

Research on the Role of Sound and Movement Rhythm in Cultivating Musical Perception and Expression Abilities of Primary School Students

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Abstract

This paper delves into the impact of Sound and Movement Rhythm (SMR) training on enhancing the musical perception and expression capabilities of primary school students. It examines the influence of SMR training across three dimensions: bolstering musical rhythm perception, refining musical melody perception, and deepening emotional perception within music. This analysis clarifies SMR's significant role in the development of musical perceptual skills among young learners. Additionally, the paper explores SMR's contribution to musical expression through three avenues: augmenting expressive techniques, igniting creative impulses, and instilling confidence in performance. SMR training is shown to be instrumental in elevating the musical perceptual and expressive proficiencies of primary school students, positively shaping their musical education trajectory.

Keywords

music education
Sound and Movement Rhythm(SMR)
musical perception
musical expression

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1. Introduction

With the advancement of quality education in China, music education has become a crucial component of foundational education, emphasizing the cultivation of students' musical perception and expression abilities. However, traditional teaching methods often prioritize theoretical knowledge over experiential learning, leading to diminished student engagement. This necessitates innovative approaches like Sound and Movement Rhythm (SMR), which integrates kinesthetic engagement with musical rhythm to enhance perceptual and expressive skills.

Originating from Dalcroze's eurhythmics^[1], SMR employs movement to internalize musical elements, fostering a dynamic connection between sound and physical response. Chinese studies have adapted this method, establishing theoretical frameworks^[2-5] and demonstrating its efficacy in improving rhythm perception, melodic sensitivity, and emotional expression^[6-8]. Additionally, SMR enhances creativity, confidence, and collaboration—key competencies in modern education.

SMR is particularly suited to primary music education due to its strong pedagogical alignment:

1.1. Developmental Suitability

Primary students naturally express themselves through movement, making SMR an effective medium for musical engagement.

1.2. Educational Objectives

By linking movement to musical concepts, SMR strengthens perception and expression, core goals of music education.

1.3. Teaching Methodologies

Its intuitive, movement-based approach complements primary-level visual and experiential learning strategies.

1.4. Classroom Engagement

The interactive nature of SMR fosters a dynamic learning environment, boosting student participation.

1.5. Creativity & Experience

Improvisational activities encourage creative exploration while deepening musical appreciation.

Given these synergies, this study investigates SMR's role in cultivating primary students' musical abilities, contributing to the advancement of music education practices in China.

2. The Role of SMR in Cultivating Elementary School Students' Music Perception Abilities

2.1. Enhancing Music Rhythm Perception through SMR Training

Music rhythm, as the structural foundation of musical expression, organizes notes and melodies into cohesive patterns. Traditional rhythm instruction often fails to engage primary school students due to its abstract and monotonous nature. This study adopts the Dalcroze Eurhythmics approach, which integrates movement-based activities to cultivate rhythmic perception dynamically.

In practice, rhythmic patterns are mapped onto specific body movements to embody temporal relationships. For instance, in the song "*Chalili, Cha*", quarter notes are expressed through "long strides," eighth notes as "walking steps," and sixteenth notes as "short runs." Such kinesthetic associations enable students

to internalize note durations intuitively. Similarly, complex rhythms—like the dotted notes in "*Kicking the Shuttlecock*"—are reinforced using onomatopoeic syllables (e.g., "baa baa baa") and percussion instruments, merging auditory and visual cues for multisensory learning. Interactive games, such as rhythm chain drills, further enhance engagement and retention.

Post-intervention assessments reveal marked improvements in students' rhythmic accuracy and expressive confidence. The Dalcroze method effectively bridges theoretical knowledge with embodied experience, demonstrating its efficacy in fostering both perceptual acuity and musical motivation among young learners.

2.2. Enhancing Music Melody Perception through SMR Training

SMR training strengthens melody perception by integrating movement and visual cues, enabling students to move beyond superficial rhythm recognition toward deeper musical understanding.

For instance, in teaching "*Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*," students trace melodic contours with finger movements—rising with ascending notes and descending with falling ones. This kinesthetic reinforcement clarifies melodic structure while reinforcing emotional expression.

Interactive games further enhance engagement and perception. In "*Little Rabbit, Be Good*," students alternate singing roles while performing gestures (e.g., hopping, hand-crossing), reinforcing melodic phrasing and rhythmic interplay through embodied participation.

By combining movement, visualization, and gamification, SMR training effectively develops students' melodic comprehension and expressive accuracy, fostering a more nuanced musical experience.

2.3. Enhancing Emotional Perception through SMR Training

SMR training strengthens students' emotional perception by synchronizing bodily movements with musical rhythms. This method aligns with elementary students' developmental traits, fostering engagement while deepening their understanding of musical narratives.

