

Teaching and Learning Music among Younger Children: Methods and Impacts of Pedagogy Development

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There are several methods in teaching music to young children. This paper aims to investigate the methodologies for teaching music for young children of five to ten years old. The research objectives for this study was to investigate the methodologies used by music teachers in teaching music to young children; and to determine the impacts of music learning on young children's behavior. A total of six purposely-selected respondents took part in this qualitative study with music teachers who had at least five years of teaching music with young children. Open interview questions were carried out using a guided interview protocol of ten questions supporting the research objectives. Findings posited that three teaching methods namely: 1) imitation method facilitates learning for psychomotor development skills for young children; 2) instructional and visual aids in the teaching processes facilitates the cognitive development and learning skills; and 3) incorporating movements into the teaching process which inculcate fun and enjoy but with guided learning. The study revealed the impacts of music learning supports the young children's development specifically: 1) improve learning skills and performance, 2) improve self-discipline and emotional control, 3) encourage creativity in young children. However, the teaching methodologies on teaching music on young children need supporting factors to capture their span of attention in learning namely: 1) facilitation to their needs to maintain their focus to learn; 2) voice projection and facial expressions from the teachers to retain the young students span of attention; 3) movement method to create fun and joyful learning environment for the young learners; and 4) offering rewards to create a healthy competitive learning culture among the young children.

Keywords: *Music teaching and learning, music, younger children, teaching methods, music education.*



Introduction

Early educational experiences significantly impact the long-term direction of children's development (Fox, 2000). Introducing music at a young age has been proven to inspire the young children to learn, develop their learning skills and psychomotor skills, and also develop their emotions and moods (Schellenberg, 2005). Niland (2019) highlighted that music education pedagogy for young children is often teacher led and structured toward specific behavioural outcomes; and that it is important to make learning music enjoyable. On the contrary, teaching music in young children is a tough challenge in school such as keeping their focus and span of attention in learning, determining the appropriate techniques for teaching music to various children, and the constraint factors such as lack of resources, limited time allocation in the school syllabus (Ismail et al., 2021; Ismail & Loo, 2018). Hence, with this background, the researchers aimed 1) to investigate the methodologies used by music teachers in teaching music to young children; and 2) to determine the impacts of music learning on young children's behavior.

History of Music Education in Malaysia

Formal music education was introduced in schools as a subject in 1983 which was approximately twenty-six (26) years after the Independence (Abdullah, 1990). Much of the curricular material in the music subject was based on the colonial British education system. Years later, the Malaysian government started sending brilliant scholars to study in countries such as the United States, Japan, Korea, Germany, and India for educational exposure in all fields. Selected music educators were given scholarships to pursue music education in the United States of America. The early days started with vocal repertoire singing the national anthem and the school song. With the inclusion of basic percussion instruments, musical practices were mainly vocal. Students also listened to music lessons on the radio station, Radio Malaya during school broadcasts sessions. During this era, choirs and marching bands were mostly organised by larger English schools. Music activities such as singing, playing musical instruments and movements were then gradually introduced in 1985 to provide learning opportunities for students to learn the basic concepts of music (Ismail et al., 2018).

The Importance of Music Education

Lehtonen (2005) shared that music brings optimism, consolation, and fresh ideas in the challenging, difficult, emotionally hard circumstances in life. These authors postulated that these sorts of encounters are common among the clinical music therapists. Music can transmit "mixed feelings," by experiencing both a sad and happy mood. Additionally, Batt-Rawden et al (2015) in their study stated that music listening and musicking are crucial tools in the process of self-development, improving well-being and providing support in the face of illness for rehabilitation and in a way improve quality of life. Another study by Jiang et. al (2016) imposed that by determining how different variables associated with listening to music can influence

stress reduction. Most commonly are the ordinary people who value music as a significant and valued session especially participated within the family members.

Music in Early Childhood Education

“Learning music plays an important role in young children’s development” quoted by Kim and Kemple (2011). Simultaneously, Paquette and Rieg (2008) mentioned that playing music can change the classrooms into positive learning environments where children are being prepared for the development stage in terms of socially, emotionally and academically.

This is supported by the research done by Fonseca et al. (2011), music and songs were proven factors that increase sensibility, improve concentration, aid memory, help to develop reading and writing abilities, foster physical development and increase enjoyment when learning.

