standard pedagogical frameworks. Czajkowski et al. (2020; 2021) highlight the role of mindfulness as a potential tool for cultivating expressivity, showing how mindfulness practices help singers manage psychological pressures and sustain focus during performance. However, access to such resources remains uneven, creating disparities in expressive development across contexts. Similarly, Springer and Silvey (2019; 2021) observed that environmental variables, particularly the quality of accompaniment, can significantly shape solo performance evaluations. These studies point to the highly contextual nature of expressivity, where individual artistry is always embedded in broader social and situational frameworks.

A further challenge arises from biases in performance evaluation. Peynircioğlu et al. (2018) reported that judgments of expressivity are frequently influenced by visual cues, raising concerns about fairness and objectivity in assessment. This aligns with broader research suggesting that cultural assumptions and visual presentation often overshadow auditory perception, complicating the evaluation process. Landry and Jeon (2020), for example, found that the interaction of bodily movement and sound adds layers of complexity to performance experience. While their study focused on dance, its implications for musical performance are significant, pointing to the necessity of integrated frameworks that account for multimodal expression. Taken together, these findings illustrate that the very qualities that make music expressive—its embodied, social, and interpretive richness—also present substantial obstacles to systematic study and fair assessment.

The persistence of these challenges underscores a clear gap in the literature. While existing research acknowledges the importance of expressivity, there remains insufficient integration between technical dimensions of performance and the affective, interpretive aspects that shape listener experience. For example, Springer and Silvey (2021) noted that although focus of attention instructions influence audience evaluation, other variables such as social interaction and collaborative context are underexplored. Similarly, Bland and Cho (2020) demonstrated that even observer body movement can affect perception of music, suggesting that traditional approaches fail to capture the full spectrum of variables influencing expressivity. The lack of comprehensive models capable of bridging technical and emotional dimensions constitutes a significant lacuna in current scholarship, justifying the need for targeted reviews and theoretical synthesis.

The primary aim of the present review is to address this gap by systematically analyzing how factors such as attentional focus, accompaniment quality, bodily interaction, and mindfulness practices influence the perception and evaluation of expressivity in music performance. By bringing together insights from music psychology, performance studies, and pedagogy, this study seeks to provide a more integrated framework for understanding expressivity as both an artistic and educational construct. In doing so, the review not only advances conceptual clarity but also offers practical implications for performers, educators, and evaluators.

The scope of this inquiry is intentionally broad, encompassing both cognitive mechanisms and social dynamics that shape expressive interpretation. Particular attention is given to ensemble interaction, solo performance contexts, and the evaluative processes in educational and professional settings. The review also considers the role of cultural context and the diverse

backgrounds of both performers and listeners, recognizing that expressivity is not universally perceived but mediated by cultural and experiential lenses. By situating the discussion within these multiple dimensions, the study aspires to present a holistic account of expressivity that can inform future research, teaching practice, and performance evaluation. This integrative perspective not only fills a critical gap in the literature but also supports the development of more equitable, effective, and nuanced approaches to cultivating and assessing musical expressivity in contemporary contexts.

METHOD

The methodology for this narrative review was designed to ensure a comprehensive, systematic, and transparent approach to gathering, selecting, and analyzing literature concerning expressivity in music performance. Given the inherently multidimensional nature of musical expressivity, the review strategy needed to capture a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, including music psychology, pedagogy, performance studies, and cognitive sciences. In order to achieve this, the literature search was conducted across several highly reputable databases, and stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to guarantee the relevance, reliability, and quality of the sources examined.

The primary databases selected for the literature search were Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Scopus was chosen due to its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals across multiple disciplines, which allowed access to publications in music performance, psychology, and education. Web of Science was included to provide an additional layer of rigor, given its strong indexing of high-impact journals and multidisciplinary reach, particularly in the areas of social sciences and arts and humanities. Google Scholar was employed as a complementary resource to broaden the search to encompass dissertations, theses, conference proceedings, and institutional reports, which often contain emerging findings not yet available in formal journal articles. The use of these three databases ensured a balance between depth, breadth, and diversity of perspectives.

