

## A SURVEY ON TEACHING READINESS AMONG NON-MUSIC TEACHERS IN GOVERNMENT PRESCHOOLS IN PERAK

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### Abstract

The education of music plays a very important role in children's lives and beyond. Many studies have shown that there is an increased emphasis on teaching children of the other language, while the arts education is being relegated. Other studies also revealed the benefit and significance of music education for preschool children in assisting them in learning other subjects. Unfortunately, the teaching readiness of the teachers who teach music have deterred the appreciation and understanding of music among preschoolers in respective preschools. This study sought to evaluate three main components of teaching readiness—content knowledge, professional development, and instructional strategies among non-music teachers in Perak government preschools. This cross-sectional survey design used questionnaires to collect data which was analyzed using the descriptive statistics. The results of this study indicated the teaching readiness of the non-music preschool teachers (N=48) in Perak is average in terms of content knowledge (M=3.35); and the instructional strategies (M=3.33) used in music classroom. The professional development indicated only 25% of the total teachers who participated in courses, workshops, seminars, and other teacher development programmes. Teachers with excellent knowledge and skills create a positive impact and leave significant effects on children in music classes. It is the responsibility of the non-music preschool teachers' to take the challenge and promote the teaching and learning of music to a greater height.

**Keywords:** teaching readiness, content knowledge, professional development, instructional strategies

### Introduction

The Ministry of Education aims in producing excellent future teacher in Malaysia<sup>6</sup>. Although the teachers have excellent academic background, they still lack in their pedagogical skills in real-school environment. Masnan claimed that as a qualified preschool teacher, they should be able to apply their knowledge and skills, which are the important assets in the process of

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education. 2004. "National report of Malaysia". Retrieved from <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/International/ICE47/English/Natreps/reports/malaysia.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2015).

teaching and learning<sup>7</sup>. In addition, they are also required to master the skills which are appropriate to the students' level of cognitive development.

Many studies have revealed that teachers in pre- and primary school feel that they are not competent enough to teach music<sup>8</sup>. Carol mentioned that although many teachers are aware of the importance of music to children, but they are unable to conduct effective music lessons to them.<sup>9</sup>

In Malaysia, most of the teachers did not receive any music education or training prior to their admission into the teacher training programme. There were also problems of lack of teaching resources. Research has shown that only 7% out of 96 qualified teacher trainers received significant formal education in instrumental skills, while 22% others described that the courses were limited to only music with creative movements.<sup>10</sup> In the previous basic education curriculum, music subject was offered as a core subject until the year 1994; it is now only offered as an elective subject.<sup>11</sup> As a result, only a small number of teacher trainees had the opportunity to learn music while others became engaged with other musical activities such as musical drama, drama and ensembles. This is the main reason for the shortage of music education teachers which has required the non-music option to teach music in schools.

**Deficiencies in the evidence.** Referring to the music education in Malaysian preschools, Chan and Kwan in Augustine claimed that there are two major issues affirmed: (a) low perception towards music and music education by the society and (b) music teachers' lack of readiness and teaching skills.<sup>12</sup> Chan and Kwan discovered that the questions pertaining to the confidence level of the music teachers' teaching skills showed only 30% of total number. Obviously, the teachers were not skilled or capable enough to perform their duties as music teachers (p.20).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Masnan, Abdul Halim. 2014. "Amalan pedagogi guru prasekolah permulaan." Doctoral Tesis, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris. Malaysia

<sup>8</sup> Carol, S-Kassner. (1999). Developing teachers for early childhood programs. *Music Educators Journal*, 86(1), 19.

Chan Cheong Jan & Kwan Shwu Shyan. "Implementation of music in government preschools in Malaysia: Music activities, teachers' perceptions and teachers' self-efficacy." *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 18, (2010). 209-225.

Anna Ehrlin & Cecilia Wallerstedt. (2014). "Preschool teachers' skills in teaching music: two steps forward one step back." *Early Child Development and Care* 184. No. 12 (2014). 1800-1811.

Ming, C. S., Liu, R., Lin, C. P. & Tang, T. M. (2003). Satu tinjauan: Kepentingan muzik sebagai mata pelajaran wajib dalam kurikulum pendidikan guru. Retrieved from [http://www.ipgkbl.edu.my/portal/penyelidikan/jurnalpapers/jurnal2003/2003\\_chai.pdf](http://www.ipgkbl.edu.my/portal/penyelidikan/jurnalpapers/jurnal2003/2003_chai.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Carol, Scott-Kassner. (1999). "Developing teachers for early childhood programs." *Music Educators Journal* 86, no.1 (1999): 19.

