



A Qualitative Study on the Role of Music in Enhancing Divergent Thinking and Creative Writing in High School Students

He Liu

University of the East, Manila, Philippines

Email: 1027355609@qq.com

Abstract: This study explores the integration of music into creative writing pedagogy to enhance divergent thinking and narrative expression among high school students. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Guilford and Torrance, and supported by findings in cognitive neuroscience, the research examines how selected Gott Tantz by E Nomine and The Castle by Nobuo Uematsu affect students' ideation, emotional engagement, and narrative structure. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten students across three secondary schools in Xiamen, China. Findings revealed that music functioned as a cognitive and emotional catalyst, stimulating fluency, flexibility, and originality in student writing. Students reported more vivid imagery, emotionally expressive content, and coherent narrative structures, with music often serving as both inspiration and organizational guide. Some challenges were noted, particularly in revision phases, highlighting the need for flexible, personalized application. These results suggest that music can be a powerful pedagogical tool for fostering creativity, emotional literacy, and student motivation in writing classrooms. Implications for differentiated instruction and curriculum design are also discussed.

Keywords: Divergent Thinking; Creative Writing; Music and Education; High School Pedagogy; Emotional Engagement;

I. Introduction

Divergent thinking, a concept introduced through the pioneering work of J.P. Guilford in 1950, represents the cognitive ability to generate multiple, diverse solutions to open-ended problems. This form of thinking encompasses key dimensions such as fluency, flexibility, and originality, all of which are regarded as essential indicators of creative potential. In the context of modern education, divergent thinking is increasingly seen as a core component of 21st-century learning, enabling students to adapt to novel challenges, approach problems from unconventional angles, and articulate complex ideas in original ways. Its significance lies not only in the domain of artistic creativity but also in fostering innovation, critical thinking, and learner autonomy across various disciplines ^[1]. (Figure 1)

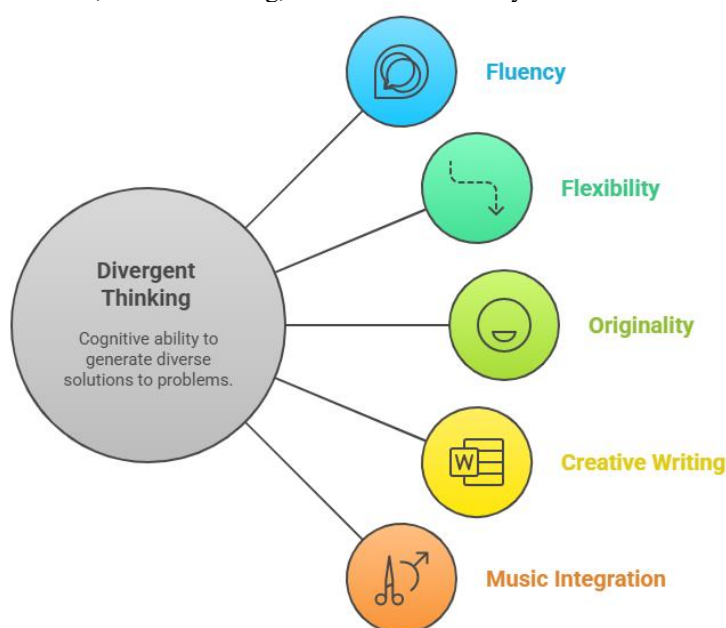


Figure 1, Divergent Thinking Through Music

Among the disciplines most directly enriched by divergent thinking is creative writing. The act of writing creatively requires students to develop characters, build settings, and communicate emotional or thematic depth, often through metaphorical or imaginative expression. When students are trained to think divergently, their writing tends to reflect greater narrative complexity and emotional resonance. However, classroom instruction in creative writing often relies on rigid structures and standardized assessments that prioritize technical correctness over creative exploration. Such constraints can limit students' expressive potential and disengage those who might otherwise flourish through more open-ended or affective writing



tasks. The challenge for educators, therefore, is to find instructional methods that invite students to think more freely, feel more deeply, and express themselves more authentically.