The search strategy was carefully constructed using combinations of targeted keywords that reflected both the conceptual and operational definitions of musical expressivity. Keywords were selected based on their frequent usage in previous studies and their alignment with the scope of this review. Core terms such as “musical expressivity,” “expressiveness,” and “performance evaluation” formed the foundation of the search queries. To capture the perceptual dimension, phrases like “audience perception” were added, while terms such as “mindfulness,” “music education,” and “expressivity” were included to identify works addressing pedagogical and psychological interventions. Furthermore, combinations such as “performance collaboration” and “accompaniment quality” were used to gather studies focusing on ensemble contexts and the role of collaborative factors in shaping expressivity. To account for the cognitive and affective aspects of performance, terms like “psychological factors,” “musical performance,” and “emotion” were integrated into the search. Boolean operators were systematically applied (e.g., “AND,” “OR”) to refine the search results, thereby ensuring that studies encompassing both technical and interpretive elements of performance were captured.

Following the initial retrieval of literature, a structured process of screening and selection was implemented. The first stage involved a title and abstract review to determine whether studies explicitly addressed issues of expressivity in the context of music performance. Articles that were unrelated to performance (for example, those focusing solely on music therapy, computational modeling of sound, or unrelated forms of artistic expression) were excluded at this stage. The second stage involved a more detailed review of full-text articles to assess whether they met the established inclusion criteria. To be included, studies had to be peer-reviewed (with the exception of relevant dissertations or conference proceedings identified through Google Scholar), written in English, and published within the last fifteen years to ensure contemporary relevance. Moreover, studies needed to explicitly investigate expressivity in performance, whether through perceptual evaluation, pedagogical interventions, or analysis of performance features such as movement, collaboration, or psychological states.

Exclusion criteria were applied to maintain focus and methodological clarity. Articles that were purely theoretical without reference to empirical evidence were excluded, unless they offered significant conceptual frameworks that informed the analysis of expressivity. Similarly, studies focusing exclusively on music therapy, while valuable in their own right, were excluded as their objectives differ from the focus of this review. Non-academic sources such as opinion pieces, non-peer-reviewed essays, and general media reports were also omitted to preserve the academic rigor of the analysis. Finally, studies not available in English were excluded to ensure consistent interpretation and evaluation of the materials.

In terms of study types, this review incorporated a range of empirical designs in order to capture the multifaceted nature of expressivity. Randomized controlled trials, though limited in number in this field, were included where available, particularly in research investigating pedagogical interventions such as mindfulness-based training programs. Cohort studies and case studies were also included, as they provided valuable insights into longitudinal developments of expressive skills and individual differences in interpretation. Cross-sectional surveys contributed by highlighting perceptions of expressivity among audiences and educators. Additionally, experimental studies examining performance conditions—such as those manipulating accompaniment quality, bodily movement, or attentional focus—were given special consideration due to their direct relevance to the evaluation of expressivity. Together, these diverse methodological approaches allowed for a triangulated understanding of how expressivity is defined, taught, performed, and perceived.

The process of literature evaluation was carried out in multiple stages to ensure reliability. After full-text screening, articles were reviewed based on their methodological rigor, clarity of research design, and alignment with the objectives of this review. Studies were assessed for the appropriateness of their research questions, the validity and reliability of their measures, and the transparency of their data analysis procedures. Particular attention was given to studies that employed multimodal methodologies, such as combining audio-visual analysis with listener evaluations, since these approaches provided a richer picture of the expressive phenomena under investigation. Moreover, the presence of theoretical grounding, such as references to constructivist pedagogy or cognitive frameworks of emotion and performance, was considered an additional marker of scholarly quality.

An important component of the selection process involved managing duplicate articles retrieved from multiple databases. Reference management software was used to organize the results, identify duplicates, and ensure that the final set of studies represented unique contributions. To minimize bias, two reviewers independently conducted the screening and selection process, and disagreements were resolved through discussion. This approach strengthened the objectivity of the review and provided greater confidence in the comprehensiveness of the selected literature.

