Music Teachers' Perceptions of the Nature of Creative Thinking and Its Value in Music Education

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***Abstract* – The National Education Philosophy has emphasized efforts to produce creative and innovative individuals to develop the nation. Therefore, creativity should be established early in the development of children through systematic and effective education. Music education in Malaysia is seen one of the way to prove to the public that music has the mean to strengthen and develop human creativity and cognitive. This study involved 45 music teachers who are currently teaching music in primary schools in Malaysia. The results showed that the majority of the music teachers perceive creative thinking as an important outcome of music education and their role as a music teacher involves the facilitation of pupils' creative thinking skills in music. Music teachers frequently engage with creative `thinking experiences by doing some activities with the pupils such as improvisations with classroom instruments and improvising rhythms to play as body percussion. All the teachers indicated that they had put a lot of effort in applying creative music teaching in the classroom. They also advocated that creative teaching in the classroom could potentially attract pupils to be interested in learning music. Teachers also agreed that the development of the student's interest in music depends on the teachers' expression of interest in these music activities, on the choice of music activities, as well as the contents of the music. This study also discovered that pupils with a musical background could enhance their creativity when given more challenging creative thinking experiences while exploring new musical activities. It is hoped that the findings of this research will offer new ideas and insights and help in the process of improving existing instructional techniques and methods of teaching music in school.**

***Keywords* – music teachers, creative thinking, music education**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education in the Education Development Blueprint 2010 pointed out that cultivation of creative element in the school's curriculum is crucial as children would be able to generate creative and innovative ideas, possess personality and appearance of creative individuals, grasp skills in creativity process, able to communicate in conveying ideas besides applying knowledge and skills critically and creatively in solving problems as well as construct decisions and manage the course of everyday life. Creative and innovative cultures among pupils are among the Ministry of Education's goals which are enshrined in the Education Development Plan 2013-2025 aiming to produce creative and innovative human capital. In addition, creative and innovative individuals are capable of inventing ideas besides possess quality inventive trait which is a good model to practise and culture among people in our society. Thus, creativity value should be instilled in teaching and learning at an early stage of children. By encouraging creativity and imagination, we are promoting children's ability to explore and comprehend their world and increasing their opportunities to make new connections and reach new understandings (Duffy, 2006).

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

At the school level, critical and creative thinking play an important role in order to initiate an interesting and beneficial to the pupils. Teachers should almost always think to come up with effective steps to attract pupils' attention especially in the music class. According to Macmillan (2004), he stated that by utilizing proper quality and effective pedagogy apart from being experienced and teaching capabilities, it enables the teachers to encourage pupils to give their full attention when the teaching and learning session takes place during music class. Majzub (2013) also mentioned that teachers need to teach using varied approaches in the class and they should also be creative in teaching using varied methods to avoid boredom and poor responses from the children.

As teachers in primary school environments, the execution of musical activities should not merely depend on the curriculum provided by the ministry. The correct methods, teaching creativity and techniques in musical instruction have largely been overlooked. This is particularly true of the general lack of awareness of the importance of proper music instruction in the early stages of childhood. Perhaps the seemingly lack of care in formal music instruction at this early stage in children education is due to a perception that it is both difficult and tedious for children. On the other hand, teachers should apply their own initiatives to think creatively in doing musical activities when teaching and learning music in class. This study focussed on teachers' perceptions of the nature of creative thinking and its value in Music Education.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to (Azzara, 2002) it has been proven that children who are involved in the creative thinking activities, are able to possess high achievement in the music field and are more highly motivated to learn. Furthermore, according to (Reimer, 2005), by having or conducting a variety of musical activities, it can help to initiate creative thinking and at the same time can help to improve thinking skills through the medium of music teaching, so that, the concept elements of music such as melody, harmony, rhythm, and forms will be easier to digest. So, it is not an easy task to become an individual or a student who possesses the characteristics of playing instrument and composing quality works at the same time.

Fairfield (2002) stated that music teachers perceived creative thinking as an essential outcome of elementary general music. He reported that the difficulties in designing

and implementing on-going creative thinking activities for their pupils, citing lack of time, resources, and physical teaching space as significant challenges. Reimer (2005) and Wong (2014) also agreed that conducting a variety of musical activities helps initiate creative thinking and at the same time also helps to improve thinking skills through the medium of music teaching. Denac (2008) also stated that the development of the children's interest in music depends on the teachers' expression of interest in music activities, on the choice of music activities and music contents and on the experience in the music environment of the family. Music teachers frequently engage with creative `thinking experiences by doing some activities with the pupils such as improvisations with classroom instruments and improvising rhythms to play as body percussion (clapping, patting, stomping, etc.).

