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Gradual Drum Curriculum for Elementary Students: Integrating Reading Notation and Performance Practice

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Abstract

This research examines the development of the drum curriculum at Favore Music with a gradual approach to reading and playing notation. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results show that a gradual approach to learning drums improves the understanding of notation systematically, starting from simple to complex rhythmic patterns. This learning model integrates hand-foot coordination techniques, improvisation, and exploration of various musical genres. The implementation of this curriculum not only has an impact on improving students' technical skills but also motivates them to learn in a more interactive and enjoyable way. With an adaptive learning structure, this curriculum can be applied in various music education contexts. These findings contribute to innovation in music education, especially in more effective and structured drumming.

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INTRODUCTION

Drumming learning is a complex discipline that not only focuses on mastering musical skills, but also provides extensive benefits in cognitive, social and emotional aspects. It engages different areas of the brain and contributes to the development of important skills such as coordination, rhythm and timing (Craddock et al., 2022; Mito & Kinjo, 2023). Drumming can improve functional connectivity in the brain, especially in areas involved in executive function and social interaction. These benefits are particularly significant for adolescents on the autism spectrum, who often face challenges in social interactions and understanding others' perspectives (Cahart et al., 2022). The benefits of drumming are not only limited to musical aspects, but also include physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions.

The learning process of drumming demands complex movement skills with coordination between different limbs, which contributes to improved physical fitness and motor control (Bonacina et al., 2021; Miyazaki et al., 2020). Engagement in drumming activities can also improve sensorimotor integration as well as cardiovascular health, making it an inclusive and accessible form of physical activity for individuals from different age groups and backgrounds (Metzler-Baddeley et al., 2023) The music education curriculum is a fundamental element in the wider education system, acting as a foundation in developing students' musical skills, creativity and cultural awareness (Bernāts & Mūrnieks, 2021; Camlin & Lisboa, 2021; Mutohhari et al., 2021). As the educational paradigm shifts towards a more student-centered approach, the design and implementation of music curriculum is becoming increasingly complex and requires a more in-depth approach. One of the key aspects of modern music curriculum development is the integration of various pedagogical strategies that are tailored to the diverse learning styles and backgrounds of students. For example, incorporating popular music into the curriculum has been shown to increase student interest, engagement and motivation. In addition, the emphasis on improvisation and creative composition in the

curriculum provides space for students to explore their musical identity and develop a unique musical style (Hui & Wong, 2023; Kai Ti & Wong, 2024).

In reading notation according to previous theoretical studies examined regarding the ways and models of understanding notation with one approach that can be applied in developing this skill is a learning model based on cognitive theory. In this focus shows that Piaget's cognitive theory, which includes the stages of assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration, can be used to improve skills in reading music notation (Maharani, 2022). In its implication on drums, apart from the explanation of the theory, there is also the use of interactive and fun methods that are also very important in the development of drum notation reading skills. Learning models that involve collaboration, such as cooperative scripts, can significantly improve students' reading skills (Khairunnisa, 2024). Learning notation through structured and gradual stages can make a reference to understanding notation well, where this good character education process provides notation reading skills more effectively (Hamdani et al., 2022). Furthermore, the role of educators in designing and customizing the music curriculum has great significance. Teachers act as curriculum designers who actively adjust and modify the learning framework to suit the needs of students. This process requires educators to have a comprehensive understanding of musical aspects as well as the application of effective teaching strategies. Therefore, innovative curriculum development is a must in creating more adaptive and relevant learning (Anderson, 2024; CAO, 2024). Moreover, the integration of technology in music education has opened up new opportunities in curriculum development, enabling more interactive, dynamic and engaging learning experiences for different groups of students (Zou & Xia, 2022).

