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A KODÁLY BASED MUSIC TEACHING SEQUENCE FOR TEACHING
SINGING TO YEAR ONE PUPILS IN A MALAYSIAN
CHINESE PRIMARY SCHOOL

LIM LI WEN



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ABSTRACT

Sequential teaching is essential for learning musical concepts for young beginners. There is a lack of Chinese teaching materials that sequenced according to a child-developmental approach in Malaysia. While there are many singing materials written in the Chinese language, none arranged in a sequential order, which Hungarian music educator Kodály believed is essential for pupils to build or extend their musical vocabulary and musical concepts progressively. The purpose of the study is to provide a set of sequenced Chinese materials for Year One Malaysian Chinese pupils to be used by general music teachers who teach in Chinese primary schools. Reflective action research, document research, journal writings and voice recordings serve as the primary data for analysis in this investigation. Data were analysed through thematic analysis, and conclusion of the analysis served as a primary source in forming the sequence. 22 cycles of action research were carried out in the classroom. In conclusion, a set of sequenced teaching materials was formed. The implication of this study introduces a core teaching sequence for music teachers to refer to when they sequence their teaching objectives and materials.





PENGAJARAN BERURUTAN BERASASKAN KAEDAH KODÁLY UNTUK MENGAJAR NYANYIAN MURID TAHUN SATU DI SEBUAH SEKOLAH RENDAH JENIS KEBANGSAAN CINA DI MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Pengajaran berurutan adalah penting untuk mempelajari konsep muzik terutamanya pada permulaan pembelajaran konsep muzik. Terdapat kekurangan bahan pengajaran lagu pendidikan muzik dalam Bahasa Cina (mandarin) yang sesuai untuk pembelajaran berasaskan perkembangan kanak-kanak di Malaysia. Terdapat banyak bahan-bahan nyanyian ditulis dalam bahasa China, namun tiada bahan yang disusun mengikut urutan yang mana pendidik muzik Hungary, Kodály percaya adalah penting untuk kanak-kanak membina atau meluaskan perbendaharaan kata muzik dan konsep muzik mereka secara progresif. Tujuan kajian ini ialah menyediakan satu set bahan (lagu) dalam pengajaran bahasa Cina yang berturutan untuk pengajaran pendidikan muzik murid Tahun Satu. Kajian tindakan reflektif, penyelidikan dokumen, tulisan jurnal, dan rakaman suara berfungsi sebagai data utama untuk analisis dalam penyelidikan ini. Data kajian dianalisis menggunakan analisis bertema dan kesimpulan dapatan kajian digunakan untuk menyusun urutan bahan pengajaran yang berurutan. Melalui 22 kitaran penyelidikan kajian tindakan yang dijalankan di dalam bilik darjah, satu set bahan pengajaran yang tersusun mengikut tahap kesukaran pengajaran telah dibentuk. Kajian ini memperkenalkan urutan pengajaran teras bagi seorang guru muzik untuk dijadikan rujukan bagi merangka objektif pengajaran dan bahan (lagu) mereka.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ETM	Education Through Music
KBSR	<i>Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah</i>
KPM	<i>Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia</i>
KSSR	<i>Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah</i>
UiTM	<i>Universiti Teknologi MARA</i>





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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Introduction

A carefully considered sequence in teaching and learning music has been shown to create smooth transitions and continuity between lessons. However, in the early seventies, Dorman (1973) demonstrated that in the organisation of content, the use of a sequence of stages was negligible. Teachers often have a limited understanding of the process of helping students to move from the enactive to the iconic, and finally to the representational stage of imaging (Dorman, 1973). The mastery of imaging is an important skill for development which further establishes the pupil's music reading skills. He also reasoned that teaching which relies on repetitious drills would end up creating consistency of error rather than achieving their objective of performance improvement.





Practitioner experience in the exploration and study of the professional teaching sequence is desirable in achieving optimal learning outcomes through teaching objectives and sorted teaching materials. Harper (1995) demonstrated his approach to teaching general music through Gordon's Music Learning Theory where he highlighted that it is critical that the first five to 10 minutes of each music class consists of skill development for a successful teaching outcome. He also argues that the Music Learning Theory is a sequential process based on the precise developmental nature of pupils, where pupils are taught a basic vocabulary of tonal and rhythmic patterns. Similarly, Spurgeon (2004) demonstrated that a classroom music teacher needs to understand and use an instructional sequence for developing competency with each music element and skill, progressing from the simplest to the most complex. The curriculum design must be clearly understood by teachers in order to generate meaningful awareness of their teaching material. Basic experience with the techniques of Orff, Kodály, Dalcroze, and Gordon would provide beneficial learning experiences so that effective teaching can take place.

