

Research Paper

# Why do individuals choose a career in music? A Systematic review of socialization-, motivation-, and identity-based factors

Judit Váradi<sup>1</sup>, Tímea Szűcs<sup>2</sup>

Recommended citation:

Váradi, J. & Szűcs, T. (2026). Why do individuals choose a career in music? A Systematic review of socialization-, motivation-, and identity-based factors. *Central European Journal of Educational Research*, 8(1), 119–132. <https://doi.org/10.37441/cej/2026/8/1/17085>

## Abstract

The process of choosing a career in music is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that requires the integration of motivational, socialization-based, and identity-oriented perspectives for its comprehensive understanding. The aim of the present systematic literature review is to identify and synthesize empirical studies examining music career choice, particularly within the context of professional higher music education, in relation to identity formation, the quality of motivation, and career-orientation decisions. The review includes 20 studies published between 2003 and 2025, representing considerable methodological heterogeneity as well as broad geographical and cultural diversity. Based on the thematic analysis, four overarching thematic domains were identified: (1) socialization and environmental factors, (2) motivational structures and career intentions, (3) identity development and identity conflicts, and (4) the influence of institutional and educational contexts. The findings indicate that, in music career choice, musician identity generally takes precedence over teacher identity, while extrinsic motivational factors play a significant role in decisions to pursue music teaching careers. Furthermore, early socialization experiences—particularly the influence of parents and first instrumental teachers—have a long-term impact on career orientation. The review also highlights that higher education institutions do not always consciously exploit their potential role in shaping professional identity. Effective interventions therefore require multi-level, developmentally oriented approaches, including the provision of early teaching experiences, the strengthening of mentoring practices, and the introduction of portfolio-career perspectives.

*Keywords:* music career choice; preservice music teachers; musician identity; teacher identity; career motivation

---

## Introduction

The study of career choice constitutes a prominent area of research within educational science and psychology, aiming to explore the factors underlying decisions that shape individuals' life trajectories. Contemporary theories of career development conceptualize career choice not as a single decision-making event, but rather as a dynamic, lifelong process closely intertwined with identity formation (Lent et al., 1994; Hirschi, 2012). Within this process, individuals do not merely select from among different occupational opportunities; they continuously construct and reconstruct their sense of self in relation to a particular professional pathway.

Psychological approaches to career choice place particular emphasis on the quality of motivation and the role of identity. According to Self-Determination Theory, career decisions are more likely to become stable and enduring when they are grounded in autonomous, intrinsic motivation and when they enable self-expression, the experience of competence, and social connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In this respect, commitment to

---

<sup>1</sup> University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary; judit.varadi.06@gmail.com (corresponding author)

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Educational Studies and Cultural Management, University of Debrecen; Center for Higher Education Research and Development, University of Debrecen; MTA-DE Development of Future Consciousness Research Group, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

a professional path becomes especially robust when the chosen activity is incorporated into an individual's sense of self and personal identity.

From a pedagogical perspective, career choice can also be understood through the lens of socialization and learning environments. From an early age, students acquire experiences through their teachers, educational settings, and institutional contexts that may exert a long-term influence on their career orientation. Consequently, the learning process cannot be interpreted solely as the transmission of knowledge and skills; rather, it also functions as an identity-forming space in which students gradually internalize what it means to belong to a particular profession.

Empirical investigations into music career choice further demonstrate that both internal (intrinsic) and external (social and institutional) factors simultaneously shape career-related decisions. Váradi et al. (2024) revealed that the determinants of music career choice can be organized into several dimensions. Their findings indicate that family patterns, peer communities, and early musical experiences, together with emotionally significant experiences associated with music—such as enjoyment and self-expression—play a substantial role in career decision-making. The study further highlights that students frequently interpret a musical career as a vocation or calling associated with long-term commitment.

From the perspective of pedagogical socialization, the role of teachers is particularly significant. Instrumental teachers not only influence students' professional development but also exert a profound impact on career orientation and, in many cases, on students' broader life trajectories. This underscores the fact that music career choice cannot be understood solely as an individual decision; rather, it is a process embedded within relational and institutional contexts.

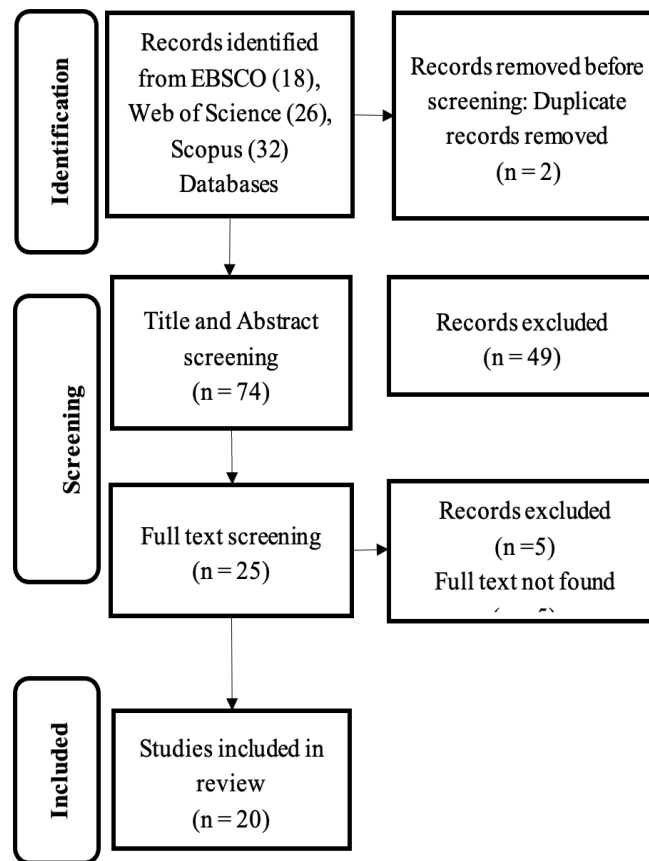
The importance of early career aspirations has also been emphasized in previous research. Váradi, Szűcs, and Strenacikova (2019) demonstrated that persistence and commitment among students in higher music education are significantly influenced by prior musical experiences and early career aspirations. Their findings suggest a close relationship between childhood “dreams” and later professional identity formation (Váradi et al., 2019).

