

Musical Innovation and Creativity in Music Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: As education increasingly focuses on 21st-century skills, musical creativity has become a key priority, but there is still no unified theoretical framework. This study addresses this issue by systematically reviewing how musical creativity is defined, its measurable effects, and the factors that influence it in music education. Using PRISMA 2020 guidelines, we reviewed literature from Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCOhost. After careful screening, 28 peer-reviewed articles from 2019 to 2025 were chosen for thematic analysis. The results show that musical creativity is complex and shaped by both how people think and how they interact with others, rather than being a single trait. The study found that creativity helps students become more independent and engaged in class, and it also encourages teachers to try new teaching methods. However, there is still a major gap in understanding how personal traits, such as frustration tolerance, interact with broader factors, such as curriculum policies, over time. The study suggests that while short-term programs work, lasting progress needs a focus on ongoing processes and learning environments that include technology and welcome everyone. These findings provide a stronger theoretical base and a clear direction for future long-term and international research in music education.

Keywords: Musical Creativity, Music Education, Systematic Literature Review, Pedagogical Innovation, Theoretical Framework.

1. Introduction

Music education has long been seen as key to students' overall and aesthetic growth (Elliott, 2021; Villanueva, Ilari & Habibi, 2024). Contemporary education is changing significantly (Cogdill, 2015), and more researchers argue that music instruction should go beyond technical skills such as memorizing theory or rote performance (Crawford, 2017).

The focus should be on encouraging students' creativity. Because of this, musical creativity has become a key topic in teaching discussions (Abramo & Reynolds, 2015; Hickey & Webster, 2001; Macdonald & Miell, 2000). As more schools include arts training, education is changing in important ways. The field now recognizes that music education should go beyond technical skills and help students develop their creativity and innovation (Abramo & Reynolds, 2015). Recent research shows that musical creativity is essential to 21st-century literacy (Coscarelli & Ribeiro, 2018; Vasil, Weiss & Powell, 2019). To support this, teachers need a clear understanding of creativity and should integrate creative activities into their core teaching methods (Crawford, 2017).

Musical creativity is a significant area of research on creativity (Yang, 2025). It examines individual creative performance in music and highlights the importance of fostering students' creative thinking in education (Sha, 2024). Zbořilová (2024) highlights the teacher's essential role in advancing beyond traditional performance-based learning to foster a more holistic educational approach with music. Therefore, music educators should first understand the concept of musical creativity and demonstrate it in their teaching.

As educational philosophies change worldwide, creativity is now seen as a key skill for the 21st century (Abramo & Reynolds, 2015). This has led to growing interest in how creativity fits into music education. Studies show that musical creativity helps students think more creatively and solve problems, which encourages new teaching methods (Fredriksson, Zandén & Wallerstedt, 2024). Still, creativity's influence goes beyond just these mental benefits. As music teaching and learning continue to change, it is important to keep looking at how creativity shapes the field.

Existing research predominantly focuses on the influence of musical creativity on teaching methodologies, thereby limiting understanding of the specific factors that enhance it. Identifying these factors is essential for optimizing the role of creativity within educational contexts. Furthermore, there is a significant lack of systematic literature reviews addressing this subject. To address these gaps, the present study conducts a systematic literature review to examine musical creativity in depth, guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How is musical creativity currently defined in the music educational sector?

RQ2. What is the effect of musical creativity in the music educational sector?

RQ3. What factors influence the development and implementation of musical creativity?

2. Methodology

The study was conducted using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology, adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. This approach ensures the research process is reproducible, scientific, and transparent (Page et al., 2021). Following established frameworks, the SLR process was executed in three primary stages of data collection, data analysis, and synthesis.

2.1. Search Strategy

To provide a comprehensive overview of the topic, a rigorous database search was performed between January, 2015, and December 2025. The search targeted three major academic databases: Scopus, EBSCOhost, and Web of Science. The search strings utilized combinations of the following keywords "Music Education" AND "Musical Creativity" AND "Artistic Creativity" "Music" AND "Creativity".

2.2. Study Selection and Inclusion Criteria

The PRISMA flow diagram Figure 1 shows that an initial search of three databases identified 392 documents (Scopus: n=182; EBSCOhost: n=103; WOS: n=107). Literature selection was guided by explicit criteria to ensure that the included studies directly addressed the research questions concerning musical creativity in educational contexts.