The resulting body of literature represented a multidisciplinary and international sample of studies, reflecting the global interest in expressivity within music performance. Studies included in the review spanned multiple cultural contexts and performance settings, from solo recitals to ensemble collaborations, thereby providing a wide-ranging view of how expressivity is constructed, evaluated, and taught across diverse environments. Furthermore, by incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research, the review was able to synthesize thematic patterns while also acknowledging the nuanced, context-dependent nature of expressive performance.

In summary, the methodology of this review integrated rigorous database searching, carefully designed keyword strategies, and clearly articulated inclusion and exclusion criteria. The selection process incorporated multiple study designs to capture the complexity of expressivity and relied on transparent evaluation procedures to ensure quality and consistency. This methodological framework provided a robust foundation for synthesizing findings on expressivity in music performance, allowing for meaningful insights into its conceptualization, pedagogy, and practice across global contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this narrative review are organized into three thematic areas that have consistently emerged from the literature: the influence of attentional focus on audience evaluation, the role of accompaniment quality in shaping perceptions of musical expressivity, and the integration of mindfulness strategies in music education and performance. Together, these themes provide a comprehensive understanding of how expressivity is constructed, perceived, and evaluated in contemporary performance contexts. Each sub-section synthesizes empirical evidence, highlights cross-cultural comparisons, and identifies patterns that reveal both the universality and variability of expressive performance across global contexts.

The first theme centers on the role of attentional focus in shaping audience evaluations of musical performance. Research by Springer and Silvey (2021) demonstrated that variations in attentional instructions given to listeners significantly influenced their judgments of expressivity, particularly in solo instrumental contexts. Their study revealed a strong interaction effect between attentional focus and the presence or absence of accompaniment, suggesting that directing the listener's attention to specific musical features alters how they experience expressivity. These findings underscore the cognitive dimension of performance evaluation, illustrating that audience perceptions are not only shaped by the qualities of the performance itself but also by the mental framing imposed before or during the act of listening. Comparable results have been reported in other contexts, lending weight to the idea that attentional focus is a cross-cultural determinant of

musical evaluation. D'Amario et al. (2022), for example, conducted a study in Italy in which audiences expressed higher appreciation for performances marked by emotional clarity and coherence, both of which were enhanced when attention was directed toward the communicative aspects of the performance. These results align with the findings of Springer and Silvey, supporting the view that listener orientation plays a pivotal role in shaping evaluative outcomes. Although Chowdhury and Widmer (2021) in Germany emphasized acoustic attributes such as technical accuracy and expressive clarity in their exploration of piano performance, their results indirectly reinforce the claim that perception is context-dependent, shaped by both intrinsic performance qualities and the cognitive lens of the listener. Collectively, this body of work affirms that attentional focus acts as a powerful moderator of expressivity, influencing not only how performances are experienced but also how they are judged in evaluative contexts across diverse cultural environments.

The consistency of these findings across different national contexts strengthens their validity while also revealing subtle cultural nuances. In Italy, the emphasis on emotional communication reflects a broader cultural orientation toward expressivity in the arts, while in Germany the prioritization of technical clarity aligns with a tradition of precision in classical performance. These variations demonstrate that while attentional focus universally shapes perception, the dimensions emphasized in evaluative judgments may differ according to cultural and pedagogical traditions. Such insights highlight the need for educators and performers to consider both cognitive and cultural frameworks when cultivating expressive performance practices.

The second theme emerging from the literature is the role of accompaniment quality in influencing the evaluation of solo performance. Silvey and Springer (2019) provided compelling evidence that high-quality accompaniment not only enhances the expressive cohesion between soloists and accompanists but also significantly elevates audience judgments of expressivity. Their study revealed that collaborative rehearsal between soloists and accompanists fosters interpretive alignment, resulting in performances perceived as more coherent and emotionally engaging. Importantly, these findings suggest that the quality of accompaniment contributes as much to perceived expressivity as the technical and interpretive skills of the soloist, highlighting the relational dimension of musical performance.