Despite these contributions, existing studies frequently examine identity, motivation, or career decision-making in isolation and rarely integrate these dimensions into a comprehensive framework, particularly within the context of professional higher music education. As a result, there remains a lack of systematic synthesis exploring how these factors interact in shaping music career choice and career persistence.

Therefore, the aim of the present systematic literature review is to identify and synthesize studies investigating music career choice in relation to identity formation, the quality of motivation, and career-orientation decisions, with particular emphasis on the context of professional higher music education.

## Method

This systematic literature review was prepared in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA 2020)

### Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted between March 1 and March 11, 2026, using the EBSCO, Web of Science, and Scopus databases. The search strategy employed combinations of the following keywords: *musician, music student, music major, conservatory, higher music education, career, vocation, employability, profession, choice, decision, intention, aspiration, commitment, persistence, retention, motivation, identity, calling, passion, and self-determination*.

In total, the systematic searches yielded 76 records, which were screened based on their titles and abstracts. Following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the full texts of 25 articles were assessed for eligibility. Ultimately, 20 studies were included in the review (see Figure 1).

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The studies included in the systematic review met the following inclusion criteria:

- (1) they reported original research published in a peer-reviewed journal;
- (2) they were written in English;
- (3) they were available in full-text form in scholarly journals;
- (4) they contained the selected keywords in their abstracts;
- (5) they belonged to the fields of music and education;
- (6) they examined music career choice in relation to identity, the quality of motivation, and career-orientation decisions; and
- (7) they were published between 2000 and 2026.

The review was not restricted to any specific countries or geographical regions.

### Data Extraction and Methodological Quality Assessment

The characteristics of the studies and the risk of bias were independently assessed by the authors. A multi-stage screening procedure was employed to identify studies meeting the inclusion criteria.

In the first stage, the titles and abstracts of all identified records were independently screened by both authors according to the following criteria: the presence of socialization-, motivation-, and identity-based factors related to career choice, within the field of music and education, and specifically in the context of professional higher music education. The results of the screening process were then compared, and studies progressed to the next phase only if both authors considered them eligible.

In the second stage, the selected studies were subjected to further analysis. The authors independently reviewed the full texts according to the same inclusion criteria applied during the first stage. After reading the full texts, both authors provided a rationale for either including or excluding each study. Studies were included in the review only when consensus was reached between the authors.

## Results

The systematic searches yielded a total of 76 records. Following title and abstract screening, 25 records were retained for full-text assessment (Figure 1). All of these studies were evaluated for eligibility according to the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Ultimately, 20 articles met the eligibility criteria and were included in the review (see Figure 1).

The included studies were published between 2003 and 2025, with the majority appearing between 2010 and 2019 (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Distribution of the selected studies by year of publication

2000-2009	2010-2019	2020-2025
2	12	6

We considered it important that the studies included in our analysis be of high quality. For this reason, only studies that had undergone a peer-review process and had been published in Scopus-indexed journals (with one exception) were included in the analysis, as shown in Table 2; consequently, we did not use the MMAT.

**Table 2.** Characteristics of the selected studies

Journal	Journal metrics	Region	Number of studies
British Journal of Music Education	Scopus Q1	UK	1
British Journal of Psychology	Scopus Q1	UK	1
European Journal of Teacher Education	Scopus Q1	UK	1
Frontiers in Psychology	Scopus Q1	Switzerland	1
International Journal of Music Education	Scopus Q1	UK	1
Journal of Career Assessment	Scopus Q2	USA	1
Journal of Music Teacher Education	Scopus Q1	USA	2
Journal of Research in Music Education	Scopus Q1	USA	4
Music Education Research	Scopus Q1	UK	2
Psychology in the Schools	Scopus Q1	USA	1
Psychology of Music	Scopus Q1	UK	3
Research Studies in Music Education	Scopus Q1	UK	1
The Journal of Applied Psychology	-	USA	1

The following table presents the frequency of keywords identified in the selected studies.

**Table 3.** Frequency of keywords occurring in the selected studies

appeared in five studies	motivation
appeared in three studies	career intention, careers, identity, mentoring, music education, socialization,
appeared in two studies	calling, career choice, commitment, intrinsic motivation, longitudinal, music education majors, music, musicians, occupational identity, professional identity, profession, recruitment,
appeared in one study	ability, academic achievement, adolescence, advice, amotivation, business students, competitiveness, distance education, doctoral students, expectancy, expectancy-value, external regulation, extrinsic motivation, fine arts, gender, graduate music education, Higher Education music, integration, motivation for enrollment, multivariate, music educators, music school, music teacher education, music teacher educators, music teacher identity, music teacher preparation, music teacher recruitment, music teacher training, music undergraduates, narrative, occupational, one-to-one tuition, parent values, perfectionism, personality traits, physical education, possible selves, preservice music student teachers, preservice music teacher education, pre-service teacher, pre-service, retention, self-determination theory, sport, student attrition, survey study, teacher attrition, teacher characteristics, teacher roles, teacher, teacher-student relationship, university students, value

Based on the thematic analysis of the keywords, the studies can be grouped into five major thematic domains:

- (1) motivational constructs,
- (2) identity and self-concept,
- (3) career choice and career-related outcomes,
- (4) pedagogical and socialization-related factors, and
- (5) musical and institutional contexts.

