

Developing Music Appreciation Competency in Fifth-Grade Students Through Game-Based Activities

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ABSTRACT: Music appreciation competence is recognized as one of the core subject-specific competencies in the 2018 General Education Curriculum, playing a crucial role in fostering aesthetic sensitivity, emotional development, and character formation among primary school students. However, current teaching practices reveal that activities aimed at cultivating this competence are often insufficiently emphasized in many primary schools. Instructional approaches tend to be limited in variety, lack experiential engagement, and underutilize the pedagogical potential of music-based games. Based on a review of relevant theoretical frameworks and prior studies both domestically and internationally, this article proposes several measures to develop music appreciation competence in fifth-grade students through game-based activities. The findings demonstrate that the integration of musical games enhances students' learning motivation, strengthens their abilities to listen, perceive, and express music, and supports the natural and positive development of aesthetic competence.

KEYWORDS: music appreciation competence; game-based learning; musical games; primary education; fifth-grade students; aesthetic development.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the competency-based reform of the General Education Curriculum, music education at the primary level not only focuses on developing singing and music literacy skills but also aims to foster students' music appreciation and aesthetic capacities [1]. According to Silverman (2009), music appreciation is an active process in which learners listen, respond, and express personal emotions toward musical works, rather than merely engaging in passive auditory recognition [2]. This perspective is reinforced by Huang (2025), who emphasizes that music appreciation education plays a significant role in shaping students' taste, emotional sensitivity, and artistic qualities [3]. Numerous international studies have highlighted the effectiveness of learning through playful activities or musical games in developing artistic cognition and emotional engagement. Park and Kihl (2012) demonstrated that rhythmic games enhance primary students' concentration, learning "flow," and rhythmic responsiveness [4]. Kim (2013) showed that integrating technology with musical games creates an interactive learning environment that significantly improves students' timbre and melody recognition as well as their motivation to learn [5].

In Vietnam, domestic studies likewise emphasize the role of musical experiences and games in fostering students' music appreciation competence. Đinh (2021) argues that experiential musical activities help learners develop the ability to distinguish timbre, pitch, and musical emotions [6]. Hoàng (2022) affirms that musical games create a positive learning environment that stimulates creativity and aesthetic sensitivity [7]. Phạm and Trần (2023) highlight that creative musical experiences combined with games enable students to connect music with real-life contexts, thereby forming a more natural and profound sense of music appreciation [8]. Although numerous studies have examined the use of games in music education, research specifically targeting fifth-grade students and the development of music appreciation competence through game-based activities remains limited. Therefore, this article aims to: (1) systematize the theoretical foundations of music appreciation and musical games; (2) propose several game-based activities appropriate for fifth-grade learners; and (3) analyze the effectiveness of these games in developing music appreciation competence within the framework of the new curriculum.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed the following groups of research methods: (1) Theoretical research methods, used to collect, analyze, and synthesize domestic and international literature related to musical competence, music appreciation competence, music teaching methods, musical games, and experiential learning; (2) Practical investigation methods, used to examine the current state of music teaching and the level of music appreciation among fifth-grade students in selected primary schools, as well as to gather music

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teachers' perspectives on the suitability and effectiveness of musical games in instruction; (3) Pedagogical design methods, through which several musical games were developed based on theoretical foundations, learner characteristics, and the content requirements of the Grade 5 curriculum; (4) Pedagogical experimental methods, involving small-scale experiments in lessons that incorporated musical games, with observations of students' participation, engagement, and abilities in listening, perceiving, and expressing music, followed by comparisons with a control group; and (5) Statistical and data analysis methods, used to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed measures

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Learning requirements for grade 5 music under the 2018 general education curriculum

The 2018 General Education Curriculum identifies musical competence as comprising three components: (1) Musical Performance, (2) Music Appreciation and Understanding, and (3) Musical Application and Creativity. For Grade 5, the curriculum specifies several learning requirements across qualities, general competencies, and subject-specific competencies.

In terms of qualities, students are expected to develop an appreciation for beauty and a respect for artistic values in music; demonstrate responsibility when participating in group performances; and collaborate, share, and support peers in singing, movement, and performance activities.

Regarding general competencies, students should be able to practise independently and confidently express emotions before an audience; engage in discussion and adjust performance tasks within a group; and explore diverse ways of presenting songs through rhythm, timbre, or simple props.

For subject-specific competencies, Grade 5 Music aims to develop three core abilities

First, music appreciation and Understanding. Students should be able to distinguish fast–slow and strong–weak rhythms; differentiate between joyful and sad melodies; identify basic features of songs; and express emotions through facial expressions, speech, and movement in response to music.

Second, musical performance. Learners are expected to sing with correct pitch and rhythm, perform expressively, and accompany songs with simple rhythmic patterns or appropriate movement.

