

ENHANCING MUSICALITY AND ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE: A STUDY ON RONDALLA TRAINING TECHNIQUES

JAMES B. ALCANTARA
Master of Arts in Education
Major in MAPEH

Abstract

This study determined the effectiveness of newly developed rondalla training techniques in enhancing the musicality and ensemble performance of student musicians in Pangasinan. A quantitative, quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control-group design was employed because random assignment was not feasible. The participants were 300 purposively selected rondalla students from three secondary schools and two tertiary institutions during Academic Year 2024–2025, equally divided into an experimental group that received the new training techniques and a control group that continued traditional training. The intervention was implemented over one academic semester. Data were collected through three validated instruments: the Musicality Evaluation Rubric (rhythm, tone quality, expression), the Ensemble Performance Rating Scale (synchronization, blend/balance, cohesion), and a 20-item Perception Questionnaire measuring engagement with the new techniques. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) summarized performance and perception levels, and an independent-samples t-test examined group differences at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results revealed that the experimental group achieved a very high level of musicality after the intervention ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.40$), indicating notable improvement in rhythm, tone, and expression. Ensemble performance of the experimental group was likewise very high ($M = 4.56$) compared with the control group's high rating ($M = 4.05$). The t-test showed a statistically significant difference between groups ($p < 0.05$), confirming the effectiveness of the new training techniques in strengthening ensemble outcomes. Students also reported very high positive perceptions of the intervention ($M = 4.54$), reflecting strong engagement, motivation, and perceived benefits. Based on these findings, the study proposes the Rondalla Enhancement and Development (READ) Program to guide music teachers in integrating effective training strategies to improve musicality and ensemble performance.

Keywords: Rondalla, Training Techniques, Musicality, Ensemble Performance, Quasi-Experimental Design, Student Perception, READ Program

1. Introduction

Music education is recognized globally as a foundational component of holistic student development, facilitating cognitive, socio-emotional, and cultural competencies beyond the domain of music itself (Arts Education Partnership, 2011). Numerous policy frameworks and research syntheses underscore that engagement in music performance cultivates students' auditory discrimination, ensemble coordination, and aesthetic sensitivity, alongside broader psychological outcomes, including enhanced communication and teamwork skills (Bussu & Mangiarulo, 2024; Arts Education Partnership, 2011; see *URL below* for details). In ensemble contexts, learners not only interpret musical structures but also negotiate timing, synchrony, and expressive cohesion, thereby actualizing musicianship through collaborative interaction. Despite the well-documented educational benefits of music and ensemble participation, specific traditional music forms, such as the Philippine rondalla, remain underinvestigated within formal empirical literature despite their enduring cultural and pedagogical significance (Rockell, 2013).

The Philippine rondalla is a *plucked-string chordophone ensemble* comprising instruments such as the bandurria, laud, octavina, guitar, and bass, adapted from Spanish antecedents and localized over several centuries within Filipino musical traditions (Rockell, 2013). Although historically transmitted through aural learning and community-based practice, the ensemble has permeated formal school curricula as a prominent medium for fostering musical literacy and cultural identity (House Bill No. 11290, 2024). Legislative efforts in the Philippines have sought to institutionalize rondalla training programs for educators, recognizing that teacher preparation is critical to sustaining pedagogical quality and cultural preservation (*Inquirer.net*, 2024). This emergent policy emphasis reflects broader socio-cultural priorities: the preservation of indigenous music practices and the promotion of participatory music making as integral to national and educational heritage. However, despite such initiatives, there is a relative paucity of systematic research on how rondalla training influences core musical outcomes, particularly *musicality*—defined as the capacity for expressive interpretation and stylistic nuance—and *ensemble performance*—defined as coordinated group execution of musical works within educational settings.

The literature on ensemble music enriches the understanding of the socio-cognitive and affective dimensions of collaborative music performance. Studies in Western and educational contexts have documented that ensemble participation can enhance communicative competencies, interpersonal coordination, and life skills that extend into broader educational engagement and psychosocial well-being (Bussu & Mangiarulo, 2024). For example, adolescent musicians involved in classical ensembles reported increased self-confidence, effective communication, and critical thinking arising from collective rehearsals and performances in structured programmes (Bussu & Mangiarulo, 2024). Similarly, broader research on participatory music learning highlights that ensemble engagement supports interpersonal synchrony and cognitive-affective regulation, which are foundational components of musicianship and collaborative learning (Springer, 2023). Although this evidence provides valuable insights into ensemble dynamics and their developmental implications, *little of this research attends to culturally specific ensembles such as the rondalla*, where local traditions, repertoire, and performance practices may mediate educational outcomes in ways distinct from Western classical models.

