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**Children's Voices Matter:  
Exploring Chinese Kindergarten Music Curriculum  
from Children's Perspectives  
Using an Adapted Mosaic Approach**

Ying Chen

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

Durham University



Feb 2026

## **Abstract**

Music education is an essential component of early childhood education, fostering children's aesthetic appreciation, emotional expression, social interaction, creativity, and cognitive development. However, previous studies have largely reflected adult perspectives, focusing on how to evaluate or improve the kindergarten music curriculum, while children as the primary participants in early childhood education, their voices have been overlooked.

This study investigates how children understand, experience, and construct Chinese kindergarten music curriculum. It was conducted in a public kindergarten in a provincial capital city in southern China, adopting an adapted Mosaic approach that integrates multiple participatory and arts-based methods such as photography, tour guiding, voting, painting, and conferencing. Grounded in the New Sociology of Childhood and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the study recognises children as competent social actors with rights to express their views. A total of 83 children (48 girls and 35 boys) aged between three and six years participated in the study. Among them were 24 junior kindergartners, 28 middle kindergartners, and 31 senior kindergartners.

Based on children's views, the type of music curriculum they prefer is as follows: play-based and joyful learning experiences; opportunity for autonomy and choice; supportive and friendly social relationship; rich and diverse musical experiences; and aesthetic, natural and supportive environments. By comparing the music lessons children currently experience with the music curriculum they envision, several issues in current kindergarten music education become evident: the curriculum contents are imbalanced; teachers mainly take on the role of instructors; lack of active peer interaction; the learning environment receives limited attention; and learning materials remain inadequate. By listening to children's voices, these insights call for rethinking Chinese kindergarten music curriculum toward practices that genuinely reflect children's voices, preferences, and ways of engaging with music.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

APA	American Psychological Association
BCE	Before the Common Era
BERA	British Education Research Association
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CE	Common Era
CNKI	China National Knowledge Infrastructure
ECC	Early Childhood Curriculum
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IRBs	Institutional Review Boards
PRC	People's Republic of China
REC	Research Ethics Committee
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for any academic award.

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# **Chapter 1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the background, significance, research questions, and overall direction of the present study. Positioned at the intersection of childhood studies and early childhood music education, the research engages with two interrelated fields. The chapter begins by presenting the research background in childhood studies, tracing the historical evolution of views of childhood in both Western and Chinese contexts. It then turns to contemporary global perspectives that recognise children as active social participants and rights holders, before introducing key developments in early childhood music education. On this basis, the chapter clarifies the aims and significance of the study and articulates the core research questions. Finally, the chapter concludes by outlining the overall structure of the thesis and summarising the focus of each subsequent chapter.

## **1.2 Research Interest**

My academic interest in early childhood education developed from my undergraduate studies in Early Childhood Education in China. This background provided me with a solid foundation in early childhood pedagogy while also sensitising me to the ways in which educational practices are constructed. During my postgraduate study, I was introduced to the New Sociology of Childhood, which reconceptualises children as competent social actors and rights holders. This theoretical shift profoundly influenced my understanding of childhood and stimulated a strong interest in research that foregrounds children's perspectives and lived experiences.

While engaging with the literature in early childhood education, I observed that much of the existing research focus on children's views of familiar people, relationships, and everyday experiences. In contrast, comparatively little attention has been paid to children's perspectives on curriculum itself. Within the context of Chinese education, the arts domain is often positioned as secondary to more academically oriented areas

of learning and may receive less systematic attention in both research and practice. In response to this gap, I chose Chinese kindergarten music curriculum as the focus of this study. By incorporating children's perspectives into the exploration of music activities, this research seeks not only to understand how children experience and interpret the music curriculum, but also to contribute to the co-construction of music curriculum practices in Chinese early childhood settings.

### **1.3 Research Background**

This study engages with two closely related fields, childhood studies and early childhood music education. Accordingly, the research background begins by outlining theoretical developments in these two areas, which together provide the conceptual foundation for the present study.

#### ***1.3.1 Childhood Studies***

Historically, children were often viewed as vulnerable, dependent, and in need of adult protection (Christensen & Prout, 2002). As a result, younger children's perspectives received far less attention in research compared with those of older children or adults (Sun et al., 2023). This traditional understanding aligns with earlier adult-centred views that positioned children as passive recipients of socialisation rather than as contributors to their own experiences (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Thorne, 1987).

Over the past thirty years, children's rights have received increasing attention, as reflected in the internationally evolving recognition of children's rights since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and through subsequent United Nations (UN) documents (UN, 1989, 2005, 2021). This growing recognition underscores children's entitlement to express their views and to be heard in matters that affect them (Lundy, 2007; Sommer et al., 2013). At the same time, the New Sociology of Childhood has reconceptualised children as active social actors, capable of interpreting and influencing their own social worlds (James et al.,

1998; James & James, 2012; Mayall, 2002). These developments have collectively strengthened the argument that listening to young children is not optional but essential.

Researchers increasingly recognise and value the unique perspectives that young children can offer as the primary experiencers of their own daily lives (Clark, 2005). Their viewpoints often differ from those of adults and therefore provide insights that cannot be accessed through adult accounts alone (Lister, 2004). In parallel, the participation of young children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings has expanded significantly over the past two decades, creating greater opportunities for their voices to be included in policy and practice (Sun et al., 2023).

As perspectives on children and childhood continue to evolve, researchers have increasingly emphasized the role of children in research. Rather than studying children merely as subjects, there has been a shift toward engaging them as active participants. This transformation reflects a growing recognition of children's agency and underscores their right to have a voice in matters that affect them (Dockett & Perry, 2011).

### ***1.3.2 Early Childhood Music Education***

Although research on arts education has been gaining increasing attention, studies focused specifically on young children remain in their early stages (Blaisdell et al., 2019). As a component of arts education, music education plays an important role in the field of early childhood arts education.

Research in developmental psychology indicates that musicality is an intrinsic aspect of early childhood, as infants from birth exhibit communicative and social capacities that are often developed and sustained through musical interactions with adults (Pound & Harrison, 2003). Music brings children enjoyment and motivates them to participate actively in expressive and creative experiences (Pugh & Pugh, 1998),

while also offering a medium through which they can communicate feelings and explore imagination and creativity (Elliott, 1993; Pound & Harrison, 2003). Besides, music serves as a means of identity formation and cultural transmission, helping children develop a sense of belonging to their own cultural heritage while also fostering openness and respect toward other cultures (Pugh & Pugh, 1998; Røyseng & Varkøy, 2014; Tao, 2025).

Early childhood music education plays an essential role in supporting children's holistic development. Participation in shared musical activities supports emotional expression and regulation (Zhukov & Barrett, 2023), strengthens cooperation and a sense of group belonging (Pound & Harrison, 2003), and contributes to the formation of identity and interpersonal connection (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Beyond its socio-emotional benefits, musical engagement is associated with broader cognitive and academic gains. Research demonstrates that musical experiences can enhance phonological awareness, vocabulary development (Burton, 2011), and contribute to early literacy and mathematical understanding (Pugh & Pugh, 1998). Listening to and creating music also expands children's awareness and reflective capacities, supporting higher-order thinking and meaning-making (Elliott, 1993).

In the Chinese early childhood education context, music education has long been shaped by broader cultural and pedagogical traditions. Since the 1990s, influenced by the national agenda of quality education, the emphasis on children's all-rounded development has gradually become a central goal of early childhood music education (Yan, 2021). However, the implementation of this vision remains closely tied to Chinese sociocultural background. Compared with Western societies, where creativity is often encouraged within individualistic and open educational cultures, Chinese culture traditionally places greater value on collectivism, conformity, interdependence, social harmony, and order (Zha et al., 2006). These cultural orientations, together with a historically knowledge-driven and teacher-directed curriculum structure, tend to constrain children's autonomy and creative exploration in classroom settings (Li et al.,

2012).

Although educational reforms in recent years have attempted to incorporate more child-centred principles into Chinese early childhood education (Li et al., 2012), challenges persist in practice. Cheung (2017) found that while Hong Kong early childhood teachers often provide stimulating environments for children's exploration, they tend to offer limited scaffolding during creative processes, partly due to insufficient professional knowledge about guiding children's musical creativity. More broadly, recent analyses suggest that teacher-directed instruction continues to dominate Chinese kindergarten classrooms, despite policy calls for more child-centred pedagogies (Amani & Fussy, 2025; Cheung, 2017). This enduring teacher-centred model has been widely critiqued for overlooking children's individual developmental needs (Yan, 2021).

In sum, while music education is widely recognised as a vital component of early childhood development, its growth within the Chinese context has been comparatively slow and remains in a stage of ongoing exploration (Yang & Welch, 2023). Despite policy efforts to promote child-centred and creative pedagogies, classroom practices continue to be shaped by teacher-directed traditions and limited opportunities for children's autonomous musical engagement. These tensions highlight the need for more nuanced inquiry into the nature and practice of music education in Chinese kindergartens. In particular, examining the curriculum from children's own perspectives is essential for understanding how they experience and make sense of music learning, and for informing the development of more responsive and meaningful music curriculum.

#### **1.4 Research Aims and Significance**

The overarching aim of this study is to explore the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum from children's perspectives. This study adopts a child-centred approach that foregrounds children as active participants and meaning-makers in their

educational experiences. By attending to children's voices, perceptions, and ideas, the study seeks to generate a more nuanced understanding of how the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum is experienced in practice. Specifically, the study aims to examine how children perceive and interpret the current music curriculum in Chinese kindergartens, what aspects of the curriculum they value or dislike, and how they imagine an ideal form of music learning. In doing so, the study not only documents children's experiences of existing practices but also explores the extent to which children's preferences and aspirations align with, or challenge, current curricular arrangements.

Previous studies have primarily focused on teacher practices, curriculum design, or educational policy from adults' perspectives, with limited attention to children as direct participants and experiences of the curriculum. By systematically exploring children's views and preferences on their current music curriculum, and visions of their ideal music curriculum, this study enriches the theoretical understanding of kindergarten music education, addresses a notable gap in the existing literature, and provides empirical evidence from the children's perspectives. Furthermore, it lays a foundation for future studies on child-centered music education and curriculum design.

From a practical perspective, this study collects children's opinions and preferences regarding music activities, offering insights for curriculum developers and teachers to design and implement learning experiences that better align with children's interests and needs. Additionally, it contributes to raising social awareness of children as active participants in their own education, promoting teaching practices that more fully respect children's perspectives and experiences. In doing so, the study provides practical guidance for the development and improvement of kindergarten music education in China.

## 1.5 Research Questions

The central aim of this study is to explore the kindergarten music curriculum in China from children's perspectives. While existing research has largely focused on teachers, parents, and policy, far less attention has been paid to children's own voices. As the direct participants and experiencers of the curriculum, children's perceptions and ideas are crucial for understanding and improving music education. Therefore, this study adopts a child-centered approach and is guided by the following four research questions.

*RQ1: What are children's perspectives on the current music curriculum in Chinese kindergartens?*

The first area of inquiry is to explore how children perceive and make sense of the current music curriculum in their daily learning. This question focuses on children's overall experiences and understanding toward the music activities they participate in. By considering children's perspectives, the study aims to fill the gap in existing research where children's voices are often absent.

*RQ2: What are the children's preferences regarding their current music curriculum in Chinese kindergartens?*

After exploring children's general perspectives, the second question aims to explore their specific preferences regarding the current music curriculum. Children may express enjoyment and enthusiasm for certain activities, while showing less interest or dislike for others. By understanding what children like and dislike, the study seeks to identify the strengths of the current curriculum as well as areas that may require improvement, from the children's own perspectives.

*RQ3: How do children envision their ideal kindergarten music curriculum?*

Beyond children's views of the existing curriculum, the third question moves toward a

more imaginative and forward-looking dimension by exploring children's visions of their ideal music curriculum. Listening to how children describe their 'dream' music lessons provides insight into their learning desires and creative expectations, which can offer valuable guidance for curriculum development and improvement.

*RQ4: Do any challenges exist in the current music curriculum in Chinese kindergartens in relation to children's preferences and ideals?*

Finally, by comparing children's perspectives on the current curriculum with their preferences and visions of an ideal curriculum, the study aims to explore whether any challenges exist in the present practice. The intention here is not to assume that challenges necessarily exist, but rather to examine from children's perspectives whether gaps or issues can be identified.

## **1.6 Structure of this Thesis**

This thesis is organised into nine chapters, each building cumulatively towards a comprehensive understanding of children's perspectives on the kindergarten music curriculum in China. Chapter 1, the present chapter, has introduced the research background, illustrated research aim and significance, and articulated the research questions that guide the overall inquiry.

Chapter 2 provides a critical review of the literature related to children's perspectives. It first traces the conceptual development of children's perspectives, highlighting key theoretical frameworks that have shaped contemporary understandings of children's agency and rights. The chapter then examines methodological traditions associated with researching children's perspectives. This is followed by a review of empirical studies that have operationalised children's perspectives in diverse educational contexts.

Chapter 3 offers an extensive review of literature on early childhood education. Drawing upon classical and contemporary theories of child development and

curriculum design, the chapter reviews major global trends in the evolution of early childhood curriculum. It then examines the historical trajectory and policy shifts underpinning the development of the kindergarten curriculum in China, identifying both continuities and departures from international models. The chapter concludes by reflecting critically on existing research concerning the Chinese kindergarten curriculum.

Chapter 4 turns specifically to the early childhood music curriculum. The chapter begins by discussing the value of music and music education in early childhood. It then reviews the broader development of early childhood music education internationally, before narrowing its focus to the evolution of Chinese kindergarten music curriculum across different policy periods. The chapter concludes with a review of current research on Chinese kindergarten music education, noting that existing studies predominantly examine educational objectives and significance, content, teaching methods, and educational challenges from adult-centred perspectives.

Chapter 5 presents the research design and methodology employed in this study. It begins by outlining the research philosophy that underpins the inquiry. The chapter then describes the application of the adapted Mosaic approach as the primary data collection framework, elaborating on the use of photography, tour guiding, voting, painting, and conferencing. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, voluntary participation, no harm, confidentiality and anonymity, are addressed systematically. The chapter further explains the sampling strategy, participant recruitment, contextual characteristics of the research site, and linguistic considerations. It concludes by detailing the analytic process, with particular attention to the use of thematic analysis as the guiding analytical framework.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 present the empirical findings of the study. Chapter 6 addresses how Chinese children perceive and experience the current kindergarten music curriculum. Chapter 7 explores children's preferences concerning the music

curriculum as it is presently delivered. Chapter 8 focuses on how Chinese children envision their ideal kindergarten music curriculum, offering insights into children's aspirations beyond their current educational realities. Together, these three chapters illuminate children's voices with regard to both the existing and the desired forms of music learning in kindergarten settings.

Finally, Chapter 9 provides the conclusion and discussion. It synthesises the findings across the entire study to answer the four research questions, discusses the theoretical and practical contributions of the research, and acknowledges methodological and contextual limitations. The chapter concludes by proposing directions for future research that may further advance understanding of children's perspectives and inform the development of more responsive music curriculum in early childhood education.

## Chapter 2 Children's Perspectives

### 2.1 Introduction

This study explores the kindergarten music curriculum from children's perspectives. In order to situate this focus theoretically and methodologically, it is essential to examine how children's perspectives have been conceptualised, studied, and operationalised within existing research. This chapter therefore provides a critical review of the theoretical, methodological, and empirical foundations of research on children's perspectives, which underpin the child-centred orientation of the present study.

Children's perspectives represent the experiences and perspectives that children acquire through their own life experiences and practices, with the children themselves being the subjects of their own life-world (Sommer et al., 2009). Following the definition from Sommer et al. (2009), children's perspectives are different from child perspectives. Children's perspectives refer to children's lived experiences, perceptions and understanding of their lives and the world, while child perspectives refer to adults' interpretations of children's perceptions, experiences, and actions. Therefore, studying children's perspectives requires positioning children as active social agents and knowledge holders rather than passive research subjects (James & Prout, 1997).

Against this background, this chapter explores key debates and developments in research on children's perspectives. Section 2.2 reviews key theoretical frameworks, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the New Sociology of Childhood, and the debates surrounding children's agency and participation in research. Section 2.3 introduces major methodological approaches for studying children's perspectives. It highlights innovative child-centered methods such as the Mosaic approach, visual methods, language-based methods, and creative and playful methods. Section 2.4 examines empirical research on children's perspectives, focusing on how these theoretical and methodological insights have been applied in

different research fields. This section is organized into three parts: social research, educational research, and studies conducted in the Chinese context.

Through these discussions, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how children's perspectives have been conceptualized, investigated, and implemented across theoretical, methodological, and empirical domains. This foundation will guide the researcher's own methodological considerations in working with children as active participants in knowledge creation.

## **2.2 Theoretical Studies on Children's Perspectives**

### ***2.2.1 Introduction***

Understanding children's perspectives has become a central concern in contemporary childhood research. Over the past few decades, there has been a growing recognition that children are not merely passive recipients of adult influence but are active participants who construct their own meanings and understandings of the world (James & Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2002). This shift in thinking has been supported by international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which emphasises children's rights to express their views and to participate in decisions that affect them (Sommer et al., 2013).

The development of the New Sociology of Childhood further advanced this reconceptualisation of children, moving away from developmental and adult-centred models toward an understanding of children as social actors embedded in specific cultural and historical contexts (Prout, 2011; James & James, 2012). Within this framework, children's voices are not only acknowledged but valued as essential contributions to social knowledge. Consequently, research with children has shifted from studying children as objects to engaging with them as collaborators and co-constructors of knowledge (Christensen & Prout, 2002).

However, this paradigm shift has also generated theoretical and methodological

debates. While children's rights and agency are now widely discussed, some scholars have questioned the assumptions underpinning these concepts, particularly regarding how children's voices are represented and whether agency implies autonomy or responsibility (Hammersley, 2017).

This section therefore examines the theoretical foundations of research on children's perspectives. It first explores the significance and limitations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a global framework for children's rights, followed by an overview of the New Sociology of Childhood that redefines the position of children in society. It then discusses how children's participation contributes to research, and finally considers the controversies surrounding the notion of children's agency. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a critical foundation for understanding how children's voices and viewpoints can be meaningfully incorporated into educational and social research.

### ***2.2.2 Views of Childhood***

The empirical context of this study is China, so tracing the historical development of views of childhood in both Western and Chinese contexts therefore provides an essential foundation for understanding contemporary childhood research.

#### ***The evolution of Western views of childhood***

Before the Middle Ages period, children were seen as subordinate to adults. Some of the oldest written accounts of childhood occurred in Ancient Sumeria (4,000-2,000 BCE) and Babylonia (2,300-1,000 BCE) which show vulnerable children were seen as off-spring of slaves and children were used for economic purposes in exchange for food and housing (Robin, 2019). However, some philosophers offered different views of childhood in ancient Greece and Rome. Heraclitus of Ephesus (535-475 BCE) argued that children should be childish and that children should not be treated like adults (Feldman, 2022). Plato (428-348 BCE) argued that children learn most effectively through play, and that in the early stages of childhood their physical and

mental development is shaped largely by their feelings and emotions (D'Angour, 2013).

In the early Middle Ages, Western culture and education were completely controlled by Christianity so pre-Christian theory didn't influence most people's views of childhood (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2017). Until the seventh century, children were classified as infancy and neophyte adults and children aged seven should enter work. From the mid-seventh century, western Europe emphasized spiritual guidance for children under the influence of both religious and scientific thinking (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014). Even though it gradually focused on children, children's rights were put last. In the Middle Ages, the concept of a child is controversial and there was lack of recognition of childhood (Robin, 2019; Archard, 2004).

Between the 14th and 20th centuries, Western conceptions of childhood reached a critical turning point, giving rise to a range of influential and progressive ideas. During the Renaissance from the 14th to the 16th centuries, humans are considered liberal, so children are seen as liberal and developmental beings. Children are treated with care and affection by adults and children have their own possessions and play activities (Frost, 2010). During the Enlightenment period of the 17th to 18th centuries in Europe, an increasing number of scholars presented arguments for childhood based on scientific facts and truths, which are the cornerstone of modernist thought (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2017). Locke's (1632-1704) tabula rasa theory suggests that all human ideas come from acquired experience, so he advocates the important role of children's acquired education in their development (Robin, 2019; MacBlain, 2022). In addition, Rousseau (1712-1788), the representative personage of this period, demonstrated a naturalistic view of childhood in his literature *Émile* (Robin, 2019; Riley, 2020). *My Pedagogic Creed* written by Dewey (1859-1952) shows the view of childhood that children have unique physiological and psychological structures and children's mental activity is a process of their development (Fallace, 2011).

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, some major psychologists, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bowlby came to a scientific understanding of children. Piaget put out four stages of children's development, which provides a way for children to learn consistency by making activities predictable (Piaget, 1972). Besides, Vygotsky argues that the key to children's cognitive development is interacting with others including using languages (Vygotsky, 2012). Additionally, Bowlby came up with the attachment theory that children should be taken care of by the main attachment figure, usually their mothers, in the first two years of life (Bowlby, 1979; Butterworth, 2013). Through developmental psychology, children have important roles as developed individuals in society and children are put into the center to be valued (Lee, 2001).

In the second half of the twentieth century, society was concerned about children as subjects participating in social relations (Baraldi, 2022). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), issued in 1989, supports children's rights in all aspects. Subsequently, the New Sociology of Childhood supposes that children are active agents in their own socialization and supports the importance of children's agency which breaks the old idea that children are passive 'beings' (James & Prout, 1997). After that, an increasing number of people focused on children as subjects who have the 'ability to act creatively and make things happen' (James, 2009 p.42). Under this situation, children are recognized as social actors and rights holders rather than passive supporters (Mayall, 2001).

### ***The evolution of Chinese views of childhood***

In early imperial China, prevailing views of childhood were closely tied to moral and cosmological beliefs. Prior to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-200 CE), children were often perceived as morally deficient or impure. Influenced by Ruist traditions of self-cultivation, however, children gradually came to be viewed as worthy of moral attention and educational investment by the late Former Han period (220CE) (Kinney, 1995). During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties (220-589 CE), a more coherent and distinctive Chinese conception of childhood began to take shape. In this

period, children's daily lives, the significance of fetal (prenatal) education, women's experiences of childbirth, and practices of childcare were all increasingly valued (Ma, 2021). According to Ma (2021), this emerging view of childhood was characterised by three key ideas. First, children were recognised as independent individuals and accorded a degree of equality. Second, play was understood as a natural and intrinsic aspect of childhood. Third, children's talents and individuality were respected, with education advocated in accordance with individual differences. Collectively, these perspectives on childhood bear notable similarities to contemporary Western conceptions.

However, Liu, X. (2019) argues that these more child-affirming ideas represented the aspirations of only a limited number of scholars and did not fundamentally transform the dominant conception of childhood in feudal China. Spanning more than 3,000 years, from the Zhou Dynasty (1046 BCE) to the end of the Qing Dynasty (1912 CE), feudal Chinese society was characterised by a rigid hierarchical order in which social status was largely determined by birth and family background. Within this system, ethical norms emphasising superiority and inferiority positioned children as subordinate to adults and demanded their absolute obedience to elders. Moreover, the low level of productivity and high child mortality rates in feudal society further contributed to the objectification of children, who were often valued primarily for their instrumental roles within the family. Gender inequality was also deeply embedded in conceptions of childhood, with the belief in male superiority manifesting from an early age.

Despite these constraints, Liu, X. (2019) notes that the Chinese view of childhood continued to evolve gradually, culminating in what has been described as the 'discovery of children' in the 16th century. During this period, several influential educators articulated more child-centred perspectives: Wang Shouren advocated naturalistic education, Yang Wanli portrayed children as lively and endearing in his writings, and Li Zhi promoted educational ideas oriented towards children's

individual development. After that, the period between the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century is an important turning point in the development of the Chinese view of childhood, a period that ended more than 2,000 years of feudal dictatorship and began to learn from the West. At the end of the Qing dynasty, social and educational views of childhood were improved: the word ‘child’ was explicitly used in national publications in 1902; the National Education Guidelines in 1904 stated that children’s education should not put a lot of pressure on children; and children’s expression was valued (Liu, X., 2019).

Afterwards, some Chinese educators such as Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Chen Heqin and Tao Zhixing learned Western ideas abroad and began to promote the Western view of childhood in China (Liu, S., 2019). They support that children are children, beings, players, pure, free, and the future of the country. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 especially after the reform and opening in 1979, the Chinese government established many regulations about the views of childhood in education and have been used ever since (Jiang, 2019). Among these guidelines, children are regarded as the wealth and future of the nation, education is expected to be child-centred and to recognise children as independent individuals, particular emphasis is placed on safeguarding their physical and mental well-being, and society as a whole is called upon to respect children.

### ***2.2.3 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child***

With the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by the UN General Assembly in 1989, there has been concern about children’s rights all over the world. Article 12 states that ‘every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously’ and article 13 points out that ‘every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information’. The UNCRC supports children to have competence to achieve experience, acknowledge, and a view of the world and children have rights to express

their views under any situation (Sommer et al., 2013). Importantly, the UNCRC has been ratified by nearly all nations, giving it unprecedented international legitimacy and making children's rights a universal concern rather than an agenda limited to particular regions (Lansdown, 2002). As a result, children's views are increasingly recognised as valuable, and encouraging children to share their perspectives has become a central expectation within contemporary childhood studies.

The definitions of 'children's perspectives' cannot be given in isolated contexts as they are based on special cultural beliefs, theories, and worldviews (Sommer et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the UNCRC provides a foundation for the theory of children's perspectives that supports children's rights to have a voice in matters affecting them and children's rights to be 'heard', 'seen' and 'included' (Sommer et al., 2013). The UNCRC is well established as an international and global framework for ensuring the rights of children in many areas such as health, family and education, it is also a useful piece of legislation for guiding adults in their efforts to ensure the participation of children in decision-making (Punch & Tisdall, 2012). Besides, the UNCRC is widely used in research and practice with children (MacNaughton & Kylie, 2008).

However, the UNCRC is controversial. Although the comprehensiveness of the UNCRC supports the research on children's rights, there are gaps in the scope of its provisions and some of its wording is too broad and lacks concrete operationalisation (Killkelly & Lundy, 2006). Cregan and Cuthbert (2014) find that the majority of children come from poor areas and they rarely have enough rights. The UNCRC tends towards liberalism and Western bias (Quennerstedt et al., 2018) and the drafting process was dominated by Western countries and completely excluded children (Tobin, 2013).

Despite these critical insights, the main trajectory of child rights research remains unaffected and the UNCRC remains widely accepted and unchallenged (Quennerstedt et al., 2018). Although the UNCRC has been criticised for its lack of clear definitions

and cultural sensitivities, Beazley et al. (2009) consider these criticisms to be unjustified because the universal acceptance of the UNCRC is due to its use of broader criteria, which were developed after 10 years of consultation and a synthesis of national views. At the same time, each State, upon ratification, has the freedom to choose to retain provisions that do not conform to its own laws or culture (Killkelly & Lundy, 2006). If the UNCRC defined terms too strictly, it would not be widely accepted by so many countries (Beazley et al., 2009).

#### ***2.2.4 The New Sociology of Childhood***

Following the pioneering research on children by the French scholar Philippe Ariès in the 1960s, and the subsequent research on children, family, and society by many historical scholars such as Alan Macfarlan, Natalie Zemon Davis, Lloyd de Mause, Lawrence Stone, etc., a significant influence has been exerted on the trend of reflection on children and childhood in both British and American sociology (Wilson, 1980). The place of the child in sociology was re-examined and the New Sociology of Childhood was produced.

By the 1980s and 1990s, the emergence of the New Sociology of Childhood challenged earlier notions of children as passive ‘beings’ and instead emphasised their role as active participants in the socialisation process (Prout, 2011). Traditional sociological understandings of children were adult-centred and saw children as subordinate objects to adults, i.e. children as threats to adult society, children as victims of adults, and children as learners of adult culture, which ignored children’s own agency and creativity and their potential contribution to social change (Thorne, 1987). In *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, a major theoretical work in the New Sociology of Childhood, James and Prout (1997) summarise the main positions and approaches of the ‘new paradigm’ in the sociology of childhood. They emphasise the shift from traditional adult-centred perspectives to new research pathways and point out that childhood is not a universal biological stage, but rather a social construct that is deeply influenced by cultural, historical and social contexts. This new

paradigm defines children as active social actors who are not only passive recipients of social influences, but also important participants capable of influencing and reshaping their own social environment.

Subsequently, a growing number of scholars have supported child agency. James and Prout (1997) claim that children have agency influences a growing number of scholars to think about children's agency. Mayall (2002) figures out that children are recognized as social actors and rights holders rather than passive supporters. Drawing on a critique of Aristotelian developmental perspectives, Matthews (2021) argues against viewing children merely as 'potential adults' whose value lies only in their future maturity. Instead, he emphasises that childhood has intrinsic worth and that children possess their own cognitive, moral and philosophical capacities, which deserve recognition and respect. Macleod (2015) believes that children's rights are grounded in their agency, establishing an inseparable connection between rights and the ability to act. Tisdall and Punch (2012) confirm that the New Sociology of Childhood criticizes that childhood is passive progress to adulthood and supports children as 'beings' in their own rights rather than 'becomings'. Based on the definition of children in the New Sociology of Childhood, Harcourt and Einarsdottir (2011) stress that childhood and children are therefore worthy of research in their own right. Danby and Farrell (2004) assert the past views of children as undeveloped and lacking power are changing, and the current view is that children are the constructors in their own lives. James and James (2012) encourage children to be independent individuals in society who can make choices for their lives, and act in wider social change.

Building on posthumanist perspectives, Murriss (2016) reconceptualises children's agency beyond traditional humanist understandings of the autonomous individual. Traditional perspectives often understand agency as an individual capacity possessed by the child, emphasising children's ability to act independently, express themselves and make choices. However, influenced by Karen Barad's concept of 'intra-action',

Murris (2016) argues that children's agency is not a fixed attribute owned solely by the individual child, but is continuously produced through relationships among people, environments, materials and social discourses. From this perspective, children, teachers, spaces, objects, language and activities all participate in the construction of meaning. Therefore, children's agency can be understood as relational and distributed, emerging through complex networks of human and non-human interactions rather than solely from the child's individual intentions or abilities.

### ***2.2.5 Agency Comes with Controversy***

While the UNCRC and New Sociology of Childhood has played an important role in recognising children as active social actors, the increasing emphasis on children's agency has also led to a number of theoretical and methodological controversies (Baraldi, 2022). Child agency is a widely used but largely unverified concept (Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi, 2013). From the point of view of the critics, the original concept of agency is taken to a good extreme (Spyrou, 2018; Abebe, 2019) but it also has limitations. Hammersley (2017) argues that if children's agency is acknowledged, their responsibility must also be recognized. However, the concept of agency creates a tension between the need to protect children and the expectation for them to take responsibility. Besides, the original standpoint that agency is the concept of autonomy is questioned by some scholars (Abebe, 2019). Robson et al. (2007) hold the opinion that children's agency can be changed by the transformation of whom they stay with, what they do, and where they are to act and practice in different situations, which shows children's ability, knowledge, and state. Even though children are their agents having the agency to show their views, it largely depends on family environment, chance, and relationship with others because children's needs are dependent on their siblings, parents, and other partners.

In addition, there are also controversial aspects to the study of children's perspectives (Harcourt & Einarsdottir, 2011). Mayall (2000) argues that even when children's perspectives are sought and listened to, these perspectives may not represent all

children in all situations, and some voices and some perspectives are not heard. Warming (2005) argues that amplifying the voices of some children can unintentionally marginalize others by prioritizing certain groups over others or failing to include diverse perspectives. She also contends that for younger children, the emphasis should be on fostering their development rather than prioritizing their rights. Komulainen (2007) mentions that children may be pressured to say what they think and this is not of their own accord so ‘listening to children’ can be confusing to children at times. Spyrou (2011) opposes collecting children’s views from hearing their voices because not all ideas are expressed by sounds. Children’s facial expressions and body language can also express their views. Mannion (2007) suggests that listening to children is a good starting point, but questions whether understanding children’s views still relies primarily on adults. Therefore, providing children with diverse and natural ways of expressing themselves, such as drawing, playing or role-playing, allows adults to better understand children’s views (Goldman et al., 2012). Besides, Kjørholt et al. (2005) confirm that despite the problems associated with listening to children’s voices, we cannot ignore the value research brings. Reflecting on the limitations of children’s voices is not intended to negate the value of research from children’s perspectives, but rather to promote better and more creative ways to represent children’s voices as well as reduce ethical issues studying with children (Spyrou, 2011).

### ***2.2.6 Contributions of Children’s Participation to Research***

Prior to the mid-1990s, despite the researchers’ commitment to improving the lives of children and their families, most studies focused on children rather than with them, which neglected the children’s perspective (Rogers & Boyd, 2020). In addition, during the era when developmental psychology dominated, the research community generally held a skeptical attitude toward children undertaking their own research, believing that children lacked competence (Kellett, 2011).

However, in recent decades, children’s participation has become increasingly common

since the adoption of the UNCRC in 1989 (Bessell et al., 2020) and the development of the New Sociology of Childhood. Lundy (2007) points out that, according to article 12 of the UNCRC, listening to children is not an autonomous choice of adults, but a legal requirement and a fundamental right of the child. James and Prout (1997) as representatives of the New Sociology of Childhood, advocate that children are active actors and that research should be based on a 'child rights' perspective, inviting children to participate actively rather than treating them as passive objects of study. Hardman (2001) asserts that children are as worthy of study as any other part of society and that focusing on children can reveal other aspects of social life that traditional ethnographic research has failed to uncover. In addition, it is now recognised that children's abilities are 'different' rather than 'lesser' than those of adults and cannot be assessed by the same standards (Christensen & Prout, 2002).

Firstly, children's participation in research can support children as collaborators in the research. Children's participation and voice not only provide an opportunity for researchers to consider children's differences, but also encourage children to communicate (Gabb & Sigh, 2015). According to Veale (2005), children's participation in research adds value by incorporating their unique perspectives into the study. Grover (2004) support that authentic social research with children is necessary because children are seen as subjects or collaborators in the research process, not simply objects to be studied. Smith (2011) states that children's abilities are in a constant state of development, and that providing children with a variety of experiences and supporting their freedom of expression helps to enhance children's abilities as research participants.

Secondly, children as participants in research can help bridge the gap created by the absence of adult voices. Children's voices in research can provide more information that we cannot get from adults because they look differently, ask different questions, speak different languages, and children connect with their peers who share similar experiences in ways that adults cannot (Lister, 2004). Main (2019) through her

research also finds out that children's viewpoints complement adults' perspectives even though the viewpoints between children and adults are opposite. Howarth et al. (2021) argue that more and more children and young people offer their opinions which are valuable in research. Incorporating children's perspectives into research not only puts effort into understanding children but also empowers children's participation rights (Main, 2019). James (2013) also points out that researching children's personal lives from their perspectives supports children as social actors. This approach recognizes their agency both in the present and in their past experiences, as their past actions, decisions, and experiences shape their current ability to act and make choices.

Thirdly, children with special needs, such as those with various physical, communication and/or cognitive disabilities, are often overlooked in research (Stafford, 2017). Therefore, some scholars support the importance of considering the voices of special needs children to ensure a comprehensive understanding of diverse childhood experiences. Carroll and Sixsmith (2016) support the importance of listening to the voices of young children with disabilities as these children are often marginalised and easily excluded from research. Prout and Hallett (2003) argue that including disabled children in research is crucial, as their voices provide unique insights into their lived experiences and challenges, ensuring that social policies and solutions are informed by their perspectives and truly address their needs. Tisdall (2012) asserts that the voices of children with disabilities need to be taken seriously and that, while it may also be productive and valuable to include their carers in research, the carers' perspectives are not synonymous with those of children and/or disabled people.

Moreover, some scholars have proposed some research recommendations for the study of children's perspectives. Lundy (2007) argues that only the voice of children is not enough, and that for children to be listened to meaningfully they must be given the opportunity and facility to then listen and act on their contributions. Powell and

Smith (2009) suggest that changing our view of children as fragile, passive victims to active social actors can ensure the effectiveness of communication with children as well as a more central role for children in research. Dockett and Perry (2003) advise that when children participate in research discussions, the initiative should be given to the child to gain agency, so the children can control the pace and direction of the dialogue, raising and exploring topics of interest to them.

### ***2.2.7 Conclusions***

Over the past three decades, theoretical developments concerning children's perspectives have evolved from the recognition of children's rights in the UNCRC to the emergence of the New Sociology of Childhood, which reconceptualised children as active social actors. These frameworks collectively challenge adult-centred views of childhood and emphasise children's agency, participation, and competence in shaping their own social experiences.

Subsequent research has extended these theoretical foundations by highlighting the significance of children's participation in research processes. Studies have demonstrated that engaging children as collaborators rather than subjects provides richer insights into their lived realities and supports their recognition as knowledgeable contributors. However, these developments have also prompted ongoing debates regarding the scope and interpretation of agency, the authenticity of children's voices, and the ethical and methodological challenges of representing diverse childhoods.

In summary, the theoretical studies reviewed in this section establish a framework that values children as competent and rights-bearing participants while acknowledging the complexities involved in accessing and interpreting their perspectives. These insights offer both conceptual guidance for the present study, which seeks to understand how children construct and express their own meanings within the context of music education.

## **2.3 Methodological Approaches on Children's Perspectives**

### ***2.3.1 Introduction***

Researchers' views on children directly influence the research methods they choose (Harden et al., 2000). In the field of child research, there is a tendency to view children as one of two extremes: either exactly the same as adults or completely different from them (James et al., 1998). One view holds that children are essentially no different from adults, so researchers use the same methods as for adults, believing that children can participate in research in a mature and rational way. However, this approach may overlook the power imbalance between adults and children, causing researchers to fail to fully consider children's unique experiences and ways of expression (Morrow, 1999).

Another perspective emphasizes the significant differences between children and adults. Researchers who hold this view tend to use ethnographic methods to get close to children's world and take children's perspectives as the core (James et al., 1998). They rely on participant observation, and adults cannot fully integrate into children's social world (Hill, 1997). Ethnography is not only applicable to those who stress children's uniqueness but also to any researcher who wishes to gain a deeper understanding of children's perspectives and experiences beyond one-off interviews (Fetterman, 2020). Since the beginning of the 21st century, some scholars have put forward a new perspective that children are both similar to and different from adults in terms of their capabilities (James et al., 1998). This viewpoint has prompted researchers to develop more child-friendly research methods, such as art-based and visual methods, to better accommodate children's ways of expression and enhance their agency in research (Punch, 2002).

Organizing the literature, methodological approaches on children's perspectives can mainly be divided into four areas: language-based methods, visual methods, art-based methods, and the Mosaic approach. These approaches are discussed in turn in the

following sections.

### ***2.3.2 Language-based Methods***

When it comes to language-based method, the most common method is interview which is widely used through adults. Children's interviews are similar for understanding children's perspectives, feelings and experiences through interactive conversations with them (Clark & Moss, 2011). Life history and biographical interview is a direct way to understand children's views and focuses on exploring individuals' personal narratives and life experiences through in-depth interviews (Davies, 2015).

In addition, researching young people's views cannot only be based on individuals but also used on groups. The focus group is a general method of gathering six to eight children to talk about one theme which provides an opportunity for children to interact and discuss with each other (Cameron, 2005). Children are more relaxed when they are together than when they are alone with adults, and focus group can stimulate individual memories of personal experiences and generate group interpretations based on lived experiences (Lund et al., 2016).

However, interviews involve answering questions in rapid succession, so children have little time to prepare (Punch, 2002). Consequently, traditional interview may not inspire children's interests and bring bad feelings to children (Gabb, 2010). The younger the child, the more limited their language expression abilities, posing greater challenges (Sommer et al., 2013). Besides, traditional interviews or group discussions may be stressful for some children and visual methods that allow children to participate in research with playful experiences are more suitable for them (Spyrou, 2011). Furthermore, children are easily influenced by those around them when expressing their views (Waller and Bitou, 2011).

Although traditional interviews are popular for collecting language-based data, some

researchers have used alternative interviews that make the interviews more applicable to younger children. Underwood et al. (2015) interviewed children using a play-based and multi-sensory communication method. Jug and Vilar (2015) adapted focus group methodology where children tell stories through toys. Smith (2014) talked about children's thoughts through drawings, artwork or block building. Almers et al. (2021) discussed with children in the outdoor environment, using a walk-and-talk method to show children's understanding and participation in the outdoor play environment.

Besides, in addition to the verbal language, there are a number of research methods that use the written language. Diaries allow for a record of the children's day to day life, and researchers through observing children's diaries to research (Punch, 2002). Davies (2015) concludes biographical approach is widely used in children's biographical research which is usually a child-centered approach which includes various methods to hear children's biographical experiences, present lives, and future thoughts. Punch (2002) supports the many benefits of diaries as a research method. Diaries allow relatively easy comparisons to be made between the different types of activities that different children do each day. Diary can also reflect the fact that children's activities vary greatly when it is a school day or a weekend. Creating a record of their daily life can be accepted by most children. However, the difficulties in using the diary method is that it depends on the child's level of literacy.

### ***2.3.3 Visual Methods***

Visual maps are a tool used in research to explore children's relationships and experiences, with researchers employing various types of visual maps to analyze social interactions and emotional connections from children's perspectives. Veale (2005) proposes visual maps, where by researchers and children create children's relationship maps together with visual techniques. Based on visual maps, researchers create different types of maps tailored to their specific research focus. Dunn and Deater-Deckard's (2001) four-field map is a basic visual map which is divided by two straight lines into four different areas representing the different types of relationships

the children have. The closer to the center, the relationship from children's perspectives between them is better (Mason & Tipper, 2008). The eco-map from McCormick et al. (2008) uses different types of lines to demonstrate the links between relationships from children's perspectives. Gabb and Singh (2015) use emoticons on the emotion map to show the relationships between characters from children's perspectives.

Besides, some research methods use visual elements and visual prompts to help children recall and express their personal experiences. The memory books (Thomson & Holland, 2005) use diaries and scrapbooks as the main forms which include a wide range of materials like postcards, stickers, photos, exam results etc. These materials in the book provide extra data helping children think of their pasts and develop their studies. The life grid method (Wilson et al., 2007) is widely used in researching children's personal lives which enables researchers to explore relationships between different life domains, fostering rich discussions and enhancing recall through visual prompts.

Clark-Ibáñez (2004) supports using photo-elicitation interviews method to research children's lives because children have limited ability to express themselves and photographs can help young children express themselves better. Stephenson (2009) also suggests that photography as strategies for listening to children's voices. Stephenson (2009) prepared 11 photographs she had taken of early childhood learning environments for 2-4 years old children. Firstly children labelled these photographs to express themselves. Then they use circular stickers of different colours to distinguish what they like or dislike. Finally, the children take their own photographs and make them into individual learning documents. In addition to photographs, video has been used to explore children's perspectives. Chesworth (2016) captured video recordings of children aged 4-5 years old playing free-choice games at the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The researcher explored how children's interest in play is moderated by participation in socio-cultural activities by recording the unstructured

conversations, comments and non-verbal responses that occur when children watch these videos with their peers and parents.

The visual methods increase children's sense of participation and freedom of expression by involving them in researching and articulating important information, giving them a degree of control (Dockett et al., 2017). The visual methods allow children to express themselves with visual elements which is particularly suitable for young children or children who are poor with language and words children can join the research (Gabb & Singh, 2015). Wilson et al. (2007) support that through visual elements, it is easier for researchers and participants to construct and reflect on life histories, helps reduce tensions between researcher and subject, and facilitates discussion and exploration of sensitive issues. Davies (2015) has the same opinion as Wilson et al. arguing that researching that provides a wide range of activities designed for children can promote children's participation and give opportunities to chart sensitive relational issues. Additionally, Yamada-Rice (2017) points out that visual tools in childhood studies can help collect and analyze research data. Besides, Abbas et al. (2013 p.320) consider visual methods have 'less resource-intensive than recorded and transcribed biographical interviews' and the data generated is better for comparison.

However, researching children should also consider more complex ethical issues than those of adults (Gabb, 2010) including but not limited to obtaining consent from school, family, children themselves. (Davis, 2017) and avoiding emotional and physical harm to children (Willis & Holland, 2009). Besides, Yamada-Rice (2017 p.71) argues that children do not always 'respond to visual methods' that the researcher provides. Waller and Bitou (2011) doubt that using 'participatory' tools can engage children and joining some research agenda may change children's experiences. Apart from researchers' critical thinking on the children's perspectives on research methods, children have shown their ideas about these research methods. Hill (2006) explored children's and teenagers' views on the research methods used to conduct research with

them and summarizes children's expectations of research methods as fairness, effectiveness, agency, choice, openness, diversity, satisfaction, and respect.

#### ***2.3.4 Art-based Methods***

Over the past three decades, arts-based research has developed steadily as an established approach within qualitative inquiry. It expands traditional understandings of 'data', moving beyond numerical and propositional accounts to include diverse linguistic forms such as poetry and narrative, as well as non-linguistic modes such as visual images, movement, and performance (Fleming, 2012).

Drawing is a common art-based method used in many research studies, allowing participants to represent their ideas, experiences, and emotions visually, often providing an accessible means of expression. In child-centered research, drawing can be used as a communication tool alongside writing or conversation, and these methods have been employed by researchers to explore a variety of topics (White et al., 2010). For example, Wiseman et al. (2019) employed the 'Draw and Tell' method, allowing 3-5 year old children to express their outdoor play experiences through drawings and encouraging them to verbally describe their artwork. For older children, researchers also incorporated a writing component to create the Draw-Write-and-Tell method, using drawing, writing, and language to explore children's ideas (Green & Lliaban, 2020).

Engaging young children in creative, playful, and open-ended arts experiences in research provides opportunities for them to understand and explore complex concepts and ideas (Blaisdell et al., 2019). The advantages of using drawings for research with children are that it can be creative, fun and can encourage children to participate more actively in the research (Punch, 2002). As a familiar and non-threatening activity, drawing allows children to express complex experiences naturally, because they often engage in it during school and play without requiring advanced skills (Mitchell, 2006). Besides, drawing gives children time to think about what they want to say and images

can be changed and added to, which gives children more control to express themselves (Punch, 2002). Similarly, art activities (Bagnoli, 2009) and the use of rich materials (Gabb, 2010) are engaging and stimulating, further enhancing children's willingness to take part. In addition, employing more diverse and innovative research methods may help mitigate the influence of adult authority over children, which tends to be more pronounced in one-on-one interactions between researchers and children (Punch, 2002).

Conversely, these research methods may also have certain limitations. Bagnoli (2009) argues that creative methods are unsuitable for all children such as young children who are not familiar with using pencils and children who do not like painting are not suitable for painting method. Some children may not be interested in drawing due to a lack of artistic ability (Punch, 2002). Not only drawing, but other forms of child participation may be difficult for some children, which can affect their confidence in participating (Bessell et al., 2020). In addition to considering whether these abilities are suitable for children, factors such as social status should also be taken into account, as it may influence how they use learning tools or abilities (Harden et al., 2000).

Additionally, Bessell et al. (2020) point out that some children prefer to imitate other's paintings or they can only draw what they can even if it is not related to research. Therefore using open, creative methods may not allow researchers to collect the data they desire (Blaisdell et al., 2019). However, Punch (2002) doesn't think copying this is necessarily a problem as the drawings still represent the children as a group, but it is important not to over-interpret the meaning of certain repeated images.

Some scholars have evaluated or developed creative and playful research methods to better facilitate children's participation and expression in educational research. Green (2017) examines four research methods for children: art making, role-playing, model building, and book making through participatory and phenomenological frameworks. In environmental education, art making and model building provide children with

opportunities to reflect on the beauty of nature and interact with it, while role playing encourages children to construct stories to express their understanding of local ecology. During model building, children integrate real and imaginary elements drawing from past and present experiences. Book making helps children reflect on photos and artwork to document and interpret their environmental experiences. Besides, Winter (2012) creates an innovative method, the reality box, to find the views of children between four to seven about state care. The outside of a box is used to shape children's images they thought in a public environment and the inside of a box can be decorated to show true opinions about children's perspectives of state care.

Additionally, Burke et al. (2024a) gave children the freedom to choose their own research methods to share their views on play spaces, which included five approaches: blocks, clay, drawings, percussion instruments and loose parts storytelling. Forty-two 5-6 year old pupils in Scotland took part in the study and the results found that children's favourite and preferred method of listening to their voices is clay and blocks. However, these methods were particularly suited to representing physical space. As the present study focuses on children's perspectives on music curriculum rather than spatial environments, clay and block construction were considered less appropriate. Representing musical experiences, instruments, or learning processes through three-dimensional materials would be less practical and potentially restrictive. Therefore, drawing was selected as the primary method, as it provides a flexible and accessible medium for children to express their thinking of music activities.

### ***2.3.5 The Mosaic Approach***

British academics Alison Clark and Peter Moss developed the Mosaic approach which is a combination of methods designed to listen to children's views and perceptions of the world around them (Clark & Moss, 2011). The Mosaic Approach focuses primarily on the views and experiences of children under the age of five and it can also be used as a tool for older children, particularly those with communication difficulties (Clark & Moss, 2001).

The Mosaic approach aims to understand children's life experience and provide a participatory, reflective, and adaptable methodology (Baird, 2013). The Mosaic approach supports the idea that children are competent social participants who are experts in their own lives, skilled communicators, rights holders, and meaning makers (Clark & Statham, 2005) and active participants in research (Baird, 2013), aligning with theories from the New Sociology of Childhood. Besides, the Mosaic approach highlights listening to and capturing children's voices responding to the UNCRC, while focusing on addressing inequalities between child participants and adult researchers (Rogers & Boyd, 2020).

The approach draws on social constructive theory, recognizing children as 'meaning-makers' playing active roles in the construction of knowledge in social contexts (Clark, 2010). The importance of the Mosaic approach is that children's opinions can change meaning and understanding with others (Clark, 2007). The materials provided from the Mosaic approach build a bridge for the communication of children and adults (Clark & Statham, 2005). Clark and Moss (2011) confirm that listening to children is a communicative process of hearing, interpreting, and constructing meaning that is not limited to verbal language.

The Mosaic approach is named because it uses multiple visual and verbal tools to reveal different pieces of children's experiences and viewpoints (Clark & Statham, 2005). The information captured by each method is equivalent to a 'mosaic', which together form a complete picture of children's views and experiences (Baird, 2013; Clark, 2007). The approach is based on the 'hundred languages of children' of Reggio Emilia, Loris Malaguzzi's educational philosophy, attempting to identify and interpret children's different 'languages' and to avoid simply counselling them (Rinaldi, 2021; Roe, 2007; Clark, 2007; Clark & Statham, 2005). However, it is important that whether a research tool is truly child-friendly depends on the attitudes and methods of the researcher rather than the tool itself (Clark and Moss, 2001). The Mosaic approach emphasises the importance of listening to children and paying attention to their

various modes of interaction and expression (Merewether & Fleet, 2014). Clark (2005) believes that these multiple approaches provide a complete view of the child as a whole, regardless of children's clarity or children's individual learning style.

The Mosaic approach has gained increasing popularity due to its numerous advantages. Clark and Moss (2001) emphasize that viewing age as a barrier to research participation is misguided, highlighting that even very young children, including those in the early years, can actively engage in research processes and contribute valuable insights. In addition, the Mosaic approach collects data in a variety of ways, which can fully reflect children's diverse expression and understanding abilities (Kellett, 2011). Clark and Statham (2005) identified the Mosaic approach is more effective in gathering the views of these children and involve them in the research than traditional methods such as interviews and focus groups. Allowing children to take photos, draw pictures, and tell stories gives them more control in research (Burke et al., 2024a).

The Mosaic approach emphasises the use of methods that are familiar and accessible to children, and motivates them to actively and naturally express their views on the content of the study in a participatory process. The Mosaic approach stresses the use of multiple methods of listening to children's voices achieving a combination of traditional and participatory research methods (Clark & Moss, 2011; Clark & Satham,2005). Traditional research methods include observation and child's interviews and participatory research methods include children's photographs, book making, child-led tours, map making, and child conferencing (Clark & Moss, 2011). The voices of young, hard-to-reach or vulnerable children are often not taken up because only more traditional methods are used, which are applied to people who are very articulate (Clark & Satham,2005).

The Mosaic approach is widely used in research with children of different ages and in a number of research areas, covering a diverse range of research contexts from

different countries. Some studies have explored children's perspectives on well-being, play, and schooling. For example, Tobin (2014) examined children's understanding of well-being, Beattie (2015) focused on children's attitudes towards outdoor play, Skrobot (2016) examined the views of children from deprived backgrounds towards play facilities, and Burke et al. (2024) investigated children's perspectives on primary school play spaces. Other studies have looked at preschool children's experiences of school (Harcourt & Mazzoni, 2012), children's opinion when they start school (Dockett & Perry, 2005), young children's experiences of early learning environments (Martin & Buckley, 2020), and children with developmental disabilities' participation in early intervention (Carroll & Sixsmith, 2016).

However, a few studies have pointed out that some of the effects of the Mosaic approach have not been as positive as they have been shown in previous studies (Baird, 2013). On reflection, this is largely due to the research design. The importance of the duration of the study and the flexibility of the research methodology cannot be underestimated when using the Mosaic approach (Baird, 2013). Researchers often dominate the design of the task, the interpretation of children's views, and the overall direction of the study, which may limit the influence of children's voices on the findings (Streelasky, 2020). Besides, Rogers and Boyd (2020) argue that relying solely on children's voices in the Mosaic approach may not be sufficient to fully reflect the context of their lives. They advocate the use of the Mosaic approach to introduce the voices of adults, such as parents and teachers, not only to enhance the interpretive power of the data, but also to increase the influence of children's voices when communicating the findings to policy makers. In addition, Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) hold the opinion that participatory methods are immature to gather children with researchers. Children's perspectives research methods are usually more complex than adults' research which results in time-consuming and complex research materials (Gabb & Singh, 2015).

### ***2.3.6 Conclusions***

Methodological approaches to researching children's perspectives have developed considerably over the past two decades, reflecting broader theoretical shifts that position children as active agents and competent meaning-makers. The approaches reviewed in this section demonstrate diverse strategies for accessing children's voices and experiences. While these methods vary in form and focus, they share a common commitment to recognising children's capacities for communication, expression, and reflection within participatory and ethical frameworks.

A range of methodological approaches has been developed to support children's participation and expression in research, each offering distinct strengths. Language-based methods, such as interviews, allow children's voices to be articulated directly, providing valuable insights into their thoughts, meanings, and reflections. Visual methods have proven particularly effective in engaging children who may have limited verbal abilities, enabling them to communicate experiences and meanings through images and other non-verbal forms. Art-based methods, drawing on art, storytelling, and imaginative play, further expand opportunities for expression.

The Mosaic approach is a multi-method and participatory framework that brings together language-based methods, visual methods, and creative and playful approaches to research with children. By combining tools such as photography, conversations, and creative activities, the Mosaic approach recognises that children communicate their experiences and meanings in diverse ways, not solely through verbal expression. This integrated design enables researchers to listen to children's voices more holistically, attending to different modes of expression and participation. Compared with relying on a single research method, the use of multiple, complementary methods allows for a richer and more nuanced understanding of children's perspectives, while also helping to address the limitations inherent in any one approach.

Despite their contributions, these methodological approaches are not without limitations. Challenges persist in balancing adult interpretation with children's autonomy, addressing ethical considerations, and ensuring that participatory techniques genuinely reflect children's lived realities rather than reproducing adult assumptions. The effectiveness of these methods ultimately depends on researchers' reflexivity, sensitivity, and commitment to equitable power relations.

## **2.4 Empirical Research on Children's Perspectives**

### ***2.4.1 Introduction***

Since the 1980s, a growing body of empirical research has increasingly focused on children's perspectives, with scholars across disciplines seeking to conduct research from children's viewpoints rather than about children alone. Over time, this shift has led to a substantial expansion of empirical studies that foreground children's voices and everyday experiences.

Within the international literature, research adopting children's perspectives has developed primarily within two broad areas: social research and educational research. Social studies examine children's views on well-being, rights, relationships, and living environments, while educational research focuses on children's experiences of school life, play, learning environments, education quality, and transitions between educational stages.

In the Chinese context, empirical research adopting children's perspectives emerged more gradually, beginning approximately two decades ago. While early studies were relatively limited in number, the past decade has seen a noticeable increase in research in this area, with a growing range of topics and empirical studies drawing explicitly on children's perspectives.

Accordingly, this section first reviews social research and educational research on children's perspectives internationally, and then examines empirical studies conducted

in China, outlining their main research directions and thematic emphases.

#### ***2.4.2 Social Research on Children's Perspectives***

The content of the social research covers research on children's well-being, children's rights, children's living and study environments, and children's relationships.

Recent studies have focused on some factors that contribute to children's well-being from children's perspectives. Koch (2018) explored children's perspectives on happiness and subjective well-being in preschool through observations and interviews with 16 five-year-old children in a Danish early childhood education and care institution. The results suggest that favourable ways of achieving subjective well-being are experiencing friendships, playing freely, experiencing nature, colours or artworks, being challenged and experiencing unusual things. Besides, Tobin (2014) used an adapted Mosaic approach including photographs, focus groups and drawing activities with 15 children from an urban Dublin preschool which explores children's perspectives of happiness. The results show that children's perceptions of happiness were associated with physical features (how the children look), emotional well-being, familial relationships and comedic influences and children's happiness in the preschool comes from a sense of identity and belonging, outdoor learning environment, relationships with peers and teachers and play opportunities. Ridge (2011) investigated low-income children's experience in the UK according to children's participation and hearing their voices to conclude how poverty impacts them. Andresen and Meiland (2019) researched how children define poverty from material fields like clothes, food, and houses and social fields like family relationships. Observation, individual interviews, and group discussion are the research methods and the last two methods include children's views.

With regard to children's rights from children's perspectives, scholars have focused on children's rights in kindergarten as well as their daily rights. Te One (2011) through stories, posters, conversational interviews, and a persona doll discuss with 43

three-year-old and 45 four to five-year-old children in a state kindergarten in Aotearoa, New Zealand on their perceptions of rights. Children wish to not hurt each other, to be good friends, to listen to each other and to be allowed access to all places at kindergarten. Pekince and Avci (2018) also focused on children's perspectives on the right of self-determination. Their research used semi-structured interviews with 16 children aged 10-13. As a result, children stated that they only have rights to determine daily matters and have no choice with thing that affect their lives.

