

Bridging musical gaps: creating educational songs with thematic learning for primary school students

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Abstract

This study investigates how primary school teachers without musical backgrounds create educational songs to support thematic learning under Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka. Thematic learning aims to integrate various subjects into cohesive themes, fostering student-centered learning (SCL) and emphasizing active engagement and critical thinking. Although the government provided the guiding textbooks, teachers face challenges in implementing SCL. Eventually, they often revert to conventional, teacher-centered methods. Previous research indicates that songs can serve as effective educational tools, but there is still a lack of thematic songs that align with the curriculum's specific themes. Using a case study approach, this research involved classroom observations, document analysis, and interviews with two first-grade teachers who developed songs for an environmental theme. The study found that teachers could create educational songs by deriving lyrics from teaching materials and improvising melodies, although they needed formal musical notation skills. Teachers and students then used these songs in classroom instruction, engaging in singing and physical activities. Despite inconsistencies in musical performance, the findings indicated that students were enthusiastic and better understood the material through these songs. The study highlights teachers' adaptive nature in leveraging available resources to meet educational objectives and emphasizes the importance of integrating arts, particularly music, into educational practices. The research contributes to the broader discourse on educational innovation, suggesting that even teachers without musical training can effectively create and use educational songs to enhance learning. Empowering teachers with resources and training in songwriting could further enrich thematic learning, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration among students. This approach aligns with the goals of the Kurikulum Merdeka, supporting holistic educational reforms and improving learning outcomes in Indonesian primary education.

Keywords

educational song, music-based interdisciplinary teaching, thematic learning with music, primary school student, primary school teacher

Introduction

Primary education in Indonesia provides a comprehensive foundation for learning, covering essential aspects of education, including cognitive (intellectual), psychomotor (skills), and affective

(attitude) domains. The Emancipated Curriculum, also known as *Kurikulum Merdeka*, introduced thematic learning to Indonesian primary schools in 2020. This curriculum builds on the 2013 curriculum, which first introduced thematic learning

for primary students.

Although the textbook has already been facilitated by the government after years of implementing thematic learning in Indonesia, the Indonesian researchers still found challenges experienced by the teachers. One of the biggest challenges in implementing thematic learning is the difficulty in implementing student-centered learning (SCL), which aims to make the learning process interactive. Chumdari et al. (2018) investigate the implementation of the thematic curriculum using a quantitative approach with students from 253 primary schools in one of Central Java's cities. According to their study, the quantitative data indicated that the thematic curriculum was well implemented. However, the conventional teacher-centered method still results in less optimal learning activities for students. Teachers, not students, continue to play an active role in the teaching-learning process.

SCL is crucial in thematic learning because it emphasizes active engagement, critical thinking, and focusing on competencies through relevant themes. This approach integrates various concepts, skills, and attitudes, fostering holistic understanding. It utilizes a variety of resources, promotes flexibility and collaboration, and differentiates instruction to address diverse needs. Direct experiences and flexible curriculum design help students grasp abstract concepts, while differentiated instruction ensures comprehensive understanding. This approach helps students see connections between subjects and achieve learning objectives effectively (Grøndahl Glavind et al., 2023; Morris et al., 2023).

One solution offered by the previous literature is using songs as a medium to teach in primary school (Arief & Isnani, 2020; Wadiyo et al., 2019, 2021). The public has created and utilized numerous songs as a means of artistic expression. However, not all songs, particularly those intended for primary

schools' thematic education in Indonesia, have met the public's expectations. Even if there were, the existing songs needed to be more than enough. The curriculum outlines specific themes to guide teachers in creating student materials. For example, the curriculum outlines eight themes for first-grade primary school students, namely: (1) myself, (2) my passion, (3) my activities, (4) my family, (5) my experiences, (6) clean, healthy, and beautiful environments, (7) things, animals, and plants around me, and (8) natural events. For these purposes, teachers should also teach students life skills while introducing aesthetics to build an integrated education that enhances children's cognitive, motoric, and affective skills through song.

Background of the Problems

Problems arise when primary school teachers lack a musical background. Most of them graduated with a bachelor's degree in primary school education. Teachers are facing challenges due to a shortage of appropriate songs, particularly those that align with the curriculum's learning themes. Professional or primary teachers face these issues because they lack professional songwriter training. Most of them lack any musical background at all. The teachers' lack of specific music training poses a challenge when it comes to developing musical tunes, such as creating original songs. Teachers can only engage in the singing process by mimicking existing songs. According to Larsson & Georgii-Hemming (2019), people with no musical background can engage in musical improvisation by focusing more on other aspects such as educational, psychological, and sociological theories rather than music per se, as well as focusing more on the process rather than the improvisation product.

This problem is not limited to Indonesia. Other countries, including the United Kingdom, have reported similar challenges. Kneen et al. (2020) find that primary school teachers in the UK also face difficulties implementing the thematic curriculum, particularly when

integrating subjects outside their expertise, such as music. The main research problem is that non-music teachers struggle to create and use educational songs as part of the thematic curriculum due to a lack of training and resources. Sub-problems include: (1) non-music graduates lacking the skills to compose songs tailored to educational content; (2) the unavailability of pre-made songs that align with the curriculum; and (3) the need for practical methods that enable teachers to integrate music effectively into thematic learning. To address these challenges, this study aims to develop a method to assist non-music teachers in creating educational songs, offering a practical solution for teachers without any musical background. This approach seeks to establish a teaching methodology that empowers teachers to incorporate song creation into thematic learning in primary education.