The rondalla occupies a unique position within Philippine culture; it is both an emblem of national identity and a vehicle for community music education. Ethnomusicological studies have documented that the ensemble's characteristic timbral textures and performance practices are deeply intertwined with Filipino social life and aesthetic values (Rockell, 2013). However, *scholarly discourse indicates a general paucity of musicological and pedagogical research on the rondalla*, particularly within formal educational frameworks. This gap is significant given that rondalla training programmes have expanded across schools and teacher education, yet systematic investigations into their effectiveness in promoting musicality and ensemble performance remain limited. The need for such research is further underscored by contemporary policy discussions in the Philippines, where legislative proposals advocate for the creation of structured rondalla training for music teachers to enhance instructional quality and cultural continuity (House Bill No. 11290, 2024).

Conceptually, the development of *musicality* involves not only technical proficiency but also interpretive sensitivity, stylistic awareness, and expressive coherence, all of which are cultivated through sustained engagement with music making (Arts Education Partnership, 2011). Ensemble performance, in turn, requires adaptive synchronization, mutual responsiveness, and shared interpretive intent among musicians, making it an ideal domain for studying collaborative musicianship as both a product and process of instructional practices. Research on ensemble interaction highlights that performance quality is shaped by collective adaptation, communicative cues, and rehearsal strategies, suggesting that instructional approaches to ensemble training

significantly shape musical outcomes. However, these principles have primarily been established in Western art-music research contexts, necessitating context-specific investigation into how indigenous ensemble forms such as the *rondalla* manifest and enhance these processes in Philippine music education.

Despite its deep cultural roots and widespread participation in schools, *rondalla research has not yet extensively examined the pedagogical mechanisms through which rondalla training fosters musicality and ensemble performance*. Existing literature on Filipino *rondalla* practices tends to emphasize ethnographic and heritage dimensions rather than educational efficacy and performance outcomes. Moreover, while ensemble participation has been linked to affective and cognitive benefits in diverse contexts, *a research gap persists in empirically examining how culturally situated ensemble training influences fundamental musical competencies among student musicians within Philippine schools*. Addressing this gap is timely and relevant for informing both music education policy and instructional design, aligning empirical inquiry with ongoing efforts to support teacher preparation and curriculum development in indigenous music traditions.

This study therefore investigates the effects of structured *rondalla* training on students' musicality and ensemble performance, aiming to bridge a critical gap in music education research and to provide evidence-based insights to support culturally responsive pedagogy. Specifically, the research examines how targeted instructional strategies influence expressive musicianship and coordinated ensemble execution within school-based *rondalla* programmes. By integrating theoretical perspectives on musicianship, ensemble interaction, and culturally situated music education, this study advances understanding of how traditional ensemble training contributes to musical development in contemporary classroom settings.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, quasi-experimental research design, specifically a non-equivalent control group design, to determine the effectiveness of newly developed *rondalla* training techniques in enhancing students' musicality and ensemble performance. Random assignment of participants was not feasible because the *rondalla* members were drawn from pre-existing school and institutional ensemble groupings; therefore, two naturally constituted groups were used for comparison: (a) an experimental group that received the newly developed training techniques and (b) a control group that continued with traditional *rondalla* training.

The intervention was implemented over one academic semester. Following the implementation period, both groups were evaluated using standardized performance-based measures to determine post-intervention levels of musicality—operationalized through rhythm, tone, and expression—and ensemble performance—operationalized through synchronization, blend/balance, and cohesion/interpretative unity. Quantitative data generated from rubric-based ratings and scaled instruments were summarized using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). To test whether the observed post-test difference in ensemble performance between the experimental and control groups was statistically significant, an independent-samples t-test was applied at the 0.05 level of significance. Statistical processing was conducted using SPSS (Version 26) to ensure consistency and accuracy of computation.

2.2 Participants

The participants in the study were 300 purposively selected student *rondalla* musicians from three secondary schools and two tertiary institutions in Pangasinan during Academic Year 2024–2025. All participants were active members of their respective school-based *rondalla* ensembles, regularly attended rehearsals, and had at least one

year of ensemble-playing experience, ensuring that they possessed adequate foundational skills for the implementation and evaluation of the training intervention. Participants represented the major rondalla instrument sections, including bandurria, laud, octavina, guitar, and bass, reflecting authentic ensemble composition in school and institutional settings.