As part of the innovations in music education, the drum curriculum at Favore Music is designed to provide a step-by-step approach to reading and playing notation. This approach focuses on developing notation reading skills progressively, starting from simple to complex rhythmic patterns, so that students can understand the concept of drum notation more systematically. With structured and adaptive learning methods, students can connect theoretical understanding with hands-on practice (Lesmana et al., 2024). This research aims to describe and analyze the implementation of a drum curriculum at Favore Music that adopts a stepwise approach to reading and playing notation. Specifically, it explores the effectiveness of the learning strategies used in this curriculum in improving students' understanding of drum notation, their technical skills, as well as its impact on motivation and the overall learning experience. As such, this research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective drum learning methods that can be applied in various music education contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative method to describe in depth the implementation of the drum curriculum at Favore Music. Qualitative research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of behavior, attitudes, perceptions, motivations, social construction, social control mechanisms, and language use by research subjects. In addition, this research is also designed to produce texts that are organized systematically, interestingly, and have evocative power, so that they can be accessed and understood by various groups of readers (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Leavy, 2024). In this study, the researcher acts as the main instrument in data collection by applying various techniques, including interviews, observation, and documentation (Mayuri Putri et al., 2024). This research was located at Favore Music, Bandung City, which is a non-formal music learning institution that serves learners from various age ranges, ranging from children, teenagers, to adults. The research subjects consisted of eight students who attended drum lessons at Favore Music. Each student has different age characteristics, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Students participating in drum lessons at Favore Music

No.	Name	Age
1.	N	8
2.	K	9
3.	RP	7
4.	KR	7
5.	SL	9
6.	JD	9
7.	LK	9
8.	CAP	8

Data collection was conducted through interviews with several drum teachers as well as teachers who played a role in designing and organizing the curriculum at Favore Music. qualitative descriptive approach does not rely on only one data source, but seeks to get a more holistic picture (Dian et al., 2023). In addition, observation of the learning process was also conducted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the gradual implementation of the drum curriculum in improving the ability to read and play music notation. The collected data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2013). Data reduction was done by sorting out relevant information in accordance with the research focus. The data that has been reduced is then presented in the form of narrative descriptions to provide a clear picture of the implementation of the drum curriculum at Favore Music.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Favore Music's Drum Curriculum: The SMOL

SMOL stands for Structure of Material Organization Learning which is the main guideline for drum learning at Favore Music, where the curriculum organization is for primary school children. The process consists of several stages, namely planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating the curriculum. In this case, the organization of materials includes not only the preparation of learning content, but also delivery strategies that are interesting and easily understood by students (Patria & Zulkarnaen, 2023; Siregar & Mashudi, 2024). The drum curriculum at Favore Music is designed in stages by grouping learning materials into five levels, namely Grade 1 to Grade 5 and using the Rock School Music syllabus guidelines with the output of getting qualification certification directly from the Rock School institution. Each level has a different learning focus, adapted to the development of students' ability to read and play drum notation. The organization of the material in this curriculum is made systematically to ensure that the learning process takes place progressively and adaptively according to the child's developmental level.

At the early levels, Year 1 and Year 2, students are introduced to the basics of drumming, including an introduction to the parts of a drum set as well as the basic techniques of using them. The explanation of the basic drum parts is always placed at the beginning of the syllabus section, from syllabus one to syllabus five to give the students the opportunity to see and recall the notation parts. In addition, they begin to learn simple rhythmic notation, such as quarter notes and eighth notes, as well as hand and foot coordination exercises to build the motor skills required for drumming. Learning at this stage is carried out with an interactive game-based approach designed to increase student engagement and motivation in understanding basic concepts without feeling overwhelmed and the selection of innovative learning approaches, such as the application of educational games, can increase student attractiveness and create a more interactive and fun learning experience (Ghasanni et al., 2023; Rosyida et al., 2024).

In Grade 4 level, learning is directed towards improving the skills of reading more complex drum scores as well as the exploration of various groove patterns in several music genres, such as pop, rock, and funk. In addition to reading drum notation, students also begin to be given the freedom to develop creativity through rhythmic improvisation where Improvisation allows students to explore musical ideas independently, thus increasing their confidence and skills in music (Ng, 2023; Nikolaou, 2024).At this stage, the learning method is more geared towards exploration, where students are encouraged to create their own rhythmic variations under the guidance of the instructor. At the highest level, Grade 5, learning is orientated towards developing independence in reading and playing more complex rhythmic patterns.

