



# Sustainability of Musical Cultures in Compulsory Education in Taiwan

Sustentabilidade das Culturas Musicais no Ensino Obrigatório em Taiwan

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## ABSTRACT

Music education in compulsory education in Taiwan has a long history. National curriculum guidelines in 2000 and 2019 put music into an integrated curriculum with visual arts, dance, and drama, but music stands still in compulsive education in Taiwan.

Elementary and secondary school music teachers in Taiwan rely on textbooks primarily for teaching general music. According to research studies, Western classical music occupies the central portion of music textbooks, thus winning significant attention over traditional instrumental music and folk songs from our own culture (Chang, 2012; Lin, 2014). Taiwan is a composite of multi-ethnic groups with diverse musical cultures, and abundant precious music must pass on from generation to generation.

Taiwan Ministry of Education has promoted bilingual teaching according to the Bilingual Nation 2030 Policy since 2019. As the Taiwan government defines bilingualism as English and our general-purpose language (Mandarin mostly), many frontline teachers are panic facing the situation. The researcher agrees or is against the bilingual policy but sees it as an opportunity that triggers frontline teachers to design and implement their music curriculum without textbooks. Without the limitation of textbooks, music teachers are free to choose materials and methods based on Arts Domain curriculum guideline. Furthermore, there are more chances to include folk songs and traditional music.

Languages used in Taiwan include Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka, and more than 16 aboriginal dialects. Languages, as mentioned above, imply multi-cultures and musics. Bringing folk songs from each culture to the music class makes learning multi-lingual. World-famous music composer and educator Zoltan Kodály asserts folk songs are children's music mother-tongue (International Kodály Society, 2023). Children learn music knowledge, theory, appreciation, and creativity through folk songs by singing and playing, and they can further comprehend the connotation of classical music.

Children absorb what music teachers provide in class. Thus, the learning materials and activities must be well-chosen and designed. We aim to guide children to connect to the world through music, grounded in mastery of one's own music culture and sharing with others. Sustaining our own music culture depends on the music teachers' effort, and it inspires our children to explore the diverse music cultures in the world.

Keywords: Folk Song; Musical Culture; Sustainability; Traditional Music

## RESUMO

A educação musical no ensino obrigatório em Taiwan tem uma longa história. As orientações curriculares nacionais em 2000 e 2019 integraram a música num currículo integrado com artes visuais, dança e teatro, mas a música continua a ser uma disciplina obrigatória em Taiwan.

Os professores de música do ensino primário e secundário em Taiwan dependem principalmente de manuais para ensinar música em geral. De acordo com estudos de investigação, a música clássica ocidental ocupa a parte central dos manuais de música, recebendo assim mais atenção do que a música instrumental tradicional

e as canções folclóricas da nossa própria cultura (Chang, 2012; Lin, 2014). Taiwan é uma mistura de grupos multiétnicos com diversas culturas musicais, e a música preciosa e abundante deve ser transmitida de geração em geração.

O Ministério da Educação de Taiwan tem promovido o ensino bilíngue de acordo com a Política de Nação Bilingue 2030 desde 2019. Como o governo de Taiwan define o bilinguismo como inglês e a nossa língua de uso geral (principalmente o mandarim), muitos professores estão assustados perante a situação. O investigador concorda ou discorda da política bilíngue, mas vê-a como uma oportunidade que leva os professores a conceber e implementar os seus currículos musicais sem recorrer a manuais. Sem a limitação dos manuais, os professores de música são livres para escolher materiais e métodos com base nas orientações curriculares do Domínio das Artes. Além disso, há mais oportunidades para incluir canções folclóricas e músicas tradicionais.

As línguas utilizadas em Taiwan incluem o mandarim, o taiwanês, o hakka e mais de 16 dialetos aborígenes. Estas línguas implicam multi-culturas e músicas. Ao trazer canções folclóricas de cada cultura para a aula de música, a aprendizagem torna-se multilíngue. O compositor e educador musical mundialmente famoso Zoltan Kodály afirma que as canções folclóricas são a língua materna musical das crianças (International Kodály Society, 2023). As crianças aprendem conhecimentos musicais, teoria, apreciação e criatividade através das canções folclóricas, cantando e tocando, e conseguem compreender melhor a conotação da música clássica.

As crianças absorvem o que os professores de música oferecem em aula. Portanto, os materiais de aprendizagem e as atividades devem ser bem escolhidos e planeados. O nosso objetivo é orientar as crianças a conectarem-se ao mundo através da música, com base no domínio da sua própria cultura musical e partilhando-a com os outros. A sustentabilidade da nossa própria cultura musical depende do esforço dos professores de música e inspira as nossas crianças a explorar as diversas culturas musicais no mundo.

