Case Study

Musical Exploration, Imitation, and Familiar Songs in Four-Year-Old Beginners' Drum Learning at a Private Music School

Journal of Early Childhood Education Research
ISSN 3123-4143
Vol. 2 (2), pp.75-85, 2026
https://doi.org/10.58230/jecer.v2i2.646
© 2026 SSED Publications

Piter Sembiring[1], Sandie Gunara[2]

[12] Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

Abstract

Purpose	:	Research on early childhood music learning has examined musical play and participation, but less is known about how exploration, imitation, and everyday musical experience interact during beginning drum instruction. This study examined how four-year-old beginners participated in drum learning through these processes.
Methodology	:	An instrumental qualitative case study was conducted in a private music school in West Java, Indonesia, involving eight four-year-old beginners across six approximately 35-minute sessions. Data comprised classroom observations and researcher field notes and were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis.
Results	:	Three themes were identified: exploratory encounters with the drum set, imitation through teacher guidance, and participation through familiar songs. The findings show that exploration and imitation were recursive rather than sequential, with children moving between teacher-guided rhythmic action and self-directed experimentation. Familiar songs provided recognizable musical references for simple rhythmic participation.
Conclusions	:	The study contributes a context-specific account of early drum learning as an interaction between children's agency and teacher mediation, rather than a linear progression toward technical performance. The findings highlight the value of allowing structured opportunities for exploration alongside teacher-guided rhythmic activity.

Keywords: early childhood music education, drum learning, musical exploration, imitation, familiar songs.

Corresponding Author:
Piter Sembiring, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia.
Email piter.sembiring06@gmail.com

Article History
Received: 21 September, 2026
Accepted: 14 November, 2026
Published: 16 November, 2026

© 2026 JECER. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution–ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-SA 4.0). https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0

1. Introduction

Early childhood music learning develops through children's active engagement with sound, movement, objects, and other people. During this period, musical activity is not limited to formal instruction; children also participate in music through play, movement, listening, vocalization, and spontaneous responses to their surrounding musical environments. Research in early childhood music education has consequently highlighted the ways in which children construct musical experiences through interaction with their environments rather than functioning solely as recipients of teacher-directed instruction (Young, 2016). This perspective is particularly relevant to instrumental learning among very young beginners, whose initial encounters with an instrument may involve exploratory activity alongside emerging forms of structured musical engagement.

Exploration is particularly evident when children encounter an unfamiliar musical instrument. In early childhood settings, musical play may involve children initiating actions, experimenting with sound, and negotiating how they participate, while teachers provide support that can progressively structure the activity without entirely constraining children's autonomy (Koutsoupidou, 2020). In the context of drum learning, such activity may involve touching different components of the drum set, striking accessible surfaces, comparing the sounds produced, and shifting between actions before children are able to reproduce a prescribed rhythmic pattern. However, exploratory behavior should not be interpreted automatically as either evidence of learning or merely as off-task activity. Its pedagogical significance depends on how exploratory actions become connected to subsequent interaction, guidance, and musical participation. This distinction is particularly important in beginner drum

lessons, where exploration and instruction may occur concurrently within the same learning episode.

A related process is imitation. Young children may observe a teacher's gestures, rhythmic patterns, and playing procedures and subsequently attempt to reproduce aspects of what they have observed. This process can be situated within a sociocultural account of learning, in which development is mediated through interaction with more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1980). More specifically, adult support can structure children's participation by temporarily reducing task demands and progressively transferring responsibility to the learner Wood et al (1976), while guided participation emphasizes children's involvement in activities with more experienced partners (Rogoff, 1990). These perspectives are particularly relevant to early drum learning because rhythmic performance requires children to coordinate bodily movements with temporal structures while simultaneously attending to another person's demonstration.