For children's living environments, Main (2019) explored the relationship between family income and children's subjective well-being. The study sample is 1010 parent-child pairs from England in which children are aged 10 to 16 and the data is mainly provided by children. Research findings indicate that family income significantly directly or indirectly influences children's subjective well-being. Apart from this, deprivation, perceptions of the fairness of the household distribution process, and subjective material well-being are influences on subjective well-being. Besides, Beattie (2015) used a modification of the Mosaic approach including observation, interview, drawing, and a playground tour exploring a child's view of outdoor play. In addition, Roe (2007) used Mosaic approach to explore the views of the landscape through children's perspectives. A variety of methods such as mapping, drawing, guided tours, games, photographs, chatty discussions, circle discussions, interviews, parental interviews and discussions, video of children playing and their favourite spaces, and informal observations to gather a small group of 6-10 year old children's views from a village in North East England. It is found that children have valuable and deep insights into the design of outdoor play environments, and that their ideal play spaces often have opportunities for risk-taking, natural elements such as trees, and hidden areas to explore.

For children's study environment, Einarsdóttir (2007) engaged 49 children aged 2-6 from Reykjavik, Iceland to illustrate their views of their kindergarten environment. Because of the young age of the children, the researcher chose energetic research

methods, including photographs, game questionnaires and drawings. Using the Mosaic approach, Skrobot (2016) conducted an action research study to explore the effects of the addition of play facilities in an urban family childcare programme serving underprivileged children through children's perspectives on outdoor play facilities. The study suggests that while the addition of play features has enriched children's outdoor play experiences, spatial conditions and the challenges of managing multi-age children remain and more support is needed. Besides Burke et al. (2024b) used an adapted Mosaic approach including observations, conversations, photograph and video tours, drawing, floorbook, and mapping with 45 children ages 5-7 years exploring their voices about primary school play spaces.

In studies of relationships from children's perspectives, most studies have focused on children's family relationships. Zartler (2015) collected 50 ten-year-old children's understanding and imagination of their future families from different social backgrounds in Australia through interviews. Before the interviews, children were invited to take photographs of their present lives and talk about their present families based on the photographs. Otto (2018) conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 second-generation Korean-American primary school students in grades 4-6 to analyse parental parenting perceptions, styles, and practices from the children's perspectives. The results suggest that there is a correlation between the quality of parent-child relationships, children's development, and parenting styles.

Several studies have employed art-based methods to engage children in expressing their experiences. Mason and Tipper (2008) talked about the ways children from Northern England define their kinship. It draws on data from a project conducted in the north of England in 2004-2006 interviewing 49 seven to twelve-year-old children from different backgrounds, cultures, and races based on children's photographs, 'concentric map' circles and drawing methods. Wenham (2017) used visual techniques such as relational maps interviewing 10 young people aged 13-17, listening to their biographies, relationships with others, and future thoughts of their

living in a ‘troubled family’. Through research, young people talked about their complex memories including social adversities, painful experiences, economic difficulties, domestic violence etc. Through life maps and audio diaries, Marschall (2017) explores Danish children’s perceptions of life in a post-divorce two households. The study collected data from ten children aged 8-12, including three girls and seven boys. The study suggests that the two households form a ‘double-loop’ structure in which children positively engage with everyday differences, while parents seek to balance them, and contrasting family values coexist rather than oppose one another.

There are also some studies that focus on the relationship between children and teachers from children’s perspectives. Cansever and Aslan (2016) collected metaphors of teachers from 441 ten-year-old children living in Turkey to understand children’s perceptions of teachers. Children all described positive teacher-student relationships that fundamentally and positively influenced children’s success in school. White (2016) completed the Teacher and Me storytelling with 12 pre-school children, 24 kindergarten children and nine first graders in the United States. The research methods also include classroom observations of the children and the collection of measurement scales. Results indicated that child-reported teacher support was positively correlated with emotional support observed in the classroom, but not significantly correlated with teacher-reported relationship quality. Child language and gender were associated with teacher-student relationship quality, but child race was not.

### ***2.4.3 Educational Research on Children’s Perspectives***

Research in the field of education encompasses a wide range of studies that examine children’s experiences in educational contexts. Existing literature can be broadly organised into four key areas: children’s school life, children’s play, educational quality, and the transition from kindergarten to primary school. These areas represent the main directions through which researchers have explored children’s engagement with education and schooling. This section reviews research within each of these

areas in turn, outlining their key concerns and contributions.

Research exploring school life from children's perspectives has been conducted across various countries. Ferreira et al. (2018) used data from 40 children, aged 3-6 years old from different classes in Brazil and Finland, to investigate children's perspectives on learning experiences in early childhood education and care. The research process includes group meetings, photographs, and group discussions. In Dockett and Perry's (2003) research, children act as sharers using drawings, descriptions, photographs, and demonstrations to introduce their school and express their views on starting school. The children who participated in the study were 5-6 years old and came from four different types of schools in Sydney, Australia. Based on drawings and interviews, Kragh-Müller and Isbell (2011) compared the perceptions of Danish children aged 3-6 years and American children aged 3-5 years about child care. The results of the study shows that they both valued their relationships with peers and teachers in the child care setting, although children in the two countries differed in the degree of success they had in establishing good peer relationships. Sahrakhiz et al. (2018) conducted 13 focus group interviews with 50 children aged 8-9 years in three German primary schools to explore their perspectives on outdoor schools. It is clear that children felt that play, sport and social co-operation in outdoor schools provided learning opportunities that can complement additional learning processes. Harcourt and Mazzoni (2012) used photography, mapping, and conversations from the Mosaic approach to listen to the experiences of 61 preschool children aged 3-5 years old in Verona, Italy, about their experiences of schooling and their perceptions of their teachers. The findings indicate that young children place strong value on their relationships with teachers, particularly in terms of the moral, ethical, and social justice meanings embedded within these relationships.

In terms of play, Nicholson et al. (2015) interviewed 98 children between the ages of 3 and 17 living in the United States and 135 adults from 21 different countries. The study compared the language used by adults to discuss children's play with the

language used by children to describe their own play experiences. The results show significant differences between adult discourse and children's descriptions of their own play. The authors therefore advocate that children's perspectives should be valued and included in research on children's play. Rogers and Evans (2006) explored role play from 3-6 children's perspectives in the UK which adopted a multi-method approach including observation, photography, informal conversations and children's drawings. Fleer and Li (2023) also through observation, children's painting and focus groups in six Chinese rural kindergartens rethought play and games from children's perspectives. McTavish et al. (2012) used the Mosaic approach to investigate how two boys, aged six and seven from different cities in Canada, used technology to create meaning in their literary worlds. The results of the study found that engaging in play was an important and meaningful creative practice in their worlds however play was not used effectively in primary school classrooms.

Besides, an increasing number of studies have explored educational quality from children's perspectives, focusing on children's lived experiences within educational settings. Barnikis (2015) explored five Canadian 4-6 years children's perspectives of their experiences in early learning environments with semi-structured interview and children's drawings. Findings show power imbalance among children in public primary schools. Besides, Wu (2019) invited 24 3.5-6.3 years Hong Kong Chinese children from two kindergartens in participation observations, informal interviews, and video-stimulated recall interviews to research children's perspectives on their play and learning. Through group activities with 69 Australian preschool children aged 3-5, McFarland and Dealtry (2017) listened to children's voices and found that many children reported difficulty hearing when seated at the back. Alvestad (2011) focused on interviews with ten 4-6 years children in three Norwegian kindergartens discussing learning environments, learning styles, and the value of learning, and learning cultures from children's perspectives. Dockett and Perry (2005) used some methods including group talking, diary, picture books, drawing, and photographing searching four-and five-year children's views of important things as they start school. Martin and

Buckley (2020) used drawing, photography, and conversation in the Mosaic approach to allow 12 3-4 year young children to share their experiences in the early learning environment. The study found that children are more inclined to take photographs and that children can provide valuable insights that can contribute to better policy and practice development. Breneselović and Krnjaja (2016) focused on gender in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) setting, and 50 children between the ages of 5 and 5.7 years from 30 state kindergartens in Serbia participated in this research with the Mosaic Approach. The theme of gender was very prominent in the children's narratives, while the practice of ECEC in Serbia is not clear on the issue of gender differences.

In addition, children with special needs are able to actively participate in the research process. Carroll and Sixsmith (2016) used the Mosaic methodological framework to explore the participation of children with developmental disabilities, aged 2 to 4 years old, in a study of early intervention disability services. Through the use of multi-method tools, Microsoft SenseCam, pictures, Talking Mats, and observation, the study was guided by the strengths of the children, ensuring the credibility and richness of the data. The results suggest that speech and language therapists play an important role in facilitating the participation of children with special needs in research and that there is a need for further enhancement of relevant skills. Underwood et al. (2015) conducted two participatory interviews with 4 children with disabilities ranging in age from 3-5 years old through a play-based Mosaic interviewing method. The children demonstrated their perceptions and values about childcare or kindergarten programs through their behaviour or verbal descriptions. The study showed that children with disabilities were able to express their abilities and that participatory methods were effective in eliciting their views.

Furthermore, studies on the transition from kindergarten to primary school have examined children's perspectives, exploring children's experiences of transition across diverse educational contexts. Sandberg et al. (2017) researched how preschool

children in Sweden, Denmark, Estonia and Germany reflect and perceive their learning and the result is based on 51 focus groups conducted with 181 children aged four to six years old. Sheridan and Samuelsson (2001) interviewed 39 five-year-old children from three lower quality preschools and three higher quality preschool about their conceptions of decision-making in preschool. The result shows that children with high levels of participation and decision-making power are in preschools with higher quality of education. Einarsdóttir (2003) used group discussions collecting 5-6 years old preschool children's expectations of primary school in Iceland. Many children were looking forward to their upcoming school experience and showed positive feelings. Both the study of Yeo and Clarke (2005) and the study of Griebel and Niesel (2002) interviewed 340 primary one children in Singapore and 162 primary one children in Germany separately about their views on the transition from preschool to primary school. Habók and Babarczy (2018) interviewed 33 first and second year pupils aged 6-9 attending primary schools in Hungary to discuss the children's perspectives on the difference between kindergartens and primary schools. Together, these three studies indicate that children generally hold positive attitudes towards school and learning during the transition to primary education.

#### ***2.4.4 Studies on Children's Perspectives in China***

In examining studies on children's perspectives in China, the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) was identified as the primary database, as it hosts the majority of Chinese-language research. It is notable that empirical research in this field has predominantly focused on children aged 3-6, as this age range corresponds to the period of kindergarten education within the Chinese early childhood education system. In China, kindergarten is typically organised into three stages: junior classes for children aged 3-4, middle classes for those aged 4-5, and senior classes for children aged 5-6. Consequently, most studies adopting children's perspectives have been conducted within kindergarten settings and have drawn participants from these age groups.

Over the past decade, informed by research on children's perspectives conducted in Western contexts, studies adopting a children's perspective have gradually developed in China, with a growing body of research emerging in this field. A systematic search of relevant literature within CNKI indicates that existing studies on children's perspectives can be broadly categorised into three main strands: studies examining children's perspectives on significant people, studies focusing on children's perspectives on significant material objects, and studies exploring children's understandings of abstract concepts. The following section will provide a review of the existing literature across these three strands in turn.

### **Children's Perspectives on Significant People**

Within Chinese research on children's perspectives, empirical studies focusing on children's views of 'significant people' have primarily concentrated on three areas: peers, teachers, and family members.

With regard to peers, existing studies have mainly examined children's views of peer relationships and self-related social experiences. Cheng (2024) selected 65 children aged 5-6 from two senior classes in one kindergarten and employed drawing and interview methods to explore children's representations of the self in self-portraits. The findings indicate that children were able to articulate and negotiate multiple dimensions of the self, distinguishing between their 'real' selves and 'imagined' selves. He (2023) investigated 32 children from one senior class, using the Mosaic approach to examine children's views of peer relationships. The study found a socially diverse class, characterised by a predominance of average-status children and a higher number of neglected and rejected children than popular or controversial ones. Ma Y. (2022) used the Mosaic approach with 112 children aged 4-5 across three kindergartens in northern China and found that children's picture book character preferences were influenced by both external appearance and internal characteristics.

Research on teachers from children's perspectives has largely focused on children's

views of teacher images and teacher-related practices. Shen (2023) and Yang (2021), drawing on interviews and children's drawings with children aged 3-6, reached similar conclusions that children's images of kindergarten teachers encompassed both external characteristics and internal professional qualities, with a clear preference for caring, supportive, and play-engaged teachers. Similarly, Shan (2018) also adopted interviews and drawing to examine children's views of teacher images. However, this study focused exclusively on senior class children and found that children portrayed teachers as caring, gentle, and emotionally supportive figures, often associated with positive emotions and a pleasant appearance. Given the gender composition of the kindergarten workforce, Han (2019) investigated senior class children's views of male kindergarten teachers through interviews, drawing, imitation games, and sociometric methods, finding that male teachers were associated with physical activity, play-based teaching, fairness, and supportive roles in children's learning. In addition, Dai (2023) focused on senior class children and used interviews, children's meetings, and drawing to explore children's views of teachers' praise, finding that children perceived teachers' praise as showing both shared and individual characteristics.

In relation to family members, existing studies have mainly explored children's views of parental roles and family relationships. Ming (2010), using interviews with 227 children aged 3-5, found that children's images of parental roles encompassed multiple dimensions, varied by age and gender, showed gaps between perception and expectation, and were associated with parent-child relationships. Zhang (2020), employing interviews, drawing, and observation with 78 children from diverse kindergarten settings, found that children viewed the ideal father in early childrearing as combining physical strength, emotional support, reliability, and active participation in caregiving and play. Ma (2022) focused on children aged 5-6 and used interviews and drawing to explore children's perspectives on fathers, found notable differences between children's images of real and ideal fathers, with idealised images shaped by children's developmental expectations, family influences, and broader social contexts. Zhu (2020), using interviews, drawing, and observation with 60 senior-class children,

found that children viewed family relationships characterised by maternal emotional centrality, evolving parental roles, close grandparental involvement, and children's unmet needs for parental attention and companionship.

### **Children's Perspectives on Significant Objects**

Research adopting a children's perspective on significant objects can be broadly grouped into three contexts: kindergarten settings, primary school settings, and the family. Among these, the kindergarten has attracted the greatest scholarly attention.

At the overall kindergarten level, existing studies have primarily focused on how children understand and describe their kindergartens. Yuan (2013), Chen (2014), and Deng (2017) all adopted 'a kindergarten I like' as their research theme and explored children's views of kindergarten as a whole. Despite variations in sample size and settings, with participants drawn from middle and senior classes across one or multiple kindergartens, these studies reached highly similar conclusions, showing that children's preferred kindergartens were consistently described in terms of environment, peer relationships, teacher qualities, daily activities, and routines. Liu (2022) focused on senior class children and examined what constitutes 'a good kindergarten' from children's perspectives, finding that children primarily described a good kindergarten in terms of its environment, key people, and daily activities. Liu (2018) examined kindergarten satisfaction from children's perspectives by selecting middle and senior class children from both public and private kindergartens in the same region, finding variations in children's satisfaction across activities, environment, and relationships, with higher satisfaction reported by girls, children in public kindergartens, and older children. Li (2024) examined kindergarten space from children's perspectives and found that children's meanings of space encompassed cognitive understandings, emotional responses, and interactive behaviours shaped through everyday spatial experiences.

At the kindergarten curriculum level, existing studies have concentrated on children's

views of art and nature curriculum. Cheng (2024) employed 30 senior kindergarten children and adopted the Mosaic approach investigating art curriculum from children's perspectives. The study found that children's preferred art curriculum were characterised by aesthetically pleasing environments, rich materials, multi-sensory engagement, everyday-based aesthetic imagination, positive emotional experiences, freedom to explore tools and materials, and opportunities for natural, self-expressive creation that showcased individuality. Wu (2015) adopted a child-centred perspective and employed a child-participatory action research model, integrating the Mosaic approach, to conduct three iterative cycles of action research aimed at optimising kindergarten nature curriculum. By foregrounding and responding to children's voices, the study redesigned and refined the design and implementation of nature curriculum. The findings indicate that nature education grounded in children's perspectives can promote children's multi-dimensional development in nature-related domains and effectively enhance the overall quality of activity design.

With regard to kindergarten area-based activities, existing studies have explored children's perspectives on different types of activity areas in kindergarten settings. These studies have examined children's overall views of area activities (Zhao, 2014; Li, 2019; Liu, 2025), as well as children's experiences of specific areas, including construction areas (Ye, 2023; Ma, Q., 2022), art areas (Hong, 2017), role-play areas (Liu, 2024; Zhao, 2023), science areas (Jiang, 2019), and book areas (Zhang, 2018). In addition, Zhang (2024) extended the research context to rural kindergartens, providing supplementary perspectives on learning area activities. Overall, these studies have explored kindergarten area-based activities from children's perspectives, addressing aspects such as materials, teachers, environment, time, and participation opportunities, and thus enriching the field with child-centred insights. However, most research concentrates on children aged five to six, with limited attention to the voices of younger age groups.

In relation to kindergarten outdoor play, existing studies have examined how children

understand and experience outdoor play and outdoor environments in kindergarten. Wu (2025) employed the Mosaic approach with senior kindergarten children to examine teacher-child interactions in outdoor free play, finding that such interactions can be categorised into supportive, affirming, participatory, controlling, and indifferent types, and that children express needs for care, companionship, shared play, and recognition within these interactions. Similarly, Zhao (2021) employed the Mosaic approach to investigate senior kindergarten children's views of outdoor play environments, finding that children preferred natural, spacious and clean spaces; diverse, low-structured and well-maintained materials; flexible playtime; a free and harmonious atmosphere; and opportunities to play primarily with peers while also involving teachers. Additionally, Liu (2023) extended the research context to rural kindergarten, employing the Mosaic approach to explore rural kindergarten outdoor free play environments from children's perspectives. Based on children's views, the study adjusted the outdoor environment and found that optimising both the physical environment and institutional arrangements from children's perspectives contributed to improved play quality.

Research on primary schooling from children's perspectives remains relatively limited. Guan (2014) conducted a study in a through-school encompassing kindergarten, primary and secondary education, involving 40 first grade pupils, and employed interviews, art analysis and observations to explore children's views on curriculum continuity during the transition from kindergarten to primary school. The study elaborated children's perspectives on the primary school curriculum across five themes: my classroom, my curriculum, my lessons, my time, and my schoolwork. Li (2017) followed four children across six time points, from the final year of kindergarten to three months after entering primary school, using interviews and drawing activities to explore perceived changes in school life, focusing on their experiences of the physical environment, peer relationships, teacher characteristics, classroom learning, and daily routines during the transition period. Similarly, Guo (2022) conducted a field study in one first-grade class to analyse pupils' views on

their adjustment to primary school, providing an in-depth and situated account of children's lived experiences and emotional journeys throughout their first semester.

At the family level, existing studies have explored children's understandings of 'home' and their experiences within family contexts from children's perspectives. Wang and Xue (2017) examined the concept of home among children aged 3-6 through interviews, finding that young children's understandings and experiences of home form a holistic and richly embedded construct rooted in their everyday life experiences. Similarly, Ma (2023) employed a combination of drawing and interviews to investigate how eight children aged 5-6 understood home, finding that children's understandings were reflected in four areas: the nature of home, the composition of home, activities within home, and experiences of home. Chen (2023) focused on senior kindergarten children and employed the Mosaic approach to explore children's views of their hometown, identifying three key dimensions in their understandings: conceptualisations of hometown, interpretations of regional identity, and understandings of geographical knowledge related to their hometown.

### **Children's Understandings of Abstract Concepts**

In this study, abstract concepts refer to social, moral, emotional, psychological, and experiential ideas that are not directly observable, such as rules, values, emotions, and social practices, and which require children to interpret meanings beyond immediate physical experience. Existing studies show a clear concentration on children in senior kindergarten classes, where research has examined a wide range of concepts, while comparatively fewer studies have focused on younger children in early childhood.

At the senior kindergarten class level, a substantial body of research has examined children's understandings of social, moral, and experiential concepts. Luo (2025), Li (2025), and Wang (2023) investigated children's understandings of rules from children's perspectives and reported similar findings, showing that senior class children conceptualised classroom rules in concrete terms, recognised their

importance and diverse rule-makers, developed differentiated emotional responses to rules, and demonstrated increasing competence in both understanding and practising rules within everyday contexts. Besides, Wang (2024) and Liu (2018) explored how children conceptualise life and death showing that children's understandings of life and death were holistic, unevenly developed, and closely linked to emotional experience. In relation to values and emotions, Zhang (2018) and Wang (2019) found that children understood happiness in concrete yet meaningful ways, grounded in material satisfaction, rich experiences through play and activities, and close relationships with family, teachers, and peers.

Zhang (2020) explored children's understandings of freedom, finding that their interpretations were both common and varied and influenced by personal, kindergarten, and broader social factors. Li (2019) investigated children's perceptions of nature showing children have positive emotional experiences in natural environments, can distinguish natural from artificial elements. Chen (2024) investigated children's understandings of the classroom practice of raising hands and found that children's hand-raising behaviours are characterised by passivity, purposefulness, contextuality, subjectivity, and egocentrism. Hu (2019) explored children's gender awareness and found that children have developed basic gender concepts, can correctly identify their own and others' gender, tend to rely on external features when judging gender, and associate personality traits and occupations with gender roles.

In comparison, studies focusing on other age groups within early childhood are relatively limited. Wang (2024) examined middle kindergarten class children's understandings of labour and found that children hold multidimensional yet superficial conceptions of labour, generally value labour and labourers, but show inconsistencies between attitudes and behaviours. Huang (2020) interviewed children aged 4-12 to explore their understandings of travel, finding that children conceptualise travel across multiple dimensions, in ways distinct from adults, with curiosity as a

core driver and cognition shaped by the interaction between developmental and environmental factors.

#### ***2.4.5 Conclusions***

Overall, empirical research adopting children's perspectives has developed into a rich and multifaceted field internationally, with a strong emphasis on both social and educational domains. Across diverse cultural and national contexts, scholars have explored children's views on well-being, rights, relationships, living and learning environments, play, education quality, and school transition. Collectively, these studies demonstrate a growing recognition of children as competent social actors whose lived experiences and interpretations provide valuable insights into social life and educational practice.

In contrast, empirical studies on children's perspectives in China exhibit a more concentrated focus, both in terms of research settings and participant groups. Existing research is predominantly situated within early childhood education contexts, particularly kindergartens, and pays comparatively limited attention to children beyond this institutional stage. Moreover, within early childhood research, a clear emphasis can be observed on children aged five to six years (senior kindergartner), while younger children receive relatively less scholarly attention. Although recent Chinese studies have increasingly engaged with children's perspectives on significant people, objects, and abstract concepts, the scope of participants and age ranges remains narrower than that observed in international research. This pattern highlights both the progress made in incorporating children's voices into empirical research in China and the need for further diversification in terms of age groups, settings, and research focus.

#### **2.5 Conclusions**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of research on children's perspectives, bringing together theoretical foundations, methodological approaches,

and empirical studies.

It first examined key theoretical frameworks underpinning children's perspectives, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the New Sociology of Childhood, and debates surrounding children's participation and agency, highlighting the shift from viewing children as passive subjects to recognising them as active social actors. Then it reviewed a range of methodological approaches used to access children's perspectives, including language-based, visual, creative and playful methods, and the Mosaic approach. This discussion demonstrated both the potential and the limitations of different methods, emphasising the importance of methodological flexibility and child-centred adaptation when researching with young children. Finally, the chapter synthesised empirical research on children's perspectives across social and educational domains, with a specific focus on studies conducted in China. This review illustrated the breadth of topics explored from children's viewpoints, while also revealing patterns, gaps, and uneven emphases within the existing literature.

In total, this chapter establishes a conceptual and methodological foundation for the present study by clarifying how children's perspectives have been theorised, studied, and operationalised in previous research. As the present study is situated within the context of kindergarten curriculum, it is also necessary to examine how kindergarten curricula have been theorised, structured, and studied in existing research. Therefore, building on the insights gained from this chapter, the next chapter reviews the literature on kindergarten curriculum, providing an essential foundation for situating children's perspectives within curriculum research.

## **Chapter 3 Early Childhood Curriculum**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Having reviewed research on children's perspectives in the previous chapter, this chapter therefore addresses early childhood curriculum as an essential dimension of the study. As this research explores children's perspectives within kindergarten music education, an understanding of how early childhood curriculum is conceptualised, structured, and implemented is essential. This chapter therefore provides the curricular context that informs both pedagogical practices and children's everyday learning experiences in kindergartens.

Education is a fundamental social activity that shapes both individual development and collective progress, and it plays a crucial role in defining the rights and daily experiences of children (Harcourt & Hägglund, 2013). As societies continue to evolve in response to economic, cultural, and technological transformations, education has increasingly been recognised as a key driver of social sustainability and human development (Agbedahin, 2019). Within this broader educational landscape, early childhood education holds a particularly vital position, as it supports children's holistic growth across cognitive, emotional, and social domains (Rumbidzai & Achebe, 2023). As an essential component of early childhood education, the early childhood curriculum plays a pivotal role in supporting children's holistic development and providing meaningful learning experiences that shape their future growth (Naughton, 2003).

Building on this understanding, the chapter reviews the development of early childhood curriculum from both global and Chinese perspectives. It first examines major theories of child development and the contributions of key educational thinkers that have influenced early childhood curriculum internationally. It then focuses on the Chinese kindergarten curriculum, outlining key stages of reform and the sociocultural factors shaping contemporary practices. Through this review, the chapter establishes a

theoretical and contextual foundation for analysing the current landscape of Chinese early childhood education and for exploring curriculum development relevant to the present study.

### **3.2 Child Development Theory and Early Childhood Curriculum**

After the Renaissance, education gradually developed and various educational models spread widely, but the development of early childhood education remained slow. Kindergartens were not created until the nineteenth century, and early childhood curriculum developed accordingly. Educators have made important contributions to the development of early childhood curriculum. However, different theoretical models provide distinctive ways of understanding children and childhood (Naughton, 2003). Historically, the early childhood curriculum has been shaped by developmental theories and by philosophical perspectives concerning the origins of knowledge (Edwards, 2003). These differing paradigms have profoundly influenced curriculum decisions and pedagogical approaches in early childhood education.

Friedrich Wilhelm Frobel (1782-1852) was a prominent German educator of the 19th century and the founder of modern early childhood education theory. He believes that education is about children experiencing life for themselves, so he encourages children to develop through natural learning (Tovey, 2016). Therefore, Frobel names the kindergarten meaning children's garden, connects the early childhood curriculum with children's life, and regards play as the way of children's life and the basic form of early childhood curriculum (Johansson, 2022). He also creates 'gifts' to be used in the early childhood curriculum for children to effectively recognize their surroundings and exercise their skills (Tovey, 2016). Although originally the Frobelian early childhood curriculum is designed to hand children philosophical materialism and children learn the unity of man, god and nature. The field of child development came into focus with the advent of Frobelian kindergarten (Spodek, 1988).

American educator John Dewey (1859-1952) redefines the concept of early childhood

education, which he views as the transformation of life, growth, and experience. He believes that the early childhood curriculum is inseparable from children's lives, and that life contains the process of education (Williams, 2017). Dewey is of the idea that school is also a form of social life that is not solely focused on learning, but also meets the needs of children and fits children's lives (Sikandar, 2015). So, schools and classrooms should provide various social activities for children to practice interchangeably and flexibly (Williams, 2017).

Rudolf Joseph Lorenz Steiner (1861-1925) founded Waldorf education in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany and the first Waldorf kindergarten in the world was established in 1926 (Nicol, 2017). Steiner (1997) believes in the unity of spirit, soul, and body so good education can reshape thinking, willing, and feeling. Children in Waldorf kindergarten learn through imitation and doing. Imaginary play is considered children's most important 'working' and it is children development activity on body, intelligence, and emotion (Edwards, 2002). Waldorf early childhood curriculum is open that learning methods and contents are adapted according to children's age, ability, and needs (Aljabreen, 2020). 'Play' is added in the curriculum providing opportunity for children's entertainment and sports and nature art activity is one of Waldorf early childhood curriculum developing children's imagination (Sobo, 2014; Aljabreen, 2020). Teachers assess teaching and learning through close individual observations of the whole children then teachers share their observations through conference in order to ask helpful questions from the children's perspectives (Aljabreen, 2020).

Influenced by Rousseau's educational ideas, Maria Montessori (1870-1952) created Montessori education in the early 1990s and the first House of Children (*Casa dei Bambini*) opened in 1907 serving underprivileged preschool children in a slum in Rome (Lillard, 2013). Montessori curriculum includes sensory education, reading and writing calculations, and practical life exercises. The type of curriculum is mainly activity-based, with group activities (dialogues, singing), physical games, free play,

manual work etc. with particular emphasis on intellectual exercises. (Edwards, 2002). The feature of the curriculum is the 'work' which is children use specific materials (working materials) to practice (Lillard, 2013). Teachers interact with children to guide them in the use of materials (Aljabreen, 2020). Montessori supports the view that children can build their capacity to take care of themselves by practicing the skills necessary for life repeatedly each day, thus helping them develop independence. She encourages children to join in nature's activities and promotes children's freedom of development (Isaacs, 2018). Therefore, the objective of the programme is to assist children to develop their inner potential and to cultivate a perfect personality in order to prepare them to enter the world (Aljabreen, 2020).

Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) founded Reggio Emilia curriculum aiming to provide the necessities to children in the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy, after World War II (Aljabreen, 2020). Reggio education has been influenced by many thinkers and educators including Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner and others which provides a rich theoretical basis for the practice of Reggio education (Edwards, 2002). It claims children have 'hundreds of languages' which means children have many ways to express themselves, such as words, painting, building, dramatic play (Moss, 2016). So Reggio approach provides enough spaces, materials, and chance to encourage children to express and children can gain the skill to express themselves at a high level by using different ways through Reggio early childhood curriculum.

To sum up, although the development of kindergarten is late, some important educators have made a lot of contributions to the development of early childhood curriculum. The views of these educators are slightly different, but they are all committed to providing an educational environment that promotes the all-round development of children, emphasizing the active participation and individual development of children. Their contributions have enriched the theory of early childhood education, provided important guidance for the continuous improvement and innovation of early childhood curriculum, and provided a rich and beneficial

educational environment for children.

### **3.3 History of Chinese Early Childhood Curriculum Reform**

In China, the reform of the early childhood (or kindergarten) curriculum has gone through three major periods, the 1930s, the 1950s and the 1980s. Although China has thousands of years of civilization and educational history, as well as a wealth of practical experience and ideology in early childhood education, there has never been a special early childhood education institution until the twentieth century.

In 1903, China established its first early childhood education institution in Wuhan, Hubei Province (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). Kindergarten was called *Meng Yang Yuan*, and the early childhood curriculum was copied exactly from Japanese early childhood education including four elements: games, songs, talks and manual skills (Liu, 2013). At the same time, Western missionaries set up large numbers of church kindergartens in China to spread Christianity and Catholicism. As a result, kindergartens at that time followed the original religious curriculum, and everything from building facilities, teaching materials, and teaching methods to daily life was adopted from the Western point of view (Li & Chen, 2017).

In the 1930s, China carried out the first reform of the early childhood curriculum. Due to the lack of early childhood education experience, it was not suitable for China to copy completely the Japanese model of early childhood education. Besides, a group of Chinese educators studied in the United States and contributed to spreading European and American educational ideas. Dewey's educational thoughts catered to the demands of social change at that time and thus received wide publicity and acceptance (Zhang, 2013). Examples of such practices include Chen Heqin and Zhang Zonglin based on Dewey's educational philosophy practicing 'module teaching' at the Nanjing Gulou Kindergarten in 1925, Tao Xingzhi started the reform in rural kindergartens in 1927, and Zhang Xuemen's attempts at 'behavioural curriculum' (Xin, 2023).

Based on the reform experiments of these scholars, China issued its first *early childhood curriculum standards* in 1932 (Li & Chen, 2017). It states that the general objectives of early childhood education are to promote children's health, to bring children joy and happiness, to develop children's good habits and to assist families in the upbringing of their children. Besides, it provides for early childhood curriculum of seven items: music, stories, songs, play, social knowledge, work, rest and meals (Zhang, 2013). During this period, numerous educators began to explore the early childhood curriculum and used it in practice to discover and create new ideas in the curriculum.

In the 1950s, with the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), China was once again faced with the need to reform education. After the Second World War, the entire international situation was shaped into a Western camp led by the United States and an Eastern camp led by the Soviet Union. As the first socialist country, the Soviet Union had not only accumulated rich experience but also provided much support and assistance to China at the beginning of the country's founding, so China issued a call for a comprehensive study of the Soviet Union (Spodek, 1988; Zhang, 2013). Dewey's educational ideas and child-centered theories were criticized because they originated from the hostile and capitalist United States, and all previous early childhood curricula were abolished, with the only curriculum considered correct during that period being those of the Soviet Union (Li & Chen, 2017).

Subsequently, in 1952, the Ministry of Education of the PRC issued the *Provisional Regulation on Kindergarten Curriculum* which divides early childhood curriculum into six subjects: physical education, language, arts, music, math, and environmental learning. In addition, the Beijing Normal University prepared *early childhood education working guide* to better guide kindergartens and teaching practice. However, the inability of the Soviet curriculum to adapt to the Chinese culture caused many problems and losses in the reform of the curriculum, resulting in the slow development of the early childhood curriculum (Xin, 2023).

However, the years from 1966 to 1976, marked by the Cultural Revolution, became the ‘dark period’ of early childhood education in China (Li & Chen, 2017). During this time, kindergartens were widely closed, and young children were sent back to their homes, thereby losing access to systematic early education. At the same time, large numbers of educators were sent to rural or remote areas for labor ‘re-education’, causing the development of early childhood education to come to a near standstill. It was not until the implementation of the ‘open door’ policy in 1978 that early childhood education in China gradually began to recover and revitalize.

In the 1980s, the Chinese ‘open door’ policy advances renewed reforms in education. Early childhood education also entered a new turning point with the advancement of the ‘open door’ policy. On the one hand, Chinese early childhood curriculum theorists actively study Western theories of children’s development and education (Li & Chen, 2017). Such as Piaget’s theory of cognitive development has been widely disseminated. On the other hand, the early childhood curriculum theories of previous Chinese educators, especially Chen Heqin, have received renewed attention (Zhang, 2013).

At the same time, a large number of Western early childhood curricula were introduced in China. The Project Approach, such as the Reggio Emilia Curriculum, the Montessori Curriculum, and the Waldorf Education Curriculum have been widely adopted in China (Zhu & Zhang, 2008; Li & Chen, 2017). These Western curricula have a wealth of educational experience and achievements, but they do not fully support the sociocultural conditions in China. Based on Western curricula, Chinese scholars are also actively exploring models of localized early childhood curricula in Nanjing, Shanghai, and Beijing (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). In 1989, the Ministry of Education of the PRC issued the *Kindergarten Work Regulations and Procedures* which emphasizes child-initiated activities, individual differences, the importance of play, integrated curriculum and the process of activities.

The Ministry of Education of the PRC issued *Kindergarten Education Guidelines* in 2001 and *The 3-6 Years Old Children's Learning and Development Guidelines* in 2012. The guidelines specify the five learning fields of the early childhood curriculum (health, language, social, science and arts). In each of these learning fields, curriculum experts have further developed teaching outlines, teaching strategies, and teaching materials to guide early childhood curriculum in practice (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). The guidelines show that there is an interconnected relationship between the different educational fields, which promotes the development of children's knowledge, abilities, and emotions (Xin, 2023). This change is favoured by Chinese early childhood educators and scholars, and until now, all state kindergartens in China have used these guidelines in the curriculum (Yan, 2023; Li & Chen, 2017).

Overall, Chinese early childhood curriculum has experienced a hundred years of development, from the initial complete imitation of other countries' curricula to the current learning from the superior curricula to develop a suitable curriculum. Chinese early childhood education as well as early childhood curriculum have been deeply influenced by sociocultural changes and conditions.

### **3.4 Reflections on the Current Chinese Early Childhood Curriculum**

#### ***3.4.1 Introduction***

Early childhood education not only provides the essential groundwork for subsequent educational stages, but also functions as an important indicator of a nation's level of socioeconomic development (Amani & Fussy, 2025). In recent decades, the reform of Chinese early childhood curriculum has been deeply influenced by both international and local educational trends. After repeatedly studying and introducing early childhood curricula from other countries, Chinese educators and scholars have gradually recognised that direct imitation of foreign models cannot address the realities of Chinese society and culture (Cheung, 2017). As a result, there has been a growing emphasis on developing early childhood curricula that reflect Chinese

cultural characteristics and educational contexts (Li & Chen, 2017).

This section reviews contemporary reflections on the development of Chinese early childhood curriculum from three major perspectives. It first examines critical learning from Western curricula, highlighting the challenges and insights that have emerged through adaptation and reform. It then explores the integration of local culture into early childhood education, demonstrating how cultural heritage and regional characteristics have been incorporated into curriculum design. Finally, it discusses the innovation and development of school-based curricula that reflect local identities and educational diversity. Together, these studies reveal both the progress and limitations of current curriculum reform and provide important reference points for considering the role of children's perspectives in future curriculum development.

#### ***3.4.2 Critical Learning from Western Curriculum***

Throughout the development of Chinese early childhood education in the twentieth century, China has been learning from the Western curriculum but has been unable to achieve satisfactory results. Some scholars have put forward their thoughts on the current reform of Chinese early childhood curriculum. Wang and Mao (1996) point out that Chinese early childhood education nowadays is the result of creating something new based on fusion, combination, and critique of what we know, and changing traditions through mutual exchange with other cultures. However, while Chinese culture has accumulated countless wisdom and experience, it also carries a heavy feudalistic burden. As a result, the integration of Chinese traditions into the Chinese early childhood curriculum requires a critical examination of its limitations and the adoption of the strengths of the others.

Besides, Zhu and Zhang (2008) critically analyze the current reform of Chinese early childhood curriculum and raise three points of concern. Firstly, early childhood curriculum should recognize the differences between different groups in different regions and develop different curricula for them. Secondly, early childhood

curriculum should be sensitive to the need to address such social issues as single-parent families, gender discrimination, etc., and pay attention to children's rights, such as equal access to public resources. Thirdly, early childhood curriculum should be aligned with the teachers' capabilities. If teachers' abilities do not meet the curriculum's requirements, it can result in ineffective classroom instruction and hinder the children's learning outcomes.

Additionally, Li et al. (2011) find that the reform of Chinese early childhood curriculum has had some success, for example, the early literacy curriculum is gradually changing and is not just about mechanical memory. By contrast, the early childhood reform does not achieve the predicted objectives. According to the research, they argue that there is no single best early childhood curriculum in the world so learning Western curriculum should be critically evaluated and curriculum reform should be reviewed to fill gaps.

### ***3.4.3 Exploration and Integration of Local Culture***

Scholars have long insisted that early childhood curriculum should be integrated into Chinese culture rather than imitating the curricula of other countries, so some scholars put effort into the integration of Chinese culture into early childhood curriculum. Zhou (2013) selected a large class (5-6 years old) in Neimenggu province to study, and through interviews with the classroom teachers and parents about cultural appropriateness, the scholar developed some early childhood curricula related to the culture of Neimenggu province. The curricula consist of five themes (hometown, song and dance, culture, play, and food) and cover all fields of the Chinese early childhood curriculum. The curricula were implemented in the classroom and reflections were made on each of the curricula. Through action research, the scholar proposes four areas of support for the development of culturally appropriate Chinese early childhood curriculum. Chinese early childhood curriculum needs to build cultural confidence, China needs to develop a proper curriculum policy, kindergartens need to create multicultural environments, and teachers need to improve their competence in

cultural education.

Besides, Qiu (2023) conducted a six-month-long fieldwork in a kindergarten in Xiamen city, analyzing all teaching and learning materials related to the Peking Opera curriculum, participating in the observation of all the curricula, and collecting teachers' reflections on classes. The author also interviewed teachers in the kindergarten about how the Peking Opera curriculum is conducted. Compared with Zhou's (2013) research, Qiu (2023) chose a study kindergarten that had already integrated Peking Opera into the early childhood curriculum and where Peking Opera-themed curricula were a special feature of the kindergarten. Based on the results of the study, the researcher provides six suggestions for integrating Peking Opera culture into the early childhood curriculum: providing teachers with professional teaching resources, giving parents more ways to learn about Peking Opera, establishing a suitable teaching evaluation system, gamifying the Peking Opera culture curriculum, focusing on the spiritual connotations of Peking Opera culture, and integrating modern elements into Peking Opera culture.

Additionally, Wu (2023) selected tie-dye, a traditional Chinese culture, as a research object to be integrated into the early childhood curriculum. However, Wu's (2023) research method is a combination of the previous two studies. Based on observations and interviews, the author understood the current situation of tie-dye in a kindergarten in Qinghuangdao city, then developed richer tie-dye curricula for action research, and finally came up with the findings of the study. This study not only identifies the problems in the current tie-dye curriculum in the kindergarten but also makes positive suggestions for comparing the effectiveness of the curriculum before and after the improvement. Based on the results of the study, the author puts forward five recommendations, focusing on the integration of the educational value of tie-dye in the early childhood curriculum, innovating the design of the curriculum content, paying attention to the development of folk culture for children, providing teachers with training, and paying attention to family education.

#### ***3.4.4 Innovation and Development of School-based Curriculum***

In addition to research on the study of integrating Chinese culture into early childhood curriculum, many scholars have also focused on the development of school-based curriculum. According to *Kindergarten Education Guidelines* (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2001), every Chinese kindergarten can develop a school-based curriculum related to the local culture or focus on characteristics of its kindergarten.

Wang (2022) selected a Chinese kindergarten in which folk game is the school-based curriculum for the study. The researcher combine folk games into the kindergarten curriculum so that children can learn about traditional Chinese folk games, such as playing shuttlecock, playing hopscotch, throwing sandbags, and flying kites. By playing these folk games, children can exercise their awareness of rules, creativity, and physical fitness, and at the same time build up their understanding of traditional folk games promoting the inheritance of traditional Chinese folk games. Through observing the folk game curriculum, interviewing teachers, and distributing questionnaires to parents, the author analyzed the shortcomings of the kindergarten's development of school-based folk game curriculum. This is mainly reflected in the lack of understanding of folk games in kindergartens, the low motivation of teachers to participate in the development of folk game curriculum, the lack of teachers' ability to carry out folk game curriculum, and the lack of curriculum resources. In addition to research on existing school-based curriculum, some scholars have designed and researched school-based curriculum on relevant topics according to the actual situation of kindergartens.

Both Xi (2019) and Gong (2019) developed culture-based, school-based kindergarten curriculum in Fengning County, focusing respectively on the 24 Solar Terms and local paper-cutting traditions. Using methods such as fieldwork, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, both studies conducted needs assessments, drew on relevant educational theories, and constructed curriculum frameworks covering goals, content, implementation, and evaluation. Their findings indicate that integrating local cultural

resources into early childhood curricula enhances children's cultural understanding and identity, supports their holistic and creative development, and strengthens teachers' curriculum capacity and kindergartens' internal development.

Building on existing school-based integrated curriculum, scholars have also explored how music curriculum can be developed. For example, Lau and Grieshaber (2018) conducted an instrumental case study investigating how a Hong Kong kindergarten teacher adopted a music-based integrated approach within a school-based curriculum. Focusing on one teacher and her class of approximately 19 children aged 5-6, the researchers collected data through non-participant observation of eight music lessons conducted across two phases, supplemented by photographic records, teacher interviews, and lesson plan analysis. The study concludes that principal support, teacher willingness, and contextual factors jointly contribute to teachers' professional growth, offering insights relevant to promoting integrated music teaching in early childhood settings.

### ***3.4.5 Conclusions***

Overall, Chinese scholars have made considerable efforts to localise early childhood curriculum through critical reflection on Western models, integration of traditional culture, and innovation in school-based curriculum development. These studies demonstrate a strong awareness of cultural identity and highlight the importance of connecting early education with Chinese social, historical, and regional contexts. Through empirical research and practice, they provide valuable insights into how culturally responsive and contextually relevant curricula can be designed and implemented.

However, despite these significant advances, most existing studies are still conducted from adult or researcher perspectives. Children's own experiences, understandings, and voices remain largely absent from the discussion of curriculum design and evaluation. Consequently, the current body of research tends to reflect adult

expectations rather than children's lived realities. Future curriculum development and research should therefore pay closer attention to children's perspectives, recognising them as active participants in the educational process.

### **3.5 Conclusions**

This chapter has reviewed the literature on early childhood curriculum from multiple interrelated perspectives. It first introduced key child development theories and their influence on the formulation of early childhood curricula. The chapter then examined the historical development of early childhood curriculum reform in China, outlining how policy, educational philosophy, and social change have informed the evolution of kindergarten curricula. The chapter further reviewed contemporary research on the Chinese early childhood curriculum. This body of literature reveals that existing studies have largely been conducted from adult perspectives, focusing on policy interpretation, curriculum design, and teachers' practices, while children's perspectives remain underexplored.

Given that the present study focuses specifically on kindergarten music curriculum from children's perspectives, there is a clear need to examine the literature on early childhood music curriculum in greater depth. Therefore, the next chapter turns to a focused literature review on kindergarten music curriculum, providing the necessary foundation for exploring children's experiences and meanings in relation to music education.

## **Chapter 4 Early Childhood Music Curriculum**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Following the review of early childhood curriculum in the previous chapter, this chapter turns to a more specific curricular domain: the early childhood music curriculum. As this study focuses on children's perspectives on kindergarten music education, it is necessary to move beyond the general curricular framework and examine music as a distinct area of learning with its own educational values, pedagogical traditions, and policy contexts.

Music education plays a vital role in supporting children's holistic development, encompassing musical, emotional, cognitive, physical, and social dimensions (Elliott, 1993; Burton, 2011). Through singing, movement, listening, and creative expression, children experience music as a natural language for communication and meaning-making (Parker, 2020; Zhukov & Barrett, 2023). Participation in music has been associated with enhanced cognitive and academic abilities, suggesting significant benefits of introducing music education during early childhood (Glenn Schellenberg, 2003). From a developmental perspective, kindergarten music nurtures rhythm, coordination, and self-expression, while also fostering cooperation and confidence (Niknampour & Tanriguden, 2025). Collective musical experiences further promote a sense of belonging and cultural identity among children (Røyseng & Varkøy, 2014).

This chapter therefore examines the theoretical and practical foundations of early childhood music curriculum, with particular attention to the educational value, historical development, and policy context of kindergarten music education. It first outlines the educational value of music and music learning, then explores the historical and philosophical development of music education for children and its evolving aims in relation to human growth and learning. The discussion further considers the development of kindergarten music education in China, examining how

national policies, educational reforms, and cultural traditions have shaped its goals and practices over time. Finally, the chapter reviews key studies and initiatives that have contributed to the understanding and advancement of the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum. Through this discussion, the chapter provides a contextual foundation for understanding the characteristics and educational significance of music education in Chinese kindergartens.

## **4.2 The Value of Music and Music Education**

Music itself doesn't possess inherent value as an object or entity, but the meaningful and enriching experience it offers to people is valuable (Varkøy, 2015). When people engage with music, they undergo an experience that enriches their lives and activities, making the act of experiencing music valuable in the context of human activity. Music represents an unusual junction of the intimate and social fields that provides both an emotional experience within the individual and promotes communal participation and sharing in a group. It allows people to deeply resonate with their own emotions and thoughts on a personal level, while also fostering interpersonal connections through shared listening, performance and appreciation so it provides the basis for self-identity and collective identity (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

Besides, music can be understood as the crossing over of human beings from ancient time to the present and music can create understanding and tolerance of other cultures, therefore music is seen as a mirror of culture and society (Røyseng & Varkøy, 2014). Consequently, music not only develops a sense of belonging to people's own culture and heritage, but also tolerance and respect for the cultures of others (Røyseng & Varkøy, 2014). Hesmondhalgh (2013) claims that music matters because music has the possibility to enrich people's daily lives and societies, music often gives people emotional experiences, and music is collective, public experience base. Music consists of music-creating and music-listening, and they bring a unique and primary order to consciousness. Through music and music education, people can express and explore their emotions, reflect on their experiences and thoughts, and thus achieve

self-growth and self-knowledge (Elliott, 1993; Elliott, 2007). In addition to self-growth and self-knowledge, which are the main values of enjoying music, the various meanings expressed in music, such as culture and morality, also give music a cultural value (Elliott, 1993).

Music is rich in multifaceted values and its significance extends to the field of music education. Music education enables students to self-grow and gain constructive knowledge through listening to and performing music (Elliott, 1993). According to Hansen (1994), the value of music education may play a secondary role compared to other subjects, but the nature of music's components is different from that of other subjects and it has an intrinsic value related to education that gives students a unique experience.

Music education not only brings emotional and cognitive growth through creation and listening, but also fosters creativity, aesthetic ability and cultural understanding through its unique structure, melody and rhythm. This intrinsic value lies not only in the musical skills acquired, but also in how it enriches students' emotional life. Besides, music activities enable students to promote physical and mental health through co-operative work, and create a sense of belonging and identity of culture and heritage (Røyseng & Varkøy, 2014). Elliott (1995) argues that listening to music is a unique and important way for humans to bring more information into consciousness. By learning music, students can gain new or better abilities related to music. New musical skills can enrich students' musical choices, thereby increasing the likelihood that music makes 'a difference' in their lives (Regelski, 2005).

Regarding the value of music education in kindergarten, there has been an ongoing debate since the early 21st century: Should music educators advocate for its place based on the intrinsic value of music itself, or emphasize its potential contribution to broader children's academic development? Burton (2011) points out that music curriculum in kindergarten not only enhances children's musical and motor skills but may also positively influence their linguistic and non-linguistic abilities, such as

sound pattern recognition, phonological awareness, and vocabulary comprehension, thereby highlighting the significance of integrating music into early childhood education curriculum.

However, despite the wide range of arguments supporting the value of music and music education, some scholars caution against overstated or overly generalised claims about the arts. Fleming (2023) argues that while the arts undoubtedly hold educational potential, sweeping and decontextualised assertions about their transformative power may be counterproductive. When advocacy relies on exaggerated or universalised claims, it risks weakening its own credibility and narrowing critical reflection. Instead, the value of music and music education should be understood in relation to specific contexts, pedagogical aims and particular practices. Such a perspective encourages a more nuanced and grounded understanding of how music functions within educational settings.

In addition to scholars' theoretical research on music and the value of music education, some scholars have also conducted practical research on the value of music education. North et al. (2000) conducted a quantitative study of the importance of music to adolescents. A total of 2,465 adolescents aged 13–14 from the North Staffordshire area of England took part in the study. They were attending Year 9 in 22 local secondary schools. The researchers issued questionnaires to these adolescents. The main components of the questionnaire included the extent to which they were involved in musical activities, evaluating the importance of music compared to other activities, and assessing the importance of several factors that might determine why they listen to or perform popular or classical music. The results of the study show that more than half of the participants played an instrument and that the sample listened to music for an average of 2.45 hours per day, that listening to music is better than other indoor activities but not than outdoor activities, and that pop music and classical music can bring different feelings and benefits. In this research, North et al. (2000) conclude that music is important to adolescents because it gives them their emotional

needs and enables them to express them to the outside world.

Conversely, Parker (2020) selected qualitative research methods on the importance of music to adolescents research. This study gathered the views of 30 adolescents aged 12-18 who frequently performed music in different environments. The voices of these adolescents reflect their experiences with a wide range of music and enrich educators' understanding of what music means to adolescents. Based on the sharing of adolescents, there are five reasons that support why music is important for adolescents. First, music enables adolescents to visualize their own abilities through others' eyes, with experiencing mutuality. Second, music enables adolescents to grow into themselves through meaningful interactions with others, with belonging and acceptance. Third, music helps adolescents develop stories that situate them in a larger world, where they have space and importance or a reason to exist. Fourth, music helps adolescents develop a sense of musical ability and motivates them to express themselves. Fifth, through music, adolescents are able to express and experience emotions in order to create meaning for themselves and others.

In addition to research on the value of music education for adolescents, some scholars have also explored younger children's perspectives on music. Zhukov and Barrett (2023) conducted a study using draw-and-tell and focus group to investigate how 4-8-year-old children in Australia perceive the role of music in their lives. The study involved 74 children from eight urban and regional primary schools across diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Children expressed that music helps them regulate their emotions, calming them down or energizing them, enhances their literacy and numeracy skills, and strengthens their relationships with peers and family members. Additionally, school-based music learning can encourage children's family musical activities at home, such as learning an instrument or engaging with music through technology.

In sum, music is valuable to so many people. It promotes the heritage of culture and

identity and contributes to people's physical and psychological well-being. Musical activities contribute to the development of social communities. Besides, music education brings the value of self-growth in music to students. Moreover, some studies have demonstrated the importance of music for adolescents both quantitatively and qualitatively. Therefore, music is valuable and so is music education.

### **4.3 The Development of Music Education for Children**

Throughout the history of human beings, philosophers and educators from ancient and modern times have seen the significance of music for children's development. Several studies have discussed the value of early childhood music education and debated how to promote children's overall development through music education.

One of the greatest philosophers in history, Plato, inculcates the value of music education for the purification of the children's souls. In particular, he stresses that early childhood education should start with music because music has rhythms and sounds that can soften children's minds and gradually develop moral values (Lmam, 2020). Besides, he considers the importance of pleasure in music education and states that music education is successful if the children are pleased by it (Woerther, 2008). In addition, he supports the development of appropriate guidelines to regulate music education, such as the content of music education that is positive and appropriate for children (Lmam, 2020).

Aristotle agrees with Plato's ideas that imitation is in the nature of children and children can subconsciously absorb music (Woerther, 2008). Aristotle points out that music has rhythms and beats that can be imitated, and children can learn to sing and play musical instruments. Aristotle argues that music is one part of education but believes that music education is sufficient during childhood which is opposite to Plato's views that musical education should be comprehensive and continue throughout an individual's life.

The Ancient Greek beliefs about music for moral development informed thinking in the West for many centuries, and were developed further by some educators, who argued that society might be improved by developing children's sensibilities through music. Rousseau points out his attitude towards children's music education in his 1761 publication *Emile*, where he believes that every child should have music literacy and considers the importance of children's musical affinities (Sušić, 2017).

Following Rousseau, in response to the utilitarianism of music education in society in the 19th century, Dewey puts forward the educational viewpoint that art as experience, that is, art is a kind of production process with intrinsic value which re-established a new concept of art education that values the growth of children's lives in the whole society (Weaterlund, 2008).

In the early 19th century, Pestalozzi believes that music, especially singing, is of great value in the development of children's character and social relationships. In his view, music could reduce children's tension or anxiety, so he gives special attention to music education for children (Sušić, 2017).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Montessori focuses special attention on children's sensory development. She believes that it is particularly important for children to be in touch with music between the ages of two and a half and five and a half because it is during this period that children are particularly sensitive and receptive that can help them acquire special knowledge and skills (Sušić, 2017).

For Plato and Aristotle, music develops the soul and for Rousseau and Dewey music education helps us be more mindful of others, but in the 20th century new ideas about child development emerged: instead of music just developing the soul and society, it is now believed that music education also helps support cognitive development (Tabuena, 2021). Musicians represented by Carabo-Cone, Kodály, Orff created teaching methods for children's music education.

Madeleine Carabo-Cone holds the opinion that learning must be integrated into life, so she creates an early childhood music education method of playing games on the musical playground with a sensory-motor and concrete environment (Tabuena, 2021). The Carabo-Cone method creates a classroom environment where children are exposed to exploring costumes, props, and toys so that they can gain basic knowledge of music. All the musical games like Banners Flying, Feeling the Beat, and Counting Measures have clear learning goals. As a result, the Carabo-Cone method not only provides diversity in entertainment but also with a foundation in music for children. The Carabo-Cone method works towards improving the musical literacy of all children which can help to ensure equity and inclusion so that every child has the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from music education opportunities regardless of their background, ability or other factors.

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze believes that the body is the first instrument for gaining the ability to experience and express music (Tabuena, 2021). Through the combination of music and bodily rhythms, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze hopes to awaken children's musical instincts and develop children's musical sensibility and keen response ability (Anderson, 2012). There are three components to the Dalcroze method, that is, eurhythmics, solfège, and improvisation. Firstly, children acquire a sense of rhythm in rhythmic movement. Secondly, children's ear training promotes children's musical ability in various aspects. Finally, children can express their creativity in music through improvisation. The goal of Dalcroze method is for students to have the ability to improvise (Anderson, 2012).

Zoltán Kodály supports the view that every child has the ability, rights, and freedom to achieve musical literacy and music education must start in childhood (Tabuena, 2021). In the Kodály method, children through experience and participation such as singing, listening, and movement understand the concept of music. The main sequence of learning is listening, singing, understanding, reading, writing, and creating. There are three tools in the Kodály method: movable do, hand signs, and

rhythmic syllables (Tabuena, 2021). In the use of teaching materials, materials will be selected to suit the age group of the students. For example, three-note chants (la-so-mi) songs are used as teaching materials for the kindergarten level (Cary, 2012).

Carl Orff thinks music freedom and discovery are important for children's musical involvement and learning (Tabuena, 2021). The Orff method is used to educate children in music through a combination of performance, dance, singing, and percussion instruments. Through the Orff method, children's natural tendency to melodies and rhythms can be stimulated (Tabuena, 2021) to develop children's musical imagination, creativity, and feelings for group activities (Cary, 2012).

Nowadays, scholars agree that early childhood music education is of great value to both social development and children's individual development (Cheng, 2021; Cui, 2015a; Roy et al., 2019). Roy et al. (2019) point out that music education as part of arts education is of great value to children's learning and development which can promote personal agency and shape their lives. Some scholars have explored the positive role of children's participation in group music interaction or music curriculum. Rabinowitch et al. (2013) found that sustained engagement in structured musical group interaction significantly enhanced children's emotional empathy. According to Cui (2015a), kindergarten music curriculum helps to cultivate children's positive attitude towards life, and music also allows children to feel the joy of self-fulfilment. Cheng (2021) suggests that integrated music curriculum not only can develop basic musical abilities such as singing and playing instruments, but also can improve children's social-emotional skills through teamwork, language skills through new vocabulary, cognitive skills by answering questions, and social literacy through storyline from music.

To sum up, from ancient times to the present, numerous scholars have deeply recognized the value of music education to children's development. In ancient times these benefits were considered to be spiritual and social, but more recent

understandings of child development have revealed the benefits of music education for children's cognitive development. In addition, many musicians and educators have put forward their unique approaches to children's music education. They advocate the cultivation of children's musical literacy, imagination, creativity, and social skills through music education from the perspective of overall development. Therefore, early childhood music education is very important for the social development and individual growth of children.

#### **4.4 Chinese Kindergarten Music Curriculum**

In the 21st century, the Chinese Government has formulated a series of documents to regulate and promote the development of education in kindergartens. Music curriculum is part of kindergarten education and there are detailed guidelines in the documents.

