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# Integrating Narrative Characters in Early Childhood Music Learning: A Study of Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear Impact on Early Learners

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## Abstract

This research explores the implementation of Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear characterization methods in the Little Musician class at Favore Music School, Bandung. It assesses their impact on young learners' musical, linguistic, and emotional development. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the study spanned six months and incorporated observations, interviews, and document reviews to gather comprehensive data. The Music for Little Mozarts curriculum, designed specifically for young children, integrates narrative characters to enhance student engagement and learning. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, focusing on data reduction, display, and conclusion to ensure robust, systematically derived findings. Results indicate that preparing and implementing character-based materials and musical instruments effectively engages children. The role-playing exercises using Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear deepened the children's understanding of musical concepts, such as pitch and dynamics, and significantly improved their emotional and linguistic skills. This was particularly evident in their enthusiastic participation in end-of-semester musical concerts. The study highlights the potential of incorporating narrative and creativity in early education to enrich learning outcomes. Character-based methods could be particularly beneficial for fostering comprehensive developmental skills in music education. However, the research was limited to a single educational setting and a short observation period, which might affect the generalizability of the results. Future research should expand the study to multiple settings and extend the observation period better to understand the long-term effects of such pedagogical strategies. This could help ascertain the effectiveness and adaptability of characterization methods in a broader educational context.

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## Introduction

The integral role of music in early childhood development extends beyond recreational activity, shaping cognitive and emotional growth (Khrisne & Hendrawati, 2016). Through music, children find a powerful medium for expressing emotions, thus shaping their attitudes and developing their character (Komala & Nugraha, 2022; Oktadus, 2022; Riyadi & Budiman, 2023). These experiences are crucial as they also enhance critical thinking, creativity, and social skills, which are essential in the formative years of childhood (Sumiyati & Pamungkas, 2023). Additionally, music education engages children in active listening and participation activities, which are foundational for building interaction skills that are beneficial throughout their educational journeys and beyond (Latuheru, 2019).

The efficacy of specialized music education methodologies, such as the Eurhythmics Dalcroze theory, is well-documented, particularly their capability to enhance musical skills and enrich performance through engaging, movement-based learning activities (Daly, 2022). This pedagogical approach is aligned with the natural inclinations of young children who are inherently predisposed to learn through movement, making such methods enjoyable and

educationally effective (Mandang et al., 2022). The approach fosters musicality and contributes to broader developmental objectives, including creativity and intelligent problem-solving, by leveraging young learners' natural behaviors and inclinations (Fitriah & Vivian, 2022; Wadiyo & Utomo, 2018).

The role of a well-structured music arts curriculum is paramount in shaping behavioral patterns and imparting cultural values, which necessitates a curriculum that is both flexible and age-appropriate for early childhood education (Febriyani & Sukmayadi, 2023; Ma'unah et al., 2020; Pranoto et al., 2023). Adaptability in teaching methods is crucial to effectively reach young learners and ensure the absorption of educational content, which should ideally be tailored to foster not only knowledge but also aesthetic appreciation and creative expression (Aufa Amroini Indah Saesari et al., 2023; Curry & Arnaud, 2023). This highlights the necessity for continuous innovation in educational strategies to meet the evolving needs of early childhood development.

Although widely used, characterization methods in music learning often lack a structured approach that incorporates the personas of musicians, which can significantly enhance the educational experience (Maghfiroh et al., 2020). By integrating such figures into the curriculum, children can gain a more comprehensive understanding of music, not just as an art form but as a narrative that encompasses the lives and contributions of musicians (Riyadi & Budiman, 2023). This method not only aids in the sensory recognition of musical sounds but also inculcates an appreciation for the creative process involved in music creation.

The objective of a Little Musician class is to introduce music to students. Art education functions to optimize the musical abilities of young children (Amini et al., 2023). The next step is determining their interest in further exploring which musical instrument they would pursue as musicians. This study focuses on young children aged three to five years in the Little Musician class at Favorite Music School, a music course institution with classes specifically designed for young children. Early childhood, defined as ages 0-8, includes children who enjoy role-playing activities (Ilsa & Nurhafizah, 2020; Yuningsih et al., 2021), but this research concentrates on toddlers in that age group. At this age, children require social and emotional development (Aulia & Setiawan, 2022; Bakri et al., 2021; Hartinah et al., 2020). Parents hope this class will provide an enjoyable activity for their children to learn and socialize. The class uses teaching materials from Alfred's Music, which provides educational content for teachers in the Little Musician class. They refer to this as the Music Discovery Books. The curriculum comprises three books, with the lowest level starting by introducing musical elements. Music Discovery Book 1 focuses on identifying sounds heard and introducing musical elements to young children (Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2020).

