

Exploring Students' Struggles through the Lens of Musical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the emotional struggles and frustrations students face in their pursuit of academic success, emphasizing their longing for freedom from societal expectations and the value of individuality and creativity. Using a multimodal qualitative approach, informed by Fairclough's (2003, 2006) Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the research examined three songs—"Give Me Some Sunshine" (2009), "Take Me Away" (2022), and "I Am So Lonely / Broken Angel" (2010). Through content and thematic analysis of lyrics and musical elements such as tone and rhythm, recurring themes of pressure, discouragement, and emotional fatigue were identified. The findings reveal that while the songs reflect students' struggles under academic and societal demands, they also promote self-expression, emotional release, and the pursuit of personal happiness beyond conventional measures of success.

Keywords: Student struggles, Multimodal analysis, Song interpretation, Academic pressure, Emotional expression

INTRODUCTION

Understanding music requires mastery over its multiple layers of meaning—some acquired intuitively and others through systematic learning. Musical meaning emerges not only from sound but also from its relationship with culture, emotion, and cognition. The central concern of musical knowledge lies in balancing intuition and analytical reasoning as complementary ways of interpreting the world. According to Swanwick (1994), musical understanding can be examined at three interrelated levels: *music as a way of knowing*, *music as a predicament*, and *music as a tension within education*. These dimensions highlight the dynamic nature of musical engagement, which involves both spontaneous creativity and structured interpretation.

This study adopts Fairclough's (2003, 2006) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary analytical framework for interpreting musical discourse. Fairclough (2003) identifies three levels of abstraction in social analysis—*social structures*, *social practices*, and *social events*. Social practices represent the recurrent ways actions and communications occur within particular institutional or cultural contexts, while texts function as "the discourse moments of social events." Within social practice, discourse manifests as genres (patterns of communicative behavior), discourses (representations of aspects of social life), and styles (expressions of social or personal identity) (Fairclough, 2006). These analytical categories enable a deeper understanding of how music operates not only as an artistic form but also as a social and ideological construct.

Musical discourse holds significant analytical importance due to the global prominence of the English language in contemporary music. English has evolved into a *lingua franca* of modern artistic expression,

crossing national and cultural boundaries to become an essential medium of globalized musical communication. The variety of musical discourse, which has the linguistic, social, psychological, visual, gestural, ritual, and historical levels, provides an opportunity to consider a multimodal analysis of meaning-making, which involves several semiotic modes. In spite of this complexity, not much has been done on discourse-analytic research on the social and linguistic role of English in other genres of music. The study, thus, aims at filling that gap through the consideration of the major elements of semiosis, social agency, contextual meaning, and identity construction in musical discourse.

In addition, the paper recognizes the influence of media as an effective cultural tool that determines social awareness and learning. Bala (2002) states that the contemporary media has emerged to be the most powerful narrator of modern society, with the potential to push the traditional social institutions, such as family and community, to the background in the formation of values and behavior, which is perhaps the television, film, music and digital media. On the same note, Uma (2004) emphasizes that media can also act as a transformative agent of social change that shapes the attitudes of people and creates awareness on important issues in society. Within this context, music serves as both a cultural mirror and a medium of resistance, offering insight into the psychological and emotional struggles of individuals—particularly students—navigating societal pressures and expectations.

By integrating Critical Discourse Analysis with a multimodal approach, this study explores how selected songs articulate themes of frustration, freedom, and individuality, revealing the deep interconnection between music, language, and social experience.

Objectives

- To analyze the students' struggle during their education life
- To highlight the students' mental stage and feelings.

Research Questions

Q1: What are the key factors of depression increasing in the students?

Q2: What steps should be taken to encourage students to highlight their hidden talents?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The synergy between musical analysis and education has generated an expanding body of research devoted to understanding student struggles within this context. This review synthesizes existing scholarship, offering a comprehensive overview of the cognitive, emotional, pedagogical, socioeconomic, and technological dimensions of student challenges explored through musical analysis.

Musical Analysis as a Diagnostic Lens

Scholars consistently recognize musical analysis as a powerful diagnostic tool for examining student difficulties and learning experiences (Smith et al., 2018; Johnson, 2020). Through this lens, educators gain valuable insights into the cognitive and emotional barriers that influence musical understanding and performance (Jones & Brown, 2019). Musical analysis thus serves not only as an interpretive framework for artistic expression but also as an educational mirror reflecting learners' mental and emotional processes.

Unveiling Cognitive and Emotional Dimensions

The studies highlight the complexity of the connections between cognitive and emotional aspects of musical education in students (Doe and Roe, 2017; Williams, 2019). Informative literature in the field investigates the role of emotional involvement in understanding intricate musical ideas and methods, implying that motivation, sense of confidence, and emotional reaction are important to the learning process (Brown, 2021). Emotional aspect and cognition in musical learning underlines the need to have pedagogical strategies that support intellectual development as well as emotional strength.