Music emerges as a promising solution to this pedagogical challenge. As a non-verbal and affective medium, music is uniquely capable of engaging the brain's emotional, sensory, and imaginative faculties simultaneously. Instrumental compositions—especially those rich in tempo variation, tonal shifts, and atmospheric qualities—have been shown to elicit vivid mental imagery and influence mood states. This capacity allows music to serve as both a stimulant and scaffold in creative writing tasks. *Gott Tanzte* by E Nomine and *The Castle* by Nobuo Uematsu are selected for this study due to their distinct sonic textures and emotive strength, offer students immersive listening experiences that can prompt ideation, inform tone, and inspire narrative structure. In this way, music becomes more than background sound; it becomes a cognitive and emotional partner in the act of writing.

Theoretical foundations reinforce the integration of music into the writing classroom. Guilford emphasized the use of non-verbal stimuli in stimulating ideational fluency, suggesting that sensory input can catalyze the brain's creative faculties [1]. E. Paul Torrance, known for his development of the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking, also stressed the value of enriched environments and varied stimuli in enhancing creativity [2]. More recently, neuroscientific research has confirmed that music activates multiple brain areas involved in language processing, memory, and emotional regulation, supporting the hypothesis that music can facilitate deeper cognitive engagement and expressive articulation [3]. This convergence of psychological theory and brain science lends credibility to the idea that music can play an integral role in fostering both divergent thinking and creative writing.

Recent empirical studies support these theoretical claims. For instance, Ritchie and Williamon found that listening to music can elevate mood and enhance cognitive flexibility, both of which are closely tied to creativity and ideation [4]. Schellenberg's work further illustrates that musical engagement can improve linguistic performance, emotional interpretation, and reasoning ability, suggesting that music's benefits are not confined to artistic tasks but extend into the broader domain of communication and cognition [3]. These findings point toward the practical potential of using music to enrich writing instruction in schools. This study builds on these insights through a qualitative exploration of high school students' experiences with music-integrated writing tasks. Focusing on the influence of two emotionally contrasting compositions, the research seeks to understand how music affects students' creative ideation, emotional depth, and narrative structure. Through in-depth interviews, the study aims to inform teaching practices that embrace music not as a supplement, but as a transformative component of creativity-centered pedagogy.

II. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Divergent Thinking and Creative Cognition

The foundation of divergent thinking is rooted in J. P. Guilford's Structure of Intellect model, which reconceptualized creativity as a measurable and cultivable cognitive skill. Divergent thinking involves the generation of multiple, original, and contextually diverse responses to open-ended tasks and is considered distinct from convergent thinking, which focuses on single, correct answers [4]. (Figure 2) This concept has become central to educational psychology in the context of developing flexible, innovative learners for the demands of modern curricula. E. Paul Torrance expanded Guilford's model and introduced the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT), which quantify ideational fluency, originality, and elaboration as indicators of creative performance [5].

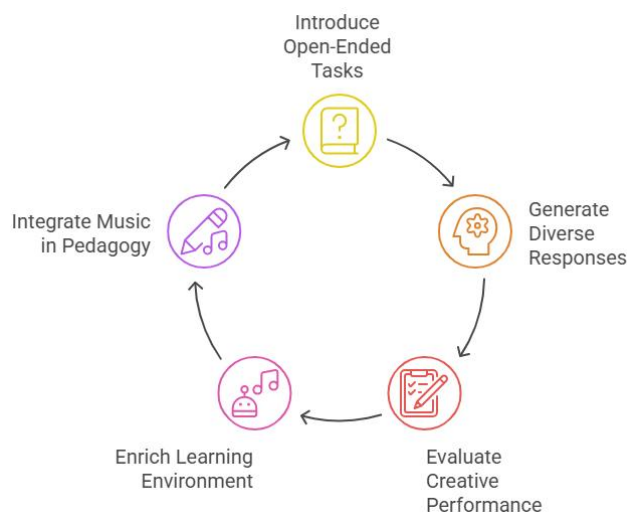


Figure 2, Cycle of Divergent Thinking and Creativity

Torrance also emphasized the necessity of enriched environments and non-verbal stimuli in the cultivation of creativity. His work highlights the interactive role of emotional and sensory input in the cognitive process. Music, as a multisensory and emotionally charged medium, fits seamlessly into this theoretical framework. It functions not only as a stimulus for emotion but also as a tool for cognitive exploration, making it a viable mechanism for activating divergent thought in learners. When introduced into writing pedagogy, music may bridge gaps between emotion, language, and imagination, offering a more holistic entry point into the writing process [5].