Firstly, the Ministry of Education of the PRC issued *Kindergarten Education Guidelines (trial version)* in 2001. The Guidelines enhance the importance of early childhood education and divide Kindergarten Education into five fields: society, language, health, art, and science. As a programmatic document, it sets out the overall objectives, principles, and guidelines in the five fields. It provides that music curriculum belongs to the art field and the objectives in the art field are children can initially feel and love the beauty in the environment, life, and art. The guidelines give ultimate goals of art education: children like to participate in art activities boldly, express their feelings and experiences about art activities, and use their favourite ways to perform art expression activities.

At the same time, the guidelines also set out requirements for what and how teachers should do in the art field education. Teachers need to provide children with access to the arts, provide children with opportunities to express themselves freely, help children to improve their artistic skills and abilities, and guide children to communicate with each other etc. *Kindergarten Education Guidelines (trial version)*

(Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2001), as a document guiding early childhood education in China in the new century, puts forward comprehensive objectives and requirements for teaching, stressing the educational philosophy of focusing on children's development. Still, it does not set educational objectives by age group, and its content is too general.

The second policy paper is *the 3-6 Years Old Children's Learning and Development Guidelines* which were issued by the Ministry of Education of the PRC in 2012. The guidelines set out specific expectations for what children of the 3-4, 4-5 and 5-6 age groups should achieve in the five fields and set developmental goals for age differences in increasing order of difficulty. The document not only provides levelled guidance for five fields but also refines the objectives and implementation guidance for each field.

In the art field, the educational objectives of the guidelines are divided into two parts: guide children to feel and appreciate art and guide children to express and create art in their ways. In the objectives of feeling and appreciation, 3-4 year old children like to listen to music or watch dance and theatre, 4-5 year old children are able to watch their favourite cultural performances or artworks attentively, and have the desire to imitate and participate in them, and 5-6 year old children are able to express their own understanding of the artworks by using facial expressions, movements and words. In the objectives of expressing and creating, 3-4 year old children can often hum and sing to themselves or imitate interesting movements, expressions and tones. 4-5 year old children can often sing and dance regularly and are willing to participate in singing, moving, dancing and performing activities. 5-6 year old children can express their own emotions or scenes from nature through simple dance movements. *The 3-6 Years Old Children's Learning and Development Guidelines* (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2012) focus on the stages of early childhood development from 3-6 while respecting the individual differences of children which can assure the scientific and standardized development of kindergarten education.

Thirdly, to strengthen the scientific management and standardize the behaviour of kindergartens, the Ministry of Education of the PRC officially adopted *Kindergarten Work Regulations and Procedures* in 2016. The regulations provide detailed guidance on kindergarten's scale, safety, health, education, equipment, staffing, funding etc. The issue of the *Kindergarten Work Regulations and Procedures* means that higher professional standards and more stringent requirements have been set for preschool education professionals than before (Chen & Yang, 2017). According to article 3, kindergarten activities should follow the characteristics and patterns of the physical and psychological development of children, as well as article 5, which stresses the importance of children's mental health, reflecting the scientific, child-centred view of children and education (Xie, 2016). Chapter 5 of the regulations describes the principles and needs of kindergarten education and highlights the importance of play. Teachers should organize a variety of interesting games in the music curriculum to stimulate children's imagination and creativity which makes a link between music education and play.

Various kinds of play should be carried out according to the different ages of children and respecting the individual development of children and their independent choice of play materials and contents so that children can have a positive emotional experience. *Kindergarten Work Regulations and Procedures* (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2016) focus on the development of children at different ages while also considering children's needs and promoting children's independent choice and creativity according to their interests so that children's personalities and abilities can be enhanced.

However, there are no restrictions on the teaching materials and methods used in the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum, which means that teachers can develop a music curriculum according to the needs of their students, classes, or kindergartens. Since the 1980s, more and more Chinese scholars have popularised some rewarding foreign early childhood music education programs to Chinese educators through their

papers and writings, such as the Orff music curriculum, the Kodály method, and the Dalcroze approach (Cui, 2015b). As a result, many Chinese kindergarten teachers use these teaching methods when they organize music curricula. Although there is no restriction on music curriculum materials, more and more Chinese folk music, drama etc. are used in the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum (Luo, 2022).

Overall, art education is essential in Chinese kindergarten education and music education is one part of arts education. There are already some documents regulating the objectives and requirements of kindergarten education including the music curriculum. According to the Guidelines, Chinese teachers and kindergartens can conduct kindergarten music curriculum in a regulated way. At the same time, Chinese teachers can also choose suitable teaching methods and materials to include in the kindergarten music curriculum.

## **4.5 Studies on Chinese Kindergarten Music Curriculum**

### ***4.5.1 Introduction***

The Chinese kindergarten music curriculum encompasses a wide range of activities, including singing, dancing, music appreciation, musical performance, and music games. It serves as the main channel for implementing music education in kindergartens. According to existing research, studies on the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum can generally be categorised into four main areas: educational objectives and significance, educational content, teaching methods, and educational problems. The following section reviews representative studies in each of these areas to outline the current state of research on the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum.

### ***4.5.2 Educational Objectives and Significance***

Kindergarten music curriculum is part of kindergarten music education, and many scholars have put forward educational objectives and significance for kindergarten music education as well as for music curriculum. Wang (2000) argues that when

talking about any issue related to early childhood music education, researchers should recognize that they are talking about early childhood music education in the context of early childhood education, rather than talking about other subjects like math, Chinese etc. or professional music education preparing students becoming musicians. Therefore, she believes that kindergarten music curriculum can inspire children's musical potential, cultivate a sense of art, and enhance their ability to express art.

Luo (2010) has the same opinion as Wang (2000) considering that early childhood music education should not be as purposeful and complex as mathematics, but should pay more attention to the exploration of children's talents and the cultivation of their well-round abilities, so that kindergarten music teaching can play a role in promoting the healthy development of children. Besides, Xiao (2019) points out that kindergarten music education, as an important form of art education for kindergarten children, aims not only to promote the overall development of children but also to give music education more cultural significance and function through the connection of historical, cultural, and social backgrounds.

#### ***4.5.3 Educational Content***

Besides, researchers have offered a wealth of insights into the selection of content for the kindergarten music curriculum. Cheng (2021) summarizes the music curriculum in Chinese kindergartens consisting of four main categories: singing activities, rhythmic activities, percussion activities, and music appreciation activities. Li's (2012) summary of the content of the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum is singing, music appreciation, rhyme, and rhythm which is the same as that of Cheng's (2021). Hou (2012) analyses three current trends in the selection of teaching materials for Chinese kindergarten music curriculum content, which mainly include Western classical music excerpts, Chinese classical folk songs and nursery rhymes, and modern children's songs.

Tong and Yan (2014) give a more detailed classification of the four types of

kindergarten music curriculum. Firstly, there should be a balance of lyrics and tunes in the singing curriculum. Secondly, the rhythm curriculum should take into account movement, music and props. Then the content of music activities should include music, characters, and rules. Finally, the music appreciation curriculum should consider musical compositions and support materials for appreciation. According to Guo (2019), the kindergarten music curriculum cannot be isolated from children's daily lives and educators should design and organize the music curriculum concerning children's life experiences. This kind of curriculum can help to enhance children's interests and understanding of music because they can relate what they learn about music to their own life experiences.

#### ***4.5.4 Teaching Methods***

Additionally, some scholars have done relevant research on the teaching methods of kindergarten music curriculum. Wu (2013) states that the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum should actively learn from international advanced programs such as the Orff method. Li (2015) also agrees with learning the Orff method and believes that drawing on the Orff rhythm teaching method can greatly enrich the content and form of the music curriculum. Zhang (2021) studied a kindergarten in China that combined the Orff method into its music curriculum and found the following problems: the formulation of curriculum objectives does not meet the social needs of children, the selection of curriculum content is not diverse, the teaching design is unreasonable, children lack opportunities for curriculum evaluation, parents lack understanding and participation in Orff music curriculum, and teacher cooperation is insufficient. According to Zhang (2021), these issues arise from the lack of well-guided development of the Orff music curriculum in the kindergarten and the insufficient professionalism of teachers in the Orff music curriculum.

Zhao, Y. (2021) designed three kindergarten music curricula based on the Dalcroze method in a large class (5-6 years old) of 40 children and reflected on the problems in the instructional design. Through her study, she finds that the kindergarten music

curriculum based on the Dalcroze method is more lifestyle-based and flexible in implementation. Xu (2014) notes that the kindergarten music appreciation curriculum can be introduced to activities through scene design, storytelling, and performance, and music curriculum can be carried out by using rhythmic, tempo, chart, and games. Gao (2016) also considers music games are effective educational methods in the kindergarten music curriculum. The rich education is expressed in the form of lively and interesting games so that children can acquire musical knowledge and skills in a joyful game.

#### ***4.5.5 Educational Challenges***

Although the status of music education in Chinese kindergartens has risen since music became a compulsory subject in 2001 (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2001), existing literature indicates that several issues in children's music education still persist.

Ke (2019) analysed 253 kindergarten music teaching activities, and the results of the analysis show that there are some problems with the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum. Firstly, the objectives of the music curriculum are vague, and the learning process is single. There is no gradual increase in the complexity and difficulty of learning with each stage of learning. Secondly, instrument playing and music appreciation activities are carried out less frequently, and there is a lack of music curriculum materials. Thirdly, many teachers often neglect children's main position in music education that teachers do not adequately take into account the children's perspectives, experiences, interests and needs. Fourth, there is no standard for teachers' evaluation after teaching.

Besides, Liu, J. (2019) analysed the relevant literature on the current situation of Chinese kindergarten music curriculum development and summarizes the current problems. The development of Chinese kindergarten music curriculum lacks relevance, most teachers often ignore the teaching of emotional aspects of children

and the enhancement of musical literacy, teachers are more inclined to technical training in music curriculum, and it is difficult for children to have emotional resonance to music through music curriculum.

Additionally, Chinese kindergarten music curriculum is based on play but the single form of play and the narrow range of choosing music cannot meet the needs of children's development (Zhao, J., 2021). Chen (2021) argues that the development of early childhood music curriculum is unbalanced between rural areas and urban areas because of the culture, funds and teaching equipment, the ability of teachers, and education perceptions are different.

Yan (2023), based on classroom observations and interviews conducted in 12 kindergartens in Qingdao, China, found that early childhood music education remains largely teacher- and textbook-centred, with limited pedagogical autonomy for teachers and restricted opportunities for children's individualised participation and self-expression in music activities. Teachers and school leaders tend to prioritise structured music lessons and predetermined learning objectives, and in order to ensure that all children meet these objectives, teachers often place strong emphasis on maintaining classroom discipline and requiring uniform participation, which may to some extent constrain children's agency in music learning.

#### ***4.5.6 Conclusions***

In general, the primary aims of the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum are to promote children's physical and mental development and to foster their artistic sensibility through playful learning experiences. The curriculum is typically organised around various forms of play-based activities, including singing, rhythmic movement, percussion, and music appreciation. Scholars have contributed valuable insights into how the content and methods of the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum can be enriched and diversified.

However, existing research has also revealed a number of persistent issues, such as limitations in curriculum design, insufficient teacher training, inadequate teaching materials, and disparities between urban and rural kindergartens. More importantly, current studies have predominantly been conducted from adult perspectives, with little attention paid to how children themselves perceive, experience, and make sense of music learning. As the primary participants in music education, children's voices and viewpoints remain largely absent from existing discussions. Therefore, it is essential for future research on kindergarten music curriculum to incorporate children's perspectives, recognising them as active agents in the construction of musical meaning and learning.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum from children's perspectives, aiming to understand how children experience, prefer, and imagine kindergarten music curriculum in their everyday educational contexts.

#### **4.6 Conclusions**

This chapter has reviewed the literature on early childhood music curriculum from both international and Chinese perspectives. It began by examining the educational value of music and music education, highlighting music's contribution to children's holistic development, including emotional, cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions. The chapter then traced the development of music education for children, illustrating how understandings of childhood, learning, and musical engagement have shaped the aims and practices of early childhood music education over time.

In addition, the chapter focused specifically on the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum by examining how contemporary national policies and curriculum guidelines inform and shape current music education practices in kindergartens, alongside a review of existing empirical research in this field. This body of research has primarily concentrated on educational objectives and significance, curriculum

content, teaching methods, and educational challenges. However, these studies are largely framed from adult perspectives, with limited attention given to children's own experiences, meanings, and views of the music curriculum.

Taken together, this chapter completes the literature review for the present study. Across Chapters 2, 3, and 4, the literature review has been organised around three interrelated areas that align closely with the research focus: children's perspectives, early childhood curriculum, and early childhood music curriculum. While existing research has provided valuable theoretical and practical insights into each of these areas, a clear gap remains in understanding kindergarten music curriculum from children's perspectives within the Chinese context. This identified gap provides a strong rationale for the present study and directly informs the research design and methodological choices discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 5 Research Design and Methodology**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology adopted in this study. It explains how the research was conceptualised and implemented to achieve its central aim, which is to explore the kindergarten music curriculum in China from the perspectives of children aged three to six. Whereas previous studies have predominantly reflected the views of teachers, parents, and policymakers, this study positions children's voices at the centre of inquiry. It views children not as passive recipients of curriculum practice, but as active, competent participants who can offer valuable insights into their own musical learning experiences and the educational contexts in which these experiences occur.

To fulfil this aim, the study employed a qualitative case study approach (Stake, 1995; White & Cooper, 2022) situated within an interpretivist and child-centred paradigm. A public kindergarten located in a provincial capital city in southern China was purposefully selected as the research site. This single-site case study design enables an in-depth exploration of children's lived experiences and interpretations within their educational environment. Rather than seeking statistical generalisation, the study aims to generate rich, contextualised, and nuanced understandings of how Chinese children perceive, engage with, and imagine their kindergarten music curriculum.

Methodology, defined as the systematic process through which knowledge is discovered and constructed, is influenced by the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions, leading to variations in the objectivity of data collection methods across different methodological approaches (Killam, 2013). In this sense, methodology provides the overarching philosophical and theoretical framework that connects the researcher's worldview with the practical strategies used to investigate the research questions. In contrast, research design refers to the concrete plan or structure that guides the implementation of the methodological principles in practice,

including how data are collected, analysed, and interpreted (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). Together, methodology and research design ensure the coherence, validity, and rigour of the research process.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 5.2 introduces the research philosophy underpinning the study, outlining the interpretivist assumptions and child-centered orientation that inform the methodological choices. Section 5.3 discusses the data collection methods, including photography, tour guiding, voting, painting, and conferencing, all of which were adapted from the Mosaic approach to facilitate children's expression in multiple modes. Section 5.4 addresses the ethical considerations of conducting research with young children, including informed consent, voluntary participation, avoidance of harm, and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. Section 5.5 presents the pilot study that refined the research tools and procedures, followed by Section 5.6 on sample selection and Section 5.7 on language considerations during the data collection process. Finally, Section 5.8 elaborates on the data analysis methods, detailing the procedures for thematic analysis, data preparation, coding processes, and the use of NVivo 15 for software support.

Overall, this chapter provides a comprehensive account of how the research design, ethical framework, and analytical procedures were constructed to ensure methodological rigour, trustworthiness, and authenticity in hearing and representing children's voices within the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum.

## **5.2 Research Philosophy**

A researcher's philosophical orientation, personal beliefs, and prior experiences not only shape the research questions they pursue but also influence their methodological choices and the interpretation of their findings (Crossan, 2003). However, research texts often present ontologies, epistemologies, theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and methods as if they were interchangeable, a practice that generates significant

conceptual confusion (Crotty, 1998).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions embedded within any research paradigm are closely interrelated. In other words, the way one addresses one of these dimensions directly influences how the others are approached. Ultimately, this reflects an issue of internal consistency among researcher's ontology, epistemology, and methodology. In research philosophy, ontology and epistemology are two key concepts, yet they are often difficult to separate, as 'to talk about construction of meaning is to talk of the construction of a meaningful reality' (Crotty, 1998 p.10).

Ontology is the study of being, and in the context of social research it concerns the nature of social entities such as organizations or culture (Crotty, 1998). Bryman (2016) highlights that a researcher's ontological position influences how social reality is understood and there are two main perspectives on the nature of social phenomena. The first perspective views social phenomena and their meanings as existing independently of individuals' perceptions and actions. The second perspective emphasizes that social phenomena are continuously created and modified through social interaction. These two positions are referred to respectively as objectivism and constructionism.

Epistemology refers to the assumptions we hold about the nature of knowledge (Richards, 2003) and the ways in which we can acquire understanding of the world (Snape & Spencer, 2003). According to Bryman (2016), a central issue in the social sciences is whether the social world can and should be studied using the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural sciences. The position advocating this approach is known as positivism, which supports applying natural science methods to investigate social reality. In contrast, interpretivism represents an alternative epistemological stance, emphasizing that fundamental differences exist between human beings and the objects studied in the natural sciences, and therefore the social

world requires distinct approaches to understanding and knowledge generation.

Therefore, this study adopts an interpretive research approach, underpinned by a constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology, to explore the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum from children's perspectives. From a constructionist ontological perspective, children's understandings of the curriculum are considered socially constructed through their interactions with teachers, peers, and the learning environment. Epistemologically, an interpretivist stance recognises that knowledge emerges through the meanings children ascribe to their experiences. Conducting research with children allows the study to capture their own thoughts and interpretations, providing rich and detailed insights into how they experience music learning and what an ideal Chinese kindergarten music curriculum might look like from their perspectives.

### **5.3 Research Procedure**

The research was carried out between March 2025 and May 2025. In China, the academic year runs from September to June of the following year. Therefore, conducting the research near the end of the academic year was particularly suitable for younger children in the junior kindergarten class, as they had already accumulated sufficient experience in kindergarten learning.

In February, the researcher contacted the participating kindergarten in advance via social media. The principal agreed that the research could be conducted in the kindergarten. In March, after returning to China, the researcher arranged a meeting with the principal to further explain in person what would be required. Afterwards, the researcher contacted the class teachers to express the intention of the study and to request their assistance in organising a music lesson during which children would take photographs. With the support of the teachers, information sheets and consent forms were distributed to parents. As parents were seen daily during drop-off and pick-up times, any questions were answered during these occasions or through other means of

communication.

As Punch (2002) notes, in adult society the nature of childhood often means that children try to please adults, and they may fear how adults will react to what they say. Time therefore needs to be invested in building relationships and gaining their trust. At the same time, adult researchers must be aware that children may lack the experience and confidence to communicate directly with unfamiliar adults. For this reason, it was necessary to become familiar with the children in advance.

Furthermore, forming an appreciative and mutually respectful relationship with children is essential, as a positive relationship increases the likelihood that children will feel comfortable and willing to share their perspectives (Eide & Winger, 2005). Since the researcher was meeting these children for the first time, before starting the study, communication was carried out with them in the classroom during free play sessions. Each child was introduced to the study individually, and their assent to participate was sought. In addition, the researcher taught each child how to use the cameras brought for the study and asked them to practise recording their ongoing free play. After this training, the formal research began.

In schools, children have little control over how their time is used, as schools want to ensure appropriate learning outcomes from classroom hours (Kellett, 2011). For this reason, the study was scheduled during free play time. Each morning, children had two hours of free play, and each afternoon, one hour, including both outdoor and classroom-based activities. Conducting the research during these times ensured that the study did not interfere with the formal school learning and relaxing activities.

It was also important to identify spaces in which children felt comfortable. Research environments should enable participants to feel at ease. Adult-dominated spaces often take adult needs as the standard, but for children, spaces should be considered from their perspectives. Understanding and respecting children's perspectives and preferences, as well as ensuring effective communication, are essential for designing

research that is both ethical and comfortable (Punch, 2002).

For this reason, the study took place in the children's familiar classrooms. The photography activity was conducted either in the children's classroom or in the music classroom, depending on where the music lesson being recorded took place, as the aim was to capture normal music lessons from the children's perspectives. During children's free play time, since the classroom needed to be available for other children's regular play activities, conducting research there could lead to interruptions and potentially affect the results. Therefore, to ensure a quiet, safe, and familiar environment, the remaining four research activities were held in the art classroom. Similar to the music classroom, the art classroom is an independent shared space that is not used during free play time, making it an appropriate and familiar setting that also aligns with the artistic nature of these research methods.

Children differ from adults in their modes of communication, which means that research with young children requires methods that are developmentally appropriate and capable of sustaining engagement and attention (Punch, 2002). Importantly, children's participation should not be treated as uniform or taken for granted, but instead should be carefully shaped in relation to their interests and capacities, the aims of the research, and the practical constraints of the research context (Blaisdell et al., 2019; Mayne et al., 2018).

In light of these considerations, this study adopts an adapted Mosaic approach as its data collection method. The Mosaic approach is particularly suited to child-centred research, as it positions children at the centre of the research process and enables them to express their views through multiple, flexible modes (Clark & Moss, 2011). While the original Mosaic approach offers a rich and diverse range of methods, it was adapted in this study in accordance with the research aims and research questions. Accordingly, this research adopts an adapted Mosaic approach, selecting three core methods from the original framework (photography, tour guiding, and child

conferencing) and incorporating two additional participatory methods (painting and voting). The specific application and integration of these five methods are illustrated in Figure 5.3.1.

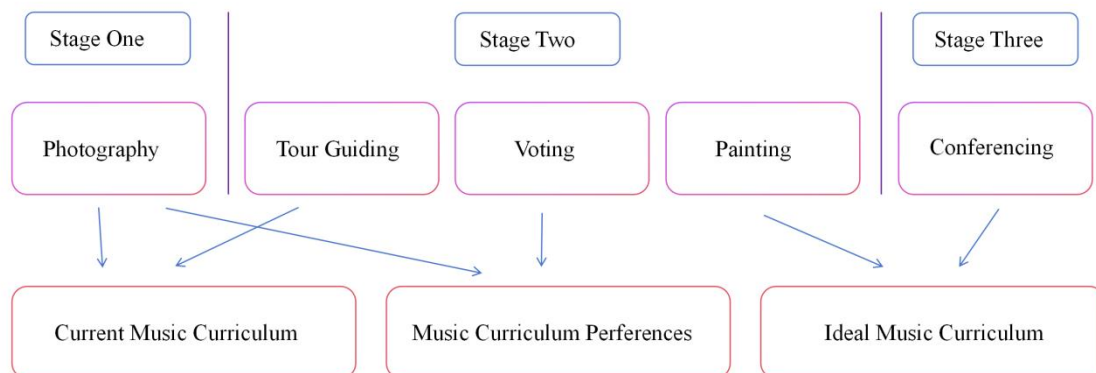


Figure 5.3.1 Research Framework and Technical Route

As shown in the Figure 5.3.1, this study employed five research methods across three stages. These five methods were designed to address different research questions. The photography and tour-guiding activities aimed to answer Research Question 1: *What are children's perspectives on the current music curriculum in Chinese kindergartens?* The photography and voting activities focused on Research Question 2: *What are the children's preferences regarding their current music curriculum in Chinese kindergartens?* The painting and conferencing activities were designed to explore Research Question 3: *How do children envision their ideal kindergarten music curriculum?*

The first stage of the study was the photography activity. During one music lesson in the classroom, children were invited to take photographs to record the lesson, with each child taking turns. While children were photographing, efforts were made to avoid interfering with the ongoing music class, although some children were inevitably distracted by the cameras. After the activity, the photographs were sorted and printed for each child. During subsequent free play sessions, children were invited individually to take part in the tour, voting, and painting stages together, in sequence. Finally, groups of three to four children participated in the conferencing stage.

In this study, data were primarily collected through children's language, including their descriptions of current music lessons, their preferences, and their depictions of dream music classes. Although child-friendly methods were employed, these served mainly as tools to assist children's participation. The researcher did not interpret children's work from an adult perspective but relied on the children's own explanations. Therefore, verbal expression was essential to the study. Although younger children may have limited vocabulary, they may also use linguistic forms that adults do not fully understand (Punch, 2002). Thus, communication difficulties were reciprocal. During the research process, whenever unclear expressions arose, clarification was immediately sought from the children to confirm their intended meaning.

Finally, each child who actively completed the study received sticker rewards. Stickers were chosen because they are a familiar form of recognition in kindergartens and could encourage participation. To express gratitude to the kindergarten and teachers, the researcher also contributed by assisting with some tasks, such as helping to decorate children's outdoor play areas.

In summary, the research procedure was carefully designed and implemented to ensure both ethical rigor and children's comfort. The study lasted for two months, with approximately one to two weeks spent in each class. Participation time varied across age groups: junior kindergarten children engaged for about 20 minutes, middle kindergarten children for around 30 minutes, and senior kindergarten children for about 35 minutes. On average, four to five children completed all stages of participation per day, although the actual duration varied, particularly for the youngest group. These procedures ensured the richness and reliability of the data, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis.

#### **5.4 The Relationship of the Researcher to the Researched**

In qualitative research, the researcher's gender, appearance, social class, ethnicity, and

other personal characteristics may influence the research process and findings in different ways. These factors may shape the relationship between the researcher and participants, as well as influence the forms of data collected and the interpretation of the data (Bourke, 2014). Therefore, it is important to clarify the researcher's position within the research context, particularly in research involving young children.

The researcher in this study is a Chinese doctoral student studying at a British university. Therefore, when communicating with the kindergarten management, teachers, and parents, the researcher primarily adopted the identity of a researcher. However, children were the direct participants in this study. In order to help children participate more naturally in the research activities, the researcher introduced herself to the children as a 'friend' who had come to play research games with them. The children were told that they would take part in a series of games together and collaboratively create their 'dream music lessons'. Through this form of introduction, the researcher aimed to reduce the sense of distance that children might associate with an adult researcher and to help them participate in the study in a more relaxed and natural manner.

During the time spent in the kindergarten, the researcher was responsible only for activities related to the study and did not undertake daily teaching, classroom management, or caregiving responsibilities. As a result, the researcher's role differed from that of the children's regular teachers. Previous studies have suggested that relationships between researchers and participants become particularly complex when children are involved in research. Compared with other participant groups, children are more likely to be affected by unequal power relationships between themselves and adult researchers (Einarsdottir, 2007). In kindergarten settings, if children perceive the researcher as a 'teacher', this imbalance of power may become even more pronounced and may influence children's willingness to express their genuine thoughts and opinions (Kim, 2012). Therefore, throughout this study, the researcher sought to build familiarity with the children through games, everyday conversations, and shared

activities in order to reduce any feelings of pressure associated with adult authority.

At the same time, it is recognised that a degree of imbalance inevitably exists between the researcher and the researched. As Råheim et al. (2016) argue, even when researchers attempt to minimise the distance between themselves and participants, differences within the research relationship still remain. Accordingly, in this study, the researcher aimed to conduct activities in ways that were familiar and comfortable for the children, while using informal and interactive forms of communication to support children in expressing their own perspectives and ideas.

## **5.5 Data Collection Method**

Children should not merely be regarded as ‘data providers’ in research, but as knowledge-makers who actively co-construct meaning (Murriss, 2016). From this perspective, data collection methods are not simply tools that help children ‘express their views’, but are important processes through which children think, understand the world and generate meaning. In the selection of research methods, this study adopts an adapted Mosaic approach as its overall methodological framework. Specifically, five participatory methods were employed within this adapted approach to explore children’s perspectives on the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum. These include photography, tour guiding, voting, painting, and conferencing. Each of these methods is discussed in detail in the following sections.

### **5.5.1 Photography**

Photography has become an increasingly feasible and attractive research tool for young children, including those of preschool age, and many researchers have favoured the use of cameras in collaborative projects with children (Sahimi, 2012). Children have limited ability to express themselves and photographs can help young children express themselves better (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). Children’s photographic work has not only reflected their understandings of the world but has also been closely intertwined with processes of identity construction and their relationships with

others (Sharples et al., 2003).

Within the Mosaic approach, photography has been child-led, capturing aspects of the world from children's own perspectives. The photographs taken by children can later be used for creating books or maps, and children can also provide verbal descriptions of the subjects of their photographs (Clark & Moss, 2011). In this study, the photography method within the Mosaic approach was applied. Through the children's own perspectives, cameras were used to capture how they perceived and experienced kindergarten music lessons, while the photos also laying the groundwork for the subsequent research stages.

The continuous advancement of modern devices and the simplified design of cameras have rendered the act of taking photographs more accessible for beginners (Sahimi, 2012). For young children, selecting a child-friendly camera has been particularly important, as the device must be both simple to operate and appealing to children. This study has therefore used a child-specific digital camera with an inserted SD card, as shown in Figure 5.5.1.



Figure 5.5.1 Child Camera Promotional Image

The process of data collection through photography has proceeded as follows. During their regular music lessons, children were invited to act as photographers and record anything they wished within the classroom. Each child was given approximately one minute to use the camera, with opportunities offered at the end for those wishing to take additional photographs. Since the camera was shared among children, it would be difficult to distinguish the authorship of each set of images without intervention. To address this, the researcher prepared number stickers corresponding to each child's ID code and attached them to the children (see Figure 5.5.2). Prior to each child's turn, the researcher took a photograph of the sticker with each child, thereby ensuring that all subsequent images could be attributed to the correct child. This ensured that, during the subsequent organization of photographs, each image could be accurately attributed and numbered according to the correct child.

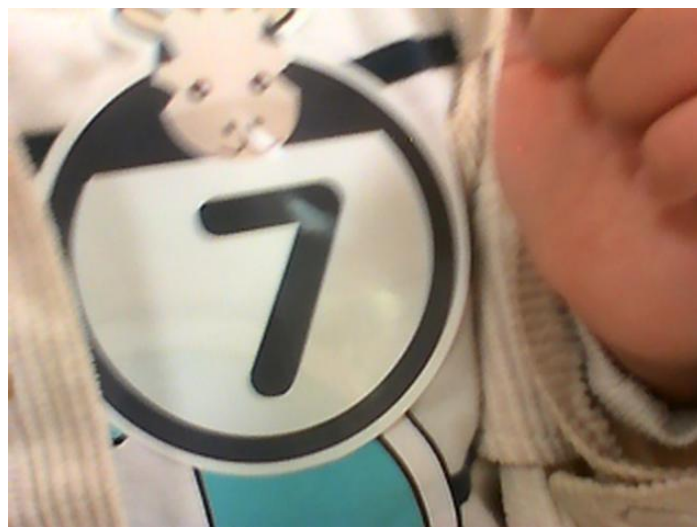


Figure 5.5.2 Children's ID Code Sticker Image

After the photography sessions, the researcher organised and coded all the images. Given children's limited technical skills, not all photographs were suitable for later use. Therefore, before moving on to discussion, the researcher reviewed the photographs with the children to check which images reflected their intentions. Photographs that did not align with children's expectations, such as blurred images, those obstructed by hands, or repeated shots have been excluded from later stages, based on joint decisions made with the children (see Figure 5.5.3).



Figure 5.5.3 Deleted Photo from Sophia (JK02)

### ***5.5.2 Tour Guiding***

In the Mosaic approach, child-led tours have been used as a way of allowing children to explain their experiences from their own perspectives while simultaneously acting as both photographers and guides (Clark & Moss, 2011). During these tours, children assume the dominant role, while the researcher listens attentively and follows their guidance. DeMarie and Ethridge (2006) argue that, compared with situations where children have relied solely on verbal accounts without photographic support, the use of photography enables young learners to articulate and communicate their kindergarten experiences more effectively. At the same time, adults are able to gain a deeper understanding of children's daily lives and social interactions through the combination of images and children's explanations.

In the present study, the tour method was adapted to minimise disruption to the ongoing music curriculum. Drawing on Stephenson's (2009) approach, tours were conducted after the photo-taking process had been completed, rather than during the lessons themselves. At this stage, children were invited to introduce and explain their photographs to the researcher, describing what each image represented and how their music lessons were organised. Through this process, children took on the roles of both tour guides and storytellers, using their photographs as prompts to convey their lived experiences of the music curriculum. The data generated from these photo-based tours

were subsequently used to analyse and summarise how the current music curriculum was experienced and understood from the children's perspectives.

### ***5.5.3 Voting***

Although voting is not part of the original Mosaic approach, it has been effectively used to elicit children's views in educational research (Hong, 2017). It is considered a child-friendly technique for capturing children's voices, as it allows them to make choices and express preferences in a simple and accessible way (Hill, 2006).

In previous studies, researchers adapted this technique in different ways. For example, Azunre and Sowrirajan (2021) combined voting with other participatory tools by asking children and parents to express their preferences through coloured stickers in a prioritisation exercise. Similarly, Stephenson (2009) invited children to place coloured stickers on photographs they had previously taken to indicate what they liked or disliked. In addition, Gabb and Singh (2015) noted that emoticons, such as smiley faces and crying faces, can be used as symbols of children's positive and negative emotions. These applications demonstrate that both colours and facial expressions can be used effectively in voting to engage children in expressing their preferences.

Building on previous research, the present study employed a voting method to explore what children liked and disliked in their music lessons. The photographs taken by the children in stage one (photography) represent the content, scenes, people, and materials of the curriculum, and the children voted on the elements within their own photographs. They were given a choice of using smiley-face and crying-face stickers to indicate their preferences, or alternatively using red and black heart stickers to represent 'likes' and 'dislikes' (see Figure 5.5.4). In practice, most children have chosen the emoticon stickers, while some have preferred to use the coloured heart stickers.



Figure 5.5.4 Images of voting stickers

This voting activity not only increased children’s interest and engagement in the research process but also allowed the researcher to gain a clearer understanding of children’s opinions on the key elements of the music curriculum. Following the voting sessions, the researcher conducted individual conversations with the children about the items they have chosen and the reasons behind their preferences (Sun et al., 2023). The data generated through the voting method have been used to analyse children’s preferences regarding the current music curriculum.

#### **5.5.4 Painting**

Drawing is often used in child-centered research as a communication tool to help children represent their ideas, feelings, and experiences visually, especially for those who are not yet confident in verbal expression (White et al., 2010; Bagnoli, 2009). As a familiar and non-threatening activity, it has been shown to stimulate children’s interest, support their active participation, and allow them more control over what and how they want to express (Punch, 2002; Mitchell, 2006). Researchers further argue that art-based activities, such as drawing and painting, are creative and playful approaches that can enhance children’s willingness to take part in research and enable adults to better understand their perspectives (Wiseman et al., 2019).

In this study, painting was used to invite children to construct and express their vision of an ideal music curriculum. In communicating this idea to the children, the Chinese term ‘mengxiang’ (dream) was used to encourage them to imagine the kind of music activities and classroom experiences they would most enjoy. Before the painting activity, the researcher prepared paper and colourful crayons. Children were encouraged to create pictures on the topic of ‘my dream music curriculum’, drawing

freely according to their imagination. After completing their drawings, the researcher talked with the children about what they have represented in their pictures (Sun et al., 2023).

However, according to Lowenfeld and Brittain's (1987) theory of children's drawing development, children aged 2-4 are generally in the scribbling stage, where their drawings consist mainly of random lines and marks without stable representational meaning. In a preliminary observation of junior classes (3-4 years old) children's work and through pilot study, all the children in this age group expressed that they could not draw.

Therefore, for junior classes children, the method was adapted into collage (Nomakhwezi Mayaba & Wood, 2015). Collage materials were provided based on elements identified in senior classes (5-6 years old) children's paintings, to allow younger children to construct their version of an ideal music class. In pilot study, this adaptation proved effective, as the younger children were able to complete the task and explain their ideas through collage.

For middle classes (4-5 years old) children, some required additional support. When they wished to draw something but did not know how, the researcher provided simple sketch examples to assist them without limiting their creativity. Senior classes children were able to complete their drawings independently and freely express their imagined music curriculum. The data obtained from the painting activity have been used to explore how children construct and express their vision of an ideal music curriculum.

### ***5.5.5 Conferencing***

In the Mosaic approach, child conferencing, also referred to as child interviewing, has been used as a way for researchers to access children's views through short, open-ended questions (Clark & Moss, 2011). In the previous step of the research, the

painting could only access children's own ideas. In order to further obtain children's perceptions of the ideas of others, as well as to make up for what children do not think of when they draw, the child conferencing use the form of children's group talking from Dockett and Perry's (2005) research.

In the present study, conferencing was organised in small groups of three to four children. The discussion was centred on the theme of '*my dream music curriculum*', and children were encouraged to talk about their ideas and comment on those of others. This group interaction allowed children to refine, expand, and sometimes challenge each other's views, thereby providing richer insights into their shared and differing perspectives.

However, only middle classes and senior classes children participated in these conferencing activities. Younger children (aged 3-4) from the junior class were not included, as they are still at an early stage of language development (Piaget, 2002). At this stage, their speech is typically limited to short utterances and simple sentence structures, which makes it difficult for them to engage in sustained discussions with others (Punch, 2002). In fact, during the pilot study I attempted to involve the junior class children, but they were unable to participate effectively in group discussions. By contrast, children in the middle and senior classes were able to use more complex sentences, participate in reciprocal exchanges, and build upon each other's ideas.

The data obtained from the conferencing sessions were used to complement the individual painting activity, providing further insights into how children collectively imagine and negotiate the construction of their ideal music curriculum.

## **5.6 Ethical Issues**

Ethics in research is commonly understood as a set of moral principles or standards that guide professional behavior, with the fundamental aim to 'do good and avoid harm' (Lichtman, 2013 p.56). In everyday life, this may involve fairness, honesty, and

responsibility toward others. In research, it extends to the protection of participants and the integrity of scholarly work. Although human subjects have been involved in studies for centuries, systematic codes of research ethics only began to emerge in the twentieth century, particularly after federal regulations and Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) were established in the United States (Lichtman, 2013). Research ethics serve to raise researchers' awareness of potential issues and guide them in addressing these, even though clear-cut answers are not always available (Alderson, 2005).

Scholars have drawn attention to the complexities of ethical practice in qualitative research. For instance, Hammersley and Traianou (2012) argue that ethical issues in educational research are inherently complex and cannot be resolved through the application of fixed rules. Therefore, ethical decision-making requires situated judgment that takes into account not only the relationship between researchers and participants but also wider responsibilities to colleagues, institutions, funders, and society at large. While they acknowledge the importance of ethical regulation, they caution against excessive bureaucratization that reduces ethics to formal compliance mechanisms such as consent forms. Instead, they emphasize that researchers must balance competing principles, exercise critical reflection, and prioritize the pursuit of worthwhile knowledge while safeguarding participants' rights and well-being. These discussions underscore that research ethics are not merely regulatory requirements but an ongoing commitment to critical reflection and responsible practice (Lichtman, 2013).

Ethical considerations are central when conducting research with young children (Eide & Winger 2005). This research project involves vulnerable participants which are young children between the age of 3 to 6 so the ethical issues must need to be taken seriously in this research (Bryman, 2016). The emphasis when researching with children should be on voluntary engagement, ensuring safety and comfort, respecting their assessment of the research's value, and implementing appropriate dissemination

strategies that minimize harm and maximize benefits (Skelton, 2008).

Ethical approval processes, such as applying to a Research Ethics Committee (REC), may be time-consuming but are essential for safeguarding child participants, ensuring compliance with evolving ethical standards, and protecting researchers from criticism or litigation (Alderson, 2005). Therefore, the study follows the ethical guidelines of Durham University (BERA, 2024), and the proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Durham University Ethics Committee to ensure that all research activities meet appropriate ethical standards prior to commencement (Appendix A).

This study involves four main ethical aspects: informed consent, voluntary participation, no harm, and confidentiality and anonymity.

### ***5.6.1 Informed Consent***

Although the concept of informed consent may appear straightforward, in some circumstances it is difficult to achieve (Lichtman, 2013). For example, it can be challenging to obtain genuine consent from minors. ‘In terms of informed consent, researchers need to explain the purpose and nature of their research clearly and unambiguously in their attempts to obtain informed consent, assent, or at the very least allow ‘informed dissent’ from the children themselves as well as adult gatekeepers’ (Morrow & Richards, 1996 p.101). In research with children, the provision of information is typically mediated by multiple ‘gatekeepers’. Within school or kindergarten settings, this usually involves approval from administrators, principals, directors, and teachers. Only after such negotiations can parents and children be formally invited to participate (Dockett et al., 2013). Therefore, with regard to the participants in this study, informed consent was addressed from the following aspects.

Firstly, I provided the kindergarten and teachers with an information sheet (Appendix B) and gave a brief oral introduction to the study, ensuring that they could raise any

questions for clarification through direct communication. As the study took place in the kindergarten, the consent of the institution and teachers was necessary, but the consent of the children's guardians was indispensable and a prerequisite for participation (Kirk, 2007). Therefore, after the kindergarten and teachers had given their consent (Appendix C and E), the parents or guardians of the children in the respective classes were invited to participate by completing the informed consent form prepared in advance. The class teachers assisted in distributing the information sheets (Appendix B) and consent forms (Appendix D) to be taken home by each child, and they also informed the parents about the study. Parents were encouraged to contact me directly if they had any questions.

In addition, while parents and guardians provided consent for their children's participation, children's own agreement was also considered essential (Nairn & Clarke, 2012). Even in cases where parental consent is given, potential participants such as children must retain the right to express their own views and decide whether participation aligns with their best interests (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005). Informed consent in research involving children and young people should reflect their own agency, rather than being determined solely by institutional 'gatekeepers' such as parents, teachers, or social workers. While gatekeepers often intervene under the guise of protection or management, such practices risk undermining children's autonomy by compelling participation or excluding them altogether. Heath et al. (2007) emphasize that as long as children are capable of understanding the research, they should have the right to independently consent or decline, and researchers must respect their decisions rather than deferring to gatekeepers' authority.

In line with previous principle, I referred to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), which emphasizes that children's consent must also be obtained. Children have the right to be informed about how their data will be used, and researchers are responsible for ensuring this transparency (Eide & Winger 2005). Since children were too young to fully understand written consent

(Alderson & Morrow, 2011), I developed a picture-based information sheet (Appendix F) and a child-friendly informed consent form (Appendix G). This approach reflects the view that attending to the interaction between images and text can be helpful when providing information about research participation to children (Dockett et al., 2013). Besides, the methods such as using diagrams, speech bubbles or pictures, employing large print, presenting information in short sections with subheadings or a question-and-answer format, and reviewing draft leaflets with children to gather their views can support children's understanding (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010).

For child participants, the explanation of the information sheet is a crucial step in supporting their understanding and capacity to provide informed consent. To achieve this, researchers must balance the challenge of offering explanations that are sufficiently clear without being overly simplified or reduced to a mere formality (Dockett et al., 2013).

In the consent form, children were invited to indicate their willingness to participate by using smiley or sad face stickers and they also provided their student number or name. Those who were able to write their student number did so themselves, while for those who could not, I recorded it on their behalf after obtaining their verbal assent (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). Importantly, the choice of sticker was made entirely by the children according to their own wishes. However, it is not only children's language but also their behaviors, emotional signals, and body language that serve as important indicators of agreement or disagreement, and that dissent requires no justification, must be respected, and genuine choices should be provided (Dockett et al., 2012).

Further, kindergartens and teachers have the right to be informed about the results of the study if they wish (Morrow & Richards, 1996). While no individual child's personal data will be disclosed, aggregated findings will be made available to

kindergartens and teachers upon request. Children are regarded as co-creators of the research outcomes, and the overall results carry important implications for kindergarten and music education practice. In addition, participants were informed that the conclusions of the study will be written up as part of my dissertation and made publicly accessible online, ensuring that kindergartens and teachers interested will have the opportunity to review the findings.

### ***5.6.2 Voluntary Participation***

Children's feelings need to be taken into account in research, and they have the right to participate as well as the right not to participate (Nairn and Clarke, 2012). However, ensuring voluntary participation requires going beyond formal consent in the context of research with young children (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

When invited to participate by preschool teachers or researchers, children may not feel able to refuse, so researchers must be alert to children's feelings of insecurity or fear during interviews (Sandberg et al., 2017). Besides, children may feel obliged to participate due to the authority of teachers, peer influence, or a desire to please adults. To minimize such pressures, researchers must provide children with clear and age-appropriate explanations, offer them simple ways to express willingness or refusal, and continually observe their behavior for signs of discomfort or reluctance (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

Another issue concerns the dynamic and evolving nature of research projects, which may deviate from their original direction and cause participants discomfort or unwillingness to continue. Therefore, informed consent obtained prior to the study cannot be regarded as final. Researchers must continue to check and respect children's willingness throughout the process, and immediately discontinue participation if a child shows any sign of reluctance (Lichtman, 2013).

Participation must be based on the child's own choice, and the process should allow

withdrawal at any time without negative consequences (Kirk, 2007). Therefore, this study fully respected the children's wishes and clearly informed them of their right to refuse participation or to withdraw at any time. There were five planned activities, and children were free to choose which ones they wished to join. During the activities, their preferences were continually respected, and any sign of reluctance resulted in the immediate termination of their participation without negative consequences.

### **5.6.3 No Harm**

According to the British Education Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines, researchers have a duty of care to anticipate potential harms and to take steps to minimise or manage any distress or discomfort during the research process (BERA, 2024). The distinction between 'harm and wrong' reminds us that ethical regulations are not merely about quantifying or minimizing risks, but also about respecting individual rights (King & Churchill, 2000, p.718). This means that avoiding harm is not only about protecting participants from measurable risks, but also about ensuring that their dignity and autonomy are safeguarded.

In the context of research with children, the danger of injury must be carefully considered (Graue & Walsh, 1998), as 'children have a right to feel safe' (Birbeck & Drummond, 2007, p.28). The more vulnerable the participants, the greater the responsibility on the researcher to ensure their protection (BERA, 2024). Child participants may face multiple risks: for example, discussing distressing topics may result in psychological harm; breaches of confidentiality may cause not only harm but also ethical wrongs; and flaws in informed consent procedures may undermine their autonomy (King & Churchill, 2000). If a child discloses information suggesting that they or others may be at risk, researchers also have a moral duty to share this with appropriate professionals who can ensure protection (Morrow, 2005).

Because children are particularly vulnerable, researchers must consider not only the prevention of physical injury but also the protection of children's emotional and

psychological well-being (Birbeck & Drummond, 2007). Because one stage of the research involves teachers in organising the music lessons, respect for both children and teachers is essential to avoid psychological harm. This includes valuing participants' ideas and suggestions and ensuring that they are treated with respect throughout the research process. Researchers further have an ethical responsibility to anticipate and address any negative emotions children may experience as a result of participation, such as conflict, threats to self-esteem, fear of failure, or embarrassment (Kirk, 2007).

In this study, avoiding harm first required attention to measurable risks. Particular care has been taken to ensure that the research environment is both familiar to the children and free from objects that might cause harm. The materials used, such as camera, crayons, and paper, are all non-toxic and harmless. In order not to interrupt the children's normal class schedule, the research activities were conducted during their free activity periods, including outdoor playtime and classroom-based area activities. To further minimise environmental risks, when all children were engaged in outdoor activities, the research sessions took place in their classroom art area. When the children were engaged in area activities indoors, the research was carried out in the art room, which was also a familiar environment and appropriate given the art-based nature of the study. In addition, all areas of the kindergarten were equipped with cameras to monitor the process, providing an extra layer of protection for the children.

Avoiding harm is not only about measurable risks, but also about safeguarding children's dignity and autonomy. As children are particularly vulnerable in research settings, researchers must respect their rights, perspectives, and emotional well-being (Graham et al., 2015). This means paying attention to both verbal and non-verbal cues of assent or dissent, and ensuring that participation remains voluntary at all times. Respect was also extended to teachers, especially given their role in organising music lessons, to prevent any psychological discomfort and to promote a collaborative

atmosphere. Children's ideas and suggestions, particularly their views on the music curriculum, were taken seriously, reinforcing their agency within the research process. In addition, the researcher carried an ethical responsibility to be prepared to manage any negative emotions that might arise, such as embarrassment, fear of failure, or threats to self-esteem, ensuring that children felt safe, respected, and empowered throughout the study.

#### ***5.6.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity***

It has been 'our duty to protect the privacy of participants' (Bryman, 2016, p.120), and this principle has been especially critical in research involving children, who have been considered a vulnerable group (Kirk, 2007). Protecting confidentiality has therefore been treated as a central ethical responsibility, not only to safeguard participants from harm but also to respect their dignity and autonomy (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Confidentiality means not disclosing to others the information provided by participants, and presenting research findings in a way that ensures individuals cannot be identified, primarily through anonymisation (Wiles et al., 2008). In line with the BERA ethical guidelines (2024), all data generated in this study have been anonymised or pseudonymised: the names of the kindergartens and participating children have been replaced with codes and pseudonyms.

As part of the research, children have taken photographs during their music classes, which have subsequently been printed and used in later stages of the study, such as guided tours and voting sessions. All photographs have been taken only with the informed consent of both parents and children, and children who did not wish to be photographed have been respected (Jarvis et al., 2014). In cases where photographs involving non-consenting children have been required for the research process, their faces have been pixelated before use. Explicit consent has also been obtained from parents and children to allow such anonymised images, including children's own photographs and voting records, to be included in the thesis. Furthermore, children's paper-based voting results and paintings have been scanned into digital form and

immediately destroyed in hard copy. To ensure data security, all materials have been stored in the researcher's OneDrive account, which has been protected by password access, thereby minimising risks of loss or unauthorised disclosure.

Data security has been prioritised to ensure compliance with the UK Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All digital data, including photographs stored on the camera's memory card, have been password-protected and transferred to an encrypted folder on a secure computer. Hard copies of children's drawings and printed photographs have been stored in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. This approach has aligned with recommended practices for secure data management, which include password protection, encryption, and secure locked storage (BERA, 2024).

### **5.7 Pilot Study**

Before commencing the main study, a pilot study was conducted to test the feasibility and suitability of the research design, data collection tools, and ethical procedures. The pilot took place in the same kindergarten where the main fieldwork was later implemented. At the time of the pilot, the kindergarten had recently welcomed ten student teachers who were responsible for organizing activities in five specialized classrooms: a dough workshop, an art classroom, a reading classroom, an outdoor graffiti workshop, and a music classroom. Each space was jointly managed by two student teachers in their final year of undergraduate study. The music classroom followed an Orff-based music curriculum, in which younger children (ages 3-4) engaged in musical listening and movement activities, while older children (ages 4-6) participated in instrumental ensembles using Orff instruments such as tambourine and hand bells.

Following discussions with the principal and supervising teachers, permission was granted for the pilot to take place within the kindergarten's regular activity schedule organized by the two student teachers. As part of this arrangement, each class in the

kindergarten attended one of five themed classrooms once a week. The sessions were held on weekday mornings and afternoons, each lasting one hour. In total, nine sessions were conducted weekly across the nine classes in the kindergarten. This regular schedule provided a structured context for selecting suitable groups for the pilot. After obtaining consent from parents, one music classroom class each from the junior, middle, and senior age groups was chosen, and a total of seven children participated. Before the sessions began, the children were introduced to the researcher and were taught how to use digital cameras for the visual activities. After photographing the Orff-based music lessons, the participating children were invited to engage in the subsequent research activities. The pilot study spanned a one-week period.

During the pilot, the research methods were tested. The pilot revealed clear differences among age groups. The senior class children demonstrated strong expressive and artistic abilities and were able to articulate their ideas clearly and engaged confidently in the activities. The middle class children also expressed their ideas effectively but occasionally required assistance with drawing. In contrast, the junior class children experienced notable challenges. They were shy with unfamiliar adults, reluctant to participate in group discussions, and their parents expressed heightened concern for the children's well-being. The junior children's verbal communication was limited, often requiring additional prompts to clarify meaning. For example, when voting for their favourite aspects of the music class, they simply said "teacher", which required follow-up questions such as "Do you like when the teacher sings?" or "Do you like when the teacher plays the piano?" to determine their true preference.

In addition, the pilot study also considered the suitability of the research setting. The pilot study was conducted in the music classroom first, as the pilot sessions were part of regular music lessons. The initial intention was to provide children with an environment that would help them recall their music lesson experiences more vividly.

However, it was later found that the music classroom was too large, as it had been converted from a general public classroom rather than designed as a professional music room. Moreover, it lacked tables for activities such as voting and painting, which were essential to the study.

Since the research design required children to engage in painting, the art classroom was determined to be a more suitable environment for the main study. Although the music classroom better aligned with the theme of the music curriculum, it was too spacious and not conducive to painting activities. Additionally, the music classroom was located on a separate floor without any teachers' offices nearby, whereas the art classroom was situated opposite the teachers' office. This proximity allowed for prompt communication with other teachers in case of emergencies, thereby ensuring the children's safety.

These observations led to several methodological adjustments before the main study. The main study was therefore conducted in the art classroom. In the pilot study, children were able to carry out the remaining activities more effectively in the art classroom, and this change did not affect their ability to recall their music lessons. Since they had already taken photographs during the music classes, these images served as effective visual cues to help them recall their experiences during subsequent activities. Besides, the group discussion component was removed for the youngest age group, and the drawing activity was replaced with collage-making, which proved to be more accessible and engaging for them. During the pilot, the children showed enthusiasm for selecting and combining collage materials and often assigned their own meanings to visual elements. For instance, one child used a picture of a stool to represent a table. This highlighted the importance of clarifying the symbolic meaning of materials with children prior to data collection. Additionally, more time was planned for building rapport with the younger children and communicating with parents through class teachers to ensure trust and ethical transparency.

It is important to note that none of the visual or verbal materials from the pilot were retained for analysis. The participating student teachers, who were conducting their first independent music lessons, felt that their sessions were experimental and preferred that the resulting data not be included in the research record. Consequently, all photographs, drawings, and voting materials were deleted after the pilot. Nonetheless, the pilot study served a crucial role in confirming the feasibility of the methods and refining the procedures for the main study, ensuring that the final research design was developmentally appropriate, ethically sound, and effectively tailored to children's capacities for expression.

### **5.8 Sample**

A qualitative research design was adopted in this study to explore children's lived experiences and perspectives on the music curriculum in a kindergarten setting. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate when the purpose is to understand meanings, experiences, and social processes from the participants' own viewpoints (Saldana, 2011). In this context, the study sought to foreground children's voices, positioning them as active meaning-makers rather than passive recipients of adult-led educational processes.

This study has selected a public kindergarten as a case in a provincial capital city in southern China. A case study involves an in-depth exploration of a single, bounded unit, valued not for its statistical generalisability but for its capacity to generate rich, holistic, and nuanced insights into complex social phenomena within a specific context (Saldana, 2011). Public kindergartens in China have followed the *Kindergarten Education Guidelines (trial version)* (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2001), and therefore share a relatively unified teaching system across the country. The chosen kindergarten, here anonymised as Rosewood Kindergarten, has been regarded as representative of public kindergartens in a Chinese city. Rosewood Kindergarten was established in the early 19th century and has been one of the earliest kindergartens in China, with a history almost as long as the beginning of modern early

childhood education in the country.

Rosewood Kindergarten currently operates on two campuses. For the purposes of this study, the main campus has been selected, as it encompasses a larger number of classes and therefore offers greater representativeness. The main campus includes three grade levels (junior, middle, and senior), with three classes per grade, amounting to nine classes in total. Within each grade, one class has been randomly chosen for the pilot study, while the other two classes have been included in the main study. In terms of facilities for music lessons, each class has been equipped with a piano for teacher use and an interactive whiteboard. The main campus also houses a dedicated music classroom, which has served not only for special music lessons but also as a multifunctional hall for larger-scale public activities. The music classroom has been furnished with one piano, two loudspeakers, and a wide range of musical instruments for children. Therefore, selecting this kindergarten as the research site has been highly appropriate for exploring the Chinese kindergarten music curriculum from children's perspectives.

In order to improve and develop our knowledge about educational institutions and children's positions within them, it has been considered essential that the voices of participants at all levels have been heard, including those of young children whose perspectives should not be overlooked (Eide and Winger, 2005). Therefore, this study has involved children from all age groups in Chinese kindergartens, including junior, middle, and senior classes. According to the *Chinese Kindergarten Work Regulations and Procedures* (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2016), the number of children per class has generally been set at around 25 in junior classes (ages 3-4), 30 in middle classes (ages 4-5), and 35 in senior classes (ages 5-6).

In total, 83 children have participated in this study: 24 junior kindergartners, 28 middle kindergartners, and 31 senior kindergartners. The sample has comprised 48 girls and 35 boys across the six classes. Table 5.8.1 presents the pseudonyms, ID

codes, and class information of the participating children.

Table 5.8.1 Pseudonym and Class Information of Participating Children

ID Code	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Class Number
Junior Kindergartners (3-4 years old)				
JK01	Selina	Girl	3-4	Class 1
JK02	Sophia	Girl	3-4	Class 1
JK03	Susan	Girl	3-4	Class 1
JK04	Sybil	Girl	3-4	Class 1
JK05	Victoria	Girl	3-4	Class 1
JK06	Violet	Girl	3-4	Class 1
JK07	Winnie	Girl	3-4	Class 1
JK08	Edith	Girl	3-4	Class 1
JK09	Edward	Boy	3-4	Class 1
JK10	Donald	Boy	3-4	Class 1
JK11	David	Boy	3-4	Class 1
JK12	Daniel	Boy	3-4	Class 1
JK13	Clement	Boy	3-4	Class 1
JK14	Charles	Boy	3-4	Class 1
JK15	Nina	Girl	3-4	Class 2
JK16	Cara	Girl	3-4	Class 2
JK17	Molly	Girl	3-4	Class 2
JK18	Elsie	Girl	3-4	Class 2
JK19	Benjamin	Boy	3-4	Class 2
JK20	Basil	Boy	3-4	Class 2
JK21	Anthony	Boy	3-4	Class 2
JK22	Albert	Boy	3-4	Class 2
JK23	Alex	Boy	3-4	Class 2
JK24	Andrew	Boy	3-4	Class 2
Middle Kindergartners (4-5 years old)				
MK01	Francis	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK02	George	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK03	Gordon	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK04	Graham	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK05	Harry	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK06	James	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK07	John	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK08	Leonard	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK09	Louis	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK10	Martin	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK11	Matthew	Boy	4-5	Class 3
MK12	Lavinia	Girl	4-5	Class 3

MK13	Lily	Girl	4-5	Class 3
MK14	Lidia	Girl	4-5	Class 3
MK15	Maria	Girl	4-5	Class 3
MK16	Mary	Girl	4-5	Class 3
MK17	May	Girl	4-5	Class 3
MK18	Minnie	Girl	4-5	Class 3
MK19	Nancy	Girl	4-5	Class 3
MK20	Olive	Girl	4-5	Class 3
MK21	Rebecca	Girl	4-5	Class 3
MK22	Ruby	Girl	4-5	Class 3
MK23	Jasper	Boy	4-5	Class 4
MK24	Lucy	Girl	4-5	Class 4
MK25	Rachel	Girl	4-5	Class 4
MK26	Rose	Girl	4-5	Class 4
MK27	Rosalind	Girl	4-5	Class 4
MK28	Sarah	Girl	4-5	Class 4
Senior Kindergartners (5-6 years old)				
SK01	Amelia	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK02	Anne	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK03	Beatrice	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK04	Bessie	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK05	Catherine	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK06	Clara	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK07	Daisy	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK08	Emily	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK09	Emma	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK10	Evelyn	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK11	Grace	Girl	5-6	Class 5
SK12	Thomas	Boy	5-6	Class 5
SK13	Robert	Boy	5-6	Class 5
SK14	Max	Boy	5-6	Class 5
SK15	Miles	Boy	5-6	Class 5
SK16	Alice	Girl	5-6	Class 6
SK17	Elizabeth	Girl	5-6	Class 6
SK18	Helen	Girl	5-6	Class 6
SK19	Isabella	Girl	5-6	Class 6
SK20	Jane	Girl	5-6	Class 6
SK21	Josephie	Girl	5-6	Class 6
SK22	Julia	Girl	5-6	Class 6
SK23	Katherine	Girl	5-6	Class 6
SK24	Laura	Girl	5-6	Class 6
SK25	Winston	Boy	5-6	Class 6

SK26	William	Boy	5-6	Class 6
SK27	Victor	Boy	5-6	Class 6
SK28	Simon	Boy	5-6	Class 6
SK29	Oliver	Boy	5-6	Class 6
SK30	Norman	Boy	5-6	Class 6
SK31	Neol	Boy	5-6	Class 6

In addition to the demographic information, the study has also involved children’s participation in five specific activities designed to elicit their perspectives: photography, tour guiding, voting, painting, and conferencing. The number of participants has varied across activities, as participation has depended on children’s and guardians’ willingness. A total of 76 children have taken part in photography, producing 308 photographs; 72 children have joined tour guiding and an equal number have engaged in voting, which has generated 311 votes; 75 children have participated in painting, resulting in 79 drawings; and 48 children have taken part in conferencing, which has been conducted in 13 groups, with junior classes excluded from this activity due to their age.

