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Educational Research

AED40A



AUTHENTIC TEACHING OF JAVANESE GAMELAN MUSIC IN SINGAPORE PRIMARY SCHOOLS



BACKGROUND

- Previous gamelan teaching approaches: oversimplified and lacked depth, with no authentic musical experiences
- Evolving emphasis on "authentic musical tasks" in Singapore's 2023 Music Syllabus (MOE, 2023): refinement in approach needed
- Consider **authenticity** when teaching music (Anderson, 1970; Koops, 2010; Palmer, 1992; Torchon, 2022) and engage students with **authentic musical tasks** for students to fairly understand Javanese gamelan music

AIM

- Provide **considerations and recommendations** for teaching Javanese gamelan authentically in Singapore primary schools

RESEARCH QUESTION

- How can music teachers **teach Javanese gamelan music authentically** to primary school students in Singapore?

METHODOLOGY

- Literature review on teaching and learning gamelan music
- 'Latihan' with Singa Nglaras Gamelan Ensemble: enhance understanding of gamelan music practices (participant observation)

AUTHENTICITY IN MUSIC EDUCATION

- "Wanting to be true to the music of a culture, to the people of the culture and to one's students in teaching" (Koops, 2010)
- (1) continuum model, (2) twofold historical, personal model, (3) threefold reproduction-reality-relevance model, and (4) moving-beyond-authenticity model (Koops, 2010)
- My definition: (1) retaining **essential features** of the music while making sensitive adjustments and (2) providing students with musical experiences close to the **practice of real-world musicians**

CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING GAMELAN

Instruments

As authentic gamelan instruments are not readily available in Singapore music classrooms, teachers can consider:

- **Physical classroom instruments** (e.g. Orff instruments): Learn fundamental gamelan playing techniques
- **Digital Instruments** (e.g. iPad): Virtual instrument apps emulate unique tuning and timbre of gamelan instruments

Recommendation:

- Use both Orff instruments and iPads to harness their respective advantages in music lessons
- Encourage students to download the virtual instrument apps for self-practice.

Mode of Teaching/Learning

Consider two approaches when teaching gamelan:

- **Aural-Oral tradition & Imitation** (practice of Singa Nglaras Gamelan Ensemble): "Feeling" the music through the senses. Learn through observing, imitating and repeating after the teacher
- **Notation:** Reading and playing music directly from a score

Recommendation:

- Observe ethnopedagogy/aural-oral tradition of gamelan music
- Students learn through imitation (although some may find it uneasy due to their Western-music background)
- Notation can be used to reinforce students' learning.

Repertoire Choice

Consider two types of repertoire when teaching gamelan:

- **Classical gamelan pieces** (repertoire of Singa Nglaras Gamelan Ensemble): Understand fundamentals of gamelan music. Choose fast and lively classical pieces to match students' aesthetic preferences
- **Student composition assignments:** Avenue for experimentation of gamelan instruments and creativity

Recommendation:

- Classical pieces: Students learn basic playing techniques and knowledge of gamelan music
- Thereafter, students create their own gamelan-inspired compositions (teachers can check students' understanding)

Use of terminologies

Consider language use when teaching gamelan:

- **Javanese terminologies** (used by Singa Nglaras Gamelan Ensemble despite English-speaking majority): Ensures accurate understanding of Javanese music concepts. Exposes students to the language
- **Simplified Western equivalents:** Provides familiarity for students. Cause misunderstanding of music concepts. Promotes eurocentricity

Recommendation:

- Use Javanese terminologies over Western equivalents
- Western equivalents oversimplifies meanings of original terminologies and misrepresents Javanese music and culture.

CONCLUSION

- Teaching Javanese gamelan music authentically in Singapore is **complex**
- Authentic music lessons: Fulfil **intention and purpose** of teaching world music (e.g. Javanese gamelan music) to learn and appreciate cultural practices
- Content knowledge needed to maintain essential features of the music when making sound adjustments to suit classroom needs
- Consider **instruments, mode of teaching/learning, repertoire choice and use of terminologies** for accurate and holistic representation and deepen understanding and appreciation of Indonesian gamelan music and culture

