



Exploring Learning Experiences through Ensemble Music and Peer Tutoring in Primary Schools: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This systematic literature review investigates how ensemble music learning and peer tutoring contribute to primary school students' academic, social, and emotional development. Drawing on empirical studies published between 2010 and 2025, the review examines the ways in which ensemble-based instruction and structured peer tutoring shape children's collaboration, communication, self-confidence, empathy, and cultural appreciation. The focus is on learning experiences in primary schools where music is used as a vehicle for both musical and non-musical outcomes. The review follows PRISMA 2020 guidelines for identifying, screening, and appraising studies. Searches were conducted in international and national databases using bilingual keywords related to ensemble music, peer tutoring, and primary education. Twenty articles met the inclusion criteria and were analysed in depth using an analytical matrix. The findings show that ensemble music learning supports responsibility, turn-taking, listening, and mutual support, while peer tutoring provides opportunities for explanation, feedback, and role modelling among students. However, the evidence base is still dominated by small-scale qualitative or classroom action research designs, with limited longitudinal and experimental studies. The review offers implications for designing culturally responsive music programmes in Indonesian primary schools, integrating ensemble and peer tutoring strategies, and developing more rigorous assessment tools for students' social and emotional skills.

Keywords: *Ensemble Music; Peer Tutoring; Primary School; Social Skills; Collaborative Learning; Emotional Development; Systematic Literature Review*

Introduction

Primary education is increasingly expected to nurture not only children's mastery of basic literacy and numeracy, but also their social, emotional, and creative capacities. Curriculum reforms and policy documents in Indonesia and elsewhere emphasise whole-child education and twenty-first-century competencies such as collaboration, communication, and cultural literacy. Within this agenda, music education has gained renewed attention because it combines cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions in a naturally collaborative context.

Ensemble music learning involves students playing or singing together in coordinated parts. Beyond developing technical musical skills, ensemble activities train students to listen to others, regulate their own contributions, negotiate timing and balance, and take shared responsibility for the quality of performance. International and local studies show that participation in ensemble music can strengthen students' sense of belonging, empathy, discipline, and confidence in expressing themselves in front of others.

Peer tutoring, in which students learn by teaching and supporting their classmates, is another pedagogical approach that has been widely used in primary schools. In peer tutoring arrangements, students alternate roles as tutor and tutee, explaining concepts, demonstrating procedures, asking questions, and giving feedback. Research indicates that peer tutoring can enhance academic understanding, metacognitive awareness, and prosocial behaviours because students must reformulate knowledge in their own words and respond to their peers' difficulties.

In the context of arts and music education, ensemble activities and peer tutoring are naturally complementary. Ensemble work requires coordination and joint decision-making, while peer tutoring provides a structure through which students can guide, model, and encourage each other in rehearsals and performances. Several Indonesian studies have shown that music-based programmes rooted in local cultural practices—such as traditional games, keroncong, and regional ensembles—can strengthen children's appreciation of local wisdom and identity.

However, findings from these studies are scattered across different journals and rarely synthesised systematically. As a result, teachers and curriculum developers may find it difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of how ensemble music learning and peer tutoring have been implemented in primary schools, what outcomes have been documented, and what challenges are commonly encountered.

A systematic literature review is therefore needed to map how ensemble music learning and peer tutoring have been conceptualised and implemented in primary school settings, what kinds of academic and social–emotional outcomes have been reported, and what methodological limitations remain.

By bringing together studies from both international and national journals, this review seeks to provide a clearer picture of the field and to identify directions for future research and practice in Indonesian primary schools. The article positions ensemble music and peer tutoring as promising, culturally responsive strategies that can support holistic student development when thoughtfully integrated into primary school curricula.

Research Questions and Objectives

Guided by the background above, this review is structured around three main questions concerning how ensemble music and peer tutoring are combined or positioned in primary school learning, what kinds of academic and social–emotional outcomes are reported for students who participate in these approaches, and what opportunities and constraints researchers and teachers identify when implementing ensemble music and peer tutoring in primary school contexts.

Accordingly, the first objective of this article is to describe the characteristics of ensemble music and peer tutoring interventions used in primary education, including their design, duration, and cultural orientation.

The second objective is to analyse the reported effects of these interventions on students' academic, social, and emotional development and to formulate recommendations that can guide teachers, curriculum developers, and researchers in designing ensemble-based learning that is both effective and culturally meaningful.

