

## **UTILIZING PRAGMATISM PRINCIPLES IN LEARNING JAZZ GUITAR REHARMONIZATION TECHNIQUE USING MALAY ASLI SONG**

**Chamil Arkhasa Nikko Mazlan**

*Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris*

**Mohd Hassan Abdullah**

*Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris*

Corresponding Author  
[jazzerlogy@gmail.com](mailto:jazzerlogy@gmail.com)

This article proposes a pragmatism approach useful in explaining the logic of learning jazz guitar reharmonization techniques. Music and practices are both unseparated and unified in the field of music education. This poses challenges for traditional and western music consolidation because reharmonization technique is only known in western music repertoires while traditional music normally utilizes old-style repertoires. Some practitioners rooted in dogmatic thinking still maintain authenticity and traditions. In this study, our data is gathered using qualitative content analysis. We then identified similarity of pragmatism principles along with the interpretation of jazz reharmonization techniques. We suggest that pragmatism approach is a useful pathway for music educators to reconceptualize teaching and learning of traditional music using jazz reharmonization technique and then, recreate and innovate a new sound and context of learning jazz harmony rather than using jazz standards repertoires.

**Keywords:** Pragmatism, Jazz Reharmonization Technique, Malay Asli song, Instrumental Jazz Guitar Lesson, Music Education

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this article, we examine and connect pragmatism principle with learning jazz guitar reharmonization techniques in the context of using Malay Asli song. We begin with the first section, providing a problem statement that drives this discussion paper. A methodology section is followed by an overview of pragmatism, that includes definitions of pragmatism and reharmonization. Then, we lay the principle of pragmatism (Sharma et al. 2018) and aligning it to the context of applying jazz guitar reharmonization using Malay Asli songs as examples of analysis.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Applying music theory such as chords, scales or even to make improvisation lines, required both understandings in the music-theoretical and practical aspect of chosen music instrument. It is because practice and theory are amalgamated, even though these ideas are not recognizable among practitioners (Regelski & Gates, 2009). But practices in actual music itself does not seem to unified. Result on jazz education in Malaysia and Taiwan done by Low (2014) indicates that jazz pedagogy in Malaysia mostly based on The Real Book while Taiwan teachers develop their reconstructing Chinese oldies and pop song and use it as material in teaching and learning jazz music. Low also mention that jazz music programs in Malaysia had been there for more than 20 years while Taiwan just started the jazz program.

From the above report, we found it fascinating and inspiring when Taiwan utilizing and focusing on their own oldies' repertoire in teaching jazz. In the context of Malaysia music education, intercultural music is not fully utilize, even transcultural approach being adapt to in line with Malaysia National Philosophy of Education (Wong et al. 2015). The idea of merging jazz idiom with Malay culture in Malaysia arise around the 1960s, as jazz composer back then attempt to promote jazz music to Malaysian society (Jan et al. 2015). How can the younger generation be appreciating and recognizing national music, when there are still people debating on national identity? (Chan, 2005). There is a need to change in learning both modern and traditional music in Malaysia. According to Klopper (2010), a concentration on the dynamic interchange is necessary among musician, teachers, learners and various musical group. Intercultural or hybrid music is a need in music education, as one of the main features in Malaysia music education system (Wong et al. 2016). Although the awareness of hybridizing music is embedded in the music education system, this does not transpire among Malay Asli traditional music practitioners, where there is little disagreement and debating on the issue of which version is the most authentic or original (Mohd Nasir, 2010; Shahanum, 2016). Inadequately, even though intercultural music has been introduced in music

programs, there are few music teachers contemplate that it is hard to find a parallel point between intercultural music and it is not relevant to execute (Cain, 2015).

