An Analysis of Elementary Musical Creativity Contents in China

Qianyun Yuan*
Conservatory of Music,
College of Creative Arts,
Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Shah Alam, Selangor,
Malaysia
Email: qianyunyuan0228@gmail.com

Wen Bin Ong*
Conservatory of Music,
College of Creative Arts,
Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Shah Alam, Selangor,
Malaysia
Corresponding author
Email: ongwenbin@uitm.edu.my

**These authors contributed equally to this study*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine and analyse the musical creativity content of elementary school music textbooks in China through qualitative document analysis. The selected materials are textbooks published by the People's Music Publishing House and People's Education Press for Grade 5 and 6 students. The frequency and percentage of musical creativity contents were recorded, and the corresponding musical elements and mediums were analysed. The results showed that the musical elements with the highest frequency are rhythm and melody, while the musical mediums with the highest frequency are vocal, body, instrument, and notation.

Keywords: *Musical creativity, Music textbooks, Elementary education, Music education*

INTRODUCTION

Music is an individualised art form that requires creative thinking. Creativity is a vital aspect in the process of music performance, appreciation, and developing musical talents. Music education is teaching music to reflect people's thoughts, emotions, and social life. Music education aims to develop a strong interest in music, the ability to feel and appreciate music, and the initial ability to express and create (Bai, 2018). The cultivation of creativity needs to be initiated from an early age, and its development should be promoted in elementary school education. A series of cross-sectional studies by Smith and Carlsson (1990) discovered that creativity in elementary school students dropped to a low point in grades 2 to 3 (ages 7 to 9) and peaked in grades 5 to 6 (ages 10 to 12).

Within formal education, the music subject is indispensable for cultivating creativity among students. Although the cultivation of musical creativity is given much attention worldwide, it remains one of the most difficult aspects of teaching and learning (Teng, 2017). Past research has shown that creative teaching is the most troubling item for teachers in music teaching (Wu, 1993; Chen, 1995; Chu, 2019). The music content in textbooks is dominated by singing activities, with a low percentage of sound sense and creative activities (Liu, 2013).

In 2011, the government of the People's Republic of China promulgated the "Compulsory Education Music Curriculum Standards" 2011, including creativity as one of the main curriculum content areas. The curriculum focuses on cultivating students' imagination and thinking potential, encouraging students to practise musical creativity and explore creative thinking skills, and cultivating innovative talents (Ministry of Education of China, 2011). This initiative has, to some extent, raised the status of music education in society and led to changes in the curriculum syllabus. In accordance with the new curriculum standards, a series of new music textbooks was published in 2013.

This study aims to examine and analyse the creative content within China's elementary music textbooks. The research questions for this study are: (1) What are the creative contents introduced in China's elementary music textbooks? (2) How are the creative contents introduced in China's elementary music textbooks?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Value of Musical Creativity

Musical creativity refers to the output process or concrete presentation of musical acts, including the explicit behaviour of creating music and the inner mental activity (Chen, 2022; Lee, 2006). The explicit behaviour of creating music consists of singing, performing, appreciating, and composing. At the same time, the inner mental activities manifest the music creation, consisting of observation, attitude, self-efficacy, and other affective expressions (Chu, 2019). Musical creativity activities in the education for elementary students should be varied and developed gradually (Nikolić & Kodela, 2016; Reimer, 2002).

Musical Elements

Musical elements are the constituent elements of a piece of music. The musical elements can be divided into single concept musical elements, such as rhythm, dynamics, melody, timbre, harmony, articulation, and texture; and integrated concept musical elements, such as expression, form, and time and place. All of these elements cannot exist in music alone but must alternate and merge through the principles of unity and change to develop a variety of musical forms (Boardman, 1988; Liao, 2010; Ji, 2016). The different combinations of musical elements make up the unique character of each piece of music, allowing one to understand the structure, expression, and even the ethnic group, region, era, and genre. Teaching students to analyse and summarise musical elements is essential in musical creativity education (Werry, 2020

Musical Mediums

Musical mediums are the means of transmitting music and play an important role in the dissemination of musical information. Musical creativity teaching connotes the freedom to express

emotions, improvise, or compose based on available knowledge and using various mediums. Effective use of musical mediums such as notation, graphics/tone painting, vocal, body, instrument, and digital creativity can be used to enhance students' creative level and mastery of musical elements (Su, 2010; Sungurtekin, 2021).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To determine and analyse the creative content in China's elementary school music textbooks, an empirical, qualitative study was performed using the document analysis method. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents (Bowen, 2009).

