

Acceptance of Gifted and Talented Students in Malaysia Towards Music Education Pedagogy

Md Jais Bin Ismail¹, Rorlinda Binti Yusuf², Ong Sy Ing³
Pusat Permatapintar Negara, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Abstract

Teaching of science and mathematics subject in gifted education has been widely practised. Introduction of Music Education is said to be crucial to provide balance and support for gifted students in enhancing their performance. This study is conducted with the purpose of investigating the extent of gifted and talented students' acceptance towards Music Education pedagogy to fulfil their learning needs. Sample study here is gifted and talented students from all over Malaysia who are studying in secondary level at Pusat PERMATApintar Negara. Hence, data was collected using the methods of in-depth interviews and focused group discussion involving gifted and talented children with learning experience in music classes. Observation was also done in music classes at Pusat PERMATApintar Negara to identify students' behaviour towards musical activities conducted. Results show that all students can accept Music Education as a subject that fulfils their learning needs with priorities in activities involving musical instruments.

Keywords - Musical activities, teaching and learning, gifted and talented, PERMATApintar

I. INTRODUCTION

Humanistic approach place emphasis that every child possesses the ability, talent and specialty of their own. However, such ability and specialty are not always directly displayed. The child needs to be given the opportunity to express as well as utilize the possessed ability in various fields to enhance different types of skills, attitudes and knowledge. Therefore, it is relevant for a child's talent to be identified and thus further developed. Maksic (2006) stated that motivation is the main aspect to develop children's talent and ability. Creativity is linked to motivation that can be done by everybody to shape attitude and produce something of high quality.

Gagne (1998) has developed Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent that explains giftedness as something natural whereas talent means skill that can be enhanced throughout life. Other researchers, on the other hand, gather that giftedness and talent are rather similar despite given different names (Winner, 1996). Tolar (2016) highlighted that each gifted and talented children is different from one another within their group and also different from

other normal children. One of the remarkable uniqueness within a group of gifted and talented children is that they can be divided into those who are musically gifted and academically gifted.

Despite the differences among themselves, a very clear characteristic on them is these children have striking ability to receive and digest substantial information. They are able to remember a lot of things since they were small. This is a good thing but it poses a new challenge in the world of education. For example, gifted and talented children get easily bored when exposed with a concept that they have learned in school. Other issues include these children often think through observation towards their surrounding instead of practically doing something (Callahan, 2015). This causes them to feel what they experience and observe as something that is real even though some things are wrong from the perspective of normal people. This must be a challenge to educate gifted and talented children regarding what is true and what should be learned.

Gardner (1997) rules seven multiple intelligences. One of them is the ability to play music that enables an individual to be sensitive towards differences, manipulation and composition of new musical messages. Psychologists and musicians often use various terms such as musically gifted, talented, able, potential dan capable to describe someone who possesses musical talent (Bogunovic, 2008). According to Teplov (1967), individual with musical talent has the musicality skill that allows the person to interact with music and becomes someone who is an expert in playing music. Mirkovic (1998) believes that someone's ability in the field of music is not only influenced by genetic but also because they learn, their ability to accept musical skills and also maturity factor. Exposure towards music from early stage is also able to influence someone's ability to be skilled in musical field as they grow up.

A. Research background

Pusat PERMATApintar Negara is the only educational institution that provides specific learning for gifted and talented children in Malaysia. Since it was introduced in year 2009, this centre has successfully awarded diploma to all of its students who completed learning at level two. A lot of efforts have been done to improve the program since it is the first to be implemented in Malaysia. Among the efforts done are linking cooperations with other

universities locally and from overseas, holding exchange programs with overseas students as well as internationally certified conferences and developing suitable curriculum for the learning of these special children.

In development of teaching and learning processes at Pusat PERMATApintar Negara, Music subject has been introduced and made as compulsory subject to all students in Foundation 1, Foundation 2 and Foundation 3 or from semester one until semester six (Pp, 2015). Music subject has been taught by instructors with qualification and experience in field of music using syllabus from overseas. In the earlier stage, the syllabus used was based on music syllabus from the Phillipines. However, in 2017, the center realized that there is a flaw in the implementation of the syllabus and hence held a discussion with all music instructors to standardise the syllabus and pedagogy of music.