Cross-cultural evidence supports the universality of this conclusion, though with contextual variations. In Germany, for instance, studies have indicated that accompaniment quality exerts a particularly strong influence in classical contexts, where precision and cohesion are highly valued. In contrast, within genres such as jazz and popular music, where improvisation plays a central role, the emphasis on accompaniment may be less pronounced, with audiences focusing instead on spontaneity and individual expressivity. These contrasts point to the cultural specificity of how accompaniment is weighted in evaluative frameworks. While rigorous empirical studies remain limited outside classical traditions, the broader implication is clear: the relational dynamics between performers fundamentally shape perceptions of expressivity, and these dynamics are interpreted through the lens of genre and cultural expectation.

The significance of accompaniment quality also extends to pedagogical and evaluative contexts. Educational frameworks that prioritize collaborative rehearsal and train students to engage meaningfully with accompanists have been shown to yield more positive performance outcomes.

This suggests that cultivating collaborative competence should be viewed as integral to developing expressive skills, rather than as a secondary consideration. Furthermore, the emphasis on accompaniment resonates with broader theories of social cognition, which posit that interpersonal attunement and shared intentionality are central to human communication, including in the domain of musical performance.

The third theme that emerged from the literature is the role of mindfulness strategies in enhancing musical expressivity and performance quality. Czajkowski et al. (2020; 2021) conducted a series of studies demonstrating that mindfulness practices in music education not only improve students' capacity to manage stress and maintain focus but also directly enhance expressive quality in performance. Their findings indicate that mindfulness fosters deeper emotional engagement with the music, enabling performers to connect more authentically with both the repertoire and their audience. The impact of mindfulness extends beyond the individual performer, influencing the collective experience of the audience, who report greater satisfaction and emotional resonance when attending performances by musicians trained in mindfulness practices.

Comparative evidence from international contexts highlights the growing integration of mindfulness in music education and performance training. In Canada and Australia, for example, institutions have begun to embed mindfulness programs into music curricula as a means of promoting student well-being and enhancing artistic outcomes (Czajkowski et al., 2021). In Australia, several music schools have formally integrated mindfulness into their curricula, with results indicating improvements not only in performance expressivity but also in academic achievement and psychological resilience. These developments reflect a broader recognition that the psychological dimension of performance is inseparable from its artistic outcomes and that educational frameworks must address both in order to cultivate expressive musicians.

The global adoption of mindfulness strategies underscores their versatility and cultural adaptability. While rooted in particular traditions, mindfulness practices have been shown to yield consistent benefits across diverse cultural and pedagogical contexts. Their integration into music education reflects a shift toward holistic models of training that emphasize both technical mastery and psychological well-being. This trend marks a departure from traditional pedagogies that have often neglected the emotional and cognitive dimensions of performance, signaling a paradigm shift in how musical expressivity is understood and cultivated.

Taken together, the findings across these three thematic areas provide a comprehensive picture of the factors that shape musical expressivity. Attentional focus highlights the cognitive mechanisms through which listeners engage with performance, accompaniment quality emphasizes the relational and collaborative dimensions of expressivity, and mindfulness practices illuminate the psychological underpinnings of expressive engagement. Across all three themes, cross-cultural comparisons reveal both commonalities and differences, pointing to the universal importance of expressivity in performance while also underscoring the role of cultural context in shaping its evaluation and development. These results affirm the multidimensional nature of expressivity, demonstrating that it is simultaneously cognitive, relational, and psychological, and that its cultivation requires attention to each of these domains.

The synthesis of these findings has significant implications for performers, educators, and evaluators. For performers, the results highlight the importance of cultivating both technical and

non-technical skills, including attentional framing, collaborative competence, and psychological resilience. For educators, the findings underscore the need to design curricula that integrate cognitive, relational, and psychological dimensions, moving beyond narrow emphases on technique. For evaluators, the research suggests that assessments of musical performance must account for the contextual and subjective factors that shape perception, avoiding reductive frameworks that privilege technical accuracy at the expense of expressive richness. Ultimately, the global evidence points to the necessity of adopting holistic and context-sensitive approaches to understanding, teaching, and evaluating expressivity in music performance.