### Overview of the Included Studies

The present systematic review includes 20 empirical studies published between 2003 and 2025 that examine the motivational, socialization-based, and identity-related determinants of music career choice. The studies display considerable methodological heterogeneity, comprising 14 quantitative studies (Moore et al., 2003; Isbell, 2008; Austin et al., 2012; González-Moreno, 2012; Parkes & Jones, 2012; Henry, 2015; Thornton, 2015; Martin, 2016; Rickels et al., 2019; Hsu & Chi, 2022; Yang, 2022; Immerz et al., 2024; Qin & Trillo, 2025; Miksza et al., 2021), three qualitative or mixed-methods studies (Gaunt et al., 2012; Goopy, 2023; Mateos-Moreno, 2023), two longitudinal follow-up studies (Moore et al., 2003; Riza & Heller, 2015), and one theoretical-empirical study (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012).

The geographical scope of the studies is broad, encompassing the United States (Isbell, 2008; Austin et al., 2012; Parkes & Jones, 2012; Henry, 2015; Riza & Heller, 2015; Thornton, 2015; Martin, 2016; Rickels et al., 2019), Taiwan (Hsu & Chi, 2022), Singapore (Bennett & Chong, 2018), Sweden (Mateos-Moreno, 2023), China (Yang, 2022; Qin & Trillo, 2025), Mexico (González-Moreno, 2012), Australia (Goopy, 2023), the United Kingdom (Moore et al., 2003; Gaunt et al., 2012), and Germany (Immerz et al., 2024).

The samples included preservice music teachers, music performance students, postgraduate music students, doctoral students in music education, secondary school music students, and secondary school teachers, thereby enabling the examination of career-choice processes across multiple developmental stages and from diverse perspectives.

A substantial proportion of the reviewed studies focused on the quality and structure of motivation, particularly within the framework of Self-Determination Theory. The most frequently occurring keyword was motivation, while related constructs such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, amotivation, external regulation, and expectancy-value also appeared across several studies.

Keywords associated with identity—including identity, professional identity, occupational identity, and possible selves—were likewise highly prominent and frequently co-occurred with motivational variables. This pattern supports the interpretation that the literature conceptualizes music career choice primarily as an identity-based process.

Keywords related to career choice and career-related outcomes—such as career intention, career choice, commitment, recruitment, and retention—also appeared across several studies, suggesting that a substantial

proportion of the literature focuses on issues of career entry and career persistence. At the same time, these variables frequently co-occurred with motivational and identity-related factors, indicating their potential mediating role in career decision-making processes.

Pedagogical and socialization-related factors were likewise strongly represented. Keywords such as mentoring, socialization, and concepts related to teacher roles and relationships (e.g., teacher–student relationship, teacher characteristics) highlight that music career choice cannot be understood solely as an individual decision, but rather as a process deeply embedded within educational and institutional environments. This interpretation is further reinforced by family-related factors, such as parent values.

Keywords associated with musical and institutional contexts—including music education, one-to-one tuition, music students, higher education, and various educational levels—indicate that most studies interpret career choice within specific educational settings. In contrast, performance-related variables such as ability and academic achievement appeared relatively infrequently, suggesting that the literature places greater emphasis on subjective perceptions and motivational factors than on objective indicators of competence.

Overall, the distribution of keywords suggests that research on music career choice is primarily conceptualized within motivational and identity-based frameworks, in which pedagogical and socialization-related factors play an important mediating role in the formation of career decisions.

Based on the thematic content analysis, four overarching thematic domains were identified through which the findings of the included studies can be organized:

- (1) socialization and environmental factors,
- (2) motivational structures and career intentions,
- (3) identity development and identity conflicts, and
- (4) the influence of institutional and educational contexts.

### **Socialization and Environmental Factors**

The included studies consistently indicate that the roots of music career choice precede the moment of formal career decision-making by many years and are closely linked to early socialization experiences. In their longitudinal study, Moore et al. (2003), analyzing data from 257 children, demonstrated that the early commencement of music studies, parental involvement during the first lessons, and the friendliness of the first teacher collectively played a decisive role in determining whether children continued their musical studies.

Similarly, Isbell (2008), investigating preservice music teachers, concluded that parents, school music teachers, and private music instructors constitute the most influential agents of primary socialization. Parents play a key role in fostering children's initial interest in musical activities during childhood, while school music teachers contribute significantly to sustaining musical participation during adolescence. School music teachers appear to play a particularly important role in initiating and maintaining interest in music teaching careers.

Yang (2022), examining Chinese preservice music teachers, likewise found that family members played a crucial role in stimulating initial interest in musical activities during childhood. However, unlike Isbell's findings, Yang did not identify a similarly positive influence of school music teachers on fostering and sustaining interest in music education careers.

At the same time, the factors predicting professional success in adulthood formed a somewhat different constellation. Participation in concerts, engagement in improvisational practice, and the family environment—particularly parental presence—emerged as the strongest predictors, whereas the amount of formal practice alone did not independently predict later professional success.

Austin et al. (2012), in their multi-institutional study, further confirmed that the high school music teacher represents one of the most influential agents of secondary socialization. Students who perceived their high school music teacher as inspiring were significantly more likely to choose a music teaching career. This relationship was also supported by Rickels et al. (2019), who, examining 2,443 secondary school music students, found that positive teacher role modeling constituted one of the strongest distinguishing variables between students intending to pursue music teaching careers and those planning alternative music-related professions.

Thornton (2015) examined secondary school music teachers as contextual sources of support. Her findings indicated that music teachers recognized and embraced their role in the recruitment of future music educators, and more than 90% of the participants identified music teachers as a significant influencing factor in career choice. Within this process, teachers' function as role models, as well as their ability to reinforce, support, and protect mentees in order to foster future success, proved to be particularly important.

