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DEVELOPING PUPILS' MUSIC READING SKILLS THROUGH A KODÁLY-BASED APPROACH

IRENE CHAI PEI LYN



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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION (MUSIC EDUCATION)
(RESEARCH AND COURSEWORK)**

**FACULTY OF MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY**

2019



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research is to develop the pupils' music reading skills through a Kodály-based approach. The pupils were facing difficulties in reading music notations, which is acquired in current Year 4 music curriculum of Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR). This study was conducted in a government Chinese primary school in Selangor, Malaysia. A total of 32 pupils from Year 4 were selected to participate in the research. The Year 4 music curriculum from KSSR was used with the adaptation of Kodály based-approach in this study. Concurrently, singing activities using solfege, Chinese children folk songs, games, and colored notations were applied in developing the pupils' music reading skills. This action research was based on the model by Zuber-Skerritt where the cycle of plan, act, observe and reflect were used in the main cycles followed by the refined cycles. A total of 8 main cycles and 19 refined cycles were used. Video recordings, pupils' written work from activities, singing and written music reading assessment, field notes, informal interviews as well as reflective journal were used as the data collection. The finding shows that there were improvements in music reading skills of the pupils at the end of the music reading assessment. The implication of the study shows that the incorporation of Kodály based approach significantly enhances pupils' music reading skills.





PEMBINAAN KEMAHIRAN PEMBACAAN MUZIK MURID-MURID MELALUI PENDEKATAN BERASASKAN KODÁLY

ABSTRAK

Kajian tindakan ini bertujuan untuk mempertingkatkan kemahiran membaca muzik di kalangan murid melalui pendekatan Kodály. Murid-murid menghadapi masalah dalam pembacaan notasi muzik di mana kemahiran ini perlu dipelajari dalam kurikulum muzik terkini iaitu Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR). Kajian telah dijalankan di sebuah sekolah rendah kerajaan di Selangor, Malaysia. Seramai 32 murid Tahun Empat terlibat dalam kajian ini. Sukatan Pendidikan Muzik Tahun Empat KSSR telah digunakan dan diterapkan dengan pendekatan berasaskan Kodály. Aktiviti-aktiviti nyanyian menggunakan solfege, lagu rakyat kanak-kanak bahasa Cina, permainan serta penggunaan notasi berwarna telah digunakan dengan tujuan mempertingkatkan kemahiran membaca muzik dalam kalangan murid. Model Zuber-Skerritt telah digunakan dalam kajian tindakan ini dengan gelungan yang melibatkan proses merancang tindakan, melaksanakan tindakan, memerhati dan melakukan refleksi. Sebanyak lapan gelungan utama telah dirancang dan setiap gelungan ini telah dirancang semula sehingga 19 gelungan. Data diperoleh berdasarkan pemerhatian, hasil kerja murid melalui aktiviti, penilaian membaca notasi muzik, nota lapangan, temu bual dan refleksi jurnal oleh penyelidik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat peningkatan dalam pencapaian ujian membaca muzik dalam kalangan pelajar. Implikasi kajian menunjukkan penerapan pendekatan Kodály dalam pembelajaran muzik ke atas murid-murid dapat meningkatkan pencapaian kemahiran membaca muzik pelajar secara signifikan.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KSSR *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah*

KBSR *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah*



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction



Music literacy which is the musical reading and writing is an important skill in music learning. It is equivalent to a language learning process (Felerabend, 2016; Tomlinson, 2013). A child learns to listen, speak and then read and write in the process of language learning. Thus, music literacy is as important as language literacy whereby a person should able to read and write after learning the listening and speaking skills in order to a better understanding and experience in language usage.

Children nowadays are exposed to different kinds of music recordings such as pop, rock and other types of songs. Music is a form of enjoyment to them but how far does the music exist ‘within’ them? In other words, they might enjoy listening to their favourite songs, or songs familiar to them, but are they actively listening to the music or involving themselves in music literacy?



In this research, I looked into Year 4 pupils' music reading skills using Kodály based approach through an action research. Eight main cycles and refine cycles were used.

1.2 Background of the Study

Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) for primary school was implemented in 1983. In the year 2011, KBSR was then changed to Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR), which is known as Primary School Standard Curriculum. The Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR) of the Year 4 music curriculum consists of four modules. The first module which is Musical Experience comprises the highest percentage – 60%, compared to the other modules, which include creativity 20% in second module, music appreciation 10% in third module and music reading and notation 10% in fourth module.

