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THE ROLE OF GENERAL MUSIC EDUCATION IN  
BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS SATISFACTION  
FOR YEAR SIX STUDENTS  
IN KUALA LUMPUR



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WONG JIAN JING

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2024



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THE ROLE OF GENERAL MUSIC EDUCATION IN BASIC  
PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS SATISFACTION FOR  
YEAR SIX STUDENTS IN KUALA LUMPUR

WONG JIAN JING

DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A MASTER'S DEGREE  
OF MUSIC EDUCATION  
(RESEARCH AND COURSEWORK MODE)

FACULTY OF MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS  
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2024



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## ABSTRACT

Student motivation plays a crucial role in general music classrooms. Among various motivation theories, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasises the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: (a) autonomy, (b) competence, and (c) relatedness, which are essential for enhancing individual motivation and well-being. This quantitative study explores how well these needs are met among Year 6 students in general music classrooms. Data were collected from students in four public primary schools using an adapted version of the Basic Psychological Needs Scale questionnaire focusing on three needs in the context of music classrooms. The descriptive analysis indicates that relatedness is the most fulfilled need, with a mean score of 3.78, followed by autonomy with a mean score of 3.61, and competence with a mean score of 3.27. The overall mean score of 3.55 across all three needs indicates that students' basic psychological needs are generally well-supported in music classrooms. These results highlighted the crucial role of general music education in satisfying students' basic psychological needs. Future research can be carried out to investigate how these needs are satisfied across different demographic groups, as well as examine the use of autonomy-supportive teaching practices in music classrooms. Expanding research to rural areas in Malaysia is also recommended to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of general music education nationwide.





## PERANAN PENDIDIKAN MUZIK AM DALAM MEMENUHI KEPERLUAN PSIKOLOGI ASAS DALAM KELAS MUZIK BAGI MURID TAHUN ENAM DI KUALA LUMPUR

### ABSTRAK

Motivasi memainkan peranan penting dalam kelas muzik. Antara pelbagai teori motivasi yang diketahui, *Self-Determination Theory (SDT)* menekankan kepuasan tiga keperluan psikologi asas, iaitu: (a) autonomi, (b) kompetensi, dan (c) keterhubungan, yang penting untuk meningkatkan motivasi individu dan kesejahteraan. Kajian kuantitatif ini bertujuan untuk melihat sejauh manakah keperluan psikologi asas ini dapat dipenuhi melalui penyertaan pelajar Tahun 6 di dalam kelas muzik. Analisis deskriptif menunjukkan bahawa keterhubungan mencatatkan keperluan tertinggi, dengan skor min 3.78, diikuti oleh autonomi dengan skor min 3.61, dan kompetensi dengan skor min 3.27. Skor min keseluruhan sebanyak 3.55 merentasi ketiga-tiga keperluan ini menunjukkan bahawa keperluan psikologi asas pelajar secara amnya adalah memuaskan di dalam kelas muzik. Dapatan kajian ini juga menekankan kepentingan pendidikan muzik dalam memenuhi keperluan psikologi asas pelajar. Kajian masa depan yang boleh dijalankan adalah melihat bagaimana keperluan ini dipenuhi dengan merentasi kumpulan demografi yang berbeza, serta meneliti penggunaan amalan pengajaran yang menyokong autonomi dalam kelas muzik. Fokus penyelidikan di kawasan luar bandar di Malaysia juga disarankan untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif tentang kepentingan pendidikan muzik di seluruh negara.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPNS	Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction
BPNT	Basic Psychological Needs Theory
DSKP	Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran
FPK	Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan
KSSR	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah
MOE	Malaysia Ministry of Education
SD	Standard Deviation
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SJK	Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan
SK	Sekolah Kebangsaan
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences





## LIST OF APPENDIXES

- A BPNS Questionnaire
- B Parental Consent Form
- C Email Correspondence Requesting Permission to Use Questionnaire
- D Letter Appointing Expertise for Instrument Validation
- E Permission Letter from the Ministry of Education
- F Permission Letter from the State Education Department





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction



Music education plays a crucial role in the holistic development of children, impacting their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth (Hallam, 2010; Schellenberg, 2006). By engaging in music lessons, students do not only enhance their skills but also make meaningful choices and build connections with others. These experiences contribute significantly to their overall well-being and development.

