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# Enhancing Creative Imagination of Preschoolers through the Use of Traditional Malay Children's Songs

Mejorar la imaginación creativa de los niños en edad preescolar mediante el uso de canciones infantiles tradicionales malayas

Azli Ariffin\*

Sultan Idris Education University Malaysia - MALAYSIA  
azli@fpm.upsi.edu.my

Saedah Siraj

Sultan Idris Education University Malaysia - MALAYSIA  
saedah@fpm.upsi.edu.my

Abdul Talib Hashim

Sultan Idris Education University Malaysia - MALAYSIA  
abdul.talib@fpm.upsi.edu.my

Abdul Rahim Razalli

Sultan Idris Education University Malaysia - MALAYSIA  
rahim.r@fpm.upsi.edu.my

## ABSTRACT

This study is an endeavor to promote music as an effective learning tool to boost children's creativity in educational setting. To facilitate this effort, a learning model on stimulating imagination through traditional Malay children's songs has been designed to enhance creative cognition among preschool children. In completion of this study, Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) is used as a data collection method to construct the designed learning model. The ISM approach helps the study to easily identify the relation between learning activities and understand the relation to the overall structure of the creative imagination enhancement model being developed. The designed learning model focuses on teaching with emphasis given on roles and relationships between teachers' theories and classroom teaching practices on imagination and creativity. Thus, this study will generally benefit and bring a positive impact on the Malaysian education system.

**Keywords:** Creative imagination, creativity, preschool, interpretive Structural Modeling.

## RESUMEN

Este estudio es un esfuerzo para promover la música como una herramienta de aprendizaje eficaz para impulsar la creatividad de los niños en el entorno educativo. Para facilitar este esfuerzo, se ha diseñado un modelo de aprendizaje para estimular la imaginación a través de las canciones tradicionales de los niños malayos para mejorar la cognición creativa entre los niños en edad preescolar. Al finalizar este estudio, se utiliza el Modelo estructural interpretativo (ISM) como método de recolección de datos para construir el modelo de aprendizaje diseñado. El enfoque ISM ayuda al estudio a identificar fácilmente la relación entre las actividades de aprendizaje y comprender la relación con la estructura general del modelo de mejora de la imaginación creativa que se está desarrollando. El modelo de aprendizaje diseñado se centra en la enseñanza con énfasis en los roles y las relaciones entre las teorías de los maestros y las prácticas de enseñanza en el aula sobre imaginación y creatividad. Por lo tanto, este estudio generalmente se beneficiará y tendrá un impacto positivo en el sistema educativo de Malasia.

**Palabras clave:** imaginación creativa, creatividad, preescolar, modelado estructural interpretativo.

\* Corresponding author.

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## Introduction

The importance of generating creative and innovative individuals and communities is central to national education. This aspiration has been realized through policies and practices to produce creative and innovative community. With reference to the 10 surge of Malaysia Higher Education Development Plan (2015-2025), developing community with high imagination and innovation is a pre-requisite for the achievement of these 10 surges. Therefore, the need to produce imaginative, creative and innovative individuals in meeting challenging demands of the country in a global economic climate requires a clear-cut and organized effort as early as childhood.

Robinson (2009) in his study emphasized that power of imagination is regarded as one of the indispensable elements in discussing development of one's creativity. He positioned imagination as a fundamental feature of human wisdom because through imagination, we can think not only of something that exists in the present or already existed in the past, but we can also think of something that we have never experienced before. In fact, we can also think of something that never exists. Imagination is an important element for the growth of one's creativity (Williams & Walker, 2003). Imagination is an activity directly involved in the creative process since creative ideas will only come from human ability to imagine. Azhar (2004) in his work, argued that the ability to imagine is an essential pre-requisite to produce and translate creative ideas. Therefore, to become a creative individual, the ability to imagine is one of the important factors that need to be considered because creative ability of an individual is influenced by one's level of imagination.