<sup>10</sup> Chan Cheong Jan & Kwan Shwu Shyan. "Implementation of music in government preschools in Malaysia: Music activities, teachers' perceptions and teachers' self-efficacy." *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 18, (2010). 209-225.

<sup>11</sup> Chai Sheau Ming, Liu, Roseline., Chong Pek Lin. & Tang Ming Tan. Satu tinjauan: Kepentingan muzik sebagai mata pelajaran wajib dalam kurikulum pendidikan guru. Retrieved from [http://www.ipgkbl.edu.my/portal/penyelidikan/jurnalpapers/jurnal2003/2003\\_chai.pdf](http://www.ipgkbl.edu.my/portal/penyelidikan/jurnalpapers/jurnal2003/2003_chai.pdf). 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Christine, Augustine. (2013). "How the Use of Music and Movement Impacts the Learning of Reading Skills by Preschoolers." *Malaysian Music Journal* 4, no. 2 (2013): 55-66.

<sup>13</sup> Chan Cheong Jan & Kwan Shwu Shyan. "Implementation of music in government preschools in Malaysia: Music activities, teachers' perceptions and teachers' self-efficacy." *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 18, (2010). 220.

Only six percent of non-music teachers were found to be confident in teaching music<sup>14</sup>, 52% less confident, 39% no confident, while the remaining three percent did not respond. Even though, 58% of the non-specialist teachers had some level of confidence to teach music, unfortunately music subject were ranked the last compared to other subjects in the confidence level. This problem occurred mainly because their initial training did not equip them to teach music effectively.

### Research Questions

This study is carried out to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the non-music preschool teachers' content knowledge in teaching music in the government preschool in Perak?
2. What is the level of their personal and professional development in teaching music in the preschool?
3. What are the instructional strategies used in the music classroom?

### Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine the teaching readiness among non-music teachers in government preschools in Perak. The first section highlights research related to the theoretical framework based on the constructivist approach. This study is based on the constructive theory where each concept is presented using various instructional strategies which gives the learner an opportunity to make his or her own connections. Researchers mentioned that while children are physically engaged in activities such as listening and creativity, the teacher must develop cognitive engagement throughout the activity to ensure learning is taking place.<sup>15</sup>

**Music in preschool.** Music is important in children's developing years. Numerous studies have proven the advantages of integrating music in other subjects, such as literacy<sup>16</sup> and mathematics<sup>17</sup> to mention a few. The perceptions of music education are shaped by people's values which influence the music teaching and learning<sup>18</sup>. Other than that, the instructional time for teaching music and other arts have been reduced which also influenced their teaching time. Music subject has also been going through challenges in maintaining their status as an 'essential' subject in many countries including Malaysia.

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<sup>14</sup> Hilary Holden and Stuart Button, "The teaching of music in the primary school by the non-music specialist," *The British Journal of Music Education* 23, no. 1 (2006): 23-38

<sup>15</sup> Vincent Rinaldo and Stephen Denig, "A constructivist approach to learning music: What role, if any, does active engagement play in the learning process?," *Journal of the Practical Application of Constructivist Theory in Education*, 2009

<sup>16</sup> Ng Pei Fern & Yeo Kee Jiar. Preschool teachers' beliefs and practices on early literacy instruction. Research University Grant [Q.J130000.7131.02H57]. University Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Malaysia. 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Kamile Geist, Eugene A. Geist, and Kathleen Kuznik, "The Patterns of Music: Young Children Learning Mathematics through Beat, Rhythm, and Melody," National Association for the Education of Young Children, January 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Carlos Abril and Brent Gault, "Perspectives on the music program: opening doors to the school community," *Music Educators Journal* 93, no. 5 (2007): 32-37.

The normal practice or activities in the preschool includes singing in large groups followed by movement activities, instrument playing, listening and few creative actions.<sup>19</sup> Less time is given to preschool children to explore and create their own music. In addition, music subject is always substituted by other subject.