In Malaysia, the Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan (FPK), also known as National Philosophy of Education, emphasises the goal of developing individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2021). This philosophy aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals who are knowledgeable, competent, and possess high moral standards, thereby





positively contributing to society. Music education aligns to this holistic approach by supporting various dimensions of student growth and fostering a comprehensive developmental experience.

While the FPK provides a broad framework for the balanced development of a student, recent motivation theories offer more detailed insights into student's well-being. One such theory is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). It highlights three key psychological needs which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. All these three psychological needs are essential to motivate and help students grow (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Meeting these needs lead to higher motivation, positive emotions, and a stronger sense of purpose. These ideas align well with the holistic development goals of the FPK, helping us understand how education can support all aspects of student growth.



Thus, this study aims to investigate how music education supports the fulfillment of these psychological needs among Year 6 primary school students in Kuala Lumpur, using SDT as the theoretical framework. By examining the role of music lessons in addressing these needs, the research seeks to provide insights into how music education contributes to the holistic development of children, in line with the objectives of the FPK.





## 1.2 Background Research

Music education is widely recognised for its crucial role in promoting the holistic development of children (Hallam, 2010). In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has placed significant emphasis on the importance of music education in primary schools, considering it a core subject within the curriculum. Specifically, the curriculum is known as Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR) Semakan (MOE, 2019). As part of the curriculum, primary school students are provided with a 30-minute music lesson per week, as outlined by the MOE (2019).

The music curriculum in the KSSR Semakan is designed to promote students' musical knowledge, skills, and attitudes across four modules. Those four modules are Music Literacy, Music Skills, Music Creativity, and Music Appreciation (MOE, 2021). Each module plays a critical role in students' overall musical development. Students are introduced to various musical concepts when they engage with these modules. It ranges from reading and writing music notation to developing instrumental and vocal abilities. It even extends to exploring creativity by composing and appreciating music from various cultures.

Basic psychological needs are crucial for further exploring music education's benefits. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a well-established framework, explains that basic psychological needs are individuals' fundamental needs for growth, well-being, and optimal functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT posits that satisfying the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness can lead to increased motivation, engagement, and well-being, while thwarting these needs can result in decreased





psychological functioning and negative outcomes (Evans & Liu, 2019; Šakan et al., 2020).

Music education researchers found that music lessons in schools can promote the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (Evans, 2015; Legutki, 2010; McPherson et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2019). Music lessons can fulfil these needs by allowing students to exercise autonomy, develop competence, and foster a sense of relatedness. During a music lesson, students are given the autonomy to make choices and control their musical learning. This eventually enhances their sense of autonomy. Through the development of musical skills and knowledge, it promotes their sense of competence. Students' need for relatedness can be fulfilled when they collaborate with peers. This results in the development of a sense of belongingness and connection to the musical group or community. This is supported by various studies stating that music lessons can provide an environment that supports students' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, leading to positive outcomes for children's development (Freer & Evans, 2018; McPherson et al., 2012). As a result, students are more likely to be motivated and engaged in their learning when their basic psychological needs are satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In conclusion, music education and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs are closely related. However, some limitations exist in these studies. Most studies have primarily focused on secondary school and tertiary level students, leaving a gap in knowledge of how basic psychological needs are satisfied in music classrooms among primary school students. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the satisfaction of basic psychological needs among primary school students in music lessons. This in hand can





contribute to expanding the research on music education's motivational benefits and supporting positive outcomes for children's well-being.

### **Problem Statement**

This problem statement addresses the impact of the pandemic on student motivation and engagement in music lessons. It emphasises the significance of addressing basic psychological needs in music education and identifies the research gap in primary school music education. These issues will be further discussed in the following sub-topic.



#### **1.3.1 Student Motivation in Music Classrooms**

Research indicates that the pandemic has significantly affected students' motivation and engagement in music classrooms (Barbeau et al., 2024; Oğuz Duran et al., 2021; Wieser & Müller, 2022). For instance, a study by Oğuz Duran et al. (2021) found that many music students experienced a decline in motivation to practice their musical instruments during the pandemic. Factors such as reduced instructional time, limited performance opportunities, and a lack of social interaction with peers and teachers contributed to this decline. Consequently, students' engagement in music education also decreased.