### **5.9 Language Considerations**

Language is not merely a medium of communication but also a means of meaning construction and the expression of social identity (Cortazzi et al., 2011). With the increasing collaboration in research at both local and global levels, and the growing emphasis on knowledge transfer within national and international contexts, language differences play a significant role in shaping how research is conducted (Goitom, 2020). When research involves multiple languages or cultures, researchers should carefully consider how translation and interpretation may influence participants’ understanding of the research (BERA, 2024).

As this study was conducted within an English academic context but involved participants whose first language was Chinese, all communication with participants and the individuals responsible for providing informed consent was carried out in Chinese. Accordingly, the information sheets and consent forms were prepared in Chinese to ensure that participants and their guardians could fully understand the

purpose, procedures, and ethical implications of the study.

As the participants in this study were Chinese children, it was essential to recognise the complexity and potential of conducting multilingual research (Holmes et al., 2015). Employing a language familiar to the children during data collection can help to elicit more authentic perspectives and experiences (Cortazzi et al., 2011). During the data collection phase, all research stages were conducted in Chinese to ensure that children could express their thoughts and emotions in the language most familiar and natural to them. Similarly, data analysis was undertaken within the Chinese linguistic context to preserve the original meanings and nuances of participants' expressions, and to avoid the premature interpretive distortion that may occur during early translation.

At the stage of research reporting, as this doctoral thesis is written in English, all quotations originally expressed in Chinese were translated into English for presentation and analysis (Goitom, 2020). However, translating interviews conducted in participants' first languages into a dominant academic language entails a risk of meaning distortion or loss (Schembri & Jahić Jašić, 2022). Therefore, particular care was taken to ensure translation accuracy through iterative checking and adding explanations, aiming to preserve the children's intended meanings as faithfully as possible.

In terms of research ethics, this study followed the principle of researching multilingually (Holmes et al., 2015), with particular attention to children's linguistic rights and expressive autonomy. Recognising that language is central to how children construct and communicate meaning, participants were encouraged to use their mother tongue to ensure that their narratives were not constrained by linguistic proficiency (Cortazzi et al., 2011). During the processes of transcription and translation, the researcher assumed a dual role as both researcher and translator, maintaining transparency and reflexivity regarding this positionality throughout the

thesis. Furthermore, to minimise power imbalances associated with language choice, children's original voices have been faithfully represented in data excerpts and analysis, ensuring that their perspectives are not diluted by the dominance of English in academic discourse.

## **5.10 Data Analysis Method**

### ***5.10.1 Thematic Analysis***

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis approach that first emerged in the 1970s and gained prominence in the 1990s as qualitative research became more widely accepted (Squires, 2023). Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be widely applied across different epistemological positions and research questions, offering a useful approach for examining participants' perspectives, identifying similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights (Nowell et al., 2017). As described by Braun and Clarke (2006), it is a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative data sets. Additionally, it is particularly suitable for studies that involve large amounts of qualitative data requiring systematic organization, coding, and analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Moreover, thematic analysis provides a clear framework for identifying, analyzing, and describing themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This analytical approach was chosen because the aim of the study was not to construct a grounded theory, but rather to explore recurring themes and patterns in children's experiences and expressions related to their participation in early childhood music learning. Given the complexity and richness of the data collected in this study, which involved five different research methods, 83 participating children, and over 100,000 Chinese characters of transcribed text, thematic analysis was selected as the most appropriate qualitative approach. This method was applied to analyze the qualitative data derived from children's responses in photographic activities, voting tasks,

artworks, and group discussions, allowing the researcher to identify and interpret recurring patterns of meaning across these multiple sources.

### ***5.10.2 Data Types and Preparation***

In line with the method framework described in Section 5.3, multiple child-centred research activities were employed in this study, and each method generated different types of data. The photography activity produced photographs of classroom music lessons taken by children from their own perspectives. The tour guiding activity generated audio recordings in which children introduced and explained their current music curriculum based on the photographs they had taken. The voting activity produced photographs of the children's sticker-based voting results, along with audio recordings of their verbal explanations of their choices. The painting and collage activities generated visual images of children's artwork and audio recordings of their descriptions of these drawings or collages. Finally, the conferencing sessions produced audio data of children sharing and negotiating their ideas collectively.

Although various types of data were collected, only the children's verbal data were included in the formal analysis. Specifically, the guided tour recordings were used to examine how Chinese children perceived and experienced their current kindergarten music curriculum (presented in Chapter 6). The recordings of voting explanations were analysed to explore children's preferences and evaluations of existing music lessons (presented in Chapter 7). Finally, the audio data from the painting descriptions and conferencing sessions were employed to investigate children's imagined and ideal forms of music education (presented in Chapter 8).

All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher before analysis, with a focus on accurately capturing the children's spoken expressions during the research activities. Anticipating that some expressions might later be difficult to interpret without the opportunity for clarification, the researcher sought immediate clarification whenever a child's meaning was unclear. Both the children's clarifications and the

researcher's follow-up questions were included in the transcripts to ensure accuracy and minimise potential misinterpretations.

As the children communicated in Chinese, all transcripts were retained and analysed in their original language to preserve authenticity and contextual nuances. The subsequent qualitative analysis was therefore conducted using the Chinese transcriptions. For inclusion in the thesis, selected excerpts were translated into English by the researcher. The translations aimed to convey the children's intended meanings as faithfully as possible while maintaining readability in English.

The transcription and presentation of excerpts in this thesis follow established qualitative research conventions in alignment with APA guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2020). Only a limited set of notations was employed to ensure clarity and consistency. Specifically, [...] indicates omitted words, [ ] marks substituted information like names, and parentheses ( ) provide clarified, or explanatory insertions. No additional transcription symbols were used. These conventions were adopted to maintain readability while remaining faithful to the children's original speech.

For documentation purposes, photographs taken by children, voting pictures, and children's art work were retained as supplementary visual records. In these images, the children's faces were covered with stickers rather than mosaics, as stickers appeared more child-friendly and avoided the potentially negative associations of pixelated faces. To ensure confidentiality and ethical integrity, each child was assigned a unique identification code, which was used consistently across all types of data. All digital files were labelled with anonymous codes, organised systematically, and stored in password-protected folders accessible only to the researcher.

### ***5.10.3 Thematic Coding Process***

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the transcribed data, following the

six-step model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006 p.87). This process involved:

- (1) Familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of the Chinese transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the children's ideas and expressions.
- (2) Generating initial codes by identifying meaningful segments across the transcripts that captured children's perspectives and experiences.
- (3) Searching for themes by grouping related codes into potential thematic clusters.
- (4) Reviewing themes to ensure coherence within each theme and clear distinctions between them.
- (5) Defining and naming themes through reflective interpretation of the children's voices in relation to the research questions.
- (6) Producing the final thematic framework and analytical narrative that connected the themes to the broader conceptual understanding of children's perspectives in education.

The coding was conducted manually in Chinese to preserve the authenticity of the children's expressions. During the process, the researcher engaged in iterative and reflexive analysis, repeatedly revisiting both the transcripts and preliminary codes to refine emerging patterns. The development of themes was primarily inductive, allowing meanings to emerge from the children's words, but it was also informed by the study's theoretical framework of participatory children's research.

#### ***5.10.4 Software Support: NVivo 15***

The Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) NVivo 15 (Lumivero, 2025) was used to assist in organizing and managing the data. NVivo is capable of processing diverse data types and is widely recognized for enhancing the transparency, rigor, and efficiency of qualitative research (Edhlund & McDougall, 2018). Researchers use CAQDAS to support a wide range of research designs and

most commonly to analyze data collected through interviews, focus groups, documents, field notes, and open-ended survey responses (Woods et al., 2016). The transcribed files were imported into NVivo to facilitate systematic coding, categorisation, and theme development. The software enabled efficient organisation of the large volume of textual data, supported hierarchical node structures, and allowed convenient retrieval and comparison of coded excerpts (Mortelmans, 2025). In addition, such features further improve the transparency and traceability of the analytical process, ensuring a more systematic and auditable approach to qualitative data analysis (Hutchison et al., 2010).

It is important to note that NVivo served as a technical aid rather than a replacement for interpretation. All coding decisions and thematic constructions were made by the researcher through iterative engagement with the transcripts. NVivo's functions primarily supported data management and visual representation, while the interpretation of meaning remained grounded in the researcher's analytical judgement. This integration of human interpretation and software support contributed to the overall credibility, consistency, and transparency of the qualitative analysis (Bringer et al., 2004).

#### ***5.10.5 Coding Procedures***

The analytical process began with the transcription of all audio recordings into textual form. Each transcript was carefully checked for accuracy against the original recordings. As only the transcribed texts were included in the formal analysis, the NVivo 15 software was used to facilitate the organisation and management of these Chinese-language transcripts. All coding was conducted directly in Chinese, the language used by the participants, to preserve the authenticity and nuance of the children's original expressions. Translation into English was carried out only during the writing stage, ensuring that analytical decisions were based on the original linguistic meanings rather than translated interpretations.

The coding process was guided by the structure of the study and the aims of each research method. Specifically, the guided tour recordings were used to explore how Chinese children perceived their current kindergarten music curriculum; the voting explanations focused on their preferences of the current kindergarten music curriculum; and the painting descriptions and group conferencing sessions were analysed to investigate their ideal kindergarten music curriculum. Corresponding to these three areas, the researcher developed three overarching thematic categories: children's perspectives on the current music curriculum (Chapter 6); children's preferences in the current music curriculum (Chapter 7); children's perspectives on the ideal music curriculum (Chapter 8).

The coding was conducted in several iterative stages. First, free nodes were created in NVivo 15 to capture children's spontaneous expressions, ideas, and feelings across the transcripts without pre-defined categories. These nodes reflected the initial, data-driven observations emerging directly from children's speech. Second, through an inductive process of categorisation and comparison, similar free nodes were grouped together to form broader categories that represented emerging patterns or shared meanings. These were organised into tree nodes, which reflected higher-level relationships among codes and formed the basis for each thematic area. Finally, the researcher refined and synthesised the categories into core nodes, which represented the major themes established for this study.

The final thematic structure was conceptualised through an iterative process of refining and integrating categories. To enhance transparency, an illustrative example of the coding process is presented in Table 5.10.1 below, demonstrating how children's verbal expressions on their preferences were coded and developed into sub-themes and overarching themes.

Table 5.10.1 Example of the Coding Process for Children’s Preferences in the Current Music Curriculum

Raw Data Excerpt (Translated)	Initial Code	Sub-theme	Core Theme
“ <i>[I vote for him because] I want to give this child some encouragement. He usually gets distracted in class, but today he was very serious</i> ” (SK02, Anne).	Peer behaved serious in class.	Peer’s Behavioral Preference	Preferences for Peers
“ <i>[I gave ‘like sticker’ for] my classmates because they are very serious in class</i> ” (MK09, Louis).			
“ <i>Because we are good friends, we usually play together, so I gave her a smiley face</i> ” (SK21, Josephie).	Friends can play together.	Peer’s Companionship Preference	
“ <i>In the fourth picture I like the television, because the television can also provide knowledge</i> ” (SK04, Bessie).	Television provides knowledge.	Functionality of Teaching Tools	Preferences for Teaching Tools and Materials
“ <i>This is the piano score, it can be sung. A music score should be praised, and it lets the teacher play nicely and more clearly</i> ” (JK10, Donald).	Piano score helps teacher to play the piano.		
“ <i>Because teacher can teach us how to sing, let us choose the songs we want, and even sings together with us</i> ” (SK21, Josephie).	Teacher can teach music.	Teacher’s Instructional Behavior Preference	Preferences for Teachers
“ <i>Because the space is big. We run around and bump into each other, falling down</i> ” (SK25, Winston).	The space of classroom is too big.	Comfort for Learning Environment	Preferences for Learning Environment
“ <i>I don’t like it. The classroom is too small</i> ” (SK12, Thomas).	The space of classroom is too small.		
“ <i>[I like] moving with the music</i> ” (SK31, Neol).	Enjoy moving activities.	Activity Content Preference	Preferences for Music Curriculum Content
“ <i>I enjoyed their performance. They performed very well</i> ” (MK18, Minnie).	Enjoy peers’ performances.		

This coding process was not fixed or linear but rather iterative and reflective. The researcher continually revisited the transcripts, re-examining the initial codes and categories in light of emerging insights and new connections across the data. Each round of reading and reflection contributed to refining, merging, or re-defining codes to ensure that the analytical structure remained closely aligned with children’s own meanings and the overall research aims. NVivo facilitated this recursive process by

allowing the researcher to track the frequency and co-occurrence of codes, visualise thematic relationships, and identify which categories were most frequently discussed by participants. Through these cycles of interpretation, verification, and refinement, a robust thematic framework was developed that faithfully represented the richness and complexity of children's perspectives.

## **Chapter 6 Children's Perspectives on the Current Music Curriculum**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Music curriculum as an integral component of kindergarten curriculum, it not only stimulates children's creativity and expressive abilities but also plays a unique role in emotional expression, social interaction, and the development of cultural identity (Elliott, 1993; Hansen, 1994; Røyseng & Varkøy, 2014). Previous studies have indicated that children's active participation in kindergarten music curriculum enables them to construct personal meanings, thereby deepening their engagement and learning experiences (Burton, 2011). Against this backdrop, exploring how children themselves perceive and experience the music curriculum is of great significance for improving early childhood music education.

In this chapter, 'photography' and 'tour guiding' methods from the Mosaic Method (Clark & Moss, 2011) were employed to capture Chinese children's authentic perspectives of their current music curriculum. During their regular music lessons, children were invited to use a child-friendly camera to freely document aspects of the class they considered meaningful or interesting. Subsequently, they assumed the role of 'tour guides' to introduce their photographs and explain their interpretations to the researcher. This method not only granted children the agency to articulate their own views but also provided a more child-centered pathway for understanding their experiences of the music curriculum.

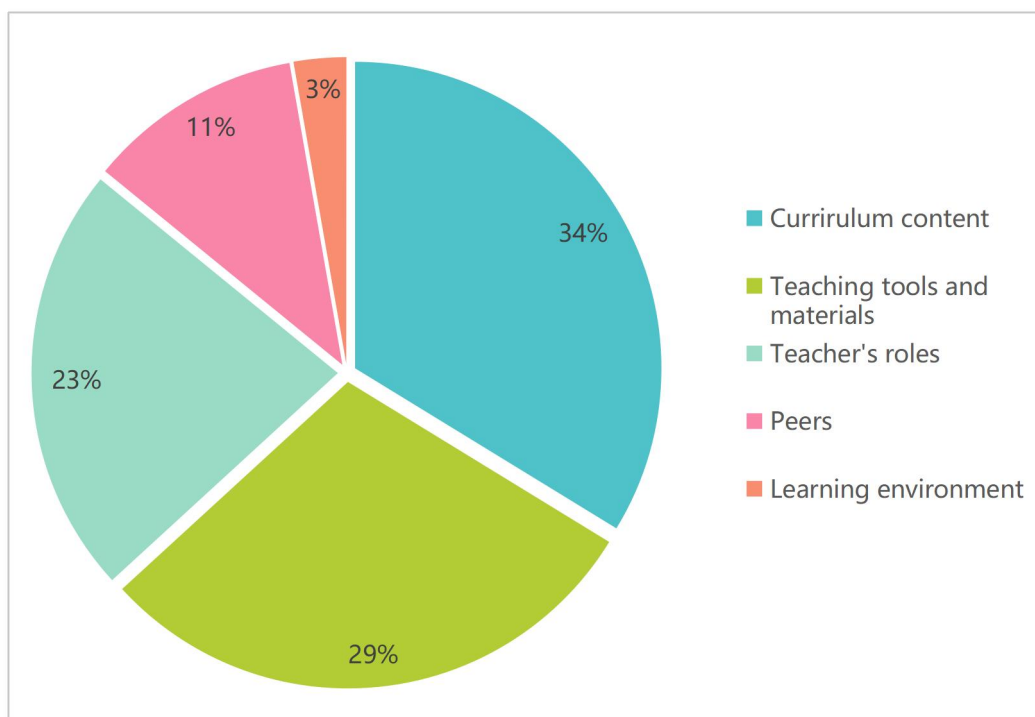


Figure 6.1.1 Proportional Distribution of Kindergarten Music Curriculum Themes

Through free coding of the children’s narratives about their photographs, a total of 322 valid codes were generated and categorized into five overarching themes. According to Figure 6.1.1, the analysis reveals that curriculum content receives the greatest attention, accounting for 34% of the codes. This is followed by teaching tools and materials (29%), teachers’ roles (23%), peers (11%), and learning environment (3%). The differences in proportion suggest the particular ways in which children chose to represent their music class experiences through the camera and their narratives. Acting as ‘tour guides’ of their own music lessons, the children highlighted curriculum content and learning materials most vividly, while also bringing teachers and peers into the picture as significant human elements. Although mentioned less frequently, the learning environment still surfaced as part of their descriptions, indicating that the setting was not absent from their perspectives but played a subtler role in how they framed and narrated their music lessons.

Table 6.1.1 below presents the five main themes of the current Chinese kindergarten music curriculum from children’s perspectives, along with their corresponding sub-themes. The table illustrates how each theme is further categorized into specific

dimensions, providing a clearer framework for analyzing the characteristics of the curriculum. In the following sections, each of the five themes will be explored in detail to illuminate how children themselves perceive and make sense of the current Chinese kindergarten music curriculum.

Table 6.1.1 Thematic Framework of Children’s Perspectives on the Current Music Curriculum

Theme	Sub-theme
Curriculum Content	Singing Activities Performance Activities Rhythm and Movement Activities Dance Activities Performance Area Activities Instrumental Learning Music Appreciation Music Games Preparatory Activities Large-scale Performances Parent Involvement Activities
Teaching Tools and Materials	Teacher’s Instructional Tools Students’ Learning Tools Other Classroom Materials
Teachers’ Roles	Instructor Organizer Supporter
Peers	Learners Performers Distractors
Teaching Environment	Classroom Decorations Living Areas Learning Space

## 6.2 Curriculum Content

Among children’s accounts of the music curriculum, curriculum content emerged as one of the most salient themes. Analysis of the narratives yielded 110 references related to curriculum content, which encompass a wide variety of sub-themes (see Figure 6.2.1): singing, performance, rhythm and movement, dance, performance area, instrumental learning, music appreciation, music games, preparatory activities,

large-scale performances and parent involvement activities. This indicates that the current music curriculum is diverse in form and scope from children’s perspectives.

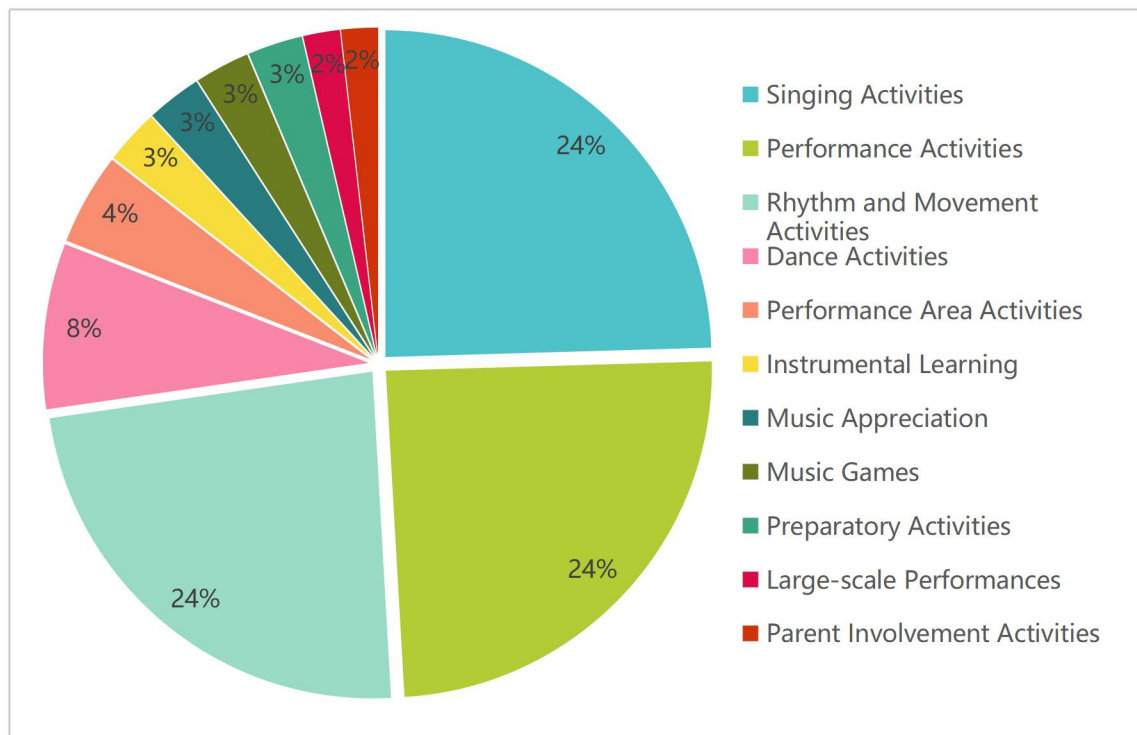


Figure 6.2.1 Proportional Distribution of Curriculum Content Themes

However, the distribution of frequencies demonstrates that the most commonly mentioned sub-themes are singing activities, performance activities, and rhythm and movement activities which are cited at the same rate (24%). Together, these three sub-themes accounted for nearly three-quarters of all references, suggesting that they occur most frequently in daily music lessons and thus occupy a central position in children’s descriptions.

By contrast, activities such as dance, instrumental learning, and music appreciation appeared only occasionally, reflecting the relatively limited presence of these forms within the curriculum. This suggests that while the content of music curriculum is varied, only a small number of activity types feature prominently in practice.

### 6.2.1 Singing Activities

Data analysis shows that singing activities occupy a central position in children’s

musical learning with 27 references and the first association they make with music lessons. Across four guiding with children, the term ‘singing’ appears frequently. This high recurrence indicates that singing is not only one of the most common organizational forms in daily classrooms but also one of the most direct and memorable aspects of children’s musical learning.

A large number of children directly identified singing as the core content of music lessons. Many gave brief and direct responses, such as “*singing*” (JK06, Violet) or “*They were singing*” (MK24, Lucy). These simple statements suggest that, in children’s experience, singing is a highly standardized activity.

Some children emphasized the teacher’s role and classroom details. For example, “*The teacher [were] playing the piano [and] teaching us [the song] about rain and thunder*” (MK02, George), “*I took a photo of teacher, [who was] teaching us to sing. The fifth photo I took is girls singing with the teacher*” (MK25, Rachel), and “*The teacher was playing the piano and teaches us to sing*” (MK27, Rosalind). These accounts indicate that teachers not only provide accompaniment and demonstration but also participate in joint singing with children, making singing a collaborative, teacher-child musical practice.

Some children recalled singing experiences in performance contexts. For instance, “*During music classes, some children are selected to sing on the front. Rest children remain seated below. The teacher leads [us] singing on the [podiums]*” (SK20, Jane) ; “*When we went to the fifth floor (music room) to watch performances [...] [some children] held a microphone and sang while the music played*” (SK21, Josephie). These descriptions show that singing activities are not limited to routine classroom practice but also extend to performance situations with an audience and stage-like context.

Overall, children’s diverse descriptions of singing activities highlight their central role in music lessons. Singing is not only the most common form of musical activity but

also the music lesson experience most easily recognized and recalled by children. Moreover, it is far from being a mere vocal learning and expression. Through teacher guidance and the collective classroom atmosphere, singing forms a comprehensive musical experience. This multidimensional participation allows singing to serve both fundamental pedagogical functions and avenues for emotional expression and self-presentation, securing its irreplaceable position within children's overall musical experiences.

### ***6.2.2 Performance Activities***

Among the various sub-themes of curriculum content, performance activities are one of the most frequently mentioned by children, with 27 references which is the same with singing activities. This proportion indicates that performance is a highly representative component of children's music lessons. Unlike large-scale performance, the performances described by children in this theme primarily took place at the classroom podium, where teachers organized the activity and invited children to come forward to present.



Figure 6.2.2 Photographing by Miles (SK15), Photo 3

The original accounts consistently emphasized the scenario of 'going to the front' or 'going to the podium' to perform. As shown in Figure 6.2.2, the terms 'front' and

'podium' described by the children, both refer to the podium area where the teacher usually conducts lessons. For example, some child explained, *"This is the teacher leading the children in a performance on the podium"* (SK21, Josephie); *"I took the photo that teacher were inviting children to performance in the front"* (MK15, Maria); *"Teacher sometimes invites some children to go up to the podium [...] to sing"* (SK18, Helen). Similarly, *"In music class, the teacher usually arranges for some children to come forward and sing"* (SK20, Jane).



Figure 6.2.3 Photographing by Clara (SK06), Photo 6

Several children described children's desire to participate in a performance, often by raising their hands to signal their willingness. For example, *"They raised their hands [waiting for] performance"* (MK21, Rebecca); *"[They were] watching the teacher and raising their hands"* (MK23, Jasper). These accounts illustrate the crucial organizational role of teachers, as well as the ways in which children gained opportunities to participate through volunteering or being selected.



Figure 6.2.4 Photographing by Lily (MK13), Photo 6

Children also described the specific forms of performance, most of which centered on singing, dancing and playing musical instruments. For instance, *“The children were singing at the podium”* (JK13, Clement), *“They were performing in the front, performing the song we learned today”* (MK08, Leonard), and *“We were singing and dancing”* (JK03, Susan). In some cases, musical instruments were integrated into the performances, as in *“What I photoed is [two children] went to the podium together. [They were] singing, using tambourines and hand bells”* (MK25, Rachel) and according to Figure 6.2.4: *“[Two children] were singing. [They were using] the instruments”* (MK13, Lily). These examples demonstrate that performance was not only a vocal activity but also incorporated body movement and simple instrumental accompaniment.

In sum, performance activities in the music curriculum are characterized by their classroom-based nature. Chinese kindergarten music curriculum was organized by teachers, conducted at the podium, and involved both individual performances and collective observation. These activities provide children with opportunities to display their singing, dancing, and instrumental skills they learned from music lessons while also enabling them to experience being recognized and to engage with peers. Consequently, performance activities occupy a central position in children’s

experiences of the music curriculum, serving both educational and socio-emotional functions.

### ***6.2.3 Rhythm and Movement Activities***

In children’s descriptions, rhythm and movement activities represent another frequently occurring and central component of music lessons. In this study, these activities were coded 26 times, accounting for approximately 24% of all music activity codes, similar to singing and performance activities. Through imitation, clapping, walking, and gestures, children concretize musical rhythm and movement. These activities provide a direct experience of musical timing while enhancing bodily coordination and collective participation.



Figure 6.2.5 Photographing by Sophia (JK02), Photo 3

‘Clapping’ is the most frequently mentioned form of movement for junior kindergarteners like Figure 6.2.5 shown. Many respondents described children clapping during class, such as “clapping” (JK01, Selina), “They were clapping” (JK18, Elsie), and “Games. Clapping (playing clapping games)” (JK24, Andrew). These simple movements indicate that clapping is not only a direct way for children to participate in musical activities but also an important means to feel rhythm and express musical emotions.



Figure 6.2.6 Photographing by William (SK26), Photo 7

Older children also mentioned imitating movements and walking to experience rhythm, such as *“Walking steps”* (SK28, Simon), *“Posing movements”* (SK01, Amelia), *“Singing, dancing, and gesture activities”* (SK02, Anne), and *“Acting as little soldiers... must stand correctly in position. Doing movements and walking”* (SK26, William) like Figure 6.2.6 shown. These activities help children practice rhythm control while enhancing bodily coordination and teamwork, making music learning more interactive and practical.

Some children referred to more comprehensive movement experiences, such as *“We were all doing exercises”* (JK16, Cara), and *“They were clapping and singing”* (JK10, Donald). These descriptions indicate that rhythm and movement activities are often combined with singing, dancing, or other motions, forming a multidimensional musical movement experience in which children perceive musical structure, rhythm changes, and the enjoyment of movement.

All in all, children’s descriptions of rhythm and movement activities highlight their significance in music lessons. Importantly, the complexity of rhythm and movement activities corresponds to developmental stages, with younger children engaging in basic clapping tasks and older children undertaking more complex forms. These activities are both foundational and practical, constituting an indispensable component

of children’s musical learning experiences.

#### **6.2.4 Dance Activities**

In this study, dance activities were coded nine times, accounting for approximately 8% of all music activities codes. Children participate in dance by imitating teacher movements, moving freely, and engaging in collective performances. These activities enrich the expressive dimension of music lessons while enhancing children’s bodily coordination and enjoyment.



Figure 6.2.7 Photographing by Lucy (MK24), Photo 5      Figure 6.2.8 Photographing by Grace (SK11), Photo 7

Some children directly described that dance activities take place during music lessons, like *“We do singing, dancing, and gesture activities”* (SK02, Anne), and *“We also dance”* (SK22, Julia). As shown in Figure 6.2.7, a child described: *“In this photo, we were dancing”* (MK24, Lucy). Besides, some children described learning dance through imitation of the teacher’s movements, such as (see Figure 6.2.8) *“This is teacher. [I] took a photo of teacher dancing”* (SK11, Grace), *“[Teacher] teaches us singing and dancing”* (SK19, Isabella). Children also mentioned freely expressing dance movements in class: *“When dancing happily, I feel very happy, moving arms and legs”* (SK20, Jane).

Collectively, children’s descriptions indicate that dance holds a significant role in

music lessons. Through teacher guidance, free expression, and collective performance, dance enriches classroom expression, promotes bodily coordination, emotional expression, and group participation, making it an indispensable part of children's musical learning.

### 6.2.5 Performance Area Activities

Within the children's accounts of the music curriculum, performance area activities were mentioned five times, accounting for 4% of all codes related to curriculum content. The performance area is an important component of daily independent play in kindergarten, typically operating as part of zone-based activities. Children can autonomously decide whether to participate and what to perform in the performance area. Unlike classroom-based performances led by teachers, activities in the performance area are primarily initiated and organized by the children themselves. They are free to choose the instruments, props, and forms of expression, as well as to arrange roles such as performers and audience members. This autonomy makes the performance area a meaningful space for musical expression, creativity, and peer interaction. Here is a photo of the performance area taken by a child (see Figure 6.2.9) and the four characters written on the blackboard mean *Dream Theatre*:



Figure 6.2.9 Photographing by Rachel (MK25), Photo 8

Children's voices demonstrate both the structure and diversity of such experiences.

Some child described: *“The performance area is for performing. First we choose the instruments... then we arrange the chairs and invite the audiences”* (MK24, Lucy), *“This is the performance area. They were holding hand bells, the keyboard, and jingle bells. The [child] was holding a basket”* (MK28, Sarah), *“When I perform, I play with [two friends]. We each hold a microphone and sing one line each”* (SK21, Josephie), which illustrates children’s awareness of the performance process and emphasizes cooperation in performance. A different child highlighted frequency of participation by saying: *“I have only watched [performance in the performance area] twice”* (MK01, Francis).

In sum, although performance area activities appeared less frequently in the children’s accounts, they embody a unique form of child-led musical engagement. The performance area empowers children to take the lead in designing and enacting performances, thereby expanding the modes of musical expression beyond teacher-directed instruction. This not only enriches the diversity of the music curriculum but also supports children’s aesthetic appreciation, collaborative skills, and social development.

### ***6.2.6 Instrumental Learning***

Instrumental learning was mentioned three times in children’s accounts, representing 3% of all curriculum content codes. Although the proportion is relatively small, these references reflect children’s specific experiences of playing and learning instruments during music lessons. As illustrated in a child’s photograph (Figure 6.2.10), the teacher was using a tambourine while conducting the music lesson, demonstrating how instrumental activities were integrated into classroom teaching.



Figure 6.2.10 Photographing by Minnie (MK18), Photo 4

Several children emphasized that instrumental activities were often introduced and modeled by the teacher. For instance, one child explained: “*The teacher [...] also teaches us to play instruments*” (SK28, Simon). Another described observing the teacher’s demonstration: “*[The teacher] was playing music. [She was holding a] tambourine*” (MK23, Jasper). Such accounts suggest that the teacher’s role in introducing and guiding instrument use was central to children’s instrumental experiences.

Besides, one child explained the learning process with teacher: “*The teacher did this with the [wooden clappers], and we did [it] too. And when the teacher shook [...] the maracas, we shook them as well*” (MK09, Louis). The same child also expressed his enjoyment of instruments: “*In the music room there are so many instruments we have learned. One instrument is the wooden clappers. And also the maracas. The wooden clappers and maracas are fun. And the jingle bells*” (MK09, Louis). These descriptions highlight not only the diversity of instruments but also the pedagogical approach in which teachers modeled instrument use.

In summary, although instrumental learning appeared infrequently in the data, children’s accounts reveal its role in enriching the music curriculum by introducing diverse sound-making tools and offering opportunities for rhythm practice, imitation,

and enjoyment. Instrumental activities thus complement singing and performance, supporting children's sensory engagement and musical exploration.

### **6.2.7 Music Appreciation**

Music appreciation was coded three times, accounting for 3% of all references to curriculum content. The music appreciation in music curriculum mainly consisted of two aspects: listening to music by teachers and appreciating musical performances by peers.

For instance, one child described simply “[*Children were*] sitting here and listening to music [*that the teacher plays*]” (JK14, Charles), while another noted “*Children were watching the performance*” (JK23, Alex). Similarly, a child explained that they were “*Watching the performance*” during class (MK16, Mary). These responses suggest that music appreciation, as perceived by children, involves both auditory and visual engagement with music.

### **6.2.8 Music Games**

In children's accounts, music games were coded three times, representing 3% of the total references. Although the proportion was relatively small, children's descriptions indicated that music games often appeared in short and flexible forms, usually embedded within other activities. In my joint documentation of the recorded lessons with children, music games did not occur. However, some children recalled from their regular music lessons that such games were occasionally incorporated.

For example, one child explained “*Singing and passing the ball*” (SK29, Oliver), showing how play was integrated into singing activities. Another child mentioned that “*During break time we play some [music] games*” (SK05, Catherine), suggesting that music games sometimes served as a relaxing or transitional activity. Similarly, a child simply noted “[*During music class*] we play this kind of game” (SK13, Robert), which illustrates the presence of playful elements in their music lessons.

As a whole, music games contributes to creating an engaging classroom atmosphere, encouraged children's active participation, and provided a playful pathway into music learning. At the same time, when integrated into other contexts such as break-time activities, music games also offered children opportunities to relax, interact socially, and sustain their interest in musical experiences beyond formal instruction.

### **6.2.9 Preparatory Activities**

The theme of preparatory activities appeared in 3% of the overall data, corresponding to three references. Preparatory activities generally served as an introductory or transitional stage before the start of formal music lessons, helping children to focus and engage with the upcoming content.

For instance, one child explained: "*The children were ready (the children sat upright in their seats, ready for the class)*" (JK19, Benjamin), indicating a moment of collective readiness before clapping or singing began. Another child remarked: "*I know it, this is the Forbidden City*" (SK25, Winston), suggesting that contextual or situational introductions were sometimes included to stimulate interest and introduce the music class content. Similarly, a child reported: "*The teacher told us how the music [...] was created*" (SK19, Isabella), reflecting how teachers used the preparatory stage to provide background knowledge.

Although mentioned less frequently than other activities, preparatory activities plays an important role in supporting transitions, capturing attention, and creating a meaningful learning atmosphere.

### **6.2.10 Large-scale Performances**

Two references were made to this theme, representing 2% of the total, highlighting its marginal presence in children's overall curriculum experience. Large-scale performances are typically organized by kindergartens during special occasions, such as Children's Day, providing children with opportunities to showcase their musical

and dance skills. In children's recollections, such events were described as memorable occasions that extended beyond everyday classroom activities.

For example, one child stated: *"It should be during Children's Day. [...] I like it. I feel it is lively under the stage"* (SK20, Jane), reflecting the excitement and lively atmosphere experienced during large-scale performances. Another child recalled: *"Children's Day is coming soon. We used to perform during Children's Day, back when I was in the junior class, but later it was canceled"* (SK13, Robert), indicating that while such events are traditional, their cancellation meant that only the senior kindergartners described large-scale performances.

In conclusion, although large-scale performances are infrequently mentioned, they offer children opportunities for self-expression, emotional engagement, and social interaction.

### **6.2.11 Parent Involvement Activities**

Parent involvement activities were mentioned twice, representing 2% of the total themes. Although it is the least frequent theme, parent involvement in music lessons can still influence children's learning experiences. These references emerged from children's recollections of previous music lesson activities in which parents participated.

For instance, one child recalled: *"One time a parent came [...] for a music class. She taught well. It was about the Three Little Pigs. [...] [It's not fun] because we should walk around frequently. It's fun because we could use our imagination"* (SK17, Elizabeth), indicating that sometimes parents not only participate in kindergarten music class teaching but also help stimulate children's interest and creativity. Another reference noted: *"Some parents can teach in the kindergarten [...] because they have to compete for the chance. It's not just anyone can come"* (SK20, Jane), showing that parents teaching in the class should have relevant skills or knowledge.

When viewed together, although opportunities for parent involvement are limited, such participation provided children with unique learning experiences and offered perspectives different from those of regular classroom instruction.

### 6.3 Teaching Tools and Materials

Within the overall coding framework, the theme of teaching tools and materials accounted for 96 references, representing 29% of the total data. This proportion ranked second among the five major themes (see Figure 6.1.1), suggesting that children perceived teaching tools and materials as a significant component of their music class experiences. While not as frequently mentioned as curriculum content, this theme nonetheless occupied a central place in children's narratives, reflecting its strong influence on how they understood and engaged with music learning.

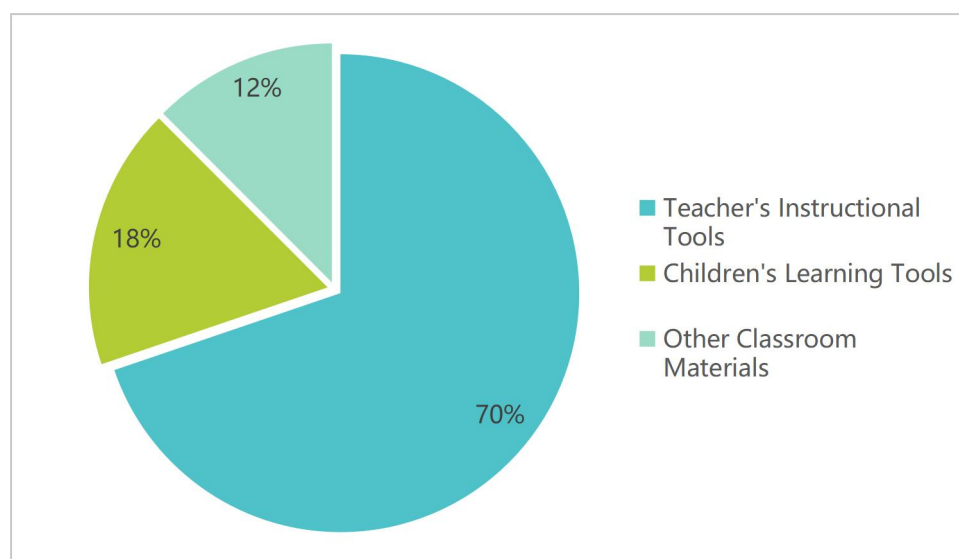


Figure 6.3.1 Proportional Distribution of Teaching Tools and Materials Themes

Further analysis of this theme generated three sub-categories (see Figure 6.3.1): teacher's instructional tools (67 codes, 70%), children's learning tools (17 codes, 18%), and other classroom materials (12 codes, 12%). Teacher's instructional tools dominated the data, underscoring the reliance on teacher-directed resources in structuring classroom activities. By contrast, children's learning tools and other classroom materials appeared much less frequently, with relatively close proportions,

suggesting that these tools are less frequently used in children’s current music lessons or they played more supplementary roles.

### ***6.3.1 Teacher’s Instructional Tools***

In children’s descriptions of the teacher’s instructional tools used in current music lessons, children most frequently referred to the interactive whiteboard, piano, and sticker charts. Among these (Figure 6.3.2), the interactive whiteboard accounts for the largest proportion (51%), followed by the piano (42%), while sticker charts are mentioned far less frequently (7%). These three tools represent the primary resources employed by teachers to facilitate instruction and engage children during class, though their proportions reveal clear differences in emphasis.

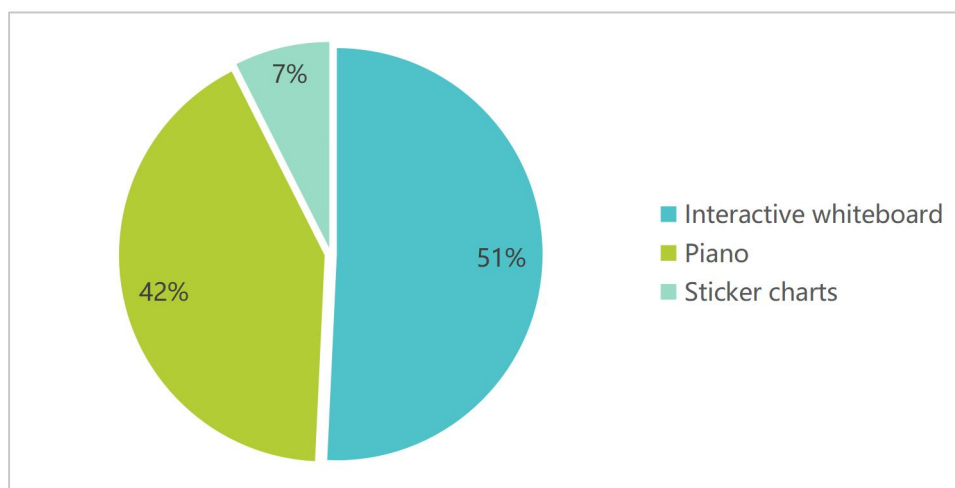


Figure 6.3.2 Proportional Distribution of Teacher’s Instructional Tools

#### **Interactive whiteboard**

Interactive whiteboard appeared 34 times in the overall dataset, demonstrating its centrality within the ‘teaching tools’ category. Although children referred to it by different names such as ‘television’, ‘computer’ and ‘screen’, these terms all denoted the ‘interactive whiteboards’ (see Figure 6.3.3) used in classroom instruction. For analytic consistency, these references are unified under the category of ‘interactive whiteboard’.

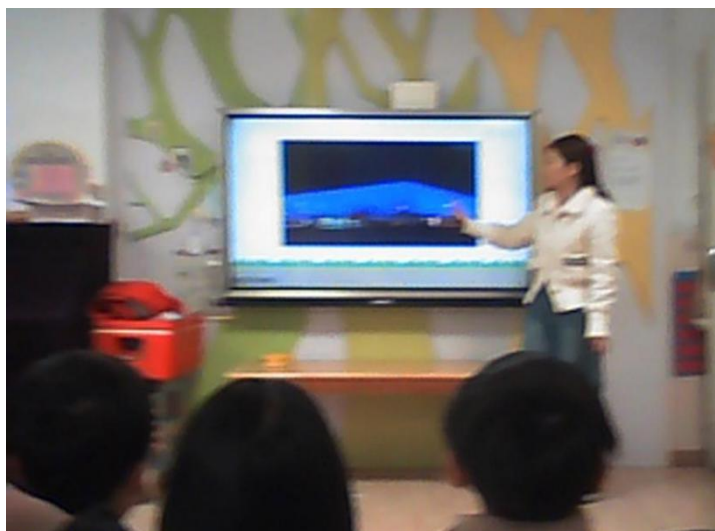


Figure 6.3.3 Photographing by Max (SK14), Photo 2

The interactive whiteboard was mentioned for its visual displays, often linked to the teaching of songs or thematic content. For instance: *“I wanted to take a picture of the TV because I felt like I had been there (the TV showed a photo of the Great Wall)”* (SK07, Daisy). Another noted (see Figure 6.3.3), *“There is a map on the TV”* (SK14, Max). Besides, visuals on the white board remind children the themes and content covered in music lessons: *“It is thunder, and also rain”* (MK06, James); *“There is rain and lightning”* (MK15, Maria); *“This is thunderstorms. The teacher used this photo to teach us a song”* (MK21, Rebecca); *“These are rain pictures. We looked at them and sang”* (MK27, Rosalind).

Children simply described the interactive whiteboard as a general teaching tool or medium for entertainment: *“[The teacher used the screen to] give us a lesson”* (SK28, Simon). Children also described the whiteboard as displaying text and lyrics, supporting singing activities. One child explained: *“There are words (on the interactive white board)”* (SK04, Bessie). Another emphasized that *“Television. Lyrics of the song”* (MK09, Louis).

Several children highlighted that the whiteboard was used to play music and guide rhythm activities: *“The teacher used the TV to teach us to sing and used the TV to play a song”* (MK21, Rebecca); *“The teacher adjusted the computer [...] to play*

*music*” (MK18, Minnie). Another explained: *“We watched television. The teacher switched the television on and then off. The television played music”* (SK13, Robert). Others stressed its role in playing videos and animations: *“The TV can be used to watch animations”* (JK21, Anthony); *“I wanted to take a picture of Qiaqia (a carton character), because when she appeared on TV she was very cute and smiled a lot”* (SK10, Evelyn); *“I photographed the TV that was showing a program”* (SK27, Victor).

Taken together, from children’s perspectives, the whiteboard provides visuals for contextualizing songs, lyrics and words for reading, music and videos to support singing, and animations that brought enjoyment. It is not only a teacher’s instructional tool but also an engaging medium that shapes children’s classroom experiences through multimodal input.

### **Piano**

Within the category of teacher’s instructional tools, the piano is the second most frequently mentioned item, accounting for 28 references. Children’s descriptions consistently highlighted the piano as a key instrument in music lessons, with many noting the teacher’s performance or use of the piano to support singing and music activities as shown in Figure 6.3.4.



Figure 6.3.4 Photographing by Rebecca (MK21), Photo 1

For instance, several children explicitly mentioned the teacher playing the piano during class: *“The teacher [was] playing the piano”* (JK13, Clement); *“The teacher sometimes plays the piano”* (SK20, Jane); *“The teacher was playing the piano at that time”*(MK09, Louis). Some children also linked the piano with the function and their feelings with piano: *“Playing music song”* (JK15, Nina); *“Playing the piano because it makes the song sounds better”* (SK19, Isabella). Overall, the piano emerges as a prominent and consistent instructional tool in children’s accounts, used by teachers to lead music activities.

### **Sticker charts**

Within the category of teacher’s instructional tools, sticker charts were coded less frequently, accounting for 5 references. Many children provided detailed descriptions of how the sticker charts functioned, using terms such as ‘Wish Bank’, ‘Good Board’, or ‘Photo Disk’. Children’s accounts consistently highlighted sticker charts as a form of classroom reward system, used to recognize positive behavior and motivate participation in music activities. Here is a photo of sticker charts taken by Oliver:



Figure 6.3.5 Photographing by Oliver (SK29), Photo 4

Children described the sticker charts as a way to track and display achievements: *“This is Wish Bank. I can let my grandmother know how many stickers I have got”* (SK06, Clara), *“I photographed the stickers I’ve collected, which can be exchanged*

*for gifts, but only if one behaves well” (SK07, Daisy), and “The teacher will give us stickers. She says that once we’ve collected dozens of stickers, we can exchange them for gifts” (SK20, Jane).*

Although sticker charts are mentioned less frequently than the interactive whiteboard or piano, they are considered highly significant by children. Many children provided detailed descriptions of how the sticker charts functioned, showing that despite the lower coding frequency, this tool plays an important role in motivating participation and providing a tangible representation of achievement.

### ***6.3.2 Children’s Learning Tools***

In children’s descriptions, a range of musical instruments were mentioned 17 times as children’s learning tools, including tambourine, hand bells, microphone, jingle bells, toy piano, and wooden clappers. Overall, opportunities for children to use these tools during regular music lessons were limited, reflected in the relatively low coding frequency.

Despite this, children still noticed and engaged with the instruments when they were available. For example, *“He was singing with a microphone and wooden clappers” (MK23, Jasper); “We use the microphone to sing” (SK19, Isabella); “There is a hand bell. We can shake it” (SK28, Simon); “The second photo is a toy piano. We can play it” (MK28, Sarah).* These descriptions indicate that while children did not frequently use these tools, each instrument contributed to hands-on engagement and supported active participation in music activities.

### ***6.3.3 Other Classroom Materials***

Other classroom materials were referenced 12 times in the children’s descriptions, accounting for 12% of the codes under teaching tools and materials. Although these items were less frequently mentioned than instructional or learning tools, they reflect children’s attention to everyday classroom objects that are part of their learning

environment but not directly involved in music instruction. Because children's daily life is concentrated in the classroom, many of these materials are items they also use in everyday routines, which happen to be present during music lessons.

Children identified a variety of classroom materials, including drinking cup, number tag, toy, chair, and art materials. For example, some children referred to cups, saying *"Theses are cups. Cups are beautiful. We can drink water"* (JK21, Anthony), while another added, *"Cup. I like drinking water"* (MK21, Rebecca). Chairs were also mentioned, as one child noted, *"We can sit on the chair"* (JK21, Anthony). Other children described number tags, such as *"There is no tag for children here. It should all be placed here to signify that we've finished having the fruit (Children should have placed their number tag in the corresponding position, but it has not been done)"* (SK04, Bessie). In addition, toys and activity areas were highlighted, for instance, *"I took photographs of the toys in the construction area. It's very neat"* (MK19, Nancy) and *"These are toys"* (MK06, James). Finally, art materials were also captured, as one child said, *"These are for painting"* (SK07, Daisy).

These classroom materials are meaningful to children while not part of formal music instruction, as they associated them with routines, rewards, or play within the classroom. Their presence in the music classroom highlights how the learning environment overlaps with children's everyday life and how children perceive and interact with objects in multiple contexts, even when not directly linked to music learning.

#### **6.4 Teachers' Roles**

In the overall data, children's references to teachers' roles appeared 74 times, accounting for 23% of all coded instances. This proportion positions the teacher as one of the most prominent elements in children's perceptions of music lessons, ranking third after curriculum content and teaching tools and materials.

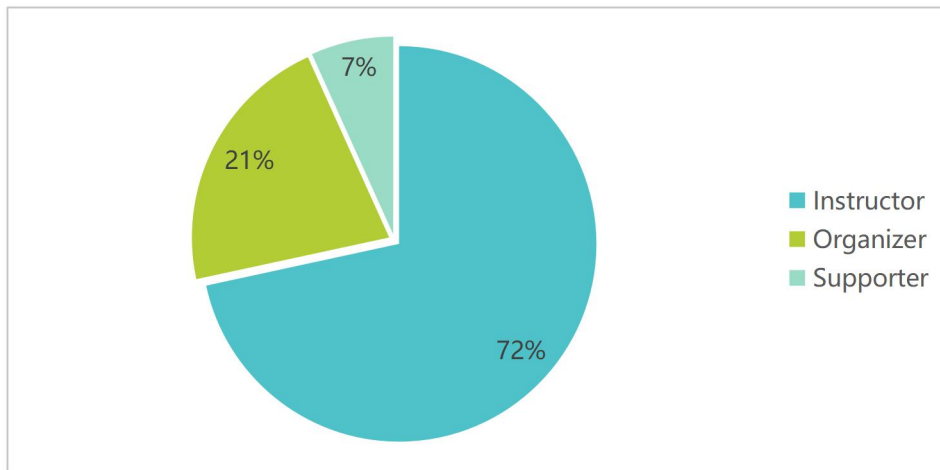


Figure 6.4.1 Proportional Distribution of Teacher's Roles Themes

Within this category, three distinct sub-roles were identified (see Figure 6.4.1). The majority of references depict the teacher as an 'instructor' (72%), centered on imparting musical knowledge and leading concrete classroom practices. A smaller proportion presents the teacher as an 'organizer' (21%), who structures lessons, distributes turns, invites children to the front, manages seating and discipline, and operates equipment to keep activities running smoothly and fairly. The least frequent role is the 'supporter' (7%), where teachers extend musical experiences beyond formal instruction by accompanying performances, encouraging participation, and creating a musical atmosphere in daily routines. Together, these three sub-roles outline how children perceive teachers' contributions to the music curriculum.

#### **6.4.1 Instructor**

Among the three identified teacher roles, the 'instructor' was by far the most dominant, with 53 codes. This reflects children's strong recognition of the teacher's role in imparting knowledge, teaching songs, modelling movements, and playing instruments. The teacher as an instructor represents the central image of classroom learning, repeatedly emphasized in children's narratives.

Children frequently described the teacher as someone who 'teaches songs' or 'gives lessons'. For example, one child explained, "*I photographed the teacher was teaching in class because I thought it was so funny*" (SK02, Anne). Another noted simply,

*“The teacher was giving a lesson and teaching us”* (SK29, Oliver). Across different age groups, children similarly emphasized the teacher’s role in teaching. For instance, one younger child stated, *“The teacher was having a music lesson”* (JK09, Edward), and another noted, *“The teacher was teaching us the song about raining”* (MK03, Gordon).

Children also highlighted more specific instructional activities: *“The teacher was playing the piano”* (MK15, Maria); *“It’s teacher [who was] playing the piano and [having] music lesson”* (JK01, Selina); *“The teacher raised her hand and rang the bell”* (SK28, Simon); *“The teacher was shaking hands”* (MK20, Olive); *“[The teacher was] singing and performing”* (SK03, Beatrice); *“The teacher was teaching us the movement and children were learning”* (MK03, Gordon). The centrality of the teacher’s instructional role was further reinforced by children’s remarks on indispensability: *“If teacher isn’t present, this music class simply cannot take place”* (SK20, Jane).

Overall, these accounts illustrate that children overwhelmingly view their teachers primarily as knowledge-givers and demonstrators in music lessons. The prevalence of this perspective underlines the central pedagogical role of the teacher in shaping children’s musical learning experiences.

#### **6.4.2 Organizer**

Although less prominent than the instructor role, the ‘organizer’ accounted for 16 codes, reflecting children’s recognition of teachers’ responsibility in managing classroom activities, arranging participation, and ensuring order during music lessons.

Children described the teacher’s role in arranging turns, inviting children to perform. For example, some child explained, *“[If you] raise your hand, the teacher will call you to come up [to the stage] and sing”* (SK07, Daisy); *“I took a photo of the teacher asking the children to come up and perform”* (MK15, Maria). Another child has

provided detailed information: *“During regular music lessons, some children are selected to sing on the front. Occasionally, others remain seated below while the teacher leads from the front”* (SK20, Jane).

Besides, teachers were also observed maintaining order and managing seating or discipline: *“I took a photo of the teacher playing a song. [...] In the second photo, the teacher was maintaining discipline”* (SK13, Robert); *“[She was] adjusting the computer [...] to play music for us”* (MK18, Minnie); *“[The teacher is helping us] rearrange our seating”* (MK22, Ruby); *“The teacher was speaking to us”* (JK13, Clement).

In sum, these accounts show that children perceive their teachers not only as knowledge-givers but also as organizers of the classroom environment, responsible for distributing opportunities, ensuring fairness, and sustaining order, all of which underpin the smooth running of music lessons.

### **6.4.3 Supporter**

The ‘supporter’ role appeared the least frequently, with 5 codes. In this role, teachers are companions who provided encouragement, created atmosphere, and supported children’s performances inside and outside the formal music class.

Children recalled moments when teachers enriched their everyday experiences with music, such as: *“At kindergarten, the teachers would play music for us”* (SK28, Simon). Some children extended teacher’s actions: *“After lunch, [teacher] usually plays some piano for us to listen to”* (SK19, Isabella); *“When lying down to rest, [teacher] plays music for lying down to rest”* (SK01, Amelia). These accounts show how teachers supported children through music beyond the boundaries of formal instruction.

Teacher’s support was also evident in performance settings. For instance, one child noted, *“This is the teacher leading the children in a performance on the podium. They*

are singing and dancing” (SK21, Josephie), while another described, “The teacher was inviting the children [to come up and perform]” (MK17, May).

These accounts underline the significance of teachers’ supportive role in accompanying children, fostering participation, and creating musical experiences that extend into daily life. This illustrates that children value teachers not only as authority figures, but also as supportive partners who enhance their enjoyment and engagement with music.

### 6.5 Peers

Children’s descriptions also highlighted the role of their peers in music lessons, though to a lesser extent compared to teachers’ roles. A total of 37 references were coded under this theme, indicating that while peers were not the dominant focus, they nevertheless shaped children’s classroom experiences in meaningful ways.