Holden and Button stressed that the number of music teachers are limited, but if the non-music teachers are assisted in training, access to resources and given professional support, it will make a difference in their teaching process.<sup>20</sup> The teachers' confidence level will increase if they are exposed to pedagogical skills, content and knowledge. Also Carol stressed that music educators ought to make an effort to develop or train preschool teachers by introducing different approaches and creative strategies in order to elevate music education so that it is taught in a fun and effective way.<sup>21</sup>

**Content Knowledge.** Teachers' content knowledge is very crucial in the teaching and learning process. Although there are many studies about aspects of teaching, however, no attention has been made about the teachers' understanding toward the subject being taught.<sup>22</sup> There are also debates on the preparation time teachers need to prepare contents rather than the types of content they have to learn. The author enquires whether teachers' content knowledge has larger impact on students' achievement. If it is so, it would be important to study various approaches which have different impacts on teachers' content knowledge.

**Professional development.** Professional development has helped teachers, and educators to enhance their abilities to improve the quality of their knowledge, skills and competence. Policy makers, school and district leaders are apprehensive about the quality of the professional development outcomes.<sup>23</sup> The authors assert that many studies have shown the positive impact of professional development on teachers' knowledge and practice. Authors claimed that the participants of professional development courses reported that professional development course are effective and beneficial to them in the sense that (1) they have better confidence of their knowledge and practices; (2) they are intellectually stimulated by the exposure to new ideas and the collegial interaction with pre-service teachers and university faculty; (3) they experience a lesser sense of isolation; (4) they are enthusiastic to assume leadership roles and (5) they have a greater feeling of professionalism (p. 7).<sup>24</sup>

**Instructional Strategies.** All content and methodological knowledge is of no use if a teacher or educator is unsuccessful in organizing the instruction in order to have effective learning experiences. The learning process continues with essential planning of the

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<sup>19</sup>Carol, Scott-Kassner. "Developing teachers for early childhood programs." *Music Educators Journal* 86, no.1 (1999): 19.

<sup>19</sup> Chan Cheong Jan & Kwan Shwu Shyan. "Implementation of music in government preschools in Malaysia: Music activities, teachers' perceptions and teachers' self-efficacy." *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 18, (2010). 209-225.

<sup>20</sup>Hilary Holden and Stuart Button, "The teaching of music in the primary school by the non-music specialist," *The British Journal of Music Education* 23, no. 1 (2006): 23-38

<sup>21</sup>Carol, Scott-Kassner. "Developing teachers for early childhood programs." *Music Educators Journal* 86, no.1 (1999): 19.

<sup>22</sup> Deborah L. Ball, Mark H. Thames, and Geoffrey Phelps, "Content Knowledge for Teaching What Makes It Special?," *Journal of Teacher Education* 59, no. 5 (2008): 389-407

<sup>23</sup> Carlos Abril and Brent Gault, "Perspectives on the music program: opening doors to the school community," *Music Educators Journal* 93, no. 5 (2007): 921-958

<sup>24</sup>Susan, W.Conkling& Warren, Henry, Warren. "The impact of professional development partnerships: Our part of the story." *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 11, no.2 (2002): 7-13.

components, implementation of lessons and the assessment of learning. Instructions can be planned in many ways but the planning approach is crucial.<sup>25</sup> The planning process comprises of seven steps namely: (1) considering previous learning and identifying the existing achievement levels of each student and the class; (2) selecting specific content to be studied that matches these achievement levels; (3) specifying the aim of the lesson along with the construction of meaningful and measurable lesson objectives; (4) considering how each student will meet the objectives; (5) preparing sequenced learning activities and experiences that result in purposeful learning involving knowledge, understanding, and skills; (6) assessing individual and group achievement; and (7) using these assessments as a teaching tool to reinforce concepts and skills, and to affect future lessons (p.36).

## Methodology

**Participants.** This study was conducted at 28 government preschools in seven districts of North and South region of Perak state, Malaysia. Before conducting this study, the researcher obtained a written consent from the relevant authorities at the Education Ministry. The consent letter stated the purpose of the study and how it would be conducted. The respondents were teachers of preschoolers. They consisted of three major races and one ethnic. These teachers are of mixed gender; both males and females. They come from different social backgrounds and they have different teaching experience. The sample of this study consists of several government non-music preschool teachers in the state Perak. The preschools were identified through the website of the Perak State Education Department along with the addresses of the schools and contact numbers. Schools were chosen randomly based on its locations and the availability of the teachers.