Literature Review

Thematic Learning

Thematic learning is the integration of teaching material from multiple subjects into a single theme. Thematic learning is an effective way to contextualize learning methods. Additionally, thematic learning aligns with students' real-life learning methods, enabling both students and teachers to engage in cooperative and interactive learning opportunities within the classroom (Min et al., 2012). Thematic learning integrates several subjects related to a theme. The theme plays a central role in the development of several integrated lessons, with a primary focus on material development as a tool for understanding the material. Thematic learning helps students learn in primary school. A theme can help students learn about various phenomena in their daily lives. Nature provides information about various disciplines in a holistic manner, not separately. Students' learning experience will become more intact and meaningful when they draw a theme from natural and social phenomena that are close to their lives (Ain & Rahutami, 2018; MacQuarrie et al., 2015).

Indonesia's education integrates thematic learning through the 2013 curriculum. *Kurikulum Merdeka* continued the effort in 2020. Various countries had integrated thematic learning long before Indonesia did. Researchers and teaching experts have conducted many studies to implement thematic learning, like developing an environment-based thematic math book with a realistic approach to instilling a caring attitude towards the environment in first-level primary school students in Kupang (Ekowati & Nenohai, 2017), assessing the effectiveness of an approach to thematic teaching (Bitchener & Turner, 2011), the influence of thematic learning models, learning styles, and reading skills on student learning outcomes (Nurlaela et al., 2018), and the research on increasing teacher knowledge and abilities related to the application of integrated thematic curricula (Wu & Chang, 2015).

When implementing thematic learning education, the Indonesian government determines the themes for grades 1 to 6 through a set of thematic books. The books guide the teacher in planning, teaching, and evaluating thematic learning in primary schools (Ain & Rahutami, 2018). The Minister of Education and Culture's Regulation Number 22 of 2016 regarding Primary and Secondary Education Process Standards regulates the integration of thematic learning, which was a fundamental concept in the 2013 curriculum at the primary school level.

The Benefits of Songs for Children

Primary school children are those who need assistance to reach their full potential. Musical activities can stimulate IQ, EQ, and SQ, which are also capital for awakening creativity and imagination (Cross, 2014; François et al., 2013; Kraus et al., 2014; Miranda, 2013). These capabilities boil down to language skills. Sound and language are symbols. As a symbol, it can be used to communicate with anyone as long as they understand what is embodied in the symbol

(Asano & Boeckx, 2015). The person who wants to interact must interpret any sound, utterance, or word equally as a symbol. Without the same meaning, communication will not work as expected (Way & McKerrell, 2017). Songs with melodies and lyrics can facilitate aesthetic interactions. Songs do not only impact students' understanding of the lyrics but also their ability to pronounce them with a cohesive tone and rhythm. Apart from significantly increasing the various potentials of children, research found that music and songs can also improve language skills and stimulate body movements (Degrave, 2019; Kaviani et al., 2014).

A song's lyrics often reflect the social lives of its listeners. A song's lyrics can convey an aesthetic message with a broader meaning (González, 2021). Song lyrics, in the form of sentences, are understandable verbal language. According to Wadiyo et al. (2022), a song is considered meaningful as art if it engages people by stimulating their senses, fostering their imagination, and enhancing their sociocultural life. All age levels cannot separate songs from their crucial role in community life. Songs are commonly used in public schools to convey messages. Language is a way to convey educational messages that are generally easier to understand and grasp. For this reason, language plays a crucial role in music, particularly through the use of lyrics, which serve as the verbal component that conveys meaning. Lyrics allow listeners to understand and study the music, from the meanings of individual words and sentences to the implicit and explicit messages embedded within the song.

Aims of the Research

This study aims to investigate how primary teachers create educational-themed songs, analyze how they use these song forms in the classroom, and evaluate how much the songs improve learning activities in the classroom.

Method

Research Model

This study used a qualitative case study design. We chose case study as the approach to gain a holistic understanding of a phenomenon by investigating complex systems that are difficult to isolate from their context and impossible to study with other research methods (Dillman Taylor & Blount, 2021).

Participants

An primary school with two first-grade classes, each with 33 students and two teachers, hosted the case study. Both teachers were graduates of the Primary School Teacher Education program and had no formal musical training. We chose an primary school setting because children at this age have more advanced language skills than preschoolers, which makes them more receptive to learning through music. Music serves as an effective educational medium, not only for developing musical skills, but also as a tool to enhance language learning and support other complex aspects of education. Public schools employ music to enrich students' learning experiences, foster creativity, and develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills, ultimately enhancing their overall potential through engaging and interactive methods such as performing arts.

To comply with the research's ethical procedures, we use pseudonyms and mention all participants anonymously. The teacher's coding system uses the format TeacherID-Gender-Age. In this study, we coded a teacher from class A as T1-F-26 and class B as T2-F-35. We also used these pseudonyms to directly quote the teachers' opinions in the subsequent results and discussion sections.