Executing intercultural music also taken into an impact of negative perception. For instance, an example of rigid narrow mind-sets, Ibrahim (2004) giving the suggestion that to sustain and maintain the legacy of Malay music, vocal training class should only conduct by an expert in Malay phonology, not someone who is expert in English phonology. Moreover, Ibrahim criticized, it is like a cursed if traditional music world uses English as their lingua franca in teaching vocal classes. In addition, traditional music lesson presence in a conventional way, conducted through oral tradition via observing, listening and playing (Shahanum, 2013) and knowledge of Malay Asli music conveyed without any formal education by self-taught traditional music practitioners (Suflan Faizal, 2015). This led to Malaysia formal music education from schools to a tertiary level just preserving the traditional music itself, rather than recontextualized the music (Shahanum, 2016). Moving toward the 21st century, learning music should be more dynamic, flexible and democratic ways, not autocratic. Ignoring the divergent of music will only lead to narrow scope and unconsciously fall into a default setting, an unknown and uncritically outdated setting of learning that affects the process and result on learning and teaching (Regelski & Gates, 2009).

In a positive perception, intercultural music education can benefits students to increase tolerance, promoting better insight and acceptance among people (Shahanum, 2016). Appreciating and learning multicultural music can also help to globalized music curriculum (Kang, 2016). As this issue arises, multicultural elements for teaching hybrid music need to be done (Wong & Chiu, 2016). Shahanum (2016) also point out that a change in education is needed and should be consistent with the current trend of globalization. According to Klopper (2010), music education is a right platform for intercultural music, if we want to tackle a wider community, we need a document and music transcription. In order to fill the current gap, this article offers a glance of how the principle of pragmatism theory can align learning jazz reharmonization techniques using Malay Asli song.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study conducted using qualitative content analysis method, which addresses the content from the book, physical artefacts, images, audio-visual and other difference media (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). In order to collect relevant documents for this study, material for this study collected via computer databases literature as databases provide and easy access on thousands of journals, conference papers and other material on different field of study (Creswell, 2013). We analytically search using Google Search

and Google Scholar, search on the keyword “pragmatism”, “jazz guitar reharmonization”, “jazz harmony” and the process of searching completed after we identified suitable material that meets our criteria on highlight pragmatism principles and makes parallel with the concept of jazz reharmonization techniques using Malay Asli song. The use of Google Scholar it is not limited to the library or traditional bibliographic databases and also considered as easy to use and simple web service that established a revolution in access scientific kinds of literature (Orduna-Malea et al. 2014).

## 4. DEFINITION

### **4.1 Harmony and Reharmonization**

To understand the texture of musical elements, it is important to learn music theory (Benedek, 2015). In music theory, there are four essential elements: melody, rhythm, tone colour and harmony (Copland, 2011). In the context of this article, I will discuss on harmony, which is necessary to operationalize reharmonization techniques in the context of jazz idioms. Harmony is when two or more notes played simultaneously at the same time (Kostka et al. 2012). The terms harmony associated in both classical music theory and jazz harmony. Backman (2008) found that tonality principles of jazz harmony derives from romantic and classical ages, dated around the 18th and 19th centuries. Other studies with a similar statement, indicate that functional harmony or tonal harmony originated in the 18th century, late Baroque period and spreads in music in Romanticism period, around 19th century (Marsik, 2013). In the same way, Forster (2010) describe there are many similar norms of traditional harmony in jazz, particularly functional harmony, which use as a guide to identifying chord relation to the key centre. Hence, Spitzer (2015) stated jazz harmony vocabulary arises from the classical music of “common practice” and jazz musician adapting popular songs and reinventing using a shorter musical structure form like 12, 16 or 32 bars. Apart from musical structure, jazz harmony also highlighted the use of extended harmony of particular chord tones, such as 7th, 9th, 11th and 13th (Bradly, 2014).

Felts (2002) highlighting reharmonization with an analogy of painting an old car with new paint, where reharmonization provides a new colour to the current song, by modifying melody with difference chord. Bradley (2014) describe reharmonization as a process of changing the original chord while adding or substituting a new type of chord. According to Terefenko (2014), the jargon “reharmonization” and “harmonization” one way or another correlated. “Harmonization” labels as supporting a song with a new suitable chord while “reharmonization” terms mean using the current chord of a song and replace it with a new chord. In this article, the terms reharmonization employs both

ways by using any modified chord progression and original chord to make available a set of new chord changes to support the melody (Terefenko, 2014).