Music must be built on pupils' acquisition of vigorous and robust foundations in basic skills before mastering other more advanced topics. Choksy (1999) showed the refinement of a teaching sequence used in the USA by Kodály practitioners and educators where it was adapted from its country of origin, Hungary. In every country, the sequence of learning is unique for each individual pupil due to the different cultural backgrounds, prior knowledge and language that they speak daily.

A learning sequence according to Kodály is a child development framework (Choksy, 1999b). Kodály formed a child development sequence of music learning that





completely changed music education in Hungary (Scott, 2004, p. 23). His sequence of music learning has been adapted by practitioners in different countries who have made the methodology relevant to their own classrooms by incorporating culturally appropriate songs into their teaching repertoire (Marsh, 2008). An effective practical child development framework is of greater importance compared with a logic-based learning sequence. Various educational theorists such as Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel believed strongly in the child-centred approach to curriculum (Niland, 2009).

The Swiss pedagogue, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) believed that the school curriculum should be based on children's natural development in which children learn best through self-discovery as well as immersion in the environment (Scott, 2004, p. 25). A logic-based learning sequence in music refers to learning in conjunction with the longest note value to the smallest note value, from high-pitched notes to low-pitched notes, and from duple meter to triple meter, then quadruple meter. A child development framework in teaching provides an understanding of musical concepts through well-planned, sequenced materials and purposeful objectives based on child-centred learning. This creates a meaningful learning experience for the pupils through practical musical activities. However, the classroom teacher must reinforce the concepts known to the pupils before making the unknown explicit.

Similarly, Bowyer (2015) argues that careful sequencing should always move from what is known to what is unknown and be based on pupils' prior knowledge. Kodály lessons review and reinforce previously learned concepts in the provided





materials before introducing new, increasingly complex musical concepts and involves a carefully scaffolded teaching plan which helps develop a foundation of musicianship that promotes in-tune singing, musicality, inner hearing, and strong music literacy. Pupils learn best when they relate newly acquired knowledge to their experience. This concept is known as ‘Constructivism’, where the learning environment supports multiple perspectives or interpretations of reality, knowledge construction and context-rich, experienced-based activities (Duffy & Jonassen, 2013). The presented materials and the teaching sequence must be meaningful and make sense to the pupils so that they can assist them to understand musical concepts better. Furthermore, the sequence of instructions must be organised in such a way that it remains relevant to the pupils’ daily activities. The vast amount of exposure to elements such as speech, language, movement and cultural practices affect a pupil’s learning style and behaviour. For instance, we walk in two-beat patterns with our left and right foot; we practice the beliefs within our culture; Chinese pupils speak Mandarin in school, and we behave within the scope of our living context. A learning process becomes meaningful and easy to understand once there is a connection between the pupil’s daily life, behaviour or activities.

The main purpose of teaching music is to enable children to achieve basic musical literacy. According to Scott (2004), “children must be comfortable with singing and have accurate singing skills. They must also be comfortable with movement and have accurate beat keeping abilities” (p. 24). Children must be able to express sensitivity to music (Feierabend 1997b; Gordon 1996). It is also suggested by Scott (2004) that “during the first two to three years of elementary music instruction, children should be immersed in active music making” (p. 24). Scott (2014) asserts that “children





should be led to explore sounds, tunes, beat, rhythm, and movement, and should be comfortable experimenting with music” (p. 24).

Many studies report that learning music benefits students in various ways, including improved academic achievement overall (Ruppert, 2006; Schellenberg, 2004). The following section outlines ways in which music learning, especially singing using one’s mother tongue, provides many benefits to a young child such as strengthening their development in language acquisition. The use of languages provides child-centered learning and hence, promotes positive learning in singing and music learning. Developing appropriate teaching sequences requires an understanding of the Malaysian music education system, therefore, this will also be explained in this section.



1.2 Mother Tongue

There are a variety of ethnic groups in West and East Malaysia. The three main ethnic groups in West Malaysia are Malay, Chinese, and Indian. The need to analyse music learning materials (children’s folk songs) in the classroom according to the pupils’ mother tongue is vital in assisting pupils to learn progressively starting with easier concepts before moving on to more challenging ones. Various well-known music education figures such as Zoltan Kodály, Shinichi Suzuki and Carl Orff used mother tongue teaching materials in their practical teaching, especially for the young child (Kendall, 1996; Parncutt & McPherson, 2002; S. Scott, 2016).