The study also included students as participants, and Table 1 below presents their demographic characteristics.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the students

Variables		f	%
Gender	Male	16	49
	Female	17	51
Grade	1 st	33	100
Age	7 years old	33	100

Data Collection Tools

Observation Form

This study used observation as the first data collection tool. As a data collection tool, observation enables the researcher to gather data across perspectives, time, and the phenomenon’s natural setting (L. Cohen et al., 2017; Cowie, 2009). The researcher in this study observed the song creation process and the classroom activities during the song implementation without interacting with the research subjects, a method known as non-participant observation. Non-participant observation can be overt or covert. Overt observation means that the participants know that researchers are present but do not interact with each other (Holmes et al., 2013).

In this study, we conducted observations on two targets. The teacher was the first target, and we aimed to observe the teachers’ activities during song creation and implementation in the classroom. For this observation, we collected data using recordings and field notes. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), using multiple data collection methods, such as recordings and field notes, enhances the reliability and validity of qualitative research.

The second observation category focused on students’ behaviors during the implementation of the teacher-created songs in the classroom. We employed a combination of video recordings and a Likert scale observation checklist to systematically record and evaluate student behaviors, given the large number of

student participants (see Appendix 1). The use of a Likert scale observation checklist is particularly effective in educational settings for measuring the frequency and nature of specific behaviors (Boone & Bourgois, 2012). We developed the checklist based on established behavioral criteria relevant to classroom engagement and participation in music activities to ensure the content validity of the observation instrument. Five music lecturers and five primary education teachers, who were not study participants, reviewed the checklist to further strengthen its content validity. This process ensured that the instrument accurately captured the targeted behaviors and provided reliable and meaningful data on students’ responses to the musical intervention.

Semi-structured Interview Form

The second data collection tool in this study was a semi-structured interview form, which aimed to comprehensively understand teachers’ perspectives and experiences in creating educational-themed songs, examining their classroom utilization, and assessing their impact on learning activities. The interviews aimed to gather detailed insights into the teachers’ creative processes, implementation strategies, and perceptions of the effectiveness of the songs in enhancing student engagement and learning.

The semi-structured interview form provided a flexible yet focused approach to qualitative data collection, combining predefined questions with opportunities for interviewees to explore topics in greater

depth. This format enabled researchers to balance structured and open-ended questioning, facilitating an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives (Kendall, 2008).

The same group of experts who evaluated the observation checklist also reviewed the interview questions to ensure their validity. This review process, which included five music lecturers and five primary education teachers, ensured that the questions were relevant and accurately captured the dimensions of interest. The interview form consists of six items (see Appendix 2), covering four key dimensions: class participation, understanding of the subject, increasing interest in music, and teachers' competencies in designing instruction with music. We designed these questions to provide a comprehensive understanding of primary teachers' use of educational-themed songs, their impact on classroom dynamics, and the competencies required to effectively incorporate music into teaching.

Documents

Document analysis is a qualitative research method where researchers examine documents to understand and interpret a topic (Bowen, 2009). According to Bowen, document analysis serves five essential functions: providing contextual information, suggesting research questions and scenarios, enhancing research data, comparing changes over time, and verifying findings from other sources. Silverman (2009) defines document analysis as a process that involves skimming, reading, and interpreting documents while combining content and theme analysis. Researchers must critically select relevant data and assess the documents' authenticity, credibility, accuracy, and representativeness.

In this study, document analysis focused on several key types of materials: thematic curriculum guidelines, teaching materials, and educational songs created by teachers. The thematic curriculum guidelines provide a comprehensive framework and

outline for the educational content and teaching objectives. Teaching materials, which include syllabi, lesson plans, and textbooks, are crucial for understanding the curriculum and instructional practices implemented in the classroom. Additionally, analyzing the educational songs created by teachers provides valuable insights into their utilization within the teaching process and their impact on enhancing learning and engagement.

By analyzing these documents, the study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the educational methods and materials used by teachers and assess their effectiveness in enhancing classroom learning activities.

Analysis

All collected data were then analyzed thematically using six steps of thematic analysis outlined by Cohen & Crabtree (2008), which include familiarizing with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes—that is, significant or intriguing patterns in the data—and then use those themes to discuss the research or make a point. A strong thematic analysis does much more than just summarize the data; it analyzes and makes meaning of it (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Process

Ethics

We provided the school's head with an information letter and consent form for this research, requesting institutional approval to involve teachers and students in the observation and interview processes under DPA LPPM UNNES year 2023 No. 195.12.4/UN37/PPK.10/2023. Additionally, all participants received detailed information sheets and consent forms to explain the data collection process and obtain their signatures. We informed the participants that their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without providing a reason.

We assured them that their decision to withdraw would not incur any penalties or negative consequences, nor would it impact their relationship with the researcher or the school.

Procedures of data collection

The data collection for this study took place at SD Labschool Unnes in Semarang, Indonesia, on June 13 and June 14, 2023. The study commenced with obtaining ethics approval to ensure the research adhered to ethical standards and respected participants' rights. We collected data through a combination of classroom observations, document analysis, and interviews.

We conducted observations during two separate meetings in each classroom. This approach allowed the researcher to comprehensively cover the theme of interest and capture a detailed account of classroom dynamics. Simultaneously, the researcher collected documents related to the observed lessons during the classroom meetings. The researcher then analyzed these documents to gain deeper insights into the instructional materials and methods used. The researcher conducted interviews with the teachers after the classroom meetings. These interviews provided additional context and perspectives on the observed teaching practices and the use of educational materials.

