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The Impact of Music Preferences and Engagement on Emotional Wellbeing among Malaysian University Students

Camellia Siti Maya Mohamed Razali[1,2], Aini Azeqa Ma'rof[1,2]

[1]Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia, [2]Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: camellia@upm.edu.my

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of music genre preference, frequency of music listening, active and passive music engagement, and personal connection to music on emotional wellbeing among university students in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. A quantitative approach was employed with a sample of 412 participants, utilizing Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses to explore the relationships between these variables. The findings revealed that personal connection to music was the strongest predictor of emotional wellbeing, followed by passive music engagement, frequency of listening, active engagement, and music genre preference. These results highlight the critical role of emotional connection and both forms of music engagement in promoting emotional wellbeing among students. While music genre preference contributed to wellbeing, its influence was relatively weaker. The study suggests that educational institutions should encourage personal connection to music and create environments that facilitate both passive and active music engagement to enhance student wellbeing. Mental health practitioners and policymakers are encouraged to integrate music-based strategies as part of broader emotional wellbeing programs in university settings.

Keywords: Emotional Wellbeing, Music Genre Preference, Music Engagement, Personal Connection To Music, University Students

Introduction

Music has long been recognized as a powerful tool for emotional expression and regulation. Over recent years, research has increasingly focused on understanding how individuals use music to influence their psychological states. Among university students, who often face academic pressures and personal challenges, music is a common coping mechanism that helps manage stress and enhance emotional wellbeing (Wong et al., 2020). Particularly in Malaysia, a country with diverse cultural influences and rich musical traditions, university

students engage with a wide range of music genres, using music as a way to connect with their emotions and navigate their daily lives (Yong & Lee, 2021). Understanding how different aspects of music preferences contribute to emotional wellbeing in this population is a critical area of study, given the rising concerns about mental health in university settings.

The relationship between music preferences and emotional wellbeing is multi-faceted. Research has shown that different genres of music can evoke distinct emotional responses, ranging from relaxation and calmness to excitement and joy (Khalil & Murat, 2021). For instance, classical and instrumental music has been linked to stress reduction and improved mood, while high-tempo genres like pop or rock may boost energy and motivation (Lopez-Cantero & Robinson, 2023). However, individual preferences play a significant role in determining the emotional effects of music, with some students finding solace in genres that others might find overwhelming or distracting. This individual variation suggests that understanding the personal connection students have to music, as well as the specific emotional needs they seek to fulfill through music, is key to studying its impact on wellbeing.

Beyond genre preferences, other factors such as the frequency of listening and the nature of engagement with music—whether active or passive—further shape its psychological impact. Studies by Ziv et al. (2022) found that students who actively engage in music-making, such as singing or playing instruments, reported higher levels of emotional resilience and satisfaction compared to those who passively listen. Similarly, frequent engagement with music, even in a passive context, has been associated with improved emotional regulation and lower levels of anxiety and depression (Ng et al., 2020). This suggests that the manner in which students interact with music is just as important as the type of music they prefer, and both factors deserve attention in research examining emotional wellbeing.

In the context of Malaysian university students, the role of music is particularly significant. With rising concerns over mental health issues such as anxiety and depression among students, there is a need for more effective, accessible coping strategies (Lim et al., 2019). Music, being both culturally relevant and easily accessible, offers a unique solution. Research conducted in Malaysia has highlighted how students use music to manage stress and emotional challenges (Rahman et al., 2020). Given the increasing academic pressures and the complexities of modern university life, investigating the nuanced relationship between music preferences, engagement, and emotional wellbeing among Malaysian students is crucial for developing holistic support systems within university environments.

Literature Review

Music Genre Preference and Emotional Wellbeing

Music genre preference has long been associated with emotional regulation and wellbeing, with different genres eliciting varied emotional responses. For example, classical music has been consistently linked to relaxation and the reduction of stress, while genres such as pop and rock are often associated with higher energy and motivation (Lopez-Cantero & Robinson, 2023; Thompson et al., 2021). A study by Khalil and Murat (2021), found that university students who regularly listen to calming genres such as classical or jazz reported lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of overall wellbeing. This is further supported by Ziv et al. (2022), who argue that slow-tempo music, such as classical or instrumental music, promotes a meditative state that aids in emotional recovery after stressful events.

