

The Learning through Play Method in Basic Piano Instruction

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Abstract

This study is entitled The Play-Based Learning Method in Piano. The focus of the research is to describe the implementation of the play-based learning method in piano instruction and to evaluate its impact on student engagement, motivation, and the development of basic musical skills. This research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study design. The research subjects are piano students with beginner-level skills, enrolled in a non-formal music education institution. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed through reduction, categorization, interpretation, and validation. The findings show that the play-based learning method successfully created an enjoyable piano learning experience, encouraged understanding of pitch, rhythm, and dynamics, and enhanced children's self-confidence and musical expression. All three students demonstrated consistent progress in both technical and affective aspects throughout the learning process. Thus, this method is considered relevant and effective for use in beginner-level piano instruction within non-formal educational settings.

Keywords

Methods, Learning and Play, Piano Learning



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INTRODUCTION

In educational practice, music serves not only as a means of entertainment but also as a medium for character formation and potential development from an early age. Along with the growing public interest in music education, instrumental learning is now conducted not only in formal schools but also in nonformal institutions such as music courses. Various age groups participate in music courses, including children aged 6–9 years. At this developmental stage, children demonstrate a strong interest in musical activities and are in an optimal period for learning basic musical concepts. One of the musical instruments commonly used is the piano. This instrument is a polyphonic instrument capable of playing melody and harmony simultaneously, making it one of the primary tools for basic music learning.

Although interest in music courses continues to increase, the learning approaches implemented in many nonformal music courses are often not fully aligned with pedagogical

principles appropriate for children aged 6–9 years. According to Ma (2025) and Yang (2023), piano instruction is still largely dominated by conventional methods that emphasize repetitive technical exercises, notation memorization, and evaluation based on immediate results. This indicates that such approaches have the potential to cause boredom, reduce learning motivation, and hinder children's musical expression. In fact, at the age of 6–9 years, children are in the concrete operational stage (Piaget), in which they learn most effectively through direct experiences, play-based activities, and physical and emotional involvement in the learning process. The mismatch between the learning characteristics provided and children's learning needs indicates a gap in music education practices, particularly in the context of instrumental learning in nonformal institutions. This condition emphasizes the importance of developing alternative methods that are more adaptive, enjoyable, and relevant to children's developmental stages.

The main problem arising from this condition is the suboptimal learning approach used in piano instruction, particularly in addressing the comprehensive learning needs of children aged 6–9 years. The piano as a musical instrument has its own complexity because it involves coordination between the left and right hands, reading notation on two staves (*treble clef* and *bass clef*), as well as understanding dynamics, tempo, and musical expression simultaneously. Children aged 6–9 years, who are still developing cognitively and motorically, require learning strategies that are gradual, contextual, and enjoyable. When piano instruction is conducted using an approach that is overly technical and abstract, children often feel overwhelmed when attempting to understand and practice various musical components simultaneously. As a result, the learning process becomes not only technically difficult but also emotionally burdensome. This situation can lead to decreased interest, low self-confidence, and inhibited musical development, even though this age period is crucial for establishing a strong musical foundation.

One relevant approach to addressing the challenges of piano learning among children aged 6–9 years is the *learning through play* method. Sormin and Pasaribu (2021) state that the learning-through-play approach has been widely implemented in children's education because it can create a learning atmosphere that is both enjoyable and meaningful. According to Nurdiyanti et al. (2024), this approach can increase children's interest and motivation because learning activities are packaged in the form of games, making the learning atmosphere enjoyable and preventing monotony. Consequently, children become more motivated to participate actively and achieve learning objectives.

In the context of children aged 6–9 years who are in the concrete developmental stage, play is not merely a form of entertainment but also serves as a medium for exploring knowledge, expressing emotions, and developing concepts through direct experiences. Playing encourages children to move actively, experiment, and interact with their environment, including sounds and the piano. Therefore, when elements of play are pedagogically integrated into the piano learning process, children not only develop technical skills but also enhance their musical imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, and self-confidence. In this regard, teachers play an important

role as facilitators who can guide play activities toward learning achievement without eliminating the sense of enjoyment that is central to this approach.

In practice, the learning-through-play method can be concretely implemented in piano instruction through various creative and interactive activities. For example, the introduction of musical notes and key positions can be conducted using visual media such as colors and pictures, as well as through games that match sounds with story characters. Children can also be encouraged to imitate rhythms through body movements and tap rhythmic patterns. All of these activities not only enrich children's musical experiences but also strengthen motor coordination, deepen their understanding of basic musical concepts, and develop social skills such as taking turns, cooperating, and listening to one another. By presenting music as something lively and enjoyable, this approach can foster intrinsic motivation and transform piano learning into a positive and memorable experience for children. In the long term, children who learn music through play-based approaches are more likely to maintain their interest and develop their musical potential in a sustainable manner.