Materials

This study focuses on China's elementary school music textbooks for grades 5 and 6. The textbooks that were analysed are two versions of Music (Books 5A, 5B, 6A, and 6B), published by People's Music Publishing House (PMP) and People's Education Press (PEP) in 2013.

Instruments

The creative content from music textbooks was intercepted and classified accordingly into ten different musical elements and six musical mediums. The ten musical elements are rhythm, dynamics, melody, timbre, harmony, articulation, texture, expression, form, and time and place, while the six musical mediums are notation, graphics/tone painting, vocal, body, instrument, and digital creativity.

Procedures

The musical creativity contents from each textbook were first identified and then classified according to the ten different musical elements and six musical mediums. For instance, the activity to "change the rhythm and pitch of this black bamboo tune and record it in the score" was considered creative content since it requires students to use their imagination to compose the piece. The musical elements identified for this activity are rhythm and melody, and the musical medium used is notation. Another example is the activity to "choose a suitable percussion accompaniment for a song and perform it while singing." In this case, the musical element identified was expression, and the musical mediums used are instrument, vocal, and body. The percentage of pages in which the musical creativity content appears in the textbooks, the frequency and percentage of musical elements, and the frequency and percentage of the musical mediums used in the creativity contents were integrated using Excel 2021 software. Tables and graphs were utilised for analysis and comparison.

FINDINGS

People's Education Press (PEP)

The total number of pages in the PEP Book 5A is 53, including nine pages of creative content, accounting for a total of 16.98%. The musical elements used in the musical creativity contents are rhythm,

melody, timbre, expression, and time and place, of which rhythm (6 times, 35%) and expression (6 times, 35%) are the most featured, as shown in Figure 1. The musical mediums used are notation, graphics/tone painting, vocal, body, and instrument, of which body (3 times, 28%) and instrument (3 times, 27%) are the most featured, as shown in Figure 2. The total number of pages in the PEP Book 5B is 55, including 12 pages of creative content, accounting for a total of 21.82%. The musical elements used in the musical creativity contents are rhythm, melody, timbre, expression, and time and place, of which expression (11 times, 52%) is the most featured as shown in Figure 3. The musical mediums used are notation, vocal, body, instrument, and digital, of which instrument (4 times, 25%) and vocal (3 times, 19%) are the most featured as shown in Figure 4.