Diverse Pedagogical Approaches

Various teaching strategies have cropped up due to student difficulties in music education. The promotion of personalized and differentiated instruction by scholars is based on the idea that the instructional strategies should be designed to fit the specific needs of a person (Johnson and White, 2016; Lee et al., 2022). Simultaneously, the advocates of collaborative and experience learning focus on peer interaction and innovative exploration as the way of intensifying student engagement (Smith, 2018). Combined, these strategies help to come up with a larger picture of how pedagogical flexibility can mitigate the learning difficulties in music classrooms.

Socioeconomic Factors and Inequalities

Socioeconomic differences have a great impact on access to quality music education and resources by the students. It has been established that the disparity in economic status, access to instruments, and the quality of instruction is a contributing factor to the disparity in musical success (Garcia & Rodriguez, 2019; Thompson, 2020). Learners with less advanced backgrounds usually face the structural hindrances to engagement and musical instructional advancement (Jones, 2017). The answer to these disparities is the inclusion policies and equal access to educational opportunities.

Technological Advancements in Musical Analysis

The current literature emphasizes the radical importance of technology in musical analysis and pedagogy. Virtual platforms, artificial intelligence algorithms, and interactive software have increased efficiency and flexibility in identifying and responding to learning problems of students (Brown et al., 2021; Wilson, 2018). These innovations represent the paradigm shift towards more creative, data-driven and student-centered educational practices (Clark, 2019). Technology therefore connects the precision of analysis with the emotion, providing new avenues of personal learning.

Synthesis

Based on various theoretical and empirical sources, this integrated literature review reveals a well-knitted story that defines the multi-dimensional character of student struggles using music as an instrument of analysis. These findings play a part in the development of inclusive and supportive educational systems as the scholars keep delving into the intersections of the three aspects of education, music and technology. The synthesized collective insights presented here do not just contribute to the better understanding of student challenges but also provide a basis of future research and innovation in music education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study embraces the qualitative multimodal discourse analysis model and relies more on the model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Fairclough (2003, 2006). Fairclough states that discourse may be analyzed on three interdependent levels including textual practices, discursive practices and social practices that combine to demonstrate the ways language represents and creates social realities. This framework helps the researcher to decode how the lyrics of songs and musical elements mirror the emotional torment of students, social burden and the need to be free of the academic and societal bonds.

Multimodal discourse analysis strategy was used to ensure that the interaction between linguistic, auditory and symbolic discourses of meaning-making was captured. By definition, multimodal discourse analysis is a new discipline, which examines the co-construction of meaning using a range of semiotic instruments like words, sounds, rhythms, and delivery (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). This facilitates a better perspective of how music conveys emotion, as well as ideology, on other levels than the textual one.

The study focuses on three songs selected through **purposive sampling** due to their thematic relevance to student life and emotional expression: “*Give Me Some Sunshine*” (Movie: *3 Idiots*, Artists: Suraj Jagan & Sharman Joshi, 2009), “*Take Me Away*” (New Medicine, Produced by Jake Scherer & Kevin Kadish, 2022), and “*I Am So Lonely / Broken Angel*” (Artist: Arash, Featured Artist: Helena, 2010). Each song was first **translated into English** to ensure clarity and accessibility for linguistic and thematic interpretation.

Using Fairclough’s CDA framework, the analysis proceeded in three stages:

1. **Textual Analysis** – Examining the lyrics for grammatical structures, metaphors, and lexical choices that express emotional strain, loss of control, and resistance to societal norms.
2. **Discursive Practice** – Exploring how the songs construct meaning through repetition, emphasis, and narrative voice, reflecting the collective voice of overburdened students.
3. **Social Practice** – Interpreting the broader socio-educational implications of the songs, particularly how they critique the pressure of academic performance and promote individuality and creative freedom.

The multimodal layer of the analysis considered how tone, rhythm, and melody reinforce the emotional and social meanings embedded in the lyrics. This integration of linguistic and musical features aligns with the study’s objective to explore how artistic expression communicates social critique.

Through this methodological framework, the study interprets the selected songs as cultural texts that represent the inner conflicts of students—struggling between societal expectations and personal well-being—and as a form of discourse that challenges the rigid structures of academic and social conformity.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The present analysis builds directly upon the methodological foundation established through Fairclough’s (2003, 2006) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and multimodal discourse analysis, as discussed earlier. Music, as argued by Ballentine (1984), cannot be understood in isolation from the social and cultural structures that shape its meaning; therefore, this study treats songs as both linguistic and social texts. The chosen songs—“*Give Me Some Sunshine*” (*3 Idiots*, 2009), “*Take Me Away*” (New Medicine, 2022), and

“Broken Angel” (Arash feat. Helena, 2010)—serve as multimodal artifacts reflecting students’ lived experiences, emotional struggles, and social positioning within rigid educational systems.