Third, musical creativity. Students are encouraged to create simple variations, design original ways of presenting songs, and express imaginative ideas inspired by the music.

These requirements serve as pedagogical foundations affirming that musical games not only align with curricular goals but also provide experiential and creative spaces that foster students' music appreciation competence in a natural and engaging manner.

3.2. Characteristics of Fifth-Grade Students and the suitability of games for developing music appreciation competence

Fifth-grade students (10–11 years old) are in a stage of significant cognitive, emotional, and social development. At this age, learners demonstrate improved concentration, the ability to analyze and remember relatively long melodies, and a growing capacity to connect music with personal emotions. However, their need for active participation, hands-on experiences, and engaging learning activities remains high. Children at this stage enjoy group collaboration, competition, and self-expression through movement, performance, and creative activities.

These characteristics indicate that game-based learning is highly suitable for music education in Grade 5. Games help sustain students' interest, stimulate active participation, foster social interaction, and encourage emotional expression—factors that are essential for developing music appreciation competence. Moreover, through listening, movement, reproduction, and creative musical games, students have opportunities to practise identifying melody, rhythm, and timbre, while naturally enhancing their musical thinking and appreciation in an effective and enjoyable manner.

3.3. Current situation of music teaching and Fifth-Grade students' music appreciation competence

To evaluate the current state of music teaching and the music appreciation competence of fifth-grade students, this study employed a survey method using questionnaires administered to two groups: students and teachers. The student questionnaire consisted of simple multiple-choice questions focusing on two criteria: (1) students' level of interest in the music subject and (2) their perceptions of the effectiveness of musical games. The survey was conducted with 70 fifth-grade students at Dong Coc Primary School (Luc Ngan – Bac Ninh) through direct in-class completion within 10–12 minutes, ensuring anonymity and response accuracy. Table 1 presents the results regarding students' interest in music and their assessment of the effectiveness of musical game

Category	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1. Interest in Music	70	100
Very interested	18	26%
Interested	34	49%
Neutral	15	21%
Not interested	03	4%
2. Perceived effectiveness of musical games	70	100

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Very effective	32	46%
Effective	27	39%
Neutral	9	13%
Ineffective	02	2%

Bảng 1

The results reveal that 26% of students were “very interested” in music and 48.6% “interested,” while only 4.3% reported lacking interest. Regarding the effectiveness of musical games, 46% of students considered them “very effective,” 39% found them “effective,” and only 2% rated them “ineffective.” These findings suggest that musical games not only enhance students’ enjoyment but also contribute to developing their ability to listen, recognize, reproduce, and express musical emotions.

For teachers, the study surveyed six music teachers from three schools—Dong Coc (Bac Ninh), Doi Can 2, and Nguyen Viet Xuan (Thai Nguyen)—using questionnaires supplemented with short interviews to clarify the frequency of musical game use, perceived effectiveness, and challenges in implementation. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and percentage calculations.

Regarding the frequency of implementing musical games, 16.7% of teachers (1 teacher) reported using them regularly, 50% (3 teachers) occasionally, 33.3% (2 teachers) rarely, and none reported never using them. Although teachers acknowledge the benefits of musical games, their actual application remains limited. The main reasons cited include: insufficient class time, large class sizes making activity management difficult, and a lack of available sample materials or ready-made games.

Overall, the survey results show that students exhibit high interest in music and clearly recognize the benefits of musical games in learning. Teachers also hold positive views but face practical challenges that limit implementation. These findings provide an important foundation for proposing more suitable, feasible, and effective musical game strategies for Grade 5 music education.

3.4. Measures for developing music appreciation competence through musical games

3.4.1. Principles for proposing measures to develop music appreciation competence through games

To ensure scientific validity, feasibility, and practical relevance, the measures proposed for developing music appreciation competence in fifth-grade students through musical games are grounded in the following principles:

Principle of alignment with the 2018 General Education Curriculum: All measures must contribute to the development of the subject-specific competencies in Music—namely appreciation, performance, and creativity—while also supporting the formation of key qualities and general competencies as stipulated in the 2018 General Education Curriculum. The selected games should directly correspond to the expected learning outcomes of the Grade 5 music content.

Principle of suitability to the psychological and developmental characteristics of fifth-grade students: Learners at this age have strong needs for activity, exploration, and friendly competition. Therefore, musical games must be engaging, promote movement, and create opportunities for emotional expression and collaboration. The games should be compatible with students’ listening, singing, and movement abilities, as well as their stage-appropriate musical memory.

Principle of feasibility in classroom teaching: The proposed measures must be simple and easy to organize within the constraints of large class sizes, limited lesson time, and modest teaching resources. The games should not require extensive preparation, must be easy for students to understand, and should be implementable flexibly within different stages of the lesson.