Results

The Song-Creation Process

Results from teachers' observations and document analysis

The observations showed that teachers from two classes had the same steps in creating the songs. Initially, the teachers examined the educational themes intended for song creation. During the observation, they identified the theme as "Environments" and the topic as "Air". As a result, the teachers created a song with the theme of "Air". Afterwards, the teachers created lyrics based on the themes presented in the teaching materials. The findings from two

different case studies revealed that the first teacher directly incorporated the lyrics into a random melody by humming it.

Meanwhile, another teacher attempted to sing the lyrics into an existing song before ultimately utilizing a new melody she had created. What is unique about this finding is that both teachers didn't use musical notations. The interview results revealed that the teachers' lack of use of musical notations stemmed from their lack of knowledge on how to utilize them effectively. Therefore, they only tried to remember their songs by repeatedly singing and recording them on their phones.

Another interview with both of the teachers revealed that they emphasized the use of the song more to convey a pedagogical message.

"I wrote the song to facilitate interactive learning. I aimed to make the students' learning experience more engaging and participatory. By incorporating a song into the lesson, I aimed to capture their attention and encourage active involvement in the material." (T2-F-35)

"The song can be used to introduce lessons about the environment, respiration, and the properties of air. Since we needed to create integrated thematic learning materials, we sang the song and did other activities at the same time, such as breathing exercises or discussions about the importance of air quality." (T1-F-26)

Here is the translation of the song's lyrics created by T1-F-26.

Table 2. Song's lyric created by T1-F-26 in Bahasa Indonesia and English

Bahasa Indonesia	English Language
Judul: Udara	Title: Air
Udara udara kau ada di mana-mana	Air air you are everywhere
Tak dapat dilihat dan tak dapat diraba	It cannot be seen and cannot be touched
Udara udara tiap orang membutuhkanmu	Everyone needs air
Udara-udara tiap orang menghirupnya	Everyone breathes air

The songs implementation

Results of Classroom Observation

Student engagement and singing accuracy

During the initial meeting, the teachers presented the theme and topic to the class, then proceeded to instruct the students using songs. During this process, the teachers tried to sing the song lyric by lyric, and the students tried to follow and repeat after the teachers. Another unique feature of this case study was that teachers frequently sang

songs they created with different tones. The different tones naturally caused students to sing with different tones as they imitated their teachers. To better understand this, the researcher recorded and wrote down one teacher's song notation. The results confirmed that there were indeed different notations for the same song created by the teachers. The teacher sometimes uses the basic tone/tonic D = do, and sometimes the basic tone/tonic C = do.

UDARA

C = Do. 4/4
Moderato

5̣ 5̣ | 1̣ . . 0 3̣ 3̣ | 2̣ . 0 5̣ 5̣ | 2̣ . 2̣ 2̣ 4̣ 4̣ | 3̣ . .

U da ra u da ra kau a da di ma na ma na

1̣ 3̣ | 5̣ . . 0 5̣ 5̣ | 4̣ . 0 4̣ 4̣ | 3̣ 3̣ 4̣ 3̣ | 2̣ . .

tak da pat di li hat dan tak da pat di ra ba

5̣ 5̣ | 1̣ . . 0 3̣ 3̣ | 2̣ . 0 5̣ 5̣ | 2̣ . 2̣ 2̣ 4̣ 4̣ | 3̣ . .

u da ra u da ra tiap o rang mem bu tuh kan nya

1̣ 3̣ | 5̣ . . 0 5̣ 5̣ | 4̣ . 0 4̣ 4̣ | 3̣ 3̣ 2̣ 2̣ | 1̣ . 0 ||

u da ra u da ra tiap o rang meng hi rup nya

Figure 1. The song created by Teacher A (*Udara = Air*)

UDARA

Moderato

U - da - ra u - da - ra kau a - da di ma - na ma - na Tak da - pat di - li - hat dan tak
 da - pat - di - ra - ba U - da - ra u - da - ra tiap o - rang mem - bu - tuh - kan - nya U - da - ra u - da -
 ra tiap o - rang meng - hi - rup - nya

Figure 2. The notations of the song created by T1-F-26

Field observations also revealed that the students often sang with incorrect and inconsistent tones. The students eagerly attempted to mimic the song their teachers were teaching, often leading to outbursts. When the teachers sang with different intonations, the students would follow, creating varied tones as well. When asked about this during the final interviews, both teachers explained that it was unimportant as long as the students understood the material.

“Yes, we observed that students sang with varied tones and sometimes shouted. However, our primary goal was for them to understand the material and engage with the song. The different intonations helped keep the activity lively and captivating for the students. Rather than perfecting their singing tones, we focused on ensuring they grasped the lyrics and the educational content. Their enthusiasm was a positive sign of their engagement and interest.” (T1-F-26)

“While it is true that the students often sang with varying tones and sometimes even shouted, we did not see this as a major issue. Our main concern was that they understood the song’s content and actively participated. Singing with different tones added a joyful element to the learning process, making it more enjoyable for the students.” (T2-F-35)