Music can also be used for children's learning environment to develop skills in thinking, imagination, and language of the child in the day care centres. From the perspective of early childhood education, learning music in early childhood can develop initial creative social development skills and shape the young children’s characteristics. This was supported by study done by Subur (2017) who elaborated that a child’s future, talent, creativity, and social potential are important personal attributes. Though, in developing learning strategies through singing, Thus, teachers should consider the characteristics of the child, develop learning strategies through singing and music to make the early learning phase meaningful and fun.

Impact of Music to Younger Children

Music relieves tension and provides a positive effect on psychological adjustment (Wang, 2018). Listening to the music helps to relieve sadness, unhappiness, or emotional distress (Kawakami et. al, 2014). Music influences neural structures involved in the regulation of emotion (Moore, 2013); and music can stimulate deep emotions in a listener (Västfjäll, 2001).

Georgieva (2017) emphasized that music also enhanced the younger generation’s creativity. Not only that, it was mentioned that programming power of music can be channeled for both creativity as positive outcomes and for destruction as negative impact. Musical creativity has been connected to the social and emotional development of children and its impact is increasingly recognized in psychological and therapeutic studies (Kotsoupidou et. al, 2009).

These groups of researchers concurred with Hickey et. al (2001) studies on understanding of music in creative ways should be the core of philosophy and practice. All these studies shared the impacts of music learning to students, particularly the young children.

On the other hand, Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (Moran, 2013) hypothesized that students should be engaged in high order thinking in the forms of: analysing, practical, and

conducting research in their lessons. Study by Georgieva (2017) when music was taught in the classroom, learning music helps children to develop and learn useful listening skills and concentration, provokes their patience and perseverance; all of which are important for coping with future life's problems. Another similar study done by Morrison (1994) concluded that music education through students' involvement in activities such as band, choir, and orchestra have a positive impact on academic achievement, self-discipline, and student leadership skills.

Music yields impact on the physiological responses and responses inside the nervous system, endocrine and cardiovascular system. Moreover, playing or listening to music also lead to mental and body stabilization, enhanced emotion, and lead to positive behaviours (Kwon, et al, 2013). Playing music was indicated to have improved the communication skills among children especially the child with autistic spectrum disorder (Gold, 1996). Based on previous research, it was proven that musical activity provides a framework for mutual interaction and growth for children with severe impairments in their communication skills (Wigram, et al, 2006).

Another study carried out by LaGasse (2017) mentioned that interventions of music in therapy have shown to have beneficial effects on social skills, including increased behavioural involvement, increased emotional engagement, and enhanced social interaction. This study supported the earlier research findings by Gold (1996) that concluded music therapy can enhance the communication skills of children with autistic spectrum disorder. The very nature of music therapy may have encouraged social behaviours that are focused on the social dimensions of music and musical engagement (Nayak et. al, 2000);

Based on the various literature reviews on past studies, it can be summarised that there are five key impacts of music learning namely, 1) emotions, 2) creativity, 3) personal attributes, 4) social behaviour. 3) teaching and learning.

Methods For Music Teaching For Young Children

Persellin (1992) outlined there were three significant methods in teaching music among young children, namely 1) visual, 2) aural, and 3) kinaesthetic. The visual image of the piece and its dependency on the printed page (music score/sheets) was one key element for music teaching and learning whereas students learn a song, as well as the visualization of the notation as they perform. Western music needs a visual interpretation of patterns and because the traditional method to read music remained a visual one (Shehan, 1987).

Next, Persellin (1992) described when musicians were asked to describe how music works in their memory, there were several responses. Some musicians believed it is most important to have an aural memory of the piece. These musicians depend on the piece's internal hearing as they perform. Singing activity is impactful to young children. Through singing, children learn to listen to the pitch, lyrics and interpret them through body movement (Anuar & Ismail, 2021).



Finally, when performing a piece, some musicians are highly dependent on finger movements or kinaesthetic memory. When playing, their muscle memory was their greatest aid (Persellin, 1992). In addition, by a kinaesthetic process, children without any aural or visual abilities will learn best.

Attention and Passion to Learn Music Subject

Axelsson and Flick (2010) defined the phrase “student engagement” as “how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes, their institutions, and each other” (p. 38). It means the student or learner’s attention and passion are important factors in the music teaching and learning process. Learners must give their full attention in learning music subjects in school so that the music learning process can be more efficient.