Principle of promoting learners’ active participation: The measures should provide opportunities for students to participate, experience, explore, and express themselves. Musical games must encourage students to listen, feel, and express independently, rather than engaging in passive listening or receiving one-way instructions.

Principle of educational, aesthetic, and safety assurance: Musical games should foster aesthetic development and positive emotional experiences, while avoiding excessive noise, negative competition, or unsafe activities. The content of the games must contain educational value rather than serving merely as entertainment.

3.4.2. Measures for developing music appreciation competence through musical games

3.4.2.1. Enhancing listening and musical perception through creative response

a. Purpose of the measure:

This measure aims to develop students’ listening and musical perception abilities by encouraging them to respond to music actively and creatively. Through listening to short musical excerpts and expressing their reactions—such as conveying emotions, visualizing melodies through lines or colors, or using bodily movements—students not only recognize melody, rhythm, and expression but also gradually form conscious and attentive listening habits. Several games suitable for this measure include “Melody Drawing,” “Emotional Colors,” “Catch the Melody,” “Listen and Guess the Emotion,” and “Music Painter.”

The common feature of these games is that students must first listen carefully and then provide a response through a chosen modality—visual representation, movement, or facial expression—thereby strengthening their capability to perceive and interpret musical elements.

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b. Implementation procedure and effective application activities

This measure is most effective when applied during the warm-up and knowledge-building stages of the lesson, where the teacher aims to “awaken” students’ musical senses and guide them into the content of the lesson. The procedure is as follows: The teacher selects a short music excerpt relevant to the lesson (approximately 10–15 seconds) and plays it once or twice. Students are then asked to express their perception by quickly drawing a line that reflects the melodic contour, selecting a color that corresponds to the emotion of the music, or using hand movements or facial expressions to imitate the direction of the melody. Several students are invited to present their responses to the class. The teacher observes, provides feedback, and links these responses to the musical characteristics of the lesson.

For example, in the listening activity “Lý cây bông” (Music 5 – Kết nối tri thức với cuộc sống [Connecting Knowledge with Life]), the teacher plays the opening excerpt, prompting students to draw soft, curved lines or use flowing hand movements to imitate the wave-like melody. The teacher then reinforces the musical features of Southern Vietnamese folk songs, such as their gentle, cheerful, and innocent melodic qualities.

c. Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes of this measure include enhancing students’ ability to listen analytically—not merely listening for enjoyment, but attending to melodic contour, rhythm, and expression. Creative responses stimulate imagination and provide opportunities for students to express personal emotions, thereby deepening their music appreciation competence and preparing them with a positive mindset for subsequent learning activities.

3.4.2.2. Developing Multisensory Music Appreciation Through the Integration of Music–Visual–Movement Responses

a. Purpose of the measure

This measure aims to enhance students’ music appreciation competence by engaging multiple senses simultaneously—hearing, sight, and bodily movement. Instead of listening and memorizing solely through auditory channels, students are enabled to “see” music through melodic maps and visual contours, and to “feel” music through physical movement. Representative games that apply this approach include “Music–Image–Motion,” “Virtual Melody Path,” “Dancing Hands,” and “Which Line is Correct?”

These games require students to first listen attentively and then choose or create lines, shapes, or movements that correspond to the melody, rhythm, and expressive qualities of the music.

b. Implementation procedure and effective application activities

This measure is particularly effective during the knowledge-building phase, when teachers need to help students identify and generalize the melodic, rhythmic, or pitch characteristics of a song or sight-singing exercise. The procedure may be conducted as follows:

The teacher plays a music excerpt (10–20 seconds), then provides two or three “melodic maps” (e.g., a smooth curve, a zigzag line, an ascending line) and asks students to select the one that best represents the excerpt they have just heard. Students then use their hands or body to imitate the chosen melodic line. The whole class compares selections and discusses the reasons behind their choices, leading the teacher to consolidate the musical concept.

For example, in Sight-Singing Exercise No. 7 (Music 5 – Kết nối tri thức với cuộc sống [Connecting Knowledge with Life]), after listening to the melody, students are presented with various contour options. Many choose a gently ascending line to represent the rising pitch, which they then imitate through hand movement; this helps students better understand the airy, flowing quality of the melody.

c. Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes of this measure include helping students internalize melodic and rhythmic concepts through visual and kinesthetic association. Transforming sound into visual shapes and movements supports learners—especially those with strong visual-spatial thinking—and enhances their ability to recognize and remember musical elements. In the long term, this multisensory approach lays a foundation for comprehensive music appreciation, integrating auditory, visual, and kinesthetic perception.