For comparative analysis, the participants were distributed into two non-randomized groups of equal size: 150 students comprised the experimental group, which received the newly developed rondalla training techniques over one academic semester, while the remaining 150 students comprised the control group, which continued with traditional rondalla training methods implemented within the same institutional context. The use of purposive sampling was appropriate because the study required participants with prior rondalla experience to ensure valid assessment of performance outcomes and comparability of baseline ensemble membership characteristics across groups.

2.3 Instrumentation

Three quantitative instruments were used to measure the effects of the newly developed rondalla training techniques on students' musicality, ensemble performance, and perceptions of the intervention: (1) the Musicality Evaluation Rubric, (2) the Ensemble Performance Rating Scale, and (3) the Perception Questionnaire on Rondalla Training Techniques. All instruments were subjected to expert content validation by music educators, rondalla conductors, and research specialists to establish appropriateness and alignment with the study objectives. Pilot testing indicated high internal consistency with an overall reliability coefficient of Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$, supporting the suitability of the instruments for quantitative analysis.

The Musicality Evaluation Rubric assessed individual musicianship in three domains: rhythm, tone, and expression. Each domain was rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (needs improvement) to 5 (excellent), with higher scores indicating stronger musicality as demonstrated through timing accuracy, sound quality control, and expressive interpretation.

The Ensemble Performance Rating Scale evaluated group-level performance outcomes, focusing on the collective execution of rondalla pieces in terms of synchronization, blend/balance, and cohesion/interpretative unity. Ensemble performances were video-recorded to support consistent scoring and to reduce rater bias. Trained music adjudicators applied the scale using a standardized numerical scoring procedure, allowing direct quantitative comparison of ensemble outcomes between the experimental and control groups.

The Perception Questionnaire on Rondalla Training Techniques measured students' engagement and attitudes toward the newly developed training techniques. The questionnaire consisted of 20 Likert-type items, rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It was designed to quantify perceptions of instructional effectiveness, enjoyment, motivation, and confidence, as well as the perceived relevance of the intervention to performance improvement. Mean scores were interpreted using the scale descriptors applied in the study, with higher mean values indicating more favorable perceptions.

2.4 Data Analysis

All quantitative data obtained from the Musicality Evaluation Rubric, Ensemble Performance Rating Scale, and Perception Questionnaire were encoded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 26. Prior to analysis, the data set was screened for completeness and accuracy to ensure the validity of statistical procedures.

Descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, were computed to determine the post-intervention levels of students' musicality in terms of rhythm, tone, and expression, the ensemble performance levels of the experimental and control groups, and the level of positive perception of students toward the newly developed rondalla training

techniques. These measures were used to summarize central tendency and variability of scores across all indicators.

To examine the effectiveness of the training intervention, an independent-samples *t*-test was used to compare post-test ensemble performance scores between the experimental and control groups. This inferential statistical test was appropriate because it assessed the difference in means between two independent groups exposed to different instructional conditions. The test was conducted at the 0.05 level of significance, and a statistically significant result was determined when the computed *p*-value was less than 0.05.

All statistical results were reported using standard conventions, including test statistics, degrees of freedom where applicable, and exact *p*-values, to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the findings.

3 Results

The musicality of rondalla students who received the new training techniques was assessed in terms of rhythm, tone, and expression. The results showed that the experimental group attained a very high level of musicality after one academic semester, with an overall mean score of 4.48 (SD = 0.40).

Among the three musicality components, rhythm obtained the highest mean score (*M* = 4.52, *SD* = 0.38), followed by expression (*M* = 4.48, *SD* = 0.40) and tone quality (*M* = 4.45, *SD* = 0.42). All three indicators fell within the “very high” descriptive range, indicating that the training techniques were effective in enhancing students’ rhythmic accuracy, tonal control, and expressive interpretation.

The study presents the ensemble performance scores for the experimental and control groups. The results revealed that students who underwent the newly developed rondalla training techniques achieved a very high ensemble performance level (*M* = 4.56, *SD* = 0.39). In contrast, the control group, which continued with traditional training methods, obtained a high ensemble performance level (*M* = 4.05, *SD* = 0.47).

The higher mean score of the experimental group indicates superior outcomes in synchronization, blend/balance, and overall ensemble cohesion compared with the control group. These findings suggest that structured, reflective training techniques contributed to stronger group coordination and unified performance.

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether the observed difference in ensemble performance between the two groups was statistically significant. The results showed a mean difference of 0.51 in favor of the experimental group. The computed *t*-value was 7.24, with a corresponding *p*-value of 0.000, which is lower than the 0.05 level of significance.