Nevertheless, the existing literature provides limited insight into how these processes unfold within beginner drum instruction for very young children. Research involving preschool children has examined rhythmic synchronization in social contexts, demonstrating the relevance of interpersonal interaction to children's emerging rhythmic coordination (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2009). Research on active drumming experience among infants, in contrast, has focused on sensitivity to audiovisual synchrony rather than on teacher-led instrumental instruction (Gerson et al., 2015). Research in private music education has also begun to examine creative and interactive approaches to drum pedagogy, including exploratory and improvisatory activities, although these studies have involved learners who are older than those examined in the present study (Sembiring et al., 2025; Sembiring & Milyartini, 2025). Taken together, these studies indicate that children's rhythmic coordination, bodily engagement, and social participation have received scholarly attention. Less well documented, however, is how four-year-old beginners move between spontaneous exploration, imitation of a teacher's actions, teacher-assisted performance, and increasingly independent attempts within actual drum lessons.

A further issue concerns the relationship between children's everyday musical experiences and their participation in beginner instrumental learning. Young children encounter music across multiple contexts, including family life, media, peer interactions, and educational settings. Familiar musical material may therefore provide a recognizable point of reference through which children participate in classroom activities, even when they are not yet able to reproduce the original instrumental patterns. Nevertheless, familiarity with a song should not in itself be interpreted as evidence of increased motivation, confidence, or learning. What requires closer examination is how children respond when familiar music is introduced and how such responses become incorporated into their participation in the lesson.

The present study addresses this gap through a qualitative case study of four-year-old beginner drum students in a private music school in Bandung, Indonesia. The study examines three interconnected processes observed during the lessons: children's exploratory encounters with the drum set, their imitative responses to teacher demonstrations and assistance, and their participation when familiar songs were incorporated into the learning activities. Rather than conceptualizing these processes as fixed or sequential developmental stages, the study examines how they emerged, overlapped, and shifted during classroom interaction. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: How do four-year-old beginner drum students engage in exploratory interactions with the drum set during private music lessons? How does imitation of teacher demonstrations unfold during early drum learning? How do familiar songs become connected to children's participation in beginner drum learning?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes a context-sensitive account of how very young beginners participate in drum learning as both exploratory and socially mediated activity. Rather than assuming that any single pedagogical approach is universally more effective, the study examines how exploration, imitation, teacher support, and familiar musical experiences are enacted within a specific private music learning context. In doing so, it seeks to

extend current discussion of early instrumental learning by foregrounding the interaction between children's spontaneous musical activity and the social guidance provided during beginner drum instruction.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how very young beginner drum students participated in musical learning within a natural instructional setting. Following Yin (2017), the study was designed as a single-case embedded study, in which the bounded case comprised six beginner drum-learning sessions involving eight four-year-old students at a private music school in Bandung, Indonesia. The primary focus was the interactional process through which children engaged with the drum set, responded to teacher demonstrations, received assistance, and participated in activities involving familiar songs. The embedded units of analysis were therefore interactional episodes in which exploration, imitation, teacher support, or engagement with familiar musical material became observable.

The case was bounded by the learning setting, participants, instructional context, and period of observation. Rather than treating each child as a separate case, the study examined the collective learning process within the bounded instructional context. This design was selected because the purpose was not to evaluate the effectiveness of a particular teaching intervention, but to develop a contextual understanding of how musical participation unfolded during early drum learning.

2.2 Participants and Research Setting

The participants were eight four-year-old children who were beginning to learn the drum set in private music school in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. All participants were classified as beginner learners and had no prior formal experience playing the drums. Participants were selected purposively because they represented the age and learning stage relevant to the research questions, namely very young children who were entering instrumental drum learning. The study was conducted within the participants' regular drum-learning setting rather than in an experimentally controlled environment. The lessons provided opportunities for children to encounter the drum set, observe teacher demonstrations, attempt rhythmic actions, receive assistance, and respond to musical material introduced during the sessions. Participant characteristics requiring verification before submission: gender distribution, age in months, prior informal musical exposure, recruitment procedure, lesson format (individual or group), number of available drum kits, and attendance across the six sessions. These details should be reported only from the original research records.