According to Isbell's (2008) findings, family members were perceived as the most positive influence in decisions regarding the pursuit of music education studies at the tertiary level (secondary socialization), followed by music education teachers and ensemble directors. The majority of participants (64%) identified music studies as a career option during high school, which was also the period when most respondents (67%) decided to pursue a career in music education. However, many students chose to combine musical performance and music education careers, or selected music education after initially deciding to continue their studies in music. Most participants made both decisions during their high school years.

Furthermore, Henry (2015) found that the overwhelming majority of talented secondary school musicians participated in a wide range of school-based and extracurricular musical experiences, including private lessons (92%), solo and ensemble competitions (92%), large-group competitions (86%), summer music camps (70%), and other extracurricular activities (76%). These experiences represented highly influential developmental opportunities and significantly affected students' decisions regarding further education.

Parental influence also emerged across several studies, although its role appeared nuanced and multifaceted. Moore et al. (2003) argued that parental support is a necessary but not sufficient condition for musical success, and that excessive parental pressure may become counterproductive. In a qualitative study, Goopy (2023) demonstrated that parental values and expectations—particularly concerns related to financial stability—may generate considerable tension between adolescent musicians' possible selves and the career paths preferred by their parents. Similarly, Qin and Trillo (2025), investigating Chinese preservice music teachers, identified parental support as a significant predictor of career intention, although its effect size was weaker than that of intrinsic motivational factors. In contrast, Thornton (2015) reported that secondary school teachers did not regard parents as a major influence on students' decisions to pursue music education careers.

Among German music and physical education student teachers examined by Immerz et al. (2024), socially induced motivation—that is, encouragement from friends, parents, and teachers—was significantly higher than in the general student population, suggesting that the social environment plays a particularly influential role in the choice of these specialized subject areas.

### **Motivational Structures and Career Intentions**

From a motivational perspective, the reviewed studies revealed a relatively consistent pattern. In contrast to general teacher-education research, which typically identifies intrinsic and altruistic motives as dominant, the majority of the included studies indicated the predominance of extrinsic motivational factors in music-related career choices.

The role of motivational factors within the context of higher music education was also examined by Miksza, Evans, and McPherson (2021), who analyzed students' career intentions within the framework of Self-Determination Theory. Their findings demonstrated that autonomous motivation was significantly and positively associated with commitment to a musical career, whereas contextual factors such as teacher control and perfectionism exerted negative effects. At the same time, competitive environments could, in certain cases, contribute positively to the maintenance of motivation, suggesting that the context of music education shapes students' motivational profiles and career intentions in complex ways.

Using content analysis among Swedish preservice music teachers, Mateos-Moreno (2023) found that the most frequently occurring motivational category was “the opportunity to work with music” ( $n = 24$ ), followed by “helping others” ( $n = 12$ ) and “students' development” ( $n = 11$ ). According to the two-level categorization applied in the study, 119 identified motivational units were extrinsic in nature, whereas only 15 units were classified as intrinsic. Interpreted within Cornali's (2019) threefold framework of altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation, this pattern differs substantially from the motivational profiles typically observed among general preservice teachers, where altruistic and intrinsic motives generally predominate.

Immerz et al. (2024), in their quantitative investigation, identified a similar pattern. Bachelor-level music students demonstrated higher levels of intrinsic motivation than the general student population; however, students enrolled in teacher education programs exhibited significantly higher levels of extrinsic-materialistic and extrinsic-social motivation compared to bachelor music students. These findings suggest that the attractiveness of music teaching as a career path may partly derive from the perceived financial and lifestyle stability associated with the profession.

This interpretation is further supported by Yang's (2022) study, in which occupation-oriented professional development emerged as the dominant factor influencing the choice to pursue higher education in music. Within this domain, more than 50% of respondents expressed optimistic views regarding future employment

opportunities, while commitment to the teaching profession ranked as the second most important factor. In addition, Yang found that well-being—comprising moral, emotional, and psychological dimensions—represented the most significant reason for engaging with music.

Students enrolled in postgraduate programs were also asked to identify the three most important reasons for entering master's-level studies. The most frequent responses included general career development, increased income opportunities, and the improvement of music education and practice, indicating the simultaneous presence of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors (González-Moreno, 2012).

In another study focusing on Chinese preservice music teachers, Yang (2022) found that during primary socialization (school years), extrinsic motivational factors—such as personal well-being and the perceived rewards of learning—were more salient than intrinsic factors, such as love for music and teaching. During secondary socialization, occupation-oriented professional development emerged as the most influential source of career choice. At the micro level, educational programs functioned as guiding structures, while at the macro level, admission requirements and educational policy served as strong orientational frameworks. This pattern suggests an identity-development process strongly shaped by forms of professionalism reinforced through educational policy.

Examining students enrolled in Mexican postgraduate music programs, González-Moreno (2012) similarly found that students typically entered these programs with high expectations shaped by aspirations for professional development and academic achievement, increased income, improvement in teaching practices, and interest in research activities.

In their discriminant analysis, Rickels et al. (2019) identified four motivational archetypes among secondary school music students. The “total immersion – teacher” profile was characterized by high utility value and a strong teacher identity, whereas the “total immersion – musician/leader” profile reflected the dominance of performance-related competence beliefs and musician identity. The markedly different motivational structures associated with these two archetypes highlight the multidimensional nature of music teaching career choice, suggesting that no single factor can adequately explain the process.

This pattern is further supported by findings from research conducted among talented secondary school musicians, in which significantly more students intending to pursue music teaching careers had participated in summer music camps (79%) compared to those who did not plan to enter music teaching. Significant differences were also identified in relation to musical leadership experiences, including conducting a piece, rehearsing an ensemble or group, and providing private lessons. Overall, students demonstrated strong and well-informed opinions about the profession. Those planning careers in music education expressed a firm commitment to the field. Although highly dedicated to this career path, these prospective music educators also recognized that the profession is not without its disadvantages (Henry, 2015).

