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**Designing Creative Music Education Materials for School Children in Malaysia: Implication for policy and teaching practices**

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**Abstract**

The Malaysian Ministry of Education aspires to produce knowledgeable, creative and innovative music pupils, teachers, educators, researchers, material writers, and curriculum designers. Thus, there is an urgency to advocate new and current ways of attracting 21st-century pupils to learn music. This study involves designing educational music teaching materials and approaches. It also evaluates the effectiveness of musical creativity, engagement, and learning outcomes through musical experience, music composition and music appreciation. The findings of this study provide insights into ways that will help policymakers, curriculum designers, and music teachers in Malaysia to develop quality teaching and learning materials for future music education.

Keywords: Music Education, Musical Creativity, Creative Thinking

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**1.0 Introduction**

The Standard Primary School Curriculum (*Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah* or *KSSR*), which was implemented in stages starting in 2011, has been reviewed to align with the new policies under the Malaysia Education Development Plan 2013-2025, aiming to ensure that the curriculum quality in primary schools is on par with international standards. The curriculum is based on internationally recognized standards. It has been articulated in the *KSSR* through the formulation of the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document (*Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran* or *DSKP*) for all subjects, encompassing Content Standards, Learning Standards, and Performance Standards. The *DSKP* for *KSSR* (2017 Revision) for Music Education is a document that outlines the curriculum content of this subject, serving as a reference for teachers in their instructions. Policymakers play a vital role in supporting and promoting these initiatives by incorporating them into educational policies and curricula. By prioritizing the development and implementation of such strategies, policymakers can ensure that music education remains relevant and appealing to students in the 21st century, ultimately contributing to their holistic development and fostering a lifelong appreciation for music. Thus, increasing time allocation for the music

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subject from 30 minutes to at least one hour per week seems crucial at this point (MAME, 2021). This concern requires urgent attention and calls for a collaborative discussion among music experts and educators to facilitate deeper understanding and develop effective solutions. Hence, teachers in the primary school environment should not merely depend on the curriculum provided by the ministry. Other teaching materials could come from the teachers themselves working together as a team in individual schools or within schools in the region. Therefore, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of innovative educational music teaching materials and approaches in cultivating musical creativity, engagement, and learning outcomes among children in Malaysia. The objectives of this study are to design music education teaching materials and evaluate the impact of educational interventions on students' musical experience, composition skills, and appreciation of music.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 *The Impact of Policies on Music Education*

Music teachers can make a difference through engagement with policy at all levels. According to Shaw (2020) Music educators may have a preference to avoid policy discussions. Moreover, music teachers in educational institutions are heavily occupied with numerous responsibilities, including teaching, directing, managing schedules and inventory, planning trips, and more. Consequently, the demanding nature of their roles has resulted in a lack of active participation from music teachers in policy discourse. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that music educators often encounter situations in which involvement in policy matters becomes inevitable.

Music educators should consider themselves an important part of the policy process and take proactive steps toward seeking solutions that serve their best interests and those of their students. Hellman (2020) stated that music education policy can be strengthened through an understanding of the policy-making process and engagement with state-level policy. There are three examples of music educators' involvement in advancing the policy goals of music education, namely through agency, consultation, and insight. First, an understanding of how state governments take policy action is needed to influence state-level policy and improve policy thinking. Second, policy changes often involve different policy strategies and require careful monitoring. Third, music education policies are influenced by unpredictable random factors. Thus, state associations can improve policy by providing timely communication, relevant information, and opportunities to discuss issues and opportunities with music educators. This is an important step in advancing music education policy forward.

### 2.2 *Music Education Policy and Implications for Teaching Practices*

Teachers also play a role in the implementation of policies. Alias et al. (2023) investigate factors impacting the integrity of academicians in Malaysia which indirectly relates to the broader educational policy landscape, suggesting potential implications for teaching practices within music education institutions. Ismail et al. (2022) explore the transition from physical to virtual learning environments in music education for gifted students, shedding light on how evolving educational norms can influence teaching practices and the formulation of music education policies. Sham et al. (2022) explore perceptions toward music education, providing valuable perspectives that can inform policy decisions and teaching approaches in the field. Analyzing the findings collectively reveals a multifaceted approach to understanding the intersection of music education policy and teaching practices, emphasizing the importance of integrity in academic practices, adaptability to new learning norms, and the significance of perceptions toward music education in shaping effective teaching strategies within the Malaysian context.