Zoltan Kodaly, a Hungarian music educator, has suggested the use of folk music in teaching children at school because the music is considered to be 'music of mother language' for children (Choksy, 1988). Folk music can raise sense of belongings to singers and listeners to something larger than themselves as a family and society (Weidknecht, 2011; Cain, 2010; Davis, 2005; Kvideland, 1989). Since folk music is mostly based on environmental themes such as sounds of animals around them, therefore the music can help the development of children as a whole more easily. Folk music can also facilitate children to easily remember, absorb and react in accordance with their own creative ways and styles. According to [11], studying folk songs is an important basis in music education of a country.

## Problem Statement

Imagination that is considered as center of creativity is a skill that must be mastered by students in the twenty-first century (Puccio & Figliotti, 2014). Imagination is considered to be an important part of the advancement of one's creativity (Signe, 2015; Williams & Walker, 2003). Beetlestone (1998) stated that imagination is an impetus to creativity because children can create extraordinary relationships with their surroundings through the power of their imagination.

According to Cheung (2012), the success of creativity building in schools depends on confidence of teachers on creativity as a concept and teaching practice in the classroom. Nevertheless, pressure from certain parties and stakeholders have led teachers to focus more on memorizing letters and numbers (Astriya & Kuntoro, 2015; Moyles, 2014; Prentice, 2000). Such teaching method causes children to stop dreaming, imagining, and playing. This scenario will unfavourably cause creative expression of children to be obstructed and stunted (Soh, 2017; Kavitha & Manonmani, 2014; Mellou, 1996).

With reference to the National Pre-School Standard Curriculum (NPSC), imagination and creativity building are the two most often linked and matched elements. In the NPSC, creative thinking skills have been described as the ability to produce or create something new and valuable through genuine imaginative ability (Ministry of Education, Malaysia (MOE), 2016). Creativity is considered as one's ability to use imagination to collect, digest and generate ideas or create something new. Moreover, the role of imagination and creativity is also expressed in the sphere of physical and aesthetic development. Creativity and aesthetics are developed through music education, plays and visual arts. Such art activities will provide opportunities for children to explore through the use of various materials and techniques to enhance their imagination and creativity naturally (MOE, 2016).

Although imagination has been regarded to be one of the processes that should exist in the development and cultivation of children's creativity, the role and position of imagination are not clearly stated in the NPSC curriculum. Imagination is seen only as a complement to the enhancement of creativity but not as an important element in the development of children's creativity. Since imagination and creativity are the natural potentials inherent in every child, it is necessary to develop and nurture both skills intentionally. This can be done by early planning at school level through the process of teaching and learning with various methods and approaches (KPM, 2010). Duna (2015) found that current researches and theories on creativity mostly concern on primary school children, compared to preschoolers.

Willis (1985) emphasized that music education should begin with folk music of a place. In fact, folk songs can be considered as great material in music education to boost children’s creative cognition in schools.

Based on the above explanation and discussion, a study should be carried out to produce a model that could serve as a guide to preschool teachers in developing children’s imagination thus encouraging their creativity in a manner that is more clear, organized and well-planned. This learning model will certainly complement and reinforce NPSC as a comprehensive pre-school curriculum to boost creativity among preschool children. Thus this model is in tandem with the government’s effort to produce creative and innovative individuals.

**Study Objectives**

The main purpose of this study is to design a creative imagination learning model to enhance creativity of preschool children. The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To design a learning model on creative imagination enhancement among preschoolers using traditional Malay children’s songs based on views and observations of experts in related fields of study.

**Research Methodology**

The learning model design process involves views of experts on learning activities that will be considered as basis for the model design. Their views and consensus will determine a list of appropriate activities that could stimulate creative imagination of preschool children using traditional Malay children’s songs. For the purpose of this study, Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) has been selected as data collection method to create the designed learning model. The ISM approach helps the study to easily identify relation between learning activities and understand relation on the overall structure of the creative imagination enhancement model being developed.