Even though the immediate effects of the pandemic are fading, challenges to student motivation in music classrooms continue in the post-pandemic period. The





lasting effects of fewer performance opportunities, along with adjustments to new ways of learning, still affect student motivation as they need to pick up the skills they may have lost or not fully developed during the pandemic. Wieser and Müller (2022) found a general decline in motivation in instrumental music instruction both during and after the pandemic. However, their study also showed that students with higher intrinsic motivation and a supportive learning environment experienced a smaller decline in motivation. This highlights the importance of creating and maintaining supportive learning environments in music education, especially as students and teachers adapt to the post-pandemic situation.

The concerns about motivation seen during both the pandemic and post-pandemic, as highlighted by Oğuz Duran et al. (2021) and Wieser and Müller (2022), are still relevant in current context. According to Self-Determination Theory, meeting basic psychological needs—such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness—is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). When these needs are not met, students are less likely to be motivated and engaged in their learning. This principle is especially relevant in music education, where personal expression and skill development are crucial. In this context, failing to address these needs can lead to a significant decrease in motivation and overall educational outcomes (Evans, 2015)

### **1.3.2 Addressing Students' Basic Psychological Needs in Music Education**

Research consistently demonstrates that students' motivation and engagement in music education are closely related to the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs





(Evans, 2015; Reeve, 2009). When students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are fulfilled, they exhibit higher levels of motivation and engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Reeve, 2009). Therefore, ensuring the fulfilment of these basic psychological needs within the music education context is crucial to foster students' motivation, engagement, and overall development.

In Malaysia's music education context, primary school music lessons are based on the KSSR Semakan curriculum. It aims to nurture children's holistic development (MOE, 2017). However, it remains unclear to what extent these music lessons effectively support students' basic psychological needs. Montgomery (2021) emphasises the importance of prioritising the diverse academic, social, and emotional needs of students in music classes over simply delivering music content. While the music curriculum provides a framework for instruction that supports basic psychological needs, it is crucial to recognise that students' levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness may vary due to individual differences and the learning environment.

To optimise music education practices in Malaysia, it is necessary to examine whether music lessons in Malaysian schools provide sufficient opportunities for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.





### 1.3.3 Research Gap in Primary School Music Education

Despite the importance of basic psychological needs satisfaction for student motivation and engagement in music education, research in this area has primarily focused on students in secondary school and higher education settings (Bonneville-Rousy et al., 2013; Evans et al., 2013; Freer & Evans, 2018; Liu, 2016; Shaheen, 2022). This in hand has left a gap in the literature with regards the satisfaction of these needs among primary school students in general music lessons. Existing studies have primarily concentrated on specific music groups, such as choirs, instrument ensembles, bands, or orchestras, rather than exploring the broader context of basic psychological needs satisfaction in music education.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by focusing on Malaysian Year 6 primary school students' satisfaction with autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs in general music classroom. By examining the satisfaction of these needs, we can gain a better understanding of how to support primary school students' motivation, engagement, and overall well-being in music education.





### 1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Evaluate the extent to which Year 6 students' psychological needs for autonomy are satisfied in music classrooms.
2. Evaluate the extent to which Year 6 students' psychological needs for competence are satisfied in music classrooms.
3. Evaluate the extent to which Year 6 students' psychological needs for relatedness are satisfied in music classroom.
4. Evaluate the extent to which Year 6 students' basic psychological needs are satisfied in music classrooms.



### 1.5 Research Questions

The following are the research questions for this study:

1. To what extent are Year 6 students' psychological needs for autonomy in music classrooms satisfied?
2. To what extent are Year 6 students' psychological needs for competence in music classrooms satisfied?
3. To what extent are Year 6 students' psychological needs for relatedness in music classrooms satisfied?
4. To what extent are Year 6 students' basic psychological needs in music classrooms satisfied?