These results indicate a statistically significant difference between the ensemble performance scores of students who received the new training techniques and those who received traditional training. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference between the two groups was rejected. The findings confirm that the newly developed rondalla training techniques had a significant positive effect on ensemble performance.

The level of students’ positive perception toward the newly developed rondalla training techniques was also examined. The results revealed a very high overall perception mean score of 4.54 (SD = 0.39).

Among the perception indicators, engagement and enjoyment received the highest mean score (*M* = 4.63, *SD* = 0.36), followed by motivation and confidence (*M* = 4.55, *SD* = 0.40), learning effectiveness (*M* = 4.50, *SD* = 0.41), and application and relevance (*M* = 4.48, *SD* = 0.39). All indicators were interpreted as “very high,” indicating that students perceived the training techniques as engaging, effective, and relevant to their musical development.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the newly developed rondalla training techniques significantly enhanced students' musicality and ensemble performance while fostering strong positive perceptions and engagement among participants.

4. Discussion

The present study examined whether newly developed rondalla training techniques could enhance student musicians' musicality and ensemble performance within school-based contexts. The results indicate that the intervention was associated with (i) very high post-intervention musicality (overall $M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.40$), (ii) higher ensemble performance for the experimental group ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 0.39$) relative to the control group ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.47$), and (iii) a statistically significant difference in ensemble performance between groups ($t = 7.24$, $p < .05$), alongside very high student perceptions of the approach (overall $M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.39$). Collectively, these findings suggest that the training techniques served as an effective pedagogical intervention, strengthening both individual musicianship (rhythm, tone, expression) and collective ensemble outcomes (synchronization, blend/balance, cohesion).

The experimental group's very high musicality scores—particularly in rhythm ($M = 4.52$), tone ($M = 4.45$), and expression ($M = 4.48$)—are consistent with a growing body of research emphasizing that musical expressiveness and interpretive competence can be systematically developed through structured teaching strategies rather than assumed as an incidental by-product of repetition. In particular, dialogic teaching and teacher modeling have been identified as key mechanisms through which young musicians develop expressive awareness and musical agency. Meissner and Timmers (2020) reported that dialogic instruction supported by modeling stimulates pupils' thinking about musical character and interpretive choices, thereby enhancing expressiveness in performance. Meissner's subsequent theoretical framework further explains how expressive learning is facilitated when instruction integrates interpretive dialogue, reflective thinking, and guided examples, making expressiveness teachable and assessable.

The pattern observed in this study—simultaneous improvement in rhythmic control and expressive interpretation—aligns with the view that musicality emerges from the interaction of technical fluency and meaning-making. When learners receive explicit prompts to shape phrasing, control tone color, and align rhythmic intention with ensemble pulse, they are more likely to demonstrate musical outcomes that extend beyond accuracy toward artistry. The rondalla context may further amplify the salience of these skills, as its idiomatic sound depends heavily on coordinated articulation, tremolo control, and melodic-accompanimental hierarchy—elements that require intentional teaching, not merely rehearsal time.

The experimental group's superior ensemble performance and the significant between-group difference support the broader conclusion that ensemble cohesion improves when rehearsals deliberately train listening, synchronization, and adaptive coordination. Research on ensemble pedagogy highlights that ensemble skill is not reducible to aggregated individual technique; rather, it is an interpersonal capability involving attention, responsiveness, and shared interpretive alignment. In a pandemic-era study on training ensemble skills, Karkina et al. (2022) demonstrated that structured, interactive tasks ("e-tivities") can improve ensemble-related competencies by requiring learners to engage in focused coordination activities, reflective listening, and iterative feedback cycles—even in constrained instructional conditions.

Similarly, qualitative evidence from music teachers indicates that ensemble development depends on pedagogical practices that support group dynamics and listening habits. Schiavio et al. (2020) emphasize that teachers view ensemble skills as intertwined with learning skills—particularly listening, mutual adaptation, and the ability to maintain productive social-performative dynamics within a group. These perspectives align with the present findings: the experimental group's higher scores plausibly reflect training sequences that made coordination goals explicit rather than relying solely on conductor-led demonstration.

From a learning-theory standpoint, embodied music cognition provides an additional explanation for why structured ensemble training may strengthen synchronization and cohesion. Bremmer and Nijs (2024) outline how entrainment, alignment, and prediction—core processes in ensemble coordination—are supported by embodied strategies such as gesture, physical modeling, and movement-based timing cues. In rondalla rehearsal, where synchronized plectrum articulation and consistent pulse are central to ensemble clarity, embodied cueing and movement-supported internal pulse training may help stabilize group timing and enhance collective precision. Thus, the observed gains in synchronization and cohesion are consistent with research indicating that embodied rehearsal strategies can improve ensemble alignment and shared temporal frameworks.