This book employs the characterization method to help teachers deliver content. Characterization of role-playing involves listening to drama and dialogues between characters and imagining them in one's mind (Hastuti & Aini, 2023). This method can train emotional feelings, responsibility, and verbal skills in young children (Andini & Ramiati, 2020; Harianja et al., 2023; Kasmawarni & Kasmawarni, 2023; Mangkuwibawa & Kurnia, 2021; Rahmawaty & Suwarjo, 2016). Through this textbook, children can actualize themselves in music (Rosma et al., 2022) and enhance their interpersonal skills through role-playing (Dyah Purwani et al., 2023; Susanti et al., 2023). In the material, figures like Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear portray the lives of Mozart and Beethoven as they became musicians, using intrinsic elements such as theme, plot, character, and children. This technique, known as role-playing, involves children listening to stories and content and actively participating in drama in the classroom (Segoni, 2022).

Character-based education featuring figures like Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear can amplify children's engagement and facilitate deeper learning of musical concepts (Barden, 2005; Fadhlurrahma et al., 2022). Such characters provide contextual backstories that allow children to explore music as a sensory experience and as a dramatic and narrative art form. This method supports enhanced cognitive development as children engage in storytelling and role-playing

and bolsters memory retention and emotional intelligence (Ovirianingsih et al., 2021; Saputra & Ikasari, 2021).

However, existing literature and practice often neglect integrating cultural elements and local wisdom through music education, which could significantly enrich its impact and relevance (Ariesandi, 2018; De Gomes & Sidi, 2022; Virganta, 2023). Additionally, there is a discernible gap in comprehensive empirical research that systematically evaluates the effectiveness of character-based methods in enhancing specific cognitive and emotional outcomes in young learners. This research gap highlights the need for studies validating and refining educational methodologies to enhance adaptability and effectiveness in diverse cultural contexts.

This study delineates the effects of implementing the characterization method with Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear in the Little Musician class at Favorite Music School Bandung. It will assess how this pedagogical approach influences early childhood development in musical skills, language acquisition, and emotional processing. By exploring these areas, the research aims to contribute valuable insights into optimizing music education strategies, ensuring they are engaging and developmentally appropriate for young learners. The goal is to provide empirical evidence that supports the integration of character-driven learning within music education to foster a well-rounded developmental process in early childhood.

## Methods

This research went through a qualitative research stage to reveal how the characterization methods used in music learning for early childhood correspond to the reality in the classroom. The study focused on applying the Music for Little Mozart's curriculum, chosen for its compatibility with the unique developmental traits of young learners and its innovative use of narrative characters, Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear, to foster engagement and learning. The rationale for employing a qualitative approach was to facilitate a nuanced exploration of the teaching and learning dynamics within the classroom, thus allowing for an in-depth analysis of both pedagogical processes and educational outcomes.

Data collection over six months encompassed observations, interviews, and documentation, supplemented by literature reviews to ensure a comprehensive data set. Observational methods primarily examined the interactions between students and the musical characters, focusing on how these interactions influenced learning behaviors and classroom ambiance. Interviews with key educational stakeholders, including the curriculum's implementers at Favorite Music School, provided insights into the reasons behind curriculum choices and their implementation strategies. Documentation included photographic evidence of classroom activities, capturing the engagement and responses of the children to the curriculum (Miles et al., 2014). Analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, which includes steps for data reduction, data display, and conclusion, ensuring that the findings were systematically derived and robustly supported. Validation of the data was achieved through source triangulation, comparing and corroborating findings across different data sources to establish the reliability of the conclusions drawn about the effectiveness of musician characterization in early childhood music education (Cohen et al., 2018).

## Result

This research involved teachers and all children in the Little Musician class, consisting of children aged 3-4 years. The results of this research consist of three sub-chapters, namely a description of learning preparation and implementation of learning using the characterization method and evaluation. This lesson always involves the characters Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear using dolls as props.