The results of this review provide important confirmation of prior scholarship on the significance of attentional focus and accompaniment quality in shaping the evaluation of musical expressivity, while also challenging certain assumptions regarding cultural neutrality and objectivity in performance assessment. The literature demonstrates that attentional focus is a decisive factor in how audiences interpret and evaluate expressive qualities. Studies such as those by Springer and Silvey (2021) show that directing listener attention toward particular aspects of a performance alters their perception of expressivity, indicating that evaluation is not merely a passive process but one actively mediated by cognitive framing. This finding aligns with D’Amario et al. (2022), who reported that Italian audiences exhibited greater appreciation for performances with clear emotional communication when attention was guided to specific expressive features. Taken together, these studies reinforce the broader theoretical argument that perception of expressivity is inseparable from the psychological and attentional states of listeners.

Similarly, the findings regarding accompaniment underscore the relational nature of expressivity in performance. Silvey and Springer (2019) emphasized that the quality of accompaniment significantly enhances audience evaluations of solo performance, pointing to the collaborative dimension of expressivity. When soloists and accompanists engage in interpretive alignment, the resulting cohesion is perceived as greater expressive depth. This reinforces theories of social cognition in performance studies, which highlight that shared intentionality and interpersonal attunement are critical for effective communication of expressive meaning. Moreover, the evidence that accompaniment is weighted differently in classical traditions compared to improvisatory genres such as jazz demonstrates how cultural contexts shape evaluative frameworks, challenging the assumption that expressivity can be measured by universally applicable criteria.

At the same time, the review highlights challenges to established understandings of performance evaluation, particularly with respect to cultural biases and multimodal influences. Peynircioğlu et al. (2018) demonstrated that visual factors, such as the movements of musicians, can significantly affect how audiences perceive expressivity. This complicates the longstanding assumption that musical assessment should or can be purely auditory. Instead, it suggests that evaluations are inherently multimodal, combining visual, auditory, and contextual cues. The implications of this finding are substantial, as they call into question the validity of assessment frameworks that ignore visual elements or assume that they constitute an illegitimate source of bias. Rather, such factors may be integral to the very experience of expressivity, requiring evaluative models that embrace rather than exclude multimodal perception.

Systemic factors also emerge as significant contributors to the challenges identified in the literature. Meissner (2021) has argued persuasively that traditional pedagogical approaches, with their emphasis on technical mastery and academic achievement, often neglect the cultivation of expressive skills. This systemic imbalance creates an environment where students internalize the assumption that technical proficiency alone is sufficient, at the expense of developing the emotional and communicative capacities necessary for expressive performance. The consequence is a generation of musicians who may excel in accuracy but struggle to engage audiences on an affective level. This educational bias reflects broader institutional priorities that privilege measurable technical outcomes over more elusive but equally vital expressive dimensions.

One of the most promising solutions identified in the literature is the integration of mindfulness practices into music education and training. Czajkowski et al. (2020; 2021) provided strong evidence that mindfulness helps performers manage stress, sustain focus, and deepen emotional engagement, all of which directly enhance expressivity. By equipping students with tools for self-regulation and reflective awareness, mindfulness offers a counterbalance to the narrow technical focus of traditional pedagogies. Importantly, mindfulness also aligns with broader educational goals of fostering well-being and resilience, thereby supporting both artistic and personal development. The adoption of mindfulness practices in contexts such as Canada and Australia, where they are increasingly embedded in curricula, demonstrates their applicability across cultural and institutional settings.

Collaboration-oriented pedagogical approaches represent another avenue for addressing the limitations identified in the literature. Silvey and Springer (2019) argued that structured rehearsal between soloists and accompanists cultivates interpretive alignment and expressive cohesion, leading to more compelling performances. Such approaches move beyond the individualistic models that dominate traditional training, emphasizing instead the relational dimension of music-making. This perspective is further supported by Springer and Silvey (2018), who showed that collaborative contexts enhance not only the expressive quality of performance but also its evaluation by audiences. Incorporating collaboration into pedagogy therefore holds promise for bridging the gap between technical instruction and expressive cultivation, while also mitigating biases by foregrounding the inherently social nature of performance.