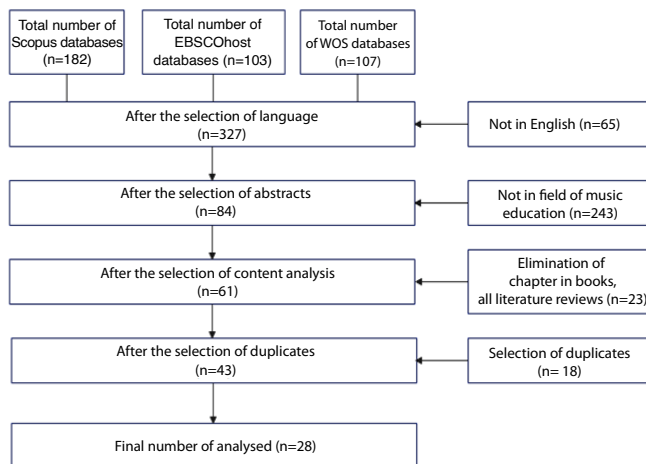
A. Inclusion Criteria

1. Studies were included if they examined the definition, impact, or influencing factors of musical creativity within the field of music education.
2. Only primary empirical studies employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches were included.
3. Articles published between January 2019 and 2025 were included to capture the most recent decade of educational innovation.
4. Only peer-reviewed journal articles were considered to ensure academic rigor and data quality.
5. Only studies published in English were included.
6. No geographical restrictions were applied; studies from all global contexts were included to ensure a diverse range of perspectives
7. Priority was given to studies examining pedagogical strategies, student psychological factors such as self-concept, and technological interventions, including gamification.

B. Exclusion Criteria

1. Book chapters, conference proceedings, and literature reviews were excluded to prevent data duplication and maintain a focus on primary evidence.
2. Studies in music that did not explicitly address “creativity” or “creative thinking” were excluded.
3. Studies focused on professional music-industry settings, such as commercial production, rather than on educational environments, were excluded.
4. Unpublished manuscripts, pre-prints, and retracted studies were excluded.
5. Single-case studies and anecdotal reports lacking sufficient methodological detail were excluded.
6. Studies in which “creativity” was used solely as a buzzword, without measurable definitions or outcomes, were excluded.

Figure 1: The Procedure of Search Approach.



3. Literature Review

3.1. Conceptualizing Musical Creativity

Musical is not a fixed trait but a concept that evolves over time. In music education, the emphasis has shifted from evaluating only the final product to focusing on the creative process and how it is experienced (Wan, 2024). Király (2024) explains that music and creativity combine both thinking and feeling. Still, there is a big gap between how traditional curricula link these personal experiences to standard academic goals. Recent data highlights a shift toward embodied creativity.

Nijs, Grinspun and Fortuna (2024) and Nagy (2020) argues that creativity is not only a mental process but is also closely linked to bodily interaction within the musical environment. Peñalba, Martínez-Álvarez and Schiavio (2021) demonstrate that toddlers develop creative musicality through sensorimotor experiences. Their research indicates that creative thinking in music education relies more on physical activity than on intellectual processes.

The literature identifies a difference between individual and collective creativity. Xu (2022) examines the role of self-psychological control in solo music creation, whereas numerous other studies advocate for participatory models. Lage-Gómez and Cremades-Andreu (2020) contend that, within secondary education, the process of social interaction holds equal significance to the musical outcome. Similarly, Verneert, Nijs and De Baets (2021) demonstrate that collective improvisation fosters a sense of belonging, indicating that creativity contributes to social cohesion as much as to artistic expression.

There is a clear gap in how these theories are evaluated. Huovinen (2021) observes that students' engagement with creativity theories is influenced by their individual thinking styles and musical backgrounds. Therefore, relying on a single definition of musical creativity may constrain pedagogical approaches. Recent research supports an ecological approach, which sees creativity as a complex system shaped by personal psychology, physical movement, social interactions, and cultural context (Wong, 2022).

3.2. Pedagogical Strategies and Innovation

A review of the literature shows that teaching methods for encouraging musical creativity have shifted from teacher-led approaches to more student-centered, technology-based, and game-like activities. Sharma (2022) identified an increasing adoption of digital tools that enhance the accessibility of creative expression. Addressi (2020) describes how the musical interaction relying on reflexion (MIRROR) platform uses artificial intelligence to create interactive experiences between children and software, helping them develop creativity through play. Robert et al. (2023) found that using games in music lessons helps elementary students learn music and be more creative by making it easier for them to get started with music theory.