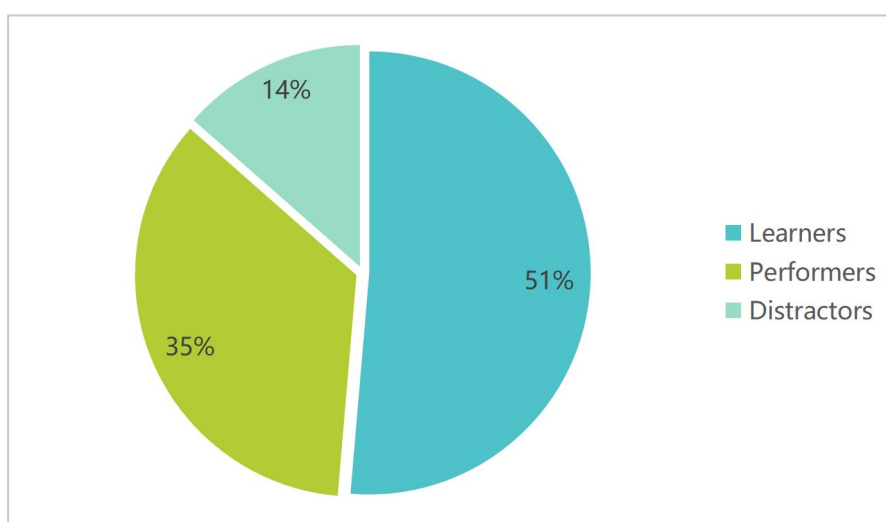


Figure 6.5.1 Proportional Distribution of Peers Themes

In this category (see Figure 6.5.1), the majority of peer-related references positioned children as ‘learners’, accounting for over half of the total (51%). A smaller yet notable proportion described peers as ‘performers’ (35%), while only a few instances identified them as ‘distractors’ (14%).

### **6.5.1 Learners**

Within the theme of peers, the most frequently identified role is that of ‘learners’ with 19 references. Children often described or photographed their classmates as engaged participants who were listening, watching, and learning alongside them. This suggests that peers were primarily perceived as co-learners in the music lesson, contributing to a shared learning atmosphere.

Peers were often mentioned simply as co-present learners observing the teacher and following instructions, such as: *“The children [were] watching the teacher to learn”* (MK02, George) and *“Classmates were attending the class”* (MK12, Lavinia). Several children highlighted their peers’ attentiveness during class. For example, some child explained: *“Photographed my classmate [who was] focusing”* (SK02, Anne); *“She was listening attentively”* (SK04, Bessie).

In addition to watching and listening, many children described their peers as actively learning through attending classroom activities. For instance, some noted: *“The children [were] clapping their hands and singing”* (JK10, Donald), and *“They were singing”* (MK24, Lucy). Peers were also expressed enjoyment of the classroom dynamic: *“I took a photo of my classmates. I find it rather jolly having them in class”* (SK20, Jane).

In summary, children’s accounts demonstrate that peers as learners played a central role in the music classroom. Their presence is not only tied to the act of learning itself but also to the sense of enjoyment and relational closeness that supported children’s engagement in music activities.

### **6.5.2 Performers**

Another key role peers took on in children’s descriptions of music lessons is that of ‘performers’ with 13 references. Children frequently mentioned classmates who were invited to the podium to sing, dance, or play instruments, highlighting performance as

a central feature of their shared classroom experiences.

Many children described their peers singing on podium, such as: *“There he was on the stage, singing right here”* (JK11, David); and *“Photographed classmates were singing and performance”* (MK12, Lavinia). Besides, performances often involved not only singing but also the use of instruments. For example, one child described: *“They were singing with tambourines and hand bells”* (MK25, Rachel). Similarly, another recalled: *“[These two children] were singing with the instruments”* (MK13, Lily). In addition, children also highlighted the performative dimension of movement and dance: *“These are my friends. They were dancing”* (MK27, Rosalind).

Overall, the accounts illustrate that children viewed their peers as active performers in the classroom, taking on visible roles through singing, dancing, and instrumental play.

### **6.5.3 Distractors**

While most children were perceived as learners or performers in the music lessons, a small number of peers were identified as ‘distractors’, which were coded five times, representing the smallest proportion within this theme. These accounts highlight that not every child consistently engaged in learning or performing. Occasionally, some peers disrupted the flow of the lesson through inattentive or playful behavior.

For example, some child noted, *“This is a photograph I took of [the child] sitting over there [...] because he was misbehaving. He was being naughty during music class, so the teacher made him sit here”* (SK04, Bessie); *“The photo shows [the child], looking rather comical here”* (SK07, Daisy). Other comments reflect moments of distraction when peers failed to concentrate: *“I took a photo of [the child]. He was looking back”* (MK17, May). These narratives illustrate that although distraction was not a dominant role, children were still keenly aware of classmates who disturbed the learning atmosphere.

In sum, the distractor role shows that children not only recognized positive forms of

participation such as learning and performing, but also acknowledged peers who disrupted the classroom dynamics, albeit as a minority presence.

## 6.6 Learning Environment

Compared with other themes, the learning environment appeared far less frequently in children's accounts, representing only a very small proportion of the total data, with only 9 references. This indicates that, although the classroom environment was occasionally noticed and described by children, it was not a central theme when they reflected on their current music lessons. According to Figure 6.6.1, children mentioned three aspects of the learning environment: classroom decorations (67%), living areas (22%), and learning space (11%).

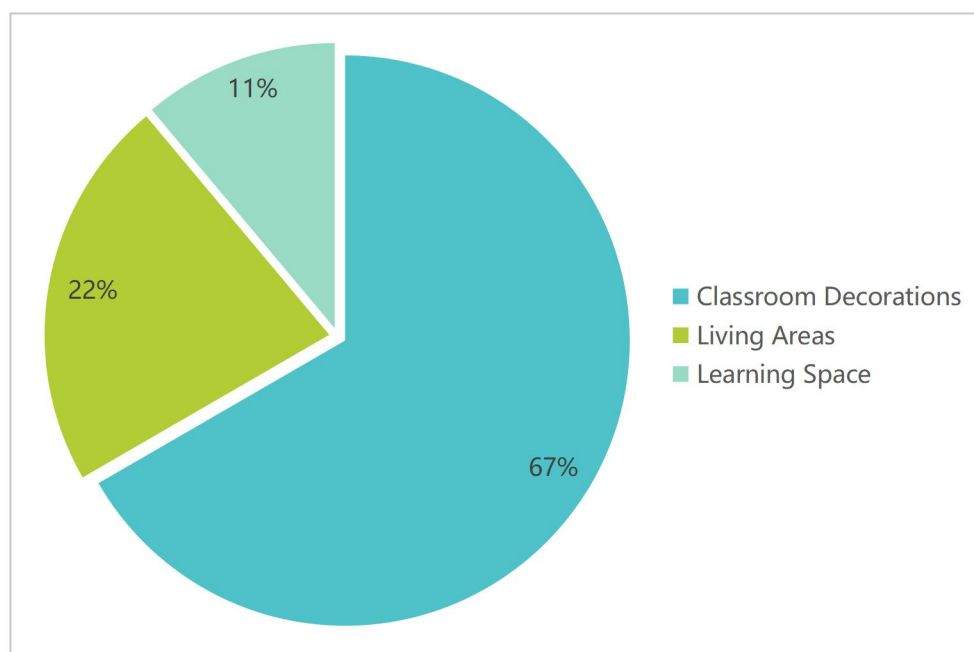


Figure 6.6.1 Proportional Distribution of Learning Environment Themes

Several children highlighted decorations that came from their own creations. For example, one child explained, *'The last photo shows these pictures we drew some time ago'* (SK07, Daisy). Another child noted the exhibition of their work, *'This was drawn by our former teacher'* (MK17, May). Some children described the broader decorative elements that characterized the classroom. For instance, one explained (see Figure 6.6.2), *'The second photo shows the themed wall. It features numerous*

*fireworks, along with lettering, many cakes, and paper aeroplanes'* (SK07, Daisy).



Figure 6.6.2 Photographing by Daisy (SK07), Photo 3

Some children also mentioned living areas within the classroom, such as the nap area, bathroom, and even the ceiling with lights and fans. One child explained, *'This is where we sleep. There's quite a lot things here. This is the graffiti wall, over there is the loo, and the sink for washing hands'* (SK07, Daisy). Another noted (See Figure 6.6.3), *'I took a photo of the light and the electric fan. Because it is so beautiful there'* (JK10, Donald).



Figure 6.6.3 Photographing by Donald (JK10), Photo 6

Finally, a child reflected on the learning space more generally. One child commented,

*'The classroom is too small'* (SK12, Thomas) indicating an awareness of the physical constraints of the classroom space (see Figure 6.6.4).



Figure 6.6.4 Photographing by Thomas (SK12), Photo 4

Taken together, these accounts reveal that children notice and value different aspects of the learning environment, especially its visual appeal and its role in their everyday routines. However, compared with other themes such as curriculum content or teaching tools, the classroom environment was peripheral in their reflections on music lessons.

# Chapter 7 Children's Preferences in the Current Music Curriculum

## 7.1 Introduction

In recent years, scholars have increasingly highlighted the importance of recognising students' voices in educational decision-making, supporting the need to provide meaningful opportunities for them to articulate their perspectives. From this standpoint, students should not only be heard but also actively involved in shaping the curriculum (Cook-Sather, 2006). Gaining a clear understanding of students' learning interests and their views on existing subjects is crucial for developing curricula that are both more relevant to their needs and more meaningful to their learning experiences (Araneda et al., 2019). Against this backdrop, the present chapter examines young students' preferences regarding their music curriculum, focusing on how their expressed 'likes' and 'dislikes' illuminate both their immediate experiences and their broader educational needs.

This chapter employs a voting method to collect data on children's preferences regarding their current music curriculum (Azunre & Sowrirajan, 2021). Although not formally part of the Mosaic approach, voting has often been used in combination with it by researchers as a child-friendly means of eliciting preferences (Stephenson, 2009). In this study, voting provided a direct and accessible way for children to indicate what they liked or disliked about different aspects of their music lessons.

After completing their photographic documentation and explanations, the children were invited to vote on any people or objects appearing in their photographs (Clark & Moss, 2011). They indicated their preferences by placing a smiling-face sticker on items they 'like' and a sad-face sticker on those they 'dislike' (Gabb & Singh, 2015). After the voting concluded, the children proceeded to describe the items they had voted on: what they had voted, and what aspects they liked and disliked about these items.

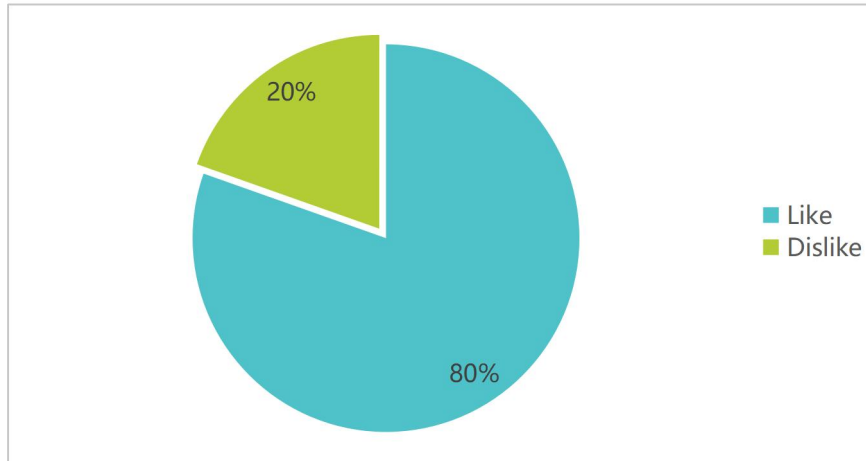


Figure 7.1.1 Proportional Distribution of Children's Votes

In total, 301 valid votes were collected. Of these, 242 votes (80%) indicated that children liked the features they had documented, while 59 votes (20%) expressed dislike (see Figure 7.1.1). This distribution indicates that the number of 'like' votes was four times greater than the number of 'dislike' votes, thereby suggesting an overall positive orientation from children towards the current music curriculum. At the same time, the proportion of 'dislike' votes, though relatively modest, nonetheless highlights the presence of less satisfying elements within children's experiences of music lessons.



Figure 7.1.2 Voting by Robert (SK13), Photo 1



Figure 7.1.3 Voting by Clement (JK13), Photo 2

However, it is noteworthy that a total of 10 invalid votes were identified, originating from 8 children. Further discussions with these children revealed that their use of the

‘sad-face’ sticker did not indicate a genuine dislike of the people or objects captured, but rather dissatisfaction with the quality of the photographs themselves. For example, one child explained, *“I think this photo was not taken well. This hand was sticking out here (only the teacher’s hand was captured)”* (SK17, Elizabeth). Similarly, a child stated (see Figure 7.1.2), *“Because only her head was captured, but not her face”* (SK13, Robert), while another simply commented (see Figure 7.1.3), *“I can’t see clearly”* (JK13, Clement). Another remarked, *“Because I took it a bit ugly”* (SK01, Amelia). These responses demonstrate that some of the ‘dislike’ votes reflected children’s dissatisfaction with the photographic outcome rather than any negative evaluation of the people, objects, or activities depicted in their music lessons.

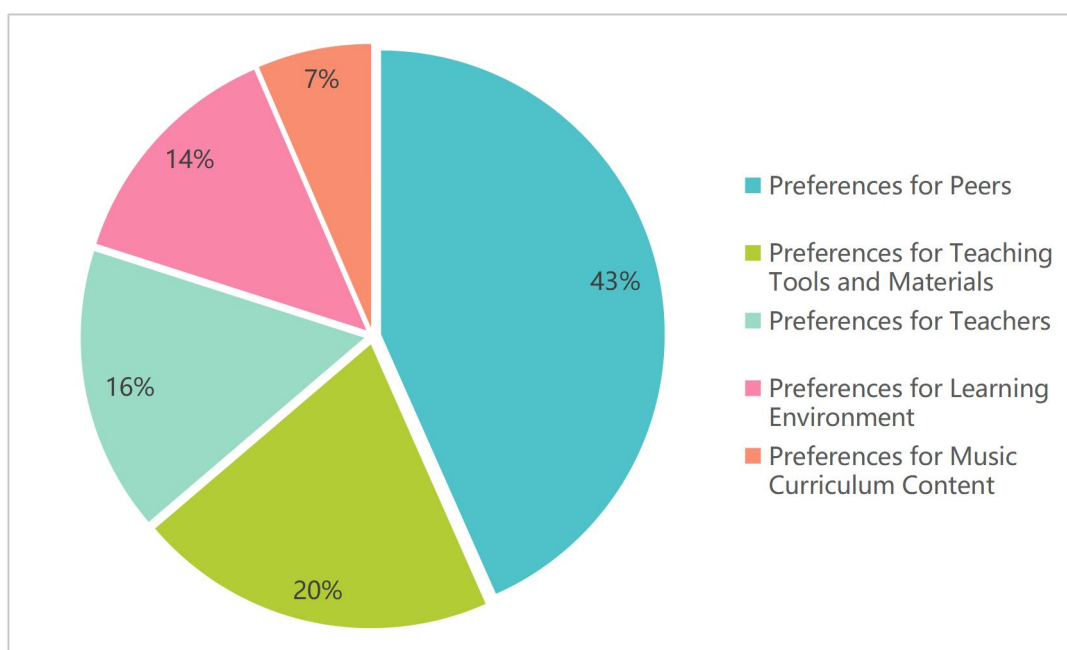


Figure 7.1.4 Proportional Distribution of Children’s Preferences Themes

Through free coding of the children’s voting outcomes, a total of 309 valid codes were generated and subsequently categorised into five overarching themes of preference. As shown in Figure 7.1.4, the analysis indicates that preferences for peers emerged most prominently, accounting for 43% of all codes which is nearly half of all coding. This is followed by preferences for teaching tools and materials (20%), preferences for teachers (16%), and preferences for the learning environment (14%). By contrast, preferences for music curriculum content were less frequently expressed,

representing only 7% of the total.

Table 7.1.1 below presents the five main themes of the children’s preferences in their current music curriculum, along with their corresponding sub-themes. These themes reflect the diverse ways in which children articulated their likes and dislikes, extending from social relationships to material, pedagogical, spatial, and content-related dimensions of their lessons. The sections that follow analyse these preferences in greater depth, illuminating not only what children enjoy most within their music lessons but also the aspects they find less engaging, thereby offering insight into their emerging expectations and needs.

Table 7.1.1 Thematic Framework of Children’s Preferences in the Current Music Curriculum

Theme	Sub-theme
Preferences for Peers	Behavioral Preference Companionship Preference Appearance Preference Competency Preference
Preferences for Teaching Tools and Materials	Functionality Playfulness Practicality Aesthetic Value Familiarity Orderliness Safety
Preferences for Teachers	Instructional Behavior Preference Teaching Skill Preference Support and Reward Preference Appearance and Personality Preference
Preferences for Learning Environment	Comfort Aesthetics Safety Autonomy
Preferences for Music Curriculum Content	Activity Content Preference Activity Theme Preference Activity Time Preference

## 7.2 Preferences for Peers

Within the overarching theme of children’s preferences in the current music curriculum, peers stood out as the most prominent category with 134 coding references. As shown in Figure 7.2.1, four sub-themes were identified in children’s accounts of peer-related preferences. Among these, behavioral preference for peers was the most dominant, accounting for 42% of the references, nearly half of all mentions. Companionship preference for peers followed closely, representing about one-third of the accounts. By contrast, appearance preference for peers (13%) and competency preference for peers (12%) were mentioned far less often, together making up just over a quarter of the references, with competency preference emerging as the least represented.

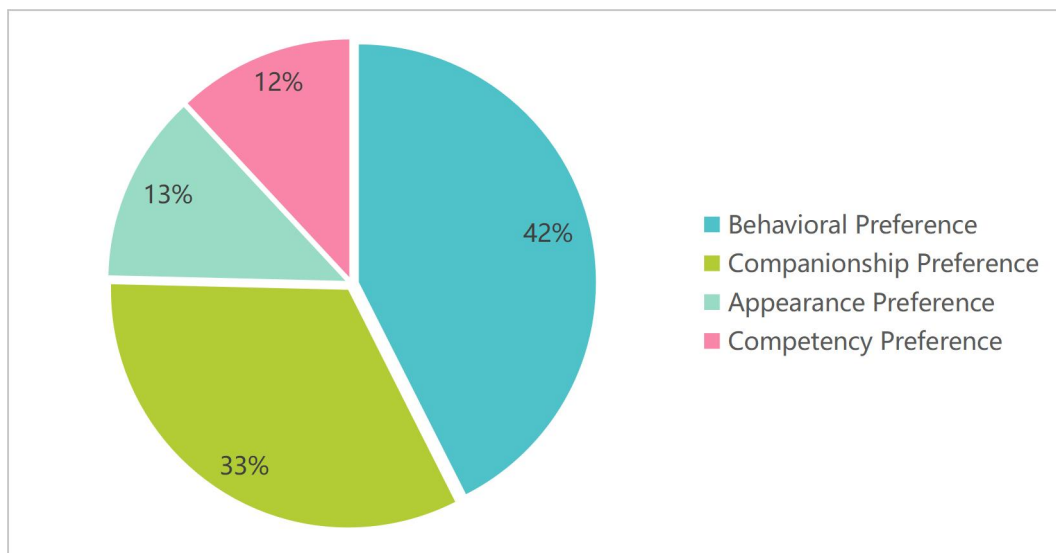


Figure 7.2.1 Proportional Distribution of Preference for Peers Themes

### 7.2.1 Behavioral Preference

Within the peer-related preferences, children most frequently emphasized their peers’ behavior in the music classroom, which constituted 42% of all peer preferences (57 references). Their accounts reflected a clear orientation toward valuing attentiveness, discipline, and positive interpersonal conduct, while simultaneously rejecting peers who disrupted lessons or displayed negative social behaviors.

A prominent aspect of behavioral preference concerned children's appreciation for peers who were attentive and actively engaged during music lessons. Several children emphasized liking classmates who consistently showed seriousness in learning. For instance, one child noted, "*He is very serious, every lesson he is very serious*" (SK02, Anne), while another explained, "*[I gave 'like sticker' for] my classmates because they are very serious in class*" (MK09, Louis). Similarly, children often pointed to positive classroom behaviors as reasons for their liking, such as "*She listened to the teacher and was serious in class*" (MK17, May), "*They were clapping hands*" (JK02, Sophia), and "*Because he did very well [in class]*" (JK23, Alex). In some cases, children also recognized improvements in their peers' classroom behavior, as reflected in the comment, "*[I vote for him because] I want to give this child some encouragement. He usually gets distracted in class, but today he was very serious*" (SK02, Anne). These accounts indicate that attentiveness, active participation, and visible progress in classroom conduct were highly valued by children in their peer preferences.

Besides, some children emphasized positive emotions and cognitive engagement as qualities they appreciated in peers. For example, one child remarked, "*Because he looked so happy while watching [peers' performance]*" (MK17, May), and another explained, "*Because she was happy, I gave her a happy sticker*" (MK07, John). Similarly, intellectual qualities were also noted, as one child commented, "*[I vote for] his head [...] because it can be used for thinking*" (SK04, Bessie). These accounts show that, beyond classroom discipline and social behavior, children also valued peers who demonstrated joy and expressiveness, as well as those who appeared thoughtful or capable of reflection.

In contrast, many children explicitly expressed dislike for peers who were disruptive, playful, or failed to follow classroom rules. For example, one child commented, "*He is very naughty and makes trouble in music class*" (SK28, Simon), while another explained, "*Because this child is very naughty. Last time he even grabbed my things.*"

*He has been taken out by the teacher many times in class*” (SK10, Evelyn). Similarly, a child described disliking a peer who was often separated by the teacher, as Figure 7.2.2 shown and stating, *“I don’t want to attend music class with him, he was taken out (he was given a separate seat by the teacher)”* (SK01, Amelia). Disruptive behavior was also associated with physical obstruction, as one child pointed out, *“He doesn’t follow the classroom rules”* (SK12, Thomas). Another noted, *“Because he is very naughty. He stands up and blocks me”* (SK22, Julia). In other cases, even seemingly minor off-task behavior drew children’s disapproval, as reflected in the remark, *“He was playing with his shoes”* (MK20, Olive). These examples demonstrate that children were acutely aware of how peers’ negative behaviors, such as breaking rules, disturbing others, or physically obstructing the classroom, undermined the collective learning environment.



Figure 7.2.2 Voting by Amelia (SK01), Photo 3

Peer behavioral preferences also extended to interpersonal conduct, where many children expressed dislike for peers who fought, disturbed others, or engaged in uncooperative behaviors. For instance, one child remarked, *“I don’t like this kind of person. Whatever he does is so annoying, and he hits people”* (SK04, Bessie), while another explained, *“Because they hit me [...] I even didn’t sit with them”* (MK21, Rebecca). Similar concerns were raised about peers who caused direct disturbance, such as *“He always kicks me”* (SK16, Alice), *“Because he always says bad words”* (SK07, Daisy), *“He is naughty and makes trouble”* (MK15, Maria), or *“He does bad*

things” (MK08, Leonard). In Chinese kindergartens, a midday nap is typically arranged, during which children rest together in the classroom. During these rest periods, certain behaviors also became points of peer evaluation, as one child remarked, “*When he sleeps, he kicks the quilt [...] and even makes noises*” (JK17, Molly).

Finally, social interaction preferences also emerged in children’s accounts. Some children expressed disliking peers who imposed friendship, as one explained, “*Because I didn’t want to be his good friend before, but he insisted on being mine*” (MK19, Nancy). Others felt upset when their wish to build companionship was rejected, such as “*Because [she] doesn’t want to be my good friend*” (MK13, Lily) or “*She doesn’t play with me*” (JK17, Molly). These examples suggest that children valued reciprocity and autonomy in forming friendships, showing preference for peers who respected their choices and shared interest in companionship.

On the whole, the accounts of behavioral preferences reveal a nuanced picture of how children evaluated their peers during music lessons and daily interactions. They most often expressed liking for peers who behaved attentively and performed well in class. In addition, some children highlighted positive emotions and cognitive engagement, appreciating peers who were happy, expressive, or thoughtful. By contrast, children showed clear disapproval of peers who disrupted lessons, broke rules, or engaged in aggressive behavior. Finally, they also emphasized their preferences in social relationships, valuing voluntary friendships while rejecting forced or exclusive dynamics. Overall, these perspectives suggest that children’s peer preferences were not limited to classroom conduct, but extended to social and emotional qualities that shaped how they experienced their learning environment.

### ***7.2.2 Companionship Preference***

Within the broader theme of peer preferences, companionship emerged as an important sub-theme, with 44 coding references in total. This category primarily

reflected two dimensions of children's likes: first, their fondness for 'good friends' who treated them kindly and maintained close relationships, and second, their enjoyment of peers with whom they could share activities and spend time together.

Firstly, many children directly referred to 'good friends' as the reason for their preference. For example, one child explained, *"Because I wanted to give her a keepsake (a smiley sticker). If I go far away, this smiley face will turn into a crying face. We are good friends"* (SK02, Anne); another noted, *"Good friend, because she treats me very well"* (SK29, Oliver); *"Because I am his best friend"* (SK12, Thomas); *"Because he is my good friend, so I love him"* (JK14, Charles); *"I gave it (a smiley sticker) to her because she is my good friend"* (JK22, Albert); *"Because we are good friends, we usually play together, so I gave her a smiley face"* (SK21, Josephie); and *"I gave it to her, she is my friend, my kindergarten friend"* (SK22, Julia). These responses show that children often based their preferences simply on the identity of being a 'good friend', emphasizing the emotional value of friendship itself.

Secondly, another group of responses emphasized the importance of companionship and shared experiences. Many children expressed liking peers with whom they could participate in activities or spend time in daily life. For example, some explained, *"I like singing with her"* (SK05, Catherine); *"I like being in music class with [her]. I like sitting with her, and sometimes during meals, I want to sit at the same table with her"* (SK18, Helen); *"He played building blocks (an area activity) with me"* (JK07, Winnie); *"I like building blocks with her"* (JK09, Edward); *"I want to play games, take photos, and have fun with them"* (JK10, Donald); *"I like playing games with him"* (JK16, Cara); *"Because he can play games with me"* (JK17, Molly); *"Because she played with me yesterday at noon"* (JK12, Daniel); and *"Because she always plays with me in the doll's house (an area activity)"* (JK18, Elsie).

In addition to classroom interactions, children also mentioned shared experiences outside lessons: *"He lives next to me, and sometimes after school we play together"*

(SK20, Jane); *“I gave a smiley sticker to that child because he lives in the same neighborhood as me. Another classmate also lives in my neighborhood, and we often play together”* (SK30, Norman); and *“Because we used to be in the same kindergarten”* (SK12, Thomas). These examples illustrate that children placed special value on peers who could accompany them in everyday kindergarten life, as well as those who shared connections in their residential communities outside school.

In addition, some children’s expressions also reflected support and care within friendships. For instance, one child remarked, *“I really like him because he gave me tasty food and he didn’t hit me”* (JK24, Andrew). Another explained, *“Because my good friend asked me to do something before, and I helped him”* (MK19, Nancy). Similarly, one child shared, *“Because he used to be best friends with [Rosalind], I saw that and gave him [a sticker]. I wanted him and [Rosalind] to be best friends”* (MK16, Mary). Another emphasized simple kindness by saying, *“Because she is very nice to me”* (SK29, Oliver). These responses indicate that children value not only emotional closeness in friendships, but also reciprocal and supportive behaviour.

Generally speaking, children’s peer preferences within music lessons demonstrate a pronounced social dimension. They attach importance both to the identity label of ‘good friends’ and to the value of actual companionship and shared experiences. These expressions reveal the central role of peer relationships in young children’s daily learning and life experiences.

### ***7.2.3 Appearance Preference***

Within peer preferences, appearance-related comments also emerged as a distinct theme, though less frequent compared to behavioral or companionship preferences, with a total of 17 coded references. Children often expressed liking peers based on physical features, clothing, or overall presentation.

Some children directly highlighted peers’ physical appearance. For example, some

child explained, *“Because she is beautiful”* (MK06, James); *“Because she is pretty”* (JK07, Winnie). In contrast, some children expressed dislike based on appearance, such as, *“I think his teeth are really bad (full of cavities, not good-looking)”* (SK04, Bessie), or, *“He always has a runny nose, I really don’t like him”* (SK07, Daisy).

A larger group of children emphasized clothing or accessories as reasons for liking peers. For instance, one child said, *“I don’t like his clothes in this color”* (JK16, Cara), but at the same time also expressed preference for attractive clothing: *“Because their clothes are very pretty”* (JK16, Cara). Others gave similar accounts such as, *“Because [her] clothes in this picture look very nice”* (MK25, Rachel), and *“I also like her dress, it looks pretty”* (MK14, Lidia). Accessories like hair ties were also mentioned: *“Her outfit in class today looked really nice [...] and her hairstyle also looked pretty”* (MK27, Rosalind), and *“I like this hair clip, [it has] a star on it”* (MK14, Lidia). Children also connected peer appearance with performance contexts. For example, one child pointed out, *“Because she looked beautiful, graceful, and lovely when she was performing”* (SK10, Evelyn).

These examples suggest that children’s appearance preferences were not abstract or symbolic, but rather rooted in concrete and immediate impressions. They tended to favor peers who looked ‘beautiful’ or ‘pretty’, and expressed disapproval toward those perceived as unclean or untidy. At the same time, they noticed and appreciated clothing, hairstyles, and accessories as forms of external adornment. Such perceptions influenced not only how children evaluated their peers in classroom contexts but also shaped their preferences in everyday interactions, showing that outward appearance played a subtle yet meaningful role in children’s social relationships.

#### ***7.2.4 Competency Preference***

Competency also emerged as an important dimension in children’s peer preferences, with 16 coded references in total. Expressions of competency preference could be broadly grouped into two categories: appreciation for skilled peers and admiration for

those who demonstrated courage and active participation.

First, many children favored peers who displayed specific abilities musical domains. Musical ability was especially salient during music lessons: *“They sang well, so I gave them heart (smiley) stickers”* (JK15, Nina); *“Because [she] sang really well. I like [her] performance”* (JK09, Edward); *“I gave [smiley sticker] to them because they sang so nicely”* (JK10, Donald). Similarly, instrumental skills were mentioned: *“Because he played [instrument] really beautifully”* (MK13, Lily); *“Because they performed really well”* (MK26, Rose); *“Because when he performed next to the TV, it sounded really good”* (MK16, Mary). Besides, children’s competency preferences were not limited to musical ability but also extended to other domains, such as visual arts and craft skills. For example, one child noted, *“He is good at painting and handicraft, and he is already very well-behaved”* (SK05, Catherine). Another child explained, *“Many boys in my class like [her], because her drawings are really good”* (SK01, Amelia). These examples illustrate that children paid close attention to peers’ talents, especially in the context of music and artistic activities, and expressed admiration toward those who were recognized as capable.

Second, some children emphasized bravery and active participation as valued qualities. For example, one child remarked, *“Because other children didn’t raise their hands, so I gave stickers to those who did”* (MK23, Jasper). Another explained, *“They raised their hands to go on stage to perform”* (MK09, Louis), while yet another said, *“Because they were performing”* (MK12, Lavinia). Children highlighted not only the outcomes of peers’ performance but also their willingness to stand up, participate, and be seen by others. For example, *“Because he went up to perform. He performed really well”* (MK27, Rosalind); *“This photo is when they [were] going to perform on stage, which is why I give smiley faces for them”* (MK25, Rachel).

In conclusion, these accounts suggest that children’s competency preferences were mainly situated within the music curriculum, with most comments focusing on peers’

musical abilities such as singing, instrument playing, and classroom performance. At the same time, a few children also extended their appreciation to non-musical skills like drawing or handicraft, indicating that their evaluations of peers' abilities were not confined to music alone. Overall, these preferences reveal that children valued both the demonstration of skills and the courage to participate in front of others, which played an important role in shaping their liking for peers within the context of music activities.

### 7.3 Preferences for Teaching Tools and Materials

The second major theme identified from children's preferences in the current music curriculum concerned their preferences for teaching tools and materials, which coded for 63 references. Within this theme, children's considerations were further categorized into seven dimensions: functionality, playfulness, practicality, aesthetic value, familiarity, orderliness, and safety.

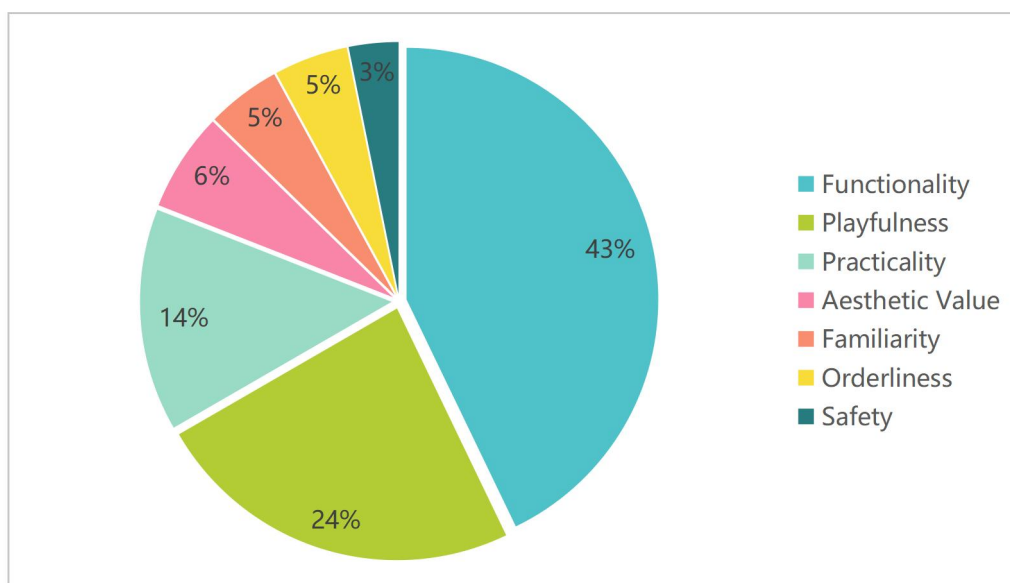


Figure 7.3.1 Proportional Distribution of Preference for Teaching Tools and Materials

Among these (see Figure 7.3.1), the most salient category was functionality (43%), which alone accounted for nearly half of all references, indicating that children paid particular attention to whether materials could be effectively used in classroom activities. The second tier of preferences included playfulness (24%) and practicality

(14%), suggesting that, beyond functionality, children also valued materials that were enjoyable and convenient to use. The remaining categories: aesthetic value (6%), familiarity (5%), orderliness (5%), and safety (3%) were mentioned less frequently, but nevertheless highlighted additional considerations that shaped children's overall perspectives.

### **7.3.1 Functionality**

The functionality of teaching tools and materials was the most frequently mentioned dimension, with a total of 27 coded references, accounting for nearly half of all comments in this theme. This indicates that children paid particular attention to whether materials could 'work' properly, support learning, and serve their intended purposes.

Interactive whiteboard (children mentioned as television or computer) and piano stood out as the most central tools in children's accounts. Interactive whiteboard was valued for its educational and musical functions: "*The television was teaching us pinyin (phonetic spelling of Chinese)*" (SK02, Anne); "*Because the television [can play] music songs*" (JK15, Nina); "*In the fourth picture I like the television, because the television can also provide knowledge*" (SK04, Bessie). Similarly, the piano was frequently mentioned as a source of music learning and enjoyment: "*The piano, because it always lets us listen to music*" (SK03, Beatrice); "*The piano can be played, and it can help us learn more knowledge*" (SK04, Bessie).

Beyond basic use, children highlighted how these tools contributed to learning and performance success. For example: "*The television, because it was giving us music lessons*" (SK26, William); "*The television was playing music about numbers*" (SK27, Victor). The piano was sometimes seen as a pathway to achievement: "*Because piano is what I like. If I play the piano well, I can participate in competitions and get a small trophy*" (SK21, Josephie).

Other tools were valued for how they supported performance or organization. For instance: *“This is the piano score, it can be sung. A music score should be praised, and it lets the teacher play nicely and more clearly”* (JK10, Donald); *“I like the microphone and the castanets, because they can be used for performances, and the microphone can be used for singing”* (MK23, Jasper); and *“(I like) this cabinet, because it can store things and hold the instruments in the performance area”* (MK24, Lucy).

Children were also quick to notice when tools did not work properly or caused discomfort. For example: *“This television is a bit too white (bright), I don’t like it”* (MK14, Lidia); *“I don’t like this piano (toy piano for children), because every time I play it, it doesn’t make sound [...] it needs to be charged”* (MK28, Sarah); *“The piano sound is too loud [...] it makes me feel dizzy when I listen”* (MK13, Lily).

Overall, functionality was the dominant concern in children’s evaluations of teaching tools, with television and piano serving as the core instruments of music learning. At the same time, children valued supplementary tools like scores, microphones, and storage furniture for their supportive roles. These insights highlight children’s practical orientation toward tools that both enable learning and ensure smooth classroom experiences.

### **7.3.2 Playfulness**

Playfulness was another salient dimension in children’s evaluations of teaching tools and materials, coded 15 times in total. Compared with the more utilitarian focus on functionality, children’s references here emphasized the enjoyment, interest, and emotional satisfaction derived from their interactions with certain tools. This perspective illustrates that children’s preferences were not only about what materials could do, but also about whether they made the learning process engaging and pleasurable.

A central source of playfulness for many children was the piano. Several children highlighted their liking for the instrument simply because they found its sound pleasing and enjoyable. For example, one child stated, *“The sound of the piano is very beautiful”* (MK06, James), while another explained, *“Because when playing the piano, the music that comes out is very nice”* (MK25, Rachel). Similarly, a child shared, *“Because [the teacher] played the piano, and it sounded so good”* (MK01, Francis). These comments suggest that beyond its role as a teaching tool, the piano was appreciated as a source of aesthetic and emotional enjoyment. Even children who did not play it themselves still emphasized its enjoyable qualities, as reflected in one child’s remark: *“[I] don’t know how to play it, but I like [the sound of the piano]”* (MK04, Graham).

The interactive whiteboard was another teaching material linked with children’s sense of fun. For example, one child remarked, *“Television. Because I like watching television, like teachers use the television to teach us”* (MK13, Lily), while another explained, *“Television. The little duck inside is so cute. The Miaomiao (a cartoon character) inside is so cute”* (SK10, Evelyn). Similarly, cartoons and characters added to its appeal: *“[We] can watch cartoon. [We] can also watch Sun Wukong (Journey to the West cartoon)”* (JK17, Molly). These accounts demonstrate how children associated the television with entertainment, familiar characters, and visual stimulation, making it a playful tool in their eyes.

Playfulness also extended to non-musical tools, such as sticker reward, which many children enjoyed for the fun and positive emotions they brought. For instance, one child explained, *“Because the teacher puts all kinds of stickers on it”* (JK02, Sophia). Another emphasized their enjoyment of receiving daily recognition: *“I vote for the plate (sticker charts), because the teacher gives me stickers [...] stick stickers on my plate every day, and the little plate even made me stick the sticker on it. I want to praise them”* (JK10, Donald). These expressions reflect how children valued tools not only for their instructional role but also for their capacity to create joy, affirmation,

and a sense of accomplishment.

Their comments showed that tools such as the piano and interactive whiteboard were not only valued for what they could teach, but also for the pleasurable and entertaining experiences they provided. In addition, children extended their sense of playfulness to reward systems and displays in the classroom, treating them as fun and motivating elements within the learning environment.

### **7.3.3 Practicality**

Practicality was mentioned nine times, reflecting children's attention to how tools and materials supported both their classroom learning and their everyday routines surrounding the music curriculum.

First, children highlighted the practical value of teaching tools directly used in music lessons. For example, some emphasized the piano: *"Because the teacher often plays music for us on the piano"* (MK23, Jasper), or simply described it as *"[Teachers] frequently use [the television]"* (SK22, Julia). Similarly, the size and presence of technological tools such as the television and computer were noted: *"[In the music room] there is an enormous television. It's so large that none of the televisions in any of the kindergarten's classrooms could match its size, even if all the televisions were placed together"* (SK25, Winston), and *"That computer is huge"* (MK01, Francis). These comments suggest that children paid attention to the frequency and prominence of such tools in the classroom, recognizing them as practical resources for music teaching.

In addition, children also referred to the practicality of materials that appeared in the music lesson environment, even if they were not directly related to the lesson itself. For instance, one child mentioned, *"This clothing is wearable and provides warmth"* (SK04, Bessie), highlighting the role of clothing in keeping comfortable during class. Others appreciated tables for their use in mealtimes: *"Because the table provides us*

*with meals every day (eat at the table every day). Love the table for us to share fruit together*” (JK04, Sybil); or the convenience of drinking vessels: *“Cups can be used for drinking water, and also for drinking milk”* (JK21, Anthony); *“Water bottle, because I like to drink water. [it’s] cool”* (MK21, Rebecca). These examples indicate that children’s sense of practicality extended beyond the lesson to include the surrounding routines before and after class.

On the whole, children’s perspectives on practicality reveal two layers: tools like the piano and interactive whiteboard were valued for their direct and frequent use in music instruction, while everyday objects such as clothes, tables, cups, and water bottles were also appreciated for supporting comfort and routines around the music class. This shows that children’s practical preferences for teaching tools and materials bridged classroom learning with their broader daily experiences in kindergarten.

#### **7.3.4 Aesthetic Value**

Compared with other dimensions, aesthetic value was mentioned relatively rarely, only four instances. However, when children did refer to it, they used consistent terms such as ‘beautiful’ or ‘pretty’ to describe the materials around them. These descriptions reveal that visual appeal, although secondary, still played a role in shaping their preferences for teaching tools and classroom objects.

For example, one child highlighted the television, noting that *“I vote for the television. This is a good television, and [the pictures] shown on it are beautiful”* (SK11, Grace). Another similarly praised the television by repeating that it was *“The television [is] very, very pretty”* (SK22, Julia). In the case of younger children, one particularly liked the sticker charts because *“The stickers are very beautiful”* (JK07, Winnie). Another child commented on the classroom cabinet: *“I vote for the cabinet. I think its color is very nice”* (JK16, Cara).

In sum, these accounts suggest that children noticed and valued the visual qualities of

both functional teaching tools and everyday classroom objects. Their remarks highlight that the aesthetic dimension is also part of their overall learning experience.

### **7.3.5 Familiarity**

Although references to familiarity appeared less frequently with three codes in total, children's comments revealed that personal experiences and home environments influenced their preferences for teaching tools and materials. Specifically, they often expressed liking for objects that resembled or were identical to those available at home, suggesting that a sense of recognition and comfort shaped their choices.

For instance, one child explained, *"I like this television. I have one at home"* (SK13, Robert), highlighting how the presence of a television at home made the classroom interactive whiteboard appealing. Similarly, the piano was valued not only for its sound but also because of its connection to home life, as one child noted, *"At my home there is a very long piano. It's longer than [the piano in the school]"* (MK04, Graham). Another child expressed fascination with a large television, relating it directly to their own home context: *"There is a big one (television) at my home too, but it's not as big as that one"* (MK01, Francis).

These examples suggest that familiarity provided children with a bridge between their home and school environments. Even when not directly tied to learning functions, materials that mirrored children's home experiences could foster positive feelings and a sense of belonging in the classroom.

### **7.3.6 Orderliness**

Although orderliness was mentioned only three times in total, children's comments highlighted their attentiveness to classroom rules and the proper arrangement of materials. Their remarks revealed that disorder or a lack of compliance with routines could directly influence their preferences.

For example, one child expressed dislike for a chair that had not been placed properly, remarking, “[I] don’t like this chair [...] because it wasn’t brought over (the chair wasn’t properly placed)” (JK21, Anthony). Similarly, another child pointed out the importance of following routines associated with name tags after eating fruit: “Because after eating the fruit, it (name tag) should be placed here, not there” (SK04, Bessie). Although items like name tags were not directly teaching tools for music lessons, they were part of the classroom environment and daily routines, and thus became connected with children’s broader sense of order and rule-following.

Together, these examples suggest that children’s preferences for teaching tools and materials include an appreciation of order and rule-following. The presence of structured routines and properly arranged objects seemed to provide a sense of stability, reinforcing the idea that classroom environments are not only spaces for learning but also for cultivating shared rules and discipline.

### **7.3.7 Safety**

Safety concerns were mentioned only two times, yet children’s remarks underscored how attentively they perceived the potential risks associated with classroom materials. Their comments revealed that even seemingly ordinary objects could become sources of danger if not handled properly.

For instance, one child expressed concern about chairs: “[I don’t like] the chair, because it could knock someone over. This is a wooden chair, unlike the old plastic one. It also requires considerable effort to lift” (SK05, Catherine). This highlights children’s awareness that the weight and material of classroom furniture directly affect their ease of use and the risk of accidents.

Similarly, another child pointed out a specific safety risk related to the piano: “Underneath the piano, [she] would bump her head” (MK13, Lily). In this case, the space beneath the piano was identified as a place where children might hurt

themselves if they were not careful.

These examples suggest that children focus on how their physical characteristics could influence safe participation in classroom activities. Their awareness highlights the importance of designing and arranging classroom environments that minimize risks, ensuring that learning spaces remain both engaging and secure for children.

#### 7.4 Preferences for Teachers

Teachers represented an important dimension of children’s preferences in the voting results, reflecting their central role in shaping classroom experiences. In total, references to teachers were coded 50 times, making this one of the major themes. Within this theme, four categories were identified (see Figure 7.4.1). Instructional behavior preference accounted for the largest share, with 48% of the references. This was followed by teaching skill preference (22%) and support and reward preference (18%). The final category, appearance and personality preference, represented 12% of the total. The following subsections present each category in detail, with examples from children’s statements.

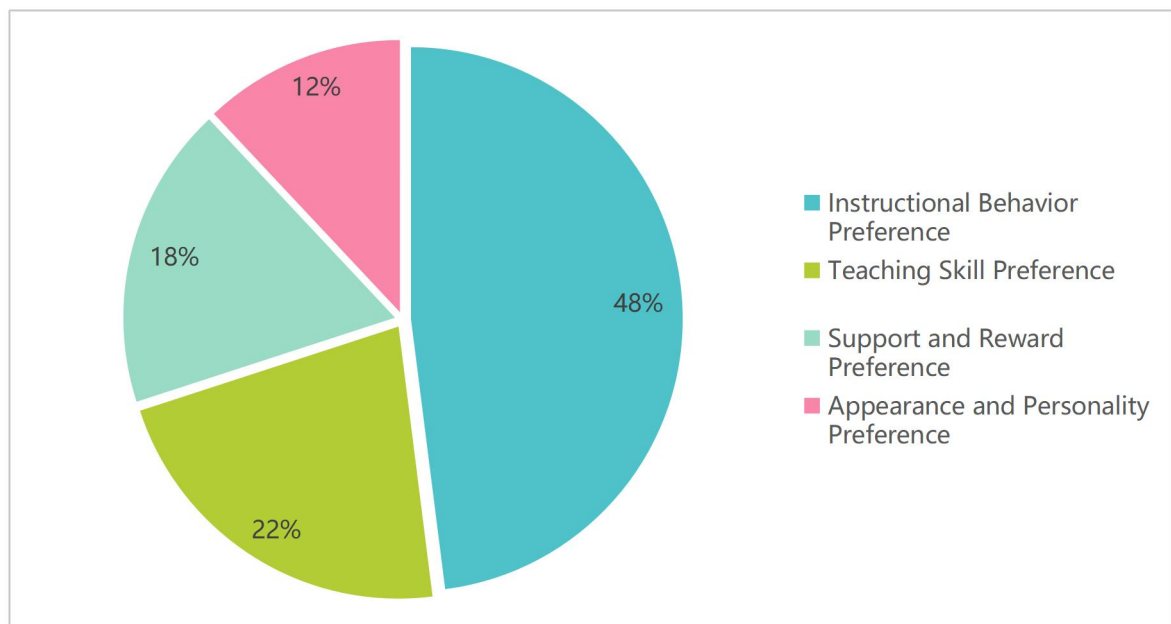


Figure 7.4.1 Proportional Distribution of Preference for Teachers

### **7.4.1 Instructional Behavior Preference**

Among all teacher-related preferences, children mentioned teachers' instructional behaviors 24 times. These preferences mainly centred on teachers' active involvement in teaching and demonstration activities, such as singing, playing instruments, lecturing, leading games, and even acknowledging the teachers' effort.

A prominent theme concerned music instruction. Several children highlighted their enjoyment when teachers taught them songs, with some noting: "*Teacher can teach us to sing*" (SK03, Beatrice); "*The teacher sings for me*" (JK24, Andrew). Similarly, some children recalled that with active emotions: "*Teacher taught us a weather song, [and it] sounded really good*" (MK16, Mary); "*Because teacher can teach us how to sing, let us choose the songs we want, and even sings together with us*" (SK21, Josephie).

Children also showed enthusiasm for teacher's instrumental performance and demonstration. They spoke fondly of moments when teachers modelled musical play, for instance, "*Teacher plays the piano for me*" (JK17, Molly). Others highlighted specific instruments such as the tambourine, explaining, "*I like teacher teaching us how to play the tambourine*" (MK17, May), and "*Teacher was playing the tambourine, because she can teach the children*" (MK18, Minnie).

Another major category was children clearly recognised teachers' role as knowledge givers. Children valued the accumulation of knowledge from their teachers: "*Teacher can teach us knowledge*" (SK04, Bessie), while another added, "*The teacher gives us lessons*" (SK29, Oliver). Similarly, one child emphasised their gains from teacher: "*The teacher can teach us a lot of knowledge. That way we have a lot to bring into music class (we can learn a lot from music classes)*" (SK18, Helen).

In addition, children valued teachers' interactive activities and games. They particularly enjoyed when teachers engaged them in playful interactions: "*She leads*

*us in hand-based interactive activities*” (SK10, Evelyn), *“I like when teacher plays games with us in class”* (MK15, Maria), or simply, *“The teacher has lessons every day and plays with us”* (MK02, George). One child also emphasized the enjoyment of the teacher’s integration of movements in the music lesson: *“I like teacher doing actions”* (MK03, Gordon).

Finally, some children expressed sensitivity to teachers’ efforts, demonstrating an empathetic awareness of their labour. For instance, one commented, *“Because she works very hard when teaching in front of [the class]”* (SK10, Evelyn), while another similarly observed, *“Teacher works very hard when teaching”* (MK13, Lily).

Overall, children’s preferences for teachers encompassed a wide spectrum of instructional behaviours, ranging from direct music teaching to playful interactions, as well as the recognition of teachers’ dedication. This indicates that children’s appreciation of teachers is both centred on what teachers do in class, and shaped by empathy towards teachers’ visible effort.

#### **7.4.2 Teaching Skill Preference**

Children also expressed clear preferences for teachers’ specific teaching skills, with 11 references coded in this category. These preferences primarily focused on teachers’ musical expertise, especially their abilities in piano performance and singing.

The majority of children’s comments emphasised admiration for teachers’ piano skills. For instance, several children from the younger classes highlighted, *“Teacher plays the piano”* (JK06, Violet; JK21, Anthony; JK23, Alex). Some children went further in their appreciation, remarking that *“Teacher. Because she plays the piano so beautifully”* (JK10, Donald), while another stated simply, *“[The teacher] plays the piano really well”* (MK27, Rosalind). Similarly, children praised teachers’ instrumental competence, noting, *“I think she is really great at playing the piano”* (MK06, James).

Alongside piano performance, children also valued teachers' singing abilities. One child explained, "*So (because) teacher sings well*" (JK15, Nina), while another added, "*Because the teacher sings songs really nicely, I gave the teacher a like*" (JK04, Sybil).

In summary, these accounts reveal that children not only enjoyed the presence of music in their classrooms, but also explicitly recognised and valued teachers' musical skills as professionals. Teachers' ability to sing beautifully or to play the piano skillfully was a significant factor shaping children's preferences, suggesting that children admired and responded positively to demonstrations of artistic expertise.

### ***7.4.3 Support and Reward Preference***

Another important dimension of children's preferences for teachers concerned their supportive behaviours and the provision of rewards, which were coded nine times. These responses reveal that children valued the ways teachers provided emotional comfort, encouragement, and rewards not only in the music lessons but also in their daily interactions.

Some children explicitly referred to material rewards offered by teachers. For example, one child explained, "*She gives us food (as a reward)*" (SK29, Oliver), while another highlighted, "*Teacher always puts on cartoons for me during mealtimes, with different [shows] for children*" (SK07, Daisy).

Other responses pointed to inclusive play and activity participation as a form of support. A child from the oldest class noted, "*Teacher always invites us to join play [...] invites us to build roads*" (SK21, Josephie). Similarly, another commented, "*Teacher plays games with us in music class. Isn't playing games just about being happy*" (SK13, Robert).

Children also mentioned emotional support and care in daily life routines. For instance, one recalled, "*When I was little and hadn't come to kindergarten before, I*

*cried, and the teacher stayed with me to sleep*” (MK19, Nancy). Another described, *“Teacher tied my hair in pigtails [...] and covered me with a quilt”* (MK21, Rebecca). A further comment reflected appreciation for teachers’ companionship: *“The teacher attends class with us every day and plays with us”* (MK02, George). Similarly, one child remarked, *“[I vote for] teacher. Before class finished, she would still play with us for a while”* (MK15, Maria).

In addition, some preferences reflected children’s sensitivity to teachers’ recognition and affirmation, as in the case of one child who explained, *“[I vote for] teacher, because she thinks I am beautiful”* (JK18, Elsie).

As a whole, these findings demonstrate that children highly valued teachers’ supportive gestures, whether through tangible rewards, inclusion in playful activities, or care in daily routines. Teachers’ recognition and encouragement were also important, suggesting that children’s preferences were shaped not only by classroom teaching but also by the broader relational and nurturing roles teachers played in their everyday kindergarten lives.

#### ***7.4.4 Appearance and Personality Preference***

Children’s preferences for teachers also extended to appearance and personality, although this was coded less frequently, with a total of six references. These responses suggest that beyond teaching skills and supportive behaviours, children were attentive to teachers’ physical attractiveness and interpersonal style, particularly in terms of kindness versus strictness.

Several children explicitly mentioned their teachers’ looks as a basis for liking them. For example, one child explained, *“Because she is good-looking”* (SK14, Max). Another similarly commented, *“Teacher, because she is pretty. Teacher’s face is not rough, and she has a chin. I like that”* (SK10, Evelyn). These examples highlight how children’s notions of attractiveness informed their evaluations of teachers.

Other children’s responses focused on teachers’ temperament and interpersonal qualities. For instance, one child contrasted two teachers, stating, “*I don’t like Teacher [one], she is very fierce. [...] I like Teacher [two], she is more gentle*” (SK27, Victor). Similarly, another explained, “*She is a little gentle, but she can also be fierce sometimes. Still, she is gentler than [the other] teacher*” (SK01, Amelia).

Taken together, these findings indicate that while less frequently mentioned, children’s preferences for teachers also encompassed aesthetic appreciation and valuations of teachers’ personality traits. In particular, children expressed a clear sensitivity to whether teachers were perceived as gentle versus strict, which shaped their feelings of liking or disliking. This underscores that teacher-child relationships in early childhood are influenced not only by pedagogical and supportive practices, but also by how teachers’ appearance and interpersonal style are interpreted within children’s everyday experiences.

### 7.5 Preferences for Learning Environment

The analysis identified 42 coded references to the learning environment, ranking this theme fourth among the five overarching preference categories. Within this domain, children’s preferences were distributed across four sub-themes (see Figure 7.5.1): comfort (36%), aesthetics (33%), safety (17%), and autonomy (14%).

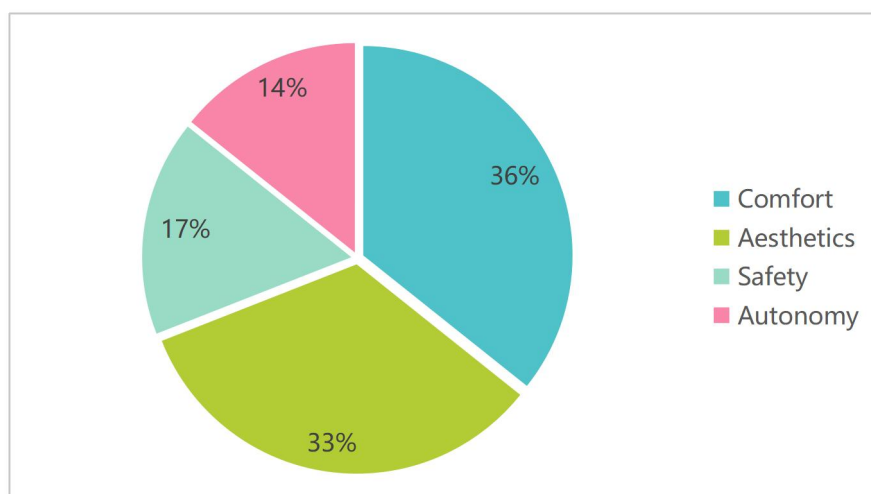


Figure 7.5.1 Proportional Distribution of Preference for Learning Environment

In learning environment, children most often emphasised issues of physical comfort and the aesthetic qualities of the classroom. By contrast, comments concerning safety and autonomy were comparatively limited. The following subsections present each sub-theme in turn, supported by children's accounts.

### **7.5.1 Comfort**

Children's references to comfort (n=15) highlighted the importance of spatial arrangements, cleanliness, and the physical qualities of the classroom environment. These comments reflected not only immediate sensory experiences, e.g. warmth, cleanliness, brightness, but also the ways in which space and crowding influenced children's enjoyment of activities.

First, several children emphasised the size and use of space. For example, one child expressed concerns about the space of music room, noting that during play *"Because the space is big. We run around and bump into each other, falling down"* (SK25, Winston). By contrast, another child appreciated the extra space for classroom: *"As that side of the classroom is full, this side is accessible for walking up to perform on stage"* (SK20, Jane). A further contrasting perspective stated directly: *"I don't like it. The classroom is too small"* (SK12, Thomas). Similarly, the perception of space is also reflected in the number of peers present. While some children disliked crowding: *"Because I don't want too many people in music class"* (SK27, Victor). These observations collectively indicate children's preferences regarding classroom spaces. They perceive their regular teaching rooms as somewhat inadequate, while the occasionally used music room feels excessively spacious. Consequently, a suitably proportioned space is of considerable importance to them.

Second, cleanliness and maintenance were important markers of comfort. A child highlighted the floor: *"Because the floor is cleaned by [the teacher], the floor is very clean [...] [and that makes me] happy"* (JK04, Sybil). Another child similarly remarked: *"[I vote for] the floor. I like big and clean "* (JK01, Selina).