Nevertheless, several limitations persist in the existing body of research, pointing to directions for future inquiry. First, the majority of studies remain concentrated within Western classical traditions, leaving questions about the generalizability of findings to other genres and cultural contexts. While there is evidence that attentional focus and accompaniment are universally significant, the specific ways in which they are valued and enacted may differ across traditions such as jazz, popular, or non-Western music. Second, the methodological diversity of studies—ranging from perceptual experiments to qualitative case studies—poses challenges for synthesis, as measures of expressivity are not standardized across contexts. The absence of common evaluative frameworks limits comparability and may obscure deeper patterns. Third, the influence of visual factors such as bodily movement remains underexplored outside of isolated studies, suggesting a need for more systematic multimodal approaches to expressivity.

In addition, while mindfulness has emerged as a promising intervention, most studies to date have been small-scale or exploratory, leaving open questions about scalability and long-term impact.

Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies tracking the development of expressive skills over time, as well as cross-cultural investigations into how mindfulness interacts with diverse pedagogical traditions. Similarly, greater attention to systemic factors—such as institutional priorities, assessment frameworks, and cultural assumptions—could illuminate the structural barriers that limit the cultivation of expressivity. Such research would not only deepen theoretical understanding but also provide actionable insights for educators and policymakers seeking to reform curricula.

Another area requiring further exploration is the intersection of technology and expressivity. While some studies have begun to investigate digital tools for performance analysis and feedback, the potential of such technologies to enhance expressive training remains largely untapped. For example, the development of interactive platforms that integrate auditory, visual, and physiological feedback could offer innovative means of cultivating expressivity in both educational and professional contexts. Integrating such tools with mindfulness-based and collaboration-oriented approaches could yield a more holistic and adaptive model of expressive pedagogy.

Ultimately, the findings of this review highlight both the promise and the challenges inherent in studying and cultivating musical expressivity. By situating attentional focus, accompaniment quality, and mindfulness within broader cultural and systemic frameworks, it becomes clear that expressivity is not a peripheral or optional dimension of performance but a central and multifaceted construct. Addressing the gaps and limitations identified in the literature will require methodological innovation, pedagogical reform, and a willingness to embrace the complexity of expressive communication in music. Through such efforts, future research and practice can move toward a more integrated, equitable, and impactful understanding of musical expressivity.

CONCLUSION

This review has highlighted the multifaceted nature of musical expressivity, demonstrating that it is shaped by attentional focus, accompaniment quality, and mindfulness-based strategies, all of which intersect with systemic and cultural contexts. The findings show that directing audience attention significantly alters perceptions of expressivity, reinforcing the idea that listening is an active, cognitively mediated process. Similarly, accompaniment quality plays a crucial role in enhancing interpretive cohesion, underscoring the relational dimension of performance and its importance for both audiences and performers. Furthermore, mindfulness practices have been identified as promising interventions for cultivating expressive depth, equipping musicians with tools to manage stress and engage more authentically with their music. Together, these insights challenge traditional pedagogies and evaluative frameworks that privilege technical accuracy over expressive richness.

The urgency of addressing these issues lies in the growing recognition that expressivity is not an optional embellishment but a core component of meaningful performance. Systemic barriers, such as narrow pedagogical priorities and biased evaluative practices, continue to limit the development of expressive skills. To overcome these challenges, educational institutions must adopt integrative approaches that combine technical, psychological, and collaborative dimensions of training. Policymakers and educators should prioritize curricula that embed mindfulness practices,

collaborative rehearsal strategies, and attentional framing techniques. Future research should expand beyond Western classical traditions to explore cross-cultural and genre-specific manifestations of expressivity. It should also employ multimodal methodologies to capture its full complexity. By embracing these directions, scholars and practitioners can foster a more inclusive, equitable, and impactful understanding of musical expressivity, enabling musicians to communicate emotion and meaning with greater authenticity and resonance.

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