The total number of pages in PEP Book 6A is 57, including four pages of creative content, accounting for a total of 7.02%. The musical elements used in the musical creativity contents are rhythm, melody, expression, and time and place, of which expression (3 times, 50%) is the most featured, as shown in Figure 5. The musical mediums used are notation, graphics/tone painting, and vocal, of which vocal (2 times, 33%) and notation (2 times, 33%) are the most featured, as shown in Figure 6. The total number of pages in PEP Book 6B is 55, including six pages of creative content, accounting for a total of 10.91%. The musical elements used in the musical creativity contents are rhythm, melody, expression, and time and place, of which expression (6 times, 60%) is the most featured as shown in Figure 7. The musical mediums used are notation, graphics/tone painting, vocal and digital, of which vocal (2 times, 25%) is the most featured, as shown in Figure 8.
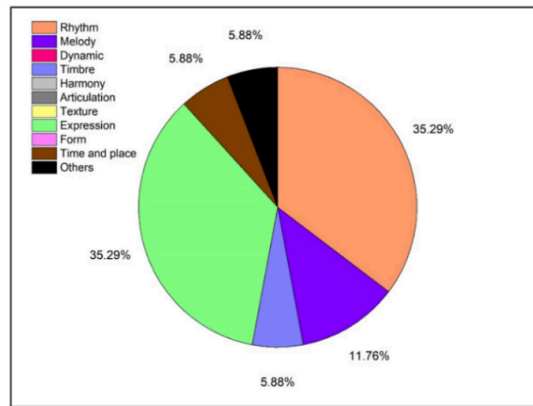
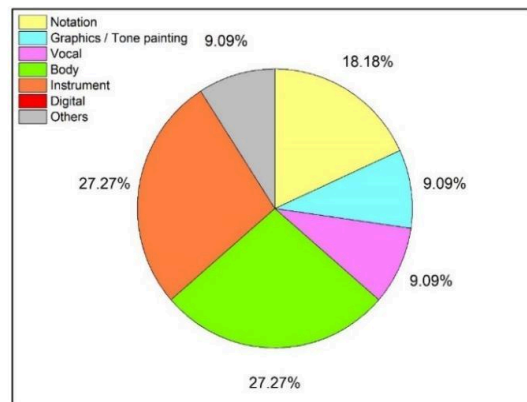

Figure 1. Musical Elements of PEP Book 5A
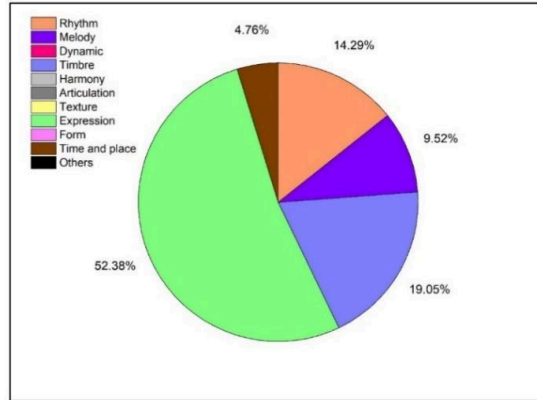

Figure 2. Musical Mediums of PEP Book 5A

Figure 3. Musical Elements of PEP Book 5B
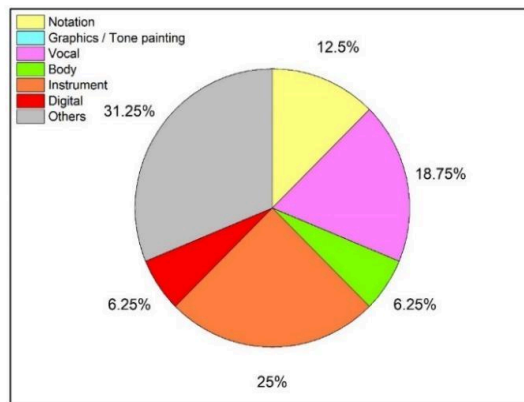

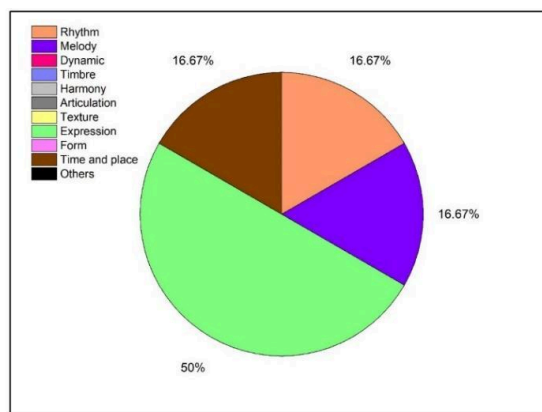**Figure 4. Musical Mediums of PEP Book 5B**