Third, children also referred to specific classroom features that contributed to physical comfort. For instance, the presence of air conditioning was positively noted: *“The air conditioner brings us warm wind [...] in winter we use it, in summer we don’t”* (MK02, George). Other children commented on the effects of light: *“There is a lamp shining here”* (MK17, May). At times, classroom furnishings were seen as limiting comfort and use of space, such as one child’s remark that *“The little dots (beds) block the performance area”* (MK23, Jasper).

Finally, comfort was linked to children’s relationships with the classroom environment itself. For example, one child attached positive meaning to the walls: *“Because I like to care for them every day. We must take care of the walls of the kindergarten, otherwise if they are broken, the walls will be sad”* (JK10, Donald).

In conclusion, these comments illustrate that young children’s sense of comfort encompasses both practical concerns and emotional or symbolic attachments. Comfort was thus understood as a multidimensional experience of both body and place.

### **7.5.2 Aesthetics**

The sub-theme of aesthetics was coded 14 times, reflecting children’s sensitivity to the visual qualities and decorative aspects of their learning environment. These references reveal that children actively evaluated their classrooms and surrounding spaces in terms of attractiveness, colorfulness, and ornamentation.

Some children expressed positive affect toward spaces that were perceived as pretty or cute. For instance, one child highlighted the beauty of a classroom pillar because *“There are these pictures on the top”* (SK03, Beatrice) and another admired a classroom space that was *“It’s pretty and there are so many toys”* (SK19, Isabella). Decorative details such as colorful stickers or festive motifs also drew appreciation: a child expressed preference for *“I do like this door. So cute, with little Year of the Snake stickers on it”* (SK21, Josephie). Similarly, younger children described liking

objects simply because they were “*So beautiful, there are so many colors*” (JK07, Winnie).

At the same time, children were equally capable of critiquing features they deemed unaesthetic. Some disliked specific objects or materials because of their perceived plainness or unattractiveness: one child commented that “*Vote for the floor. This floor isn't very good-looking. I'd like a colourful floor*” (SK26, William). Some rejected a poster with Chinese character because it was “*not good-looking*” (SK28, Simon) and “*I can't read this character. If it were replaced with an image I'd like it*” (MK06, James).

Other remarks showed aesthetic judgments blended with functionality or emotional resonance. A child described that “*[I vote for] this graffiti wall, because it is lovely*” (SK07, Daisy), while the presence of natural elements outside the window “*[I vote for] this tree. Because it's composed of green and blue-green, and I'm really fond of that colour scheme*” (MK14, Lidia).

On the whole, these accounts suggest that children valued colorful, decorated, and visually engaging environments, while expressing dislike toward plain, text-heavy, or monotonous designs. Their remarks reveal a strong orientation toward visual aesthetics, where decoration, color, and imagery were central to making the classroom feel appealing.

### **7.5.3 Safety**

Children's references to safety were coded seven times, focusing on both potential hazards in the classroom and protective features that reassured them. Their comments revealed an acute awareness of risks related to physical objects, hygiene, and the prevention of accidents.

First, children identified classroom elements that could pose dangers. For example, one child expressed dislike for an exposed cable: “*Because the wire might scratch my*

hand” (JK21, Anthony). Another worried about the ceiling fan or ventilation system: “*Because this ceiling (fan) blows air, it will make me sick. My mom said it would make me vomit*” (JK10, Donald). Similarly, concerns were raised about the height of furniture: “*Because this one is lower, it is easy to bump [my] head*” (MK06, James).

Second, children emphasized features that ensured safety. For instance, walls were described as protective: “*This wall can protect us*” (SK04, Bessie). Doors were also appreciated for being ‘well-behaved’: “*Under no circumstances should you put your hands in the gaps, as you’ll get them caught. But the children didn’t put their hands in the gaps, so it’s (door) been very well-behaved. I must praise it (door)*” (JK10, Donald).

Third, children also linked safety with hygiene and disease prevention. For example, one noted: “*[I vote for] masks. When you wear them, there are no germs*” (JK21, Anthony). The same child further added that disinfecting equipment made the environment safer: “*That basket can disinfect (It is a disinfection kit capable of sterilising items within the classroom)*” (JK21, Anthony).

In summary, these observations highlight that children’s sense of safety encompassed both physical protection and health-related practices. Their comments illustrate a developing awareness of environmental risks and preventive measures, suggesting that a safe learning environment was understood not only as free from immediate hazards but also as actively maintained for their well-being.

#### **7.5.4 Autonomy**

Children’s six references to autonomy primarily concerned the display and recognition of their own creative work within the classroom environment. Their comments emphasized the importance of having their products acknowledged, valued, and made visible to others.

First, several children expressed positive feelings toward spaces or furnishings that

showcased their creations. For example, one child commented: “[I vote for] our work, because I feel it looks very good on display now” (SK07, Daisy). Similarly, another pointed to the display cabinet: “Because it shows the children’s works” (SK14, Max). A third echoed this appreciation: “[I vote for] children’s work display” (SK12, Thomas).

Second, younger children also highlighted classroom decorations made by themselves or their peers. For instance, one child explained: “[I vote for] these paintings. [Because the children drew it themselves]” (JK13, Clement). Another described ceiling decorations: “This is a paper cup, the children painted it. They are so beautiful and so many colors” (JK07, Winnie). Likewise, another child referred to a collaborative product: “[I vote for] this (the paper-cup wind chime). [They were] made by both the teacher and the children” (JK16, Cara).

Totally, these narratives suggest that children valued classroom environments that reflected their own agency and contributions. The display of their creative products was not merely a decorative feature but a recognition of their participation and identity within the collective classroom community. Autonomy, in this sense, was closely linked to visibility, ownership, and the affirmation of children’s voices in shaping their learning spaces.

## **7.6 Preferences for Music Curriculum Content**

In the children’s voting dataset, preferences relating to the content of the music curriculum were coded 20 times, accounting for approximately 7% of all references. Although not among the dominant domains, children’s reflections on music curriculum content provide valuable insights into how they perceive and engage with classroom activities. Within this theme, three sub-categories were identified (see Figure 7.6.1): activity content preference (60%), activity theme preference (30%), and activity time preference (10%).

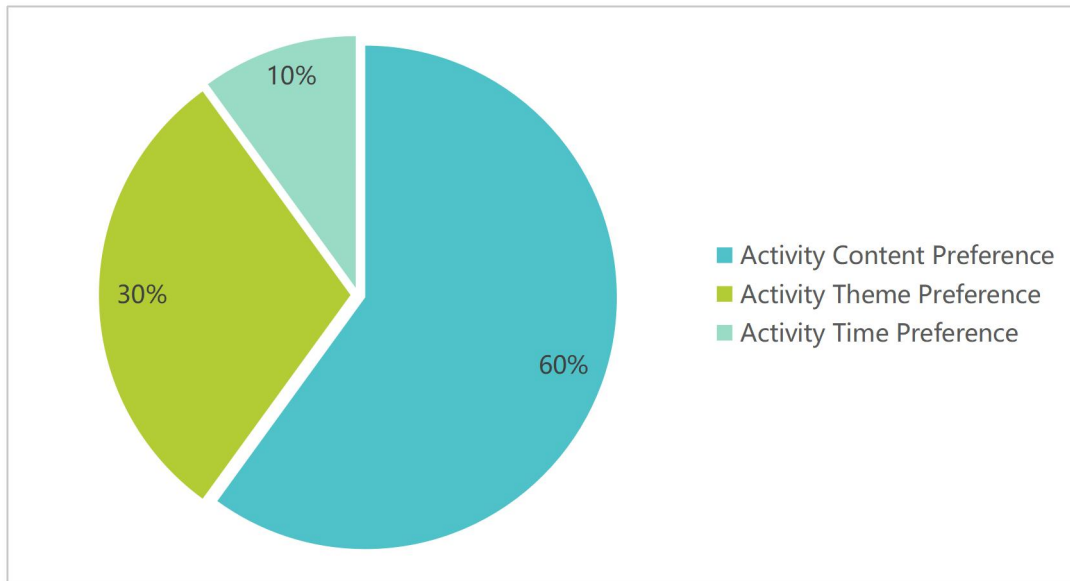


Figure 7.6.1 Proportional Distribution of Preference for Music Curriculum Content

The distribution indicates that children were primarily concerned with the specific content of musical activities. A smaller proportion of comments reflected children’s preferences for thematic aspects of activities, while relatively few references focused explicitly on the timing or scheduling of music activities.

### 7.6.1 Activity Content Preference

Children’s preferences for the specific content of music activities were the most prominent within the curriculum domain, accounting for 12 coded references. The data suggest that young learners valued music lessons that were active, participatory, and performance-oriented, often highlighting opportunities to move, sing, play instruments, or perform.

Some children particularly enjoyed movement-based activities in the music room, one child recalled that: “[I like] moving with the music” (SK31, Neol). Similarly, another child also expressed enthusiasm about the music room space because “I wish to perform [as a soldier]” (SK25, Winston), indicating a strong desire to engage in music and movement activities. However, a child expressed a negative attitude toward the music and movement activity, noting that the walking frequency was too high and saying, “My legs feel sore, so I want to sit down” (SK17, Elizabeth).

A recurrent theme across multiple accounts was the strong appeal of performance-related activities. Children frequently highlighted the enjoyment derived from either participating in or observing performances. For instance, one child commented, *“I like [her] performing”* (JK09, Edward), while another noted, *“I enjoyed their performance. They performed very well”* (MK18, Minnie). Besides, several children expressed particular enthusiasm for engaging in autonomous performances within the designated performance area. As one child explained, *“Because the performance area can perform all sorts of things. And there are also many things (instruments and other materials) we can use”* (MK25, Rachel). Another child elaborated, *“This is where the kids play in the performance area. I love singing and dancing in here”* (MK28, Sarah).

In addition, small number of children highlighted other components of the music lessons. For example, one child remarked, *“I also like the preparatory activities in music class”* (SK27, Victor), while another referred to the music, stating, *“I like the song ‘Great China’ that the teacher taught us”* (SK01, Amelia).

In summary, the evidence shows that children place high value on active, embodied, and participatory forms of musical engagement. Children’s preferences for music activities were largely centered on active participation and performance, with movement, singing, and role-play emerging as key sources of enjoyment. Others highlighted the value of preparatory activities and songs.

### ***7.6.2 Activity Theme Preference***

Children’s comments on thematic preferences within music lessons were less frequent, only coded six times, but revealed distinct emotional responses toward the imagery and narrative themes embedded in musical content.

Some children expressed positive associations with familiar or aspirational themes. For instance, one child noted, *“Because I feel I’ve been there”* (SK07, Daisy),

suggesting a sense of connection between classroom themes and personal experience. Similarly, another child enjoyed the theme of transportation and travel: “[I vote for] airport because I like taking planes. But my mom hasn’t taken me yet” (SK28, Simon). Another child expressed excitement about space exploration, simply stating, “Because I like this space” (SK27, Victor). These examples show how children’s lived experiences and curiosities can enhance their engagement with music lesson themes.

In contrast, several children exhibited negative reactions to certain visual or auditory stimuli, especially those involving threatening or unfamiliar imagery. One child commented, “I like listening to the music, but I don’t like looking at this. The patrol soldier (picture) looks a bit scary” (SK29, Oliver). Another child expressed fear toward weather-related content: “Because the TV showed thunder and rain pictures. I felt scared” (MK06, James). Consistent with this, another child explicitly stated, “I only like singing. I don’t like singing the thunder song [...] because I’m afraid of thunder. I like songs about flowers” (MK25, Rachel).

Taken together, these responses highlight that children’s thematic preferences in music are closely tied to emotional valence and personal relevance. Themes that evoke familiarity, safety, or aesthetic pleasure are favored, whereas those that depict threatening or unsettling elements tend to elicit rejection. These findings underscore the importance of emotionally attuned curriculum design, where musical themes not only stimulate imagination but also respect young learners’ emotional boundaries and lived experiences.

### ***7.6.3 Activity Time Preference***

Children’s references to the timing of music activities were rare, only coded two times. Both comments came from a single child who expressed a clear dislike for afternoon sessions, associating them with fatigue and a desire for the school day to end.

As the child explained, “[I don’t like] having the class. I want to go home soon. [...] I don’t like having class in the afternoon. During class I feel a bit sleepy” (MK25, Rachel). These remarks suggest that time-of-day effects can shape children’s enthusiasm and attentiveness in music lessons.

Although only a few explicit references were recorded, such observations underscore the importance of considering children’s physiological rhythms and daily routines when scheduling music lessons.

## **Chapter 8 Children's Perspectives on the Ideal Music**

### **Curriculum**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

In recent years, research across social and educational domains has increasingly recognised children as social constructors of their own worlds rather than passive participants in adult-designed realities (Clark & Statham, 2005; Clark, 2010). Research on children's imagination is vital for uncovering how they envision and give meaning to the worlds they create in their minds (Zartler, 2015). Through creative expression, such as drawing, storytelling, and play, children often articulate not only how they experience the world, but how they wish it to be (Goldman et al., 2012). These imaginative acts reflect children's ability to move beyond description toward construction, envisioning ideal spaces, relationships, and learning environments that embody their own values and desires.

In the field of music education, however, relatively few studies have examined how children envision their ideal music learning experiences. By examining how children imagine their ideal music curriculum, researchers can uncover perspectives that are often overlooked in adult-designed programs, thereby contributing to the development of a music curriculum genuinely shaped by children's voices and experiences. This chapter therefore explores Chinese children's perspectives on the ideal kindergarten music curriculum, seeking to reveal their aspirations for the people, activities, tools, and environments that constitute their dream music class.

To uncover these perspectives, two qualitative methods were employed. First, all participating children were invited to engage in a drawing activity (using collage for the youngest group) through which they individually represented their vision of an ideal music class. These visual representations enabled even the youngest participants to express ideas beyond verbal language, illustrating the spatial, material, and emotional dimensions of their imagined classrooms. Second, children's conferencing

were conducted with older children (middle kindergartners and senior kindergartners) to encourage collaborative dialogue about what an ideal music lesson might include. These discussions provided insight into how children negotiate and refine their collective ideas. Data from both activities were analyzed thematically, yielding a total of 679 coded references that form the basis for the thematic framework presented in this chapter.

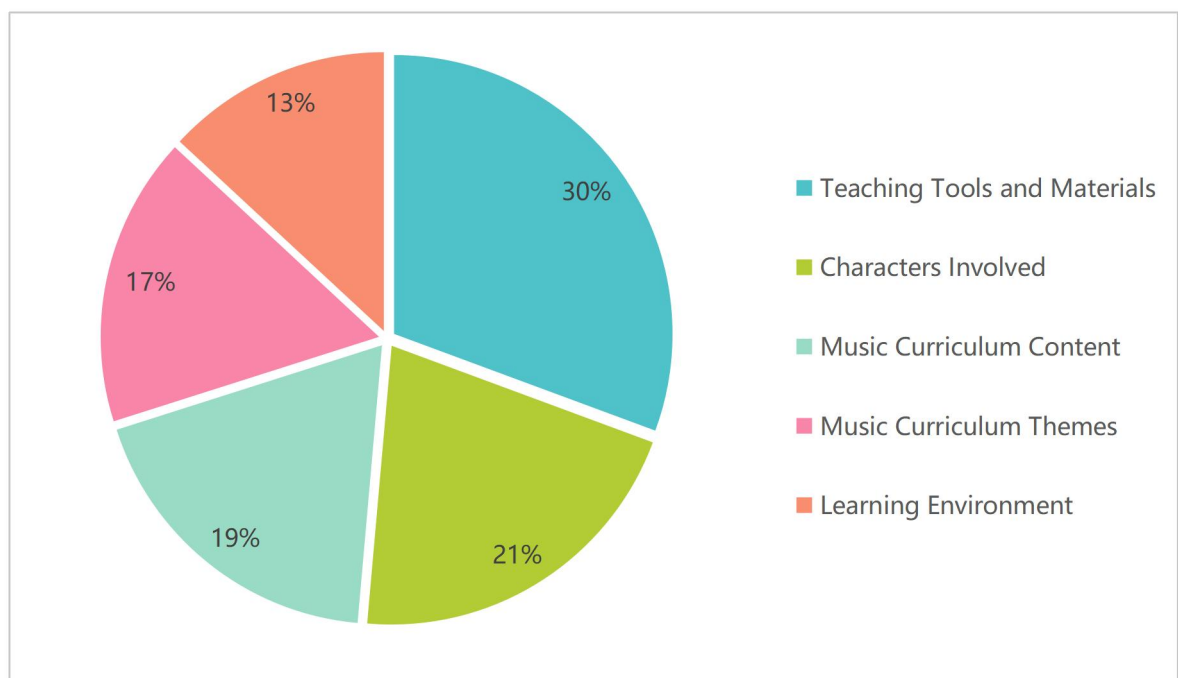


Figure 8.1.1 Proportional Distribution of Children’s Ideal Music Curriculum Themes

According to Figure 8.1.1, the five major themes appeared with relatively balanced proportions: teaching tools and materials accounted for about 30% of the total references, followed by characters involved (21%), music curriculum content (19%), and music curriculum themes (17%), while learning environment made up approximately 13%. This relatively even distribution indicates that children’s visions of the ideal music curriculum encompassed multiple dimensions.

Table 8.1.1 below outlines the complete thematic framework of children’s perspectives on the ideal music curriculum, detailing each major theme and its associated sub-themes. The subsequent sections of this chapter are organized according to this framework, providing a structured presentation of children’s

imaginative and participatory visions of their ideal music learning experience.

Table 8.1.1 Thematic Framework of Children’s Perspectives on the Ideal Music Curriculum

Theme	Sub-theme	
Teaching Tools and Materials	Musical Instruments	Instruments included in the current curriculum
		Instruments not included in the current curriculum
	Educational Support Tools	
Characters Involved	Teachers Peers Family Members Imaginary Characters	
Music Curriculum Content	Singing Activities Classroom Performances Instrumental Learning Music Games Dance Activities Large-scale Performances Self-directed Performances	
Music Curriculum Themes	Conventional Themes	Singing music curriculum Performing music curriculum Instrumental music curriculum Dancing music curriculum
	Imaginative Themes	Outdoor music curriculum Stage performance music curriculum Play-based music curriculum Experiential music curriculum Family-based music curriculum Whole-school large-scale music curriculum
Learning Environment	Decorative Features Connection with Nature Supportive Features Thematic Features Autonomy Safety Prompting Features	

## 8.2 Teaching Tools and Materials

Children’s imaginative constructions of their ideal music curriculum placed notable

emphasis on the tools and materials that support music learning. Within this theme, a total of 208 instances were coded, which were further divided into two subcategories: musical instruments and educational support tools.

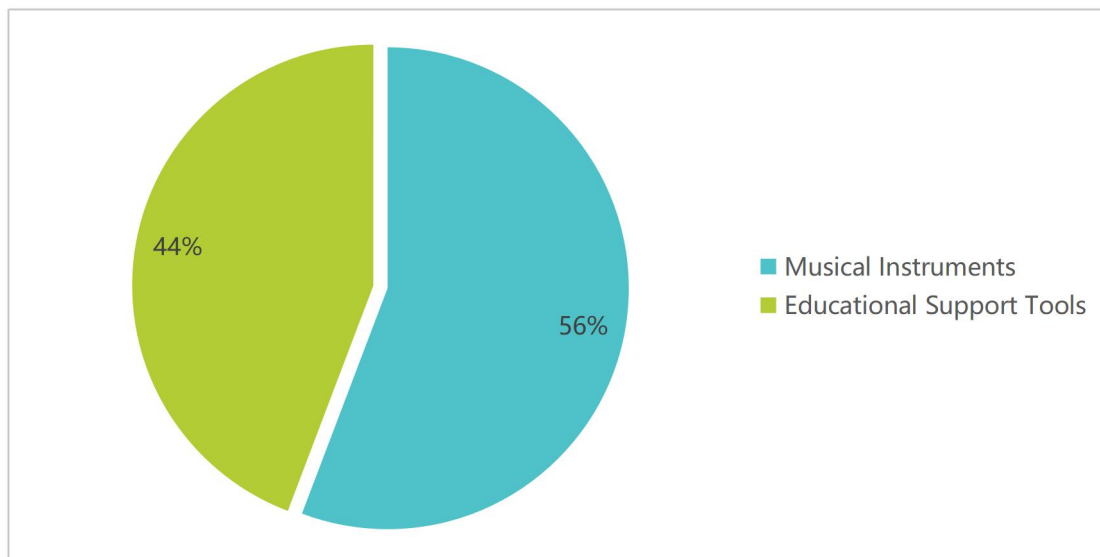


Figure 8.2.1 Proportional Distribution of Teaching Tools and Materials Themes

As shown in Figure 8.2.1, references to educational support tools accounted for 56% of the total instances under this theme and musical instruments represented 44%. This distribution indicates that both musical instruments and educational support tools occupied equally important positions in children’s imagined music classrooms. While musical instruments represented the tangible and expressive means through which children engaged with sound, educational support tools reflected their recognition of the broader resources that facilitate and enrich musical learning. The relatively balanced proportions between the two subcategories suggest that children valued not only the instruments themselves but also the materials, technologies, and aids that make music learning more interactive, supportive, and enjoyable.

### ***8.2.1 Musical Instruments***

Within the category of musical instruments, children’s depictions and discussions revealed two distinct subgroups: instruments that are already included in their current Chinese kindergarten music curriculum and those that do not typically appear in their

kindergarten music classroom experiences but were desired.

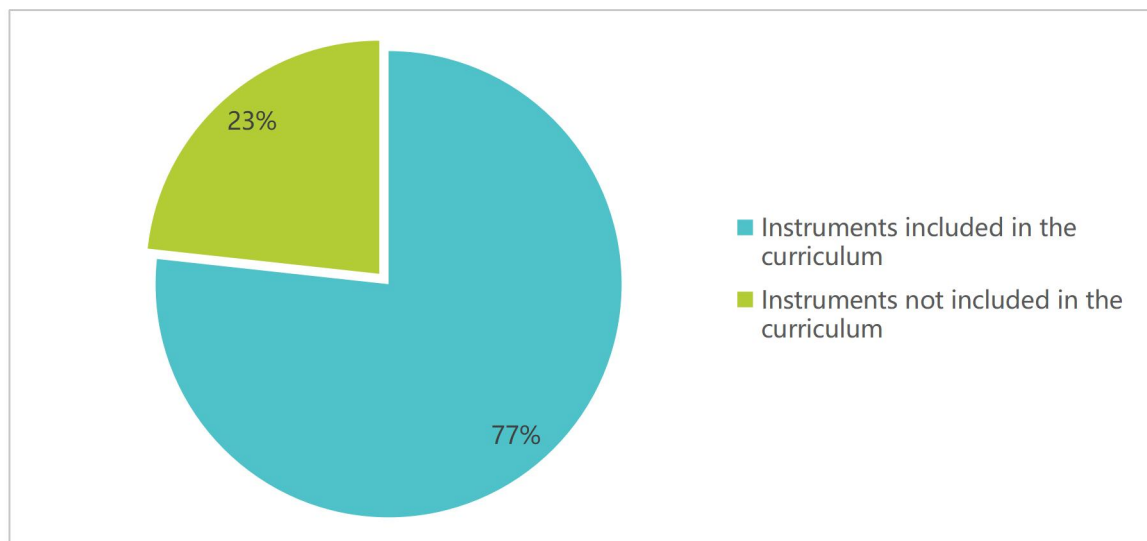


Figure 8.2.2 Proportional Distribution of Musical Instruments Themes

As shown in Figure 8.2.2, references to instruments currently included in the curriculum accounted for 77% of the total instances, while imagined instruments represented 23%. This distribution suggests that children's visions of an ideal music class were largely grounded in the instruments they regularly used in their current lessons. Their imaginative constructions were thus closely connected to familiar classroom experiences. However, some children also integrated experiences and impressions from their broader musical lives into their imaginative constructions. In doing so, children envisioned a music class that offers access to a wider variety of instruments and richer opportunities for musical exploration and expression.

#### **Instruments included in the current curriculum**

Among the instruments already included in the current Chinese kindergarten music curriculum, five main types were identified: piano, microphone, tambourine, drum, and jingle bells.

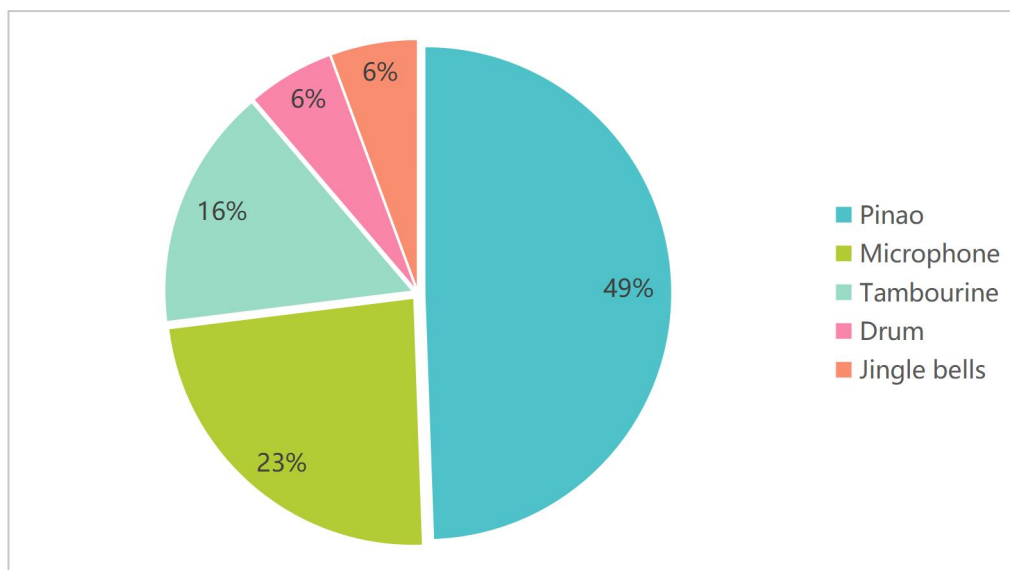


Figure 8.2.3 Proportional Distribution of Instruments Included in the Current Curriculum Themes

As shown in Figure 8.2.3, the piano was mentioned most frequently, accounting for 49% of all references within this subgroup, nearly half of the total. The microphone followed with 23%, while the tambourine represented 16%, and both drums and jingle bells each accounted for 6%. It is worth noting that when asked about the instruments they use or their favorite instruments, children often categorized the microphone as a musical instrument. Therefore, in this study, the microphone is regarded as a type of musical instrument.

### ***Piano***

Among all the instruments mentioned, the piano appeared most frequently, with 44 coded instances across drawings and group discussions. It emerged as the dominant instrument in children’s ideal music classes and was strongly linked to their everyday classroom experiences. Most children depicted the teacher as the person playing the piano suggesting its central role in their understanding of music teaching. For example, children repeatedly stated that “*Teacher is playing the piano*” (JK08, Edith; MK14, Lidia; SK09, Emma), or described detailed scenes such as “[*Teacher*] is enjoying playing the piano here” (SK07, Daisy).

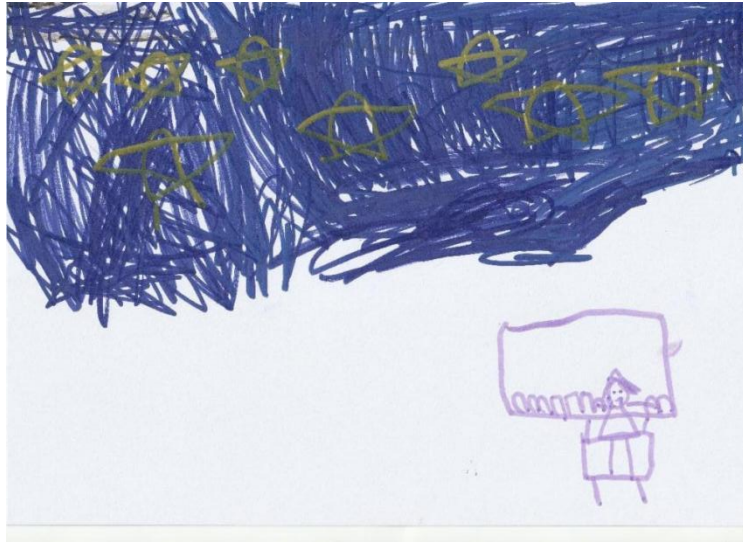


Figure 8.2.4 Painting from Clara (SK06)

However, several children also imagined themselves taking part in piano playing. A child expressed a wish to learn playing the piano: “*All the children are playing the piano*” (MK28, Sarah). As shown in Figure 8.2.4, a child envisioned: “*I want to play the piano. I am playing the piano in the evening*” (SK06, Clara). These expressions suggest that children’s imaginative visions were not confined to observing the teacher’s performance but included their own participation and learning.

Taken together, children’s descriptions indicate that the piano occupied an important place in their visions of an ideal music class. It was primarily portrayed as a key teaching tool used by teachers, reflecting its central role in existing classroom practices. At the same time, some children also expressed a personal wish to learn or play the piano themselves, suggesting that beyond its instructional function, the piano also represented a meaningful and desirable aspect of their own musical aspirations.

### ***Microphone***

The microphone was mentioned 21 times, accounting for 23% of all musical instrument-related codes. Children frequently associated microphones with classroom activities, singing, and performing, showing how they viewed the microphone as both a teaching tool and a means of musical expression. Their narratives reflected three primary uses: teaching, singing, and performance.

In many children's accounts, microphones were closely linked to teachers and classroom communication. Several children described teachers using microphones while teaching, such as: *"She (teacher) uses the microphone to speak to us, teach us"* (JK21, Anthony). Children described both teachers and students engaging in music class with microphones: *"[We] need to learn songs. I am holding a microphone. The teacher is also holding a microphone"* (SK05, Catherine). These suggests that microphones were perceived as essential classroom tools that facilitate interaction and audibility during their ideal music lessons.

Besides, a significant portion of children's depictions involved using microphones for singing and music-making. *"They should use microphone when they are singing"* (JK09, Edward), and *"And microphone. It's for students"* (SK29, Oliver). These accounts highlight that microphones were seen as tools that make singing possible and enjoyable, reinforcing the participatory nature of music classes.



Figure 8.2.5 Painting from Katherine (SK23)

Beyond classroom singing, microphones also appeared as symbols of performance and imagination. Several children envisioned themselves or peers performing with microphones, such as *"This little girl is singing with a microphone"* (SK22, Julia); *"A child is performing with a microphone"* (MK04, Graham). As shown in Figure 8.2.5, a child explained: *"The child on the left is me, holding a microphone and singing. The*

*child on the right is also singing. We are both holding microphones”* (SK23, Katherine). These examples reveal how children associated microphones with performance, visibility, and creativity.

Overall, the microphone was represented as both a functional classroom tool and a symbol of performance and self-expression. Through their descriptions, children revealed an understanding that microphones amplify not only sound but also participation, confidence, and enjoyment. In their imagined music classes, microphones enable both teachers and children to be heard, seen, and engaged.

### ***Tambourine***

The tambourine appeared 14 times in children’s representations of their ideal music classroom, accounting for 16% of all musical instrument references. As one of the most familiar percussion instruments in kindergartens, it was frequently described as both a learning tool and a performance instrument, revealing its dual role in classroom participation and musical enjoyment.

Many children associated the tambourine with their daily music lessons, reflecting its importance as a familiar classroom instrument. Some children highlighted the teacher’s use of the tambourine as a central teaching tool: *“The teacher uses a big tambourine”* (MK24, Lucy), and *“The teacher has music, it’s the tambourine (The teacher uses tambourine to play music)”* (MK08, Leonard).

Besides, several children described either themselves or others using the tambourine during classroom music lessons. For example, some children said, *“I drew the one [we] can shake in hands (tambourine)”* (SK03, Beatrice); *“I want to draw a tambourine in my hand because I held it yesterday”* (MK21, Rebecca); *“What he holds is a tambourine”* (MK13, Lily). As illustrated in Figure 8.2.6, one child imagined learning and performing with the instrument during music lesson: *“[I want to] let the children come up and perform with the tambourine. [...] There is only one tambourine in our class but I want all the children to have”* (MK16, Mary).



Figure 8.2.6 Painting from Mary (MK16)

From children's perspectives in their ideal music lessons, the tambourine was not merely a teaching aid used by the teacher, but also a learning instrument through which they could explore and experience music independently.

### ***Drum***

The drum appeared less frequently in children's representations, being coded five times in total. Although it was not a highly prominent element in their imagined music classrooms, the drum was consistently described as one of the instruments used during music lessons.

Children's comments also reflected that the drum was part of the teaching process, often introduced or demonstrated by teachers. As one child noted, "*I drew a drum. The teacher can teach us to play the drum*" (SK03, Beatrice); "*The child [is playing the drum]. There is only one drum*" (MK06, James).

Overall, while the drum was not as frequently represented as other instruments, it held a meaningful place in children's musical imagination. It was seen as a classroom instrument that supported rhythm learning and performance, embodying both the teacher's instruction and the child's participation in active music-making.

### ***Jingle bells***

The jingle bells appeared five times in children's data, showing a similar function to the tambourine as a rhythm instrument commonly used in classroom music activities. Although less frequently mentioned, it still represented an important part of children's musical imagination.

Several children mentioned jingle bells as part of their imagined or remembered classroom activities, indicating its role as a common learning instrument in music lessons. Their references were often brief and direct, such as "*Then he holds two jingle bells*" (MK17, May), "*Probably the jingle bells*", (MK07, John), and simply "*Jingle bells*" (MK04, Graham). These statements suggest that children viewed jingle bells as familiar and accessible tools for making music.

### ***Instruments not included in the current curriculum***

Children also mentioned a range of instruments that are not commonly used in their regular kindergarten music lessons, which was coded 27 times. These instruments were diverse in type and cultural background, including both Western and traditional Chinese examples. As illustrate in Figure 8.2.7, the most frequently mentioned was the guitar (26%). Several instruments appeared with equal frequency (11% each), such as the dizi (Chinese bamboo flute), pipa (Chinese lute), shakers, and hand bells. Other instruments were mentioned less often, including the guzheng (Chinese zither, 7%) and a group of instruments each coded once (4% each): the erhu (Chinese two-stringed fiddle), drum kit, harmonica, triangle, ukulele, and bamboo clappers. Together, these references reflect the breadth of children's musical imaginations and their interest in exploring a variety of sounds and instruments beyond the typical classroom setting.

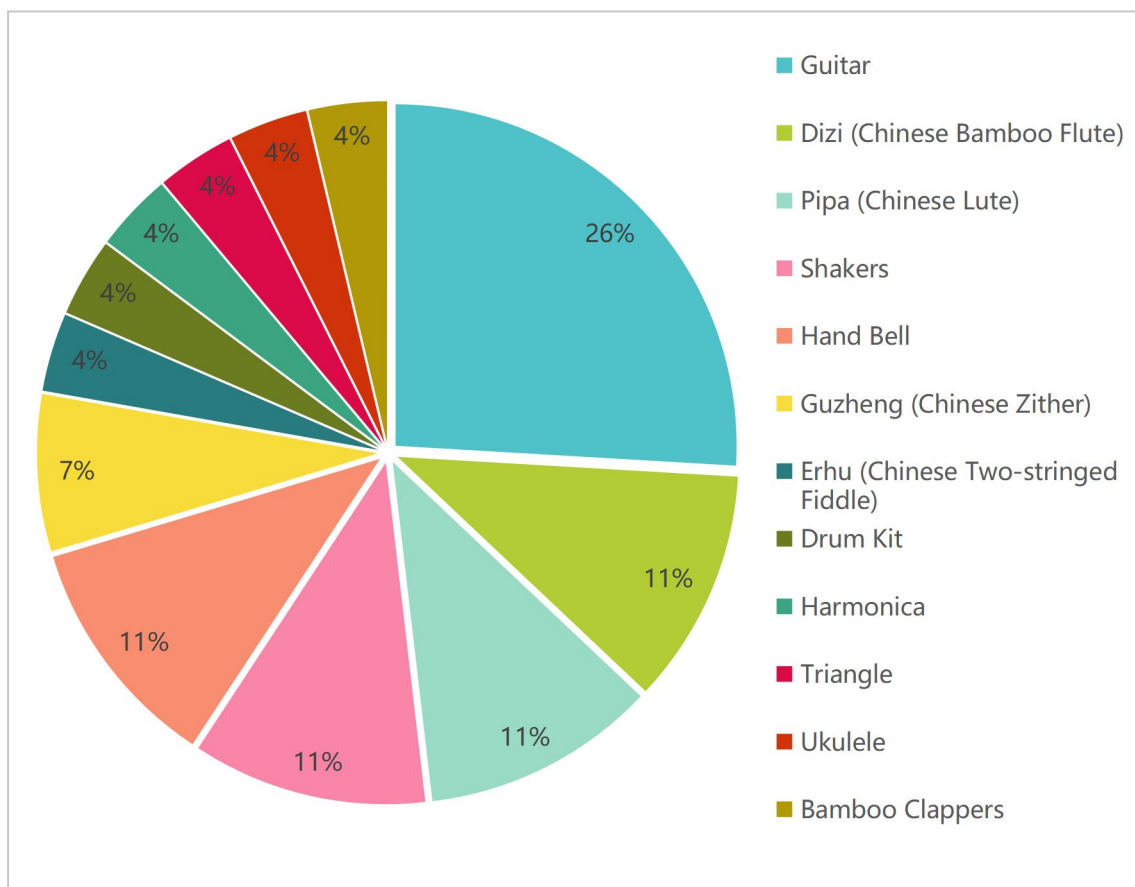


Figure 8.2.7 Proportional Distribution of Instruments not Included in the Current Curriculum Themes

Some children described instruments that were primarily associated with teachers' performances or demonstrations. For example, one child explained, *"This is a harmonica. At the front there's a music stand where you can place the harmonica. [...] The teacher is demonstrating, who is the performer. Children can perform too"* (SK02, Anne). Another child mentioned, *"The teacher will use [...] the guzheng, along with various ancient musical instruments. [...] I'd also like the teacher to play the guzheng and pipa for us [to listen to]"* (SK17, Elizabeth).

A number of children envisioned themselves not only as listeners but as active performers. Among these, the guitar appeared most frequently. One child described, *"This lesson is all about learning to play the guitar"* (SK04, Bessie), while another explained, *"This is a cabinet. I draw a guitar on the top inside, and there's another one here. This one is mine"* (SK05, Catherine). The idea of learning from the teacher

was also expressed directly: *“Teacher will teach us playing the guitar”* (SK08, Emily). Similarly, a child described the use of instruments in the performance area: *“I want to draw a guitar and put it in the performance area. There is a child coming to play the guitar. He plays a very small guitar”* (MK16, Mary).

These examples suggest that even though instruments like the guitar, dizi, or pipa are not typically used in daily kindergarten lessons, children actively imagine them as part of their ideal music classes. Their drawings and discussions reveal a desire not only to learn these instruments but also to perform and display their musical abilities within shared, expressive spaces.

### 8.2.2 Educational Support Tools

As another major category of teaching tools and materials, educational support tools were coded 92 times in total, representing children’s references to various classroom objects and resources that assist music teaching and learning.

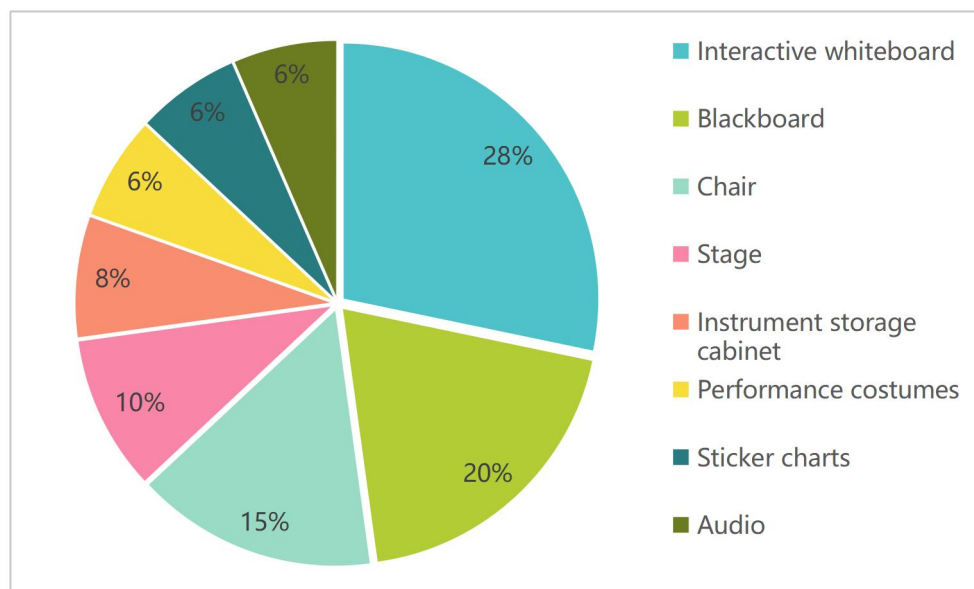


Figure 8.2.8 Proportional Distribution of Educational Support Tools Themes

Among all references (see Figure 8.2.8), the interactive whiteboard appeared most frequently, which represents 28% of all the sub themes, followed by the blackboard (20%). References to chairs and stages were also common which represent 15% and

10% respectively. Items mentioned less frequently included instrument storage cabinets, performance costumes, sticker charts, and audio equipment (around 6%).

### **Interactive whiteboard**

Children frequently referred to the interactive whiteboard, often using alternative terms such as “TV”, “big screen”, “computer”, or “whiteboard”. A total of 26 coded references were identified, highlighting children’s awareness of this technology as an important medium for presenting and supporting musical activities in their ideal music curriculum.

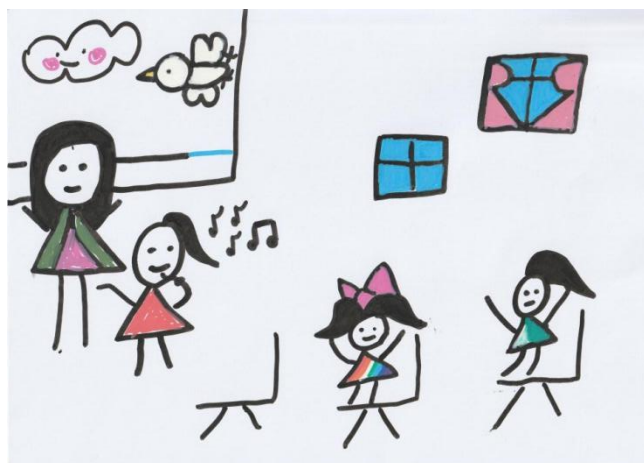


Figure 8.2.9 Painting from Jane (SK20)

Across all age groups, children described the interactive whiteboard as an essential teaching aid that combines sound and visual elements to support music learning. For example, one child explained (see Figure 8.2.9), *“This is the TV. It shows clouds and a bird. It’s playing the song they sing”* (SK20, Jane), while another noted that *“There is a computer. The teacher is playing a song for them (The teacher plays a song on the computer). There is a music score on the computer”* (SK21, Josephie). Similarly, younger children also recognized its function: *“The big TV is playing songs”* (JK07, Winnie), and *“This is something for making music. This is TV. It plays songs for us”* (JK19, Benjamin).

In sum, children’s descriptions reveal their clear awareness of the interactive

whiteboard as a medium that integrates sound and image to support music learning. They perceived it as a tool for playing songs, displaying visual materials, and enabling collective participation through watching and singing together. This suggests that the interactive whiteboard functioned not only as an instructional aid but also as an engaging and enjoyable element of their classroom music experiences.

### **Blackboard**

A total of 18 coded references were related to the blackboard, which children frequently described as a familiar tool within their classroom learning environment. The blackboard was primarily understood as a traditional learning tool used for writing, drawing, or displaying lesson content.

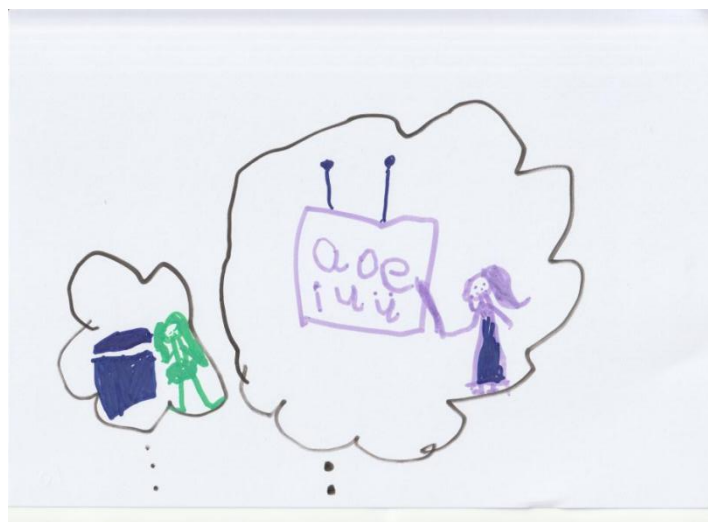


Figure 8.2.10 Painting from Anne (SK02)

Children across different age groups regarded the blackboard as a useful tool for music lessons, often describing it as something that teachers and children could use to write lyrics, draw, or display learning content. As shown in Figure 8.2.10, a child said: *“This is the blackboard. There are letters ‘a’, ‘o’, and ‘e’ on it”* (SK02, Anne). Many younger children also recognized its expressive functions: *“The big blackboard. I want it writes the lyrics. Step by step, jump jump jump (singing)”* (JK16, Cara); *“It can write our names and numbers. But now I want to change a black board for writing music”* (JK21, Anthony). However, many children referred to the blackboard

more generally as a symbol of teaching and learning, whether in music or other subjects, emphasizing its role as an integral feature of their classroom space. For example, one child marked: “[*The blackboard*] can be used for drawing” (JK14, Charles).

In sum, the blackboard was recognized by children as a practical tool that supported music learning through writing, drawing, and displaying song lyrics or musical symbols. It remained a meaningful and familiar part of their ideal classroom experience, representing a space where teachers and children could share, express, and participate in musical learning together.

### **Chair**

A total of 14 coded references were related to chairs. Although simple and ordinary, chairs were recognized by children as one of the essential materials for music lessons, used by both teachers and children to sit and take part in classroom activities.

Several children mentioned that teachers needed chairs: “*The teacher is in front of the piano, but there’s no chair [for her]. I’ll draw one*” (SK07, Daisy), and “[*The teacher*] plays the piano. I want her to sit on a chair” (JK07, Winnie). Others referred to children, noting “*The children are sitting on the chairs*” (SK09, Emma), or “*I want to draw a big chair so many children can sit*” (MK25, Rachel).

Overall, the chair symbolized comfort, readiness, and participation, reflecting children’s recognition of how such everyday objects support their engagement in music learning.

### **Stage**

Across all age groups, the stage was mentioned nine times in children’s drawings, often depicted as a central space for musical performance.



Figure 8.2.11 Painting from Isabella (SK19)

Children described the stage as a place for singing, dancing, and teaching, showing aspiration toward this special setting. For example, one child explained, *“It’s for singing and dancing. The teacher teaches us on the stage”* (SK07, Daisy), while another noted that *“[We are] on the stage. The stage is outside”* (SK17, Elizabeth). Similarly, another child emphasized (see Figure 8.2.11), *“This is the stage [...] it’s inside the classroom”* (SK19, Isabella). Younger children also recognized the presence and purpose of the stage. One explained, *“Because children need to dance here”* (JK17, Molly), while one child said simply, *“The stage is for dancing”* (JK21, Anthony).

In sum, children portrayed the stage as an exciting and meaningful part of their musical world which is a place associated with performance, participation, and visibility. Their comments revealed their aspiration to be active performers, reflecting the social and emotional dimensions of musical learning in early childhood.

### **Instrument storage cabinet**

Though mentioned only seven times, the references to instrument storage cabinets showed children’s interest in and longing for such spaces to keep and organize their instruments.

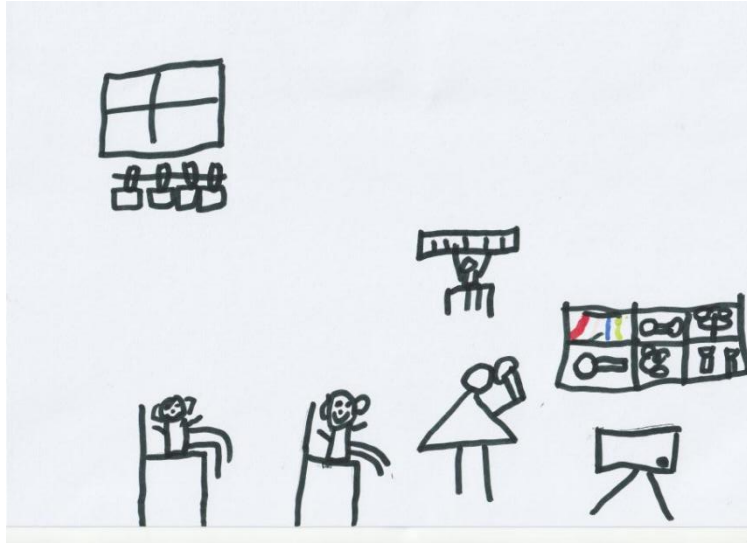


Figure 8.2.12 Painting from Graham (MK04)

Children recognized its practical role as a designated space for storing instruments used in music activities. For instance, some child explained, *“I want a cabinet for putting instruments. There’s a box full of instruments. I don’t know how to draw instruments, so each dot is one instrument”* (SK13, Robert); *“There are two cabinets. This one is for keeping the instruments”* (MK17, May). As shown in Figure 8.2.12, another child elaborated, *“I put them in the cabinet. There are also bells and jingle bells. This is a special cabinet for instruments. It’s in the middle of the performance area. Wigs are required [here]”* (MK04, Graham). Another child listed the instruments it contained: *“This is the cabinet for instruments: tambourines, maracas, string bells, castanets, and jingle bells”* (MK09, Louis).

Overall, children’s references to the instrument storage cabinet revealed both an understanding of how instruments are kept and organized, and a sense of anticipation for variety and abundance in musical resources that the cabinet represents.

### **Performance costumes**

Although mentioned only six times, children’s references to performance costumes revealed their vivid imagination and enthusiasm for musical performances. As illustrated in Figure 8.2.13, one child described: *“[This is] a little skirt for going on stage”* (MK19, Nancy). Another child noted: *“[This is] a wardrobe for keeping little*

skirts. [...] The clothes are for wearing during performances” (MK25, Rachel). Similarly, one child illustrated: “There are a lot of people. They should wear dance clothes and shoes. [...] These are special clothes for performance. The teacher still needs to be dressed” (MK28, Sarah).



Figure 8.2.13 Painting from Nancy (MK19)

In sum, children’s depictions of costumes reflected an yearning of their aesthetic and performative significance. They regarded performance clothing as a meaningful element of musical expression, representing preparation, and enjoyment in shared performances.

### **Sticker charts**

This theme was coded six times in children’s drawings and interviews. Although mentioned relatively less frequently, it reflected children’s recognition of the motivational and reward systems embedded in their music learning environments. The sticker chart appeared in their accounts as both a visual record of achievement and a medium for encouragement.

One child described a designing: “[This is] a name tag with numbers. Good performance can be rewarded” (JK01, Selina). Another child explained, “There is a tag for each number. I even changed it into a heart shape” (SK18, Helen),

highlighting children's personalization and emotional engagement with the reward system.

Overall, children's depictions of sticker charts revealed their understanding of fairness, effort, and encouragement in music activities. Such visual markers of achievement not only supported behavioral motivation but also expressed children's desire for recognition and belonging within their musical community.

### **Audio**

References to audio appeared six times in total, though this theme accounted for only a small proportion of the data. Nonetheless, children's mentions of speakers reflected their awareness of how sound and music are produced and shared in music activities.

One senior kindergartner explained, *"This is the audio that can play music. We all hold microphones"* (SK23, Katherine). Another described its use simply, saying, *"The audio can be placed in the room. It can play music"* (JK21, Anthony).

In sum, children's references to audio revealed not only their awareness of the device's classroom functions but also their desire for its use in music activities. They perceived the audio as a tool that could amplify music, make sounds louder, and support performances by projecting the voices of both teachers and students.

### **8.3 Characters Involved**

In children's imagined music lessons, a total of 141 references were coded in this category, making it the second largest theme. This suggests that the presence and roles of people were central to how children envisioned meaningful and enjoyable music experiences.

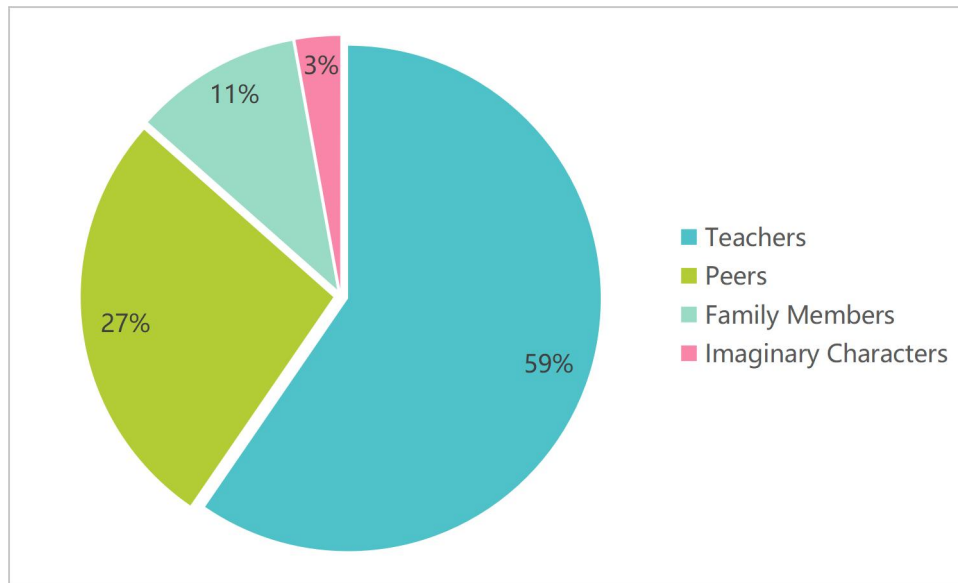


Figure 8.3.1 Proportional Distribution of Characters Involved Themes

Among these (see Figure 8.3.1), teachers were mentioned most frequently, accounting for over half of all references (59%). Peers were the second most commonly mentioned group (27%), followed by family members (11%). Imaginary characters, though mentioned only occasionally (3%), also appeared in children’s narratives, revealing the imaginative dimension of their musical experiences.

### **8.3.1 Teachers**

Teachers were one of the most frequently mentioned figures in characters involved, with a total of 84 coded references. From children’s expectations of their ideal music lessons, the teacher’s role could be categorized into five types: instructor, supporter, organizer, helper, and motivator. This classification reflects children’s imagination of a music curriculum where the teacher not only imparts knowledge and provides support, but also organizes activities, offers direct assistance, and encourages their participation and confidence.

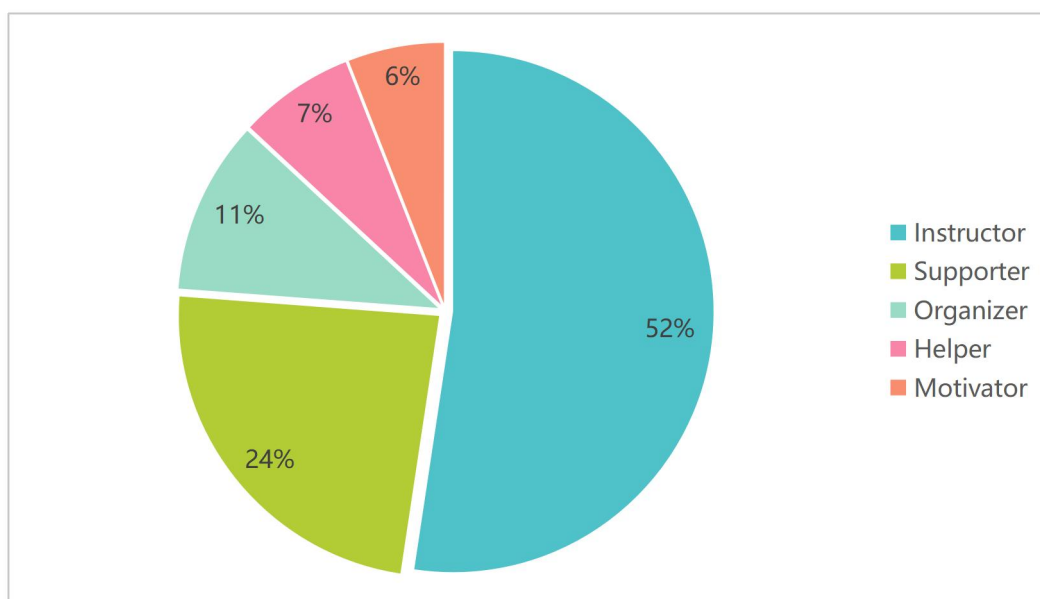


Figure 8.3.2 Proportional Distribution of Teachers Themes

Among these (see Figure 8.3.2), teachers as instructors were mentioned most frequently, accounting for more than half of all references. The supporter role followed, representing roughly one quarter of the data. The organizer role appeared less often, only accounting 11% of the theme. The helper and motivator roles were mentioned least frequently, respectively accounting for around 7% of all references.

### **Instructor**

Within this sub theme, 44 references described teachers as the main instructors and facilitators in children’s musical experiences. Across children’s narratives, teachers were consistently portrayed as the ones who teach songs, guide dance movements, demonstrate instrumental skills, and lead collective musical activities. These descriptions highlight the central instructional function teachers occupy in the kindergarten music environment.

In several accounts, children directly referred to teachers’ instructional actions, emphasizing their leadership in singing and dancing: “*Teacher can teach us singing, dancing, and interactive activities during music lessons*” (SK10, Evelyn), “*Teacher teaches us movement and singing*” (MK03, Gordon) and “[*Teacher*] teaches us singing and dancing” (JK23, Alex). Such depictions suggest that children clearly

associated the teacher's role with teaching skills.

In other cases, children mentioned specific content or tools used in instruction. For example, *"This is the teacher teaching me the alphabet. She's also teaching me to play this (guitar), which produces different tones. The teacher is teaching us music"* (SK05, Catherine). Likewise, a child vividly described: *"The teacher is instructing the students [on] how to play the piano. The teacher must provide us with a big piano. The teacher brings her own instrument to teach us how to play"* (MK11, Matthew). Such descriptions demonstrate children's recognition of the teacher's musical expertise and her active demonstration of instrumental performance.

Overall, children's depictions of teachers as instructors reveal a view of music education as guided, demonstrative, and interactive. Teachers are seen as knowledgeable figures who lead and model musical learning, while simultaneously creating an atmosphere of enthusiasm and engagement. This understanding highlights how, in children's perspectives, the instructor role combines authority with warmth, positioning the teacher as both an expert and an enabler of joyful musical experiences.