### 3.1. Preparation Using Method Characterization of Musicians in Early Childhood

Providing music material to children in the Little Musician class was carried out according to the level of students' abilities. To implement the characterization method, teachers must pay

attention to the teaching materials and the number of children in the class (Gaol et al., 2023). Before starting Little Musician class, the teacher prepares the materials, media, and tools that will be used. The tools used are musical instruments, such as claves, maracas, xylophones, keyboards, and tambourines (interview with Mr. Bona). The method prepared is the characterization method, so the teacher also prepares two dolls that will be used in each lesson. These dolls can be explained in Figure 1 below. As material reinforcement, the teacher also provides pictures that children can color at the end of the lesson. The image is, of course, adapted to the topic of discussion.



**Figure 1.** (a) Beethoven Bear doll, and (b) Mozart Mouse doll  
source: (Barden, 2005)

### 3.2. Implementation of Music Learning Using Method Characterization of Musicians in Early Childhood

In Music Discovery Book I, children are taught about the elements of music, namely, the first high and low notes. The teacher models the notes on the keyboard and then adapts them to animal sounds. For example, lions have a low roar, while birds have a high pitch when they sing. After that, children are read stories or fairy tales about dolls of Beethoven Bear and Mozart Mouse who accompany them in learning music. It is said that there was a bear named Beethoven Bear. He is very fond of low notes. Then, there was a mouse named Mozart Mouse, where the mouse liked high notes. Through this perception, children are expected to be able to identify high and low tones.

The learning method used in this class is characterization or role-playing. When they sing songs that sound about high notes, children will imitate the way Mozart's character, Mouse, speaks. They also wave their hands up to represent the high note. However, if they sing songs with low notes, they will sing while imitating the character of Beethoven Bear's voice, bending slightly and waving their hands downwards. Just like when singing a song containing high notes, this movement represents the low timbre of Beethoven Bear's voice.

Teachers use musical instruments to help children understand the character of high-pitch and low-pitch, one of which is the xylophone. The xylophone is a musical instrument played by striking, and it generally consists of one octave of the major scale. Children can sound high notes by hitting the small plate, while the large plate is for lower notes.



Figure 2. Children play high and low sound using Mozart and Beethoven doll  
(Documentation: Mastri Dihita Sagala, 2022)

In Figure 2. it can be seen that the child plays high and low notes on keyboard instruments. The dolls can also represent High and low sounds on keyboard instruments. The teacher directs the children to take turns in their respective roles. If the child is positioned to the right of the keyboard, the child will sound a low tone. Meanwhile, if the child is in the position to the left of the keyboard, then the child will role as Beethoven, who liked low notes. If the child successfully plays his role as Mozart's Mouse or Beethoven's Bear, the teacher will invite the children to clap and appreciate that success. If the children already understand high and low notes, the teacher will provide pictures for the children to color. The image is of Mozart's Mouse standing on a high note xylophone and the temporary Beethoven standing on a low note.

Mozart's Mouse character and Beethoven's Bear were again presented in the lesson. The teacher then invites the children to pay attention to things around them related to loud and soft sounds. The teacher gives pictures to be found in Book I. There is a picture of a lion and a baby sleeping. Then, the teacher asks questions about the sound volume produced by the voices of lions and sleeping babies. The children immediately responded and imitated the sound of a lion roaring, followed by the sound of a baby sleeping. Based on this activity, children can conclude that a lion's voice produces a loud sound, while a sleeping baby produces a soft sound.

Previously, the teacher and children had agreed that Mozart Mouse liked soft, temporary Beethoven Bear loves loud noises. The teacher divides the class into two groups based on the characters and distributes musical instruments to each child. This characterization method indirectly requires children to be patient in waiting for the right time for the child to play a role (Nurarifiati & Astini, 2023). This activity does not need to pay attention to the number of children to play the characters. The song contains poetry, such as instructions for playing a musical instrument with a soft and loud sound. Playing music can be done by singing together while making movements that follow the song's rhythm (Utomo & Ardiyarta, 2013). When the song contains poetry about soft notes, the children playing the role of Mozart Mouse will play the musical instrument softly. However, if the song lyrics contain loud sounds, the children will play the role of Beethoven Bear and play musical instruments loudly. This activity is carried out alternately so that children can experience playing the roles of these two characters, understand their characteristics, and learn how to produce soft and loud sounds. The lesson ended again with a coloring activity, namely a picture of a lion and a sleeping baby, representing loud and soft sounds.