**Research Instrument.** This study is a survey to investigate the non-music teachers' readiness in teaching music in government preschools. A pilot study was carried out on 35 preschool teachers from three other states in Malaysia. After the pilot study was conducted the researcher gathered the data and reviewed the comments posted by each teacher who participated in the pilot study. A questionnaire was used in this survey to collect the data. A questionnaire is a form used in a survey design that participants need to complete and return it to the researcher. The participants chose answers to questions and provided basic personal or demographic information. Additionally, the researcher used the questionnaire in closed-ended (Likert scale) and open-ended questions to measure and analyze the data.

A pilot test was conducted on a sample of 30 preschool teachers from other states. The results from the pilot test were used to amend the items of the questionnaire. A pilot test of a questionnaire is a procedure in which a researcher makes changes in an instrument based on feedback from a number of individuals who complete and evaluate the instrument. This helps determine that the individuals in the sample are capable of completing the survey and that they understand the questions (p.402).<sup>26</sup>

**Data Collection.** The researcher obtained the approval from the Higher Education authorities and the Head teacher of each school, the researcher then approached each preschool teacher. In this study, Section A which consists of the demographic details of the preschool teachers

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<sup>25</sup> Alfred S. Townsend. *Introduction to effective music teaching: Artistry and attitude*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2011

<sup>26</sup> Creswell, John W. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (3rd Edition). Nebraska-Lincoln: Pearson Education International, 2008, 284

were described using percentages following the number of teachers (frequency). Section B with the three main components of the study will be described using the mean and standard deviation. Finally, in Section C, participants provide their own responses to three open-ended questions.

## Results

The questionnaire is divided into three sections: Section A, consist of the demographic data, Section B, shows the results of the non-music teachers' teaching readiness. This section revealed the results of the non-music teachers' content knowledge, personal and professional development in teaching music, and the instructional strategies and activities they used in their music classrooms. Finally, Section C consists of open-ended questions which require teachers to give their recommendations to improve the quality the music subject in preschools.

**Section A:** Demographics details of the participants. The number of participants can be found in Table 1 based on the three regions—North, Central and South of Perak. There were 48 preschool teachers who took part in this study. The teachers were from seven different districts in Perak. From the forty eight teachers who took part in the study, 46 were females and two males. The teachers were from a diversity of races. With regards to academic qualifications, the ranges were from Master's Degree to Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) qualification. The teachers graduated from 11 institutions in the East and West of Malaysia while 12 other teachers did not provide any response to this section. Their teaching experiences ranged from one to 15 years.

### Section B:

**Research Question 1.** This question describes the non-music preschool teachers' content knowledge of music teaching in their classrooms. The mean scores of the question range from 1.96 to 4.38. The overall mean from all the items in this section is 3.35 which is between *3-somewhat agree* and *4-agree*. The results indicate that the non-music preschool teachers agree that they are aware of the importance of music and have an average level of content knowledge to teach music in preschool.

**Research Question 2.** This question investigates the non-music preschool teachers' participation in professional development programme in music, as well as the impact on the teachers. The overall results indicated that only 25% of the teachers joined professional development programmes, such as course, seminars, conference, workshops, music qualification programmes, observation or training. The impact of the programme effectiveness is also very low. The open-ended question of this study revealed that 60.4% of the 48 teachers suggested that they need exposure in music teaching by attending courses, workshop or seminars, followed by exposed to music instrument and read notation.

**Research Question 3.** This question analyses the non-music preschool teachers' teaching strategies and activities conducted in their music classes. Part A of this question stated eleven types of tools utilized by teachers, where the top four includes white board, computer, CDs and video. Audio-visual equipment such as CDs, cassettes, video, television and non-

pitched percussions were used frequently by preschool teachers in their music classes.<sup>27</sup> It is contrary to the preschool curriculum that encourages the utilization of materials from environment to produce melody that was found to be moderately effective. Collecting objects, it allows children to create natural percussion such as the chink of chunkies, the rattle of broom pods, the music of marble galls in a jar, and the shaking of shells or banging of bones, in turn helps them develop an appreciation for the natural environment.<sup>28</sup> This kind of hands-on exercise includes natural materials normally encountered in everyday living experiences (p.1482). The shortage of teaching equipment is a common problem for teachers in preschools and music instruments such as percussions are necessity for simple musical activities.<sup>29</sup>

Part B indicates whether the teachers were able to use various strategies and activities in their music teaching. The mean score of this question ranges from 1.65 to 4.23. The overall mean from all the items in this section is 3.33 which is between 3-*somewhat agree* and 4-*agreewhich* indicates that teachers are fairly capable to teach music with various strategies and activities in the classroom.