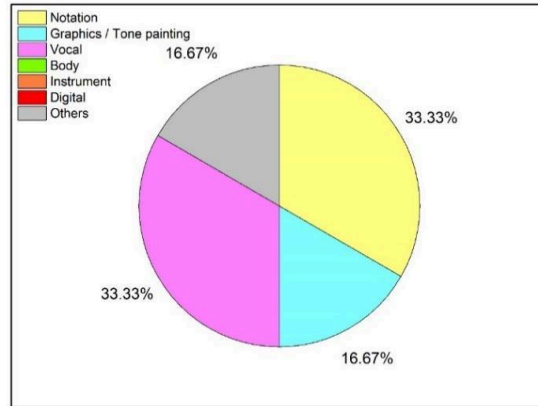**Figure 5. Musical Elements of PEP Book 6A**

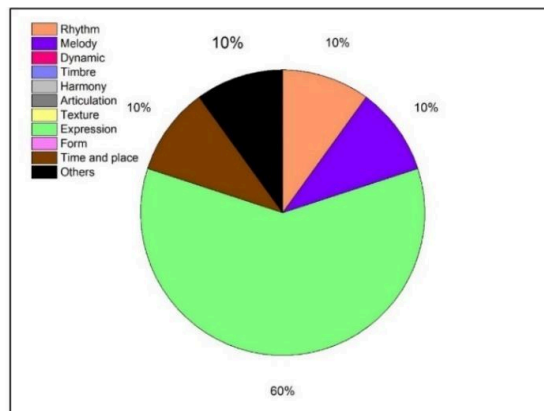**Figure 6. Musical Mediums of PEP Book 6A**

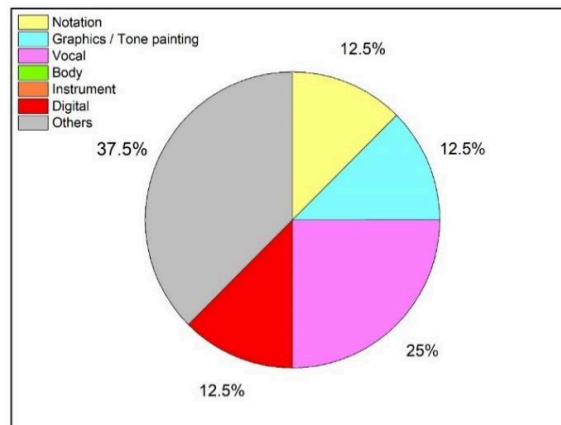**Figure 7. Musical Elements of PEP Book 6B**

Figure 8. Musical Mediums of PEP Book 6B

People's Music Publishing House (PMP)

The total number of pages in PMP Book 5A is 59, including 14 pages of creative content, accounting for a total of 23.73%. This textbook's creative content is repeated frequently, with "choose

percussion instruments to accompany the song." repeated five times. The musical elements used in the musical creativity contents are rhythm, melody, timbre, expression, and time and place, of which expression (9 times, 39%) and rhythm (8 times, 35%) are the most featured as shown in Figure 9. The musical mediums used are notation, graphics/tone painting, vocal, body, and instrument, of which instrument (5 times, 33%) and notation (4 times, 27%) are the most featured as shown in Figure 10. The total number of pages in PMP Book 5B is 59, including 11 pages of creative content, accounting for a total of 18.64%. The musical elements used in the musical creativity contents are rhythm, melody, expression, and time and place, of which expression (12 times, 52%) and rhythm (7 times, 31%) are the most featured as shown in Figure 11. The musical mediums used are notation, vocal, body, and instrument, of which instrument (6 times, 26%), body (6 times, 26%), and vocal (6 times, 26%) are the most featured as shown in Figure 12.