In the new music curriculum of KSSR for Year 4, one of the modules introduced is music literacy that consists of music reading and notation. Based on Year 4 music curriculum, the pupils are only required to learn to read and write the notes G, A, B, C and D.

In this research, I as the practitioner focused only on the fourth module. However, important skills that students need to acquire before they are able to be skilful in music literacy also includes listening and singing. This can be seen in the



KSSR first module where singing, movement and playing instruments, which comprises of 60% compared to the other three modules. This shows that singing is very important in pupils' music learning (Sheridan, 2015). According to Mícheal Houlahan & Tacka (2015), singing is the essence of the Kodály concept, and tuneful singing is the foundation of Kodály approach to music education. Moreover, singing requires the rapid internalisation of sound and provides immediate participation in the musical experience. Houlahan & Tacka (2008), also mentioned that inner hearing skills are more easily developed through the pupil's own voice, hearing skills are more easily to be developed.

Developing music literacy skills is an essential aim in music learning. In other words, all the pupils in the school should have the chance to learn music and elements with understanding. This is supported by a great amount of research throughout the world. For example, Houlahan & Tacka (2008, p. 24) stated that, "Kodály believed that all students should become musically literate, that is they should be able to read and write music with ease." It is equivalent to the easiness when they read and write their own language; Sumner (1997, p.1) states that, "Music should belong to everyone" was one of the main principles which Zoltan Kodály stated in his music philosophy; and Choksy (1981, p.7) stated that musical learning must begin with the child's own natural instrument – the voice.





1.3 Problem Statement

In my six years of teaching experience as a primary school music teacher, I realised that many of the pupils are not able to read the music notation when they are singing. This experience is also based on other music teachers' music teaching experience established through my interviews with them. These teachers found that very few pupils look at the music notations when they are singing. The pupils could not sing the song when they were given a short music score with only the music staff notation and without the lyrics. The pupils preferred to look at the music's lyric and sing (Cheah & Low, personal communication, October 20, 2015).

Based on my teaching experiences as well as of other teachers, most of the pupils will just imitate the teacher's singing without trying to listen to their own singing voices while singing during the music lesson. Moreover, the pupils learn the songs by rote most of the time which causes them to have difficulties in reading those notations. This shows that the pupils are poor in music literacy skills which requires an understanding of symbolic language and linked the visual and auditory part. This is supported by Holmes (2009) who mentioned that, "it is not so difficult to find music classrooms where students are taught to sing songs by rote and listen to musical works but are not taught the basic skills of reading and notating music" (p.13). According to Houlahan & Tacka (2015), music literacy is the ability to decode and encode a system of musical sound patterns in staff notation. It also encompasses music reading and music writing skills. In other words, musical literacy is an essential skill to music in a similar way to learning to read and write languages. The primary goal of the Kodály



approach to music education is to produce “the musically literate adult – literate in the fullest sense of being able to look at a musical score and think sound, to read and write music as easily as words” (Lane, 2006).

The problem that the pupils face in music literacy skill is they hardly read black staff notations as they have never been exposed to the notation learning in their music Year 1 music lessons. Music reading skills are not included in Year 1 to Year 3 KSSR syllabus. Meanwhile, some of the music singing teaching was just based on the music accompaniment with CD recordings without learning any music staff notations. In other words, I found that the pupils were not cultivated with the music reading skills.

In addition, Jacobi (2012) says that, music reading is a spatial process where the music notations are derived through analysis of the spatial location of the notes and of their relative height separation on the staff which is the pitch intervals. The eye must be taken in both horizontal and vertical information for the brain to interpret in music reading. Therefore, text reading is different from music reading where we must teach the pupils. Based on Choksy (1981), “Teach sound before sight” which is one of the Kodály principles is important in teaching music literacy. In teaching music literacy, voice is the most important instrument to begin and to learn some music elements from songs. Thus, singing in tune precedes the understanding of pitches on the staff and followed by reading the staff notations. The awareness for reading among the pupils is important to connect their understanding to the music.

Since music literacy skills in KSSR is only introduced in Year 4, it is crucial to ensure that teachers start to implement music literacy by then. This is because according to my own observation and teaching reflection from other music teachers during the music meeting; music literacy is not being implemented according to how it should be. Therefore, this is an issue that music school teachers need to address.

1.4 Purpose of Study

This research focuses on the ways of developing the pupils' music reading skills through a Kodály based approach. It also focused on my adaptation of Kodály based approach in teaching practice through the development of teaching plan cycles.