The ISM approach was introduced by Warfield (1973, 1974, and 1976) to analyze complex socio-economic systems. ISM is a management tool in decision making process. The ISM approach involves relevance of individual or group ideas that will assist researchers to understand complex situations using association map comprising of various elements that could influence a complex decision (Charan, Shankar, & Baisya, 2008). Warfield (1982) has described ISM as a computer-assisted learning process that allows individuals or groups of users to generate a structure or map framework that will explain the relevance of elements based on specific contextual relations. ISM involves the process of discussion and analysis on the progress of an issue. Knowledge integration of a subject and structured understanding of a problem will lead to outcome of a solid decision based on strong reasons.

In other words, ISM manages to resolve complex issues through experts’ observations and views at one time. Ideas and association between them are discussed within framework on issues under study. The association map framework will visually illustrate the relation between idea and information obtained. This map will be the basis for concept on particular issue for researchers to discuss, understand and reach consensus from a number of experts

**ISM Conceptual**

Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) uses the concept of pairing analysis on ideas to gain consensus and match complex issues by organizing the number of ideas to the structured association model as illustrated in fig. 3.1 below.

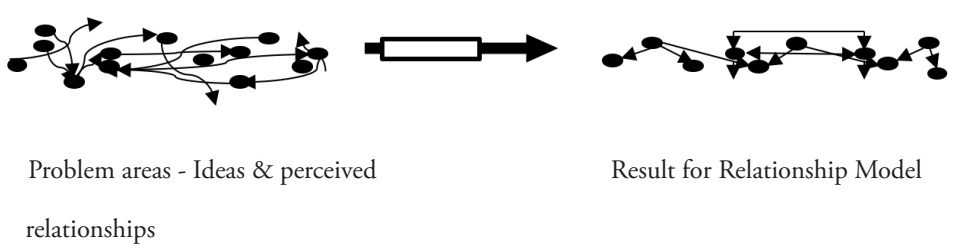


Figure 1. ISM Conceptual overview. Adaptation from Structure Decision Making with Interpretive Structured Modeling (ISM) (P.3), 1999, Canada: Sorach Inc.

**ISM Process**

In brief, ISM begins with identifying variables related to the issue under study. The process then followed by a problem-solving session involving discussion among experts on the related issues. The next phase identifies the context that is closely related to the chosen variables based on the prescribed issues. The structure of the Self-

Interaction Matrix (SSIM) will be created by comparing the pair's compatibility to transitive variables and logic. This SSIM data will be transformed into reach matrix through separate mathematical help. Finally, the setting of variable space will then form a model structure known as Interpretive Structural Model (ISM). The structure of this model will be evaluated and interpreted by experts to reach for an answer or at least one exact consensus on the issue.

The processes and procedures will be further described for next part of discussion on procedures. This part will also explain the implementation of ISM with other research methodologies such as nominal group technique (Delbecq, Van de Ven & Gustafson, 1975), Delphi technique (Dalkey, 1972), focus group interview (Krueger & Casey, 2001) and many more. In this study, nominal group technique (NGT) has been used to obtain the variables discussed by the experts in another ISM session. With NGT combination, the ISM conceptual has been made possible for the use of this study.

There are nine (9) steps involved in the designing phase of creative imagination enhancement activity model for preschoolers through the use of traditional Malay children's songs. The diagram below shows a flow chart of each step in the study methodology.