The total number of pages in PMP Book 6A is 59, including 13 pages of creative content, accounting for a total of 22.03%. The musical elements used in the musical creativity contents are rhythm, melody, dynamics, expression, and time and place, of which expression (10 times, 44%) and rhythm (7 times, 30%) are the most featured, as shown in Figure 13. The musical mediums used are notation, vocal, body, and instrument, of which vocal (6 times, 32%) is the most featured, as shown in Figure 14. The total number of pages in PMP Book 6B is 59, including 17 pages of creative content, accounting for a total of 28.81%. The musical elements used in the musical creativity contents are rhythm, melody, dynamic, timbre, expression, and time and place, of which expression (16 times, 49%) is the most featured, as shown in Figure 15. The musical mediums used are notation, vocal, body, instrument, and digital, of which vocal (5 times, 23%) and notation (5 times, 23%) are the most featured as shown in Figure 16.
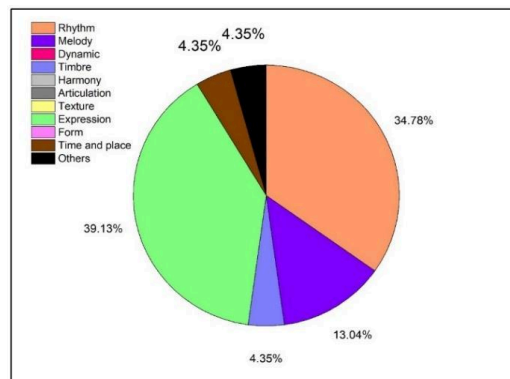

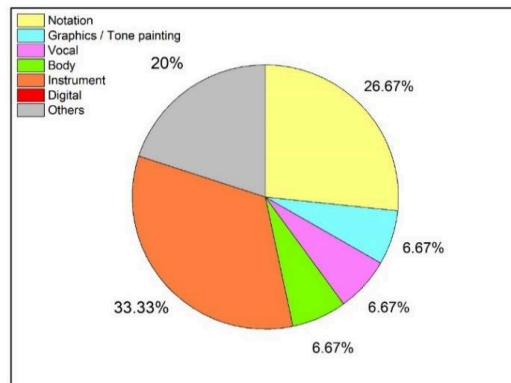**Figure 9. Musical Elements of PMP Book 5A**

Figure 10. Musical Mediums of PMP Book 5A
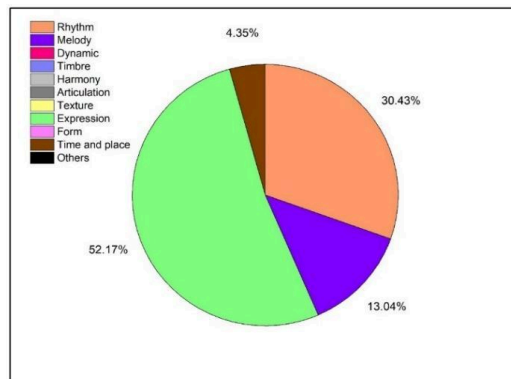

Figure 11. Musical Elements of PMP Book 5B
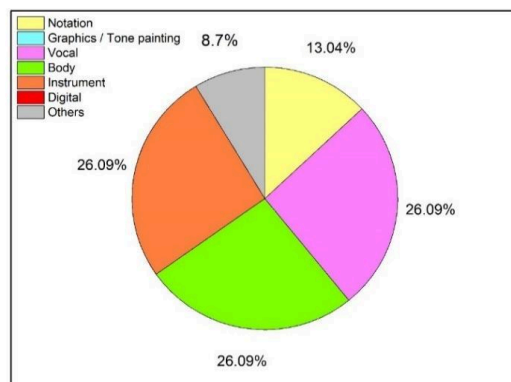

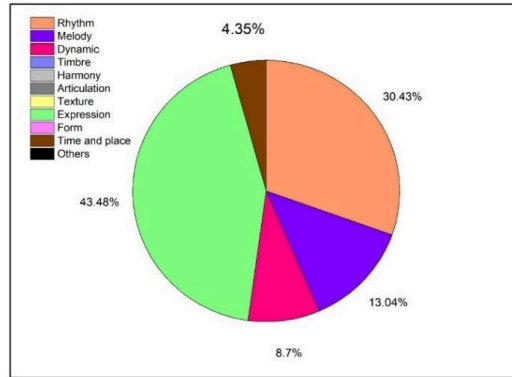**Figure 12. Musical Mediums of PMP Book 5B**