In music reading learning skills, singing and inner hearing are strongly linked. Developing inner hearing which is one of the important skills through singing is strongly emphasised in the Kodály approach of teaching. It is essential in competent music reading for the sound image to be imagined before the actual vocalisation takes place. It is also stated by Colin & Graham (1995), that the notion of appraisal in music needs to be addressed to the essential difference between listening to music attentively and merely hearing it in the background. He says that one should not only hear music and pay attention to it, but also internalise it for subsequent recall using inner hearing skills. It adds to the student's appreciation and understanding of the music and ability to sing, play and read it.



1.5 Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- 1) To determine ways to improve Year 4 pupils' music reading skills.
- 2) To identify Kodály-based approach in assisting the development of Year 4 pupils' music reading skills.

1.6 Research Questions

- 1) How to improve the Year 4 pupils' music reading skills?
- 2) How does Kodály-based approach assist in developing Year 4 pupils' music reading skills?



1.7 Conceptual Framework of Research

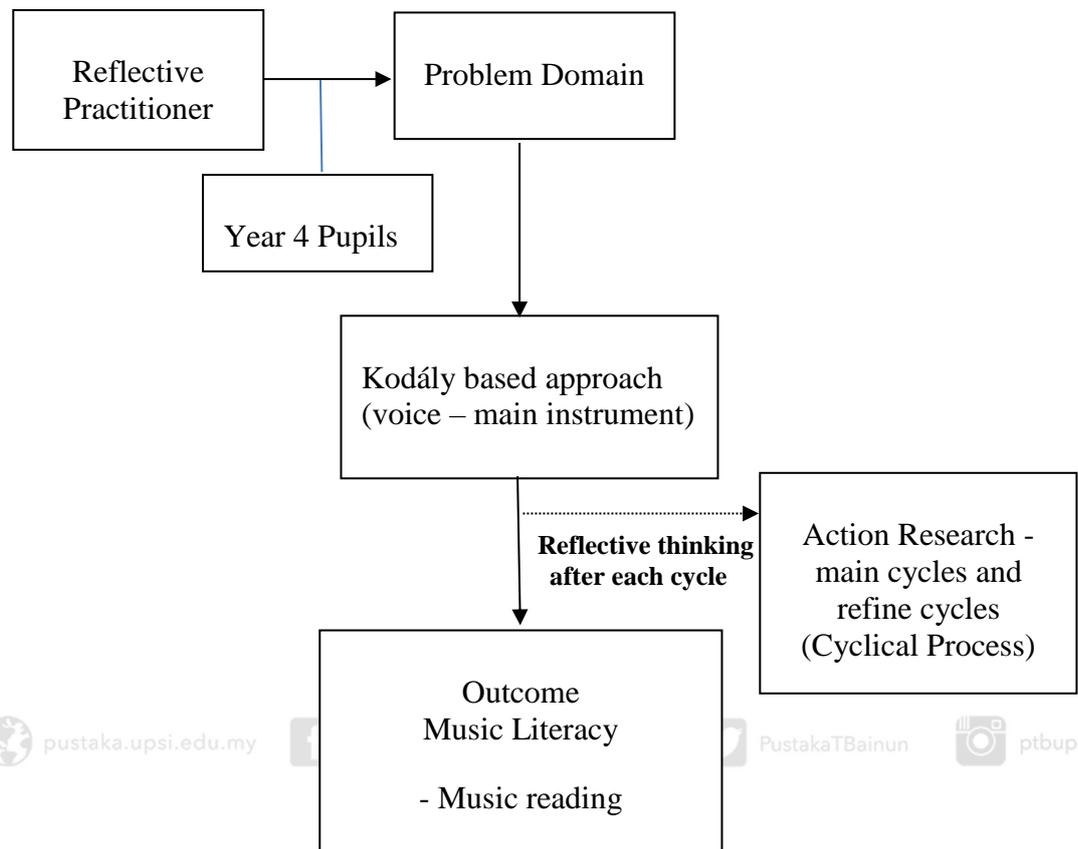


Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework

Figure 1.1 represents the conceptual framework of this research. This research is an action research which is based on the personal experience of the practitioner and reflection on her own teaching. I, as the practitioner, conducted the action research on 32 pupils in a classroom. The problem domain encountered by the pupils is they lacked music reading skills. A Kodály-based approach was implemented into the Year 4 music curriculum for teaching and learning on music reading in the classroom. Kodály based approach which consists the use of teaching tools such as rhythm syllables, movable do solfege and hand signs were used. Voice is the main instrument used in singing Chinese children folk songs. This action research is a cyclical process



of revised plan where there was reflective thinking by the practitioner after each cycle of her own teaching. Overall, it is expected that the pupils' show improvement in their music literacy skill in music reading.