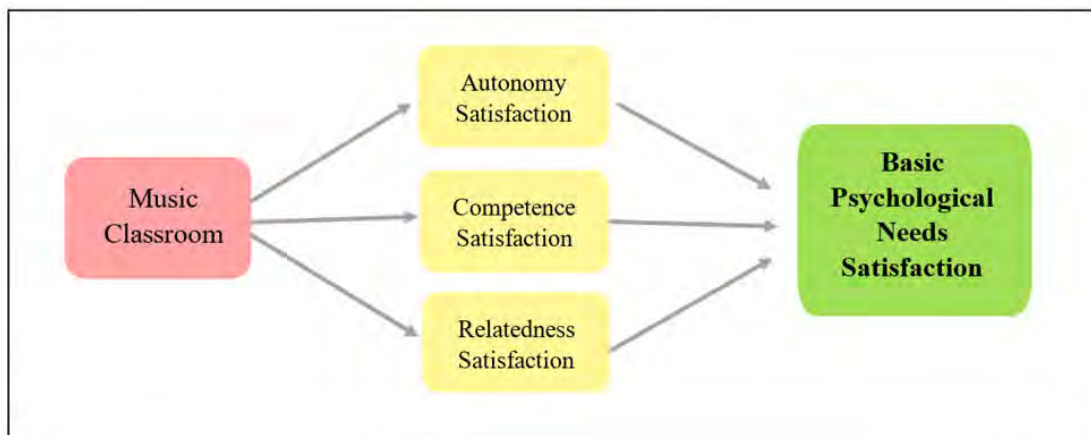


## 1.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.1 below illustrates the research process.

**Figure 1.1.**

*Conceptual Framework*



The independent variables in this study are the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Through active participation in music activities during music classes, it is expected that students will enhance their music skills and engage in meaningful interactions with teachers and peers. These experiences are acknowledged to have an impact on the satisfaction of students' basic psychological needs. It will therefore influence the dependent variable of this study, which is the satisfaction level of basic psychological needs.

To assess the satisfaction level of students' basic psychological needs in music classrooms, the researcher administered the validated Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction Scale to the students. This allows them to provide their perceptions of



satisfaction towards autonomy, competence, and relatedness in music classrooms. These questionnaires are completed by students after the music lesson. The collected scores provide a quantitative measure, which is analysed to determine the extent to which students' basic psychological needs are met in music classrooms.

In summary, this conceptual framework provides an overview of the research focus, highlighting the importance of addressing basic psychological needs in the context of music classrooms for Year 6 primary school students.

## 1.7 Operational Definition

An explanation of some important definitions will be provided in this section which is related to the research.

### 1.7.1 Basic Psychological Needs

Basic psychological needs refer to the innate and universal psychological needs that are essential for human growth and development. These needs include the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, it refers specifically to the three fundamental psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of students in music lessons.





### **1.7.2 Autonomy**

Autonomy is the need to feel in control of one's own actions and decisions based on personal values, goals, and interests (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, autonomy refers to the extent to which students are able to make decisions about their musical learning in music lessons.

### **1.7.3 Competence**

Competence refers to the need to feel effective in one's actions and to experience mastery of tasks and challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, it refers to the extent to which students feel they are developing their musical skills and knowledge in music lessons.

### **1.7.4 Relatedness**

Relatedness is the psychological need to experience a sense of connection and belonging with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, it refers to the extent to which students feel a sense of connection to their peers and to the music group within the music classrooms.





### 1.7.5 Motivation

Motivation can be defined as the psychological force or energy that stimulates, guides, and sustains behaviour towards achieving a goal. It involves the internal and external factors that influence individuals to engage in certain actions and persist in their efforts (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). In the context of this research, it refers to the internal drive and desire of students to actively participate and engage in learning activities.

### 1.7.6 General Music Education

General music education, often referred to as general music, is a segment of the school curriculum designed to meet various musical learning objectives. These objectives typically include singing, playing instruments, creating music, making connections to other subjects or contexts, and responding to musical experiences (Abril & Gault, 2016). For the purposes of this study, "general music education" specifically refers to the music lessons conducted in primary school classrooms.

### 1.8 Study Limitations

One of the main limitations is that the sample population is limited to Malaysian government primary school students in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, the results may not represent primary school students in other regions of Malaysia, where the cultural and socioeconomic factors may differ.





Besides, the sample population is limited to Year 6 primary school students in Malaysia. While this age group is considered cognitively capable of answering questionnaires and providing their perceptions, it is important to note that the findings may not be generalizable to other age groups or educational contexts.

Additionally, this study relies on self-report measures to assess students' psychological needs satisfaction, which are subjected to response biases and may not accurately present students' experiences in music lessons. Another potential limitation is that the music teacher's characteristics, such as teaching style and experience, and the implementation of music lessons in school may also influence students' psychological needs satisfaction and music development, which may impact the findings of this study.

Overall, it is important to consider these limitations when analysing and interpreting the results of this study.