According to Kos (2018), teachers should work throughout their careers to learn about policies, school context, and new ideas. *Utusan Malaysia* (2022), reported that the Ministry should consider all the requirements of Music Education in primary schools. The subject of Music Education is not just an insignificant additional subject, and the teachers who teach music should be proficient and specialized in music. Most primary school music teachers are non-music-specialists, and as a result, they may lack interest in music but are compelled to teach it due to administrative directives. The Ministry of Education should also consider implementing a policy that involves training proficient music teachers to teach Music Education in schools. Additionally, it is essential to ensure that every school is equipped with up-to-date musical instruments and teaching aids for music. Learning the latest ideas about curriculum approaches to teaching, and musical opportunities might allow teachers to maintain programs that are current and relevant for a greater number of students. While professional development offered within schools can be beneficial, it is important to note that specialists such as music teachers often require additional resources beyond the school setting.

### 2.3 *Challenges and Strategies for Cultivating Creativity in Music Education.*

The cultivation of creativity in music teaching plays a vital role in ensuring that students actively participate in various activities during music instruction. For instance, music students learn skills such as composing, improvising, and arranging music using appropriate instruments to create high-quality work. These tasks provide learners with opportunities to engage in comprehensive creative thinking, enabling them to generate novel and improved outcomes based on the institution's learning plan blueprint, which aims to enhance students' thinking abilities. According to Md Jais et al. (2020), creative thinking encompasses both convergent and divergent thought processes. In order to become an effective music educator in schools, it is essential to possess the right attributes related to musical ability, including pedagogical skills, soft skills, and effective classroom management techniques. The availability of diverse music teaching materials that can facilitate creative thinking in music is limited in government schools. Many teachers primarily rely on the curriculum materials provided by the Ministry of Education, as there are few alternative resources to enhance the effectiveness, creativity, and innovation of music instruction. MAME (2021) reported that the most vital issue in implementing creative music teaching in school is time allocation where the music subject is given only 30 minutes a week in the primary school timetable. Even with the use

of updated teaching materials, it becomes difficult to fully engage in creative music activities and foster students' creative thinking within such a limited timeframe. Therefore, it is crucial to address this issue by increasing the time allocation for music education to at least one hour per week, allowing for more comprehensive and effective creative music instruction at this point. Additionally, teachers have the autonomy to create their policies by designing curricula and establishing classroom procedures. Through their advocacy, teachers also exert influence on policy decisions made by other stakeholders.

### 3.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing interviews, to investigate the challenges faced by music teachers in implementing musical creativity in the classroom. It also examined the obstacles related to music education policy and curriculum in primary schools. The study involved six music teachers from public schools and ministry officers responsible for the development of the primary school curriculum. The objective of conducting interviews was to gather information regarding the musical activities conducted in Primary Two, identify feedback from music teachers on the challenges they face, their teaching methods and available resources, and the current issues they encounter in music education. This valuable feedback was crucial in informing the development of suitable materials to enhance and nurture musical creativity among students at the Primary Year Two level. The teachers for this study were selected using purposive sampling, specifically focusing on those with over 10 years of experience teaching music in Level One (Year 1-3) primary schools in Selangor.

### 4.0 Findings

#### 4.1 *The Importance of Music in Primary School*

Music plays a crucial role in the holistic development of children, offering numerous benefits that contribute to their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth. All six music teachers strongly emphasized the significance of music education in the early development of children. They highlighted that through music classes, "students can showcase their talents through activities like singing and playing musical instruments" (MT2, MT5). Furthermore, regular participation in classroom practices helps reduce performance anxiety, as students have the "opportunity to repeatedly demonstrate their skills and knowledge" (MT1). Teachers also stated that the introduction of music education also "assists in balancing pupils' emotional development" (MT?) as they tend to be "happier" (MT1) when participating in activities that especially involve "music and movements" (MT3, MT4, MT5 and MT6). The teachers advocated the importance of introducing music education at the primary level because participating in various activities in music class like singing, playing musical instruments, sound exploration, creative movement activities, as well as musical performances is a definite way of "boosting the pupils' confidence level (MT1, MT3, MT5, and MT6).