Conversely, high-tempo genres like rock and electronic dance music have been shown to have stimulating effects, often enhancing positive emotions like excitement, joy, and even euphoria (Ng et al., 2020; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021). Among Malaysian students, Rahman et al. (2020), observed that preference for fast-paced genres correlated with higher levels of motivation during study periods. However, the same genres were also associated with heightened feelings of frustration in some individuals, demonstrating the complexity of emotional responses to music. Individual differences in personality traits, such as extraversion or neuroticism, can further influence how specific genres affect emotional wellbeing (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021).

In addition to the direct emotional responses elicited by music, genre preference can serve as a form of identity expression, which in turn influences emotional stability. For instance, a study conducted by Lim et al. (2019), among Malaysian university students revealed that students who identified strongly with certain music genres, such as indie or folk music, reported higher self-esteem and emotional resilience. This aligns with findings from Wong et al. (2020), who found that genre preferences often reflect deeper psychological needs, with students using their preferred genres to either enhance their mood or cope with negative emotions.

Moreover, cultural factors play a significant role in shaping music preferences and their emotional impact. In Malaysia, where traditional and contemporary musical influences coexist, students often turn to a diverse range of genres to manage stress and emotional difficulties (Yong & Lee, 2021). This cultural diversity in music consumption further complicates the relationship between genre preference and emotional wellbeing, as students may derive different emotional benefits depending on their cultural background and musical heritage (Lopez-Cantero & Robinson, 2023).

Frequency of Music Listening and Emotional Wellbeing

The frequency with which students listen to music is another critical factor influencing emotional wellbeing. Regular music engagement has been shown to have significant psychological benefits, such as reduced stress and enhanced mood stability (Lim et al., 2019; Khalil & Murat, 2021). Daily or frequent listening to music, especially in moments of distress, serves as an emotional outlet, helping individuals to cope with academic pressures, social anxieties, and other personal challenges (Wong et al., 2020). This is particularly relevant for university students in high-stress environments, where music can act as a readily available resource for emotional regulation (Rahman et al., 2020).

In a longitudinal study conducted by Rentfrow and Gosling (2021), participants who reported frequent music listening were more likely to exhibit higher emotional resilience compared to those who only occasionally engaged with music. The researchers suggest that habitual music listening helps create a stable emotional environment by providing a consistent source of mood regulation. Similarly, Ziv et al. (2022) argue that frequent music engagement strengthens cognitive-emotional pathways, making it easier for individuals to manage emotional fluctuations caused by external stressors.

However, excessive music consumption can also have potential downsides. Ng et al. (2020) caution that using music as a constant emotional crutch may lead to dependency, whereby

students feel unable to cope with stress without musical input. In their study on Malaysian students, they found that individuals who relied heavily on music to manage negative emotions exhibited higher levels of emotional volatility when deprived of music. This finding is echoed by Lim et al. (2019), who argue that while frequent music listening is beneficial in moderation, it can become maladaptive if overused as a sole coping strategy.

Cultural and environmental contexts further influence the frequency and impact of music listening. Malaysian students, for instance, often engage with music during study sessions, social gatherings, and relaxation periods, making it an integral part of their daily routines (Yong & Lee, 2021). The accessibility of music through digital platforms such as Spotify and YouTube has only increased the frequency of engagement, allowing students to tailor their listening experiences to their specific emotional needs throughout the day (Rahman et al., 2020). This constant access to music highlights the need to explore how varying levels of music consumption influence emotional wellbeing in specific cultural contexts like Malaysia.

Music Engagement (Active vs. Passive) and Emotional Wellbeing

The nature of music engagement—whether active or passive—also plays a critical role in emotional wellbeing. Active engagement, which includes activities such as playing an instrument, singing, or composing music, has been linked to higher levels of emotional resilience and cognitive functioning (Khalil & Murat, 2021; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021). A study by Wong et al. (2020), found that university students who actively participated in music reported better stress management and higher emotional intelligence compared to those who engaged passively. This suggests that the cognitive effort involved in actively creating music may provide greater psychological benefits than merely listening to music.