IV. METHOD

The quantitative method was used in this study. Questionnaires were distributed to 45 music teachers who were currently teaching music in primary school, especially at level One (Year 1 and Year 2). The *Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Facilitating Musical Creativity or* (**TPPFMC)** was adapted from a study done by Fairfield, 2010. TPPFMC was used in this study because it has an extensive coverage of general items of musical creativity especially creative thinking in music. The researcher then modified a few questions in the TPPFMC questionnaire based on Malaysian Music Education Curriculum and current situation in music education in primary schools. Results from the quantitative data were analysed using SPSS in descriptive statistics to obtain the mean score and frequency.

V. FINDINGS

The respondents of the study comprised of 26 male music teachers (57.8%) and 19 female music teachers (42.2%). The number of male music teachers exceeded the number of female music teachers. For the teaching experience of music teachers, the result shows that 32 (71.1%) music teachers have been teaching music in primary school for more than 10 years. For the educational background, the majority of music teachers in this study possess a Degree in Music Education with 37 frequency (82.2%). It showed that the standard of teaching music in primary school was upgraded because majority teachers have had higher qualification in music.

TABLE I: MUSICAL CREATIVE THINKING EXPERIENCES AMONG PUPILS

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std.Dev
1	Creative Thinking is an essential goal of music education.	45	4.27	.58
2	Music creative thinking can be developed in every person	45	3.89	.80
3	Music Education typically offers pupils an opportunity to develop their creative thinking skills.	45	4.42	.50
4	My role as a music teacher involves the facilitation at pupils creative thinking skills.	45	4.42	.50
5	The ability to develop more than one solution to a musical problem is an essential component of creative thinking in music	45	4.16	.52
6	A musical composition must be unique or original to be creative	45	3.91	.87
7	The longer musical composition lasts, the more creative tends to be	45	3.51	1.06
8	A musical composition must make musical sense to be creative	45	3.98	.84

Table I shows creative thinking among pupils based on music teaching experience. This creative thinking is based on pupils experiences in creating compositions, improvising, creative movement, singing, performing music and creating listening maps. The results showed that "Music Education typically offers pupils an opportunity to develop their creative thinking skills" and "My role as a music teacher involves the facilitation at pupils creative thinking skills" with the mean score of 4.42 and a standard deviation of .50. The item that shows the lowest mean score was "The longer musical composition lasts, the more creative tends to be" with a mean score of 3.51 and standard deviation of 1.06. This shows that if the composition of the song is played too long, the creative thinking of the pupils cannot reach a high level. The pupils will lose their focus and are less prominent in their creativity. It also depends on the experiences of the pupils in the music activities they have had.

TABLE II: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CREATIVE THINKING EXPERIENCES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std.Dev
1	Create a song to sing that is not notated	45	3.51	1.55
2	Create a song to sing that is notated with traditional notation	45	4.02	1.45
3	Compose music to play on a classroom instrument that is not notated	45	3.07	1.32
4	Compose music to play on a classroom instrument that is notated	45	4.22	1.17
5	Improvise with their voices	45	4.12	1.15
6	Improvise with classroom instruments	45	4.69	.51
7	Improvise on recorder	45	4.13	.87
8	Improvise rhythms to play as body percussion (clapping, patting, stomping, etc.)	45	4.62	.72
9	Compose or improvise with found sounds (recycled and/or handmade instruments)	45	4.02	1.27
10	Create movement or dance to music			
11	Invent their own form of musical notation	45	3.04	1.57

Table II shows the average frequency of teachers in involving pupils in creative thinking during teaching and learning activities in music classes. The result shows that overall, teachers often implement creative activities with pupils between 7-9 times a year. It can be seen from the highest mean score of 4.69 with a standard deviation .51 in item "Improvise with classroom instruments" followed by item "Improvise rhythms to play as body percussion (clapping, patting, stomping, etc)" with mean score 4.62 and standard deviation .72 . The lowest mean score was "invent their own form of musical notation" with mean score 3.04 and standard deviation 1.57.

Thus, it could be concluded that music teachers are aware of the importance of musical activities in enhancing creative thinking of pupils during teaching and learning music in the classroom. In addition to the creative activities listed in this table, there were also creative thinking experiences that have been performed in music rooms such as improvise music in a medley, using Curwin hand-sign, do acting according to the song lyric, using recycled material to make their own musical instrument, compose rhythmic pattern using flash card playing and do experiment with the music concepts and involve pupils with musical performance, musical contest and dance to enhance student creativity.