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research design as this is the most appropriate research method to find out in-depth how music teachers teach music to young children and understand the phenomena on how young children learn through music and the impacts on their pedagogical development.

The research was conducted through an online interview method, using Google Meet as the interview platform where semi-structured interviews were used. An interview protocol (or interview guide) was developed with a total of ten (10) open-ended questions to obtain data from the respondents’ inputs, views and to share their teaching experiences as realities of the world. The design of the interview protocol supported the two (2) research objectives,

A total of six purposely-selected respondents took part in this qualitative study with music teachers who had at least five years of teaching music with young children. The summary of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile Summary of Respondents

Respondents	Gender	Qualification	Years Teaching Music for Young Children	Institution
A	Female	Bachelor of Music Education	31	Public School
B	Male	Bachelor of Science (Hons) (Physics).	10	Private
C	Male	Diploma in Music	5	Private
D	Female	Bachelor of Music Education	7	Public School
E	Female	Diploma in Music	5	Private
F	Male	Diploma in Music	5	Private

The questions were adopted and adapted from a recent study by Rejoss (2020) entitled “The Use of Music in Preschool Classroom: Case Study of Non-Music Teachers”. The interview questions were constructed to fulfil the research objectives: 1) to investigate the methodologies used by music teacher in teaching music to young children; and 2) to determine the impacts of music learning on young children’s behavior

The scope of this research focused solely on teachers who teach music to young children throughout Malaysia.

Findings and Discussion

Four respondents taking part in this research were from private music academies and two respondents from government primary schools teaching music for your children. A total of eighty-three percent (5 respondents) had more than 5 years of teaching experience in music education for young children.

Teaching Methods in Music Education

From the interview analysis, analysis showed that there are three types of teaching methods in teaching music for the young children in schools or academies namely: 1) imitation, 2) instructional books, and 3) movement techniques.

Imitation. The imitation is the process of learning something in terms of imitating and practicing visually. Findings of the study revealed a common theme where all six (6) respondents inferred an imitation method was used to teach the students or young learners.

Respondent E stated that children feel more at ease imitating what their teachers do; that it is

easier for them to understand, and the children can directly follow the way the teacher plays. This finding was also supported by Respondent F who quoted:

“While teaching, I used musical instruments to allow my students to imitate the movement of the teacher; since my class is focused on teaching children at a young age, the common techniques I use is imitation”.

Interestingly, respondent D also provided almost similar responses. Quoted:

“While teaching the recorder, I used the imitation method by playing the melody on the recorder and followed by the students”.

Similarly, feedback responses from respondents A, B, C and E indicated the imitation method makes learning easier for younger children. This technique provides two-way communication between the teachers and the young students to interact and at the same time stay focused in learning.

This finding from this study concurred with most of the literature and past studies carried out by past researchers. A music teaching method adapted to teach the notes of a musical scale to a player so that the notes are remembered (Oren-Chazon, 2002). The instrument included a sound system with a memory where the musical scale's audible tones were stored and meant to reproduce a tone extracted from the memory so that the player would hear it. Then, the students can easily visualise the lesson that they are learning and imitate (repeat by doing).

Instructional Books. The next theme developed from the analysis depicted in instructional books. Using a textbook as a teaching resource is a good idea because the syllabus in the textbook has a specific goal in mind. Undoubtedly, textbooks facilitate the work of teachers and make the planned teaching process organized and effective. Respondent A mentioned that she used a Music Textbook as a guide. She quoted:

The Music Textbook is a guide for all the music teachers...but, we can add other materials to make the class more interesting.”

In addition, respondent A suggested that other teaching materials can be added to make the class more fun and interactive. A teacher must be creative to find the best and most appropriate way to teach young children. This will indirectly entice students to enrol in a class with a positive and cheerful atmosphere.

Respondent C emphasized that he used the book to refer to the syllabus needed, even more for the students who will be taking the ABRSM Grades. Meanwhile, respondent D stated that she used the Music and Arts Education Textbook as well as the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document (DSKP). Likewise, respondents E and F were using ABRSM and Rock School Textbooks.

ABRSM, DSKP and Rock School textbooks are required for teaching students who will enroll in the course for the examination. The goal is to get students to the level required to pass the examination. Indirectly, the use of books serves to organise the learning and teaching process.