3.4.2.3. Developing musical expression and imagination through mini dramatisation activities

a. Purpose of the measure

This measure focuses on developing students’ expressive abilities and musical imagination through small-scale dramatisation activities. Rather than merely listening to and describing music, students transform their perceptions into concrete narratives, characters, and situations, expressing them through speech, gestures, movements, and performance. Representative games applying this measure include “Music Storytelling,” “Music–Role–Play,” “One-Minute Stage,” and “A Story from the Melody.” These activities require students to construct a short script based on the music, assign roles, and perform in front of the class.

b. Implementation procedure and effective application activities

This measure is most effective during the application–extension stage of the lesson, after students have listened to, analyzed, and become familiar with the melody, rhythm, and thematic content of the song or musical excerpt. The procedure typically involves the following steps:

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The teacher plays the full song or musical excerpt; divides the class into small groups (4–6 students); and asks each group to create a short story (4–6 sentences) corresponding to the emotions or imagery evoked by the music. Each group then stages a mini dramatization (1–2 minutes) using simple props such as scarves, conical hats, or paper fans, and performs it for the class.

For example, in the lesson “Khúc hát đồng quê” (Music 5 – Kết nối tri thức với cuộc sống [Connecting Knowledge with Life]), after listening to and exploring the song, groups may create stories depicting a morning in the fields, children herding buffalo and flying kites, or farmers harvesting rice. They then dramatize these scenes through soft, gentle movements that convey the peaceful and lyrical quality of the song.

c. Expected outcomes

The expected outcome of this measure is that students express musical emotions more vividly through actions and speech, shifting from merely “listening and retelling” to truly “living within the music.” Mini dramatisation activities help students develop confidence, cooperation, and communication skills, while deepening their music appreciation through meaningful contextual experience tied to stories, characters, and settings. This measure also contributes to fulfilling the curricular requirements of the 2018 General Education Curriculum regarding the development of aesthetic competence, communication, and collaboration.

3.4.2.4. Developing music appreciation competence through timbre-discovery games using body percussion and simple percussion instruments

a. Purpose of the measure

This measure aims to strengthen students’ ability to perceive timbre and rhythm—two fundamental components of music appreciation—by allowing them to directly experience sound production and timbre differentiation through body percussion or simple percussion instruments (such as claves, wooden clappers, or small drums). The integration of listening, sound creation, and responsive activities helps students perceive musical elements more clearly and develop auditory attention. Representative games include “Mystery Timbre” (listen and identify the instrument), “Hidden Rhythm” (listen and reproduce rhythmic patterns), “Who Has the Sharpest Ear?” (react to changes in timbre), and “Sound Detective” (distinguish sounds from different sources). These games encourage students to actively explore and describe sound qualities, thereby developing music appreciation competence through hands-on experience.

b. Implementation procedure and effective application activities

This measure is most effective during the practice stage of the lesson, when the teacher aims to reinforce students’ recognition of rhythm, timbre, and melodic characteristics. Implementation can proceed as follows: the teacher performs a simple rhythmic pattern or produces sound using a percussion instrument; students listen carefully and respond according to the rules of the game—by identifying the instrument, reproducing the rhythm, or distinguishing variations in timbre. After each round, the teacher provides feedback and highlights the relevant rhythmic and timbral characteristics, helping students connect the activity to the musical content of the lesson.

For example, in the lesson “Khúc hát đồng quê” (Music 5 – Kết nối tri thức với cuộc sống [Connecting Knowledge with Life]), the teacher may conduct the game “Hidden Rhythm”: students listen to a short musical excerpt and use claves to tap along with the main rhythmic pattern. The teacher then guides students to recognize the gentle, steady quality of the melody.

c. Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes of this measure include enabling students to perceive music through multiple channels: listening, performing, and responding. Direct involvement in sound production helps students better understand rhythmic structures, perceive differences in timbre, and develop music appreciation through action-based learning. The measure also contributes to improving students’ concentration, teamwork skills, and engagement, creating a dynamic and motivating learning environment.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The study has identified both the theoretical and practical foundations for developing music appreciation competence in fifth-grade students through game-based activities within the framework of the 2018 General Education Curriculum. Survey results indicate that fifth-grade students show a high level of interest in Music and have positive perceptions of the role of musical games in supporting their learning. Meanwhile, teachers also recognize the effectiveness of such games but have limited opportunities to implement them regularly due to practical constraints. Based on these findings, the article proposes four key measures: (1) enhancing listening and musical perception through creative response; (2) developing multisensory appreciation by integrating music with visual and movement-based activities; (3) fostering musical expression and imagination through mini dramatisation; and (4) strengthening music appreciation through timbre-discovery games using body percussion and simple percussion instruments. All measures align well with learners’ psychological characteristics, the objectives of the subject, and real-world teaching conditions.

These measures not only contribute to improving the effectiveness of Music education but also help create a joyful, experience-rich learning environment that encourages emotional expression, fosters aesthetic competence, and supports the development of key learner qualities. The article also suggests directions for future research, particularly pedagogical experiments to validate the effectiveness of these measures across diverse instructional contexts, thereby contributing to the refinement of competency-based Music teaching models.

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