The following material is to recognize slow tempo and fast tempo. First, the child will be stimulated through questions about the walking speed between mouse deer and snails. The child answered that the mouse deer walked faster than the snail. The teacher also asked about other things close to the child's surroundings. The teacher asked what would be faster if you wanted to go to Favore Music School on foot or by car. Spontaneously, the child answered by using a car. These two statements can conclude that children know the difference between fast and slow tempo.

To implement this method into music learning, the teacher again uses characterization involving the Mozart Mouse doll and Beethoven Bear. The teacher said that there was a mouse who wanted to steal the bear's belongings. The teacher plays music provided in the textbook, which contains the story. While the song plays, the children act out the drama of the mouse stealing the bear's belongings. The teacher asks one child to be a sleeping bear and the rest of the mice. Next, the child rotates around the bear. The music played has a slow tempo, while the child pads follow the tempo of the music. Then, a child who played the role of a mouse took the bear's possession. The tempo of the music changes to faster. Children express their joy as they have succeeded in getting the bear's belongings. Not long after, the music slowed again like that scary sound mark that the bear woke up and realized his belongings had been lost. The bear realized that little mice had stolen his belongings. Finally, the bear runs after the thief's mice and the music sounds fast. All the children ran around until the classroom atmosphere was so busy that the bear got a mouse who stole his things. This activity can be repeated by changing the roles of each child, but the teacher still has to pay attention to time.

The drama can be performed several times so children can change roles and feel the music's tempo changes in each scene. At the end of the learning activity, children process coloring a picture in which Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear are riding in a car with two flags on the right and left sides that say slow and fast, namely slow and fast. The following is an overview of the coloring activity.

### 3.3. Evaluation of Music Learning Using Method Characterization of Musicians in Early Childhood

Evaluation means knowing the success of a program or what has been done. Evaluation is carried out through the Little Musician Class music concert performance. Concerts are held at the end of the semester (interview with Mr. Bona). Before the concert, they practiced together, guided by the teacher. At the concert, they wore vests like the costumes Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear wore.



Figure 3. Performance Little Musician class (Documentation: Mastri Dihita Sagala, 2022)

As shown in Figure 3, learning evaluation was carried out through their performance at the Favore Music School concert. Children perform musical works by singing while playing musical instruments. They performed "Hello Song" while playing the tempo using claves. They also performed the song "High and Low Sounds" while performing their learned movements—the final performance.

## Discussion

Applying character-based learning methods in early childhood music education, mainly through the Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear characters in the Little Musician class, offers a profound way to engage young learners. This approach effectively synthesizes elements of play, imagination, and music education to foster cognitive, linguistic, and emotional development, aligning with contemporary educational theories that emphasize the importance of holistic developmental techniques in early education (Anastasya & Sukmayadi, 2023; Nurhayati, 2019). The strategic use of storytelling and role play, combined with musical interaction, not only

captivates and maintains children's interest but also promotes a deeper emotional connection to the learning material, thereby enhancing retention and comprehension (Imanizar et al., 2021; Rambe & Apriani, 2021). This integrative method proves especially valuable in cultivating verbal skills and emotional intelligence as the children interact with the puppets and music, engaging multiple senses and cognitive processes (Paggama et al., 2023; Riyadi & Budiman, 2023). Thus, the characterization approach in music education serves as a dynamic conduit for a comprehensive educational experience underpinned by the dual pillars of enjoyment and learning efficacy.

Our study's findings corroborate the efficacy of the Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear method in teaching fundamental musical concepts such as high and low tones, dynamics, and rhythmic patterns. Using character-based storytelling to introduce complex musical concepts is instrumental in making abstract ideas tangible for young learners (Amelia et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2017). It transcends traditional teaching methods by embedding musical education within a narrative context that is naturally engaging for children, thereby fostering not just cognitive understanding but also emotional and aesthetic appreciation of music (Triningsih et al., 2022; Viani & Ardipal, 2019). The data from the Little Musician class shows that this approach not only enhances musical knowledge but also bolsters the children's confidence and willingness to participate in musical activities, indicating a broader impact on their social skills and self-esteem. This holistic development is crucial for early childhood education, as it builds a foundation for academic skills and personal growth.