For example, in teaching "*The Little Donkey*," educators create a rural ambiance using multimedia, immersing students in the song's pastoral imagery. As

students move rhythmically—mimicking a donkey’s gait—they intuitively grasp the melody’s joyful rhythm and rustic emotion.

Similarly, with “*Spring Dawn*,” SMR training helps students physically express their connection to the spring scenery. Movement-based exploration enables them to embody the song’s emotional shifts, refining both rhythmic accuracy and affective interpretation.

For “*Farewell*,” students convey the song’s melancholy through deliberate motions (e.g., slow steps, bowed heads), internalizing its emotional weight. Vocal modulation is simultaneously guided to enhance expressive authenticity.

By integrating movement with musical emotion, SMR training cultivates nuanced perception and dynamic expression.

3. The Role of SMR in Cultivating Elementary School Students’ Musical Expression Abilities

3.1. Enhancing Musical Expression through SMR Training

SMR training strengthens primary school students’ musical expression by synchronizing bodily movements with rhythmic elements. This approach enables deeper perception of musical emotions and facilitates accurate, vivid conveyance of musical works. For example, in teaching the classical piece “*Spring River Flower Moon Night*,” educators guide students to close their eyes, immerse in the music, and mimic natural movements—such as river flows or flower blossoming—through structured body actions. This direct engagement enhances students’ interpretation of musical nuances and fosters personalized expression styles.

The training cultivates creativity and performance confidence, as students actively emulate instrumental sounds and dynamics using their bodies and voices. This method ignites intrinsic motivation, increasing student engagement and proactive learning. Outcomes include heightened musical expression abilities and sustained interest, demonstrated through bold, individualized performances.

3.2. Stimulating Musical Creativity through SMR Training

SMR training integrates bodily movements with musical

rhythms to foster dynamic musical perception and creativity in primary students. This approach employs scenario-building and impromptu performance as key strategies.

Scenario-Building and Bodily Rhythms. Educators create immersive musical contexts to spark creativity, enabling students to express emotions through movement. For example, in teaching “*The Naughty Cuckoo*” (Huacheng textbook, Grade 1), students envision spring landscapes and mimic the cuckoo’s liveliness, strengthening perceptual abilities and laying foundations for creative activities.

Impromptu Performance and Creativity. Guided impromptu exercises cultivate innovation through active participation. In “*The Grassland is My Home*,” students collaboratively design actions like horse-riding or whip-wielding in small groups, then present performances. This enhances imagination, deepens musical comprehension, and empowers original musical expression through iterative practice.

3.3. SMR Training Cultivates Confidence in Musical Performance

SMR training significantly enhances primary students’ confidence in musical performance through integrated kinesthetic engagement with rhythm. This approach facilitates a deeper, embodied understanding of musical structure and expressive intent. By physically enacting rhythm and emotion (e.g., tempo, dynamics, articulation), students internalize musical concepts more profoundly, moving beyond abstract cognition to experiential learning. This embodied comprehension naturally reduces performance anxiety associated with abstract interpretation.

Crucially, the act of expressive movement itself serves as foundational practice for musical expression. Translating musical impulses into physical gestures lowers the psychological barrier to vocal or instrumental performance, providing a safe and intuitive pathway for initial expression. Successfully embodying music kinesthetically builds essential self-efficacy and expressive courage.

Furthermore, SMR activities inherently create frequent, low-stakes performance opportunities within the group context. Sharing these embodied interpretations fosters a supportive environment where students gain validation and a tangible sense of achievement. This positive reinforcement directly translates to increased willingness and confidence in subsequent vocal or

instrumental performances.

Illustrative Application: Utilizing SMR for a piece like “*Ode to Joy*”, students first internalize its rhythmic vitality and joyful character through synchronized movement. This embodied understanding and prior successful physical expression significantly bolster their confidence when transitioning to singing and conveying the song’s emotion vocally, often resulting in more assured and enthusiastic performances.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Through an in-depth exploration of the role of SMR in cultivating primary school students’ music perception and performance ability, this paper concludes that, first of all, SMR can significantly enhance primary school students’ music perception ability, especially their perception of

music rhythm. Secondly, SMR encourages the combination of body movements and music, effectively improving primary school students’ music performance ability, enabling them to express music more freely through body language. In addition, SMR also stimulates students’ creativity and imagination, providing strong support for the all-round development of primary school students.

Looking forward to the future, we anticipate more research on the application of SMR in music education, especially empirical research targeting students of different age groups. In addition, research can further explore the combination of SMR with other music teaching methods to form a more complete and diverse music teaching system. At the same time, we also anticipate research to reveal the impact of SMR on students’ long-term music learning and the development of music literacy.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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