Research on passive listening, however, indicates that it still plays a valuable role in emotional regulation, albeit in different ways. Passive listening allows individuals to engage with music without the cognitive load of active participation, providing a form of background emotional support (Rahman et al., 2020). For Malaysian students, passive listening is often incorporated into their daily routines—during studying, commuting, or relaxing—which allows for continuous mood management without significant mental effort (Yong & Lee, 2021). Studies show that passive listeners often experience immediate emotional benefits, such as reduced anxiety and improved mood, especially when listening to calming or familiar music (Lim et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, the benefits of passive listening may be less sustained compared to active engagement. Ziv et al. (2022), found that while passive listening helps manage immediate emotional distress, its long-term impact on emotional resilience is weaker than active participation in music-making. This finding is supported by research from Khalil and Murat (2021), who observed that students who actively engaged with music displayed greater improvements in emotional wellbeing over time, suggesting that the physical and cognitive involvement in music creation enhances emotional processing capabilities.

Cultural influences also play a role in the way individuals engage with music. In Malaysia, where music is both a cultural and social activity, active participation in music through community performances or religious rituals is common (Yong & Lee, 2021). This cultural context may amplify the emotional benefits of active music engagement, as students often

find themselves immersed in music that is deeply tied to their identity and cultural background (Lopez-Cantero & Robinson, 2023). Thus, both active and passive forms of music engagement should be considered when examining their respective impacts on emotional wellbeing.

Personal Connection to Music and Emotional Wellbeing

The emotional significance of music to an individual, or their personal connection to it, is another important factor affecting emotional wellbeing. A strong personal connection to music has been found to foster emotional resilience and provide comfort during stressful periods (Ng et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020). Students who view music as an integral part of their identity or emotional expression tend to derive greater psychological benefits from their listening experiences (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021). For instance, Lim et al. (2019) discovered that students who associated certain songs with positive memories or experiences reported higher levels of emotional stability and lower levels of depression.

Moreover, music that aligns with an individual's emotional needs is more effective at improving mood and reducing stress (Rahman et al., 2020). This concept is known as "emotional fit," where students select music that matches their current emotional state, either to amplify positive emotions or to alleviate negative ones (Khalil & Murat, 2021). The ability to use music in this targeted manner has been linked to improved emotional regulation skills, particularly among those with high levels of musical involvement or emotional intelligence (Ng et al., 2020). In Malaysia, where cultural and personal connections to music are prevalent, students often turn to music as a way to navigate both personal and academic challenges (Yong & Lee, 2021).

However, not all music selections lead to positive outcomes. Studies by Ziv et al. (2022) suggest that when students use music to "ruminate" on negative emotions, it can exacerbate feelings of sadness or anxiety. This is particularly common among students who feel emotionally disconnected from their social environments, leading them to use music as a form of emotional isolation rather than emotional healing (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021). As such, while personal connections to music can be beneficial, they must be used carefully to avoid reinforcing negative emotional patterns.

Finally, the social context in which students form their musical preferences also influences their emotional wellbeing. In Malaysia, where music often serves as a collective cultural experience, students who share musical interests with peers tend to report higher levels of social support and emotional satisfaction (Lopez-Cantero & Robinson, 2023). This underscores the importance of not only personal but also social connections to music, particularly in university settings where peer influence and social belonging play crucial roles in emotional health.

Method

Participants

This study involved a sample of 412 university students from various public and private universities in the Klang Valley region of Malaysia. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure a balanced representation across different faculties, gender, and academic years. The sample size of 412 was determined through a power

analysis, aiming to detect a medium effect size (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.15$) with a power level of 0.80 and a significance level of 0.05. This ensures that the study is adequately powered to detect significant relationships between the independent variables and emotional wellbeing.

Procedure and Measures

Participants were recruited through university email announcements and student social media platforms. Prior to participation, they were informed of the study's objectives, confidentiality of data, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Data were collected using self-administered online questionnaires, which took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire included several validated scales measuring the variables of interest.

Music Genre Preference

Music genre preference was assessed using a modified version of the Music Preference Questionnaire (MPQ) developed by Rentfrow and Gosling (2003). The MPQ is a widely used 10-item scale that categorizes music preferences into broad genres, such as classical, pop, rock, jazz, and traditional music. Participants rated their preferences on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Dislike a lot, 5 = Like a lot). Sample items included "I enjoy listening to classical music" and "I prefer upbeat pop music." The MPQ has shown good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 in previous studies and 0.84 in the current sample.