### **Supporter**

Under the theme of teacher as supporter, 20 instances captured children's views of teachers as caring figures who offer both emotional and practical support, fostering a sense of companionship during music learning.

Rather than acting only as instructors, teachers were often depicted as caring figures who prepare the environment, assist with activities, and create a warm atmosphere for children's participation. One child described, *"The teacher on the left holds a cloth in her hand, preparing to wipe the tables. Meanwhile, she has already arranged decorations and some small balloons. The [other] teacher is conduct the lesson cheerfully"* (SK18, Helen). Similarly, another child also expressed a desire for the presence of multiple teachers: *"I want two teachers. This is teacher [Anna], and [another] teacher. Teacher [Anna] is accompanying the children nearby. (One teacher*

*conducts the lesson, while another teacher accompanies)*” (JK20, Basil).

Children also portrayed teachers as caring and protective figures within the group context. In one drawing, a child explained that *“The teacher is tall. She keeps watching over us to protect us”* (MK28, Sarah). Others described teachers’ supportive involvement during performances, such as *“The teacher sits in the audience watching our performance”* (MK27, Rosalind), and *“The teacher takes some photo of me from below [the stage]”* (MK15, Maria).

Overall, children’s portrayals of teachers as supporters reveal that care, encouragement, and presence are central to their experiences of music learning. Through actions such as preparing materials, accompanying children, watching performances, and celebrating success, teachers embodied a supportive role that nurtured both musical confidence and a sense of belonging.

### **Organizer**

Within this theme, nine instances were identified, revealing how children envisioned teachers as organizers responsible for maintaining order, ensuring safety, and coordinating classroom activities.

Children’s accounts highlighted the teacher’s authority in guiding group behavior and upholding a harmonious learning atmosphere. One child explained, *“[Teacher] must also keep an eye on the children, ensuring they don’t get into fights and don’t hurt themselves. Teachers always have our best in mind”* (MK15, Maria). Similarly, another child described, *“If they (students) start arguing, the teacher can tell them to be quiet and make them stop”* (SK07, Daisy), emphasizing children’s hoping of teachers as protectors who maintain order out of care and responsibility.

Beyond behavioral management, children also recognized teachers’ role in communication and organization within the broader school setting. For instance, one child mentioned, *“During break time, if any child feels unwell, they may go home on*

*their own, but must inform the teacher*” (SK04, Bessie), while another added the organization of parents behavior, *“Moreover, if your parents wish to visit the school, they must inform the teacher beforehand, otherwise the teacher won’t know what you’re doing here”* (SK21, Josephie). These examples demonstrate that children perceive teachers as key coordinators who regulate interactions between home and school, ensuring proper communication and structure.

In the musical domain, teachers were seen as leaders who organize performance activities and guide collective participation. A child described, *“The teacher takes this stick (baton) to show us how to sing. Then she raises it, and we all sing together. After that, teacher points at them, and they all come up to sing”* (SK21, Josephie). Another account echoed this organizational dimension: *“The children here are learning to sing. After finishing their [music] lesson, the teacher invites three pupils to come up and begin their performance”* (MK17, May), portraying teachers as conductors who structure the flow of activities and give children opportunities to perform.

Collectively, these depictions illustrate that children viewed teachers as classroom organizers who manage behavior, ensure safety, organize music lessons, and facilitate communication. The teacher’s managerial role is central to maintaining an orderly and supportive environment in which musical learning could take place smoothly and joyfully.

### **Helper**

Six instances were coded under this sub theme, illustrating children’s perception of teachers as helpers who would assist in practical tasks, organize classroom activities, and support their participation in music lessons.

In children’s depictions, teachers were seen as approachable figures who actively join in, help prepare, or contribute to collective efforts. One child described that: *“The teacher is helping the masterpieces (performance) of the children below or above”* (SK19, Isabella), and another child recounted: *“I sing, the teacher acts out the*

*movements (collaborative performance)*” (SK01, Amelia), portraying the teacher as a supportive partner who would help coordinate and enrich children’s stage performance.

Beyond performance, children also mentioned the teacher’s help in organizing daily routines and providing comfort or enjoyment. For example, one child expressed a wish for teachers to *“tidy up belongings, arrange chairs, start the film”* (MK06, James), associating the teacher’s help with maintaining an orderly and enjoyable environment. Another child added, *“I’d like the teacher to bring us some fruit and doughnuts”* (MK25, Rachel), illustrating a caring and service-oriented image of the teacher who attends to children’s needs with warmth and generosity.

Overall, children’s imagined depictions of helpful teachers reveal a desire for supportive, caring, and participatory adult figures in their musical experiences. The teacher’s assistance, whether through organizing materials, joining performances, or offering acts of care, symbolized attentiveness and collaboration.

### **Motivator**

Children’s accounts also revealed an imaginative portrayal of teachers as motivators, individuals who would inspire, reward, and uplift them during musical activities. Although mentioned less frequently, only five times, these depictions highlighted the emotional dimension of teaching that children valued in their imagined music classrooms.

Children’s accounts reflected a wish for teachers to offer immediate and tangible rewards as a form of encouragement. As expressed by one child who said, *“I want teacher preparing gifts in the classroom. The children who behave well can get a gift”* (MK09, Louis). Another child also imagined that *“The teacher is holding this is food to reward everyone for good behaviour”* (SK05, Catherine).

In addition to tangible rewards, children emphasized the importance of emotional encouragement from teachers. One child described: “*Teacher invites me to perform on the podium*” (SK18, Helen), highlighting the teacher’s role in providing opportunities for recognition and confidence-building through performance. Similarly, one child said: “*The teacher is clapping*” (SK20, Jane), depicting a teacher who could show encouragement through applause and positive feedback.

Overall, children’s imagined portrayals of teachers as motivators emphasized warmth, recognition, and emotional support. Teachers in these imagined scenes are motivators who would help sustain children’s enthusiasm for music through affirmation, applause, and rewards.

### 8.3.2 Peers

A total of 38 references were coded under the category of peers, making them the second most frequently mentioned characters in children’s imagined music classes, following teachers. Within this category, children portrayed their peers in five distinct roles, reflecting varied expectations of social participation and cooperation in musical learning.

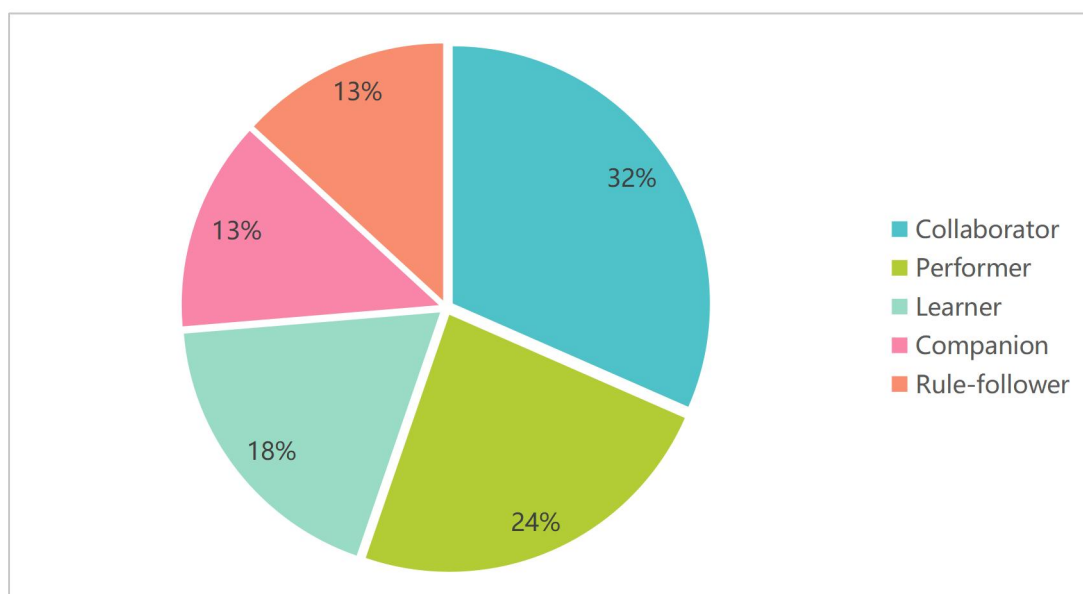


Figure 8.3.3 Proportional Distribution of Peers Themes

According to Figure 8.3.3, the role of collaborator appeared most frequently, accounting for 32% of all references. The performer role followed with 24%, while the learner role represented 17%. The remaining two roles, companion and rule-follower, each accounted for 13% of the total references.

### **Collaborator**

Peer as collaborator was coded 12 times, emerging as the most prominent and significant peer role in children's imagined music curriculum. Their depictions highlighted a sense of teamwork and mutual participation in the musical process.

For instance, one child described, *"The child on the left is me. I am singing with a microphone. The child on the right is also singing. [...] We're both holding a microphone"* (SK23, Katherine). Another child illustrated how collaboration can produce harmony: *"Each child sings a different note, and in the end we combine these notes into one song"* (SK27, Victor).

In a group discussion, children envisioned even broader forms of cooperation among different classes:

Josephie (SK21): *"I want junior class to join us. [If] we teach the songs to the junior class, then both the senior and junior classes can sing together."*

Jane (SK20): *"If a child can play the piano, they play the piano. If they can play the drums, they play the drums. If they can play the guitar, they play the guitar. Everyone contributes what they can."*

Josephie (SK21): *"And when we're singing, if you can play, then play. If you can't, then don't. [...] You can find what you like and join in your own way."*

Together, these accounts reflected children's vision of a collaborative and inclusive musical environment, where peers share responsibilities, learn from one another, and collectively create music.

### **Performer**

Peer as performer was coded nine times, illustrating children's imagination of peers as central figures in musical presentations and stage activities.

This role highlighted children's recognition of performance as a joyful and valued part of music learning, where peers take turns to sing, dance, and play instruments in front of others. One child described, "*He is singing, and the audience below is applauding his performance*" (SK10, Evelyn). Similarly, another child noted, "*This child is also performing, dancing*" (JK05, Victoria).

Children's drawings and narratives often reflected a clear sense of turn-taking and participation: "*We take turns to perform*" (SK01, Amelia). Another child noted: "*They are [performing by] playing the piano and singing, while another child plays [the music]. The others are lining up to take turns*" (MK02, George).

Together, these accounts portray children's vision of peers as enthusiastic performers who contribute to the collective joy of music-making through expressive participation and shared performance experiences.

### **Learner**

Peer as learner was coded seven times, reflecting children's imagination of peers as attentive and disciplined participants in music lessons. In their depictions, learning was represented as an active yet orderly process, where peers listened carefully to the teacher and demonstrated proper classroom behavior.

As one child described, "*This child is sitting very straight. [...] They are listening to the teacher*" (SK28, Simon). Another child similarly emphasized attentiveness: "*He is listening carefully to the lesson*" (SK13, Robert). Younger children also portrayed peers in a learning posture, focusing on listening and following instructions: "*[They] are listening to the teacher speaking*" (JK06, Violet); "*They are listening to the teacher*" (JK17, Molly).

These accounts reveal children's perception of learning as an important aspect of musical participation, where peers engage respectfully, follow the teacher's guidance, and embody the attentive learner's role within the classroom context.

### **Companion**

Peer as companion was coded five times, portraying children's imagination of peers as friends and classmates who share musical experiences together. This role emphasized the social and emotional dimensions of music learning, where joy and togetherness were valued as integral parts of classroom life.

One child depicted this sense of friendship and shared activity, saying, "*The black figure is me, and the green one is my friend. We are having class together*" (SK31, Neol). Another child illustrated gendered interaction during performance, observing, "*The girls are performing on the stage, and the boys are watching below*" (SK10, Evelyn).

The importance of shared space and collective participation also appeared in children's discussions: "*The [space of] classroom can be bigger so that more children can sit together. [...] That way, everyone can have class together. I feel happy*" (SK20, Jane). Similarly, one child drew "*A row of children sitting together below*" (MK14, Lidia), highlighting a sense of presence and companionship within the musical setting.

Collectively, these representations suggest that companionship was an essential part of children's imagined music lessons, reflecting their desire for inclusion, friendship, and shared enjoyment through music.

### **Rule-follower**

Peer as rule-follower was coded five times, primarily emerging from group discussions in which children expressed their awareness of classroom discipline and the importance of maintaining order during music lessons. This role reflected

children's internalization of behavioral norms and their recognition of the need for a harmonious learning environment.

In one senior class group discussion, children identified behaviors they disliked in class, emphasized children's collective expectation for quietness and attentiveness during music activities.

Beatrice (SK03): *"I don't like screaming."*

Emily (SK08): *"I don't like it when other children shout and move around."*

Daisy (SK07): *"I don't want that: when many children make noise, [we] can't hear anything."*

Children from the middle class similarly linked rule-following to focused participation, demonstrating an awareness of structured participation and self-management, extending rule-following beyond obedience to include cooperative organization.

Rose (MK26): *"Children should listen to the teacher."*

Rosalind (MK27): *"[We] can't make trouble."*

[...]

Rachel (MK25): *"We can find a host, and the host can call each performer one by one."*

Overall, the rule-follower role illustrates children's developing sense of discipline, order, and mutual respect within their imagined music lessons.

### **8.3.3 Family Members**

Family members were coded 15 times in total, representing a relatively smaller proportion among all role categories. As shown in Figure 8.3.4, 60% of these references described children's wish for their family members to watch their music lessons or performances, while 40% reflected their desire for family members to actively participate in music activities or performances.

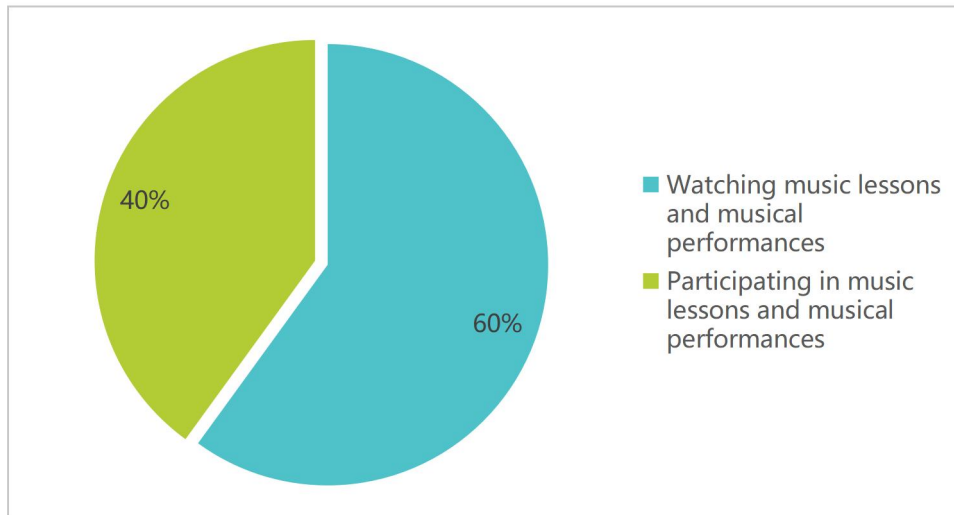


Figure 8.3.4 Proportional Distribution of Family Members Themes

Although the overall frequency of this category was comparatively low, these accounts reveal children’s meaningful expectation for family involvement and shared musical experiences within their imagined music lessons.

**Watching music lessons and musical performances**

The idea of family members as audiences in music lessons reflected children’s wish to share their musical experiences with their family members. Although this sub theme appeared less frequently, it revealed meaningful insights into how children envisioned emotional connections between school and home through musical activities.

Several children expressed the desire for parents to be present and witness their participation in class. As one child said, “[I] want my mom and dad to see me having [music] lessons” (SK05, Catherine). Another child similarly imagined parents as audience members, stating, “We can also invite our parents to watch our [music] class” (SK30, Norman). Younger children also echoed this expectation, as one explained simply, “[Parents] watch children singing” (JK09, Edward).

In a group discussion, children further elaborated this vision of family involvement by imagining an audience composed of multiple family members.

Anne (SK02): “I [want to] invite my whole family to watch my performance.”

Evelyn (SK10): “I want to invite my little sister because she sits beside me (I

*want she sits beside me) and I like her very much.”*

Anne (SK02): *“My whole family can help me collect things and then sit in the audience. [...] They can even give me a trophy and a prize.”*

Together, these accounts reveal children’s emotional association between music learning and family pride, suggesting that being watched and appreciated by family members represented an important part of their imagined music experiences.

### **Participating in music lessons and musical performances**

Children’s imagination of family involvement in music lessons also extended beyond mere observation to active participation. This sub theme, labeled family members as participants, appeared six times in the data and revealed children’s desire to share musical experiences with their parents in more interactive and collaborative ways.

Rather than remaining as passive observers, family members were imagined as active co-performers and supporters during musical activities. One child described a cooperative singing experience: *“We can also ask our own parents to sing with us”* (SK07, Daisy). Another child extended this idea, suggesting, *“It’s the same with singing. If you can’t sing a song, you can ask your dad to help. Dad and mom can sing one line, then you sing the next. You can practice the song every day [...] and perform it in kindergarten and with your parents”* (SK21, Josephie).

These narratives highlight children’s desire for music to become a shared family experience that extends beyond the classroom. Their imagination of joint performances underscores not only their sense of belonging and joy but also their understanding of music as a bridge that connects learning, affection, and togetherness within family life.

#### **8.3.4 Imaginary Characters**

Although representing the smallest proportion among all participant roles, the code of imaginary characters appeared four times in the data, reflecting children’s strong

sense of imagination and their desire to bring unexpected surprises into the music classroom.

These children envisioned non-human participants, incorporating fantastical or anthropomorphic figures into their imagined musical performance. For example, one child explained: *“Of course, it’s the green grass elf, because it will perform The Little Mermaid on a stage far from the sea. Children are watching below”* (SK02, Anne). Similarly, a child imagined, *“At 8 p.m., I will hold a robot event, a robot performance. [...] This little rabbit cheers beside the heart, [...] and this real little bear performs in the circus”* (SK10, Evelyn). Another child also mentioned, *“A clown. He performs in the music class”* (SK28, Simon).

These excerpts demonstrate that children’s conceptions of musical participation extend beyond real-life experiences. Imaginary characters such as elves, animals, and robots reflect children’s desire to make music learning more magical, playful, and filled with imaginative possibilities.

#### **8.4 Music Curriculum Content**

A total of 127 references were coded under the theme of music curriculum content, illustrating children’s diverse understandings and expectations of what should happen in music lessons. In this study, content refers to the specific types of musical activities or components that constitute a music lesson. That is what happens during the class from children’s perspectives.

According to children’s illustration, these references were categorized into seven main content areas: singing activities, classroom performances, instrumental learning, music games, dance activities, large-scale performances, and self-directed performances.

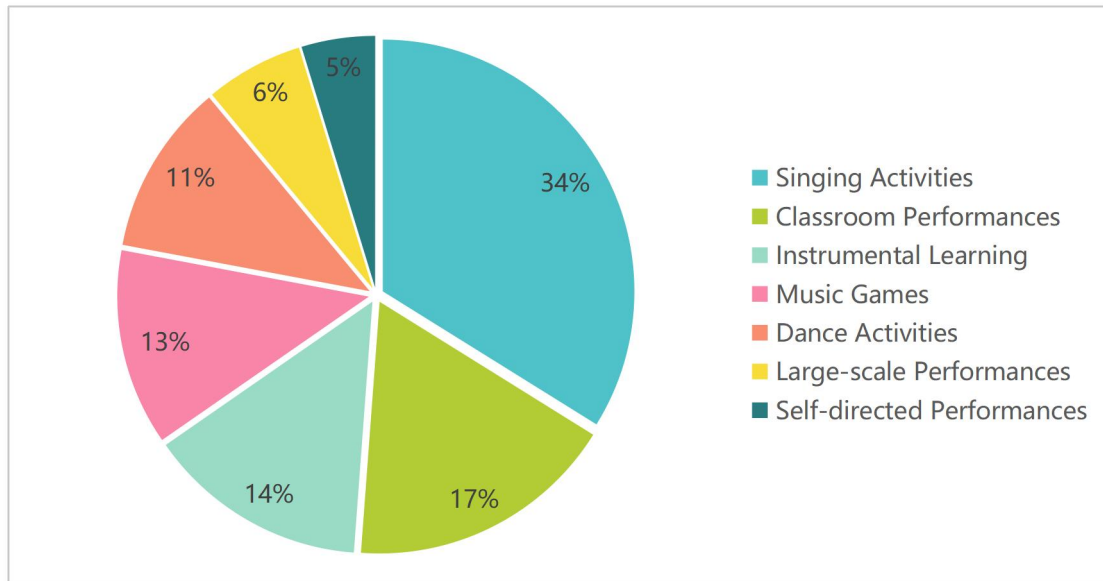


Figure 8.4.1 Proportional Distribution of Music Curriculum Content Themes

Among these (see Figure 8.4.1), singing activities were mentioned most frequently, accounting for 34% of all references, suggesting that singing remains the most central and familiar form of musical engagement for children. Classroom performances made up 17%, followed by instrumental learning (14%) and music games (13%). Dance activities constituted 11% of the data, while large-scale performances and self-directed performances were less commonly mentioned, representing 6% and 5%, respectively.

#### ***8.4.1 Singing Activities***

Singing activities were the most frequently mentioned element of children’s envisioned music curriculum, coded 43 times and accounting for 34% of all references under this theme. Singing appeared as a central and familiar musical experience for children, representing both an enjoyable activity and a key method of musical learning.

Many children described classroom scenes where they sang together with teachers or peers. For instance, one child shared, “*We also do some singing [activities]*” (SK04, Bessie). Another child envisioned a teacher-led singing scenario, saying, “*[We] need to learn singing. I hold a microphone, and the teacher also holds a microphone*”

(SK05, Catherine).

Younger children similarly emphasized singing as a joyful and embodied activity, often accompanied by movement or instrumental sound. One junior class child said, “*Clapping hands and singing*” (JK06, Violet), while another described a more interactive experience: “*He is singing. The music comes from the children’s microphone (children are singing with microphone). The teacher plays the instrument*” (JK16, Cara).

Children also recognized group singing as a cooperative and organized classroom practice. As one middle class child noted, “*First we sit on chairs and listen to the song, then we divide into girls and boys and sing together*” (MK25, Rachel).

Together, these narratives suggest that singing represents not only the most prevalent musical activity in children’s imagination, but also a medium through which they express participation, interaction, and enjoyment. Singing is viewed as both a learning process and a social experience, bridging the teacher’s instruction with children’s collective engagement in music making.

#### ***8.4.2 Classroom Performances***

Classroom performances were another prominent element in children’s visions of music lessons, coded 22 times. This theme reflects children’s imagination of music performances as an integral part of classroom learning, where the process of singing, dancing, and playing instruments naturally leads to opportunities for in-class performances. These classroom performances thus represented a joyful extension of learning, combining creativity, expression, and peer appreciation within the familiar classroom setting.

Several children explicitly described such classroom performances. One child said, “*Children can also perform*” (SK02, Anne), while another explained, “[*The children and the teacher*] are on the stage, both performing” (JK07, Winnie). Similarly, a

middle group child illustrated a performance scene involving instruments: “[We] perform using instruments. The other children can sit here, just like watching a movie)” (MK23, Jasper).

Other children emphasized the variety of activities included in these performances, such as singing, instrument playing, and movement. One explained, “Singing, using tambourines and a small piano. There’s also a performance. The teacher and classmates watch me perform” (MK26, Rose). Another described: “We two are performing on the podium” (MK15, Maria). A further example from another child mentioned, “Let the children come up and perform with a tambourine” (MK16, Mary).

Taken together, these accounts show that children viewed classroom performances as interactive and participatory experiences, where everyone could be both performer and audience. Through these imagined scenes, they expressed an ideal of performance as a collective celebration of musical learning, blending enjoyment, collaboration, and recognition within the classroom setting.

### **8.4.3 Instrumental Learning**

The sub theme that instrumental learning as one of music curriculum content, coded 18 times, reflects children’s imagination of learning to play various musical instruments as a central and enjoyable part of their envisioned music lessons. Children’s accounts revealed a strong interest in both traditional and modern instruments.

Several children mentioned specific instruments they wished to learn or imagined using. One child shared, “We can also play (learn how to play) the pipa” (SK04, Bessie), while another described a diverse instrumental setting: “The teacher is teaching us to play the guitar and the drum set” (SK08, Emily). Similarly, a child illustrated a scene of ensemble playing: “The teacher plays the piano, and I play the

*flute*” (SK14, Max).

Children also described rich instrumental learning experiences that combined rhythm, coordination, and group participation. One noted, “*In this music lesson, the teacher organizes us to sing and play drums*” (MK06, James). Another explained, “[*The teacher teaches us to use*] *tambourines. [We] follow the rhythm of the music and play together*” (MK20, Olive). Similarly, one child described the classroom environment: “*We have music lessons in the music classroom. There are [various] instruments. This is the cabinet for storing musical instruments. There are tambourines, maracas, bell strings, castanets, and jingle bells. [...] [We] learn singing and instruments*” (MK09, Louis).

Altogether, these accounts demonstrate that children viewed instrumental learning as a hands-on and collaborative musical experience, blending rhythm, melody, and play. Their descriptions reveal not only a curiosity about a wide range of instruments but also an appreciation for the interactive and social aspects of making music together with teachers and peers.

#### **8.4.4 Music Games**

Music games, was coded 16 times, were often perceived as a fun and interactive part of the lesson that combined singing, movement, and rhythm, turning the classroom into a lively and playful learning environment.

Several children mentioned specific kinds of games they would like to play or imagined happening during music lessons. One child said, “*We can also play something like a little frog game (a finger game)*” (SK04, Bessie). Another expressed her wish, “*The teacher will teach us to sing, dance, and play games together*” (SK07, Daisy). Similarly, one child shared a concrete idea about how the music game could be played: “*We play along [with the music], and when the music stops, everyone must do their favorite pose*” (SK10, Evelyn).

Children in a conference discussed familiar playground-style music games:

Lucy (MK24): *“Let’s do some funny activities. Let’s play musical chairs.”*

Mary (MK16): *“We used to play that when we were in the junior class.”*

Matthew (MK11): *“I played it in the music classroom before, but I didn’t go there this time.”*

Lucy (MK24): *“The [children from] junior class one also played musical chairs.”*

Matthew (MK11): *“But in musical chairs, you must wait until the music stops before sitting down.”*

These examples illustrate that children envisioned music games as joyful, participatory, and often rule-based experiences, merging fun with rhythm and coordination. Children valued active participation and creativity, seeing games as a bridge between learning and enjoyment in music lessons.

#### **8.4.5 Dance Activities**

Dance activity as one of the ideal music curriculum content was coded 14 times. Dancing appeared as a spontaneous and expressive form of musical engagement, allowing children to move freely with the rhythm and to share joy with others.

For some children, dancing was imagined as an organized activity guided by the teacher. One child vividly described that *“What I imagine is that the teacher will let us practice dancing here. We can practice dancing on the carpet, while the teacher plays the guitar and music”* (SK05, Catherine), reflecting an image of structured yet lively dance activity participation.

Other children emphasized the collective and joyful nature of dancing. For example, some child simply said: *“And dancing. [...] Everyone dances together”* (SK08, Emily); *“They are dancing”* (SK28, Simon), suggesting a sense of group involvement. Younger participants also mentioned dance as a natural part of their imagined music

classes: *“He is dancing”* (JK19, Benjamin), and *“I want them to dance”* (JK01, Selina).

Overall, these descriptions reveal that dancing, whether imagined as an individual performance or a collective classroom activity, represented for children a joyful, physical, and expressive component of their musical learning experiences.

#### **8.4.6 Large-scale Performances**

Although this theme appeared less frequently in the data (eight coded references), children’s discussions revealed a clear fascination with large-scale performances. Their descriptions reflected aspirations that went beyond the regular classroom, imagining music lessons transformed into events involving stages, audiences, and a heightened sense of excitement.

In several group discussions, children elaborated on how they envisioned such performances taking place:

Emily (SK08): *“I want the teacher to first teach us below the stage, and then we go up to perform while the teacher guides us from below.”*

Daisy (SK07): *“I like going on stage to sing and dance.”*

Emily (SK08): *“I like going on stage to play the guitar.”*

Daisy (SK07): *“I like going on stage to dance, like the big stage outside.”*

Another group of children imagined even grander settings for their musical performance activities:

Josephie (SK21): *“We can first set up some music decorations, then invite children to sing. Whoever knows the song can take the microphone and sing.”*

Helen (SK18): *“We can go to the fifth floor (music classroom) to sing and perform.”*

Jane (SK20): *“I want all the kindergarten children to go to one big music classroom.”*

Similarly, individual drawings also revealed this vision of large-scale performances. One child described, *“I want to draw a stage. I’ll draw a teacher too. I sing, and the teacher does the movements. [The children] perform one by one”* (SK01, Amelia).

Together, these accounts illustrate that large-scale performances were imagined as opportunities for children to go on stage, showcase what they had learned, and perform confidently in front of others. Rather than being tied to any particular festival or event, these performances represented children’s aspiration for a more formal and celebratory setting within their everyday school life.

#### **8.4.7 Self-directed Performances**

Although the smallest category within this theme, self-directed performances (six coded instances) revealed children’s imagination of a more autonomous and creative form of musical expression. These performances took place in specially designated ‘performance areas’, where children envisioned themselves organizing and presenting shows on their own, sometimes using props, costumes, and instruments they chose independently.

In the group discussion, several children elaborated on how such performances might take place:

May (MK17): *“I can perform in the performance area and sing Happy New Year (a song). I can use a tambourine to perform. ”*

Minnie (MK18): *“The teacher can play the song on the TV, and we can listen while performing in the performance area.”*

George (MK02): *“Everyone can sit on the floor and [watch] the performance. We don’t need to follow student numbers. We can just go up and perform freely.”*

Individual drawings also reflected similar ideas. For example, one child described, *“This is a special cabinet for instruments, placed in the middle of our performance*

area. [We also] need wigs. A child is holding a microphone and performing” (MK04, Graham). Another child added, “Then I drew a person performing [in the performance area]” (MK27, Rosalind).

In sum, these accounts highlight children’s desire for freedom and ownership in their musical experiences. The performance area was not merely a physical space but a stage of self-expression where children could take initiative, design their own shows, and share their creativity with peers.

### 8.5 Music Curriculum Themes

While the previous chapter examined the content of music lessons, this chapter focuses on their themes, which describe the overarching ideas or contexts that guide the design and experience of a lesson. In total, 114 references related to music curriculum themes were coded.

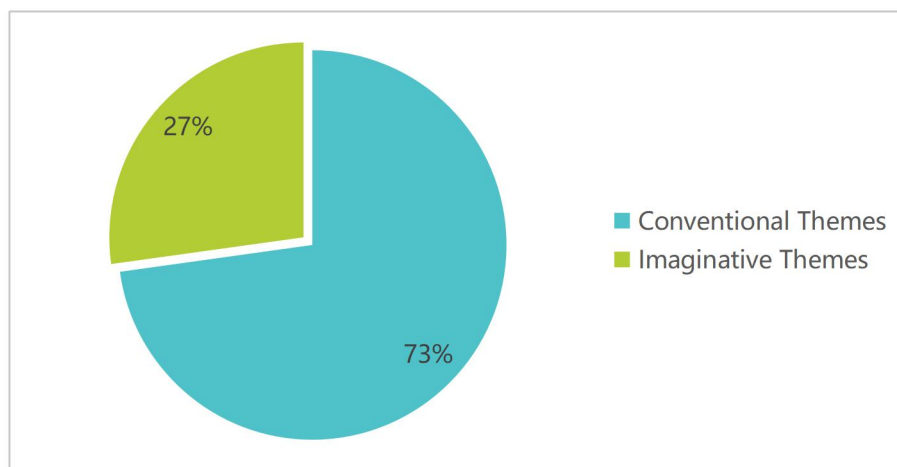


Figure 8.5.1 Proportional Distribution of Music Curriculum Themes

Based on these data, children’s descriptions of music lesson themes could be categorized into two main types: conventional themes and imaginative themes. As shown in Figure 8.5.1, conventional themes appeared most frequently (73%), while imaginative themes were less common but still significant (27%).

### ***8.5.1 Conventional Themes***

A total of 83 references were coded under the category of conventional music curriculum themes, representing children’s perceptions of music lessons that align with their everyday classroom experiences.

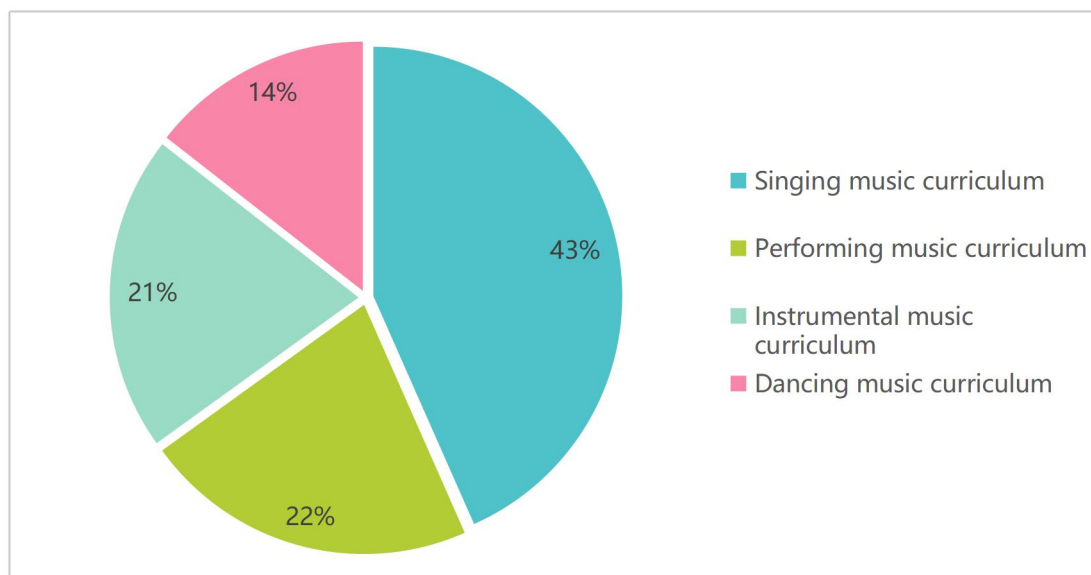


Figure 8.5.2 Proportional Distribution of Conventional Music Curriculum Themes

As shown in Figure 8.5.2, these themes were divided into four main types. The singing music curriculum appeared most frequently, accounting for 43% of all references. This was followed by performing music curriculum and instrumental music curriculum, which represented approximately 22% and 21% respectively. The least mentioned were dancing music curriculum, making up only 14% of the total.

#### ***Singing music curriculum***

Among all conventional themes, singing music curriculum appeared most frequently, accounting 36 references. They often depicted scenes of teachers leading the class in singing, sometimes accompanied by piano playing or rhythmic instruments.



Figure 8.5.3 Painting from Laura (SK24)

For example, one child described her painting (see Figure 8.5.3) vividly: *“The teacher [in the middle] [...] is teaching the children to sing. The children are very happy. These are the notes sung by the teacher”* (SK24, Laura). Similarly, younger children emphasized a music lesson with singing and clapping hands: *“[The teacher] sings and plays the piano, la la la la la (singing), and [the children] clap their hands and sing”* (Small class, Child 11).

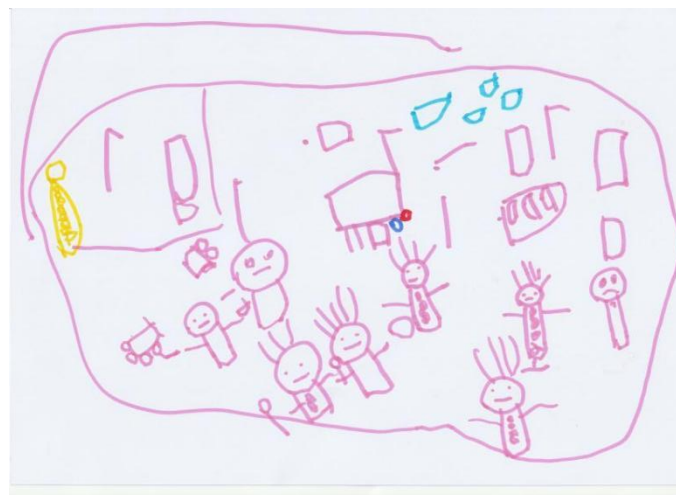


Figure 8.5.4 Painting from May (MK17)

Other children described music lessons that integrated singing with performance, *“The teacher plays the piano and sings. Then she plays the music. Children line up one by one. Singing and dancing (performance)”* (MK02, George). As shown in Figure 8.5.4, the child said: *“The teacher teaches us to sing, [...] and after learning,*

*three children are invited to go up and perform” (MK17, May).*

Another description reflected a more participatory form of singing activity with instruments: *“We first sit on chairs and listened to the song. Then we divide girls and boys while singing together, and then perform with tambourines” (MK25, Rachel).* In some cases, the teacher’s use of instruments or media supported the singing activity, as in *“The teacher talks about the song ‘Summer of Thunderstorm’, plays the music on the TV, uses a tambourine to beat the rhythm, and children sing” (MK24, Lucy).*

These examples collectively suggest that singing lessons represented not only a familiar and foundational component of children’s music learning, but also a lively and integrative musical experience in their imagined classrooms. In children’s visions, singing is not limited to vocal practice but encompasses performance, instrumental play, rhythmic movement, and expressive gestures.

### **Performing music curriculum**

A total of 18 references were coded under the category of performing music curriculum, which represented children’s perceptions of learning to perform music in their everyday classroom settings. Most of these descriptions referred to small-scale performances that took place in the regular classroom or designated performance areas, where children imagined themselves singing, playing instruments, or being invited by the teacher to go on stage.

Children often described the atmosphere of such lessons as lively and joyful. For instance, one child shared: *“The teachers have already prepared decorations and small balloons. The teacher is very happy teaching the class, and all the children are happy too. Then the teacher invites me to go up and perform” (Large class, Child 31).*

Another child linked the classroom performance practice to upcoming large-scale events, explaining that the performances in class are preparations for the Children’s Day celebration: *“The children are playing the drum set. They are performing because Children’s Day is coming soon” (Large class, Child 9).*



Figure 8.5.5 Painting from Lidia (MK14)



Figure 8.5.6 Painting from Rosalind (MK27)

Some children’s drawings and narratives further revealed their visions of classroom performance spaces. For example, one child described her painting (see Figure 8.5.5 ), *“This is the tambourine. Someone is singing on the front. The teacher is playing the piano. Two children are dancing (performing). Three children are watching them and listening to music”* (MK14, Lidia). Another child also talked about her picture (see Figure 8.5.6 ), *“Then I drew a person performing. The teacher can come to watch. There are tambourines and microphones, and we need many chairs”* (MK27, Rosalind).

These accounts indicate that children perceived classroom performances as both a learning process and a joyful event, where musical skills, participation, and expression came together. In their imagined lessons, small performances are intimate within familiar classroom environments, enhanced by props, decorations, and the teacher’s guidance. Such lessons reflected children’s appreciation of performing as an opportunity to express themselves, collaborate with peers, and experience a sense of celebration and accomplishment.

**Instrumental music curriculum**

The sub theme was coded 17 times, representing children’s imaginative descriptions of music lessons centered on playing and learning instruments. Their accounts

revealed a strong enthusiasm for instrumental exploration, often emphasizing teacher demonstrations, individual practice, and group participation.

Many children described the lessons as being organized around instrumental learning, emphasizing teacher demonstrations, individual practice, and group participation. One child imagined, *“The teacher first plays the piano for us, then we play the drum ourselves. The teacher also teaches us to use the triangle, and finally, we use the tambourine that we could shake”* (SK03, Beatrice). Another child envisioned a structured lesson focused on guitar learning: *“This lesson is about learning to play the guitar. The steps for playing guitar are written on the blackboard”* (SK04, Bessie).



Figure 8.5.7 Second Painting from Sarah (MK28)

Some children also associated instrumental learning with a well-equipped and visually stimulating classroom environment. One child imagined the ‘music classroom learning’ with a storage cabinet filled with instruments: *“We are having music lesson in the music classroom. [...] There are tambourines, maracas, bell strings, castanets, and handbells. [We] learn singing and instruments there”* (MK09, Louis). Similarly, another envisioned a collective piano learning activity (see Figure 8.5.7): *“There is also a piano-playing activity. All the children are playing the piano”* (MK28, Sarah).

Collectively, these descriptions reveal children’s expectations for instrumental lessons as dynamic, participatory, and multisensory experiences. They imagined music

classrooms as spaces where teachers not only demonstrate but also invite every child to explore diverse instruments blending enjoyment with skill development.

### **Dancing music curriculum**

Dancing music curriculum was coded 12 times, representing children's expectations of dance learning and nonperforming as one of the conventional themes of music lessons. Compared with other themes, children's accounts of dance lessons were generally simple and straightforward, focusing primarily on the act of dancing itself.



Figure 8.5.8 First Painting from Catherine (SK05)

Several children directly identified the activity as a dancing lesson. One child stated plainly, *“It is a dancing activity”* (JK21, Anthony). Another described the lesson he created simply, *“The teacher teaches us to sing and dance”* (JK23, Alex). Similarly, one child depicted a dance performing: *“The teacher plays the piano. He is singing, and she is dancing”* (JK11, David). A child also imagined the teacher dancing together with them: *“She (the teacher) is dancing with the children”* (MK28, Sarah). As shown in the Figure 8.5.8, a child imagined indoor spaces as places for dance practice, *“What I imagine is that the teacher will let us practice dancing here later. We can practice dancing on the running track, while the teacher plays the guitar and music”* (SK05, Catherine).

Overall, these brief yet vivid descriptions reflected children's perception of dance as a

joyful, physical, and interactive component of music lessons. While their accounts lacked complexity or elaboration, they revealed that dancing was understood as an essential part of their imagined musical experiences child engagement.

### 8.5.2 Imaginative Themes

A total of 31 references were coded under the theme of imaginative music curriculum themes. Although the frequency of this category was relatively low, it reflects children’s creative extension of their understanding of regular classroom music activities. These imaginative themes represent children’s idealized visions of what a music curriculum could be, extending beyond the boundaries of conventional teaching to include fantasy, creativity, and diverse learning settings.

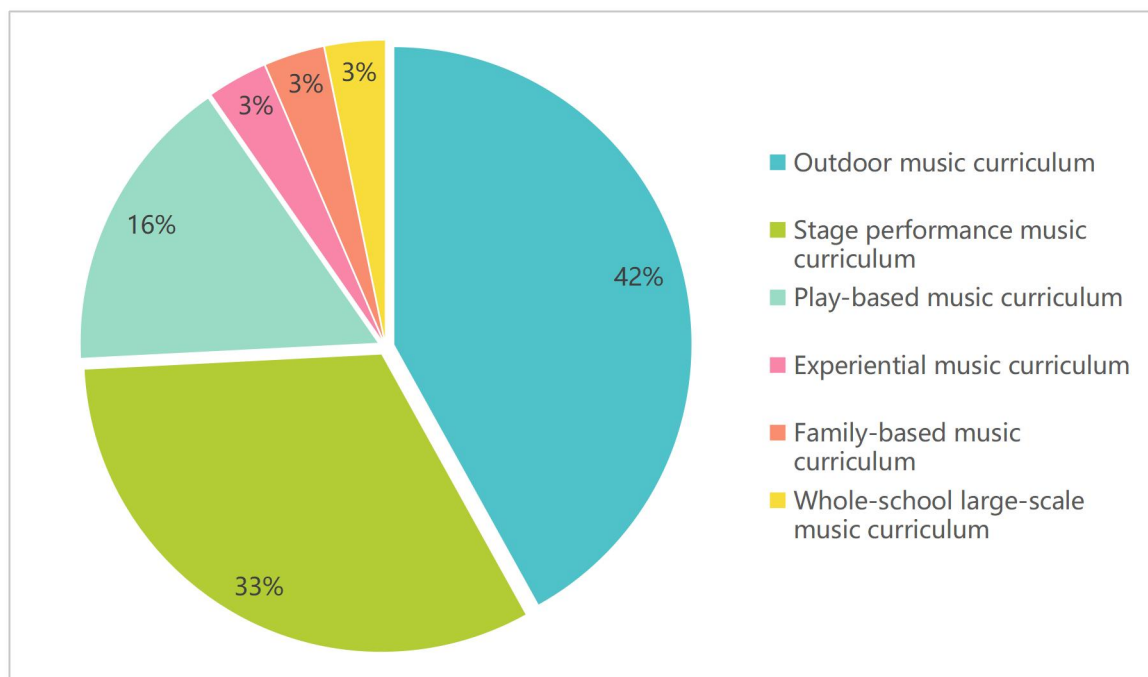


Figure 8.5.9 Proportional Distribution of Imaginative Music Curriculum Themes

Children’s imagined music curriculum themes were categorized into six sub themes (see Figure 8.5.9). Among these, outdoor music curriculum was the most frequently mentioned, accounting for nearly half (42%) of all references. This was followed by the stage performance music curriculum, which represented about one-third (33%) of children’s imaginative descriptions. The play-based music curriculum also appeared

in children’s narratives, accounting for 16% of total. In contrast, experiential, family-based, and whole-school large-scale music curriculum were mentioned only occasionally (each 3%).

### Outdoor music curriculum

The outdoor music curriculum was the most frequently mentioned imaginative theme, coded 13 times. Children envisioned music lessons taking place beyond the classroom, in open and natural environments where music learning could merge with nature, creativity, and play. These ideas reflected their aspiration for freedom, exploration, and sensory engagement during music learning.



Figure 8.5.10 Painting from Williams (SK36)



Figure 8.5.11 Collage from Sophia (JK02)

Children’s drawings reflected their fascination with outdoor learning spaces. In Williams’s (SK26) drawing (see Figure 8.5.10), the child reimagined the music classroom outdoors, relocating classroom tools and technology into outdoor: *“This is outside the classroom. There’s no computer (interactive whiteboard) outside, so we move the computer down. [...] This (computer) plays funny music. These are chairs, the floor, and here are the trees and the sun.”* Similarly, in the process of creating collages (see Figure 8.5.11), a younger child described an outdoor music lesson thus: *“I want to have class outside, put up a balloon, children below, the teacher here, and one more cloud above. I want a piano. [The children] are below, and there are big*

*trees*” (JK02, Sophia)

Besides, children’s group discussions revealed rich imaginations about having music lessons outdoors, where natural settings provided both space and inspiration. For instance, in a child conference, several children described vivid outdoor learning scenes:

Grace (SK11): *“On the outdoor lawn, then we set a big table, four children sit there, and the teacher uses a blackboard to teach us how to read musical notes.”*

Daisy (SK07): *“[The teacher] can also teach children to draw nature. If children don’t know how, the teacher can show them.”*

Catherine (SK05): *“We can look at flowers and grass, and the river, enjoy the scenery, and then inspiration will come through our brains During music class, we can create a song ourselves and singing for each other.”*

In another group discussion, children envisioned outdoor music learning as a joyful collective activity that combined singing and dancing. Their descriptions reflected a desire for spacious and beautiful environments where music and movement could happen freely and happily:

Josephie (SK21): *“Every time we sing, there are many classmates. So we can all sing all together, and we can also sing outdoors, the outdoor background is prettier, and we can also dance, wear costumes, like ballet and other dances.”*

Helen (SK18): *“We can go outside to dance because it’s larger than the music classroom. We can dance freely, spin around.”*

Overall, both discussion and visual data reveal that the outdoor music curriculum represents children’s aspiration for open, creative, and multisensory experiences. Through these imaginative depictions, children redefined music learning as a harmonious interaction between nature, creativity, and joyful expression.

### Stage performance music curriculum

The stage performance music curriculum was another major imaginative theme, coded 10 times. Children envisioned music lessons that centered on performing on stage, showcasing their songs, and inviting audiences such as teachers, peers, and parents. These ideas revealed their desire to express themselves publicly and to experience the joy and recognition of musical performance.

In group discussions, children described performance settings that resembled concerts or formal school events. For example, in a senior group discussion, children elaborated detailed scenarios of how such performances could be organized:

Josephie (SK21): *“We can first set up some musical decorations, then invite children to come up and sing. Whoever knows the song can take the microphone and sing.”*

Helen (SK18): *“We can go to the fifth floor (the music classroom) or somewhere else to sing and perform.”*

Jane (SK20): *“I want all the children in the kindergarten to go to a big music classroom singing and performing.”*

Josephie (SK21): *“First, [we can let] the teacher teach us, and then our parents can come to join and watch our performance.”*

Similarly, in a middle class conferencing, children extended the notion of stage performance by emphasizing order, audience, and ceremony:

Rose (MK26): *“We enter [the stage] one by one in a line.”*

Rachel (MK25): *“Sometimes teachers also come.”*

Rosalind (MK27): *“Let the teacher sit in the audience to watch us perform.”*

[...]

Rachel (MK25): *“I have another idea. We can find a host, who can call each performer to the stage one by one.”*

Rose (MK26): *“When entering, there should be tickets.”*

In another discussion, several middle class children further elaborated on how a musical stage performance could be organized within their music lessons:

Louis (MK09): *“We use instruments to play songs in music class. All the children play together.”*

Leonard (MK08): *“How can we all perform? Only on a big stage can hold for everyone to perform.”*

Olive (MK20): *“We can take turns, one by one.”*

Leonard (MK08): *“Or three children at a time.”*

Olive (MK20): *“We have to go on stage to perform, and the teacher needs to teach us.”*

Overall, the stage performance music curriculum demonstrates children’s aspiration to turn music learning into a public celebration. Through their imagined performances, they revealed confidence, creativity, and a strong desire for recognition and shared joy within the kindergarten community.

### **Play-based music curriculum**

The play-based music curriculum appeared less frequently but represented children’s imaginative effort to merge music learning with playful, interactive experiences. Coded five times, this theme reflected children’s belief that music lessons should be fun, engaging, and full of movement, rhythm, and laughter.

In a child conferencing, senior class children vividly described various musical games that could take place during lessons:

Robert (SK13): *“For example, we can play games in music class. [We] can play ‘Cat and mouse’.”*

William (SK26): *“That’s a running game.”*

Simon (SK28): *“And the ‘Statue Game’.”*

Neol (SK31): *“These games are so much fun.”*

Robert (SK13): *“[Play games] like ‘Train’ or ‘What’s the Time, Mr. Wolf’.”*

[...]

Robert (SK13): *“It needs to have rhythm.”*

Simon (SK28): *“Music should be played.”*

Neol (SK31): *“When the music stops, [we] can not move.”*

In a middle class discussion, children imagined games involving instruments and sound-matching activities:

Jasper (MK23): *“Use instruments to play games with us.”*

Lidia (MK14): *“The teacher [...] makes a sound [with an instrument], and whoever has the same instrument wins (children need to identify which is the same instrument and collect it).”*

Overall, the play-based music curriculum reflects children’s desire to transform music lessons into joyful, game-like experiences. Their ideas highlight a conception of music learning as active, participatory, and driven by curiosity and fun.

### **Experiential music curriculum**

The experiential music curriculum appeared only once in the data but offered a vivid example of how children envisioned connecting music learning with lived, thematic experiences. This theme reflected children’s desire to situate music learning within meaningful real-world contexts that align closely with what they were currently studying in class.

This theme reflected a desire to connect music learning with real-life contexts, emphasizing respect, atmosphere, and emotional resonance. In the drawing session, one child described an imagined lesson held at a highly symbolic location: *“I want to have class at Tian’anmen Square. We can watch the flag-raising ceremony and sing the national anthem together. Inside [Tian’anmen], we can have a music lesson about our motherland. It must be very quiet”* (SK11, Grace).

This account reflected the child’s recent engagement with songs about Tian’anmen,

and her wish to experience the music lesson in the real setting related to its theme. Her imagination emphasized situated learning, where musical understanding deepens through direct sensory and contextual experiences.

### **Family-based music curriculum**

The family-based music curriculum was mentioned once in the data. Although music lessons in kindergarten are not directly connected to home learning, the child envisioned extending musical experiences into the family context. This imaginative idea suggests that children perceive music as a shared, relational activity that could also take place within the intimacy of home life.

In one younger child's description, the imagined family music lesson involved the participation of multiple family members, each taking a different role: *"My mom sits here playing the piano. My dad sits on the chair writing on the blackboard, and I stand by the window watching people outside (to see if other children are coming to my house to learn music). My brother is listening to music"* (JK10, Donald).

This depiction reveals a child's imagination of home as an educational and musical space, where learning is supported by family participation and shared enjoyment. While kindergarten music lessons may not explicitly involve home-based learning, children's accounts suggest the potential for home-school connections through family music activities or take-home musical tasks.

### **Whole-school large-scale music curriculum**

The whole-school large-scale music curriculum was mentioned once in the data. In this imaginative scenario, a child envisioned an inclusive music lesson that involved the entire kindergarten community, highlighting a sense of togetherness and collective joy in music learning.

In one drawing, the child described an imagined large-scale setting for music learning: *"It's for Class 1, Class 2, and Class 3 all learning together in one big classroom."*

*Small classrooms can only fit a few people, but a big classroom can hold everyone from the whole kindergarten. That's more fun*” (SK20, Jane). This account illustrates a child’s aspiration for communal and large-scale musical experiences, where music becomes a shared celebration rather than an individual or small-group activity.

## 8.6 Learning Environment

The learning environment theme was coded 89 times, representing the smallest proportion among all categories in children’s ideal music curriculum. Nevertheless, these accounts demonstrate that environment remained a central and meaningful dimension in children’s musical imagination.

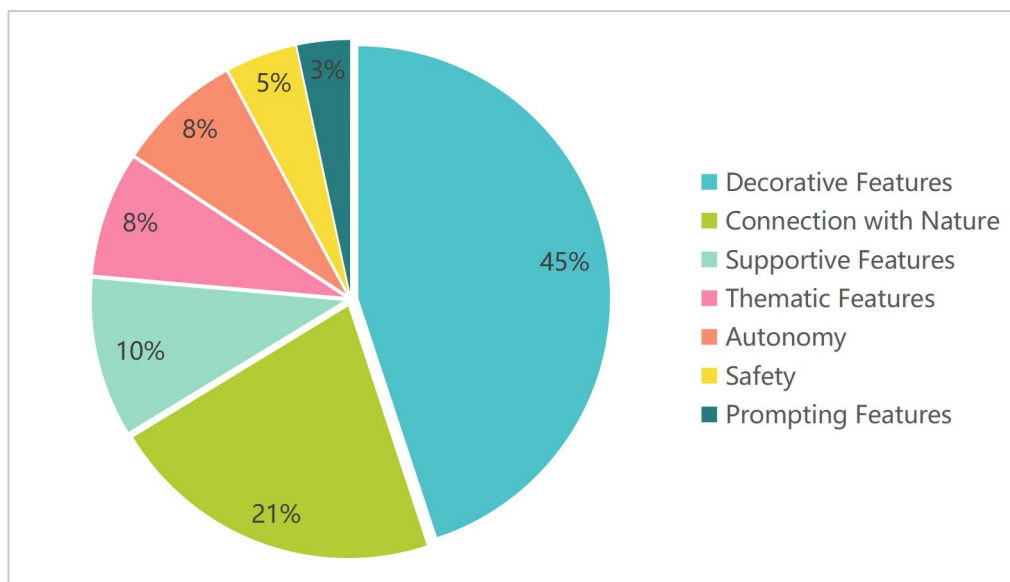


Figure 8.6.1 Proportional Distribution of Learning Environment Themes

As shown in Figure 8.6.1, the most frequently mentioned aspect was decorative features, accounting for 45% of all references. This was followed by connection with nature (21%), supportive features (10%), and thematic features (8%). Meanwhile, autonomy (8%), safety (5%), and prompting features (3%) were mentioned less frequently, representing the smaller yet meaningful components of children’s imagined music learning environments.

### 8.6.1 Decorative Features

Decorative features were the most frequently mentioned aspect of the imagined learning environment, coded 40 times. Children showed a strong aesthetic awareness and creative imagination in describing how their ideal music classrooms should look: filled with colors, lights, and decorative objects that make the space festive and inspiring.



Figure 8.6.2 Painting from Elizabeth (SK17)

In several children's drawings, decorations such as balloons, ribbons, lights, and curtains appeared as recurring motifs. For instance, one child imagined, *"I want to draw many decorations. I want to draw balloons and stars"* (SK07, Daisy). Similarly, another child envisioned a classroom that resembled a stage with bright lighting and flower-shaped lamps (see Figure): *"These are curtains, like curtains on a stage. The flowers are also lights. The light is inside the flower"* (SK17, Elizabeth). Middle class children also demonstrated a similar enthusiasm for decoration. For example, *"I also want to draw an ice cream as decoration. [These are] ribbons hanging from the ceiling to make it look like a stage. These are lanterns, and I want to draw some bows to decorate the wall"* (MK19, Nancy).



Figure 8.6.3 Painting from Helen (SK18)

Other children imagined using colorful materials to decorate the classroom, emphasizing brightness and beauty. According to her painting (see Figure 8.6.3), the child described, *“I want to draw some pink ribbons [...] and some balloons [...] for decoration. There are pink glitter pieces on the stage”* (SK18, Helen). In another drawing, a child explained the difference between the existing classroom and the imagined one, noting how color could transform the atmosphere: *“There aren’t any sparkles, balloons, or little lights [in our real classroom]. The lights [in our real classroom] are white, but the ones I drew are colorful”* (SK19, Isabella).

Overall, these descriptions reveal that children envisioned their ideal music curriculum as one rich in decorative and stage-like qualities. Rather than viewing decoration as mere embellishment, they imagined the music classroom itself as a thematic and performative space, where visual beauty and musical experience were closely intertwined. The emphasis on stage-style decorations, such as curtains, ribbons, and colorful lighting, suggests that children associated the design of the learning environment with the excitement and expressiveness of musical performance, integrating aesthetic atmosphere as an inseparable part of their imagined music lessons.

### 8.6.2 Connection with Nature

The theme of connection with nature appeared 19 times in children’s imagined learning environments. Their depictions showed a strong appreciation for natural beauty and sensory experience, imagining music lessons surrounded by sunlight, greenery, and outdoor sounds.



Figure 8.6.4 Second Painting from Catherine (SK05)

In several drawings and discussions, children described outdoor music lessons as lively, colorful, and immersed in nature. For example, one child illustrated her painting: *“These are flowers, these too, these are rainbow-colored flowers. There’s also a lot of grass, and this is a hillside”* (SK05, Catherine). Similarly, a child imagined an outdoor dancing scene filled with sunlight and trees: *“[We are dancing] outdoors, where there are trees, clouds, and the sun”* (SK08, Emily). In another collage, one junior kindergartner expressed enjoyment in moving on the grass: *“We can walk on the grass”* (JK21, Anthony).