Moreover, the joyful learning approach applied in this curriculum aims to create a fun learning atmosphere, so that students remain motivated in developing their drumming skills and by creating a fun learning environment, students not only acquire technical skills in music, but also develop a deeper appreciation for music (Silva et al., 2024). Apart from being a guideline for teachers in teaching, the curriculum also plays a role in tailoring the learning process to the individual needs of students. Each child has a different level of development, so the learning methods applied are flexible and personalized. If there are students who have difficulty in understanding the material, the teacher can adjust the approach with simpler strategies, such as the use of rhythmic games or interactive exercises. Conversely, for students who are progressing faster, instructors can provide additional challenges to keep them motivated to improve.

Content in the RSL Curriculum at Favore Music

In Favore Music's RSL curriculum, learning materials cover various fundamental aspects of drumming that are organized in stages to develop students' technical skills and understanding of music notation. One of the main focuses in this curriculum is basic sticking exercises, which aims to train hand coordination in playing

rhythmic patterns systematically. In addition, students are taught the notation position of each drum part, so that they can understand the sound distribution produced by the various elements of the drum set. The curriculum also includes an introduction to various musical notation symbols, such as quarter note, eighth note, and sixteenth note, as well as rest notation that indicates moments of silence in drumming. Understanding these symbols is the basis for students to read and interpret drum scores more accurately.

Drum Notation
Explain to student notation drum by following book instruction

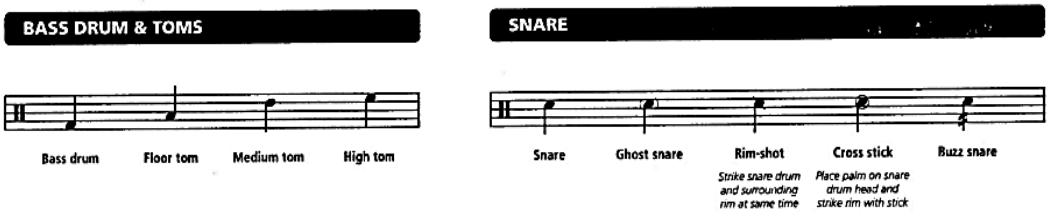

Figure 1. Drum Notation Explained

In Grade 1 to Grade 5, students are consistently given directions and reminders regarding notation placement, both in terms of the position of each drum part and the use of notation symbols. Teachers guide students to recognize and understand the elements of the drum set, including the snare drum, tom-tom, floor tom, bass drum (or kick drum), as well as the different types of cymbals, such as hi-hat, crash, and ride cymbal. Understanding these positions helps students in developing spatial orientation towards the drum set as well as improving coordination in playing it. In addition, the RSL curriculum also introduces various notation symbols commonly used in drum scores, such as accent marks, coda symbols that indicate the end of a song, and several other marks that serve as musical directions in drumming. During the learning process, students are not only introduced to these symbols but also given repeated practice to ensure their understanding and application in drumming effectively. The figure below presents some examples of symbols used in drum notation as per the RSL curriculum.

Furthermore, in the RSL curriculum, the sticking exercises at Grade 1 to Grade 5 levels have similar learning structures, especially in practicing various basic rudiments such as single stroke roll, paradiddle, and triplet sticking patterns. Nonetheless, the complexity of the techniques in these exercises increases gradually according to the level of difficulty in each grade. In Grade 2 to Grade 5, students begin to be introduced to more comprehensive techniques in drumming, such as flam techniques, accented triplets, and drag rudiments.

The introduction of these techniques provides significant benefits to the development of students' skills, considering that these various techniques are fundamental elements that are often found in modern and classical music repertoire. Thus, understanding and mastering these techniques not only improves students' technical competence in drumming but also broadens their horizons to various musical styles.

In the process of learning, the teacher has the flexibility to assist students in sticking exercises directly. This approach can be done through the call and response method, where students imitate the teacher's playing in the given pattern, or by playing the exercise simultaneously with a predetermined tempo. In addition, in the aspect of developing rhythmic skills, teachers can also gradually increase the tempo of exercise to train students' accuracy and consistency in maintaining the stability of sticking games at various speeds (Burger & Wöllner, 2023). This approach allows students to gain a more structured and challenging playing experience, so that their technical skills develop optimally.