2.3 Researcher Positionality

Articles were assessed against pre-specified criteria. Inclusion criteria: (1) publication between 2020 and 2026; (2) focus on children aged 0–8 years in ECE, kindergarten, or early primary settings; (3) PjBL implemented as the primary or co-primary instructional approach; (4) at least one cognitive outcome variable explicitly measured or synthesised. Exclusion criteria: (1) non-empirical opinion articles or editorials; (2) studies addressing exclusively affective or psychomotor outcomes without any cognitive component; (3) non-peer-reviewed grey literature; (4) full text inaccessible after two retrieval attempts.

The researcher was also the drum teacher who conducted the observed lessons. This dual role positioned the researcher as both an active participant in the instructional process and the primary researcher responsible for documenting and interpreting the children's learning activities. The researcher therefore did not occupy the position of a detached observer. Instead, the classroom interactions analyzed in this study occurred within the researcher's regular teaching practice.

This position provided the researcher with direct access to the children's learning processes and enabled close observation of their responses to demonstrations, assistance, and musical activities. At the same time, the dual role created a potential for interpretive bias

because the researcher's teaching decisions and expectations could influence both the classroom interactions and the subsequent interpretation of the data. To address this concern, the researcher maintained a reflexive orientation throughout the analysis by distinguishing descriptive observations from subsequent interpretation and by repeatedly examining the observation records during coding and theme development. The researcher's role as teacher was therefore treated as part of the case context rather than as a condition to be separated from the data. The study does not claim to provide an objective account independent of the researcher; instead, it presents an interpretive account of children's participation within a teacher-researcher instructional context.

2.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through systematic classroom observation and researcher field notes across six drum-learning sessions, with each session lasting approximately 35 minutes. The observations focused on three processes corresponding to the research questions: children's exploratory interactions with the drum set, their responses to teacher demonstrations and assistance, and their participation when familiar songs were incorporated into the lesson. During each session, the researcher recorded observable actions, verbal exchanges, responses to teacher demonstrations, attempts to reproduce rhythmic patterns, requests for assistance, and changes in children's interaction with the instrument. Particular attention was given to interactional episodes in which children shifted between spontaneous exploration and teacher-guided activity. Verbal utterances that were relevant to the learning process were recorded in the observation notes. To maintain methodological consistency, parent conversations, video documentation, and interviews are not treated as sources of analytic data in the revised manuscript unless corresponding records are available and are reported systematically in the Results. The familiar-songs theme is based on children's observed comments and responses during the lessons rather than on retrospective reports from parents. The six sessions differed in instructional emphasis, as shown in Table 1. The table presents the context of the observations only; interpretations of children's responses are reported separately in the Results.

Table 1. Session Sequence and Primary Instructional Focus

Session	Primary instructional focus
1	Familiarization with the drum set and its components
2	Basic rhythmic imitation
3	Tempo awareness and motor coordination
4	Activities incorporating familiar songs
5	Exploratory rhythmic playing
6	Guided interaction and consolidation of learned activities

2.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Rather than treating thematic analysis as a process of "data reduction," the analysis focused on developing and refining patterns of meaning across the observation records and field notes.

The analysis proceeded through five interconnected stages. First, the researcher familiarized himself with the observation records and field notes by repeatedly reviewing the material and identifying episodes relevant to the research questions. Second, initial codes were generated from observable actions, verbal responses, and interactional sequences. Examples included *touching and striking unfamiliar drum components*, *observing teacher hand movements*, *requesting assistance*, *reproducing a demonstrated rhythm*, and *recognizing a familiar song*. Third, related codes were compared and organized into broader patterns. Fourth, candidate themes were reviewed against the dataset to determine whether they formed coherent patterns while remaining distinct from one another. Finally, the themes were defined and named in relation to the research questions and the observed learning context.