Shinichi Suzuki grounded his method on how children learned their mother tongue and sequenced a system whereby children learn to play their violin before learning to read the notation (Parncutt & McPherson, 2002). Scott (2016) argues that Shinichi Suzuki developed his approach to education around the mother tongue approach. He highlights that typically developing children can learn to speak Japanese (their mother tongue) and that is the main reason that Shinichi Suzuki used many teaching materials which use their mother tongue language in materials for beginner violin instruction. By teaching music in the pupils' mother tongue, understanding of musical concepts is simpler and more meaningful to the young. The suggestion of using songs written in the mother tongue for learning singing is also due to the child-centred approach that is based on a child's understanding of their speaking language's melodic contour (Davidson, 1994). In Chinese primary schools, the Chinese language needs to be analysed according to its linguistics criteria when sorting the teaching sequence, in terms of both melodic and rhythmic aspects.

General public-school teachers who teach the subject music must achieve the desired teaching objectives within the designated 30-minute period of instruction in Malaysia. Generally, a year of schooling will have roughly 42 to 43 weeks (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2016). The total hours for the delivery of music lessons for one class will be about 21 hours a year. An optimal teaching sequence would enable music teachers to achieve the desired teaching objectives within the limited time. Willis (1995) states that one of the characteristics in objective-rational instructional design is careful sequencing, and the teaching of sub-skills is essential. Willis (1995) also states that sequential learning may provide an organised way of





systematically preparing materials for educators and may provide support on developmental ways of gaining knowledge for the educators.

1.2.1 Music Syllabus for Primary Schools in Malaysia

The current standard primary school syllabus (Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah - KSSR) introduced by the Ministry of Education has been implemented since 2011 (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, n.d.). The KSSR was intended to replace the primary school syllabus (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah – KBSR). At the time of writing this dissertation, the KSSR curriculum was being transformed in stages in

2016 until it was fully implemented in all primary schools from Year One to Year Six.

The KSSR syllabus was then reviewed, and a newly revised KSSR syllabus was implemented starting with Year One pupils in 2017. In the new KSSR syllabus, music is one of the compulsory subjects for pupils from Year One (aged seven) to Year Six (aged 12).

In the 2017 music curriculum for primary Year One, the units are presented using a thematic approach in which lessons are structured around a series of topics and merged with the Visual Arts subject under a new subject called Arts Education, or '*Pendidikan Kesenian*' (Wong, Chan, Tee, & Loh, 2016). In the newly revised curriculum, music has been integrated into various themes such as 'My Best Friend', 'Happy New Year', 'Simple Games', 'Count On', 'Underwater World' and other similar themes. It consists of 22 units for the whole year and pupils are required to learn





music before moving on to the Arts subject in each unit. Both music and arts have corresponding chapters. Pupils sing songs before learning arts that are related to the music they have sung and learnt previously. Music has been placed in odd-numbered units while arts are in the even-numbered units.

The music subject as taught in Malaysian primary schools prior to 2017 was called ‘World of Music’, and it was one of the compulsory subjects in the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR). The National Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Education, 2012) highlights that the music subject contains essential knowledge that every pupil in Malaysia should learn. Daniel Pink (as cited in Moyer, 2013) asserts that art education is critical in providing the pupils with the skills to reason both analytically and algorithmically. Similarly, Houlahan and Tacka (2015a) state that learning music gives pupils many opportunities to perform music, develop critical-thinking skills (reading and writing music), be creative, become stewards of their cultural heritage and be informed listeners and audience members. Therefore, it is vital for every growing child to experience and learn music.

After the above overview of the Malaysia Music Curriculum, the Kodály teaching philosophy is discussed in the next section. The development of a Kodály-based teaching sequence is then argued. The Kodály teaching philosophy is used as a guideline towards enhancing teaching and learning within the Malaysian Music Curriculum.





1.2.2 Kodály Teaching Philosophy

Zoltan Kodály's (1882–1967) philosophy and approaches are well known in the Music Education field. Kodály's native country, Hungary, has a well-planned teaching and learning sequence based on folk music and composed material, which is highly beneficial to learning music (Szonyi, as cited in Choksy, 1999). In Malaysia, pupils in primary school would benefit from the development of a learning sequence based on Kodály's philosophical and pedagogical approaches. In the 1990s, Johami Abdullah (2010) highlighted the need for studies on the use of the Kodály method in Malaysia due to a lack of research in this area in the country. Kodály was introduced in Malaysia under one of the courses hosted by the Faculty of Music, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) in collaboration with the Young Choral Academy in 2009. The Kodály method then started to be developed actively in the private sector in Malaysia. Such efforts were carried out by the Young Choral Academy and Poco Studio. The Young Choral Academy has collaborated with the Australian Kodály Society to host various courses, giving certification to the attendees of courses with the Australian Kodály certification programme. The Poco Studio also invited clinicians from the Kodály Institute of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, Kecskemet, Hungary to organise a course for music teachers in 2016. The development of Kodály activities has become vibrant in Malaysia ever since.