Technical Exercises

a. **Single Stroke 8 Notes, 16 Notes (the test will played 70 bpm)**
b. **Double Stroke 8 Notes, 16 Notes (the test will played 70 bpm)**

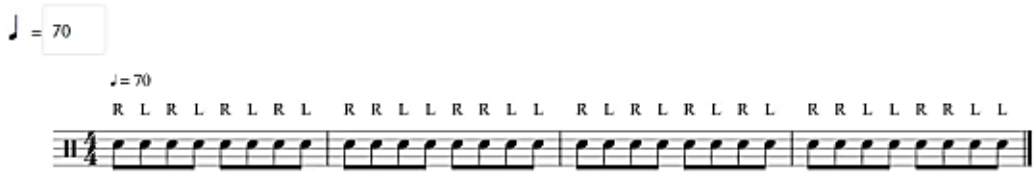

Figure 2. Single and double strokes in eighth notes, alternate bars (Exercise Sticking Grade 1-5 in RSL)

c. **Single Paradiddle 16 notes (the test will played in 70 bpm)**

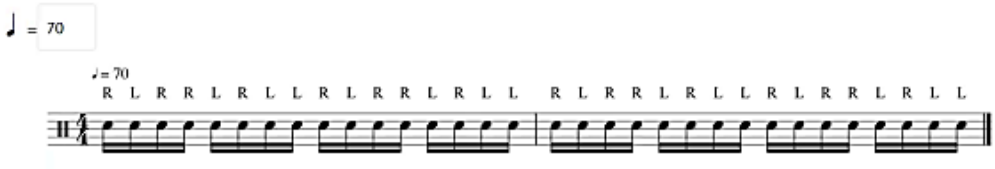

Figure 3. Single paradiddle in 16th notes (Exercise Sticking Grade 1-5 in RSL)

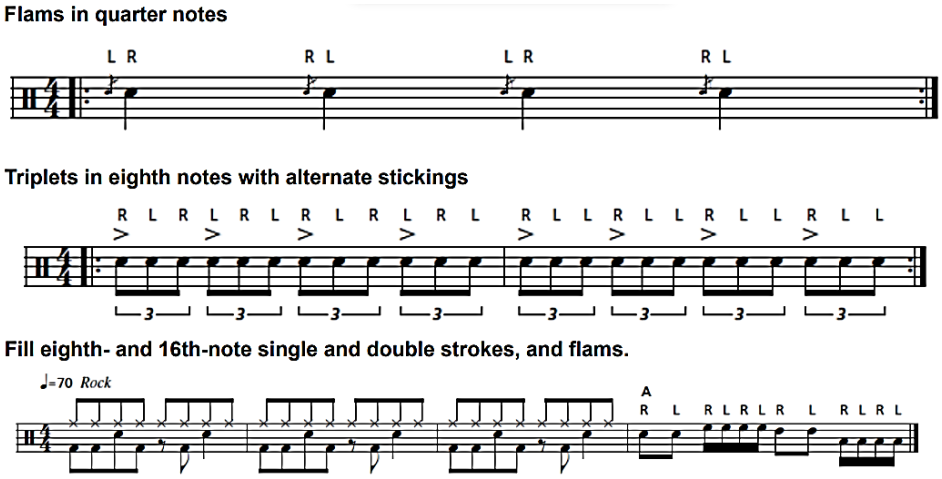

Figure 4. Additional techniques in drumming

After students have learnt the various stages of the exercise material and understand the basic concepts of music notation, the next step in the RSL curriculum is to implement this understanding into song playing. The songs presented in this curriculum are systematically designed to support students' skill development, according to the genres and notation patterns learned at each level and RSL provides backing tracks to make it easier for students to analyze their playing. This learning structure allows students to apply mastered rhythmic techniques and concepts in a more tangible musical context.

In the RSL syllabus, there is a division of genres and song categories that are adjusted to the level of difficulty and learning goals of each grade. In Grade 1, students are introduced to rock genre songs that focus on basic rhythmic patterns and stability. In Grade 2, the scope of material is expanded with the introduction of simple pop and funk genre songs, which introduce students to more dynamic groove variations. Entering Grade 3, students begin to learn funk songs with a higher level of difficulty, including the use of more complex fill-ins to improve transitional skills in drumming.