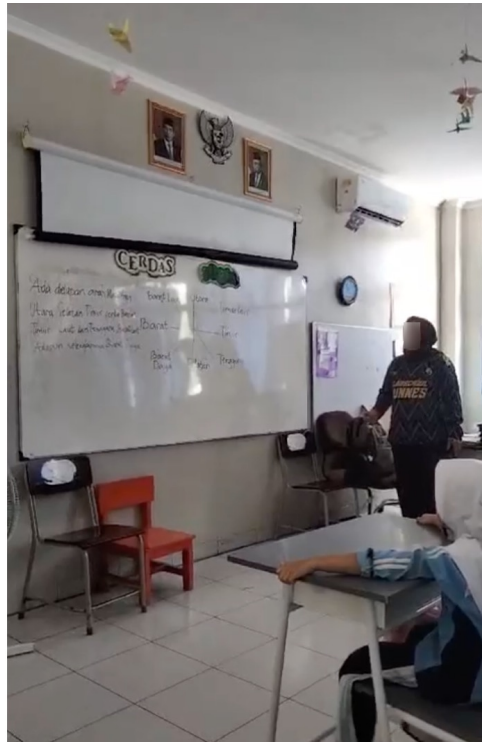


Photo 1. Class B teacher teaches “Air” theme material to students before learning using songs

Student participation, movement, synchronization, and behavior during classroom activity

For the second meeting, the teachers asked the students to repeat after them when singing this song. What was new was that the teachers asked the students to sing the same song again, this time adding movements that

corresponded to the lyrics. For instance, teacher A demonstrated a crossing motion for the word “*tidak dapat*” (“cannot”) and a gesture of covering their eyes for the word “*dilihat*” (“seen”). The students then stood in the middle of the classroom to sing and practice these movements (see Photo 2).



Photo 2. Class A students practiced songs made by their teacher with added movements

The second teacher also mentioned that the movements and lyrics helped the students enjoy the material more. Students' enthusiasm supported the learning process when the teachers asked them to sing and move in sync with the song's lyrics and rhythm.

"Additionally, the movements and lyrics helped the students enjoy the material more. When we asked them to sing and move along with the lyrics and rhythm of the song, their enthusiasm was evident, making the learning experience more effective and enjoyable." (T2-F-35)

During the observation period, we noted a significant increase in behaviors that indicated a deeper understanding of the material. Specifically, students exhibited a higher frequency of gestures and actions that demonstrated their engagement with the concept of air. For instance, many students instinctively reached out as if to touch the air around them, reflecting their attempt to grasp the idea of air being omnipresent yet intangible. Additionally, there was a marked increase in the number of students taking exaggerated breaths during the singing activities, which illustrated their comprehension of breathing as a fundamental interaction with air and aligned with the song's lyrics. These physical actions, as well as their spontaneous reactions and expressions while singing, provided clear evidence that the students were internalizing the educational content. The improvement of their behaviors underscored the effectiveness of using music and movement to enhance understanding of abstract concepts like air.

Effect on students' understanding of the subject

The song effectively engaged young students through its catchy and repetitive nature, proving a valuable educational tool. The simplicity of the lyrics, despite the variations in student singing, facilitated quick memorization and recall of information, such as the key points about

air: its all-encompassing nature, intangible nature, and essential role in breathing. Observations highlighted that students displayed high levels of enthusiasm during the learning process, which correlated with their comprehension of the material taught through the songs.

The effectiveness of this musical approach was evident during the review sessions at the end of the two meetings. Teachers asked students questions to assess their understanding of the material. Based on their observations, T1 and T2 assessed the students' understanding during the review sessions at the end of the lesson by asking questions related to the song. They asked, "What is something we learned about air from the song?" and "Can you explain why everyone needs air?" The students responded quickly, with answers like "Air is everywhere even though we cannot see it" and "We need air to breathe." Their correct and confident responses demonstrated that the song had effectively conveyed the critical concepts about air and helped them grasp the material.

The students' ability to answer these questions demonstrated their grasp of the content. Their correct responses indicated that the educational songs helped reinforce the lessons, making abstract concepts more concrete and memorable. This finding was consistent across both meetings, underscoring the song's role in enhancing students' understanding and retention of the subject matter. Their ability to recall and apply the content demonstrated the song's effectiveness in reinforcing the lessons and making abstract concepts more tangible.

Results from Interview

The impact of thematic music-based teaching on student participation

According to T1's interview results, thematic music-based teaching profoundly impacts student participation by transforming the learning experience into a more dynamic and interactive process. Traditional methods

often involve passive reception of information and can lead to disengagement, particularly when covering extensive materials within a single theme. The inclusion of music, such as singing and rhythmic activities, breaks this monotony by adding an element of fun and excitement. This shift captures students' attention and sustains their interest throughout the lesson.

“Thematic music-based teaching significantly enhances student participation by making lessons more engaging. With numerous materials to cover under the same theme, traditional methods can sometimes become monotonous. Incorporating fun activities, such as singing, breaks this monotony and maintains student interest. Without such creative approaches, students might feel bored and disengaged.” (T1-F-26)

T2 mentioned that by incorporating musical activities into the curriculum, educators address the challenge of maintaining student engagement in a student-centered learning environment. Music-based teaching aligns with student-centered learning (SCL) principles by creating enjoyable, participatory experiences that resonate with students. The interactive nature of singing and music activities encourages students to participate rather than passively absorb information. This active engagement helps students to stay focused and invested in the lesson, leading to a more effective and enjoyable learning experience.