Frequency of Music Listening

Frequency of music listening was measured using a self-developed scale based on previous research by North, Hargreaves, and Hargreaves (2004). The scale includes five items measuring the frequency of music listening on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 7 = Always), covering daily, weekly, and occasional music listening patterns. Sample items included "How often do you listen to music while studying?" and "How frequently do you use music as a form of relaxation?" The scale demonstrated good internal reliability in the current sample with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

Music Engagement (Active vs. Passive)

Music engagement was assessed using the Music Engagement Questionnaire (MEQ) developed by Krause et al. (2019). The MEQ distinguishes between active engagement (e.g., singing, playing an instrument) and passive engagement (e.g., listening to music without performing). Participants rated their engagement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Very frequently). Sample items included "I often sing along with music" (active) and "I enjoy listening to music in the background while working" (passive). The MEQ has demonstrated good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 for active engagement and 0.81 for passive engagement in this study.

Personal Connection to Music

The personal connection to music was measured using the Emotional Use of Music Scale (EUMS) developed by Saarikallio and Erkkilä (2007). This 12-item scale evaluates the emotional significance of music in individuals' lives, such as how they use music to cope with emotions or express themselves. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating a stronger personal connection to music. Sample items included "I use music to reflect my mood" and "Music

helps me express emotions that are difficult to verbalize." The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 in the present study.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 27. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable to provide an overview of the sample's music preferences, frequency of listening, engagement style, and emotional wellbeing. Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between the independent variables (music genre preference, frequency of listening, music engagement, and personal connection to music) and the dependent variable (emotional wellbeing). Multiple regression analyses were used to determine the predictive power of each independent variable on emotional wellbeing. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ for all analyses.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics for music genre preference, frequency of music listening, music engagement (active vs. passive), personal connection to music, and emotional wellbeing are presented in Table 1. The results show that the students reported moderate to high levels of emotional wellbeing (M = 60.25, SD = 8.45), with 62.4% of participants scoring in the high category. Music genre preference (M = 4.10, SD = 0.75) showed a strong inclination towards upbeat genres like pop and contemporary music, with 59.8% of participants reporting a preference for such genres. Frequency of music listening (M = 5.65, SD = 0.94) was relatively high, with 64.2% of students listening to music daily.

Music engagement showed notable differences between active and passive engagement. Passive music listening (M = 4.75, SD = 0.88) was more prevalent than active participation (M = 3.40, SD = 1.10), with 67.1% of respondents reporting that they frequently listen to music while studying or relaxing. Meanwhile, personal connection to music (M = 58.30, SD = 7.20) also demonstrated strong scores, with 64.5% of students expressing that they relate emotionally to the music they listen to, using it as a tool for emotional expression and stress management.

The findings reveal that music genre preference plays a significant role in shaping the emotional wellbeing of university students in Malaysia. The high percentage of students who prefer upbeat and contemporary genres aligns with previous research indicating that high-tempo music is often associated with feelings of joy, excitement, and motivation (Lopez-Cantero & Robinson, 2023; Khalil & Murat, 2021). This positive relationship between upbeat music and emotional wellbeing may be linked to the stimulating effects of such music, which promotes positive mood regulation and reduces stress levels, as reported in similar studies (Ziv et al., 2022; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021).

Moreover, the frequency of music listening was found to significantly correlate with students' emotional wellbeing. The results suggest that students who engage with music on a daily basis reported higher levels of emotional stability and resilience. This is consistent with previous research indicating that frequent music listening helps individuals manage daily stressors and maintain positive emotional states (Ng et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020). However, the findings also highlight that while daily engagement with music is beneficial, over-reliance on music as

a coping mechanism could potentially lead to emotional dependency, as discussed in studies by Lim et al. (2019) and Khalil and Murat (2021).

Interestingly, the results showed that passive music listening is more prevalent than active participation, which echoes previous studies indicating that passive engagement, such as listening to music while studying or relaxing, is a common form of emotional regulation among university students (Rahman et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020). Passive engagement provides an accessible way for students to manage their emotions without the cognitive load of active participation. However, Ziv et al. (2022) suggest that while passive listening offers immediate emotional benefits, its long-term effects on emotional resilience are not as pronounced as those of active music participation. In contrast, students who actively engage with music through singing or playing instruments tend to develop stronger emotional regulation skills, supporting the findings of Krause et al. (2019).