The research questions informed the analytical focus but did not determine the final themes in advance. The analysis was therefore data-informed rather than based on a fixed

coding scheme. Although exploration, imitation, and familiar songs were identified as areas of interest from the outset, the boundaries, characteristics, and relationships among these themes were refined through repeated engagement with the observation data. This distinction is important because the themes should not be presented as having simply been imposed by the research objectives.

The final analysis generated three themes: (1) exploratory encounters with the drum set, (2) imitation through teacher observation and assistance, and (3) participation through familiar songs. These themes were subsequently used to organize the Results and to support interpretation in the Discussion.

Table 2. Illustrative Coding Process

Data extract	Initial code	Analytic focus	Primary instructional focus
Student B: "Can I try it, Mr.?"	Requesting permission to explore	Initial interaction with unfamiliar instrument	Exploratory encounters
Student C: "Mr., what is that?"	Identifying unfamiliar drum component	Curiosity about instrument features	Exploratory encounters
Student D: "Mr, how did you play that part just now?"	Seeking procedural clarification	Attention to teacher demonstration	Imitation through teacher guidance
Teacher guides the child's hands while repeating "Right... Left..."	Physical and verbal assistance	Supported reproduction of a demonstrated action	Imitation through teacher guidance
Student A: "I know this song, Mr!"	Recognition of familiar musical material	Connection between prior musical knowledge and classroom activity	Familiar songs

2.5 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

The researcher also served as the teacher and sole analyst; particular attention was given to reflexivity and transparency during data interpretation. Rather than relying on source triangulation as evidence of objectivity, the study documented the analytic process from the initial observation records through coding, category development, and theme refinement. The researcher repeatedly reviewed the field notes to distinguish directly observed behaviours from interpretive comments. Descriptions of children's actions, verbal responses, and interactions with the teacher were retained as the primary empirical basis, while broader interpretations were developed only during the thematic analysis. An analytic record was maintained to document coding decisions and revisions to candidate themes during the analysis process. No peer debriefing, independent second coding, or external review of the coded material was conducted. This limitation is acknowledged when interpreting the findings, particularly because the researcher's simultaneous roles as teacher and analyst may have influenced which classroom events received greater attention and how those events were interpreted.

3. Results

3.1 Exploratory Encounters with the Drum Set

At the beginning of the observed lessons, all eight children approached the drum set and began interacting with its different components. Before using the drumsticks, they primarily explored the instrument with their hands. Their initial actions included touching and striking accessible surfaces, particularly the snare drum and the bass-drum area. When interacting with

the bass-drum pedal, the children attempted to press it with their hands rather than operating it with their feet. These early actions occurred before the children were introduced to more structured playing procedures.

The children also examined the physical features of the instrument before and during their initial attempts to play. They looked closely at the drums, toms, and cymbals and directed questions to the teacher about unfamiliar components. Student A pointed to one part of the drum set and asked, "*What is this, Mr.?*" Student B similarly asked, *"Can I try it, Mr.?"* After the teacher gave permission, the children continued to strike parts of the drum set that were within reach. The observation notes recorded repeated striking of the snare drum and toms, with children attending to differences in the sounds produced, including variations in loudness.

At this stage, the children's playing consisted of irregular strikes rather than recognizable rhythmic patterns. The direction, timing, and force of the strikes changed from one action to another. The children also varied the intensity of their playing, producing louder and softer sounds as they moved between different parts of the instrument. These actions occurred before the introduction of a consistent rhythmic pattern or formal technique.

The teacher allowed the children to continue interacting with the instrument while gradually introducing more structured elements of playing. The teacher adjusted their seating positions, introduced the drumsticks, and provided simple verbal directions such as *"here, sit here," "here's the stick,"* and *"try hitting it gently."* Despite this guidance, the children continued to use their hands during the early exploration of the instrument.