#### 4.2 *Music Teaching Approaches*

Music teachers in primary schools often employ various Western music approaches such as Kodaly, Orff, and Dalcroze (Anderson, 2013). These methods are tailored to suit the proficiency level of the students, aiming to generate interest in learning music. The module for music teaching is largely influenced by the techniques advocated by Kodaly, Orff, and Dalcroze, as they have proven to "engage students effectively" (MT1, MT2, MT4). Based on the interviews, all music teachers commonly used music teaching approaches in schools including Kodaly, Dalcroze and Orff. These approaches are deemed suitable for Malaysian classrooms and contribute to the development of pupils' creative thinking in music. Based on the teacher's statement, different approaches to teaching have their advantages and suitability for different topics. The teacher expresses a particular interest in topics that "involve singing and movement" (MT2, MT5 and MT6), especially for Year Two pupils. As a result, they choose the "Dalcroze approach" (MT2, MT3, MT4, MT6), which aligns with the idea of expressing feelings and emotions through movement.

#### 4.3 *Challenges Faced by Music Teachers When Implementing Music in Primary School*

Music teachers in this study expressed significant challenges when it comes to implementing music education in their schools. The issues they encountered included insufficient support, limited financial resources, lack of necessary skills, inadequate teaching time, and a scarcity of teaching materials. These issues have an impact on the implementation of music education in all the schools in the country.

##### 4.3.1 *Lack of Support*

The perceptions and attitudes of specific parents, teachers, and administrators can be viewed as lacking positivity. This is because they perceive music as a subject primarily for leisure and mere entertainment. Consequently, this explains the noticeable absence of encouragement towards learning music from both music teachers and students. In rural areas, a considerable number of parents hold the belief that learning music is prohibited (haram) in Islam and consider it to be a futile pursuit. As a result, they are reluctant to allow their children to engage in music education, perceiving it as a waste of time. Music teachers reported that the poor response towards music education in schools is attributed to the "attitudes and perspectives of parents, administrators, and students" (MT2, MT4), who perceive music as a "leisure activity or entertainment" (MT2) rather than a valuable subject. Consequently, this "lack of support and encouragement" (MT4, MT5, MT6) has resulted in limited participation from both music teachers and students.

#### 4.3.2 Lack of Musical Facilities and Financial Resources

Another challenge arises from the inadequate availability of musical facilities and limited financial resources which hinder efforts to assist and enhance the quality of music education. This is especially evident in the lack of provision for teaching aids and musical instruments. The majority of schools struggle to afford complete sets of musical instruments, including the “*Angklung* set, recorders, and Orff Instruments” (MT5). Consequently, “numerous students in these schools fall behind their peers” (MT6) in larger, well-funded institutions. All teachers emphasize that “adequate finances are crucial for enhancing the quality of learning” and “acquiring necessary teaching materials”, including “musical instruments for classroom use”. Unfortunately, smaller schools often face “budget constraints” (MT3, MT5, MT6), resulting in limited funds to purchase complete sets of instruments such as *Angklung* sets and recorders.

#### 4.3.3 Time Allocation

All music teachers reported that the primary issue in teaching music in the classroom is the limitation of time. The allocated 30-minute class per week for music learning on the school timetable is deemed “insufficient” (MT1, MT2, MT3, MT4, MT5 and MT6). This poses a “significant challenge for teachers to effectively impart music knowledge” (MT2, MT6) and for students to grasp the subject comprehensively, particularly for “those who struggle academically” (MT6). Many music teachers expressed frustration regarding the “limited time allotted to music compared to other subjects on the timetable” (MT3, MT4, MT6). The class duration has been reduced from one hour to just 30 minutes per week, greatly “disrupting the learning process”. Conveying comprehensive music knowledge within such a short time frame poses a significant challenge for teachers, and it becomes even more difficult for students to achieve mastery in music. All music teachers strongly hope that the Ministry would reconsider and establish a new policy to “increase the allocated time for Music Education to 1 hour per week”. This is to ensure that music instruction in schools can be fully implemented and allow for creative teaching approaches in music.