After it has been improved, music syllabus adopted from California Public Schools was introduced and cascaded on January 2018. Music test is set with allocation of 60 percent marks for practical assessment dan 40 percent marks for written assessment. The process of teaching music in class is based on the concept of '*different learning style*' which provides the opportunity for students to learn based on their abilities. This means that students who are already highly skilled in music or have ABRSM test grade will learn at higher level compared to those with no music background.

To implement effective teaching of music, the researcher aims to identify what are the effective musical activities from the perspective of gifted and talented students themselves. This is important to ensure what is taught by the teachers accurately fulfil their requirements. Benny and Blonder (2016) state that if teaching activities do not fit gifted and talented children's requirements, thus the skills and experiences that they possess cannot be fully utilized. If they are not exposed to activities that fulfil their requirements, these children will be inclined to rebel. They can feel easily stressed that is prone towards disciplinary problems or depression (Harun and Aimi, 2012).

Music Education is a subject that is enjoyable and grabs the attention of many students. By doing musical activities, students grasp various moral values, enhance creativity and appreciate aesthetical art (Mahmood and Musnie, 2014). For gifted and talented students, music is a need that must be done in teaching and learning process so that their learning environment is not static and dull. Therefore, it is very important that music subject is exposed to gifted and talented students with effective activities to help their development.

Thus, data collection methods are employed through in-depth interview and focused group discussion among gifted and talented students who have music learning experience from Pusat

PERMATApintar Negara. The researcher has also conducted observation in music classes to identify musical activities that is more entertaining for students.

B. Problem statement

Attention needs to be given towards specific programmes for gifted and talented students in school. Schultz (2005) underlines that gifted and talented programmes should tally with gifted and talented characteristics and principles. It should not be taken lightly or conducted without enough skills. It is more fitting to involve individuals who are gifted and talented to join together in planning and conducting gifted and talented educational programmes. This will bring a whole new perspective to understand what is being said about giftedness and how to fulfil the gifted and talented children's needs. Gifted and talented children have bright minds and potential to bring changes to the society. Therefore, an allocation needs to be provided by the government to prepare resources and trained instructors in order to guide gifted and talented students in using those resources effectively (Siegle and McCoach, 2010).

Based on the factor of high intellectual capability and unique abilities, most gifted and talented children often are not satisfied with the activities conducted in school. Research done by Milgram and Hong (1999) finds that gifted and talented students conduct own activities to entertain themselves and fulfil their needs. Memmert (2006) finds that gifted and talented students are far more creative than normal students. A styling programme was organized on his students and observation after six months showed that gifted and talented students are able to conduct creative movement sport activities very well compared to normal students. From this result, Memmert triggered a question which is: how are these gifted students able to use their cognitive abilities in the field of sports better than normal students? In the next study, he found that actually these students are able to see objects beyond close-distance visual zone compared to normal students. This means gifted and talented children are able to process information visually faster that gives the picture of what is happening on the field and what action that can be done effectively.

Other than that, in the world of education that is even more challenging now, there are many learning activities that have been developed by teachers as well as researchers. It is tough for teachers to choose which activity that is more suitable in teaching and learning especially involving gifted and talented children. Gross, Macleod and Pretorius (2007) state that activities in curriculum model are only suitable for a number of students and not necessarily fulfil the needs of all students. Maker (1982) once stated that techniques used in teachers' teaching is only suitable for few students only.

Curriculum level needs to be altered and modified differently for gifted and talented students because they are not supposed to be exposed in current curriculum that gives similar exposure to all students (Gross, Macleod and Pretorius, 2007). If gifted and talented students are treated similarly as normal students, they will easily feel bored. According to Kaplan (1990), gifted students need something that is intellectually challenging. Being bored may cause them to feel more stressed compared to normal students. Therefore, since music education program for gifted and talented children is still new in our country, it is very important for us to explore how far these students are able to accept Music Education as a subject that can fulfil their learning needs.