Investigating doctoral students in music education, Martin (2016) found that commitment to higher education careers may increase with age. Furthermore, doctoral students in music education demonstrated significantly stronger commitment toward teaching in higher education than toward teaching music in kindergarten through Grade 12 settings. This finding was reinforced by the fact that the majority of participants identified college-level teaching as their preferred career path after graduation. At the same time, doctoral students who had taught in K–12 education concurrently at some point during their studies were significantly more likely to express intentions to return to K–12 teaching positions (Martin, 2016).

Examining the concept of calling, Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2012) argued that strong internal commitment may paradoxically reduce individuals' receptiveness to career-related advice, which in the long term may hinder realistic career planning. This issue is particularly relevant within the context of music career choice, where the intensity of musical identity may at times limit consideration of alternative career pathways.

Riza and Heller's (2015) findings further support this relationship: participants who had previously demonstrated stronger commitment to the musical domain evaluated their own musical abilities more positively several years later. This subjective self-evaluation, in turn, increased the likelihood that they would attempt to pursue success within this highly demanding field, regardless of their actual level of ability. These results suggest that commitment substantially shapes individuals' cognitive interpretations and may contribute to the prioritization of personal perceptions, even in the face of objective external feedback.

Similarly, in Thornton's (2015) study involving secondary school music teachers, the majority of participants considered love of music and musical competence—or confidence in one's musical abilities—to be particularly important factors in music career choice.

Investigating students majoring in physical education, fine arts, and music in Taiwan, Hsu and Chi (2022) found that these students demonstrated significantly higher levels of intrinsic motivation than students from

other academic disciplines. The authors suggest that this may be explained by the fact that these students had already undergone extensive training in specific skills prior to entering university. Consequently, choosing to continue participation and pursue studies within these disciplines reflects the maintenance of interest and enthusiasm for the field, as well as the demonstration of favorable performance and competence. In addition, these students may have received substantial social support from parents, peers, or coaches, which could further explain their elevated levels of intrinsic motivation. Indeed, the authors identified intrinsic motivation as the most important factor influencing learning and academic achievement among Taiwanese students (Hsu & Chi, 2022).

At the same time, students majoring in physical education, fine arts, and music also demonstrated significantly higher levels of introjected regulation than students from other disciplines. Introjected regulation represents a relatively autonomous, yet still externally regulated form of motivation. Furthermore, first- and second-year students displayed higher levels of introjected regulation than third-year students (Hsu & Chi, 2022).

With regard to external regulation, although students majoring in physical education and music exhibited higher levels of intrinsic (autonomous) motivation than students from other disciplines, their levels of external regulation (controlled motivation) were also significantly higher. External regulation in this context refers to pressures associated with parental and coaching expectations. These findings are consistent with the developmental trajectories of Taiwanese music and physical education students, who typically begin developing specialized skills at an early age (Hsu & Chi, 2022).

Within the framework of expectancy–value theory, Austin et al. (2012) demonstrated that attainment value—that is, the personal importance attached to perceiving oneself as a music teacher—constituted the strongest predictor of commitment to teaching, proving to be a more powerful predictor than intrinsic motivation or competence beliefs alone.

Similarly, Parkes and Jones (2012), examining students pursuing music-related careers, found that students' choices were directly influenced by both expectations and values. Their findings suggest the existence of a cumulative effect: the more highly students evaluated their expectations and values, the more likely they were to pursue careers in the respective domain, whether in teaching or performance. However, even students who were unlikely to pursue music teaching careers perceived music teachers as providing an important service to society and rated this value more highly than other expectancy–value constructs. Given the widespread perception that teaching is not a financially lucrative profession, students often believed that individuals must possess a strong personal commitment in order to choose teaching as a vocation. Moreover, many students appeared to consider the importance of music education itself more significant than the level of their teaching-related skills. From this perspective, it seems logical that students who regarded music education as personally important were more likely to report intentions to pursue music teaching careers.

In González-Moreno's (2012) study, gender-based analyses revealed that female students demonstrated significantly higher value perceptions than male students. Female participants considered postgraduate education more important in enhancing the impact of their professional work as musicians and music educators.

### **Identity Development and Identity Conflicts**

Questions of identity emerged prominently across the majority of the included studies, with many investigations identifying the tension between musician identity and teacher identity as one of the most characteristic challenges faced by preservice music teachers.

Examining preservice music teachers in Singapore, Bennet and Chong (2018), drawing on the theoretical framework of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), demonstrated that most participants primarily identified themselves as musicians, while teacher identity occupied a secondary position. Particularly noteworthy was the finding that students who primarily defined themselves as music teachers were significantly more likely to intend to continue teaching after the expiration of their mandatory employment contracts. In contrast, participants with a dominant musician identity frequently planned to leave the profession even during their training.

Mateos-Moreno's (2023) findings are consistent with this interpretation. Among the Swedish students examined, the attractiveness of music teaching was primarily rooted in the opportunity to maintain an ongoing connection with music, rather than in the intrinsic value of teaching itself. These results reinforce earlier findings by Hargreaves and Marshall (2003), as well as Conway et al. (2010), who argued that the primacy of musician identity is a common characteristic within this population.

According to Parkes and Jones (2012), students' beliefs regarding the importance of music teaching and their expectations concerning musical performance are critical determinants of career choice. Students who more strongly believed that music teaching was personally important were more likely to report intentions to pursue careers in music education. Conversely, students with stronger beliefs in their future success as performers were more likely to aspire toward performance careers.