Movement Techniques. Finally, the movement technique is another theme of the teaching method derived from the interview analysis. The method of movements in teaching music includes several examples such as the Kodaly, Orff and Dalcroze methods. For example, the method of singing solfege or Movable Do is taught using hand movements while singing, which is widely used by music teachers.

Respondents A and D stated that they used movement methods such as Kodaly, Orff, and Dalcroze, quoted:

“The type of methods that I use to teach are observation through engagement activity such as playtime, acting... Kodaly method, Orff method and Dalcroze method sometimes...” (Respondent A)

“I use the Orff, Kodaly and Dalcroze method to attract students. This method makes them more cheerful and focused.” (Respondent D)

Respondent D stated that she used Orff, Kodaly, and Dalcroze methods to attract students since these methods necessitate movement and creation. As a result, incorporating movement into the teaching process encourages students to learn and stay focused during class. On top of that, respondent E stated that she preferred to use a flexible method based on the children's abilities.

Hence, the analysis inferred that 1) the imitation method facilitates learning for younger children; 2) instructional books aid in the organisation of the learning and teaching processes, and 3) movement techniques incorporated in the teaching process encourages students to learn, enjoy and stay focused during class.

Student's Attention and Passion to Learn Music Subject

There were two questions posed in the interview protocol seeking for the respondents' perceptions on what makes the young children want to learn music. Based on the analysis, results indicated two factors which influenced the student's attention and passion for learning music which are coded as 1) children personality, and 2) methods of teaching delivery

Personality. Three respondents shared similar perceptions on the children's personality. Respondent B stated that his student's attention and passion to learn music were the student's age and personality. This perception was also supported by respondent A. Quote:

“Each student has a different ability to focus in the class; It is very difficult to teach different levels and personality of students in the same classroom. Especially for those students with dyslexia, autism, slow learners and hyperactive.”

Respondent F shared his perceptions:

“Student’s attentions are different...depending on the student's personality. For students who join classes with the basis of interest and want to learn, they are easier to focus on rather than students who were sent by their parents to learn music but have no interest.”

Methods of Teaching Delivery.

i. Student’s needs and desires. This factor influences interest and passion in learning music. Respondents A and E shared the same inputs when the students' needs and desire to learn are met, learning is effective. This is a novel approach to motivate the students' interest and desire to learn indirectly. This perception was also supported by respondent F who said:

“Some students tend to play only songs of their choice. The step I do is by applying the lesson or even drum patterns that match the song of their choice. Despite following the wishes of the students, the right techniques or approaches need to be applied”.

ii. Voice projection and facial expressions were mentioned as proactive methods for influencing young children's interest. Informant C and F shared the same views:

“If students start to lose focus and start playing, I will raise my voice and show facial expressions. Students will stop playing and return to focus ... then I will continue teaching.”

iii. Rewards and Penalty. Respondent D believed in the methods of rewards and penalties as a proactive approach to encourage the young students to learn and develop the skills. Respondent D justified that teachers generally took the initiatives to provide incentives to these young students to pique their interest. This manner encourages a healthy competitive culture among the young learners; hence the learners will compete and work harder to improve their learning. Respondent F shared:

“When the students started to lose focus, the approach I took is by giving rewards to students when they have completed the task. For example, when a student can play the task given, I will reward them with candy. Indirectly, students will have more fun, and they will have a desire to complete the task.”

iv. The Movement Technique. The movement method seems to be one of the factors to attract students' interest in learning music. Respondent D highlighted:

“I apply movement methods even while teaching theory. For example, if on that day they have been taught the topic of tempo. So, the activity that I will carry out to assess the students' understanding is to make free movements according to the song that the teacher plays or clap according to the tempo of the song”.

v. Personality: All respondents shared the same perception on the children’s ability to focus

depending on their personality.

Impact of Music Learning for Child Development

Respondents were asked about their perceptions on impacts of music learning for the development of young children. Three common themes evolved for impact of music learning namely: : 1) improve learning skills and performance, 2) improve self-discipline and emotional control, 3) encourage creativity in young children.

Improve learning skills and performance. Respondent A claimed that music helps children relax (soothing music), focus and memorise (classical music), have fun (body percussion music), and learn math and languages. This finding is somewhat aligned with Paquette and Rieg (2008)'s study which claimed music can turn classrooms into productive learning environments in which children can excel academically, socially, and emotionally.