#### 4.3.4 Music Resources and Teaching Material

The Ministry of Education provides various teaching materials and music resources, including musical instruments, compact discs, textbooks, and curriculum guides. However, one of the teachers reported that “the supplied teaching materials needed to undergo further evaluation by music teachers” (MT2, MT5 and MT6) to ensure their relevance and suitability for students at different levels of proficiency. Most teachers lack music skills and are not able to optimally utilize the materials. In general, the materials provided by the ministry are inadequate, lacking comprehensiveness, and fail to enhance or elevate the reputation of music teaching and learning in Malaysia. The teacher highlights a sense of uncertainty regarding curriculum revisions. Teachers are typically informed about new courses and promised new materials and teaching guides. However, “schools only receive these materials at the end of the year, leading to delays and potential issues in implementing the revised curriculum” (MT1). Another issue they face is the “lack of teaching aids and musical equipment in schools due to insufficient allocation” (MT1, MT2, MT4, MT5) provided by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Music teachers have to comply with the policies in music education, where the allocated budget for each school is limited. They have to “make use of the existing resources” (MT5, MT6) to implement music education in schools and plan suitable music resources and teaching materials for the use of the music room and music teaching activities in schools.

#### 4.4 Feedback from Curriculum Developer

The interview included the music curriculum officers from the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Development Division, responsible for designing the primary school music education curriculum. The objective of the interview was to ensure that the design of the musical creativity module in this study aligns with all the standard requirements set by the ministry for teaching music education in schools. Music curriculum officers reported that this inclusion of creative activities in the classroom environment promotes higher-order thinking, fosters artistic skills, and enables students to apply their acquired knowledge to bring their creative ideas to life. The curriculum places significant emphasis on two vital elements: creativity and innovation. Music curriculum officers further explain that although these elements differ from each other, they are mutually complementary. Creativity involves the ability to utilize imagination to generate, combine, and assimilate ideas, while innovation entails applying creativity through modifying, refining, and practising existing ideas or inspirations. Both creativity and innovation are crucial for the development of individuals capable of surmounting the challenges of the 21st century. According to music curriculum officers, educators have a vital role to play in integrating creativity and innovation within the music classroom during the teaching and learning process. To facilitate this, teachers are provided with the latest music education syllabus and teaching materials, enabling them to creatively teach music through engaging musical activities that captivate students' interest.

## 5.0 Discussions

The implementation of effective policies for Music Education and music teachers plays crucial roles in creating a high-quality and enriching music learning environment. The design of music creative educational materials was based on the Constructivism Learning Theory. Constructivism promotes social and communication skills by fostering a classroom environment that emphasizes collaboration and exchange of ideas between teachers and students during musical activities. Students actively participate in creative musical activities and learn how to articulate their ideas clearly as well as to collaborate on tasks effectively by sharing in group activities. Music teachers in school should have a strong background in music, pedagogy, and instructional strategies to effectively engage and inspire students. Continuous professional development programs and opportunities are vital in keeping teachers abreast of the latest trends, techniques, and methodologies in music education, empowering them to enhance their knowledge and skills. Adequate allocation of

resources is also crucial for successful music education. This includes providing access to a variety of musical instruments, teaching materials, and technological tools that facilitate interactive and engaging learning experiences. Teachers in the primary school environment should not merely depend on the curriculum provided by the ministry. Other teaching materials could come from the teachers working together as a team in individual schools or within in the region. The designing of music education materials is just one example of how music teachers can contribute their creativity and innovation to improving the quality of teaching and learning music in schools at all levels. This aligns with the Ministry of Education's goal, as enshrined in the Education Development Plan (2013-2025) to produce creative and innovative human capital.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, music education policies should prioritize the professional development of music teachers, allocate sufficient resources, provide adequate instructional time, and promote inclusive and equitable music learning experiences for all students. By fostering a supportive and enriching environment, music teachers can effectively nurture students' musical abilities, creativity, and appreciation for music. This study provides supplementary music education materials to support primary school music teachers. These creative materials are designed to align with the new syllabus in the music education curriculum of the Malaysian Ministry of Education, to diversify music activities to foster pupils' creative thinking. It is hoped that future studies will expand on this present study by examining the effectiveness of implementing these materials across diverse classroom settings and exploring their long-term impact on student's musical development and creativity.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The study found that there is an urgent need to prioritize designing creative music education teaching materials for school children in Malaysia. The implications of this research extend to both policy and music teaching practices within the Malaysian education system. By addressing this need through appropriate policies and teaching practices, we can cultivate a generation of students who are not only proficient in music but also equipped with the creative and critical thinking skills necessary for success in the 21st century.

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