**Section C:** Suggestions to improve the quality of music teachers in preschool. 29 out of 48 non-music preschool teachers state that they need exposure in music teaching by attending courses, workshop or seminars. Seven teachers state that they need to be exposed to music instruments such as keyboard or guitar while another three states that theory music or notation reading is necessary in teaching music. Other than that, one teacher states about the importance of knowing the nursery rhymes or children's song and another states that teachers should have access to music resources. Seven teachers did not respond to this question.

## Conclusion

**General Findings.** According to the overall results, there were three different outcomes following the research questions of the study. The outcome of the first research question demonstrates an average effect where non-music preschool teachers somewhat agree that they have sufficient content knowledge in teaching music in preschool. The second research question demonstrates an insignificant outcome where only a quarter of the total teachers attended any form of professional development programmes which basically had no or less impact on them. The third research question demonstrates an average effect where non-music preschool teachers somewhat agree that they vary their teaching styles, activities and strategies in their music classes.

**Implication of Findings.** 36.14% of the non-music teacher trainees in Malaysia disagreed that music should be a compulsory subject.<sup>30</sup> This is because not all teachers love music and

<sup>27</sup>Chan Cheong Jan & Kwan Shwu Shyan. "Implementation of music in government preschools in Malaysia: Music activities, teachers' perceptions and teachers' self-efficacy." *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 18, (2010). 209-225.

<sup>28</sup>Siew Nyet Moi & Sopia Abdullah. "Learning to play natural percussion instruments: An environmental expression for preschool trainee teachers." *Educational Research* 1, no.9 (2011): 1481-1487.

<sup>29</sup>Theano Koutsoupidou, "Self-Assessment in Generalist Preservice Kindergarten Teachers' Education: Insights on Training, Ability, Environments, and Policies," *Arts Education Policy Review* 111, no. 3 (2010): 105-111

<sup>30</sup>Chai Sheau Ming, Liu, Roseline., Chong Pek Lin. & Tang Ming Tan. Satu tinjauan: Kepentingan muzik sebagai mata pelajaran wajib dalam kurikulum pendidikan guru. Retrieved from [http://www.ipgkbl.edu.my/portal/penyelidikan/jurnalpapers/jurnal2003/2003\\_chai.pdf](http://www.ipgkbl.edu.my/portal/penyelidikan/jurnalpapers/jurnal2003/2003_chai.pdf).2003.

it is based on the individual teacher's choice. Previous studies also demonstrated that preschool teachers lack confidence in music teaching and skills especially in singing and playing in a preschool setting.<sup>31</sup> Ehrlin highlights that preschool teachers should be competent in both the theoretical and practical aspect of music in order for them to become could become skilled in the field<sup>32</sup>. Glover and Ward in Holden and Button state that trained teachers are capable to teach basic musical skills to children, but they admit that a lack of training in music education can affect their confidence level.<sup>33</sup>

**Conclusion.** Teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills create a positive learning environment and leave significant impact on children in music classes. Effective teachers demonstrate a variety of teaching styles and strategies to make the learning process more meaningful. In order to maintain effective teaching, teachers who are lack of confidence in teaching should take the opportunity to participate in professional development programmes to discover new learning tools and strategies, assessment method, find new resources, and enlarge their network towards aiming for the best music learning environment for children. Children respond to music intensely where it must be acknowledged and understood. In terms of teaching readiness, it is the responsibility of the non-music preschool teachers to take the challenge and promote music teaching and learning to a greater height.

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<sup>32</sup>Anna Ehrlin and Cecelia Wallerstedt, "Preschool teachers' skills in teaching music: two steps forward one step back," *Early Child Development and Care* 184, no. 12 (2014): 1800-1811

<sup>33</sup>Hilary Holden and Stuart Button, "The teaching of music in the primary school by the non-music specialist," *The British Journal of Music Education* 23, no. 1 (2006): 23-38

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