Palavras-chave: Canção Folclórica; Cultura Musical; Sustentabilidade; Música Tradicional.

## 1. Introduction

Compulsory education in Taiwan was a 6-year elementary level and extended to 9 years in 1968 (Ministry of Education, 2016). Music has been included in the curriculum since the beginning. *Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines* in 2000 and *12-Year Basic Education Curriculum Guidelines* in 2019 proclaim music along with visual arts, drama, and dance integrating as arts domain. The Arts domain is responsible for “addressing the individual arts, and together the arts should promote, connect, and integrate the learning of other academic subjects (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 1).

In compulsory education, the music and Arts Domain went through Westernization, localization, and globalization. Owing to complex colonial history, Taiwan has developed its culture in different phases of

sociopolitical situations: the Spanish and Dutch occupations, Chinese immigration, Japanese colonization, Pan-Chinese cultural inheritance, Taiwanization, and contemporary democratic movements and localization (Ho, 2021). Materials used in the music classes become evidence of musical culture development. This article aims to discuss the situation of music teaching materials and make recommendations.

Textbooks are an essential source of topics, texts, visuals, and language in the structure of course materials (Pulverness, 2004). Apparently, elementary and secondary school music teachers in Taiwan rely on textbooks primarily. According to research studies, Western classical music occupies the central portion of music textbooks, thus winning significant attention over traditional instrumental music and folk songs from our own cultures (Chang, 2012; Lin, 2014). Ellis (2003) stated that traditional songs, riddles, rhymes, and other children’s lore are ideal for

younger students, but they only appear few in music textbooks. Music textbooks can reflect the societal change, and we can observe the cultural mindsets, customs, and daily life of the period (Hsu, 2017). Taiwanese music in high school music textbooks contains aboriginal music, Han Chinese traditional music, contemporary music, and popular music. Taiwanese music in music textbooks is used for appreciation primarily. Aboriginal music mainly focuses on singing and songs, while Han music includes regional dramatic music, folk instrumental music, and Han Chinese folk songs (Lin, 2014). Contemporary Taiwanese musicians in composition and performance are introduced in music textbooks. Mainstream popular music, whether in Mandarin or Fulao, is also included in music textbooks.

Taiwan went through a history of colonial regimes; thus, different cultures bring various levels of influence to our life and arts. Myths, memories, values, traditions, and symbols are potent differentiators and reminders of the unique culture and fate of the ethnic community to make one's national identity (Ho, 2021; Smith, 1999). Chinese culture is one of the many facets that comprise the greater Taiwanese identity (Beaser, 2006). Fulao, Hakka, and more than 16 aboriginal ethnic groups create the diversity of cultures in Taiwan. When we know the importance of traditional forms of music and arts in the curriculum, Taiwanese Opera, folk songs, and Taiwanese puppet shows serve as Taiwanese identities in the localization movement (Ho, 2021).

Meanwhile, the Bilingual 2030 Policy moves arts education from localization to globalization. Taiwan's government has launched the Bilingual 2030 policy precisely to boost the competitiveness of the young generation to enable the next generation to enjoy better job and salary opportunities. National Development Council and the Ministry of Education

actively coordinate all available resources to implement the Bilingual 2030 Policy. Six main goals are as follows: A) accelerating the development of bilingual higher education, B) optimizing bilingual conditions in a balanced manner for education at and below senior high school level, C) developing digital learning, D) expanding the provision of affordable English proficiency test capacities, E) raising civil servants' English proficiency, and F) establishing an administrative body dedicated to policy promotion and implementation. According to item B, elementary and secondary schools have been actuated to implement "bilingual" teaching in Arts and other domains since 2019.

A survey study conducted in 87 schools in Taiwan showed that a significant number of students attended cram schools,<sup>1</sup> and their parents paid for elementary school English classes, while 29.2% spent more than 1600 USD a year (Chen & Huang, 2016). When parents prepare their children for globalization, the Ministry of Education puts forward its action. It addresses its strategies and goals for "bilingualization" at senior high schools and below as follows: A) enhancing students' ability to use English in daily life, B) promoting interschool cooperation, C) advancing digital learning, and D) increasing the bilingual workforce. Thus, bilingual teaching became another earthquake after the competency-driven curriculum in 2014. The most popular topic in preservice and in-service teacher training is how to teach arts in English now.