Exploration also extended to parts of the drum set that were less immediately accessible. When the children noticed the crash cymbal, Student C pointed toward it and asked, *"Mr., what is that?"* The teacher identified the instrument component and allowed the children to try it. After striking the cymbal, the children responded to its louder and sharper sound. One child laughed and repeatedly struck the cymbal, after which Student D commented, *"Wow, that's really loud, Mr!"* These episodes showed that the children's early interaction with the drum set involved repeated physical contact, attention to differences in sound, and verbal questions about unfamiliar components.

3.2 Imitation Through Teacher Demonstration and Assistance

Following the initial exploration of the drum set, the lessons included more structured demonstrations by the teacher. The teacher first helped the children adjust their seating positions and introduced the basic way of holding the drumsticks. The teacher then demonstrated a simple rhythmic pattern while saying, *"I'll play a few beats; you follow along."* The demonstrated pattern consisted of alternating right- and left-hand strokes on the centre of the snare drum at a slow and steady tempo. During the demonstration, the teacher repeated the verbal cues, *"Right, left, right, left."*

During these demonstrations, the children often watched the teacher before attempting to play. Their attention was directed toward the movement of the teacher's hands, the position of the drumsticks, and the coordination of the teacher's body during the demonstration. After the teacher said, *"Alright, let's try that one now,"* the children attempted to reproduce the demonstrated pattern while continuing to look at the teacher's movements.

As the children attempted to reproduce the pattern, they adjusted the direction and sequence of their strokes in response to the teacher's movements. Their playing did not always remain temporally consistent, and right- and left-hand movements were sometimes confused when the teacher used the verbal cues *"Right" and "Left."* When a child stopped after making an incorrect movement, the child often returned attention to the teacher's hands before attempting the pattern again. During these attempts, the teacher maintained a relatively slow tempo of approximately 60–70 BPM to support the children's attempts to follow the demonstrated movement sequence.

Difficulty became more apparent after repeated attempts, particularly when children lost the established tempo or departed from the demonstrated pattern. The children nevertheless continued to return to the teacher's demonstration. At one point, one student directly requested assistance by asking, *Student E: "Mr, how did you play that part just now?"*

The teacher responded by combining verbal explanation with physical guidance. The teacher held the child's hands and guided the striking movements slowly while continuing to provide the verbal sequence, "Right... Left... Right... Left..." After receiving this assistance several times, the child asked the teacher to release the hands and attempted the pattern independently. Following several minutes of independent playing, the child moved away from the demonstrated tempo and began producing a freer sequence of drum sounds.

The observed interaction between demonstration, assistance, and independent attempts was also accompanied by verbal reinforcement. When a child successfully followed a simple pattern, the teacher responded with comments such as *"That's right, good!"* and *"Keep going, that's very good."* The teacher also clapped while guiding the children's rhythmic playing. During these exchanges, children sometimes smiled, looked toward the teacher, and then returned their attention to the drum set. The observations therefore recorded imitation as an interactional sequence involving demonstration, attempted reproduction, assistance, and renewed independent attempts.

3.3 Familiar Songs in Beginner Drum Learning

Familiar songs were introduced during one of the observed learning activities when the teacher asked the children, "What songs do you like to listen to these days?" The question prompted the children to name songs they recognized from their everyday listening. The songs mentioned included "Golden" from *K-pop Demon Hunters*, "Steve's Lava Chicken" from *A Minecraft Movie*, and "Sunflower" from the *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* soundtrack. When the songs were played, the children responded by combining listening with movement and simple drumming. The teacher did not initially ask the children to reproduce the original drum patterns of the songs. Instead, the activity focused on following the pulse and basic beat through simple strikes, particularly on the snare drum. The children were also allowed to move between different parts of the drum set while responding to the music.