Methodology

Review Design

This study adopted a systematic literature review design to collect, evaluate, and synthesise empirical findings on ensemble music learning and peer tutoring in primary school settings. The review focused on journal articles that reported original research rather than purely theoretical discussions and that examined outcomes related to students' academic learning, social skills, emotional development, or cultural appreciation.

Reporting Framework

The reporting of the review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines. The PRISMA framework was used to structure the processes of identifying, screening, assessing eligibility, and including studies, as well as to increase transparency in the selection and synthesis of literature.

Data Sources and Databases

Literature searches were conducted in a combination of international and national databases, including major indexing services, open-access journal portals, and Indonesian journal platforms such as Sinta and Garuda. These sources were selected to ensure coverage of both global research and locally published studies relevant to ensemble music, peer tutoring, and primary education.

Search Strategy

Bilingual keywords were used in various combinations, for example: “ensemble music”, “music learning”, “peer tutoring”, “collaborative learning”, “primary school”, and their Indonesian equivalents. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine the searches and to capture studies where ensemble music and peer tutoring appeared either separately or in combination.

- The time frame for the search was limited to publications between 2010 and 2025 in order to capture both foundational work and the most recent developments in the field. Titles and abstracts were scanned to remove clearly irrelevant records, such as those focusing on secondary or tertiary education.
- In addition, the reference lists of key articles were examined using a snowballing technique to identify further studies that met the inclusion criteria but might not have appeared in the initial database searches.

All identified records were exported into a reference management worksheet to document the source, year, and basic descriptive information of each article.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- Studies were included if they: (1) were published in peer-reviewed journals; (2) focused on primary school students, approximately 6–12 years of age; (3) involved ensemble music learning and/or peer tutoring as central components of the intervention or classroom practice; and (4) reported outcomes related to academic achievement, social skills, emotional development, or cultural understanding. Both quantitative, qualitative, classroom action research, and mixed-method designs were eligible.
- Studies were excluded if they: (1) focused on secondary, tertiary, or non-formal education; (2) discussed music or peer collaboration only in a general way without a clear ensemble or peer tutoring component; (3) did not report empirical data; or (4) were not available in full text.

Study Selection (PRISMA)

- In the identification stage, all records retrieved from the databases were compiled and checked for duplicates. During the screening stage, titles and abstracts were read to assess their relevance to ensemble music, peer tutoring, and primary school contexts.
- Articles that appeared relevant were then subjected to a full-text eligibility check. At this stage, studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded, and the reasons for exclusion were documented.
- The final inclusion stage resulted in a set of twenty empirical articles that formed the basis for the narrative synthesis presented in this review.
- Although the review was conducted by a single researcher, the selection process followed explicit criteria and a documented workflow in order to enhance transparency and replicability.

Data Extraction

For each included study, data were extracted into an analytical matrix covering the following elements: author(s) and year; country and context; participants and grade level; type of ensemble or peer tutoring intervention; research design and instruments; and main findings related to academic and social–emotional outcomes.

Quality Appraisal

A basic quality appraisal was conducted by examining the clarity of research questions, the appropriateness of the research design, the description of participants and procedures, the suitability of data collection instruments, and the transparency of data analysis. While no formal scoring system was used, this appraisal helped to interpret the strength and limitations of the evidence.

Data Synthesis

Because the included studies used diverse methodologies and outcome measures, a narrative thematic synthesis approach was adopted. Findings were grouped into categories related to the roles of ensemble music, the functions of peer tutoring, their integration in classroom practice, and the challenges and implications identified by researchers.

Scope and Justification of the Topic

The scope of this review is limited to ensemble music and peer tutoring in primary schools. This focus is justified by the unique developmental characteristics of children in early and middle childhood, the central role of primary education in shaping lifelong attitudes toward the arts, and the growing interest in using culturally grounded music activities to support social–emotional learning.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the main patterns that emerged from the analytical matrix of studies on ensemble music learning and peer tutoring in primary schools. The synthesis highlights how these approaches are conceptualised, what outcomes are reported, and how they are linked to broader agendas of character education and local cultural preservation.

General Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies

In general, the studies in the matrix show that ensemble music and peer tutoring are implemented in diverse contexts, ranging from urban to rural schools and from formal classroom instruction to

extracurricular activities. Most of the research involves small to medium-sized groups of students in grades one to six, with interventions usually carried out over one or two school terms.