Students reported very high positive perceptions of the training techniques ($M = 4.54$), with particularly strong ratings for engagement and enjoyment ($M = 4.63$). This is pedagogically significant: interventions that improve performance but reduce learner motivation can be difficult to sustain in real school conditions. The present results instead suggest that the new techniques were not only effective but also acceptable and motivating to learners.

Related research supports the linkage between ensemble participation, motivation, and perceived personal growth. Bussu and Mangiarulo (2024), for example, found that adolescents involved in ensemble music-making reported benefits in communication, teamwork, and self-confidence, alongside challenges that required adaptive learning and persistence. While their work focused on a different ensemble tradition, it reinforces the general point that structured ensemble experiences can foster both musical and socio-emotional development, which in turn support continued engagement and practice.

A further implication concerns assessment design. In school music contexts, what is taught is often shaped by what is evaluated. The study's use of structured rubrics for musicality and ensemble performance aligns with recommendations in Philippine music education research that emphasize the need for systematic, performance-based assessment tools. Tabuena et al. (2021) discuss how music assessment techniques in the Philippine K–12 context should capture meaningful performance outcomes to support skill transfer and instructional improvement. The present findings suggest that when musicality dimensions (rhythm, tone, expression) and ensemble outcomes (synchronization, blend/balance, cohesion) are operationalized and measured consistently, instructional interventions can be evaluated with greater clarity, supporting evidence-based refinement of rondalla pedagogy.

Finally, the findings contribute to a limited but important body of scholarship on the rondalla as a culturally significant ensemble form. Ethnomusicological work underscores the rondalla's role in Filipino identity and its enduring place in Filipino musical soundscapes, including in diaspora contexts. Rockell (2013) highlights the rondalla's role in cultural transmission and its symbolic connection to Philippine national identity. Within schools, this cultural function intersects directly with pedagogy: improving rondalla musicality and ensemble performance strengthens not only technical outcomes but also the quality and credibility of cultural performance and heritage transmission. In this respect, the study's results support the educational value of investing in structured rondalla training approaches that are both musically rigorous and culturally sustaining.

References

- Arts Education Partnership. (2011). *How music education helps students learn, achieve, and succeed: Music matters*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED541070.pdf>
- Bremmer, M., & Nijs, L. (2024). Embodiment in music education. *Journal de recherche en éducat*ions artistiques, 2, 13–26. Retrieved from <https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/106343/embodiment-in-music-education>

- Bussu, A., & Mangiarulo, M. (2024). Playing music together: Exploring the impact of a classical music ensemble on adolescent's life skills self-perception. *PLOS ONE*, 19(7), e0306326. Retrieved from <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0306326>
- House Bill No. 11290. (2024). *An act institutionalizing rondalla training programs for music teachers*. House of Representatives. Retrieved from https://docs.congress.hrep.online/legisdocs/basic_19/HB11290.pdf
- Inquirer.net. (2024). House bill pushes 'rondalla' training program for music teachers. Retrieved from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2026934/house-bill-pushes-rondalla-training-program-for-music-teachers>
- Karkina, S., Faizrahmanova, L., Kamalova, I., Akbarova, G., & Kaur, B. (2022). Performance practice in a pandemic: Training ensemble skills using e-tivities in music teacher education. *Frontiers in Education*, 7, 817310. Retrieved from <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2022.817310/full>
- Meissner, H. (2021). Theoretical framework for facilitating young musicians' learning of expressive performance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 584171. Retrieved from <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.584171/full>
- Meissner, H., & Timmers, R. (2020). Young musicians' learning of expressive performance: The importance of dialogic teaching and modeling. *Frontiers in Education*, 5, 11. Retrieved from <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2020.00011/full>
- Rockell, K. (2013). The Philippine rondalla: A gift of musical heritage in a migrant context. *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, 9(1). Retrieved from <https://ijaps.usm.my/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Art4-Rockell.pdf>
- Schiavio, A., Küssner, M. B., & Williamon, A. (2020). Music teachers' perspectives and experiences of ensemble and learning skills. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 291. Retrieved from <https://public-pages-files-2025.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00291/pdf>
- Tabuena, A. C., Morales, G. S., & Perez, M. L. A. C. (2021). Music assessment techniques for evaluating the students' musical learning and performance in the Philippine K-12 basic education curriculum. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 21(2), 192–203. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED618566.pdf>