During these activities, some children sang along while playing, while others moved their heads or bodies in time with the music. *"Golden"* generated a clearly recognizable response in the observation notes: Student A said, *"I know this song, Mr!"* One child then played the snare drum during the chorus while smiling and looking toward the teacher. The children's responses included singing, body movement, striking the drum, and attending to recognizable sections of the song. The children also experimented with their drum playing while the familiar songs continued. Their rhythmic responses remained simple, but the observation notes recorded attempts to align particular strikes with recognizable parts of the music. The activity therefore combined previously familiar musical material with basic rhythmic playing rather than requiring reproduction of the original recorded drum performance.

4. Discussion

The first finding shows that the children's initial encounters with the drum set were characterized by direct physical exploration. Before adopting the procedures associated with formal drum playing, the children touched, struck, compared, and repeatedly investigated different parts of the instrument. This pattern suggests that the first stage of instrumental participation was organized around discovering what the instrument could do rather than immediately reproducing a prescribed technique.

This finding is consistent with Nieuwmeijer et al (2019), who examined musical play among teachers working with four- to five-year-old children and found that musical exploration could be incorporated into early years education when teachers allowed children to explore while providing appropriate guidance. Their study, however, concerned teachers' experiences of facilitating musical play rather than children's interaction with a specific instrument during beginner lessons. The present study extends that work by showing how exploratory activity can occur within an instrumental learning context, where children's direct manipulation of the drum set becomes part of their initial participation in instruction. Importantly, the finding does not establish that exploration itself produces musical learning; rather, it shows that exploration constituted an observable part of how these beginners entered the learning activity.

The relationship between exploration and teacher guidance is also relevant to recent research on instructional forms in musical play. Chung (2026) found that guided-play contexts were associated with higher observed behavioral and emotional engagement than highly teacher-directed contexts in kindergarten music activities. The present study cannot make the same claim because engagement was not operationalized through a standardized measure. Nevertheless, the comparison is useful in showing that structured guidance and children's freedom to act need not be treated as opposing conditions. In the observed lessons, the teacher allowed exploration to continue while simultaneously arranging seating, introducing drumsticks, and providing brief verbal directions. The pedagogical significance of the finding therefore lies in the coexistence of child-initiated exploration and deliberate instructional structuring.

The second finding concerns the sequence through which children observed the teacher, attempted to reproduce the demonstrated pattern, received assistance, and then attempted the action again with greater independence. The children did not reproduce the demonstrated patterns consistently at first. They sometimes confused hand sequences or lost the tempo, and they frequently returned their attention to the teacher before trying again. This pattern indicates that imitation in the observed lessons functioned as an unfolding process rather than as an immediate act of accurate reproduction.

The developmental relevance of rhythmic imitation is supported by recent research involving children of a similar age. Natati et al (2026) examined music training with two- and four-year-old children and used an adapted rhythmic-imitation task to examine emerging rhythmic abilities. Their findings showed improvements in rhythmic skills following an eight-week training programme, while the authors explicitly cautioned that the adapted imitation measure should be interpreted as an indicator of emerging rhythmic ability rather than as evidence of stable rhythmic competence. The present study complements this evidence from a different methodological perspective: rather than measuring change in rhythmic performance, it documents the classroom process through which a four-year-old child attempted to reproduce a teacher's rhythmic action, encountered difficulty, requested assistance, and returned to the task.

The observed movement from assisted performance to independent attempts is particularly important. After the teacher physically guided a child's hands, the child asked the teacher to release the hands and attempted to continue independently. However, the playing subsequently became less regular and shifted toward freer rhythmic activity. This pattern complicates an assumption that early instrumental learning necessarily progresses in a straight line from imitation toward independent mastery. In this case, independence did not simply replace guided imitation; it was accompanied by a renewed movement toward exploration. The finding therefore suggests that, for these beginners, imitation and exploration were interdependent modes of participation rather than discrete stages.