C. Significance of research

Since education for gifted and talented children in Malaysia is only available at Pusat PERMATApintar Negara, it is expected that there will be more educational institutions developed to serve the purpose of providing suitable intervention for gifted and talented students. This is proved when the government has agreed to develop another center specifically for education of gifted and talented students at Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Raja Melewar, Seremban (1news, 2017). It is possible to assume that there will be more educational institutions developed in the future since the number of gifted and talented students in this country is increasing and needs more appropriate intervention.

Thus, this research will be able to help teachers especially those teaching music subject to employ musical activities that are truly suitable for gifted and talented students. At least, this research can be made as basic guidelines for music educators to further understand gifted and talented students. With the implementation of suitable musical activities, these music classes can be conducted efficiently and effectively fulfil the needs of those students. Students will not feel bored, stressed and this will surely avoid uncontrollable behaviours.

On the other hand, this research can be made as guidelines by the Malaysian Ministry of Education to plan standard music curriculum for gifted and talented students in school. Curriculum and assessment for music specifically can be developed by considering learning activities that fulfil the students' needs. The ministry may also plan for styling activities with musical patterns for students to learn in science, mathematics and language classes.

II. THE UNIQUENESS OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

Every child has their own gift and talent. Some of them are able to think in higher level and have extraordinary ability as compared to their peers. According to Montgomery (2013), there are three in a million of children that are categorized as gifted.

They possess extraordinary characteristics that can be identified since they were small. Some of them can speak very well at the age of 6 until 9 months, can read and spell at the age of two years old, self-taught and ready to formally learn from age three years old. If they are sent to kindergartens or preschools, the syllabus will be too easy for them and they would be able to finish it briefly. Most gifted and talented children that are sent to kindergartens and preschools easily get bored and difficult to be controlled due to the syllabus taught does not fit their requirements.

Renzulli (1978) stated that gifted and talented individuals possess three characteristics which are further ability than current age, ability to carry out more tasks and enhanced creativity. Gagne (1985) agrees with the opinion explaining that gifted individuals have high competency, aptitude and potential in conducting a task beyond their current age. Four gifted and talented domains suggested by Gagne include intellect, creativity, socio-effective and motor senses.

According to Van Tassel-Baska (1996), not all gifted and talented children portray high cognitive and socio-emotional characteristics. Some of them display the characteristics according to age development. There are also those who are able to demonstrate the characteristics only when they are exposed to activities related to their interests and behaviours such as music. Therefore, when planning an activity for gifted and talented students, their three difference factors should be prioritized: learning speed, readiness in solving problems and manipulation of ideas to make inferences (Van Tassel-Baska, 1988).

Passow (1988) explains that gifted and talented students not only need more tasks but also different tasks will be able to develop their abilities. Thus, they need to be provided with suitable teaching and learning programmes. Maker (1982) agrees that learning for gifted and talented children should be different considering factors like learning content, processes and environment.

Salhah (2008) clarifies intelligence topic by suggesting that music corner can be provided in a classroom as one medium to build togetherness among students. This can give positive effects towards students' learning processes especially focusing on cooperative method. Musical activities including background music, lyrics, duet, poetic, clapping dan sounds can be conducted to cultivate cooperativeness in classroom.

A. Music education at school

Main component in music curriculum is doing performance. To perform, students are exposed to activities involving musical instrument. Among musical instruments that are often taught are recorder and keyboard (Wigfield, O'Neill dan Eccles, 1999). Research done by Mahoney, Larson and Eccles (2005) found that there is high tendency among

students to play instruments, however most of them only learn how to play halfway. Research shows that only motivated students who have positive views are interested to continue learning to play musical instruments until they finish school. Research does not only explore instrument playing activities in school but also listening to music, dancing, singing and learning music using computer are also explored as musical activities conducted in schools.