1.8 Significance of Research

This study is conducted to develop the pupils' music literacy that is music reading skills in the classroom through action research. It is crucial, as there is a need of developing Year 4 pupils' music literacy skills in music reading as they start learning the staff music notation in their music curriculum. A good teaching approach and learning skills will lead them to a better understanding of reading a music score when they sing. Based on Winslow & Dallin (1992), since melodic elements are present in virtually all music, thus the ability to read music notation is an important musical skill. Moreover, according to Jacobi (2012), Kodály's opinion that the children should learn how to read and write music and that this leads to musical independence is crucial to the children in their music learning. In other words, teaching by rote-learning in the classroom is not enough to teach music to the children.

It is also important to instil critical thinking and problem-solving skills within the pupils in their music learning as they would be able to explore the spatial process of staff notation with different sounds and pitches. Cognitive process is vital for children, especially in developing their inner hearing in reading a music score. According to Gromko (2004), audiation is one of the cognitive processes specific to





music reading. Pupils have to think independently of the notes and their sounds in their mind when they are given a music score to read. Thus, the connection between cognitive development and inner hearing development will be enhanced.

It is important for the teacher as the researcher to plan, act, observe and reflect constantly on their teaching practice. This process enables teachers to improve their daily teaching practice in the classroom, and to develop teacher professionalism by reflection-on-action, and thus contributing to educational improvement and high expectation learning demands too. The process of professional development is continuous and on-going as teachers could develop their teaching skills with the new knowledge and approach gained. The expected strategies for self-improvement could help us to turn the problems into positive experiences (Wallace, 1998).



1.9 Study Limitations

This research was only conducted in a selected Chinese Malaysian Primary School. The subjects are one of the Year 4 school classes. All the pupils in the class are Chinese. Therefore, Chinese language is the pupils' mother tongue and were used in the research session as the communicative language. In this research, the music reading will only be limited to pitch which consist do, re, mi, so and la with the note durations of quaver, crotchet, minim, and semibreve.





1.10 Operational Definition

Children Folk Song

The folk songs of the children's own cultural heritage that is their own musical mother tongue (Houlahan & Tacka, 2008).

Hand signs

To show tonal relationships in singing by visualizing the note or tone is going up or going down (Houlahan & Tacka, 2008).

Inner Hearing

Inner hearing is an ability to hear music inside our heads without the need to play or sing those notes (Becky, 2010).

Kodály based approach

It is an approach to music education developed in Hungary. It is child developmental, experiential, and highly sequential. Its primary goal is to develop the understanding and knowledge in music literacy (Choksy, 1999).

Musical literacy

The ability to read, write, and think music (Houlahan & Tacka, 2008).



Music reading

The ability to interpret symbols of music into the sound of music and produce it with voices (Houlahan & Tacka, 2008).

Musicianship

Musicianship is a broad concept that covers a complex range of musical abilities. It may be defined as the ability to ‘think in sound’ when a musician is able to produce music which they perceive internally and in the imagination, whether through playing by ear, singing, reading from notation or through improvisation (The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 2010). A concept to model the different ways in which music and music knowledge is conceptualized from the perspective of music and the knowledge, skill and artistic sensitivity instilled in performing music.

Pitch

The perceived quality of sound that is chiefly a function of its fundamental frequency, the highness or lowness of sound (Roberts, 1997). The quality of a sound governed by the rate of vibrations producing it; the degree of highness or lowness of a tone.

Practitioner

A practitioner is a person who reflects in action tends to question the definition of the task, the theories in action which brings to it, and the measures of performance by which is been controlled (Schön, 1983). He or she is a person who is actively engaged in the practice of a profession.



Sight Singing

Based on The Harvard Dictionary of Music (1986), sight singing is defined as “singing a piece of music on seeing it for the first time. The ability to sing at sight requires the ability to imagine the sound of pitches or intervals without the aid of an instrument”.

Teaching Practice

The implementation of teaching strategies by the teacher in her teaching to improve the students’ learning and achievement in the classroom (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Teaching Plan Cycles

A continuing spiral of steps in which each of the steps consist of a circle of planning, action and finding of the action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