In this dissertation, I argue that Malaysian primary schools should have a specific teaching sequence that is suitable for the local pupils who would benefit from a curriculum that is based on either local folk songs or local children's songs. A learning sequence which is constructed using Chinese children's folk songs and other



appropriate composed music or chants (as the core teaching materials) could provide a progressive teaching structure in which students could gradually master increasingly difficult skills after mastering the basic skills. Kodály’s teaching sequence model in the national curriculum of Hungary is an experience-based approach to learning rather than a cognitive developmental approach (Organization of American Kodály, 2012). Materials (songs and tunes) that are already known to the school children themselves need to be identified and analysed to support the learning sequence. An analysis of the existing Malaysian collections of Chinese children’s folk songs and compositions in the Chinese language would reveal appropriate music materials that are consistent with the teaching objectives of the syllabus.

1.3 Singing Materials

Kodály method materials are drawn strictly from two sources which are “authentic” folk music and “good-quality” composed music (Choksy, 1999, p.16). In this research, various sources of Malaysian Chinese children’s folk music and “good-quality” composed music were collected, analysed and categorised for use in classroom teaching.

The presentation of music materials, concepts, and development of skills can be achieved in a meaningful way only if the curriculum is well sequenced (Organization of American Kodály, 2012). The singing materials must be carefully selected, sequenced and matched with the teaching objectives, and pupils’ background, prior knowledge, and age. With a careful selection of educational materials (songs) and



purposes (learning objectives), the teacher can progressively teach according to best practice principles.

Kodály (1964), as cited in Organization of American Kodály (2012) and The University of Oklahoma (2016), argues that the compositions of every country, if original, are based on the songs of its people. These folk songs must be regularly sung, observed, and studied, as it is important to examine the music of each country of origin to understand the localised values of its people. In selecting resources and songs for children, I have observed that teachers in schools tend to use many English songs due to the availability of many published scores in that language. However, English educational materials (songs) which are native to local young pupils who speak Mandarin as their mother tongue are much more challenging for them to build a sense of musical concepts especially at the beginning of their learning. This was part of Kodály's philosophy where using mother tongue language songs and child-centered based teaching is crucial for teaching beginners. Young pupils should be introduced songs from their own mother tongue before introducing songs in the native language such as English.

In phonology, language and dialects contain different sounding systems. The standard dialect in Chinese primary schools in Malaysia is Mandarin. Therefore, pupils in Chinese schools are familiar with the language system itself. Various music educators have used mother tongue instructional materials such as Kodály (Choksy, 1999a), Suzuki and Carl Orff (Brathwaite, 1988; Liperote et al., 1961; Liperote, 2006; Osborn, 1966). Pupils can start with accurate reading and speak in their mother tongue





while enjoying singing musically in that same language. Musical concepts and accurate singing enable teachers to teach young beginners to achieve quality foundations in learning music by rote before learning symbols. Kodály points out the importance of learning music by first learning in the mother tongue (Choksy, 1999a). However, while Bahasa Malaysia is the national language of Malaysia and is spoken mostly by Malays as their mother tongue, the Chinese speak Malaysian Chinese, and most Indians communicate in Tamil or English as their first language.

The materials used for singing must be analysed and aligned for the purposes of teaching. The teacher must take into consideration the educational materials used in every teaching classroom. According to Houlahan and Tacka (2015b), elements such as tone set, rhythm, melody, form, games for songs, and musical signs such as the 'repeat sign' must be taken into consideration when sequencing teaching materials. 'Repeat sign' refers to the musical symbol indicated in a music score that requires a section of music to be repeated. Singing games provide a fun way of learning while the repeating patterns in music enable re-inforcement of pupil's musical learning.

According to Houlahan and Tacka (2015), one of the vital components of the Kodály method is the teachers' ability to sequence materials along with presenting concepts and elements to pupils that are derived primarily from the singing repertoire. This is regarded as an experience-based approach to learning. The three main elements of sequencing in the Kodály programme include the presentation of materials, concepts, and development of skills. This can be done in a meaningful way only if the curriculum is well sequenced, carefully planned, and well taught, which will result in successful