Singing activities are seen as something vital and can be used in any subjects at schools. This is because singing is a skill that is commonly done by a person when they are happy or sad which can be assimilated as part of teaching process in classroom. Mok and Lee (1989) commented that singing activities usually take place in our daily lives, and therefore very suitable to be conducted in classroom as an effective medium to enhance students' memory. Besides that, the use of beats and rhythms as accompaniment is said to be an effective method to enhance students' memory and add students' interest to learn (Rosli and Omar, 2013). This is also clarified by Hisyamuddin and Amir (2012) who stated that musical and singing activities are truly effective in developing students' social skills.

Rief (2008) explains that musical activities through movement is effective for students. Teachers normally do such activity during transition session. They will do music with exercising movement, coordination and self-awareness, following direction and recreation. The substance used are rhythmic poetry, poems, sounds of fingers snapping and songs with mac rhythms. However, before doing these activities, students must be taught how to move, do formation and other skills. Additionally, Brownhill (2014) explains movement activities through dancing are effective in developing students' physical skills. Space awareness and imaginative element are used to explore music through movements.

B. Benefits of music for gifted and talented students

In the field of art, Clark and Zimmerman (1998) have commented in a report of anecdote records about academically gifted and talented students. Those students have attended an academic camping programme bringing musical instruments. Shocking result from the observation is when they found that most of these students have high inclination towards music. This shows how important is the field of music within or outside school that can further demonstrate gifted and talented students' skills.

Application of art and music subject in Gifted and Talented Education is rather complex. One and only research is conducted by Clarke (2006) about challenges and successes in implementation of musical programme in gifted and talented children's classes. Clarke interviewed teachers, students and employed observation on musical classes. He found that musical composition activities are important in

this curriculum. Teachers who conduct composition activities would be able to differentiate students who have natural musical abilities and students who have musical talents that can be nurtured. Research result also shows that gifted and talented students have the ability to play musical instruments despite just having learned how to use them.

Nevertheless, learning of other musical topics should also be given attention. Among topics that can be exposed to gifted and talented students are musical theory, musicology composition, musical performance and aural (listening) (Tolar, 2016). This will allow gifted and talented students to infer musical theories in performances or create forms of music based on what they have learned in class. Schroth and Helfer (2011) support this explanation by stating involvement of art in Gifted and Talented Education must expose students with basic concepts first, then discussion to allow students to reach a higher level.

Clark, Gilbert and Zimmerman (1998) accentuate that music and art subjects are needed in Gifted and Talented Education. They believe that music and art subject should not be marginalized because these subjects allow gifted and talented students to use their natural ability and creativity. McKay (1983) also agrees by stating that music will be able to solve problems faced by gifted and talented students. However, musical activities conducted must fit with their interest and truly appropriate with their abilities. Clark (2006) explained:

"The use of group work in music, however, is important as it allows students to build skills in team work, and focus less on academic competition." (Page 49)

This shows that music subject encourages gifted and talented students to learn in group. For students who are more comfortable to learn by themselves may not be interested in group learning but at least in such group activities, they will be given precious experience. Students will find that music enables them to learn in less stressful yet more entertaining environment.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research is in qualitative form. Respondents in this study consist of students who study in secondary level at Pusat PERMATAPINTAR Negara. They have seated for a test constructed by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia who has certified and verified them as someone who are characterised as academically gifted and talented.

Research sample is chosen using convenient sampling technique. This is due to tested sample being easily approachable and readily grouped in class. According to Stephanie (2015), convenient

sampling technique is suitable to be employed when the researcher can easily approach their respondents and normally used to study respondents at school, workplace and supermarket.

Three methods of data collection are used: interview, focused group discussion and observation. Individual and grouped interview were conducted on the gifted and talented students. Two classes from Foundation 2 was chosen to be group interviewed whereas five students from Foundation 2 were interviewed individually. The researcher have also made an observation towards two classes from Foundation 2 and two classes from Foundation 3. Observation was also conducted in music classes for Foundation 2 and Foundation 3.