Our results affirm the significance of integrating imaginative play into learning frameworks when juxtaposed with existing literature on early childhood music education. Studies have consistently shown that music education can enhance cognitive functions and emotional intelligence, which are further enriched through character-based learning (Jaschke et al., 2018; Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2020). However, our study extends these findings by illustrating how specific storytelling and role-playing elements can amplify these benefits. This contrast with more conventional music education approaches, which often prioritize direct instruction and replication of musical notes and rhythms, offers a fresh perspective on the potential for the narrative to enrich the educational experience (Bautista et al., 2018; Sala & Gobet, 2020). Thus, the characterization method supports traditional educational goals and introduces a novel dimension to music learning that aligns deeply with young children's intrinsic play-based learning tendencies.

Moreover, the success of the characterization method in our study challenges some prevailing assumptions about early music education, particularly those that favor structured and early formal training. Unlike the approaches detailed by Medina & Barraza (2019) and van Vugt et al., (2021), which focus on the developmental impacts of structured musical instruction, our findings suggest that a narrative and character-driven approach can be equally effective. This method's ability to engage young learners on multiple sensory and emotional levels may offer a more profound and lasting impact on their overall musical and cognitive development than previously recognized. It prompts a reevaluation of early childhood music education paradigms, advocating for a balanced integration of structured and creative play-based methods.

As demonstrated in our findings, adopting character-based storytelling in music education necessitates a nuanced consideration of its application across diverse educational settings. While the benefits of such an approach are apparent, individual differences in learner engagement and the variability in cognitive, linguistic, and emotional development among young children suggest that customization of teaching strategies might be required (de Lima et al., 2022; Esteve-Faubel et al., 2024; Sritanto, 2022). Educators should be attuned to these differences and consider incorporating a flexible framework that allows for adaptations based on direct observations and feedback from children's interactions with the music education content. This adaptability not only enhances the effectiveness of the educational approach but also ensures that it can meet the diverse needs of early learners, fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

In light of these findings, the role of creative play in music education emerges as a critical component of early childhood development. The interaction of narrative elements with music education fosters creativity, enhances problem-solving skills, and supports social interaction among young learners (Agustin et al., 2022; Wardana & Nurfuadi, 2023). These skills are invaluable as they lay the groundwork for future academic and personal success, indicating that integrating such methods can have far-reaching implications beyond the music classroom. However, the balance between structured learning and creative exploration remains crucial for educators, who must strive to harness both benefits to optimize educational outcomes.

Conclusively, the successful implementation of the characterization method in the Little Musician class underscores its potential to significantly enhance early childhood educational outcomes, encompassing musical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. This method enriches the learning experience and equips young learners with the skills to navigate future educational and personal challenges (Johariah, 2021; Midas & Connie, 2021). The implications for future pedagogical strategies are profound, advocating for an education system that values and incorporates creativity and narrative in teaching foundational concepts. Further research is essential to explore how these findings can be generalized to other educational contexts and to assess the long-term impacts of such innovative educational practices on child development.

## Conclusion

This study successfully outlined and assessed the implementation of the Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear characterization methods at Favore Music School Bandung's Little Musician class, significantly influencing early childhood students' musical, linguistic, and emotional processing abilities. The primary objective—to describe the effects of these educational character methods on young learners—was thoroughly achieved, showcasing innovative pedagogical practices that fuse role-playing with music education to foster comprehensive developmental skills in young children. The findings indicated that the preparation and utilization of musical instruments and character-themed materials engaged the children effectively. The role-playing activities, notably through characters such as Mozart Mouse and Beethoven Bear, facilitated a deeper understanding of musical concepts like pitch and dynamics, enhancing not only their musical skills but also contributing to more affluent emotional and linguistic development, as evidenced by the enthusiastic participation in end-of-semester musical concerts. These findings suggest that incorporating narrative and creativity into the teaching of fundamental concepts can significantly enhance learning outcomes, highlighting the potential for character-based learning methods to enrich educational practices, particularly in early childhood education, and underscoring the importance of innovative approaches in educational settings aimed at holistically developing a child's abilities. However, the study's scope was confined to one educational institution, potentially influencing the generalizability of the results. It was limited to a single academic term, which may not fully capture long-term educational impacts. Future research should aim to expand the study to include multiple educational settings and extend the duration of observation better to understand the long-term effects of such pedagogical strategies, and further studies could explore the application of similar characterization methods across different age groups and learning environments to ascertain their effectiveness and adaptability in broader educational contexts fully.

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