Although the learning-through-play approach has been widely used in children's education, studies specifically exploring its implementation in piano instruction at nonformal music courses remain limited in the literature. In fact, the complexity of the piano requires an approach that is consistent with children's developmental stages. Based on these considerations, this study aims to describe the implementation of the learning-through-play method in piano instruction for children aged 6–9 years and to evaluate its impact on their engagement, motivation, and basic musical skills.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the implementation of the learning-through-play method in piano instruction for children aged 6–9 years. Liana (2020), Nurrisa et al. (2025), and Sari (2022) explain that qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behaviors. Qualitative research is descriptive in nature and tends to employ in-depth analysis. Processes and meanings from the subjects' perspectives are emphasized in qualitative research. Furthermore, Malahati et al. (2023) state that a case study design emphasizes an in-depth examination of a particular problem. Therefore, this approach enables the researcher to explore in depth the processes, meanings, emotional responses, and development of children's musical skills during piano learning.

The research subjects consisted of eight children aged 6–9 years who attended piano lessons at a music course institution in Bandung. The subjects were selected purposively based on age criteria. Data were collected through participatory observations conducted during 5–6 learning sessions, in-depth interviews with piano teachers and students' parents, and documentation. The observation instrument focused on children's involvement in the learning process, their responses to play-based activities, and the development of piano-playing skills, which were observed qualitatively. Interviews were conducted to explore teachers' and parents'

perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the method, as well as the changes experienced throughout the learning period. The data were analyzed using data reduction, thematic categorization, and triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of the findings..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Learning-through-Play Method in Piano Instruction

The findings of this study are discussed beginning with the first meeting, which focused on introducing piano keys and pitch through visual games. The teacher used colored stickers attached to the piano keys and conducted a pitch-guessing game based on the colors. The children showed a high level of interest, began to recognize the positions of the keys, and responded to the sounds with enthusiasm. During the second meeting, rhythmic practice was conducted through body movements and hand clapping while following rhythmic patterns. The children learned to recognize the concept of tempo, practiced concentration, and adjusted their movements to the sounds produced. The third meeting introduced role-playing activities. The children were encouraged to express stories through simple melodies played improvisationally. Their confidence increased as they interpreted sounds according to their own perspectives. During the fourth meeting, rhythm and melody games were combined. The song provided was **Lightly Row**. The children followed the predetermined rhythmic patterns and then responded with appropriate melodic phrases. This process trained their auditory perception, coordination, and musical creativity. The fifth meeting followed the same approach as the fourth meeting, but a different song was provided. During the sixth meeting, evaluation was conducted through individual performances. The children performed short songs that they had learned. The teacher noted that all three children performed confidently and were able to demonstrate improved musical expression.

Overall, classroom implementation showed that the learning-through-play approach in an individual learning format was able to increase children's engagement, understanding of basic musical concepts, and confidence in playing the piano. The three subjects demonstrated positive and consistent development throughout the learning process. These findings reinforce the view that this approach is appropriate for children with basic levels of musical ability and has the potential to support long-term music learning.

In addition to the musical skills observed throughout the learning process, this study also found significant changes in the attitudes of each subject. Children who initially demonstrated passive behavior, tended to remain quiet, or lacked confidence when beginning the sessions gradually became more open, enthusiastic, and active in responding to the teacher's instructions. Verbal and nonverbal interactions between the children and the teacher also increased, particularly during role-playing activities or when the children were asked to communicate musical ideas based on stories. This indicates that the learning-through-play method affects not only technical development but also children's affective and social development. The children's ability to express ideas through music, respond to praise, and manage mistakes during practice sessions represents an important component of

comprehensive music education. Thus, the impact of this method extends beyond merely mastering a musical instrument.

Results of the Implementation of the Learning-through-Play Method in Piano Instruction

The results showed that the implementation of the learning-through-play method successfully increased children's active participation in the piano learning process. Gradually, children's technical skills in recognizing notation, identifying hand positions, and playing simple songs improved. The teacher organized the learning process progressively by incorporating play elements directly related to the learning materials, such as using animal stories to introduce rhythmic patterns or imitation-sound games as a means of practicing dynamics.

Interviews with parents revealed that the children tended to be more enthusiastic about attending piano lessons when the play-based method was implemented. Parents reported that their children even began to take the initiative to practice at home without being forced. The researcher, who also served as the teacher, stated that the classroom atmosphere became more lively and that the children became more open in expressing their difficulties or asking questions. The implementation of this method also affected the children's non-musical skills. For example, the children demonstrated improvements in concentration and emotional regulation when facing technical difficulties. Some children who were initially passive became more active and communicative. This indicates that the learning-through-play method is not only effective in a musical context but also contributes to children's holistic development.