Alongside outdoor imagery, some children also envisioned indoor classrooms that maintained a natural atmosphere through material, light, or symbolic elements. For example, one child noted the color of the flooring: *“This is our wooden floor. The color of the wooden floor is brown”* (SK18, Helen). Similarly, some children envisioned the presence of nature through the window, such as, *“The sun is outside.*

*There are little butterflies, flying and flying” (JK20, Basil) and “Outside, the cicadas are calling. The little birds outside are also singing and dancing” (MK14, Lidia).*

Overall, these descriptions demonstrate that children imagined their ideal music environments as harmoniously intertwined with nature, whether physically outdoors or symbolically represented indoors. Their inclusion of trees, sunlight, insects, and birds suggests an appreciation for the sensory richness and vitality of the natural world.

### **8.6.3 Supportive Features**

A total of nine references were coded under the theme of supportive features, illustrating children’s awareness of how physical comfort and practical facilities could enhance their music learning experiences. Their ideas revealed a consideration of both the comfort and functionality of the learning environment.

For instance, one child emphasized the importance of temperature control and comfort, explaining: *“It’s cool outside the classroom. We can also turn on the air conditioner inside. If we have class inside, it’s better, [...] because sometimes it’s really hot outside”* (SK30, Norman). Similarity, in a group discussion, several children also highlighted the role of air conditioning in creating a comfortable environment:

Daisy (SK07): *“If it’s summer, we won’t be afraid of the heat. We can learn different things while enjoying the air conditioning.”*

Emily (SK08): *“In winter, we can turn on the warm air conditioner.”*

Beyond comfort, some children also envisioned practical and supportive facilities. One child described: *“There is also a socket to charge the microphone”* (SK09, Emma). Meanwhile, another group emphasized the need for enough space and seating to accommodate everyone:

Leonard (MK08): *“We need a lot of people.”*

Louis (MK09): *“There isn’t enough seating.”*

Leonard (MK08): *“Seating is available at the back and at the front.”*

Rebecca (MK21): *“[We’ll] arrange plenty of chairs. [The audience] can take a seat in the area or in the performance area.”*

In total, these reflections suggest that children’s ideal music classrooms were not only aesthetic or creative spaces but also supportive environments designed to meet practical needs. The inclusion of air conditioning, seating, and charging outlets reflects children’s awareness that physical comfort and functional design are essential to making music learning enjoyable, efficient, and inclusive.

#### **8.6.4 Thematic Features**

A total of seven references were coded under the theme of thematic features, revealing that some children envisioned music classrooms that reflected specific themes or cultural motifs. These themes primarily centered around festive celebrations and curriculum-related content, showing how children connected the design of their learning space with the broader topics or moods of their music activities.

In several discussions, children expressed a strong preference for festive decorations that could transform the classroom into a celebratory and imaginative space. For example, during one group conversation, they proposed:

Harry (MK05): *“Put up streamers. And pumpkins.”*

Leonard (MK08): *“Then we can celebrate Halloween.”*

Harry (MK05): *“And then we can also have Christmas.”*

Similarly, other children mentioned specific decorative elements associated with Christmas, emphasizing the joyful and symbolic nature of holiday themes: *“I also want to decorate it with a Christmas tree”* (JK19, Benjamin) and *“Christmas decorations. This little thing that looks like a sock is for Santa to put gifts in”* (MK13, Lily).

Beyond festival-related imagery, some children extended their imagination to

curriculum-themed decorations, aligning the classroom environment with the content of their music lessons. For instance, one child created an image of weather-related elements related to weather music curriculum: *“Lightning decorations. I also want to draw dark clouds, and the last one is thunder”* (MK24, Lucy).

Together, these examples demonstrate that children’s imagined music learning environments were not only aesthetically pleasing but also conceptually meaningful. The integration of festive and content-based themes reflects their desire for a music classroom that interacts dynamically with what they learn and celebrate. For children, a themed environment helps make learning immersive and emotionally resonant, turning ordinary lessons into experiences that embody the rhythm, mood, and spirit of the music itself.

#### ***8.6.5 Autonomy***

A total of seven references were coded under the theme of autonomy, reflecting children’s awareness of ownership and participation in shaping their music learning environment. Their descriptions emphasized the importance of personal expression, peer visibility, and collective identity within the classroom space.

For instance, several children envisioned classroom decoration that showcased students’ artistic contributions and photos: *“We can stick up the pictures we’ve drawn. We can also post the works we like, and even photos of us having lessons in class”* (SK03, Beatrice); *“These are the photos we hang up. The children’s photos”* (SK04, Bessie); *“[The classroom is decorated with] children’s paintings”* (JK06, Violet).

These accounts highlight children’s desire to see themselves represented in their learning space, transforming the classroom into a personalized and socially meaningful environment. Their imagined autonomy did not simply involve physical decoration but symbolized a sense of belonging and co-creation, suggesting that for children, feeling ‘part of’ the classroom is integral to enjoying and engaging in

musical learning.

### **8.6.6 Safety**

Safety features were coded four times, reflecting children's concern for the security of their learning environment. Although safety was less frequently mentioned compared with other environmental aspects, these references revealed children's awareness of protection, surveillance, and the need to create a secure atmosphere for learning and performance.

One child explicitly imagined a safety device as part of the classroom: "*This is a security camera to watch out for thieves*" (SK28, Simon). Similarly, a group of middle class children discussed the importance of keeping the classroom protected from outsiders:

Leonard (MK08): "*We also need police. Without them, thieves could come in.*"

Rebecca (MK21): "*We can't invite strangers we don't know. And we must not let kidnappers or thieves come in.*"

These conversations demonstrate that children's ideal music environment were not only joyful and creative but also safe and protected spaces. Their emphasis on security measures suggests that children perceived safety as a prerequisite for comfort and participation.

### **8.6.7 Prompting Features**

Prompting features were coded three times, representing children's creative ideas about how the classroom environment could serve as a reminder or indicator of time or emotion. Although these features were rarely mentioned, they revealed children's awareness of how visual cues in the environment could help organize and support musical learning.

For instance, one child explained how decoration could serve a temporal function: *“The ribbons tell us what month and day it is”* (SK04, Bessie). Another child imagined adding expressive symbols to reflect classroom moods: *“At the end, there’s a small circle with an emoji face. It shows whether we are happy in music class or not”* (SK18, Helen). These depictions illustrate that the classroom environment was imagined by children as a space with prompting functions. Not only reminding them of lesson times and dates but also reflecting their feelings and learning states during class.

## Chapter 9 Conclusion and Discussion

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study, which explored Chinese kindergarten music curriculum from children’s perspectives. Drawing on evidence from Chapters 6 to 8, it examines the current state of music lessons as experienced by children, their preferences for existing practices, and their conceptualizations of an ideal music curriculum. Together, these results address the four research questions that shaped the study. The chapter then offers an integrated discussion of the major findings, highlighting the study’s contributions to the understanding of children’s perspectives and to the broader field of early childhood music education. Finally, it outlines the methodological and conceptual limitations of the research and proposes directions for future inquiry.

### 9.2 RQ 2 & RQ 3: Characteristics of Children’s Preferred Kindergarten Music Curriculum

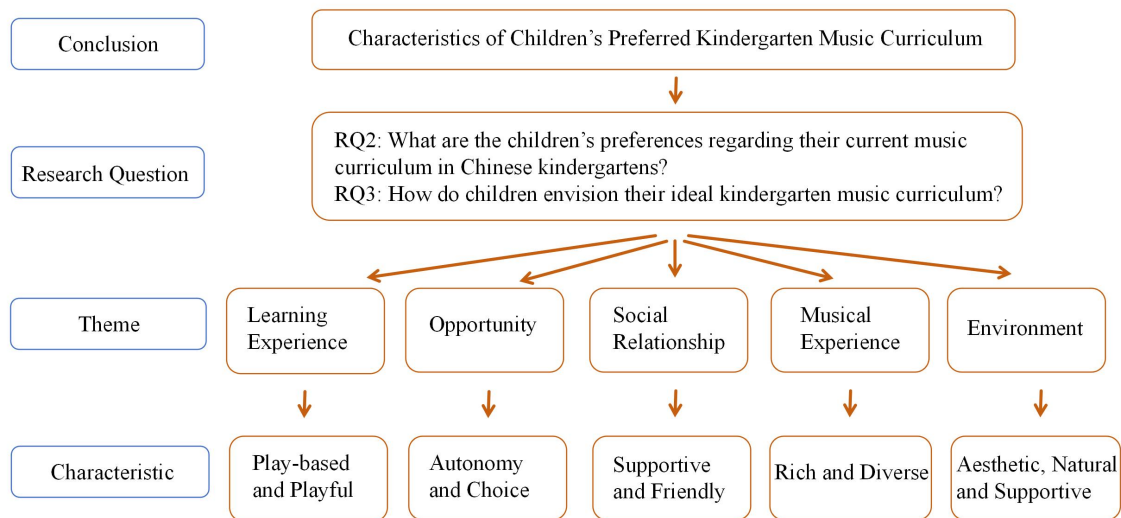


Figure 9.2.1 Analytical Pathway from Research Questions to the Characteristics of Children’s Preferred Kindergarten Music Curriculum

As shown in Figure 9.2.1, findings from the children’s participatory activities presented in Chapters 7 and 8 revealed clear patterns in what’s children’s preferences

in current and imagined Chinese music curriculum, addressing the second and third research questions (*RQ2: What are the children's preferences regarding their current music curriculum in Chinese kindergartens? RQ3: How do children envision their ideal kindergarten music curriculum?*). Specifically, Chapter 7 examined Chinese children's preferences regarding their current music lessons, while Chapter 8 explored how they envision their ideal music curriculum. Because the themes emerging from the two chapters closely intersect, the results for RQ2 and RQ3 are presented together in this section.

From children's perspectives, a Chinese music curriculum they appreciate and enjoy is characterised by five key elements: (1) play-based and playful learning experiences, (2) opportunities for autonomy and choice, (3) supportive and friendly social relationships, (4) rich and diverse musical experiences, and (5) aesthetic, natural and supportive environments. These dimensions collectively illuminate what Chinese children perceive as the essential qualities of a meaningful kindergarten music curriculum.

### ***9.2.1 Play-based and Playful Learning Experiences***

'Play' plays a significant role in children's learning processes. Within Piaget's (1951) theory of cognitive development, play is understood as a cognitive activity that supports learning through the assimilation and consolidation of existing schemas, enabling children to practise and refine their knowledge and skills. In contrast, within Vygotsky's (1967) social development theory, play is conceptualised as a socially mediated activity that promotes learning by allowing children to engage beyond their current developmental level within the zone of proximal development. The findings of the present study align with both theoretical perspectives. They indicate that play constitutes an essential component of learning, not only through play-based learning forms, but also through playful learning experiences characterised by enjoyment, engagement, and active participation (Homer et al., 2020). In this study, children expressed a clear preference for music lessons that are both structured around

play-based activities and experienced as playful, highlighting the importance of integrating play and playfulness into early childhood music education.

Play-based learning refers to learning-oriented forms of play that are embedded in social and cultural activities, where children engage freely and purposefully while adhering to shared rules, roles, or goals (Thomas et al., 2011; Van Oers & Duijkers, 2013; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). In this research, children repeatedly described their preferred music lessons as ‘fun’, ‘playful’, or ‘include games’ which are not only the opportunity to include play, but the playfulness embedded in musical activities that shaped and promoted their sense of meaningful and enjoyable participation (Robertson et al., 2022). These experiences aligned closely with early childhood understandings that position play as a primary mode through which children encounter and make sense of musical ideas (Niland, 2009; Holden et al., 2014). Within early childhood education, play has long occupied a central place in educational discourse, being conceptualised as the key context through which young children learn and develop (Thomas et al., 2011). Besides, play is regarded as a natural advantage for children and the preschool years (ages 3-6) represent a peak period of play (Ilgaz et al., 2018), during which children are most familiar with play-based experiences and are therefore well positioned to articulate their own perspectives on what constitutes meaningful play (Colliver & Doel-Mackaway, 2021).

Playful learning emphasises the affective and motivational dimensions of participation, where children perceive tasks as enjoyable, engaging, or ‘fun’, even when the activity is not strictly a game (Jørgensen et al., 2023). Such playful qualities are known to encourage exploration, sustain curiosity, and enhance children’s sense of agency in classroom activities (Baker et al., 2023). Notably, children in this research expected playful elements to be woven into the existing lesson structure so that learning could unfold through embedded playful experiences. This orientation resonates with the notion of playful structure, which emphasises the integration of playfulness across classroom activities without positioning play and learning as

competing aims (Walsh et al., 2011). Within such a framework, playful engagement is sustained not through spontaneity alone, but through developmentally appropriate scaffolding that supports children in extending their learning while preserving enjoyment and autonomy. The conditions under which such engagement becomes most effective also reflect evidence that well-designed game elements foster optimal learning by balancing challenge, curiosity, and competence (Ke et al., 2016).

Taken together, the findings suggest that, from children's perspectives, meaningful music learning depends upon the presence of both play and playfulness. Play provides clear structures through which participation becomes purposeful, while playful features enhance the inherent appeal of the materials and activities. Importantly, this child-centred view does not stand in contrast to adult-led understandings of early childhood learning. Rather, it converges with existing research emphasising the centrality of play and enjoyment in fostering sustained engagement and exploratory learning. In this respect, children's expectations reinforce broader pedagogical arguments for embedding play-based structures and playful experiences more systematically within early childhood music education.

### ***9.2.2 Opportunities for Autonomy and Choice***

Children's narratives indicate that autonomy and choice constitute one of the core dimensions through which they evaluate the quality of their music lessons. Children appreciated the opportunities for autonomy that currently exist within their music lessons, such as contributing to classroom decorations, choosing certain actions in performance areas, or taking part in brief performance moments. Such expressions of autonomy not only reveal children's aspiration for a more agentic music-learning experience but also demonstrate their heightened sensitivity to opportunities that affirm their sense of agency (Wood, 2014). Besides, children also envisioned richer forms of choice when imagining their ideal music classroom. In these imagined scenarios, the idea of 'being able to decide for myself' appeared repeatedly, with children expressing wishes to choose their own instruments, learn favourite songs,

collaborate with preferred friends, and perform independently. This emphasis on having choice aligns with the principles of playful learning, which requires children to act with agency and autonomy within the learning process (Thomas et al., 2011).

This emphasis on autonomy and choice is consistent with previous research on children's experiences of music play in early childhood settings, which has similarly identified children's desire for freedom and autonomy in music-making activities (Koutsoupidou, 2020). From a pedagogical perspective, Scott (2003) argues that when adults collaboratively design developmentally appropriate curricula within well-prepared environments, children are capable of making informed choices from an early age, thereby fostering independence and self-regulation. Similarly, Niland (2009) emphasises that children's voices should form the foundation of early childhood music curriculum, suggesting that autonomy emerges when educators actively listen to children's musical interests and integrate these into curriculum decisions. Within such environments, autonomy and choice are experienced by children as the freedom to explore, experiment, and express themselves musically, rather than simply as compliance with adult-directed activities.

Viewed in this way, autonomy is not only a pedagogical principle but also a motivational condition that shapes how children emotionally and cognitively engage with music learning. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), autonomy represents a fundamental psychological need that supports the development of intrinsic motivation (Ryan et al., 2016). Research has shown that providing meaningful choices aligned with learners' interests and abilities can significantly enhance engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2013). However, Evans and Boucher (2015) caution that the mere presence of choice is insufficient to foster motivation, as it must be meaningful, support children's sense of competence, and be provided in an appropriate amount. When lessons allowed them to choose content that aligned with their interests, learners reported higher levels of engagement, stronger persistence, and more positive emotional experiences (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). These contrasts

illustrate that choice functions not only as an operational preference but also as a key condition enabling children to experience joy in music learning.

Overall, these findings indicate that, from children's perspectives, an engaging and meaningful music classroom is one in which their sense of agency is actively recognised. While structured teaching remains essential for guiding learning, children value having spaces where their ideas, preferences, and creative expressions can meaningfully shape the learning environment. Such agency was reflected not only in opportunities to make choices, but also in broader expressions of autonomy. Providing greater space for children to influence classroom activities, contribute creative outputs, and participate as active subjects rather than passive recipients may therefore deepen their sense of ownership, enhance the personal relevance of learning, and ultimately strengthen their overall musical experience.

### ***9.2.3 Supportive and Friendly Social Relationships***

Across children's accounts, supportive and friendly social relationships emerged as a central dimension through which they evaluated the quality of their music lessons. Whether describing their current classroom experiences or imagining an ideal lesson, children consistently emphasised the significance of warm teacher-child interactions and collaborative peer relationships. This finding aligns with evidence that even very young children show strong interest in others (Howes, 1988; Kutnick & Kington, 2005) and that relationship-building holds a prominent place in early childhood learning environments (Kington et al., 2013).

Firstly, children acknowledged their appreciation and preference for teachers in their roles as instructors and managers. However, they also expressed a preference for teachers who served as supporters, helpers, and motivators, guiding their engagement in the music curriculum. In their view, teachers were central figures in music learning, but this centrality was associated with providing guidance, emotional support, and practical assistance, rather than exercising authority or directing tasks unilaterally.

This echoes research showing that emotional support, empathy, and mutuality constitute core components through which children conceptualise positive teacher-child relationships (Chu et al., 2025). Children's emphasis on patience, attentiveness, and encouragement aligns with evidence from a study with secondary school students and teachers, which found that supportive teacher-student relationships foster feelings of love, respect, and safety, and are associated with increased engagement, motivation, and academic performance (Gyeltshen & Gyeltshen, 2022).

Besides, evidence from a qualitative interview study with teachers in secondary education suggests that positive teacher-student relationships often extend beyond the classroom context, with interactions occurring across a wider range of settings and topics (Claessens et al., 2016). Consistent with this broader relational perspective, children in the present study described their interactions with teachers as part of an overarching relational climate embedded in the daily kindergarten routine, emphasising that teachers' care and support were not confined to the music lesson alone.

Secondly, children highlighted the importance of peers within music learning environments. In most cases, peers referred to classmates who shared the lesson. However, in certain activities, such as large-scale performances, parents and other participants were also perceived as part of a broader peer group. Children particularly valued opportunities to 'play together' or 'perform together', describing collaborative experiences as both enjoyable and reassuring. These perspectives align with recent research suggesting that preschool children's learning experiences are strongly shaped by peer interactions embedded within wider social networks, rather than isolated dyadic relationships (Choi et al., 2025).

Children's preferences for working with friends further reflect this relational complexity. While they expressed a strong desire to collaborate with familiar peers,

they also emphasised the importance of peers ‘following the rules’ and ‘not disrupting the class’, indicating an expectation that supportive peer environments are grounded in shared responsibility and mutual respect. This finding resonates with research highlighting that teenagers value peer relationships that promote prosocial behaviour, group cohesion, and constructive participation in learning activities (Adams-Wiggins & Haluska, 2025).

In sum, children’s expectations regarding teacher-child and peer relationships reflect a strong orientation toward emotional security, cooperation, and positive social interaction. These findings reinforce prior evidence on the importance of friendships in early childhood settings (Kington et al., 2013) and highlight that a high-quality music lesson is not defined solely by engaging activities or opportunities for autonomy, but also by the presence of a relationally supportive environment in which children feel noticed, understood, and encouraged (Chu et al., 2025).

#### ***9.2.4 Rich and Diverse Musical Experiences***

In the present study, children’s accounts clearly express their desire for rich and diverse musical experiences within the early childhood music curriculum. In their views, a ‘good’ music lesson should extend beyond basic singing and rhythm practice to incorporate a broader range of learning opportunities, such as instrumental playing, stage performances, outdoor musical activities, and music exploration embedded in play. Such diversity enables children to engage with music through multiple modalities, sustaining their interest, stimulating motivation, and deepening their understanding of musical concepts. This aligns with research emphasising that diverse forms of musical literacy are both reasonable and essential in supporting a comprehensive engagement with the musical world (Cain & Walden, 2019). Mas and Gómez (2012) similarly argue that today’s music education must adopt flexible, authentic, and practice-oriented approaches, particularly in increasingly multicultural and dynamic social contexts. Children’s expectations therefore resonate strongly with the broader shift toward learning designs that move beyond standardised formats and

allow for variation that responds to learners' interests, backgrounds, and identities.

Children also expressed a strong desire to access a wider range of musical materials, particularly musical instruments. Rather than relying solely on the familiar percussion instruments frequently used in early childhood classrooms, they wished to explore 'new', 'special', or 'unfamiliar' instruments, including Western and Eastern devices. From a multiliteracies and critical pedagogical perspective, musical engagement is a multimodal, culturally situated practice connected to learners' lived experiences, identities, and social contexts (Argyriou, 2025). Providing diverse musical materials can therefore expand children's opportunities for multi-sensory participation and culturally meaningful exploration. At the same time, research suggests that rich instructional materials become pedagogically powerful only when teachers understand children's developmental processes, participation styles, and cultural backgrounds, enabling these materials to support more meaningful learning (Neuman & Danielson, 2021). Children's eagerness to access a broader array of instruments thus reflects their desire for more open and resource-rich environments through which to explore and make sense of music.

In addition to diverse content and materials, children placed considerable value on opportunities for performance and creative expression. They highlighted the importance of stage presentations, classroom showcases, and sharing musical products with parents and peers as moments that allow them to feel recognised, confident, and accomplished. This perspective echoes a study describing how contemporary childhood involves participation in multiple musical environments, including family, community, and digital spaces, which collectively broaden children's musical repertoires and identities (Young, 2009). Within such a landscape, formal music education bears a responsibility to provide wider opportunities for exploration, performance, and cultural exchange, allowing children to bring their diverse musical experiences into the classroom and engage in identity-building processes (Mas & Gómez, 2012). Furthermore, research indicates that the

effectiveness of young children's learning depends less on fixed pedagogical models than on whether they can meaningfully mobilise diverse cultural resources during shared activity (Van Oers, 2003). Offering varied formats for performance and creativity thus plays a critical role in supporting children's agency, collaboration, and expressive potential within early music education.

Taken together, children's expectations for 'rich and diverse musical experiences' reveal their wish for music learning that is not restricted to a single mode of engagement but instead provides multiple pathways through varied content, materials, and expressive opportunities. Their perspectives reinforce contemporary arguments for more inclusive, flexible, and culturally responsive music curricula and highlight the importance of designing early childhood music environments that honour children's interests, cultural experiences, and creative capacities.

#### ***9.2.5 Aesthetic, Natural and Supportive Environments***

In children's narratives, the aesthetic, natural, and supportive qualities of the music-learning environment emerged as important dimensions through which they evaluated the quality of their music lessons. This finding is consistent with a study conducted with 5-6-year-old children, which examined children's perspectives on both real and ideal preschool classroom environments, highlighting children's preferences for aesthetically pleasing spaces, rich learning and play materials, and connections with nature (Buldu & Buldu, 2025). Creating an environment that stimulates interest, sparks curiosity, and provides emotional support can strengthen children's intrinsic motivation, enhance their engagement, and make musical learning more enjoyable (Hendricks et al., 2014).

First, aesthetic appeal was one of the environmental features to which children were most immediately attentive in the present research. They frequently expressed a desire for music classrooms to include more visually engaging elements, such as decorations related to lesson themes or festival events, and stage-like lighting or backgrounds.

Research has shown that aesthetically designed learning environments support children's cognitive connections, social engagement and emotional well-being, while simultaneously fostering a sense of belonging, identity and competence (Pinciotti & Verba, 2013). For children, a carefully arranged, visually pleasing and artistically rich music space is not merely 'nice to look at'. Rather, it conveys the message that 'this is a place where I can learn and create'. The aesthetic qualities of such environments serve as a foundation for stimulating curiosity, prompting inquiry and supporting creative expression (Pinciotti & Verba, 2013).

Second, children in this research frequently voiced their wish to extend musical activities into outdoor settings. Many children expressed a desire to sing, play instruments, or explore music on grassy fields, in gardens, wooded areas, or other open outdoor spaces. These child-initiated preferences appear to confirm Pound and Harrison's (2003) view that outdoor environments play an integral role in early childhood education, not only by providing space, fresh air, and tolerance for noise, but also by offering rich and varied soundscapes that support young children's musical exploration. Physical spaces can support children's learning and development, and diverse environments enrich independence, autonomy, and exploratory engagement (Westberg, 2021). Additionally, outdoor and transitional spaces, characterised by openness, variability, and contextual richness, provide opportunities for more creative and flexible musical experiences (Liao et al., 2025a). Accordingly, the design of educational environments and institutional policies should take children's experiences in these informal spaces seriously, ensuring that such environments offer playfulness, accessibility and adequate support (Aminpour et al., 2020).

In terms of a supportive learning environment, children expressed that the spaces in which they learn should actively assist and enhance their learning experiences. In outdoor settings, research has similarly shown that well-designed outdoor environments can foster richer imaginative play, encourage greater physical activity,

promote calmer and more focused engagement, and facilitate positive social interactions (Nedovic & Morrissey, 2013). Indoors, intentionally organised and thematically designed classroom spaces actively support learning by guiding children's attention, structuring their exploration, and embedding subtle cues that reinforce their understanding of curricular content (Kang et al., 2024; Ríos-López et al., 2025). Beyond these pedagogical functions, children also emphasised that feeling safe is a crucial component of a supportive environment (Hendricks et al., 2014). For them, a supportive space enables participation, exploration, and concentration, thereby creating the conditions necessary for meaningful learning.

Overall, children's emphasis on aesthetic qualities, natural environments and supportive physical conditions highlights the multifaceted role of space in shaping their learning experiences. Visual aesthetics foster emotional engagement and interest; natural settings expand the depth and flexibility of musical experiences; and safety and comfort provide the foundational stability needed for participation. An environment that integrates these features can enhance children's engagement and well-being in music learning, while creating an open, creative and agentic learning space that aligns with their expressed needs. These findings reaffirm that in early childhood music education, the learning environment should be understood as a 'third teacher' (Pinciotti & Verba, 2013), whose design and enactment need to be grounded in children's experiences, interests and developmental needs.

### 9.3 RQ 1 & RQ 4: Comparing the Current and Ideal Kindergarten Music Curriculum

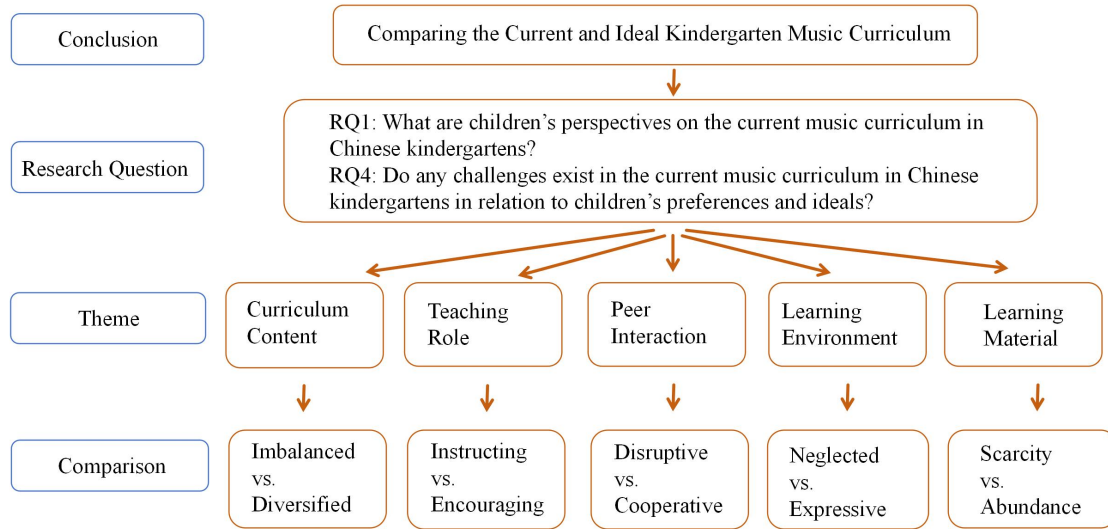


Figure 9.3.1 Analytical Pathway from Research Questions to the Comparison of the Current and Ideal Kindergarten Music Curriculum

According to Figure 9.3.1, findings from Chapter 6 address the first research question (*RQ1: What are children's perspectives on the current music curriculum in Chinese kindergartens?*) by illustrating children's perspectives on the current Chinese kindergarten music curriculum. By comparing these findings with those from Chapter 8, which present children's visions of their ideal music lessons, several gaps between current practices and children's preferred curriculum become evident. Identifying and analysing these gaps enables the study to answer the fourth research question (*RQ4: Do any challenges exist in the current music curriculum in Chinese kindergartens in relation to children's preferences and ideals?*), which concerns the challenges that arise when the existing Chinese curriculum does not align with children's preferences and ideals. Therefore, this section presents the results for RQ1 and RQ4 together by highlighting the key discrepancies between the current and ideal Chinese music curriculum.

Chinese children identified five major gaps between the current curriculum and their ideal one: (1) imbalanced vs. diversified curriculum contents, (2) instructing vs.

encouraging teaching roles, (3) disruptive vs. cooperative peer interactions, (4) neglected vs. expressive learning environments, and (5) scarcity vs. abundance in learning materials. These contrasts highlight the core challenges in current practice and the key areas needing improvement to better align music education with children's needs and aspirations.

### ***9.3.1 Curriculum Contents: Imbalanced vs. Diversified***

Children's documentation of the current Chinese kindergarten music curriculum indicates that, although a wide range of musical activities are nominally included, children's everyday music lessons tend to be dominated by a narrow set of highly structured practices, particularly singing, rhythm exercises, and teacher-led performances. Other forms of musical engagement, such as music games, music area activities, instrumental exploration, or project-based performances, were described as occurring infrequently and often being limited to special events or festive occasions. These findings resonate with Yan's (2021) ecological study of musicking in Chinese kindergartens, which shows that while music appears across multiple contexts in kindergarten life, it is predominantly implemented through organised music sessions and functional uses, with comparatively limited opportunities for diverse, child-initiated musical experiences in everyday practice.

In sharp contrast, when imagining their 'ideal music curriculum', children expressed expectations for content that is more diverse and creatively engaging. Although traditional activities such as singing and performing were still mentioned with high frequency, children also placed considerable value on participation-oriented and exploratory activities such as music games, instrument learning, and opportunities for large-scale stage performances. These preferences suggest that children desire activities that offer greater autonomy and align more closely with their personal interests. Children's interests are widely recognised as central to meaningful learning and play in the early years (Chesworth, 2016) and they are more motivated to participate in musical activities that reflect their own preferences (Temmerman, 2000).

When educational provision aligns with children's individual needs and interests, such engagement not only enhances participation but also creates conditions that support the development of children's individuality (Fineman, 2009).

From children's perspectives, it is evident that the current Chinese music curriculum, despite its apparent diversity, suffers from significant imbalance in implementation: structured and teacher-directed activities dominate, while creative, experiential, and exploratory forms of musical engagement are marginalized. Children's visions of an ideal curriculum reveal a strong desire for richer, more open, and more creatively oriented musical experiences. This underscores the need for future curriculum design to better balance activity types, ensuring that the music curriculum becomes genuinely diversified and more closely aligned with child-centred principles.

### ***9.3.2 Teaching Roles: Instructing vs. Encouraging***

In children's descriptions of the current Chinese kindergarten music curriculum, teachers are primarily portrayed as 'instructors', 'organizer', and 'supporters'. This indicates that the existing music classroom continues to center on knowledge transmission and classroom regulation, emphasizing skill teaching, directive instruction, and control over activities. Children's accounts suggest that teachers mainly take responsibility for teaching songs, demonstrating rhythms, organizing activity sequences, and managing discipline and performances. Such a role configuration reinforces a teacher-centered instructional model (Lerikkanen et al., 2016), consequently limiting children's autonomy and active participation in the music class (Yan, 2023; Kangas et al., 2015).

In contrast, within children's imagined 'ideal music curriculum', the teacher's role expands significantly. Beyond the existing functions of instructing and supporting, children also highlight teachers as 'helpers' and 'motivators'. They hope that teachers can provide emotional support, offer timely assistance when challenges arise, and encourage them during musical expression, stage performance, or instrument

exploration (Hong, 2017). Such expectations reflect children's desire for a more open, warm, and supportive learning atmosphere.

The role of 'helper' reflects children's expectation for individualized assistance. For example, receiving guidance when learning new instruments, engaging in creative musical activities, or preparing for performances, rather than merely following standardized demonstrations. The 'motivator' role illustrates children's emphasis on confidence-building and emotional affirmation in music learning. They hope teachers recognize their efforts and create an environment where every child feels safe to try, express, and take musical risks.

Overall, children's perspectives reveal a clear mismatch between the teaching roles they currently experience and the ones they hope for. While real classrooms are largely shaped by a traditional focus on instruction and classroom management, children envision teachers who provide stronger emotional support, offer individualized assistance, and actively encourage their musical expression. Future music curriculum design should take these shifts in role expectations into account, aiming to balance structured teaching with responsive and supportive practices, and ultimately fostering a more child-centred learning environment that promotes exploration and expressive freedom (Lerkkanen et al., 2016).

### ***9.3.3 Peer Interactions: Disruptive vs. Cooperative***

In children's accounts of their current kindergarten music lessons, peers were described as occupying multiple roles: they were 'learners' and 'performers' who participated together in class, but they were also frequently portrayed as 'distractors'. Children commonly noted that some peers did not always follow classroom rules during music activities, engaged in disruptive behaviours, or interfered with activities arranged by the teacher. These descriptions reveal a degree of disciplinary challenges within peer interactions in existing music classrooms, with such disruptions often diminishing children's engagement and lowering the overall quality of their musical

learning experiences. Research shows that peer relationships become increasingly significant in early childhood and primary education, and harmonious peer interactions are closely associated with children's academic performance and socio-emotional wellbeing (Gallagher & Sylvester, 2009; Wentzel et al., 2014).

In contrast, children's envisioned 'ideal music classes' portray peers very differently. Beyond continuing as learners and performers, children hoped peers could become 'collaborators', 'companions', and 'rule-followers'. This shift suggests that children not only merely wish for fewer disruptive behaviours (Dursley & Betts, 2015), but also desire supportive and cooperative peer relationships (Wentzel et al., 2014) that encourage joint participation in music activities and foster a positive, friendly classroom atmosphere.

Importantly, children's expectations for ideal lessons revealed a broadened understanding of 'peers', extending beyond classmates to include family members, particularly parents. While their accounts of current music lessons showed an absence of family participation, children imagined parents watching performances, observing lessons, or even taking part in music activities together. This contrast highlights a missing element in the existing curriculum and corresponds with findings by Maharaj (2021), who reports that parental involvement in early childhood settings is often limited and that many parents have little knowledge of the curriculum implemented in early years centres.

Taken together, children's dual perspectives reveal both the challenges of disruptive peer behaviours in current music lessons and their aspirations for more cooperative, supportive, and emotionally connected learning environments. These findings underscore the need for future music curriculum design to pay greater attention to the value of peer relationships and family involvement. Establishing consistent classroom rules, promoting collaborative learning structures, and creating mechanisms for meaningful parental participation may help build more holistic, positive, and socially

rich music-learning experiences for young children.

#### ***9.3.4 Learning Environment: Neglected vs. Expressive***

In children's accounts of the current Chinese kindergarten music curriculum, descriptions of the learning environment were extremely limited. Children mainly noted that the classroom consisted of learning and living areas, with occasional mention of basic decorations. These descriptions remained largely at the level of physical layout rather than reflecting any functional significance for music learning. This aligns with Knauf's (2019) observation that some kindergartens tend to overlook the role of the environment in supporting children's learning and exploration, resulting in spaces that fail to serve as accessible and meaningful educational resources. Similarly, Chen and Wang's (2018) study from the perspective of Chinese children showed that indoor environments often did not provide sufficient support.

In sharp contrast to their limited real-world experiences, children's imagined 'ideal music curriculum' contained rich and specific expectations for the learning environment. Through references to aesthetic qualities, natural elements, supportive features, thematic cohesion, autonomy, safety, and environmental prompts, children positioned the environment as an active contributor to their learning rather than merely a decorative or operational backdrop. Existing research similarly underscores the importance of intentional visual and spatial design in supporting children's learning. Classroom aesthetics operate as an implicit pedagogical force that shapes how children engage with curriculum and with one another (Apps & MacDonald, 2012) and curriculum-related displays have been found to enhance learning (Ríos-López et al., 2025). Besides, classroom wall displays and visual elements are shown to influence how children make sense of curricular content: classroom visual design can help bridge explicit and implicit curricula by offering subtle learning cues (Kang et al., 2024).

Natural spaces play an important role in supporting more active, confident, and

embodied forms of learning (Bilton, 2010). Children in this study similarly linked this broader importance of outdoor experiences to their musical learning, incorporating natural elements into their ideal music spaces. Mac Naughton and Williams (2009) suggest that classroom arrangements should harmonize with children's natural rhythms, thereby supporting exploration and curiosity. However, in practice, kindergarten music environments remain heavily dependent on fixed indoor spaces that primarily serve teachers' instructional needs rather than children's sensory experiences and learning modes. Based on a qualitative case study in a Taiwanese kindergarten, Liao et al. (2025b) examined children's engagement in music-related art activities across outdoor spaces using interviews, teacher journals, and analyses of children's work, and found that children experienced greater freedom and creativity in outdoor settings. This finding reinforces the present study's results that children strongly prefer musical learning experiences in outdoor environments.

Therefore, from children's perspectives, the learning environment is not merely the backdrop of the music curriculum but a crucial factor shaping the quality of experience. Children's emphasis on naturalness, openness, and opportunities for exploration reveals significant gaps in current curriculum design and echoes broader research underscoring the value of inspiring spaces, natural contexts, and creative experiences. Future kindergarten music curricula should more intentionally integrate natural environments and flexible learning contexts, enabling the environment to function as the 'third teacher' that meaningfully supports musical learning, expression, and emotional engagement.

### ***9.3.5 Learning Materials: Scarcity vs. Abundance***

Children's accounts of their current kindergarten music lessons reveal a clear imbalance in the use of learning materials: while teachers frequently use a range of instructional tools, the materials that children themselves can access and actively engage with remain noticeably limited. Children noted that the materials most frequently employed during lessons are those used by teachers for demonstration,

including the whiteboard, piano, and tambourine, while materials that children can manipulate independently are considerably restricted. Materials are relatively more abundant in the music room and the performance area (Rodríguez & Álvarez, 2017). However, during regular music lessons, children have limited opportunities to use these materials, and hands-on engagement remains infrequent.

From an educational standpoint, the accessibility and interactivity of learning materials are key components of high-quality early childhood education. Constructivist theory and related studies emphasize that materials should be made available to learners both before and during instruction so they can actively use and interact with them (Oppong Frimpong, 2021). Children's accounts indicate that this principle is not yet fully realized in current music teaching practices.

In contrast, children's envisioned 'ideal music lessons' reveal a strong desire for more abundant, varied, and personally accessible materials. Children expressed a wish not only for a wider range of instruments but also for individually assigned resources. Many described instruments they seldom or never encounter in current lessons, such as guitar, pipa, erhu, or dizi, and some hoped for a classroom equipped with enough child-sized pianos for everyone. In the performance area, they envisioned richer props, costumes, and role-play materials to support creative stage activities. These expectations are highly consistent with established principles in early childhood music education. Pound and Harrison (2003) argue that early childhood settings should include a designated music area where children can access a variety of resources for music making, including instruments made from different materials, instruments played in diverse ways, pitched and non-pitched instruments, and tools representing different cultural traditions.

In total, children's dual perspectives highlight a clear discrepancy between the limited materials they are currently able to use in lessons and their strong desire for more abundant and accessible learning resources. While real classrooms offer few

opportunities for active material use, children imagine a learning environment where materials are rich, individually accessible, open to exploration, and supportive of creative expression. Future curriculum design should place greater emphasis on the provision, placement, and accessibility of musical materials. This includes establishing accessible music areas, increasing opportunities for whole-class instrumental participation, and expanding the diversity of available resources to create a more exploratory, hands-on, and creatively oriented, child-centered music learning environment.

#### **9.4 Contributions of the Study**

Theoretically, the study extends understandings of child-centred perspectives by reinforcing that young children are active, competent social agents who hold the right to express their views (James and Prout, 1997; Prout, 2011). The findings demonstrate that children are not passive recipients of educational experiences but meaningfully interpret, negotiate, and communicate their perspectives using diverse expressive resources (Mayall, 2002; Tisdall and Punch, 2012). By showing that children can articulate how music lessons are experienced and how they ought to be designed, the study strengthens theoretical frameworks that foreground children's rights, competence, voice and agency in childhood studies, further validating the legitimacy and importance of including children's voices as contributors to educational knowledge production (James, 2013).

Methodologically, previous studies have shown that the Mosaic approach is a valuable participatory framework for engaging children aged 3-6 in research on their lived experiences (Harcourt & Mazzoni, 2012). The present study extends this evidence by demonstrating not only its continued applicability, but also the necessity of adapting specific tools and procedures when working with younger participants. Within the Mosaic approach, the children's conference was difficult for 3-4 years old children to engage with meaningfully, although children aged 4-6 were able to participate successfully. The findings indicate that children aged 3-4 were unable to meaningfully

participate in this form of group interview, while children aged 4-6 engaged effectively. This aligns with previous research, where group interviews with children have typically been conducted with participants aged four and above (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Barnikis, 2015).

Drawing, incorporated in this study as an additional participatory method beyond the original Mosaic approach, posed particular challenges for children aged 3-4. According to Lowenfeld and Brittain's (1987) theory of children's drawing development, children in this age group are typically in the scribbling stage, where mark-making is exploratory and lacks stable representational meaning, making drawing a less effective medium for communicating experiences or ideas. Furthermore, drawing is not universally suitable for all children. In this study, four children participated in all other activities but consistently declined to take part in drawing, all of whom were boys. This is because some children may be unfamiliar with using drawing tools, may lack confidence in their perceived artistic ability, or may simply have little interest in drawing, which can limit their willingness and capacity to participate meaningfully (Punch, 2002; Bagnoli, 2009).

In contrast, other methods included in the Mosaic approach used in this study, such as child-led photography and tour guiding, proved to be highly effective and were well received by children across all age groups. These methods were readily used by children aged 3-6 and enabled rich data collection, consistent with previous studies that have successfully employed similar approaches with young children (Rogers & Evans, 2006; Harcourt & Mazzoni, 2012; Ferreira et al., 2018). Moreover, although voting activities are not a formal component of the Mosaic approach, they were adapted in this study through the combined use of stickers, emoticons, and simple voting procedures to support children in expressing their likes and dislikes in an accessible and engaging manner. This adaptation builds on previous studies demonstrating that visual cues such as stickers and facial expressions can effectively enable young children to communicate preferences (Stephenson, 2009; Gabb & Singh,

2015; Azunre & Sowrirajan, 2021). Together, these findings highlight the value of flexible and child-friendly arts-based methods and provide practical guidance for future research with young children.

Practically, this study introduces a new lens for understanding early childhood music education by examining current practices from children's own perspectives. Through their photographic records and related narratives, children articulated their understandings and perceptions of how music lessons were enacted within their kindergarten context. At the same time, the study constructs a child-informed vision of an ideal music curriculum which is supportive, interactive, aesthetically engaging, and rich in opportunities for exploration. A comparison between children's depictions of current music lessons and their envisioned ideal curriculum reveals a clear gap between existing practice and children's expectations (Araneda et al., 2019). These insights offer concrete, actionable recommendations for future curriculum design, teacher practices, and learning-environment development, ultimately contributing to the creation of more responsive and child-centred music education in early childhood education (Liao et al., 2025b).

### **9.5 Research Limitations**

This study has certain limitations, particularly in relation to the methodological choices adopted. This study involved young children and used participatory child-centred methods, it required substantial time at each stage (Gabb & Singh, 2015). This is largely because younger children are often unfamiliar with written forms of communication and may have limited verbal expression, as well as having relatively limited experience and cognitive capacities (Huang et al., 2016), therefore requiring substantial time to scaffold, guide, and support children's participation. In addition, research with young children entails more complex ethical considerations due to their status as minors (Gabb, 2010). Compared with research involving adult participants, ethical considerations in research with children are more complex, requiring heightened attention to recruiting child participants, avoiding harm,

ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and securing informed consent as an ongoing process throughout the research (Huang et al., 2016).

Methodologically, despite the adoption of child-centred tools, the research remained largely researcher-designed and researcher-interpreted. This raises concerns that children's voices may have been constrained by adult-imposed structures or interpretive frameworks (Streelasky, 2020). Research that views children as co-researchers requires their participation to be embedded across multiple stages of the research process, including the identification of research questions, commissioning of research, methodological planning, data collection, data analysis, the formulation of recommendations, and the presentation and dissemination of findings (Coad & Evans, 2008). However, such an approach also entails significant challenges, including children's limited research capacities, the need for comprehensive training programmes, difficulties in balancing insider and outsider perspectives, the complexity of remuneration, the necessity of addressing power differentials, and the ethical imperative to safeguard children's wellbeing and rights throughout the research process (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015).

Except the methodological constraints, the scope of the research content also presents several limitations. As the study was conducted in a single public kindergarten located in a mid-level Chinese city, the findings cannot be considered representative of the wider diversity of Chinese early childhood settings (Yan, 2021), particularly those in more developed metropolitan areas or rural regions (Yang & Welch, 2023). Moreover, the study focused primarily on commonly observed formal music lessons in six classes, leaving out other informal or spontaneous musical experiences that often occur in kindergartens but are less visible in classroom-based observations. The children's perspectives, while central to the study, also reflect only one dimension of curriculum experience. The absence of teachers', parents', and administrators' perspectives restricts the comprehensiveness of the findings (Rogers & Boyd, 2020). Taken together, these factors limit the generalisability and completeness of the study's

portrayal of kindergarten music curriculum across broader educational contexts.

## **9.6 Directions for Future Research**

First, future research could broaden its scope to investigate Chinese kindergarten music curriculum from children's perspectives across different regions of China. As the present study drew primarily on data from a specific region, subsequent studies may examine children's experiences in rural and urban areas, across different provinces, in eastern, central, and western regions, and within multi-ethnic communities (Yan, 2021). Such comparative work would help construct a more comprehensive understanding of children's perspectives on music learning across Chinese varied educational landscapes.

Second, cross-cultural and international comparative studies hold significant potential. Children's musical experiences are closely shaped by broader cultural environments, social expectations, and learning contexts (Aróstegui & Louro, 2009). Future research could therefore compare the views of children in China with those in other countries to explore how cultural differences influence their interests, modes of participation, and emotional engagement in musical activities. Such comparisons would help identify which needs and preferences are universal among young children, and which are specific to particular socio-cultural settings, thereby informing culturally responsive curriculum development.

Third, future research could adopt a wider range of diverse and innovative child-participatory methods to deepen the understanding of children's experiences. Although this study employed an adapted Mosaic Approach, emerging technologies and methodological developments offer additional creative possibilities. For example, digital devices such as iPads could be integrated throughout all stages of similar research (Ferreira et al., 2018), enabling children to take photographs, vote on and introduce selected images, create drawings, record sounds, and narrate their ideas in a flexible and self-directed manner. These methods not only offer children greater

control over how they document and present their own experiences, but also reflect children's growing familiarity and comfort with digital devices in their everyday lives (Plowman, 2016).

Furthermore, future research should move beyond children's perspectives on music learning to include their perspectives on other areas of the kindergarten curriculum, such as language, social development, health, and science (Ríos-López et al., 2025; Tao, 2025). Investigating children's experiences and meanings across multiple curricular domains would allow researchers to identify potential commonalities and divergences in how children engage with different forms of learning. Such cross-domain comparisons can deepen our understanding of the distinctive and shared features of various curricular areas, and ultimately contribute to a more coherent and integrated approach to early childhood curriculum design.

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## Appendix A Ethical Approve Letter



Inspiring the extraordinary

Education Ethics Committee  
Durham University, Confluence Building  
Lower Mountjoy, Stockton Road  
Durham  
DH1 3LE

Ms YING CHEN  
Education

20 March 2025

Dear Ms YING CHEN ,

Thank you for your ethics submission. The Education Ethics Committee has granted ethical approval for the following project:

Title: Hearing Children's Voices: Exploring Chinese Kindergarten Music Curriculum from Children's Perspectives Using an Adapted Mosaic Approach  
Dates: 01/03/2025 - 31/05/2025  
Supervisor / Project Team Members: SOPHIE, CLAIRE WARD, DIMITRA KOKOTSAKI ,  
Project ID: 2087  
Review Reference: EDU-2025-2087-5632

Please note the following feedback:

If the work requires any other approvals or licenses, please make sure that these are in place before you start work.

### **General conditions of ethics approvals**

It is expected that you will begin work on the project within one year of the date approval is given. Ethics approval is normally granted for the stated duration of the project, up to a maximum of five years. Beyond this, you should apply for extension or re-approval.

If you make any significant changes to the design, duration or delivery of your project, you should submit an amendment form for further consideration and approval as required.

If any significant ethical issues arise (i.e. a risk, foreseen or unforeseen, becomes a live issue), you should notify Education Ethics Committee. If you have received approval from an external body, you will also need to check their requirements regarding notification of adverse events.

If you have any queries regarding this approval or need anything further, please contact [ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk).

## Appendix B Participant Information Sheet

**Project title:** Hearing Children's Voices: Exploring Chinese Kindergarten Music Curriculum from Children's Perspectives Using an Adapted Mosaic Approach.

**Researcher:** Ying Chen

**Department:** School of Education, Durham University

**Contact details:** ying.chen@durham.ac.uk

**Supervisors name:** Dr. Dimitra Kokotsaki & Dr. Sophie Ward

**Supervisors contact details:**

dimitra.kokotsaki@durham.ac.uk & s.c.ward@durham.ac.uk

Dear Teachers and Careers,

I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at Durham University, and I plan to conduct my dissertation research in the kindergarten during this term. This study will involve some of the children in your kindergarten. We take the safety and rights of each child seriously therefore we hereby request your consent and support.

### **Research Purpose:**

By listening to the voices of children, this study hopes to understand their views and expectations of the kindergarten music curriculum, to identify the challenges of the current music curriculum, and to create a music curriculum that better meets the needs of children.

### **Research Activities:**

During the research, I will use game-based activities to co-create the children's ideal kindergarten music curriculum. The activities include:

1. **Photography:** Children take some photos when they are having the music class to show the music class from their eyes.
2. **Tour Guiding:** Children act as tour guides to introduce the photos they took .
3. **Voting:** Children vote for the photos, choosing what they like and dislike.
4. **Painting:** Children draw their ideal (own) music class.
5. **Conferencing:** Children participate in group discussions to collectively create their ideal music class.

### **Research Duration:**

The photo session takes place during the children's music class, and each child has one minute to take some pictures. Children participated individually the tour guiding, voting, and drawing sessions, which around 20 minutes totally. Children participate in the conferencing is approximately 20 minutes.

**Participants:**

Children within those randomly selected classes who have obtained consent from both their parents and themselves.

**Safety Measures:**

This study fully respects the children's willingness and rights. Children are free to choose which activities they would like to participate in, and they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. To ensure children's privacy, real names and other personal information will be replaced with codes, the face shown in the photo will be blurred. Any data collected will be handled with strict confidentiality and will only be shared with those directly involved in the study.

All materials used in the research are age-appropriate, safe, and non-invasive. The activities will take place in the children's regular classrooms, ensuring that they remain in a familiar and comfortable environment. The researcher will ensure that no child feels pressured to participate in any activity, and the children will be given breaks as needed to prevent fatigue or stress.

**Research Risk:**

Participating in this study may pose emotional and psychological risks, such as stress or anxiety for the children. To mitigate this, the researcher will spend time with the class in advance to build familiarity and reduce stress. Emotional support will be provided throughout the study, and the researcher will address any signs of distress immediately.

To reduce children's sense of isolation, if a child wishes to participate but their parents have not provided consent, they will be allowed to engage in individual activities without being included in group activities to ensure no data is collected. The researcher will only focus on creating a supportive, no data record, simply participating and playing in the activities the same with other children.

To minimize disruption to the children's regular school activities, the study will be conducted during free play times (includes out door play and indoor play): two hours in the morning and one hour after lunch. The research will be closely timed, stopping promptly if it overlaps with other scheduled activities.

In order to avoid children feeling marginalised during group activities, if there are children who strongly wish to participate but whose parents have not provided informed consent, they will be allowed to take part in the activities in the same way as their peers, but no data relating to them will be collected or recorded at any stage. In such cases, the researcher will contact you directly to inform you about the child's wish to join. If parental consent is still not granted, the child will instead be guided to

continue with normal class activities with researcher and will not be included in any aspect of the research sessions.

**Research Benefit:**

Participating in the research allows children to express their views and feelings about the music curriculum, enhancing their self-expression and self-confidence. Parents can gain insights into their children’s musical preferences, enabling them to better support their children’s musical development. The kindergarten can adjust and improve the music curriculum and teaching strategies based on the results of the study, better meeting the needs and interests of the students and improving the overall quality of education.

**Data Usage and Storage:**

All research data will be securely stored in line with the University’s data privacy policy. You can find information about the University’s responsibilities for data protection and your rights under data protection legislation in the University’s [privacy notice](#).

Personal data will be anonymised and aggregated for use in the PhD and research publications. All personalised data (children’s audio recordings, photos without use consent) will be destroyed at the first possible opportunity and by the end of the study.

*Withdrawal of data*

You and your child can withdraw at any time without consequences. However, data can be withdrawn up until 01/07/2025, after which it may no longer be possible to remove data if it has already been anonymised and aggregated for analysis. If you choose to withdraw before this point, Any collected data will be discarded.

**Research Results:**

Durham University is dedicated to sharing its research for public benefit. As part of this, all Higher Degree theses are made freely available in an online repository. The study your children participate in will be written up as a thesis and published open access, both in print and online, to support future research.

**Research Contact:**

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or their supervisors. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please submit a complaint via [research.policy@durham.ac.uk](mailto:research.policy@durham.ac.uk).

## Appendix C Kindergarten Consent Form

**Project title:** Hearing Children’s Voices: Exploring Chinese Kindergarten Music Curriculum from Children’s Perspectives Using an Adapted Mosaic Approach.

**Researcher:** Ying Chen

**Department:** School of Education, Durham University

**Contact details:** ying.chen@durham.ac.uk

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy your children to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I agree with the following:	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above project.		
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.		
I understand who will have access to information about children and how the information will be used.		
Children taking photos when they are having music class.		
Children doing a guided tour activity.		
Children doing a voting activity.		
Children doing a painting activity.		
Children doing a conference activity.		
Children talking with researcher about their opinions through activities.		
Allowing the researcher use children’s painting in thesis, publication, and conference.		
Allowing the researcher use the photos children taken in thesis, publication, and conference. These photos will not involve the child’s face.		
Allowing the researcher to use a voice recorder to record information from conversations with children during participation activities.		
Allowing the researcher use the transcript from children in thesis, publication, and conferencing.		
Respecting the wishes of children when they do not want to participate.		

I agree to children in the kindergarten participating in this research project.

Kindergarten’s Name \_\_\_\_\_

Principal’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D Parental Consent Form

**Project title:** Hearing Children’s Voices: Exploring Chinese Kindergarten Music Curriculum from Children’s Perspectives Using an Adapted Mosaic Approach.

**Researcher:** Ying Chen

**Department:** School of Education, Durham University

**Contact details:** ying.chen@durham.ac.uk

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy your children to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I agree with the following:	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above project.		
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.		
I understand who will have access to information about children and how the information will be used.		
Children taking photos when they are having music class.		
Children doing a guided tour activity.		
Children doing a voting activity.		
Children doing a painting activity.		
Children doing a conference activity.		
Children talking with researcher about their opinions through activities.		
Allowing the researcher use children’s painting in thesis, publication, and conference.		
Allowing the researcher use the photos children taken in thesis, publication, and conference. These photos will not involve the child’s face.		
Allowing the researcher to use a voice recorder to record information from conversations with children during participation activities.		
Allowing the researcher use the transcript from children in thesis, publication, and conferencing.		
Respecting the wishes of children when they do not want to participate.		

I agree to my child’s participation in this research project.

Child’s Name \_\_\_\_\_

Career’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E Teacher Consent Form

**Project title:** Hearing Children’s Voices: Exploring Chinese Kindergarten Music Curriculum from Children’s Perspectives Using an Adapted Mosaic Approach.

**Researcher:** Ying Chen

**Department:** School of Education, Durham University

**Contact details:** ying.chen@durham.ac.uk

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy children in your class to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I agree with the following:	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above project.		
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.		
I understand who will have access to information about children and how the information will be used.		
Children taking photos when they are having music class.		
Children doing a guided tour activity.		
Children doing a voting activity.		
Children doing a painting activity.		
Children doing a conference activity.		
Children talking with researcher about their opinions through activities.		
Allowing the researcher use children’s painting in thesis, publication, and conference.		
Allowing the researcher use the photos children taken in thesis, publication, and conference. These photos will not involve the child’s face.		
Allowing the researcher to use a voice recorder to record information from conversations with children during participation activities.		
Allowing the researcher use the transcript from children in thesis, publication, and conferencing.		
Respecting the wishes of children when they do not want to participate.		

I agree to children in the class participating in this research project.

Children’s class \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_

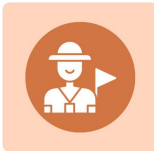
Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F Children's Information Sheet

My name is Ying, and I study at a university in England. I am doing a big project about music class in kindergarten. I want to find out what you think about current music class and what you dream music class! I will play five games with you to explore our music class:



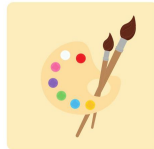
Photo game: you can take photos during music class.



Tour guide game: you can show me about you photos.



Voting game: you can use stickers to vote for the things in your photos.

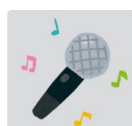
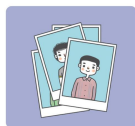


Drawing game: you can draw your dream music class.



Talking game: we can talk in a small group about music class!

If you want to join, you can choose to join all the games, or just the ones you like.



I hope to collect your photos, record your voices, and collect your drawings during the game. I will only do these things if you agree.

These will help me show other people how we can make music class more fun.

## Appendix G Children's Consent Picture

If there are any of the five games you want to join, you can put a **smiley face sticker** next to them. If there are any you don't want to join, you can put a **sad face sticker**. You can also do the same for the things for I might record or collect, e.g., your photos, voices, and drawings. You can say **no** at any time.



Please write or tell me your student number: \_\_\_\_\_