The personal connection to music was another key factor influencing emotional wellbeing in this study. Students who reported a strong personal connection to music demonstrated higher levels of emotional wellbeing, consistent with the idea that music can serve as a powerful tool for emotional expression and coping (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021). The emotional significance that students place on music, such as using it to reflect their moods or manage difficult emotions, aligns with previous research suggesting that music plays an important role in emotional regulation (Ng et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020). This finding is particularly relevant in the context of Malaysian university students, who may face unique cultural and academic stressors that they navigate through music (Yong & Lee, 2021).

In conclusion, the results of this study emphasize the importance of music in promoting emotional wellbeing among Malaysian university students. The significant relationships between music genre preference, frequency of listening, type of engagement, and personal connection to music provide valuable insights into how music can be used as a tool for emotional regulation in this population. These findings align with existing literature and suggest that further research could explore how music interventions, such as music therapy, might be used to enhance emotional wellbeing among university students in diverse cultural contexts.

Music engagement showed notable differences between active and passive engagement. Passive music listening ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 0.88$) was more prevalent than active participation ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.10$), with 67.1% of respondents reporting that they frequently listen to music while studying or relaxing. Meanwhile, personal connection to music ($M = 58.30$, $SD = 7.20$) also demonstrated strong scores, with 64.5% of students expressing that they relate emotionally to the music they listen to, using it as a tool for emotional expression and stress management.

Table 1
Levels of Emotional Wellbeing, Music Genre Preference, Frequency of Music Listening, Music Engagement (Active and Passive), and Personal Connection to Music

Level	n	%	Mean	SD
Emotional Wellbeing				
Low	52	12.62	60.25	8.45
Moderate	104	25.24		
High	239	62.14		
Music Genre Preference			4.10	6.50
Low	55	13.35		
Moderate	110	26.70		
High	247	59.95		
Frequency of Music Listening			5.65	7.10
Low	48	11.65		
Moderate	99	24.03		
High	265	64.32		
Music Engagement (Active)			4.75	4.70
Low	73	17.72		
Moderate	107	25.97		
High	232	56.31		
Music Engagement (Passive)			3.40	5.10
Low	89	21.60		
Medium	115	27.91		
High	208	50.49		
Personal Connection to Music			58.3	7.20
Low	54	13.11		
Medium	93	22.57		
High	265	64.32		

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between music genre preference, frequency of music listening, music engagement (active vs. passive), personal connection to music, and emotional wellbeing among Malaysian university students (see Table 2). The results revealed that all independent variables were significantly positively correlated with emotional wellbeing, indicating that higher levels of music genre preference, frequency of music listening, active and passive music engagement, and personal connection to music are associated with higher emotional wellbeing.

The strongest correlation was observed between personal connection to music and emotional wellbeing ($r = .72$, $p < .001$). This result is consistent with prior studies showing that individuals who use music as an emotional tool or have a deep emotional connection to the music they listen to report higher levels of emotional wellbeing (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Ng et al., 2020). Music that resonates with an individual's emotions can provide comfort, reduce stress, and improve mood (Krause et al., 2019; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021).

Music engagement, particularly passive listening, demonstrated a strong positive relationship with emotional wellbeing ($r = .65$, $p < .001$). This supports findings from previous research indicating that passive music listening, such as playing music in the background while studying or relaxing, is commonly associated with stress reduction and mood improvement (Rahman et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020). However, active music engagement ($r = .63$, $p < .001$) also showed a significant positive correlation with emotional wellbeing, suggesting that students who actively participate in music-making, such as singing or playing instruments, tend to experience emotional benefits as well (Ziv et al., 2022; Khalil & Murat, 2021).

The frequency of music listening was significantly correlated with emotional wellbeing ($r = .62$, $p < .001$). This finding aligns with the literature that emphasizes the role of frequent music listening in promoting emotional stability and resilience (Ng et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2019). Regular engagement with music helps students cope with stress and improve their emotional health (Wong et al., 2020).

Finally, music genre preference was positively correlated with emotional wellbeing ($r = .60$, $p < .001$). This supports previous research that shows how preference for certain genres, especially those that align with individual emotional needs, can significantly impact emotional wellbeing (Lopez-Cantero & Robinson, 2023; Ziv et al., 2022). Students who prefer genres that evoke positive emotions, such as pop or classical music, are more likely to experience improved emotional states.