Despite the increasing integration of technology, invention and performance-based pedagogy continue to serve as foundational elements in creative development. Navarro Ramón and Chacón-López (2021) contend that improvisation functions as a cognitive catalyst, fostering broader creative thinking in children. Zheng and Leung (2023) note that piano teaching in China is increasingly using creative performance strategies rather than relying solely on memorization. Mateos-Moreno and Garcia-Perals (2024) add that while many studio teachers say they value creativity, their teaching is often limited

by traditional curricula and the focus on exams. The creative classroom environment is influenced as Fekete, Fehérvári and Bodnár (2022) found that structured seminars focused on creative music exercises work well in universities, provided they avoid strict, top-down teaching. Nazario (2022) points out that “freedom” is a key factor in teaching, and that excessive structure can limit creativity. So, encouraging musical creativity means finding a careful balance: giving enough structure for students to build skills (Robert et al., 2023), while also keeping the space open and “free” for real creative discovery (Nazario, 2022).

3.3. Internal Influencing Factors: Psychology and Self-Concept

Research indicates that a student’s internal psychological state and their “musical self-concept” are primary determinants of creative output. In contrast to external factors such as curriculum or environment, these internal variables influence whether a student perceives sufficient safety to take the risks necessary for innovation.

Musical self-concept, as defined by Self-Concept Theory, plays a significant role in shaping students’ creative engagement in music learning (Mawang, Kigen & Mutweleli, 2019). Research indicates that students with greater confidence in their musical abilities are more likely to attempt to be more creative and adopt innovative approaches (Wan, 2024). This finding supports the concept of a competence loop, in which belief in one’s abilities fosters creative participation, which, in turn, enhances self-confidence. However, this relationship is not always linear. Excessive reliance on self-perception without developing actual skills may lead to overconfidence and to creative output that lacks depth (Burland & Davidson, 2002). Social Identity Theory suggests that students’ perceived roles influence their willingness to take creative risks.

Huovinen (2021) found that students who mainly see themselves as “performers” focus on technical accuracy and often avoid trying new things because they fear making mistakes. On the other hand, students who identify as “composers” or “improvisers” are more comfortable with uncertainty and more likely to experiment. This matches earlier research showing that strict, performance-focused identities can limit creativity.

Flow Theory often connects psychological control to creative performance, but some researchers question whether students can reliably reach flow in structured or high-pressure environments (Xu, 2022). Autonomy, as described in Self-Determination Theory, is thought to encourage creative risk-taking (Nazario, 2022). However, too much freedom without guidance can cause students to lose focus and explore ideas without a clear purpose. Students experiencing psychological restriction are likely to produce music that is physically constrained and less creative (Nagy, 2020). Students perceive affordances, defined as opportunities for action, according to their psychological readiness. When students experience psychological overwhelm, they may not recognize the creative potential in a musical instrument or software (Nijs et al., 2024).

3.4. The Role of the Teacher and Environment

Modern teaching methods provide essential support for developing creativity (Király, 2024). The transition from a teacher-centered approach to a participatory model is essential (Hickey & Webster, 2001). Creativity is more likely to develop when the classroom is conceptualized as a social ecosystem rather than a traditional lecture hall.

In Spanish secondary schools, for instance, participatory creativity is characterized by the teacher functioning as a co-creator instead of a judge (Lage-Gómez & Cremades-Andreu, 2020). When educators present music as a series of problems to be solved, such as asking, “How do we express sadness using only these three notes?”, this approach elicits higher levels of divergent thinking compared to conventional repetitive practice (Sha, 2024).

One important external factor is how teachers see their own ability to support creativity. Schiavio et al. (2023) and Sungurtekin (2021) both note that many music teachers do not feel prepared to encourage creative activities and often view creativity as something people are born with, not something that can be learned.

Cultural ecology functions as a significant moderating factor. Within the Chinese educational context, Yingmin and Man (2024) and Qi (2023) analyze the influence of traditional values and pedagogical norms on students’ creative thinking. Although traditional Chinese music education has historically prioritized technical mastery and rote learning, recent developments indicate a purposeful integration of “Chinese music” as a medium for fostering modern creative thought (Qi, 2023). The mediation of students’ creativity is frequently associated with their frustration tolerance and emotional regulation, both of which are shaped by these specific cultural environments (Wang & Jiang, 2022).