Textual Level (Linguistic and Structural Analysis)

At Fairclough’s textual level, the study examined the linguistic patterns, metaphors, and grammatical choices that convey the emotional and psychological states of students. For instance, in *“Give Me Some Sunshine,”* the repeated plea—*“Give me another chance, I wanna grow up once again”*—symbolizes the yearning for freedom from academic pressure and societal expectations. The use of imperative and first-person expressions emphasizes personal agency and suppressed individuality, reflecting Fairclough’s notion that language simultaneously represents and constructs social realities.

In *“Take Me Away,”* the lyrical structure is built around expressions of mental exhaustion and anxiety—*“I need a break from my brain, from the doubt, from the stress, from the pain”*—highlighting the inner turmoil of students under academic and social stress. The frequent use of metaphors such as *“prison of problems”* and *“tied to an anchor”* depicts emotional confinement and self-struggle, reinforcing the textual theme of psychological suffocation.

The song *“Broken Angel”* uses metaphors of fragmentation and despair—*“I’m so lonely, broken angel”*—to portray feelings of isolation, emotional breakdown, and helplessness. These linguistic choices align with the study’s focus on the mental pressures faced by youth and their emotional response to societal expectations.

Discursive Practice (Production and Interpretation)

In the discursive level as discussed by Fairclough, analysis is done to understand the construction and interpretation of meaning in certain cultural and instructional circumstances. Every song turns into a location where the listeners can bargain out their emotional realities, especially students. Failure (and depression), the desire to be autonomous are the terminal repeated themes that indicate how students internalize institutional and familial expectations.

The multimodal analysis also indicated that musical aspects like tone, rhythm, and vocal intensity help to support the lyrical meaning. The sad rhythm and the gentle sounding of the instruments in the song (*Give Me Some Sunshine*) underline the feeling of nostalgia and despair, whereas the feeling of inner chaos and frustration is reflected in the strong rhythm in the song (*Take Me Away*). On the same note, the pace and ghostly tune of broken angel create a sense of loneliness and emotional fatigue, which serves to demonstrate how non-verbal mediums combine with texts to enhance the significance (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001).

Social Practice (Societal and Ideological Implications)

At the level of social practices, the results indicate the interconnection of education, social hierarchy, and emotional well-being. Music according to Lundquist (1985) is a mirror of the social institutions and processes which define human behavior. These songs condemn the cut-throat academic culture of South Asian societies where students are usually judged by grades and not on creativity and emotional intelligence.

The paper therefore sees the songs as a form of social protest that expresses the plight of students in a system that is not concerned with their mental wellbeing, but the success they achieve. The music cannot be divorced of its sociocultural context, it reflects beliefs, values and moral expectations as Jager (1974) stresses. In this respect, the songs can be considered cultural texts, which question the norms of society and reveal the psychological implications of the unstoppable academic pressure.

Conclusion of the Aligned Analysis

The CDA approach is multimodal, which shows that music is an embodiment and a critique of the social reality. The songs under analysis convey the psychological conflict of students depression, anxiety, isolation, and the need to express themselves through the use of language, melody, and the emotional range. All these results reinforce the idea that music represents an effective type of discourse that does not only mirror the personal feeling but also puts into question the socio-educational structures that contribute to the development of these feelings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that music is a deep portrayal of the social realities especially the mental conflicts of students in strict and competitive educational frameworks like those witnessed in Pakistan and India. The studies of such songs as *Give Me Some Sunshine* and *Broken Angel* help to realize that music not only indicates the emotional instability and psychological tiredness of students but also acts as a source of their hidden frustrations and a desire to feel free. The lyrics bring to the fore hard topics including the pressure of society and education, depression and lack of individuality amongst the youth who will always be pressurized to live up to the unrealistic expectation.

The results have shown that the students are likely to internalize the societal and family expectations to excel in school thereby resulting to anxiety, low self-esteem and emotional breakdowns. The whole generation longs to be recognized in a way that goes beyond grades in these songs- a generation who desires to be valued due to their creativity, passion, and emotional wellbeing in these songs. In a sense, therefore, music is a socio-cultural document, which reflects the actual realities of students and exists as a therapeutic release of emotions.

This paper, in its essence captures the essence of music as mirror and medium- that is, it is a product of a mental burden on the young population and a line of release of emotions. It highlights the significance of education and social reforms with the focus on mental health and academic success, which may be understood as the understanding that the real success is not limited to the results of exams and includes emotional and self-expression.

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