Goopy's (2023) qualitative investigation, focusing on adolescent male musicians, further enriches this perspective. Within the framework of possible selves theory, the study revealed that young musicians' possible selves—including the desired musician self, the feared financially insecure self, and the "safe career" self preferred by parents—often exist in conflict with one another. This internal tension becomes particularly critical during the transition to higher education, when career decisions begin to take more concrete form.

Austin et al. (2012) also highlighted the identity-shaping role of institutional context. Significant differences were identified among students across the 16 institutions examined with respect to the strength of occupational identity, indicating that institutional culture and the values conveyed within these environments substantially influence how students position themselves along the musician–teacher continuum.

Rickels et al. (2019) likewise confirmed that strong competence beliefs related to musical performance are negatively associated with intentions to pursue music teaching careers, suggesting the existence of a structural tension between a strong performer identity and the choice of a music teaching profession.

According to Isbell (2008), the influence of secondary socialization is significantly associated with both teacher identity and musician identity.

Yang's (2022) research involving Chinese students further demonstrated that, amid substantial governmental policy changes and restructuring within education systems, music education students experience complex struggles between the identities of student teacher and newly qualified teacher.

Riza and Heller (2015) provided evidence that an early sense of calling may help resolve career decision-making dilemmas in situations where tensions arise between the internal and external dimensions of career choice. Early vocational commitment enhances perceived competence, thereby enabling individuals to pursue challenging careers later in life, regardless of their actual level of musical ability. Individuals with strong commitment are more likely to take risks, persist in the face of challenges, complete their studies, and ultimately secure employment within their chosen vocational field, thereby potentially satisfying both internal and external career-related needs. Consequently, the conflict between the internal and external dimensions of career choice may diminish among individuals with strong vocational commitment, as they are more likely to achieve positive outcomes in both domains.

In Martin's (2016) study, doctoral students in music education identified more strongly with the identities of "music teacher educator" and "teacher mentor" than with identities such as "student" or "K–12 music teacher." In addition, doctoral students in music education expressed the lowest levels of confidence regarding their ability to maintain a satisfactory work–life balance as university professors.

### **Institutional and Educational Contexts**

The fourth thematic domain identified across the included studies concerns the influence of institutional characteristics and structural features of higher music education on the development of professional identity and career intentions.

In their qualitative investigation, Gaunt et al. (2012), examining conservatory students' perspectives, demonstrated that one-to-one instrumental and vocal tuition—although naturally possessing strong mentoring potential—was, in practice, primarily realized through coaching, instruction, and advice-giving. It rarely extended to reflective discussions concerning long-term professional identity formation and career planning. Of the 34 students interviewed, 21 were unable to articulate concrete professional plans, and many struggled to publicly connect their passion for music with realistic professional opportunities.

Among undergraduate music education students, participation in ensembles and performance opportunities were identified as positive influencing factors contributing to decisions to continue pursuing music teaching careers (Isbell, 2008).

For Chinese preservice music teachers, educational programs and curricula may function as powerful orientational frameworks for career development (Yang, 2022).

González-Moreno's (2012) investigation among students enrolled in postgraduate music programs further highlighted that, alongside the positive effects of continuous academic advising, faculty members and institutional leadership play a decisive role in students' professional development. In particular, they contribute

to the formation of positive value systems, support the alignment of students' professional aspirations, interests, and goals with academic requirements, and foster supportive departmental cultures.

The study also demonstrated that participation in postgraduate music education is strongly motivated by aspirations for professional development, academic achievement, orientation toward academic careers, and commitment to teaching and research. Consequently, postgraduate programs should pay particular attention to how students interpret their educational experiences and to the extent to which these experiences contribute to the realization of their professional goals.

Within the Singaporean context, Bennett and Chong (2018) emphasized the identity-strengthening role of early teaching experiences. Students who had acquired classroom experience prior to entering teacher education, either as contract teachers or scholarship trainees, demonstrated stronger teacher identities and were less likely to intend to leave the profession.

Martin (2016) similarly found, among doctoral students in music education, that participants who had simultaneously taught in K–12 settings during their studies were more likely to express intentions to return to this professional pathway. At the same time, the majority of participants believed that teaching undergraduate music education students had played a substantial role in their decisions to pursue careers in higher education. The author therefore suggested that music teacher educators could provide doctoral students with more opportunities to engage in undergraduate teaching as guest lecturers or course instructors. These findings indicate that early teaching experiences play a decisive role in shaping career decisions.

Similarly, Henry (2015), examining talented secondary school musicians, observed that students intending to pursue music education careers had more frequently been offered leadership opportunities, such as conducting, leading rehearsals, or providing private lessons. These early teaching-related experiences exerted a substantial influence on their career planning.

In contrast, Thornton (2015), in a study involving secondary school teachers, found that participants did not highly value the influence of “teaching opportunities,” and relatively few teachers reported implementing strategies that incorporated teaching and/or leadership experiences.

According to the findings of Immerz et al. (2024), bachelor-level music students—who participated in the most specialized and instrument-focused training programs—were the least uncertain regarding their choice of study program, yet simultaneously considered the fewest alternative career pathways. This finding suggests that early specialization may simultaneously serve as a source of identity security and a factor limiting consideration of alternative career opportunities.

Investigating the career intentions of Chinese preservice music teachers, Qin and Trillo (2025) demonstrated that personality traits—particularly conscientiousness and extraversion—significantly predicted intentions to pursue teaching careers, with these effects operating partly through motivational mechanisms. This finding suggests that institutional selection and training processes should take personality characteristics into account in addition to musical competence.

In Yang's (2022) study, personality development also emerged as a key value of school music education. It was closely associated with individuals' core competencies and was considered capable of fostering the development of musicality, aesthetic sensitivity, and mental and emotional intelligence.