The physical and social environment of a classroom plays a big role in shaping creative opportunities. Wong (2022) explains that, for students with intellectual disabilities, creativity depends more on classroom inclusivity than on cognitive ability. If the environment does not offer fair creative chances, students’ potential may go unnoticed. Research shows that musical creativity needs support from teachers, a flexible curriculum, and a culture that values the creative process over the final result (Bogojevic, 2021; Schiavio et al., 2023). Table 1 shows the summary of the thematic analysis.

Table 1: Summary of Thematic Analysis.

Theme	Key Variables	Methodology	Reference	Country
Pedagogical Innovation	Practical training, skill cultivation	Case Study	Sha (2024)	China
External Ecology	Primary education institutional support	Case Study	Bogojevic (2021)	Montenegro
Pedagogical Innovation	Improvisation cognitive catalyst	Experimental	Navarro Ramón and Chacón-López (2021)	Spain
External Ecology	Teacher influence College environment	Quantitative	Yingmin and Man (2024)	China
Conceptualization	Affordance landscape Movement	Theoretical	Nijs et al. (2024)	Belgium
Conceptualization	Embodied space physical environment	Theoretical	Nagy (2020)	USA
Conceptualization	Collaborative creativity Belonging	Qualitative	Verneert et al. (2021)	Belgium
Internal Factors	Self-concept Secondary students	Correlational	Mawang et al. (2019)	Kenya
Internal Factors	Psychological control Multi-music environment	Quantitative	Xu (2022)	China
Pedagogical Innovation	AI-reflexive interaction, MIROR	Experimental	Addressi (2020)	Italy
External Ecology	Teacher self-reported views	Qualitative	Schiavio et al. (2023)	Austria
External Ecology	Imagination, teacher perceptions	Qualitative	Sungurtekin (2021)	Turkey
Conceptualization	Participatory creativity, social process	Theory Building	Lage-Gómez and Cremades-Andreu (2020)	Spain
Internal Factors	Frustration tolerance, emotion regulation	Quantitative	Wang and Jiang (2022)	China
Conceptualization	Theory appraisal, argumentation	Qualitative	Huovinen (2021)	Sweden
Internal Factors	Preference vs. Interference	Experimental	Xiao et al. (2023)	China
Conceptualization	Cognitive-emotional synthesis	Theoretical	Király (2024)	Hungary
Pedagogical Innovation	Freedom as a trigger	Qualitative	Nazarío (2022)	Brazil
External Ecology	Primary school fostering	Case Study	Bogojevic (2021)	Montenegro

Theme	Key Variables	Methodology	Reference	Country
Pedagogical Innovation	Seminar exercises, university level	Qualitative	Fekete et al. (2022)	Hungary
Pedagogical Innovation	Piano performance, cultivation	Case Study	Zheng and Leung (2023)	China
External Ecology	Pedagogy perceptions, interview	Qualitative	Zheng and Leung (2023)	China
Pedagogical Innovation	Gamification, literacy, play	Mixed Methods	Robert et al. (2023)	Malaysia
Internal Factors	Remote associate tasks, stinting	Experimental	Threadgold et al. (2019)	UK
External Ecology	Cultural identity, creative thinking	Theoretical	Qi (2023)	China
Conceptualization	Sensorimotor discovery, toddlers	Observation	Peñalba et al. (2021)	Spain
External Ecology	Studio teachers, curriculum pressure	Qualitative	Mateos-Moreno and Garcia-Perals (2024)	Spain
External Ecology	Inclusive ecology, disabilities	Case Study	Wong (2022)	Hong Kong

4. Results And Discussion

Creativity is conceptualized as a process in which an individual, embedded within a particular cultural and social context, draws upon prior experience to imagine, evaluate, and reconstruct ideas, resulting in outcomes that are both novel and valuable (Lage-Gómez & Cremades-Andreu, 2020). The principal components of creativity are novelty, relevance, aesthetic value, collaboration, and reflection (Huovinen, 2021). In the context of music, creativity integrates these elements with distinctive forms of emotional communication, sound media, and practical processes. To provide effective guidance, music educators must comprehend the creative thinking process, design suitable scenarios, and apply aesthetic judgment to support independent student expression (Schiavio et al., 2023; Sungurtekin, 2021; Zheng & Leung, 2023).