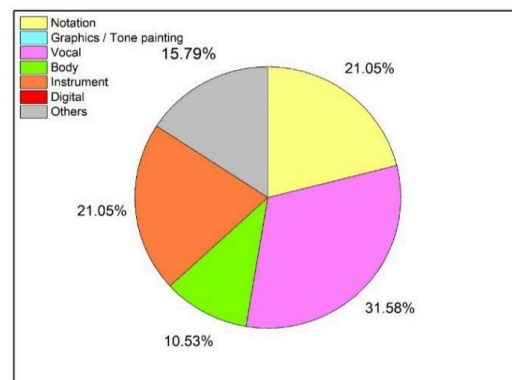**Figure 13. Musical Elements of PMP Book 6A**

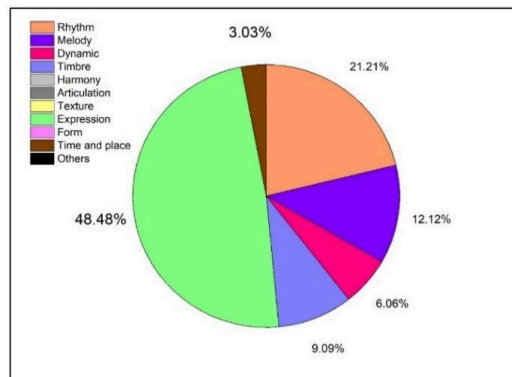

Figure 14. Musical Mediums of PMP Book 6A

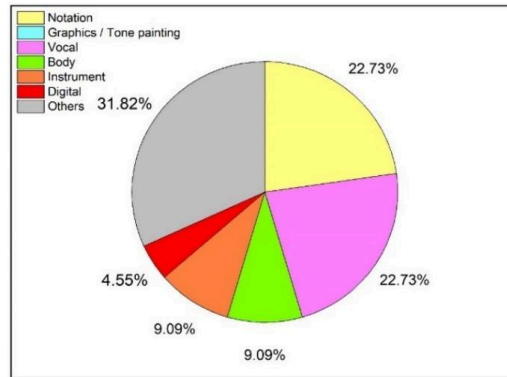**Figure 15. Musical Elements of PMP Book 6B**

Figure 16. Musical Mediums of PMP Book 6B

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine and analyse the creative content within China's elementary music textbooks. The research questions proposed were: (1) What are the creative contents introduced in China's elementary music textbooks? (2) How are the creative contents introduced in China's elementary music textbooks?

Table 1. Comparison of Musical Creativity Contents Frequency in PEP and PMP

Version	Total pages	Pages of musical creativity contents	Percentage (%)
PEP	220	31	14.09
PMP	236	55	23.31

Table 1 shows that PMP (23.31%) has the highest percentage of musical creativity contents among the two versions, appearing once every 4.3 pages on average, while the PEP (14.09%) has a lower percentage with musical creativity contents appearing once every 7.1 pages on average. In terms of page count, the PMP has the most pages and is the most even, with 59 pages each, followed by the PEP with 31 pages.

Table 2. Comparison of Musical Elements Used in Creativity Contents in PEP and PMP

Version		Musical elements										
		Rhythm	Melody	Dynamic	Timbre	Harmony	Articulation	Texture	Expression	Form	Time and place	Others
PEP	Frequency	11	6	0	5	0	0	0	26	0	4	2
	Percentage (%)	20.37	11.11	0	9.26	0	0	0	48.15	0	7.41	3.70
PMP	Frequency	29	13	4	4	0	0	0	47	0	4	1
	Percentage (%)	28.43	12.75	3.92	3.92	0	0	0	46.08	0	3.92	0.98