As the Taiwan government defines bilingualism as English and our general-purpose language (Mandarin mostly), many frontline teachers are panic facing the situation. According to a survey study,

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<sup>1</sup> A cram school is a specialized school that trains its students to achieve particular goals, most commonly to pass the entrance exams of high schools or universities.

bilingual teaching troubles teachers the most is “no textbook,” and selecting teaching materials and designing curriculum become extra burdens for teachers. Some scholars assert that bilingual policy leads Taiwan to neo-colonialism (Lee, 2022). The researcher agrees or is against the bilingual policy but sees it as an opportunity that triggers frontline teachers to design and implement their music curriculum without textbooks. Without the limitation of textbooks, music teachers can select teaching materials and methods based on Arts Domain curriculum guideline. Furthermore, music teachers can choose more folk songs and traditional music as teaching materials in the classes.

## 2. Musical Cultures in Taiwan

Taiwan has a rich cultural tradition in music and theater, such as Taiwanese Opera. Taiwanese Opera’s stage speech is composed of classical and vernacular two levels (Hsu, 2010), and it is recognized as “a theater of the Taiwanese” (Chang, 1997). Hakka Opera features historical events and Hakka stories transported from China. Hakka people reside and work in hilly areas for producing tea, so Hakka Opera is known as “tea-picking opera” and is mainly performed outdoors as a tradition (Ho, 2021). Hakka Opera applies Beiguan (northern pipe) as its musical style played by Chinese instruments, namely Shao-Na (Chinese reed-trumpets), gongs, and drums. Taiwanese puppet shows include glove puppet shows, shadow puppet shows, and string puppet shows. Among them, glove puppet shows blend local cultures, such as local dialects, folk music, colorful painting, embroidery, and puppet manipulation (Ho, 2021).

Folk songs are adapted to traditional practices that have been converted, consecrated, and re-

gulated for “new national purposes” (Hobsbawm, 1983). Taiwanese scholars initiated a movement to collect folk songs in 1967. Lin and Chien (1977) defined “nature folk song” as songs or rhymes without an author, either composer or lyricist, but pass on through oral transmission, contrary to “composed folk songs.” Folk songs and rhymes build on the same foundation, while songs have melody and rhyme only have words.

William John Thoms explained popular antiquities and popular literature as folklore. Many scholars apply the vocabulary in oral transmission literature, such as fairy tales, riddles, myths, legends, and so on (Yu, 2022). Due to the characteristics of oral transmission, there are variations of melodies and lyrics through time and space. Chien (2011) addressed four features of folk songs: oral transmission, collective, anonymous, and variation. Hence, folk songs become the carrier of cultural characteristics, language customs, societal structure, and daily life. Folk songs are our intangible assets and excel other traditional artistic handcrafts (Yu, 2022).

## 3. Sustainability of Musical Culture

The sustainability of musical culture depends on learning. Learning influences concepts and sounds, and the learning process further makes music variant.

Ordinary people’s culture and experiences create folk songs representing the community’s life. From the diachronic point of view of folk songs, the melody varies by different usage of words, but the melodic pattern remains. Therefore, the stability of music makes folk songs become a format of cultural memory and reservation (Yu, 2022).

While many people think folk songs represent

“tradition,” in other words, “old,” UNESCO (2022) asserts that intangible cultural heritage is also contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part. In addition to the above statement, intangible cultural heritage also demonstrates inclusive, representative, and community-based features. As one of the intangible cultural heritage, folk songs are apparently valuable materials for children to learn music and cultures.

In a music classroom, what materials teachers should share with students is an often-discussed issue. Many music teachers swing from choosing something popular among students to something in textbooks. Just like everywhere else in the world, students like popular music more than other musical styles (Hsu, 2009; Su, 2005), and teachers need help to draw their attention to textbook materials. Students consider music and songs in the music textbooks to be “old,” and they put “old” in the equation with “no fun.” Not only teaching materials should be considered, but also the teaching methods music teachers should keep in mind. A fun music class depends on good teaching strategies. World-famous teaching methods, such as Kodály and Orff, provide rich ideas and resources for music teachers. In addition, both methods suggest teachers start with folk songs in one’s own culture and extend to other cultures. Kodály took the games of song and dance that brought joy to children and incorporated them into classroom practice, and he believed each nation has a wide variety of folk songs well-suited to teaching purposes (International Kodály Society, 2023). Through those singing games, children learn musical forms and traditions from one’s own families and other cultures. Children can experience the simple joy of singing and playing in a group, which is often missing from the technological play of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A survey study showed that teachers demonstrated a positive attitude toward folk song teaching in elementary and secondary schools (Liu, 2007). More and more teachers include folk song teaching in their music curriculum and apply action research to prove its effectiveness (Lee, 2014; Wu, 2011). We hope every generation keeps singing folk songs and passing on the musical culture. Tradition and mother tongue are not convincing enough to make children learn (Yu, 2022). Folk songs come from past life experiences but develop with time. Children living nowadays cannot imagine how people live in a time without computer technology, but they can still sing beautiful melodies and make folk songs alive in today’s Taiwan.

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