Despite established theoretical foundations, significant discrepancies persist in the understanding of musical creativity. Among the 28 papers reviewed, only six offered explicit definitions. Existing research primarily emphasizes the originality and value of the final musical work or performance, frequently overlooking the creative process and the contextual environment. Most definitions are static and do not account for the dynamic influence of individual variability on creativity. Future research should adopt more flexible and evolving definitions.

4.1. *The Effect of Musical Creativity in Music Education*

Musical creativity in education remains challenging. However, most studies examined its impact on students, teachers, and institutions. Researchers generally agree that movement-based activities and gamified composition significantly increase originality, improvisational fluency, and classroom engagement (Nijs et al., 2024; Peñalba et al., 2021; Robert et al., 2023). These creative tasks provide immersive experiences that enhance internal motivation (Lage-Gómez & Cremades-Andreu, 2020). Findings suggest that a teacher's openness, cross-style music literacy, and reflective peer collaboration are strong predictors of students' creative performance (Yingmin & Man, 2024).

Teachers who model curiosity and tolerate uncertainty through open-ended tasks effectively stimulate creative thinking (Lage-Gómez & Cremades-Andreu, 2020; Mateos-Moreno & Garcia-Perals, 2024). Institutional support is critical. Schools that embed creativity into curriculum blueprints and provide digital workstations drive continuous innovation (Robert et al., 2023).

Current research is limited by a focus on short-term interventions. There is a clear need for longitudinal studies to track the migration of musical creativity skills into other domains, such as science and language (Huovinen, 2021; Peñalba et al.,

2021). Additionally, more attention should be paid to how school-level policies and resource integration safeguard creative opportunities across different socio-economic baselines (Yingmin & Man, 2024; Zheng & Leung, 2023).

4.2. Factors Influencing Musical Creativity

Individual traits like motivation, emotional control, and motor skills directly shape the quality of creative work (Mawang et al., 2019; Wang & Jiang, 2022). At the same time, teacher qualities such as teaching beliefs and feedback styles influence how students work together and the classroom atmosphere (Nijs et al., 2024; Schiavio et al., 2023). Other important factors are how tasks are structured (Navarro Ramón & Chacón-López, 2021), the use of technology and tools (Addessi, 2020), and the overall learning environment (Wong, 2022). Well-designed tasks can spark student potential by offering the right mix of challenge and freedom (Robert et al., 2023). Platforms like MIROR make it easier for students to experiment with new ideas, providing a safe space to learn from feedback and improve (Addessi, 2020). The physical and social environment also shapes how safe students feel, which is important for encouraging creative risk-taking (Peñalba et al., 2021; Wong, 2022). In reality, these factors are closely connected. Future studies should focus more on cross-cultural differences to avoid relying only on similar groups. Combining behavioral, emotional, and physical data over time will help us better understand how musical creativity can persist throughout life across cultures. As shown in Figure 2, the terms ‘music,’ ‘creativity,’ and ‘artistic’ are the most prominent keywords.

Figure 2: Word Cloud Result of Thematic Key Term.



5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This literature review examines how musical creativity is understood in music education, exploring its different roles, impacts, and the factors that shape it. After

reviewing 28 peer-reviewed studies, the review finds that musical creativity is the ability of both learners and teachers to generate new, meaningful, and appealing musical ideas. This happens through imaginative, emotional, and ongoing acts of exploration, change, and communication within specific cultural settings. The study finds that when students show greater musical creativity, they become more independent and engaged, and experience deeper learning. It also helps their emotional and social growth, and encourages new teaching methods and a more dynamic curriculum. However, most current research still focuses mainly on short-term outcomes, finished products, and similar cultural contexts. There is still insufficient understanding of how key factors such as motivation, teacher openness, and task design interact.

Instead of only judging the final performance, schools should focus on the creative process. Using reflective technologies and activities, such as movement and improvisation, can make it easier for students to be creative. Creativity should be built into the main curriculum, not just added to classroom activities. Schools need to provide resources such as digital music workstations and collaborative spaces to support innovation. Teacher training should help teachers feel more confident and comfortable with uncertainty. Teachers should be encouraged to move from directing students to working alongside them as co-creators.

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