In focus group discussion, eight panel members were chosen who are students from Foundation 3 aged 15 years old from different classes. They have experience of learning music worth two years and eight months at Pusat PERMATApintar Negara. Questions posed to them are based on effective musical activities that they have experienced throughout music teaching and learning process in the institution. They were also asked about musical activities which are effective and appropriate to be taught to them.

IV. RESULTS

The researcher analyses the result based on three research instruments used which are interview, focused group discussion and observation.

A. In-depth interview

There are two types of interview conducted which are individual and grouped. Respondents' explanations in these interviews are coded according to themes. Based on the interview session conducted individually on five gifted and talented students, they are asked about musical activities appropriate to be taught to them and their favourite musical activities. It is found that all of them gave clear answer which is playing musical instruments. They wanted to learn how to play musical instruments and perform in front of the public. The first student said that musical skill can be learned through 'one on one' musical learning with a teacher. Second and third students said they prefer if they are invited to perform using musical instruments in front of or outside the classroom. The fifth suggested that a competition of playing musical instruments to be held. Therefore, all of these responses are gathered in a theme that is playing musical instruments activity.

The second theme is musical theory activity. It was found that the first student stated interest to do musical theory exercises because it challenges the mind. He feels entertained when given homework regarding musical theory exercises. The third theme is dancing activity whereby the fourth student stated her interest to learn dancing activities.

In the group interview, on the other hand, students are asked about musical activities that are not suitable for them. Three themes have been successfully recorded in this group interview. The first one is aural. Students claimed that they feel it is difficult to recognize melody played and the activity stresses them out. The second theme is singing activities. In this case, students explained that they feel very stressful when they are asked to perform solo singing. The third theme is lyric writing activities. Students claimed that they do not like compose and writing song lyrics because they are not linguistically expert to find suitable lyrics to fit the melody.

B. Focused group discussion

Based on focused group discussion conducted for 42 minutes, it is found that all panel members agreed that gifted and talented students are suited to be exposed with playing musical instruments activity during music class. They enjoy playing with musical instruments and look forward to explore them. Aside from playing with musical instruments, they also enjoy learning rhythmic aspect. Activities like clapping in rhythmic patterns make them susceptible towards notes on scores.

Other than that, students are also suitable to be exposed to singing activities during music class. They are more interested to sing based on scores or song lyrics. So, they will be more focused towards melody and pitch in a song. Panel members suggested that competition is held to uncover musical talents among gifted and talented students. Through competition, they will be able to display ethnic culture through music. To develop and enhance their musical skills, they can be exposed to musical theories. The learning of musical theory should be applied to musical instruments so that students do not forget and understand better about the theoretical concept.

Gifted and talented students also mentioned that they are interested to learn about the history and evolution of music beginning from Baroque to classical era until 21st century. They are interested to learn about development and characteristics of music during those eras. They think, it is rather unique to learn about history of music. From the aspect of teaching, panel members suggested that teachers can use technology-based teaching materials such as LCD, television, computer and other because the materials attract students' attention and avoid dullness among gifted and talented students.

In learning about music, panel members strongly agree if gifted and talented students are able to learn theoretically and directly apply to the instruments as practical activity. Hence, teachers can play a role in teaching the theories and practical in a music class. Teachers are also recommended to inform the importance of learning a musical topic because gifted students are always curious about why

they have to learn certain topics. To conclude, all panels decided that the following are musical activities that are appropriate to be conducted during music class according to priority based on results from panel members; i. playing musical instruments according to songs' score, ii. clapping in songs' rhythmic pattern, iii. singing based on songs' score, iv. music competition and cultural sharing between classes, v. learning musical theories, and vi. learning history of music.

C. Observation

Observations are conducted in five music classes consisted of 15 to 17 gifted and talented students. Teaching and learning of music has taken place for 40 minutes which are doing movements, musical theories, aural, playing recorder and singing. During movement activities, two students were found to be talking to their friends and not moving according to song tempo. In the first 10 minutes, they were not able to move according to song bit but after 30 minutes, students were able to do uniformed movements according to the song. It is found that they listened to the music meticulously and ask their friends when they were not sure of what movement they should do.