The third finding concerns the children's responses when familiar songs were incorporated into the lesson. The children recognized songs associated with films and digital media and responded through verbal recognition, singing, bodily movement, and simple drumming. The teacher did not require them to reproduce the recorded drum patterns. Instead, the activity emphasized following the pulse and basic beats while allowing children to respond with relatively simple rhythmic actions.

This finding corresponds closely with Vasil & Kondracka-Szala (2025), who examined music preferences and perceptions among preschool children aged four to six in Poland and the United States. Their findings showed that children preferred popular music they already knew, including music encountered through children's films, radio, and the internet, and that children often expressed their responses through movement more readily than through verbal description. The present study extends this observation into instrumental learning by showing how recognition of familiar musical material was accompanied by embodied responses within a drum lesson. Familiarity therefore appeared in the observed data not simply as a preference but as a recognizable point of reference around which children could organize movement and simple rhythmic participation.

At the same time, the findings do not demonstrate that familiar songs increased motivation, confidence, or sustained attention. Those claims would require a more systematic operationalization of engagement and comparison across equivalent learning activities. The evidence supports a narrower interpretation: familiar songs provided musical material that the children already recognized, and that recognition coincided with observable responses such as singing, moving, and playing along with simple beats. The pedagogical value of familiar songs in this case therefore lies in their capacity to connect an existing musical reference with an immediate classroom activity, rather than in a demonstrated causal effect on learning.

Across the three themes, the teacher–child relationship emerges as the context through which exploration, imitation, and familiar music became part of the same learning process. The teacher did not merely demonstrate techniques; the teacher also regulated the pace of activity, responded to children's questions, provided physical assistance, introduced familiar songs, and allowed opportunities for independent experimentation. Koops & Tate (2021) propose that teacher–child musical interaction in early childhood can be understood as a relational process involving responsiveness, musical participation, and opportunities for creative expression. The present case adds a specific instrumental dimension to this perspective by showing how those interactions were enacted through the physical and temporal demands of beginner drum playing.

This interactional character is especially important because the researcher was also the teacher in the observed lessons. The findings should therefore not be interpreted as a record of children's behavior independent of teaching practice. The children's exploratory and imitative actions developed within an instructional relationship in which the teacher continuously adjusted the conditions of participation. The value of the case lies precisely in this situated quality: it shows how early drum learning unfolded through reciprocal adjustments between children's actions and the teacher's responses.

Taken together, the findings suggest that early drum learning in this case was characterized by movement among exploration, imitation, and familiar musical participation rather than by a fixed progression from one mode to another. Children could explore the instrument, attend to a teacher's model, seek assistance, attempt the action independently, and return to exploratory playing. Familiar songs introduced an additional point of entry through which children could participate using musical material they already recognized. These patterns suggest that beginner drum learning for very young children may be better understood as a dynamic process of participation than as the early acquisition of technical procedures alone.

The contribution of the study should therefore be understood as contextual and process-oriented, rather than causal. The findings do not demonstrate that exploratory learning, imitation, or familiar songs are universally more effective than conventional instruction. Instead, they document how these forms of participation were enacted within one private music-school setting involving eight four-year-old beginners and one teacher-researcher. The study consequently offers a more specific account of the interaction between children's spontaneous actions and teacher-mediated participation at the earliest stage of drum learning, while leaving questions of comparative effectiveness for future research.

5. Conclusion

This study found that early drum learning among four-year-old beginners was organized through an ongoing interplay of exploration, imitation, and familiar musical experience rather than a linear progression toward technical performance. Children explored the physical and sonic possibilities of the drum set, used teacher demonstrations and assistance to organize rhythmic actions, and responded to familiar songs as recognizable musical references for simple rhythmic participation. The study's main contribution is a context-specific account of how exploration and teacher-mediated imitation operate together in early drum learning. The findings suggest that children's agency is not replaced by instruction; instead, children moved between self-directed exploration and guided rhythmic action, including moments of returning

to freer playing after supported imitation. This highlights early instrumental learning as a recursive and interactional process, rather than a simple progression from exploration to technical mastery. These conclusions are limited to eight four-year-old beginners in one private music school and should not be generalized beyond the case.