Improve self-discipline and emotional control

A majority of the respondents shared that music improves emotional behaviour in children particularly, discipline and emotional control of the children. Sweeney et. al (2002) stated that music has been known to have a strong impact on human emotions for decades. Music was mostly known for its mood-triggering potential in the context of social science. Respondent B elaborated:

“Music is very important to children because it helps the brain development for children...music also helps in their creativity development and also discipline.”

Respondent D expressed *children will always have fun while learning music and can indirectly prevent students from becoming passive.* Respondent E claimed that learning music makes students more disciplined. He quoted:

“Music is very important for student development. Music not only stimulates the brain but also allows children to relax and enjoy or in other words have fun.”

These findings concurred with findings from Nicholson et. al (2008) that music improves children's emotional, communicative, and social development. Learning music creates and impacts physiological responses and stimuli within the nervous system, endocrine and cardiovascular system; hence contributes to mental and body stabilization, increased emotion, and positive actions (Kwon et al, 2013)

Encourage creativity in young children. Music learning encourages young children to be more creative. Respondent C shared her experiences. She quoted:

Music is able to make children become more creative. For example, when teaching drums, children able to apply the rhythm taught and apply into their favourite

songs... sometimes you need creativity from each of them to assist the teaching process

Respondent B also shared the same thoughts. He recalled music is important to children because it aids in the development of their brains, creativity, and discipline.

This finding was verified against the literature from Hickey and Peter (2001) who shared that students should be exposed to a wide range of musical songs and styles during their early years. As the students grew older, they began to delve into the "how" of creative composition.

Challenges in Teaching Music for Young Learners

Teaching music for young students and more so young children is a challenging task for all music teachers. In this study, the respondents were asked to share the challenges faced in teaching music for the young learners. The analysis indicated three main challenges faced by music teachers namely: 1) parent's perception, 2) children's attention and ability, and 3) time management.

Parent's Perception. One of the main challenges is parental perception. Parents hold a critical part in their children's education since they serve as role models and symbols to their children.

Respondent A revealed that some parents are closed-minded and consider music not accepted as an academic subject, but rather as a form of entertainment. Contrary, respondent B shared that parents have too high expectations. He expressions:

The high expectations from parents.... Some parents overly push their children to play music. For example, their child has just started learning music for a month but wants to take grade 2 or higher. This puts pressure on their children indirectly and also affects the teacher in teaching...

Children Attention and Ability: The second challenge was getting student attention and focus. Children are easily distracted while learning. Thus, teachers need to know their students' attitudes and personalities. A majority of the respondents feedback that their students did not pay full attention in class.

Respondent E shared his opinion that students' abilities are different and teachers need to be more creative in creating classroom activities. Therefore, teachers must ensure students devote their full attention to learning music in school so that the process of learning can be more successful. The activities such as singing, playing instruments, musical games, and movement are designed to accommodate various types of learning and teaching methods.

Time Management. The crucial challenge is time management. Time is important in teaching music lessons and time is also important for the learning and skills to take place. Time



constraints experienced by teachers and students will affect the learning and teaching process.

Respondents B and F also shared the same views. Both described that time for children to practice is quite limited per class if they do not practice at home. This perception was also supported by respondent D who claimed that the allocation of 30 minutes of music lesson session is insufficient.

As a teacher we need to be more creative and open to choose any teaching methods that are more flexible and not focusing on one way only. This is because every child has their own abilities and limitations. Suitable methods will stimulate children's desire to learn. Therefore, making learning sessions more effective. In conclusion, there are no specific methods that are able to be used in teaching music to the younger generation. The type of method used is according to the ability and level of the children themselves.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Learning music facilitates the growth and stimulation of children's development. Music education contributes to some extent to the physical, mental, and social growth of young children in the early years of a child's life. Undoubtedly, music learning is also capable of molding a young child or person to be disciplined. The teaching methods used by teachers to teach music to younger children must be adaptable, flexible and are not limited to a single approach. The teaching and learning of music must be appropriate and guided by the personality, ability and the readiness of the students to learn. Learning music must be fun and joyful; the young learners should be able to demonstrate the learning outcomes from every piece of task being taught with the imparted knowledge and through engagement of positive teacher-student relationships. Creative teaching methods are suggested based on the learners' personality and abilities, readiness to learn and learning environment. It is suggested that further research be carried out for bachelor music students in various institutions.

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