#### **4.2 Principle of Pragmatism**

Reviewing on multiple literature of pragmatism, show that there are three names consistently associated with pragmatism, they are Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey (Agarwal & Maheshwari, 2010; Farjoun et al., 2015; Nowell, 2015; Russill, 2016; Adeleye; 2017). Pragmatic terminology came from Greek vocabulary, meaning action, the other word for it, practice or practical that came from the word pragmatikos (Farjoun, 2015; Adeleye, 2017). Pragmatic define a practical and flexible way of solving a problem (Farjoun et al, 2015). Praxis and pragmatism shared the same meaning as praxis indicate human action, while pragmatism refers as tangible action (Regelski, 2017). Likewise, studies by Plowright (2016) explained Charles Sanders Peirce believes that definitions just the beginning of understanding an idea. Therefore, he has developed a method of higher-order thinking to explained that understanding, which Peirce views as pragmatism.

According to pragmatism, whatever is practical and works, that is the truth. It is not right or wrong on the ideas themselves, they are true if the ideas employed can solve a problem related to educational practice (Bhatt, 2018). Moreover, similar studies have been done on pragmatism, they believe that reality is not in one perception, but can be seen in multidimensional. Whatever works also can change, because of reality change. Thus, no one can claim what they believed in possess any ultimate truth (Sharma et al. 2018). Pragmatism views 'reality', 'goodness' or 'badness' and 'truth' in the same relative terms, that is why pragmatism is also known as experimentalism, because an experiment is the only criterion to gain the truth (Adeleye, 2017). Reality is something that we believed, linked by our past experiences that influenced our action and thinking. Charles Sanders Peirce suggested to view belief as a way of thinking and habit as a rule of action or a rule for action (Plowright, 2016). Other studies on pragmatism proposed seven principles in viewing pragmatism:

**Pluralism:** There are numerous of reality, not just one because each person holding a truth according to what they experience in the past.

**Emphasis on Change:** The world is a constant flux, evolving and progressing to attain the truth.

**Emphasis on Social Aspects:** Education is to develop social personality so that student can excel in society while developing their social circumstances.

**Utilitarianism:** To fulfil our purposes and to test the truth of our action with reality.

**Changing Aim and Values:** Old values and aim cannot be the truth as situation and condition are changing from time to time.

**Individualism:** Adjust according to our environment, equally with common interest and liberty.

**Experimentalism:** Emphasise the importance of action rather than mere ideas.

(Sharma et al. 2018)

## 5. UTILIZING PRAGMATISM PRINCIPLES IN LEARNING JAZZ GUITAR REHARMONIZATION TECHNIQUES

Taking into consideration these seven principles of pragmatism highlighted by Sharma et al. (2018) above, we align with jazz reharmonization techniques. Firstly, pragmatism emphasized on pluralism. Pragmatism believe the truth is not one but many, same goes with chords, by utilizing reharmonization technique, a note can transform into various types of chord, either major to minor, dominant to minor and many more. Fascinatingly, pluralism also exists in terms of the basic musical concept that relatively connected with scales such as “transposition”, “inversion”, “triad” and “chord type” (Tymoczko, 2011). Likewise, there are various of reharmonization techniques, such as “Tritone Substitution” (Levine, 2011; Tymoczko, 2011; Broze & Shanahan, 2013; Terefenko, 2014), “Reharmonizing V as II-V” (Levine, 2011), “Reharmonizing Minor Chord” (Levine, 2011; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko, 2016), “Reharmonizing V Chords” (Levine, 2011; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko, 2016), “Reharmonizing I Chords” (Levine, 2011; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko, 2016) and much more. In this article, we demonstrate how a single idea of reharmonization aligning with the principle of pragmatism as mentioned above. Referring notation 1 below is the example of Malay Asli song title Damak before applying reharmonization:



**Notation 1:** Excerpt Instrumental Malay Asli *Damak*

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4tVZOWc2T0>)