“Our thematic-based curriculum aimed to emphasize student-centered learning (SCL). By integrating singing into the lesson, we provide students with enjoyable activities that align with the taught themes. This approach makes the learning process more enjoyable and helps students stay engaged with the lesson content.” (T2-F-35)

Overall, using thematic music-based teaching strategies ensures that students remain engaged and motivated, making the

learning process more enjoyable and more effective in reinforcing the material.

The effectiveness of thematic music-based teaching on subject comprehension

Similarly, by summarizing both T1 and T2 interview answers, thematic music-based teaching is highly effective in enhancing students' understanding of the subject matter, particularly through its approach to memorization and engagement. By utilizing repetitive song lyrics, this method capitalizes on the power of repetition to reinforce learning. The continuous exposure to the same information through music aids in internalizing key concepts, making them more accessible for students to recall. Integrating movement into the activity adds a layer of reinforcement. The physical actions associated with the song create multisensory connections to the content, further embedding it in students' memories.

Music-based teaching becomes especially valuable for abstract concepts that are difficult to observe directly, such as the nature of air. Songs transform complex or intangible ideas into concrete, memorable experiences. The melody and accompanying movements help students visualize and understand concepts that might otherwise be challenging. By converting abstract material into a fun and interactive format, students can grasp and retain complex content more effectively. This approach not only makes learning more accessible but also turns potentially overwhelming subjects into engaging and manageable lessons.

Here are the direct quotations for T1 and T2 interview responses:

“Thematic music-based teaching enables memorization of the material through repetitive song lyrics, often accompanied by movement. This repetition helps students internalize and recall information more effectively. The movement component further reinforces their learning by associating physical actions with the song's content.” (T1-F-26)

“Direct observation is not always possible for abstract concepts, such as the nature of air. In such cases, songs provide a fun and memorable way to convey the material. The melody and movement involved in singing help students grasp and retain abstract concepts, turning challenging material into something tangible and accessible.” (T2-F-35)

The influence of thematic music-based teaching on student cooperation and classroom harmony

According to T1, thematic music-based teaching significantly enhances student cooperation and fosters a harmonious classroom environment by actively involving students in learning. Music and dance activities are powerful tools that transform students from passive recipients of information into active participants. When students engage in singing and dancing, they become more invested in the lesson, which helps them focus better and interact more meaningfully with the content. This increased engagement naturally leads to improved cooperation among students, as they are more likely to work together and support each other during these interactive activities.

“Music and dance activities promote active engagement and intention from students. Students become more involved in the lesson when they sing and dance, making them less likely to be passive listeners. This active participation fosters a cooperative classroom environment where students are more inclined to work together and engage with the lesson content.” (T1-F-26)

Furthermore, T2 agreed, saying that allowing students to express themselves by shouting, singing loudly, and dancing boosts their motivation and enthusiasm. This freedom of expression creates a vibrant and positive classroom atmosphere where students feel more connected and excited about their learning experience. As students’ energy and

enthusiasm rise, their behavior improves, and they become more collaborative. The high levels of engagement and the joy of participating in musical activities contribute to a more cohesive and cooperative classroom environment, where students work together harmoniously and are more open to sharing ideas and supporting their peers.

“Allowing students the freedom to shout, sing loudly, and dance enhances their motivation and enthusiasm. This increased energy and freedom of expression contribute to a more cooperative and harmonious classroom atmosphere. Students’ behavior improves when they feel excited and engaged, and they collaborate more effectively with their peers.” (T2-F-35)

The feasibility of primary school teachers creating thematic songs: challenges and requirements

Concerning this question, T1 mentioned that primary school teachers have the potential to create effective thematic songs for their lessons, even if they lack formal musical training. While initially daunting, writing lyrics can be straightforward and manageable. Once you set the lyrics, you can approach adding a melody with simple techniques. A valuable tool for teachers in this process is a recorder, which helps capture and remember musical notations, making refining and developing the melody easier.

“Primary school teachers can indeed create songs for thematic lessons, even if they lack musical backgrounds. Initially, I was nervous about creating music due to my limited musical knowledge. However, starting with writing lyrics was manageable, and adding a melody was the next step. To aid this process, a recorder can help remember musical notations and refine the melody.” (T1-F-26)

Meanwhile, T2 explained that teachers’ main challenge was creating musical

notations and melodies, especially if they were not musically inclined. However, the focus should be on creating compelling and educational lyrics that align with the lesson content. The musical aspects, such as the melody or notation, are secondary to the effectiveness of the lyrics in conveying the material. The primary goal is to create a song that students enjoy and can easily sing along to, which will enhance their learning experience. When students actively engage and participate, the thematic song becomes a powerful tool for reinforcing the lesson and ensuring that the material is memorable.