Similarly, Martin (2016), in research involving doctoral students in music education, argued that non-programmatic factors influencing effectiveness and commitment—such as personality variables and interpersonal interactions—also warrant closer examination.

## **Discussion**

Taken together, the findings of the 20 included studies outline a complex, multi-level model of music career choice in which individual, social, and institutional factors exert their influence not independently, but through dynamic interactions. This finding fundamentally challenges simplified narratives that explain music career choice exclusively in terms of passion for music or commitment to teaching.

The most consistent finding across the reviewed studies is the primacy of musician identity over teacher identity (Bennett & Chong, 2018; Mateos-Moreno, 2023; Austin et al., 2012; Rickels et al., 2019). Importantly, this phenomenon extends beyond the initial moment of career decision-making and permeates the entire educational trajectory, showing direct associations with intentions to leave the profession. In cases where musician identity remains dominant, music teaching tends to assume an instrumental function: it becomes a means of maintaining access to music rather than being perceived as an intrinsically valuable vocation in its own right. This finding aligns with Roberts's (1991) classical concept of the “fallback career” and suggests that

systematic efforts over the past three decades to strengthen teacher identity among music students have achieved only partial success.

A second overarching finding of the review concerns the prominent role of extrinsic motivations in music teaching career choice. This pattern—confirmed by González-Moreno (2012), Yang (2022), Mateos-Moreno (2023), Immerz et al. (2024), and Qin and Trillo (2025)—casts a paradoxical light on the motivational background of individuals entering music education. On the one hand, extrinsic motivations, such as employment opportunities, financial security, and flexible working conditions, reflect rational career considerations and may contribute to stable professional commitment. On the other hand, as argued by Mateos-Moreno (2023), drawing on the work of Deci, Ryan, and Koestner (2001), the dominance of extrinsic motivation may undermine the long-term sustainability of intrinsic motivation, particularly in situations where external reinforcements—such as students' visible progress—are temporarily absent.

Within this context, the concept of calling proposed by Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2012) becomes particularly relevant. Strong internal commitment—represented among some preservice music teachers by the intensity of musical identity—may paradoxically reduce receptiveness to realistic career advice and generate resistance toward broader interpretations of professional identity. This mechanism may help explain why the development of teacher identity remains difficult in certain studies, even when targeted educational interventions are implemented.

The longitudinal investigations of Moore et al. (2003) and Riza and Heller (2015), together with the findings of Isbell (2008), Austin et al. (2012), and Thornton (2015) concerning secondary socialization, as well as Goopy's (2023) examination of adolescent possible selves, collectively outline the contours of a developmental socialization model of music career choice. According to this model, music career choice emerges as the outcome of a long-term, multi-stage developmental process, characterized by several critical phases: (1) early childhood musical socialization within the family; (2) the relationship with and influence of the first instrumental teacher; (3) peers' musical commitment and participation in collective musical activities; (4) the role-modeling influence of secondary school music teachers; and (5) the transition into higher education together with the identity-shaping effects of institutional environments.

This developmental perspective integrates the findings of multiple studies and highlights that the effectiveness of interventions depends substantially on age and developmental stage. During the early stages, parental support and the influence of inspiring first teachers appear to be decisive, whereas during adolescence peer influences and the dynamics of possible selves become increasingly salient. In higher education, institutional culture and educational experiences emerge as the dominant shaping forces.

The findings of Gaunt et al. (2012), Bennett and Chong (2018), and Immerz et al. (2024) collectively demonstrate that higher education institutions—despite their central role in shaping music career identity—do not always consciously exploit this potential. Conservatory education has traditionally focused on the transmission of technical mastery and comparatively rarely devotes systematic attention to the development of students' professional identities, career planning, and their understanding of real-world professional contexts.

Taken together, the findings suggest that effective interventions should operate simultaneously across multiple levels. The provision of early teaching experiences—which, according to Bennett and Chong (2018), Martin (2016), and Henry (2015), strengthens teacher identity—appears to be one of the most promising strategies. The deliberate development of mentoring practices within one-to-one instruction, advocated by Gaunt et al. (2012), could help students connect their passion for music with realistic professional opportunities. In addition, the introduction of a portfolio-career perspective, proposed by Bennett and Chong (2018), may help reconcile musician and teacher identities, allowing students to integrate rather than sacrifice one identity in favor of the other.

One important implication of the review is that the motivational structure underlying music career choice cannot be regarded as culturally neutral. Studies conducted in the United States (Isbell, 2008; Austin et al., 2012; Parkes & Jones, 2012; Henry, 2015; Riza & Heller, 2015; Thornton, 2015; Martin, 2016; Rickels et al., 2019) emphasize somewhat different factors than research carried out in Sweden (Mateos-Moreno, 2023), Singapore (Bennett & Chong, 2018), Taiwan (Hsu & Chi, 2022), China (Yang, 2022; Qin & Trillo, 2025), Mexico (González-Moreno, 2012), or Germany (Immerz et al., 2024). Socially induced motivation, for example, appears more prominently within collectivist cultural contexts, whereas self-realization and personal interest tend to dominate in more individualistic societies. Likewise, the importance of financial security—which is structurally reinforced within Singapore's scholarship and contractual obligation system (Bennett & Chong, 2018)—emerges with different intensity than in European welfare-state contexts.

### Conclusion

Based on the synthesis of the 20 included studies, it can be concluded that the factors shaping music career choice can be understood across four interrelated levels: the level of early socialization and the influence of significant others; the level of motivational structures and value orientations; the level of identity dynamics; and the level of institutional and educational contexts. The interaction among these four levels gives rise to the distinctive motivational profile that differentiates preservice music teachers from students in other teacher education fields, while simultaneously encompassing both resources and risks with regard to long-term professional commitment.