Referring notation 1, from first to the third measure, using G triad, consist of G note as root, B as major third and D as perfect fifth. Fourth measure using D triad with D note as root, F# as major third and perfect fifth on the note A. The concept of pluralism in pragmatism can be illustrated by using reharmonization, as mentioned by Chamil Arkhasa Nikko (2016), a major7 chord can be expanded and transform into six different

types of chords, using the patent of Major7 – Minor7 – Major7 – Minor7 – Dominant7 – Minor7 $\flat$ 5 – Minor7. Notation 2 below will be explained how a single chord G transform into a different quality of chords:



**Notation 2:** Reharmonized Instrumental Malay Asli Damak

Referring on notation 2, the original chord of G major on measure one to three (refer notation 1) now change into three different quality, first measure with Emin7, the second measure turn into A7 and third measure using Dmaj7. On Fourth measure, instead of using D triad, the chord now adding up an interval of minor 7th which now the quality of the chord change into a dominant 7th.

Another principle of pragmatism, we combined both “emphasized on change” together with “changing on values and aim”. Even though the reharmonization technique synonym within jazz music, we argue that the idea reharmonization technique can also complement into traditional music, by substituting the old chords with a new one. As illustrated in notation 1 and the different type of chord emerged after applying reharmonization, clearly showed that there are changes happened. In more explicit views, these changes can be view and relate with pragmatism principle of changing on values and aim. From G major chord, values or quality of chord changed to Emin7 on the first measure, A7 on second measure and Dmaj7 on the third measure after reharmonizing the original chord. In another way around, reharmonizing change the aim of how we label chord changes. From a straight Imaj chord for three measures in the key of G major, change into II – V – I progression in the key of D major as shown below:



**Notation 3:** Excerpt Instrumental Malay Asli Damak  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4tVZOWc2T0>)

Chord Degree: I<sup>min7</sup> V<sup>7</sup> I<sup>maj7</sup>

(A) E<sup>min7</sup> A<sup>7</sup> D<sup>Maj7</sup>

**Notation 4:** Reharmonized Instrumental Malay Asli Damak

Next principle of pragmatic is the concept of “utilitarianism”, which pragmatists believe truths and reality need to be tested, critically examine is it useful to fulfil our purposes. Anything useful, then that is the truth (Sharma et al. 2018). Referring back to the original chord from measure one to three as demonstrate in notation 3, is there any logic of how a chord with major tonality change into minor tonality? Yes, there is. This is where reharmonization technique fit nicely to fulfil the purpose of changing a chord and producing different type of sounds. The reason Emin7 chord suitable to use because the melody lines start with G note, which also served as minor 3rd for Emin7. On the second measure, replacing G to A7 chord, with B note as a melody lines, creating a sound of A7(9). The note B is a major 2nd interval, tension 9th in A7. Semiotically we relate the underpinned meaning of “reality” as “sound”, which any chord can sound pleasant or unpleasant, in other words, either consonant or dissonant (Fishmen et al. 2001).

Another pragmatism principle is “Individualism”, which pragmatists believe each of everyone with equality, fraternity and freedom in every aspect and we should adjust accordingly to our milieu. By utilizing reharmonization, more ways of interpreting music arise and we can voice out unique sound of chord, individually. Reharmonization technique can offer freedom as we can choose what type of chord we want to use, what kind of tension notes and how we harmonized the melody and much more to offer. Likewise, guitar students can freely choose type of reharmonization technique, adjust it within their musical preferences. Example below demonstrate how we interpret pragmatism principle of individualism with reharmonization technique:

- 1) Original chord before applying reharmonization:

**Notation 5:** Excerpt Instrumental Malay Asli Damak  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4tVZOWc2T0>)



The first measure, G note on the first beat, root note for G major chord. On the second measure, B note on the first beat, major 3rd for G major chord. The third measure, D note on the first beat, perfect 5th of G major chord.

2) Variation 1 using Bmin7 on G major:



**Notation 6:** Sample of chord reharmonized using B<sup>min7</sup>

The first measure, G note on the first beat, minor 6th for Bmin7, this creating a Bmin7(#5) sound, as minor 6th enharmonic to sharp 5th interval. On the second measure, B note on the first beat, root note for Bmin7. The third measure, D note on the first beat, minor 3rd of Bmin7.

