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PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS PRIVATE  
MUSIC EDUCATION

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# **PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS PRIVATE MUSIC EDUCATION**

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to investigate parents' attitudes towards music education and the factors why they do not send their children for private music classes. Fifteen parents from selected areas located in Bintong, Kangar, Padang Besar Utara and Padang Melangit was interviewed for this study. Results showed that most parents support music lesson whether in or out of school but they are mostly unable to give full support and attention because of financial problems and lack of commitment to send their children to private music classes.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Everyone loves music and listen to music. But the difference is in the types of music that people like to hear and in what ways they listen, learn and appreciate them. Music means "sounds that are arranged in a way that is pleasant or exciting to listen to, the art of writing or playing music, and the written or printed signs that represent the sounds to be played or sung in a piece of music" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2005). To many people, music is a form of entertainment and used mainly for leisure and recreation.

However, despite the interest and acceptance of music for leisure purposes, people still tend to perceive negative thoughts about how youth treat music and use music in their life. For example, most secondary school students like to hear Pop, R&B, Rock, Hip Hop and other types of fast music. Some students, especially those who are interested enough to participate in music making activities, their interest in music sometimes lead them to dress, talk, and behave in ways that they think reflects their inclination and interest towards specific genres of music. Furthermore, involvement in music making activities like the pop/rock bands further encourage youth to imitate their favourite singers or musicians.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The implementation of music in the school curriculum has enabled children to learn music in school. Honig (2004) said that, "Music has mathematical structure, as well as emotional power. Listening to rhythms and tonal patterns enhances your child's brain functioning" (p.26). However, not all families understand about the benefits of music. Music in general is often looked upon as a tool for entertainment. Parents' thinking and opinions about music may influence their perception about music and later their decision to allow their children to learn music through private music classes.

A study by Dai and Schader (2001) found that parents have their reasons why they prefer not to send their children to private music classes. Dai and Schader (2001) stated that "musical talent development in a child is a prolonged process requiring adult assistance of both large investments of time and financial resources". This finding may be a major factor which causes parents to discourage their children to learn music formally. The fact that music, considered to be good only for entertainment and leisure, is also costly makes most parents think that music is not important enough in their children's life. Problems such as financial commitment and time to send children to music classes, buying of instruments, and books may tend to deter parents from supporting music lessons. In Malaysia, preference for spending money on tuition classes for academic subjects is also a factor that causes many

spending money on tuition classes for academic subjects is also a factor that causes many parents to refrain from supporting music lessons. Furthermore, lack of private music schools in their area also contributes to the difficulty of sending their children to private music class even if they wanted to.

Sometimes parents' education level and background may also be a factor that influences their decision to not send their children to private music lessons. For example, some parents maybe never think that music can be a good career choice. Most parents do not know about music's benefit. This study will therefore look at parents' attitudes towards music education and the factors which influence them to refrain from sending their children to private music classes.

## **THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the parents' attitudes towards music education and why they do not send their children to private music class. Specifically, this study will be conducted with the following objectives:

1. To find out parents' perceptions about formal music education.
2. To describe parents' attitudes towards private music instruction.
3. To investigate the reasons why some parents do not send their children to private music class.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions will be the guidelines for this study and attempts to answer three main questions.

1. How do parents perceive formal music education as a subject at school?
2. What are parents' attitudes towards private music instruction?
3. What factors influence parents to refrain from enrolling their children in private music classes?

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study will help us to understand how parents perceive music education and what sort of problems they face if they were interested to send their children to private music classes.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study will only examine parents with children who are not learning music privately but learning music either at primary or secondary school. In addition, the interview only involved parents with children in government schools. The small sample for this study does not represent the opinions of all parents who do not have children learning music privately. Parents from areas in Bintong, Kangar, Padang Besar Utara and Padang Melangit, Perlis were selected for this study.



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Music in everyday life**

Listening to music can be said to be everybody's favourite past time activity. Learning music formally through private music classes seems a style of life for some middle to upper class families. Parents who believe that learning music has benefits and helps enhance academic achievement will tend to send their children to private music classes. According to Honig (2004, p.26), "music has mathematical structure, as well as emotional power. Listening to rhythms and tonal patterns enhances your child's brain functioning". This statement clearly supports the idea that music helps in brain development of children. Not only that, even music can also help the children upgrade their skills in Mathematics, memory power and reading technique. According to National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA 2011), "As children's brains are developing at their fastest when they are very young, with 80 percent of brain development occurring by age 3, and 90 percent by age 5, music helps with making connections in the brain." This proves that music can stimulate mind and give the positive effect of active participation in music.