In relation to the first research question, Table 2 shows that, excluding the musical elements that cannot be clearly defined (others), the PEP textbooks featured more musical creativity contents with expression (48.15%), rhythm (20.37%), and melody (11.11%). Similarly, the PMP textbooks also featured more musical creativity content with expression (46.08%), rhythm (28.43%), and melody (12.75%). This

indicates that both versions of the textbook place more emphasis on the musical elements of rhythm, expression, and melody in the design and use of musical creativity contents. The use of the expression in the musical creativity contents is mostly to create a certain atmosphere, to play a role, to set the soundtrack according to the style of the song and the plot development of the story, to express personal creative ideas and emotions, such as creating lyrics and designing performance forms for the song. The use of rhythm in the musical creativity contents is mostly the practice of rhythm adaptation and creativity, using percussion instruments or the body as an instrument to accompany songs, creating rhythms for a certain situation, such as "sports" and "walking animals". The use of melody in the musical creativity contents is mostly for creating melodies with the given tones, continuing to arrange the melody, creating melodic fragments according to the given rhythm, and changing the original pitch to create new melodies. In actual teaching, the use of these elements is also relatively simple. For instance, students are asked to use percussion instruments to accompany the songs. Most of the percussion instruments are unpitched, unlike piano and violin, which require fundamental playing skills. Students are only required to create their rhythms to participate in the musical expression activity, which is easy to understand and execute. The two versions of the textbook did not utilise all of the ten musical elements in the creativity contents. The elements of dynamic, harmony, articulation, texture, and form were not used in both versions.

Table 2. Comparison of Musical Elements Used in Creativity Contents in PEP and PMP

Version		Musical mediums						
		Notation	Graphics/ Tone painting	Vocal	Body	Instrument	Digital	Others
PEP	Frequency	7	3	8	4	7	2	10
	Percentage (%)	17.07	7.32	19.51	9.76	17.07	4.88	24.39
PMP	Frequency	16	1	18	11	17	1	15
	Percentage (%)	20.25	1.27	22.78	13.92	21.52	1.27	18.99

In relation to the second research question, Table 3 shows that, excluding the musical mediums that cannot be clearly defined (others), the PEP textbooks featured more musical creativity contents through vocal (19.51%), notation (17.07%), and instrument (17.07%); while the PEP textbooks featured more musical creativity contents through vocal (22.78%), instrument (21.52%), and notation (20.25%).

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Elementary school music textbooks in China emphasise more on rhythm, expression, and melody in the use of musical elements while lacking in the use of dynamics, harmony, articulation, texture, and form. This result is similar to the findings of Wei-Chen Yeh (2012), which examined the musical creativity contents of secondary school art textbooks in Taiwan. The results of Yeh's study showed a higher percentage of expression, rhythm, and timbre and a lower percentage of harmony, dynamic, articulation, texture, and time and place. Through this study, it is hoped that the use of dynamic, articulation, texture, harmony, and form will be increased in the design of musical creativity content for future music textbooks. Some suggestions for the application of these musical elements are using body movements to express dynamics, using different playing techniques on musical instruments to express articulation, and creating a variety of ostinato groups to incorporate texture.

In terms of musical mediums, elementary school music textbooks in China cover all six mediums in their musical creativity contents. However, there is more use of notation, instrumental, vocal, and body, and less use of graphics/tone painting and digital. This result is similar to the findings of Jining (2016),

which examined the musical creativity contents of secondary school textbooks in Taiwan and China. The results of the study showed that both regions had the highest percentage of notation, with China having the lowest percentage of graphics/ tone painting and digital. As an auditory medium, graphics/ tone painting can stimulate students' subconscious thoughts and inspiration and provides more freedom for expression in comparison to only using notation. With the advancement of technology, the digital medium will soon become a more popular and powerful auxiliary tool. In teaching, the software can be used to allow students to create simple music and feel the fun of musical creativity.

This study presents certain limitations, thus the need to be cautious with the observations. For instance, this study only conducts a comparative analysis of textbooks and does not analyse the actual applications and effectiveness of musical creativity education. In addition, China's Ministry of Education may launch a new music textbook in 2024 in lieu of the latest adjustment on the curriculum standards in 2022. Therefore, this study provides direction for future research, such as observations of the effectiveness of musical creativity contents and analysis and comparison of new textbook editions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

REFERENCES

Bai, H. R. (2018). The Importance of Music Education in Quality Education. *Course Education Research,* 43, 189-199.