The majority of studies focus on the development of social and emotional skills—such as cooperation, self-confidence, empathy, and responsibility—rather than on technical musical proficiency alone. Many interventions draw on local musical traditions or children's songs, reflecting an interest in integrating cultural heritage into the school curriculum while simultaneously strengthening students' interpersonal skills.

The Role of Ensemble Music and Peer Tutoring in Primary School Learning

The synthesis of the matrix indicates that participating in ensemble music helps students experience learning as a collaborative endeavour. Playing in an ensemble requires each student to coordinate rhythm, melody, and dynamics with others, which in turn encourages attentive listening, mutual adjustment, and shared decision-making. These processes nurture a sense of collective responsibility and belonging in the classroom community.

Within this framework, peer tutoring functions as a mechanism for peer support and scaffolding. More capable or more experienced students help their classmates by demonstrating techniques, breaking down difficult passages, and offering encouragement during rehearsals. In many studies, peer tutoring roles emerge naturally as students take initiative to guide their friends, while in others teachers formally assign tutor roles and provide simple guidelines or checklists.

When ensemble activities are grounded in local musical genres, peer interactions also become a medium for transmitting cultural values. Students not only practise musical patterns but also discuss lyrics, stories, and meanings embedded in the songs. This combination of ensemble music and peer tutoring thus contributes simultaneously to musical learning, social–emotional growth, and the appreciation of local culture.

Implementation Challenges and Limitations of the Evidence

Despite these benefits, several challenges in implementing ensemble music and peer tutoring in primary schools are reported. Teachers frequently mention constraints such as limited instructional time, insufficient instruments, and large class sizes that make it difficult to organise sustained ensemble practice. Some teachers feel less confident in managing group music activities or in facilitating peer-led learning, which can lead to a reliance on teacher-centred methods.

From a research perspective, many of the studies employ classroom action research or small-scale qualitative designs. While these designs are valuable for exploring classroom innovation, they often lack control groups, long-term follow-up, or standardised measures. As a result, the strength of claims about causal relationships between ensemble music, peer tutoring, and specific student outcomes remains limited.

Implications for the Development of Music Education in Primary Schools

The patterns identified in the matrix point to several implications for the development of music education in primary schools. First, ensemble music learning should be planned explicitly as a context for cultivating social and emotional skills, not only as a vehicle for preparing performances. Lesson plans can incorporate objectives related to cooperation, empathy, and communication alongside musical targets.

Second, there is a need to develop more structured assessment instruments for observing and documenting students' social–emotional development in ensemble and peer tutoring contexts. Clear, operational indicators of collaboration, responsibility, and empathy would allow teachers and researchers to monitor progress more systematically.

Third, sustained support from school leaders and colleagues is crucial. When schools value music and provide time, space, and resources for ensemble practice, teachers are more likely to experiment with peer tutoring and other collaborative approaches. Partnerships with local artists and communities can further enrich programmes and strengthen students' sense of connection to their cultural environment.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review has examined how ensemble music learning and peer tutoring contribute to the academic, social, and emotional development of primary school students. The findings indicate that ensemble activities provide a rich context for students to practise listening, coordination, responsibility, and cultural appreciation, while peer tutoring structures create opportunities for explanation, feedback, and shared problem-solving.

At the same time, the existing evidence base is still characterised by small-scale and context-specific studies, with relatively few rigorous experimental or longitudinal designs. Future research should therefore aim to design and evaluate integrated ensemble-and-peer-tutoring models, develop more robust instruments for assessing social–emotional outcomes, and explore implementation in diverse school settings.

By synthesising findings from national and international literature, this article provides a foundation for further innovation in music-based learning in Indonesian primary schools. It is hoped that the insights offered here will encourage teachers, school leaders, and policy-makers to invest in ensemble-based and peer-mediated music programmes that honour local culture while preparing students to collaborate in a rapidly changing world.

Author Contributions

Wawan Effendi, S.Sn. conceptualised the study, conducted the literature search, and drafted the manuscript. Dr. Setiawan Edi Wibowo, S.Pd., M.Pd. provided critical feedback on the research design and the interpretation of the findings. Dr. Firmansyah, M.Pd. supervised the overall study, refined the theoretical framework, and reviewed the final version of the manuscript.

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