3) Variation 2 using Dmaj7 on G major:



**Notation 7:** Sample of chord reharmonized using D<sup>maj7</sup>

The first measure, G note on the first beat, perfect 4th for Dmaj7, creating a Dmaj7sus4 sound. On the second measure, B note on the first beat, major 6th for Dmaj7. The third measure, D note on the first beat, the root note of Dmaj7.

4) Variation 3 using F#min7 on G major:



**Notation 8:** Sample of chord reharmonized using F#<sup>min7</sup>

The first measure, G note on the first beat, minor 2nd for F#min7, creating a flat ninth sound. On the second measure, B note on the first beat, perfect 4th for F#min7. This creating a F#min7(11) sound. The third measure, D note on the first beat, minor 6th of F#min7, creating the sound of F#min7(#5).

5) Variation 4 using A7 on G major:



**Notation 9:** Sample of chord reharmonized using A<sup>7</sup>

The first measure, G note on the first beat, minor 7th for A7. On the second measure, B note on the first beat, major 2nd for A7, creating an A7(9) sound. The third measure, D note on the first beat, perfect 4th of A7, creating the sound of A7sus4.

6) Variation 5 using C#min7<sup>b</sup>5 on G major:



**Notation 10:** Sample of chord reharmonized using C#min7<sup>b</sup>5

The first measure, G note on the first beat, augmented 4th or enharmonic to flat fifth for C#min7<sup>b</sup>5. On the second measure, B note on the first beat, minor 7th for C#min7<sup>b</sup>5. The third measure, D note on the first beat, minor 2nd of C#min7<sup>b</sup>5, creating the sound of flat ninth sound.

7) Variation 6 using Emin7 on G major:



**Notation 11:** Sample of chord reharmonized using E<sup>min</sup>7

The first measure, G note on the first beat, minor 3rd for Emin7. On the second measure, B note on the first beat, perfect 5th for Emin7. The third measure, D note on the first beat, minor 7th of Emin7.

Lastly, we combined both pragmatism principle on “emphasize social aspect” and “experimentalism”. Pragmatism emphasis practical aspect more than just idea. By experimenting, we could justify either our idea work or not. The educative process occurs when we start exploring. In our case, as we illustrated above. Experimenting Malay Asli song using jazz reharmonization technique, indirectly engaging students in a social aspect, exploring new musical ideas of two different type of music, both traditional and modern idioms.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As Bhatt (2018) mention, philosophy is useful in education because we can examine our rationality on educational ideas with another ideal's consistency. To prove this claim, we explored how pragmatism can occasionally reform, complement traditional music using reharmonization techniques. The world itself is a constant flux (Farjoun et al. 2015), keep changing and the same goes to music. Hereafter, education is dynamic and it will keep evolving, chances to preserve traditional heritage can continue with mixing both western and traditional music, producing new form and style of Malay Asli Music (Mohd Nasir, 2010).

There is no point of arguing the authenticity of a certain style or norms especially in traditional music, because from pragmatism standpoint, whatever true before, may not be in the future (Adeleye, 2016). We should not stick ourselves in the weight of custom and tradition, apathy and fear, because this will lead us to lost in today's world (Sharma et al. 2018). If we stand with ignorance and stick with what believe yesterday, this will lead to narrow scope practices in music and unconsciously fall into a "default setting", an unknown and uncritically outdated setting of learning that affects the process and result on learning and teaching (Regelski & Gates, 2009).

Moreover, as we discuss in this paper, reharmonization techniques work fine with Malay Asli song, coherence with pragmatism view, whatever works, then it is likely true (Sharma et al. 2018). With the assimilations of jazz reharmonization and Malay Asli song, student's perception of the usage of reharmonization will be widened up, offering a new kind of experience. As Adeleye (2017) mention, we should not limit the experience and it should be productive, so we can develop an educative experience for the future. If we don't put credit on a new style of Malay Asli song, this music will only continue to stay within the older generation old. Any practices from different music genre surely share similarities of musical elements such as harmony. Each different practice in music can closely be linked together with other musical styles. As we discuss in this paper, carrying the legacy of traditional music repertoires in a new and different path of learning jazz harmony theory.

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