In Grade 4, the focus of learning includes the exploration of rhythmic patterns in the rock and heavy metal genres, with an emphasis on variations in kick drum patterns as well as more diverse use of the hi-hat. This stage requires students to develop dynamics control as well as playing stability in a faster and more

intense tempo. Furthermore, in Grade 5, students are introduced to more complex playing techniques, covering more challenging rhythmic variations as well as mastery of various technical elements in drumming. Through this stage, students not only develop technical skills and musicality, but also gain experience in interpreting notation in a more applicable manner in various musical genre contexts. With the step-by-step approach applied in the RSL curriculum, students can build a solid drumming foundation and progressively improve their playing skills according to the level of difficulty.

Curriculum Discussion and Implementation

The implementation of the RSL curriculum in drumming lessons at Favore Music aligns with previous studies that discuss the graded approach to teaching musical instruments. Previous studies emphasized the importance of a graded learning system that provides a gradual structure for students to progressively understand technical and musical concepts. The RSL curriculum offers a systematic learning path combining technical exercises, notation reading, and direct application in songs, along with an international certification exam provided by Rock School. Favore Music, as a non-formal educational institution, allows flexibility in communicating with parents or students regarding certification exams. These exams can be conducted directly by qualified teachers, ensuring alignment with research findings that highlight the benefits of structured curriculum-based learning in improving students' long-term retention and conceptual understanding. Regarding the relevance of the curriculum to students' needs, the RSL curriculum effectively caters to learners at different proficiency levels through its graded system. It ensures gradual skill progression from fundamental techniques to advanced drumming concepts, fostering a solid technical and theoretical foundation. The methodology aligns with the material delivered, as it integrates step-by-step skill acquisition, starting with rudiments and progressing to complex rhythmic patterns and genre-specific playing techniques. This structured approach aids students in developing both technical proficiency and musical interpretation.

The learning resources provided within the curriculum are also adjusted to the students' skill levels, ensuring accessibility and comprehensibility. Each grade level contains instructional materials, including sheet music, backing tracks, and guided exercises, which reinforce learning at an appropriate difficulty level. However, additional supplementary resources, such as teacher-developed exercises and improvisation sessions, are necessary to enhance creative expression and adaptability in various musical contexts. Assessment within the RSL curriculum is conducted through a combination of formative and summative evaluations. Formative assessments include regular teacher feedback, practice logs, and peer evaluations, allowing continuous monitoring of progress. Summative assessments are primarily carried out through certification exams, measuring students' proficiency in technical skills, notation reading, and musical interpretation. While the certification process provides a standardized measure of achievement, further integration of performance-based assessments, including improvisation and ensemble playing, can offer a more comprehensive evaluation of students' musicality and creative growth.

Despite the strengths of the RSL curriculum, some challenges remain in its implementation. Intensive teacher guidance is required, particularly for students struggling with notation reading or complex techniques. Additionally, while the curriculum ensures a strong technical foundation, fostering improvisational skills and creative exploration necessitates supplementary instructional approaches beyond the prescribed syllabus. Thus, an optimal balance between structured curriculum implementation and adaptive learning strategies is essential to cultivate both technical proficiency and expressive musicianship in students.

CONCLUSION

Favore Music's drum curriculum adopts a gradual approach that accommodates the progressive development of students' skills, from basic introduction to exploration of advanced techniques. By combining notation-based learning methods, coordination, improvisation, and playing experience in various genres, this curriculum creates a comprehensive and adaptive learning environment. The learning structure, which uses a gradual level system, allows students to build a more systematic understanding of notation, improve motor skills, and develop musical expression. In addition, the international certification-based approach through Rock School provides academic validation of students' competencies, thus increasing the credibility of learning. Despite its advantages in systematic structure, the main challenge in implementing this curriculum is the need for intensive teacher guidance, especially in helping students understand complex technical aspects. Therefore, a balance is needed between the implementation of a structured curriculum and a flexible learning approach to optimally stimulate students' creativity and musical expression. Further research is recommended to explore the effectiveness of this method in a wider age group and in the context of formal

education. A comparative study between the phased curriculum and other drumming methods can also provide deeper insights into the advantages and limitations of this approach. In addition, the integration of technology in drumming, such as digital-based applications and augmented reality, can be a potential area of research to increase engagement and learning effectiveness.

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