“Teachers can compose songs, even without a musical background. The primary challenge lies in creating musical notations and melodies. However, crafting effective lyrics that cover the lesson material is crucial. The melody or notations are secondary to ensuring that the song is enjoyable and helps students remember the content. The key is to ensure that the students are happy and can easily sing along, reinforcing their learning.” (T2-F-35)

Discussion

Songs to Convey an Educational Message

The findings revealed that there were no specific regulations governing the creation of songs by teachers for educational purposes. Songs can contain anything. Melody and lyrics combine to form songs. People generally refer to a lyrical melody as a song. The melody already qualifies as a song because it is a piece of music. Teachers define a song as complete when it possesses elements like rhythm, melody, harmony, and lyrics. Songs can contain a variety of elements, including educational messages that are highly engaging and serve as valuable material for the lyrics. Fundamentally, melody and lyrics combine to form songs. Songs typically refer to melodies accompanied by poetry or lyrics. However, the fundamental components that constitute a song, as outlined in this study, include lyrics, melody, rhythm, and complete harmony (Levinson, 2017; Temperley & de

Clercq, 2017). Once the songs are complete, with all the elements present, they take on meaning as they manifest in sound. The song has a series of sentences, so the verbal language changes its meaning (Hu et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the teachers compose a song that features a melody. Once the teachers arrange the notes with different notes, they assign note values, transforming them into a melody. It is a melody, but it contains rhythm. This rhythm exhibits subtleties of harmony due to the presence of unseen tonal values that are solely perceptible through feeling. Harmony is both vertical and horizontal. The melody moves in horizontal harmony, while basic sounds follow a tone series from bottom to top in vertical harmony. For this reason, humans can perceive the melody as something beautiful, apart from the rhythm itself, which determines whether the song is enjoyable. In a lesson to convey an educational message, it is the melody that is given a series of meaningful words (Chou, 2014; Coyle & Gómez Gracia, 2014; Kuśnierek, 2016).

Because song lyrics have a musical rhythm, people perceive them differently than words or verbal sentences. Countless songs worldwide are used for various human purposes, including learning related to language recognition and activating physical movements or beautiful body expressions (Chou, 2014; Coyle & Gómez Gracia, 2014). A melody can be embedded in any spoken language to create a song. People claim that music, with its unique character, serves as a universal language. People will naturally perceive or feel differently between language spoken verbally and language attached to a melody (Engh, 2013; Oliveira, 2015), which, in turn, is language in the form of a series of words, referred to as song lyrics.

Any sound, utterance, or word symbol must be interpreted equally by the person wishing to interact. That is why it is said that communication will only run as expected with the same meaning of symbols

(Sasamoto, 2019). Songs with melodies and lyrics can facilitate aesthetic interactions, impacting not only the understanding of the lyrics, but also the ability to pronounce them with a unified tone and rhythm. In addition to significantly enhancing the potential of human children, research on music and songs can also enhance language skills and stimulate physical movements, all of which contribute to the enhancement of interaction (Degrave, 2019; Kaviani et al., 2014).

Children respond when they sing together in class, when a song tells a story, when it creates an atmosphere, or when it motivates someone to take action. The initial response stemmed from the inner nuances. The teacher can easily use basic thinking to determine what they want from the students, starting with the inner nuances. The song resonated deeply with the students' aesthetic sensibilities. The teacher hopes that this song will provide further direction to the students. Teachers certainly have more desires, namely, how to achieve the main learning objectives, where songs are only used as a tool to enrich and facilitate the educational process, supported by body movements.

Everyone can Make a Song, Including the Teachers

Unlike composing songs for commercial gain, the study revealed that the teachers' requirements for song creation were distinct from their proficiency in notation. It was more about summarizing the materials into some interesting lyrics. Besides the benefit of songs in education, as discussed previously, teachers' ability to create interesting and informative lyrics following the themes of their learning would be important in teaching children in primary education. According to Zin et al. (2019), the implementation of a thematic approach will not succeed if teachers have no knowledge of its contents and pedagogy. Moreover, according to Ghunu (2022), the role of the teacher as the one who understands the needs of the class and

the issues existing around them is essential since the thematic curriculum tries to improve students' practical intelligence by integrating the knowledge into the students' real-life issues. Therefore, empowering teachers with the skills to write compelling educational songs is critical to successfully implementing this curriculum and enhancing student learning.

In this case, empowering the teachers does not imply that they must be able to create a song professionally. However, the focus lies in motivating teachers to compose a song that aligns with the theme, regardless of its imperfections. We use song components, such as lyrics, melody, and rhythm, to deliver the teaching materials and educational messages, reflecting on the findings and previous literature. Citing some ground theories on music for education, according to Gardner (1983), music, including its lyrical and melodic elements, can cater to different types of intelligences, accommodating diverse learning styles in educational settings. This theory aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which posits that music, as a cultural artifact, transmits knowledge and scaffolds learning through its rhythmic patterns and narrative structures.

More recent literature also supported the theories, such as studies by Rickard et al. (2013) and Hallam (2010), which provide empirical evidence supporting the cognitive benefits of music-based interdisciplinary teaching, demonstrating its role in enhancing memory consolidation and information processing. These findings underscore how well-crafted lyrics, coupled with a harmonious melody and rhythmic framework, can effectively communicate educational concepts and messages. Furthermore, in Custodero (2005) and Hargreaves (2012), music's emotional and affective dimensions can foster deeper connections with educational content and stimulate intrinsic motivation among students.