In activity of learning musical theory, three students were found to be closing their eyes for around five minutes. The teacher thought the students were asleep but when asked, they were able to answer the questions correctly. 11 students showed bored expression and frequently looked towards the window. Students are found to display more interest when learning theories using teaching aids. During that time, the teacher was showing pictures of notes and theoretical exercises on the television. Students expressed their excitement and showed cheerful expressions. Besides that, one student was found busy doing his own work when the teacher was teaching in front. However, the student was actually composing a song in his manuscript. He successfully created two pages of a song during that session. This clearly shows that gifted and talented students are inclined towards composition activities.

During aural activity, students were found to be able to identify melody played in the first 15 minutes. After that, they revealed that they were confused and unable to play the song melody accurately. The class began to get noisy and more than eight students were not paying attention by talking and laughing. In singing activity, it is found that students appear uninterested towards solfa songs. They showed bored reaction and did not sing solfa with the right tone. They were more interested in singing songs that they already know. There were two students who showed to the teacher about two Japanese songs from Youtube that were synthesised in the form of unique music, but they could not sing the melody of the song. They were only interested with the singing techniques and song composition.

During recorder playing activity, students paid attention very well. They played the recorder according to the score given. They needed 20 minutes to master song score that has 8 rhythmic bars. When they do not know, they will ask their friends and teacher. Students also demonstrated courage to teacher and friends when playing the recorder. In a class, it is found that 15 out of 17 students were able to play recorder with correct rhythm. There were no student playing around or talking in the class. Instead, they all paid attention to the music score and strived to demonstrate better skill than their friends.

By the end of the class, students in music class stated their interest towards the activities conducted. There were 13 students enjoyed in movement activities, 8 of them enjoyed technology-based theoretical learning activity and 10 students enjoyed learning about singing. Kenworthy in Noraini (2008) explained that effective learning can take place if there is interest among students and one of the ways to trigger that is by doing enjoyable teaching and learning activities.

V. DISCUSSION

Based on results of the research, it is found that acceptance of gifted and talented students towards Music Education pedagogy is through the activity of playing musical instruments. This is proven from the result of focused group discussion and interviews that showed all respondents share similar perspectives regarding the activity of playing musical instruments. The result from observation showed that students portrayed positive and interesting behaviours towards the activity of playing musical instruments. This is in line with Clarke's (2006) view that stated gifted students possess high inclination towards playing musical instruments.

It is also found that gifted and talented students are interested in competing or doing musical performance. They do not feel awkward and are really confident to display their abilities in front of the public. This is in line with Mastropieri and Scruggs (2010) who stated that gifted and talented children have extraordinary abilities compared to normal children. They can also demonstrate exceptional performances and achievements. Thus, it is not impossible for them to do musical performance in public.

Based on the results gathered, it is found that other musical activities suitable and fulfil requirements of gifted and talented students are musical theory, history of music, singing, dancing and song composition. However, gifted and talented children are found to not show much interest in aural activities. This can be proven from the result of group interview and observation whereby students were uninterested with the activity. They claimed that it is difficult for them to identify song pitch and melody which made them lose interest in aural activities.

Other than that, activities such as writing song lyrics and singing solo were also said to be not suitable from the result of group interview. To gather their attention in a certain musical topic, teachers may use interactive teaching aids, application of theory to practical and inform the relevance of the topic being cascaded.

VI. CONCLUSION

After this research was done, it is therefore very clear that there are musical activities suitable for gifted and talented students. These activities can be used by music teachers as a method in teaching and learning music for gifted and talented students. Teachers may also improve the quality of teaching and avoid dullness among gifted and talented students by practising the mentioned steps. Van Tassel-Baska (1996) stated that teaching and learning activities for gifted and talented students must be planned carefully and implemented accordingly so that it can bring appealing results. Styling activities across cognitive, affective, social and aesthetic also must be conducted on them.

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