TABLE III: MUSIC TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING CONDITIONS THAT ENHANCES CREATIVE THINKING

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std.Dev
1	I feel well trained to develop pupils' creative thinking in music	45	3.67	.77
2	I have the resources I need to implement creative thinking experiences in my teaching	45	3.67	.77
3	I have enough time to implement creative thinking experiences	45	2.58	1.08
4	I worry that when pupils work independently on creative thinking tasks, such as composing or improving, I might lose control of classroom management.	45	2.71	1.01
5	Activities that emphasize creative thinking (such as composing and improvising) are part of my school district's music curriculum	45	4.02	.81

Based on the results in Table III, the highest mean score for the item "Activities that emphasize creative thinking (such as composing and improvising) are part of my school district's music curriculum" was 4.02 with a standard deviation of .81. This was followed by item "I feel well trained to develop pupils' creative thinking in music" and "I have the resources I need to implement creative thinking experiences in my teaching" which have the mean score 3.65 and a standard deviation of .77. The lowest mean score was "I have enough time to implement creative thinking experiences" with a mean score 2.58 and standard deviation of .77. These results showed that teachers are aware of the implementation of creative thinking in their school but the time constraint was the main issues in implementing musical creativity in their musical activities.

VI. DISCUSSION

Results from quantitative data analysis revealed creative thinking as the essential goal of music education, while the role of the music teacher was to facilitate pupils' creative thinking skills. Previous research findings also indicate that the vast majority of music teachers perceive creative thinking as an important outcome of music education (Fairfield, 2010; Wong, 2014; Reihmer, 2005, Azza, 2002; Miner, 2007).

The teachers also expressed the importance of doing musical activities with their pupils so that the pupils could experience doing creative activities guided by teachers. This finding is similar to Denac's (2008) study which states that the development of the student's interest in music depends on the teachers' expression of interest in these music activities, on the choice of music activities, as well as the contents of the music. The results also show that the majority of the music teachers agreed with the idea that their role as a music teacher involves the facilitation of pupils' creative thinking skills. Music teachers frequently engage with creative `thinking experiences by doing some activities with the pupils such as improvisations with classroom instruments and improvising rhythms to play as body percussion (clapping, patting, stomping, etc.).

This study also discoveredthat pupils with a musical background could enhance their creativity when given more challenging creative thinking experiences while exploring new musical activities. As such, music teachers must look for a variety of musical activities, teaching methods and materials to attract pupils to learn music and be creative in the music classroom. Reimer (2005) and Wong (2014) also agreed that conducting a variety of musical activities helps initiate creative thinking and at the same time also helps to improve thinking skills through the medium of music teaching.

Results from the quantitative data analysis showed that when pupils were given complete freedom to create, their creative thinking would be enhanced. These findings are consistent with a previous research done by Fairfield (2010) where 71.1% of the respondents reported a high level of agreement with the idea that fluency (i.e. *the ability to develop more than one solution to a musical problem*) is an essential component of creative thinking in music.

The results of this study also showed that respondents were ambivalent that originality, syntax and extensiveness are essential components of creative thinking. Half of the respondents (51.1%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement "a musical composition must be unique or original to be creative (originality). This is also similar to Fairfield's finding in 2010. To another statement "a musical composition must make musical sense to be creative (syntax)", most of the respondents (68.9%) neither agreed nor disagreed. As for another statement "the longer a musical composition lasts, the more creative it tends to be (extensiveness)" slightly contradicted Fairfield's study whereby only 40% of the respondents disagreed compared to the majority of the respondents (82.1%) who disagreed in Fairfield's study.

VII. CONCLUSION

In line with the Malaysian Ministry of Education's aspiration to produce knowledgeable, creative thinking and innovative music pupils, teachers, educators, researchers, material writers and curriculum designers alike need to find new and current ways of attracting pupils to learn music. This could be in the form of creative teaching materials that are technologically enabled and relevant to 21st century children. Hence, the process of teaching and learning should concentrate further on creating more attractive and effective activities for the music classroom.

Furthermore, special music courses related to pedagogical approaches to music teaching could be conducted by and among music teachers to improve their teaching styles with the latest music approaches. Majzub (2013) mentioned that teachers need to teach using varied and creative approaches in the class to avoid boredom and loss of interest among the pupils. Enhancement training of music teachers could be through courses organized at the ministry level, where music teachers develop more knowledge and competence of music skills as well as pedagogy to cope with the demands of change nationally and globally.

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