### **Benefits of music learning**

Some parents give support and motivate their children to learn music because they believe that learning music has a lot of benefits. Dai and Schader (2001, p.23), found parents whose children were attending precollege music programs "reported more intrinsic than extrinsic reasons and expectations relating to the benefits of music training. Moreover, these parents believe that music training nurtures many desirable characteristics in their children including discipline, diligence, academic performance, and intelligence". According to Clayton (2001, p.1), "children who are active in music programs have been shown to achieve higher scores on some measures of intelligence and on standardized tests, and to have fewer disciplinary problems in school and beyond". In addition, she also said that learning music brings rewards to intellectual and emotional growth. Studies such as these seem to reinforce the benefits of learning music and can encourage parents to support their children's interest to learn music.

According to The Canadian Press (2006), music lessons can help children as young as four have more advanced brain development and improve their memory. The study by Trainor and Whyte (2006) found that those who took music lessons showed more changes in brain responses. Trainor stated that "music training could lead to improvements in literacy, verbal memory, visiospatial processing, mathematics and IQ" (p.1). In addition, she also said that the study represents the first time researchers have identified the benefits of music lessons for preschool children and found particular changes in the attentional systems of children who took music lessons, which affected their ability to pay attention to important things around them. Besides that, Whyte (2006) stated that many studies have shown the value of music education and many parents want it for their children. White believed that music has benefits for cognitive processing and cognitive development. She felt that music should be considered a core part of the preschool and school curriculum.

### **Religion and music**

For a country like Malaysia where there three major ethnic groups with their own religions, religious beliefs sometimes create contrasting perceptions of music education. For example, a study by Harris (2002) in Castle Community College revealed that an Imam in a community where her study was conducted "does not accept the use of many musical instruments and listens to no music at home. For her, music is always linked with other matters which are *haram*, such as fornication, alcohol and drugs" (p.56). She stated that "within Islam it is necessary to do everything possible to avoid circumstances which require

you to listen to music" (p.56). This shows that people's perceptions towards music vary and for some, music is not important. It is just an entertainment.

As a Malaysian and a Muslim, it is sometimes difficult to make music a part of our life because our religion does not look upon music as important compared to the western countries. According to Dahri (1999, p.9), "This kind of art has become a daily menu in homes, places to drink and supermarkets in the west as they do not have the Koran as well as prayer which includes the life of a true Muslim". In addition, he stated that the "western effort of establishing schools of music gave challenges, especially for Muslims as it tends to make us lose focus in *Islam*". However, today, in Malaysia music is found everywhere, such as in the supermarkets, restaurants, hotels, shopping malls, lifts and many more places. It is because Malaysia has many races and religion. According to Fatwa Committee National Council (2005), "songs is permitted in Islam as long as the song has good lyrics, praising Allah and the Prophet, the beauty of the creations of promoting goodness and responsibility, promoting fear to Allah, it has morally good motive, does not promote illegal relationship between man and woman, does not lead to fitna, does not reveal awra and does not praise Allah's creation excessively". Everyone have their own thoughts, opinions and beliefs about the use and function of music in their life.

Music makes people feel enjoyment but sometimes music also brings a bad attitude among teenagers. This is because when some people listen to music, they cannot give full concentration to their work. Also, there are negative lyrics in music that can influence teenagers to be more aggressive. According to Juned (2001, p.1), "concerned with this negative aspect of music, the Ministry of Education of Brunei Darussalam asked *Fatwa Mufti Kerajaan* to investigate and prove what types of musical instruments can be used in their schools". He also listed several types of musical instruments that cannot be used in music learning which are drums, woodwind, strings, keyboard and brass, except *dufuf* which is *kompang*. It is because, the Ministry of Education of Brunei Darussalam are worried that the music lessons will affect students behaviour at school. They still give students experiences with music but they do not want students to become too obsessed or interested with music. However, it is unsure whether after the list was made, whether the schools in Brunei did not use any of those instruments in their music classes. According to Fatwa Mufti Kerajaan of Brunei there are no laws to completely omit music activities in schools in Brunei. This statement was written by Fatwa Mufti Kerajaan of Brunei when the Ministry of Education in Brunei requested some information about what types of instruments could be used in school to prevent students from learning some instruments that can be wrong beside Islam.

An interesting study by Harris (2002) revealed a more serious negative perception of music among some parents who use the reason of religion to discourage the learning of music. She said that "For some Muslims, music is pronounced *haram* and is forbidden in Islamic law due to its associations; it has frequently been linked with sex, drugs and alcohol, for cultural reasons they would still prefer their children not to take part" (p.49). In contrast to the situation in Harris' study where music classes are non-existent during the Ramadhan month, the situation fortunately does not happen in our country whereby music lessons at school still continues during Ramadhan month.

### **Parental musical background**

Some problems with parental support for music can be also related to parents' background, whether educational or musical. This factor may take on two sides: parents with no background but fully supporting music and parents with no background and not supporting music education. According to Keith (2011, p.1), "When learning a song, a musical instrument, or a dance step, your child experiences the unique integration of body and mind that music provides. Sensory integration is a crucial factor in children's learning readiness for school subjects such as reading, writing, and math". He convinces the parents' questions about how the music makes their child become smarter. He also give the explanation that