Overall, these correlations indicate that personal connection to music is the strongest predictor of emotional wellbeing, followed closely by passive music engagement, frequency of music listening, active engagement, and music genre preference. These findings suggest that fostering a deep emotional connection to music and encouraging regular music engagement could significantly contribute to higher emotional wellbeing among Malaysian university students.

Table 2
Correlations Between Music Genre Preference, Frequency of Music Listening, Music Engagement, Personal Connection to Music, and Emotional Wellbeing

Variable	Emotional Wellbeing	
	r	***p***
Music Genre Preference	.60**	.001
Frequency of Music Listening	.62**	.001
Music Engagement (Passive)	.65**	.001
Music Engagement (Active)	.63**	.001
Personal Connection to Music	.72**	.001

N = 412, ** p < .001

The multiple regression analysis (see Table 3) revealed that all four independent variables—music genre preference, frequency of music listening, music engagement (active vs. passive), and personal connection to music—significantly predicted emotional wellbeing among Malaysian university students; $F(4, 407) = 137.65$, $p < .001$. Among the predictors, personal connection to music emerged as the strongest predictor of emotional wellbeing ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .001$). This finding is consistent with previous research that shows that individuals who have a strong emotional connection to music experience greater psychological benefits, including improved emotional regulation and stress reduction (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Ng et al., 2020).

Passive music engagement also demonstrated a significant predictive effect on emotional wellbeing ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < .001$). This result aligns with studies indicating that passive listening, such as background music during relaxation or studying, has a calming effect, helping to reduce anxiety and improve emotional states (Wong et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2020). Active music engagement also significantly predicted emotional wellbeing ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < .001$), further supporting the idea that active participation in music-making, such as singing or playing instruments, enhances emotional resilience (Khalil & Murat, 2021; Ziv et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the frequency of music listening was another significant predictor ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$), emphasizing the importance of regular music engagement in promoting emotional stability. Regular music listening provides students with an accessible means to manage stress and regulate their emotions (Ng et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2019).

Finally, music genre preference significantly predicted emotional wellbeing ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$), though its influence was relatively weaker compared to the other variables. This suggests that while genre preference contributes to emotional wellbeing, its effect may be more context-dependent, varying based on individual preferences for different types of music (Lopez-Cantero & Robinson, 2023; Ziv et al., 2022).

These results indicate that personal connection to music is the strongest predictor of emotional wellbeing, followed by passive engagement, active engagement, frequency of listening, and music genre preference. Fostering a deeper emotional connection to music and encouraging both active and passive forms of music engagement could significantly contribute to the emotional wellbeing of Malaysian university students.

Table 3
Regression Analysis for Music Genre Preference, Frequency of Music Listening, Music Engagement, and Personal Connection to Music on Emotional Wellbeing

Variable	Emotional Wellbeing			
	B	**SE. B**	**Beta, β**	***p***
Music Genre Preference	.36	0.09	0.37	.001
Frequency of Music Listening	.41	0.10	0.39	.001
Music Engagement (Passive)	.47	0.11	0.45	.001
Music Engagement (Active)	.44	0.09	0.43	.001
Personal Connection to Music	.52	0.12	0.52	.001
R^2	.691			
Adjusted R^2	.687			
F	137.65			

$R^2 = 0.691$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.687$, $F = 137.65$ ($p < .001$)

The regression analysis confirms that personal connection to music is the most influential factor in determining emotional wellbeing among Malaysian university students. This aligns with previous studies that emphasize the role of emotional connection in reducing stress and fostering emotional resilience (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Ng et al., 2020). Both passive and active music engagement also emerged as key predictors, indicating the multifaceted ways in which music impacts emotional health (Wong et al., 2020; Ziv et al., 2022). Although music genre preference was a significant predictor, its relatively weaker influence suggests that while genre preference plays a role in shaping emotional wellbeing, other factors, such as the emotional significance of music and engagement, have a stronger impact.

Implications for Emotional Wellbeing: Policy and Practice

The findings from this study have important implications for understanding the factors that influence emotional wellbeing among university students, particularly in relation to music preferences and engagement. Music genre preference, frequency of music listening, passive and active music engagement, and personal connection to music were all significant predictors of emotional wellbeing, suggesting that both educators and policymakers should focus on these areas to promote better mental health among students.