Boardman, E. (1988). The Generative Theory of Musical Learning Part I: Introduction. *Soundings* (Reston, VA), 2(1), 4-30.

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document Analysis as A Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40.

Chen, I. C. (2022*). An Action Research of Infusing Arrangement Software into Elementary School Composing Instruction* [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Taipei.

Chen, Y. M. (1995). *Research On Creative Thinking Teaching in Elementary Music Subjects*. Royal Dragon Press.

Chu, M. H. (2019). *An Action Research on Integrating Visuals into Fifth-Grade Music Creation Instruction: An Example Of Icon Your Music Software* [Unpublished master's thesis]. National Chiayi University.

Fei, C. K., & Du, Y. T. (2013). *Music, Grade 5 Book A and B*. People's Education Press.

Fei, C. K., & Du, Y. T. (2013). *Music, Grade 6 Book A and B*. People's Education Press.

Ji, N. (2016). *Analysis and Comparison of Music Creativity Contents in Junior High School Textbooks of Taiwan and Mainland China* [Unpublished master's thesis]. National Taiwan Normal University.

Lee, H. C. (2006). *Action Research Regarding to Take Advantage of "Children Musical Play" and "Creative Drama" to Enhance the Learning Outcomes of Music Creation Against Elementary School Students ~ Example Of Grade 5* [Unpublished master's thesis]. National University of Tainan.

Liao, M. L. (2010). *A Study of the Effect of Applying Visual and Kinaesthetic Aids in Listening Musical Elements and Styles in Seven Graders* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. National Taiwan Normal University.

Liu, Y. C. (2013). *Content Analysis of Textbooks in Arts and Humanities of Elementary School* [Unpublished master's thesis]. National Pingtung University of Education.

Ministry of Education of China. (2011). *Compulsory Education Music Curriculum Standards*. Beijing Normal University Publishing Group. http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/201112/W020220418401387878443.pdf

Nikolić, I., & Kodela, S. (2016). Musical Creativity – Constitutive Element or Product of Musical Talent Development. *Facta Universitatis, Series: Visual Arts and Music*, 85. https://doi.org/10.22190/fuvam1602085n

Reimer, B. (2002). *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing The Vision*. Prentice Hall.

Smith, G. J. W., & Carlsson, I. M. (1990). *The Creative Process: A Functional Model Based on Empirical Studies From Early Childhood to Middle Age*. International Universities Press, Inc.

Su, J. H. (2010). A Study on Digital Music and Its Application in Teaching Based on The Development of Music Creativity. *Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences*, 6, 85-107.

Sungurtekin, S. (2021). Classroom and Music Teachers' Perceptions about the Development of Imagination and Creativity in Primary Music Education. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 5(3). http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/scholarly-journals/classroom-music-teachers-perceptions-about/docview/2712880445/se-2

Teng, T. Y. (2017). *An Action Research Targeted at the Upper Grade on Using 1990-2015 Taiwan Mandarin Popular Music in Primary School Musical Curriculum of Creation* [Unpublished master's thesis]. National University of Tainan.

Werry, J. (2020). Building Knowledge Through the Elements of Music, Part 1. *Music Teacher*, 99, 59. http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/magazines/building-knowledge-through-elements-music-part-1/docview/2452535689/se-2

Wu, B. (2013). *Music, Grade 5 Book A and B*. People's Music Publishing House.

Wu, B. (2013). *Music, Grade 6 Book A and B*. People's Music Publishing House.

Wu, B. M. (1993). *Theory and Practice of Music Game-Based Teaching in Elementary Schools*. Taiwan Government Department of Education.

Yeh, W. C. (2012). *A Content Analysis of the Music Creation Part of the Arts and Humanities Textbook Series at the Junior High School Level* [Unpublished master's thesis]. National Taipei University of Education.