Nevertheless, several challenges were encountered by the teacher in implementing this method. One of the main challenges was the limited duration of learning sessions, which generally lasted only 30–45 minutes per meeting. The teacher therefore had to design activities that were intensive while remaining enjoyable. Another challenge involved differences in children's personalities and levels of readiness, requiring the teacher to apply a differentiated approach. Not all children immediately responded positively to play-based methods, particularly those who were accustomed to conventional learning. Therefore, adaptation and individualized approaches were necessary.

Discussion

Piano instruction for children aged 6–9 years needs to consider their developmental stages comprehensively, including their physical, cognitive, and emotional development. The findings of this study are consistent with Lubis et al. (2024), Nasution et al. (2023), and Sinta Zakiyah et al. (2024), who explain that children's development between the ages of 6 and 12 encompasses physical development, fine and gross motor development, intellectual development, and emotional development. Khotimah and Agustini (2023) and Wardani (2022) further explain that at this stage, children can understand concepts more easily through direct experiences and concrete activities.

In this piano learning study, this was reflected in the ability of children in this age group to coordinate fine motor movements, such as pressing piano keys with their fingers, which

represents a continuation of the development of larger muscles that have developed since early childhood. At this stage, children not only demonstrate physical maturity in controlling movements with greater precision but also begin to develop logical thinking, concentration, and emotional appreciation of music. Therefore, piano learning is highly relevant and effective in supporting children's overall development during this age range.

The implementation of the learning-through-play method in piano instruction provided children with opportunities to manipulate sounds directly, connect musical symbols with concrete actions, and develop musical understanding through contextual processes. Activities such as introducing piano keys using colored stickers, playing rhythm games, and accompanying stories with music provided multisensory stimulation that was appropriate to children's learning characteristics, thereby supporting the development of musical understanding gradually and naturally.

Furthermore, scaffolding is important because it can stimulate students' active engagement in the learning process. Students are provided with guidance so that they can work more effectively toward achieving learning objectives, with the guidance adjusted to their needs throughout the learning process (Adinda et al., 2024; Purwasih & Rahmadhani, 2022). The children in this study demonstrated significant improvement when the teacher provided guidance through structured play activities. The play process functioned not only as a tool for developing musical understanding but also as a medium for building social interaction and communication between the teacher and the children. During each session, the teacher played an important role as a facilitator by providing support when children experienced difficulties while also giving them space to explore and discover their own musical ideas.

Furthermore, music learning should not be viewed merely as the transmission of technical skills but also as an effort to establish emotional connections and musical meaning (Váradi, 2022; Varner, 2024). This is consistent with the findings of this study, which showed that children who actively participated in musical play demonstrated high emotional engagement, ranging from facial expressions when playing particular notes to the courage to interpret stories through music. This indicates that the learning-through-play method supports affective and expressive aspects of music learning. Therefore, this approach not only creates an effective learning experience but also makes the learning process personally meaningful for the children involved. Rhythm-playing activities and melodic improvisation in this study provided children with opportunities to develop audiation skills through repeated, direct, and enjoyable experiences.

In addition, the development of musical elements such as tempo, dynamics, and phrasing also appeared to improve as children's involvement in activities requiring expressive control and concentration increased. The children learned to adjust their body movements to particular tempos, recognize changes in dynamics during performance, and create simple melodies according to the atmosphere of a story. These findings demonstrate that the learning-

through-play method supports not only cognitive and affective development but also the development of essential musical skills through a natural and progressive approach.

The discussion of this study strengthens the argument that the learning-through-play method is a relevant strategy for piano instruction. Moreover, in the context of nonformal music courses, where the pressure of formal examinations is less dominant, this approach provides greater opportunities for creativity and exploration..

CONCLUSION

Implementing a learning-through-play method in piano instruction for children aged 6–9 has proven effective in enhancing the quality of the learning process. Piano lessons are conducted through enjoyable yet structured activities, such as visual-based games for piano key recognition, body-rhythm exercises linked to piano tempo patterns, and the expression of stories through simple, improvised melodies. The individualized nature of the lessons provides children with optimal opportunities to personally explore sound, tempo, and dynamics. Research subjects demonstrated significant progress in mastering basic piano skills, understanding simple musical structures, and displaying greater confidence in musical expression. Furthermore, the children's emotional engagement and enthusiasm for piano learning increased progressively with each session. Consequently, the learning-through-play method warrants wider application in beginner-level piano instruction, particularly within non-formal music schools that require an approach that is flexible and fun, yet pedagogically sound.

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