6. References

Bamberger, J. S. (1991). *The Mind Behind the Musical Ear: How Children Develop Musical Intelligence*. Harvard University Press. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=lGAB62lZY3cC

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology*, *9*(1), 3–26. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000196

Bremmer, M., & Nijs, L. (2020). The Role of the Body in Instrumental and Vocal Music Pedagogy: A Dynamical Systems Theory Perspective on the Music Teacher's Bodily Engagement in Teaching and Learning. *Frontiers in Education*, *5*(June), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00079

Chung, F. M. Y. (2026). Engaging Young Learners: Instructional Models and Engagement in Musical Play. *Education Sciences*, *16*(5), 685. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci16050685

Gerson, S. A., Schiavio, A., Timmers, R., & Hunnius, S. (2015). Active Drumming Experience Increases Infants' Sensitivity to Audiovisual Synchrony during Observed Drumming Actions. *PLOS ONE*, *10*(6), e0130960. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0130960

Gordon, E. E. (2012). *Learning Sequences in MusicL Skill, Content, and Patterns*. GIA Publications.

Kirschner, S., & Tomasello, M. (2009). Joint drumming: Social context facilitates synchronization in preschool children. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, *102*(3), 299–314. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2008.07.005

Koops, L. H., & Tate, K. (2021). A framework for considering teacher-child musical interactions in the early childhood classroom. *Early Child Development and Care*, *191*(12), 1956–1971. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1862820

Koutsoupidou, T. (2020). Musical play in early years education: towards a model of autonomy through adult support. *Music Education Research*, *22*(1), 87–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2019.1703920

Natati, A., Barachetti, C., Urbani, M., & Majorano, M. (2026). Investigating the Impact of a Music Training Programme on the Development of Rhythm, Lexicon, and Executive Functions in 2- and 4-Year-Olds. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *54*(6), 5475–5489. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-026-02247-z

Nieuwmeijer, C., Marshall, N., & van Oers, B. (2019). Dutch early years classroom teachers facilitating and guiding musical play: problems and opportunities. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *27*(6), 860–871. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2019.1678926

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in Thinking*. Oxford University PressNew York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195059731.001.0001

Rogoff, B. (2023). Mutually Constituting, Fractal: Individual and Cultural Aspects of Holistic Process. *Review of Research in Education*, *47*(1), 60–83. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X231224666

Roulston, K. (2006). Qualitative investigation of young children's music preferences. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, *7*(9), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.59236/ijea7n9

Sembiring, P., & Milyartini, R. (2025). Rhythm Explorers: Creative Approach in Drum Learning for Elementary Students in Private Music Education. *IJECA (International Journal of Education and Curriculum Application)*, *8*(2), 219. https://doi.org/10.31764/ijeca.v8i2.31888

Sembiring, P., Sitanggang, I. A., & Hutapea, C. J. K. T. (2025). Pedagogical strategies for drum learning: A qualitative study on fun and discipline for elementary students. *Journal of Research in Instructional*, *5*(2), 402–415. https://doi.org/10.30862/jri.v5i2.686

Vasil, M., & Kondracka-Szala, M. (2025). Polish and American preschool children's preferences for and perceptions of popular music. *Journal of Popular Music Education*, *9*(1), 39–59. https://doi.org/10.1386/jpme_00145_1

VYGOTSKY, L. S. (1980). *Mind in Society* (M. Cole, V. Jolm-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (eds.)). Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4

Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). the Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *17*(2), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x

Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. SAGE Publications. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=uX1ZDwAAQBAJ

Young, S. (2016). Early childhood music education research: An overview. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *38*(1), 9–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X16640106