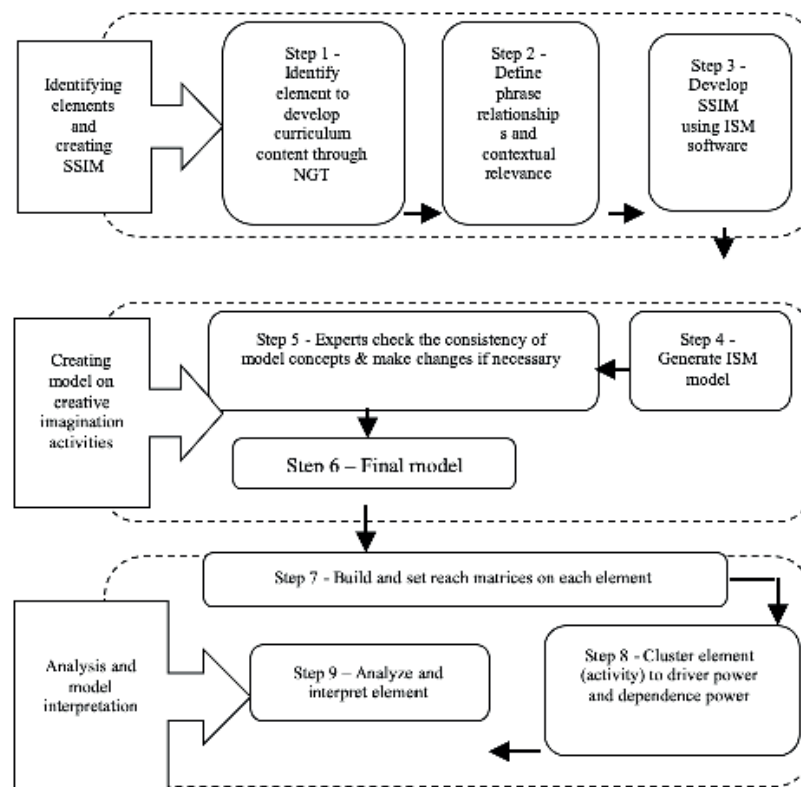


Figure 2. Flow Chart on designing Model of Activities Using Traditional Malay Children's Songs for Enhancement of Creative Imagination among Preschoolers

### Sampling

In this study, members involved in the NGT process were the same group members during the Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) session to develop an activity model on creative imagination enhancement of preschoolers through the use of traditional Malay music. The reason of same group members selected for both NGT and ISM projects by the researchers is because the group is directly involved in the development stage of model construction during the ISM session. The group members are experts who have been selected by the researchers of the study. Therefore, the right selection of experts is the key to the success of this study realizing that the outcome will be based on experts' views and opinions. (Parente, et al., 1994; Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007). Dalkey & Helmert (1963) defined experts as knowledgeable individuals in certain fields; while Adler & Ziglio (1996) emphasized that the selection of experts should be based on four conditions of expertise:

1. knowledge and experience on issues being studied;

2. the ability and willingness to engage;
3. have sufficient and adequate time to engage; and
4. effective communication skills.

Janes (1988) accorded that the number of experts involved in the study using ISM approach is limited to a maximum of eight experts. This is because each expert should engage with other panel members. Therefore, the quality of argument and discussion is closely related to the number of experts available. Armstrong (1985) stated that number of panel groups need to be between 5 and 20 people. While Pastrana et. al (2010) mentioned that the ideal group size is usually 6 to 12 people. Nevertheless, there are eleven (11) experts involved in the study comprises of various expertise related to the study. List of experts' profile is as shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1. Profile of Experts

DESIGNATION	AREA OF EXPERTISE	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
1. Associate Professor	Child Psychology	20
2. Associate Professor	Music Education	15
3. Senior Lecturer		
4. Senior Lecturer	Curriculum	15
5. Senior Lecturer		
6. Lecturer	Early Childhood Education	10
7. Lecturer		
8. Lecturer	Early Childhood Education	12
9. Teacher	Curriculum	
10. Teacher	Music Education	15
11. Teacher	Curriculum	12
	Preschool	13
	Preschool	14
	Preschool	13
		12

**Instruments**

There are two instruments used in this phase. First, the list of frameworks for children’s creative imagination enhancement activities derived from literature references and Nominal Group Technique (NGT) sessions. This list of activities serves as a guide for experts to identify appropriate and coherent learning activities to be incorporated into the model that is being developed. All of the activities need to be approved by the experts whether they should be incorporated into the model, combined or to be rejected from the model design. The experts are also allowed to propose other appropriate activities to be included in the model. The final list of activities that are selected and agreed by the expert members will be represented once again to the panel experts.