Overall, the teachers successfully created songs that encompassed the teaching

materials and aligned with the thematic approach's themes. The songs sparked the students' enthusiasm and enabled them to comprehend the teaching materials. Even though teachers frequently perform songs in different ways during class, they have effectively utilized these songs as a teaching tool. The teacher effectively created a song, which is a multifaceted form of artistic and cultural expression, by integrating melody, lyrics, rhythm, form, performance, and purpose (Hannon & Trehub, 2005; Temperley & de Clercq, 2017). DeNora (2000) and Frith (1996) explain how different forms of music provide frameworks that enhance coherence, variation, and thematic development throughout the song.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored the methods and outcomes from the efforts of primary school teachers without musical backgrounds to create educational songs to support thematic learning in Indonesia. Despite facing challenges such as limited musical knowledge and a lack of formal songwriting training, the teachers demonstrated resourcefulness and creativity in developing songs aligned with educational themes specified in the curriculum. Through qualitative methods, including classroom observations, document analysis, and interviews, it was evident that these songs served as practical teaching tools, which helped to engage with the students and enhance their understanding of the materials.

The findings underscored the importance of integrating arts, specifically music, into educational practices to foster holistic learning experiences. By employing songs as a medium, teachers conveyed educational content and stimulated students' cognitive and affective domains, promoting active participation and meaningful engagement in learning. The variability in song creation processes highlighted teachers' adaptive nature in utilizing available resources to meet educational objectives.

Moreover, this research contributes to the broader discourse on educational innovation and teacher empowerment within the thematic learning framework. It emphasizes the potential for non-music teachers to leverage creative methods in curriculum delivery despite initial musical proficiency limitations. Supporting teachers with resources and training in songwriting could further enhance their capacity to develop impactful educational materials that resonate with diverse student needs and learning styles.

Ultimately, empowering teachers to create educational songs enriches the learning environment and aligns with educational reforms aimed at fostering 21st-century competencies such as creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. As Indonesia continues to refine its educational strategies under the *Kurikulum Merdeka* framework, integrating music and arts-based approaches, such as educational song creation, holds promise for improving educational outcomes and enriching the educational experience of primary students across the country.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this research was to determine the extent to which an primary teacher, lacking any musical background, could create a song for thematic education. More research on primary teachers' music competency would be highly beneficial, given the proven benefits of learning through songs and the fact that all teachers can create their own songs. Understanding basic music theory, which includes notes, scales, chords, rhythm, and tempo, could enable teachers to read and interpret simple musical scores. Competency may also include knowledge of music pedagogy, such as singing, movement, and instrument play. By developing these competencies, primary teachers can create a rich, engaging, and effective music-based interdisciplinary teaching environment for their students.

Recommendations for Practitioner

As we can see, this research has demonstrated that anyone, including teachers, is capable of creating a song that effectively conveys educational messages. However, practitioners could further contribute by conducting an analysis of the training needs involved in song creation. Such research could identify specific areas where teachers require further support and training, such as music theory, songwriting techniques, or integrating musical activities with curriculum objectives. This analysis would help develop targeted professional development programs, ensuring teachers have the necessary skills and confidence to create effective educational songs. By addressing these aspects, future research could significantly enhance the integration of music into primary education, fostering a more dynamic and interactive learning environment.

Limitations of Study

While case studies may involve a single participant or a small group, it is crucial to note that this particular case study focuses solely on two primary classroom teachers employed in an Indonesian primary school.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1. Observation Form

Observation Form						
Explanation: This form has been developed to determine the frequency of students' behaviors observed in the classroom. 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Often), and 5 (Always).						
No	Behaviours	1	2	3	4	5
	Engagement with the song:					
1	Actively participates in singing the song					
2	Enthusiastically follows along with the lyrics					
3	Displays interest and enjoyment while singing					
	Accuracy of singing:					
1	Sings with the correct tone and pitch					
2	Sings lyrics accurately without mistakes					
3	Attempts to match the teacher's tone and pitch					
	Participation in Movements:					
1	Follows the teacher's movements accurately					
2	Synchronizes movements with the lyrics					
3	Shows enthusiasm and energy while performing movements					
	Behavior During the Activity:					
1	Maintains focus and attention during the lesson					
2	Avoids disruptive behavior					
3	Displays respectful behavior towards the teacher and classmates					
	Enthusiasm and Motivation:					
1	Shows excitement when asked to sing and move along					
2	Participates willingly without prompting					
3	Expresses enjoyment and enthusiasm for the activity					
	Memorization and Recall:					
1	Memorizes song lyrics accurately					
2	Recalls song lyrics and movements during review sessions					
3	Answers questions related to the song correctly					
	Understanding of Material:					
1	Demonstrates comprehension of the song's content					
2	Relates song lyrics to the lesson's theme and topic					
3	Correctly answers review questions based on the song					
	Overall Participation:					
1	Consistently participates throughout the entire lesson					
2	Engages in all aspects of the activity, including singing and movements					
3	Shows improvement in participation over the course of the meetings					

Appendix 2. Semi-structured Interview Form

Semi-structured Interview Form		
Explanation: This form has been developed to determine your perspectives, experiences, and insights on thematic music-based teaching. Your responses will be used for research purposes and will remain confidential. Your honest feedback is greatly appreciated		
Name-Surname:	Gender: Female (<input type="checkbox"/>) Male (<input type="checkbox"/>)	Age:...
Semi-structured Interview Questions		
Q1. How does thematic music-based teaching affect students' participation in the lesson? Please explain.		
Q2. What are your views on the impact of thematic music-based teaching on understanding the subject? Please explain.		
Q3. How does thematic music-based teaching with music accompaniment affect students' cooperation and harmonious behavior in the classroom? Please explain.		
Q4. In your opinion, can primary school teachers create songs when teaching thematic lessons? What challenges do they face? What do they need? Please explain.		

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