## 1.9 Importance of Research

This study seeks to examine the extent to which Year 6 primary school students' basic psychological needs are met during their music lessons. The fulfilment of these needs is a crucial factor in students' overall well-being and motivation, making this study significant in providing valuable insights into how music lessons can positively impact students' holistic development. This study will contribute to various fields, including providing practical implications for students, music educators, policymakers and the existing literature on the topic.





### **1.9.1 Enhancing Student Learning Experiences and Well-being**

Meeting students' psychological needs can lead to improved engagement, interest, and motivation in music lessons, ultimately enhancing their overall learning experiences. Furthermore, as research has shown, the satisfaction of basic psychological needs in music lessons can have a positive impact on students' mental health and well-being, including increased self-esteem, lower levels of anxiety and depression, and a more positive outlook on life (Ryan & Deci, 2017). As such, the study's findings can have significant positive implications for students' overall growth and development.

Moreover, the study's findings will provide empirical evidence of the relationship between basic psychological needs satisfaction and music development, thus highlighting the critical role of meeting students' psychological needs in enhancing their music skills and abilities. This can benefit students by improving their performance in music lessons, increasing their interest in music learning, and enhancing their overall music development.

### **1.9.2 Empowering Music Educators to Meet Students' Psychological Needs**

Reeve (2012) emphasised that teachers play a crucial role in supporting the satisfaction of their students' psychological needs. By understanding students' need for competence, music teachers can provide tailored instruction to help students who lack confidence in their instrument-playing skills to rebuild their abilities. Additionally, by comprehending students' need for relatedness, music teachers can foster social





interaction by promoting peer learning and creating ensemble performance opportunities to fulfil students' need for relatedness. Furthermore, music teachers can support the satisfaction of students' need for autonomy by giving them choices in their learning. This include options to choose the songs or pieces they want to learn or providing opportunities to collaborate on music projects. This can help students feel more in control of their learning, which in turn can increase their motivation and engagement in music lessons.

By understanding the importance of basic psychological needs and satisfaction in music education, teachers can tailor their instruction and activities to better meet their students' unique learning styles and preferences. This approach can create a better engaged and supportive learning environment that promotes students' well-being and motivation to learn music. The findings from this study can guide music teachers and educators on how to design and implement effective music lessons and activities that meet the psychological needs of students. It would then improve their overall music development.

### **1.9.3 Informing Music Education Policies to Prioritise Students' Holistic Development**

This study aims to contribute to the development of music education policies in Malaysia by emphasising the importance of addressing students' basic psychological needs. While the findings may not be universally applicable to all contexts within Malaysia, they can provide valuable suggestions for enhancing the music curriculum to better support students' holistic development.



The insights gained from this study can offer practical recommendations for the Malaysian Ministry of Education, particularly in terms of curriculum development and revision. Although the study's scope is specific, its results can inform adjustments to the national music curriculum, helping to ensure that it addresses the psychological needs of students effectively and thereby improves the quality and impact of music education.

#### **1.9.4 Bridging the Literature Gap**

The results of this study will provide valuable insights that can serve as reference materials and guidance for future researchers interested in investigating similar topics.

Specifically, this study's focus on autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the context of music education will contribute to the growing body of research on the applicability of self-determination theory in music contexts. As noted by Liu (2016) and Virkkula (2020), more research is still needed in this area. The findings from this study will fill a gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence of the psychological needs satisfaction of primary school students in music lessons.

Additionally, this study will address the specific gap in the literature regarding the satisfaction of the psychological needs of students in the Malaysian context, particularly in music education. It has been a relatively unexplored area in the literature. The findings from this study will have important implications for policies and practices in music education in Malaysia. This is because it promotes the holistic development and well-being of primary school students. By providing empirical evidence on the



satisfaction of psychological needs of primary school students in music lessons in Malaysia, this study will significantly contribute to the literature and serve as a foundation for future research in this area.

### 1.10 Summary

This study highlights the importance of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in explaining how the satisfaction of Year 6 primary school students' basic psychological needs interacts with the social environment of music classrooms. Through the discussion of the issues addressed in this thesis, those involved in primary school education can gain insights and ideas for developing a better understanding of their role in supporting students' psychological needs, satisfaction and motivation in music lessons. Overall, this chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the research and prepares the reader for the subsequent chapters.