The second instrument is interpretive structural modeling software developed by Sorach Incorporation named Concept Star. This software is used to facilitate the process of closed-door discussion and selection on list of activities among experts to determine the relation of each learning activity that has been incorporated into the software.

**Results and Discussions**

The diagram below is the Model of Activities Using Traditional Malay Children’s Songs for Enhancement of Creative Imagination among Preschoolers with the support of Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) software.

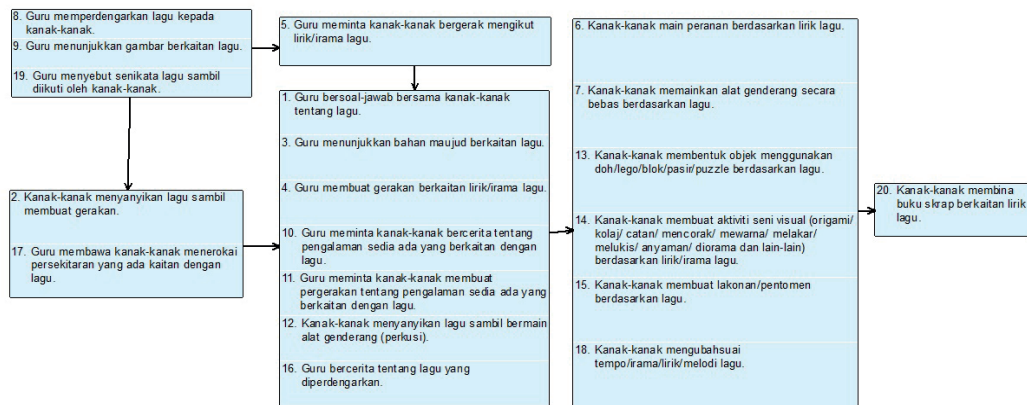


Figure 3. Model of Activities on Using Traditional Malay Children's Song for Enhancement of Creative Imagination among Preschoolers based on Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) approach.

Based on the model, it is clear that creating a learning model could enhance the creativity of preschoolers to meet the needs of the community at large. Creating a learning model that takes into account local factors such as tastes, desires and abilities of the children can certainly facilitate teaching process of the teacher as well as learning process of the children.

**Conclusions**

The rationale for this study is to respond to the needs and aim of the country to establish a creative and innovative community. Since this effort should begin at the early stage of the child's life and need to be done formally in schools, hence the laborious attempt to create such model is very timely. The rationale is based on the following factors.

Firstly, development and improvement of children's creativity is one of the main objectives outlined by the Ministry of Education for preschool education. Beginning from the preschool curriculum was formulated and introduced in 2001, until the creation of NPSC in 2017, the emphasis on creativity in teaching and learning process to produce creative and innovative students was never marginalized. Moreover, creative and critical thinking skills are part of the necessary skills to be practiced in the teaching and learning process in the classroom (Liang & Lin, 2015; Naderi & Abdullah, 2010; Ananda, 2005). Mellou (1996) explained that creative teachers in their teaching could nurture and nourish the creativity of children as well as creative environment and programs.

Second, in general, the aim of preschool education is to develop comprehensive and integrated children's potential in various aspects through a safe and generative learning environment with the use of fun, creative and meaningful approach. Ensuring a fun, creative and meaningful approach in learning certainly depends on the teacher's ability to execute such approaches. Hence, the potential development of children will be more effective.

This model will definitely benefit those who wish to improve the creativity level of children such as the Curriculum Development Division, the Education Technology Division, relevant institutions and stakeholders in developing a learning method for a more comprehensive approach to boost children's imagination and creativity.

Finally, it is with great hope that this study will provide some guidance and references to improve teaching methods and practices of teachers in the classroom. This effort is to enhance the creativity of children in a more effective manner and to bring great impact on national education.

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