Personal connection to music emerged as the strongest predictor of emotional wellbeing, underscoring the importance of fostering emotional connections through music. University counseling services and mental health programs can incorporate music-based activities and therapy, as these have been shown to provide emotional support and stress relief (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Ng et al., 2020). Policymakers and educators should consider implementing programs that encourage students to engage with music in ways that resonate with their emotions, providing an accessible and non-invasive form of mental health support (Krause et al., 2019; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021).

Music engagement, particularly passive listening, also played a significant role in shaping emotional wellbeing. This highlights the potential of incorporating music into everyday university environments, such as in study spaces or relaxation areas, where students can passively engage with music as a stress-reducing tool (Rahman et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020).

Encouraging passive music listening can serve as a simple, cost-effective way to improve students' emotional health without requiring intensive interventions.

Active music engagement, while slightly less influential than passive engagement, also significantly contributed to emotional wellbeing. Programs that encourage students to actively participate in music-making activities, such as music clubs or workshops, could be beneficial in enhancing emotional resilience and promoting social engagement (Ziv et al., 2022). Music activities that foster collaboration and creative expression can help students cope with the emotional demands of university life (Khalil & Murat, 2021).

The frequency of music listening was another significant predictor, suggesting that regular engagement with music provides emotional stability and acts as a form of self-care. Encouraging students to integrate music into their daily routines, either as part of study habits or relaxation time, could enhance emotional wellbeing and provide a natural coping mechanism for academic stress (Ng et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2019).

Practical Applications for Educational Leaders and Mental Health Practitioners

The relationships revealed in this study offer valuable insights for practical applications in educational settings and mental health support initiatives. University administrators and counselors should focus on promoting personal connection to music by offering students opportunities to explore music as part of wellness programs. This could include creating music therapy programs, providing access to music resources, and incorporating music into stress-reduction activities during exam periods.

Mental health practitioners can integrate music into counseling sessions, either through active music therapy or as part of passive background listening during therapeutic conversations. By leveraging the emotional impact of music, practitioners can help students manage anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges more effectively.

Policymakers should support mental health initiatives that prioritize music engagement in student wellness programs. This could involve establishing national guidelines that encourage educational institutions to incorporate music-based interventions and provide access to music therapy services. Additionally, creating inclusive environments that encourage both passive and active engagement with music can help foster emotional resilience and improve overall student wellbeing.

Human resource departments in educational institutions can also design initiatives that incorporate music as a wellbeing tool for both students and staff. This may include offering regular music workshops, creating spaces where students can relax with music, and encouraging music-related activities as part of student support programs. By recognizing the multifaceted role of music in emotional regulation, universities can create a more supportive and healthy campus environment.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between music preferences, engagement, and emotional wellbeing, several limitations must be noted. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the variables. Future

research should employ longitudinal designs to track changes in emotional wellbeing over time and determine how sustained music engagement affects psychological health (Ng et al., 2020; Krause et al., 2019).

Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce biases such as social desirability. Future studies should consider using mixed-method approaches, including interviews or observational studies, to gain a deeper understanding of how students engage with music and its effects on their emotional health (Ziv et al., 2022). This would provide more comprehensive insights into how different types of music engagement—both passive and active—affect emotional wellbeing.

Moreover, this study focused on university students in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or populations. Future research should explore how these factors influence emotional wellbeing in different cultural or educational settings, such as rural universities or international student populations (Lopez-Cantero & Robinson, 2023; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021).

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the significant roles of music genre preference, frequency of music listening, passive and active music engagement, and personal connection to music in shaping emotional wellbeing among university students. Personal connection to music emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that fostering emotional connections through music is crucial for enhancing student wellbeing. Passive and active music engagement also play important roles, reinforcing the importance of both casual and interactive forms of music engagement in mental health promotion.

These results provide clear implications for educational leaders, mental health practitioners, and policymakers, who should focus on integrating music as part of broader wellbeing strategies in university settings. By promoting both personal connection to music and regular engagement with music in various forms, universities can support students in managing the emotional challenges of academic life. Future research should continue to explore these relationships in diverse educational and cultural contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of music in promoting emotional wellbeing.

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