For future research, particularly promising directions include the expansion of longitudinal investigations, the deepening of cross-cultural comparisons, and the empirical evaluation of interventions aimed at supporting professional identity development.

### Limitations

The methodological heterogeneity of the included studies, the potential influence of publication bias, and the fact that the vast majority of the reviewed investigations focused on preservice music teachers may limit comparability across studies. Furthermore, cultural and educational differences may substantially influence the meaning and professional interpretation of the term music teacher, thereby complicating cross-cultural comparisons in research on music career choice.

Consequently, cultural variability should also be regarded as an important cautionary factor: the findings of the present review cannot be mechanically generalized across all cultural contexts. Consideration of local educational policies, institutional structures, and labor-market conditions is essential for the appropriate interpretation of the findings and for drawing valid practical implications.

**Acknowledgments:** We thank Johnathan Dabney for the English language editing.

### References

- Austin, J. R., Isbell, D. S., & Russell, J. A. (2012). A multi-institution exploration of secondary socialization and occupational identity among undergraduate music majors. *Psychology of Music, 40*(1), 66–83.
- Austin, J. R., Isbell, D. S., & Russell, J. A. (2012). A multi-institution exploration of secondary socialization and occupational identity among undergraduate music majors. *Psychology of Music, 40*(1), 66–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735610381886>
- Bennett, D., & Chong, E. K. M. (2018). Singaporean pre-service music teachers' identities, motivations and career intentions. *International Journal of Music Education, 36*(1), 108–123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761417703780>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*(4), 227–268. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01)
- Dobrow, S. R., & Tosti-Kharas, J. (2012). Listen to your heart? Calling and receptivity to career advice. *Journal of Career Assessment, 20*(3), 264–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072711434412>
- Gaunt, H., Creech, A., Long, M., & Hallam, S. (2012). Supporting conservatoire students towards professional integration: One-to-one tuition and the potential of mentoring. *Music Education Research, 14*(1), 25–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2012.657166>
- González-Moreno, P. A. (2012). Student motivation in graduate music programmes: An examination of personal and environmental factors. *Music Education Research, 14*(1), 79–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2012.657168>
- Goopy, J. (2023). Intersections and conflicts between adolescent boys' musical possible selves, university study, and parent values. *Psychology of Music, 51*(2), 624–639. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03057356221101651>
- Hargreaves, D. J., & Marshall, N. A. (2003). Developing identities in music education. *Music Education Research, 5*(3), 263–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461380032000126355>
- Henry, M. L. (2015). The musical experiences, career aspirations, and attitudes toward the music education profession of all-state musicians. *Journal of Music Teacher Education, 24*(2), 40–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057083713506998>
- Hirschi, A. (2012). The career resources model: An integrative framework for career success. *Journal of Career Assessment, 20*(3), 369–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072711434440>
- Hsu, Y., & Chi, Y.-h. (2022). Academic major satisfaction and regret of students in different majors: Perspectives from self-determination theory. *Psychology in the Schools, 59*(11), 2287–2299. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22563>
- Immerz, A., Nusseck, M., Hohagen, J., & Spahn, C. (2024). Student motivation to study music and sport – a comparison between study subjects and study programs on intrinsic and extrinsic motivational aspects. *Frontiers in Psychology, 15*, 1393339. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1393339>
- Isbell, D. S. (2008). Musicians and teachers: The socialization and occupational identity of preservice music teachers. *Journal of Research in Music Education, 56*(2), 162–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429408322853>
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45*(1), 79–122. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1994.1027>

- Martin, L. D. (2016). Doctoral students in music education: Occupational identity, career intent and commitment, and confidence for teaching in higher education. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 26(1), 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057083715602123>
- Mateos-Moreno, D. (2023). What is attractive about becoming a music teacher? Exploring the motivations of pre-service music teachers towards the profession. *British Journal of Music Education*, 40, 311–324. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051723000335>
- Miksza, P., Evans, P., & McPherson, G. E. (2021). Motivation to pursue a career in music: The role of social constraints in university music programs. *Psychology of Music*, 49(1), 50–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735619836269>
- Moore, D. G., Burland, K., & Davidson, J. W. (2003). The social context of musical success: A developmental account. *British Journal of Psychology*, 94(4), 529–549. <https://doi.org/10.1348/000712603322503088>
- Parkes, K. A., & Jones, B. D. (2012). Motivational constructs influencing undergraduate students' choices to become classroom music teachers or music performers. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 60(1), 101–123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429411435512>
- Qin, M., & Trillo, R. T. (2025). Antecedents of preservice music teacher students' career intention to become music teachers: The roles of demographics, personality traits, and motivations. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 48(4), 739–760. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2023.2259077>
- Rickels, D. A., Hoffman, E. C., & Fredrickson, W. E. (2019). A comparative analysis of influences on choosing a music teaching occupation. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 67(3), 286–303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429419849937>
- Riza, S. D., & Heller, D. K. (2015). Follow your heart or your head? A longitudinal study of the facilitating role of calling and ability in the pursuit of a challenging career. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 100(3), 695–712. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038561>
- Thornton, L. C. (2015). Important others: Music teachers' perceived roles in music teacher recruitment. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 24(3), 97–107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057083713512836>
- Váradi, J., Kerekes, R., Pótfi, M., & Radócz, J. M. (2024). Determining factors in the career choice of music high school students. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 6, 100321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100321>
- Váradi, J., Szűcs, T., & Strenacikova, M. (2019). Persistence in tertiary music education in Hungary and Slovakia. *Journal of Adult Learning, Knowledge and Innovation*, 3(1), 6–11. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2059.03.2019.02>
- Yang, Y. (2022). Professional identity development of preservice music teachers: A survey study of three Chinese universities. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 44(2), 313–330. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X211020960>



© 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).