2.2 Music and Cognitive Engagement in Learning

Neuroscientific and psychological studies have demonstrated that music activates multiple neural circuits

associated with memory retrieval, emotional regulation, and verbal articulation. Research by Koelsch revealed that music listening engages areas of the brain that are responsible for affective processing and semantic association, both of which are foundational to creative cognition [6]. These findings suggest that music has the capacity to support key elements of creativity, including mental imagery, symbolic reasoning, and narrative sequencing.

Emotional arousal stimulated through music also enhances attention and memory consolidation, both of which are necessary for sustained creative engagement. Musical characteristics such as tempo and harmony have been shown to affect arousal levels and influence the thematic direction of student-generated content. Fast rhythms may trigger rapid

ideation and energy, whereas slow tempos foster introspection and elaborate visualization. In educational contexts, this translates into higher-quality written expression and greater originality. Such cognitive-emotional synergy underlines the potential of music to move beyond passive background use and serve instead as an intentional prompt for creative writing tasks [6].

Classroom-based research further reinforces the connection between music and creativity. Ritchie and Williamon observed that music exposure prior to creative tasks resulted in enhanced cognitive flexibility and increased narrative complexity in student writing [7]. Their study highlights music's role not only in shaping mood but also in modulating cognitive readiness. Motivation, emotional comfort, and focus are often positively influenced when music is strategically integrated into instructional settings.

2.3 Creative Writing Pedagogy and Affective Stimuli

Traditional approaches to teaching writing tend to emphasize syntax, coherence, and technical accuracy, often at the expense of emotional engagement and imaginative expression. Although these structural elements are necessary for communicative clarity, over-reliance on them can stifle student creativity. Creative writing pedagogy increasingly advocates for more affect-driven and student-centered approaches that allow for exploration, personal voice, and emotional resonance. In this shift, affective stimuli serve as crucial tools for activating deeper layers of thought and feeling.

Music, in particular, holds unique pedagogical value due to its ability to evoke complex emotions and mental images that serve as narrative seeds. Teachers who incorporate music into writing instruction often report observable improvements in student creativity, including richer description, greater emotional authenticity, and more original storytelling. These outcomes suggest that music not only fosters expression but also encourages risk-taking and emotional vulnerability in a safe academic setting. Nonetheless, in many exam-oriented systems, especially in secondary education, time constraints and standardized curricula restrict the integration of such stimuli. This underutilization reflects a broader disconnection between creativity research and pedagogical practice.

Despite growing awareness of music's benefits, structured applications of music in writing classrooms remain scarce. Few instructional models have been developed to guide educators in selecting and integrating musical compositions intentionally. As a result, creative music-based interventions are often improvised or inconsistently applied, lacking the rigor needed to evaluate outcomes or replicate results. This study attempts to fill this gap through a qualitative investigation into the use of music as a deliberate instructional aid in creative writing.

2.4 Previous Studies on Music in Education

Several researchers have explored the correlation between music education and cognitive development, particularly in areas such as spatial reasoning and verbal performance. Schellenberg's work revealed that music training could lead to measurable improvements in language and reasoning skills, suggesting that the cognitive benefits of music extend beyond artistic domains [8]. Although this research did not focus specifically on writing, it supports the broader claim that music facilitates essential cognitive processes involved in creative production.

In a classroom context, Hargreaves and North examined the effects of background music on student writing and found that the emotional tone of music significantly influenced the style and content of student compositions [9]. Their findings suggest that auditory environments play a powerful role in shaping narrative perspective and emotional depth. Barrett and Tafuri expanded this research to early childhood, demonstrating that musical cues can influence both language development and creative narrative structure [10]. Their study emphasizes music's scaffolding potential for story sequencing, mood creation, and character development.

However, very few studies have investigated the use of emotionally rich and stylistically distinct compositions—such as Gott Tante and The Castle—in structured high school writing instruction. Moreover, most existing research relies on quantitative methods, overlooking the personal experiences and reflective insights of students engaging with music-integrated tasks. The absence of qualitative evidence in this area leaves a gap in understanding how learners internalize and respond to music during the writing process. This study contributes to that gap, using student interviews to explore how music shapes divergent thinking, emotional involvement, and the structural features of creative writing.

III. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design rooted in interpretivist inquiry, aimed at exploring the lived experiences of high school students as they engaged with music-integrated creative writing activities. The goal was to understand how selected musical compositions influenced students' divergent thinking processes and narrative construction. A semi-structured interview format was adopted to allow for both depth and flexibility in participants' responses, ensuring that individual insights were captured without constraint.

Qualitative methods were selected to access students' subjective perceptions, emotional engagement, and cognitive shifts—elements not easily quantified but essential for understanding the dynamic relationship between music and creativity. This design supports thematic analysis, allowing patterns and categories to emerge organically from participant narratives.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Ten students from three public senior high schools in Xiamen—Xiamen No.1 Middle School, Xiamen No.2 Middle School, and Xiamen No.6 Middle School—participated in the study. (Figure 3) A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who met the following criteria: (a) currently enrolled in Grade 11 English or Language Arts courses, (b) demonstrated interest in creative writing, and (c) had access to music-listening facilities during instruction. The schools

were chosen based on comparable curriculum structures, availability of classroom audio equipment, and administrative approval to conduct educational research. Participant demographics were not used as a variable of comparison, as the emphasis of this study remained on thematic depth rather than generalizability.

Figure 3: Distribution of Interviewees by School

School Name	Participants
Xiamen No.1 Middle School	4
Xiamen No.2 Middle School	3
Xiamen No.6 Middle School	3

3.3 Data Collection Tools

The primary instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview protocol developed around three core domains: cognitive stimulation, emotional expression, and writing outcomes. Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and was conducted in a quiet, familiar setting within each school to ensure participant comfort. Interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Supplementary materials included the two musical compositions—“Gott Tanzte” by E Nomine and “The Castle” by

Nobuo Uematsu—which were introduced during a prior classroom session. Students engaged in free writing exercises immediately after listening, which served as a stimulus for later interview questions.

3.4 Interview Protocol

The interview guide comprised open-ended questions designed to elicit reflective and descriptive responses. The following core questions formed the backbone of the protocol:

Can you describe how listening to the music pieces "Gott Tanzte" and "The Castle" influenced your thinking process when coming up with new ideas or perspectives in your writing?

In what ways, if any, did the musical compositions help you express emotions, imagery, or structure in your creative writing?

How did you personally feel about using music as part of the writing process? Would you recommend it to others, and why or why not?

Probing and follow-up questions were used to clarify or deepen responses when necessary. Care was taken to avoid leading questions and to create a nonjudgmental environment where participants felt free to share both positive and critical perspectives.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Transcribed interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved six stages: familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. NVivo software was used for organizing codes and generating thematic networks.

Initial coding focused on repeated references to emotional impact, mental imagery, ideation, and structural writing changes. These codes were grouped into broader categories that corresponded to cognitive, emotional, and expressive domains of the writing experience. Patterns across schools were noted but not emphasized, as the goal was depth over demographic comparison.

Themes that emerged—such as enhanced ideation, emotional resonance, and narrative clarity—were triangulated with observational notes taken during the music-listening sessions. This enhanced the reliability of interpretation by anchoring self-reported data in observed classroom behavior.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All ethical guidelines for research involving minors were strictly followed. Informed consent was obtained from both students and their guardians. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymized transcripts, and pseudonyms were used in all reporting.

IV. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed three major themes aligned with the research objectives: (1) Enhanced Ideation through Music, (2) Emotional Resonance and Expressive Writing, and (3) Structural Development and Narrative Coherence. These themes reflect the participants’ responses to music-facilitated creative writing exercises and provide insight into how specific musical stimuli influenced their thinking and writing processes.

4.1 Demographic Profile

Demographic Profile provides sample characteristics, including gender distribution (40% male, 60% female), universal age range (16-17 years), school allocation across three provincial key high schools, self-reported writing interest levels (70% high interest), and music training background (50% with formal training averaging 3.2 years). This structured presentation not only enhances study replicability by documenting population parameters but also implicitly

acknowledges limitations regarding generalizability, as the sample's inherent characteristics - particularly the self-selected writing interest and substantial musical training prevalence - may have amplified observed effects of music-integrated pedagogy compared to more heterogeneous student populations. The tabular format efficiently communicates potential moderating variables while maintaining focus on the qualitative research design's primary objectives.

Characteristic	Distribution	Notes
Gender	Male: 4 (40%) Female: 6 (60%)	Self-reported identification
Age	16–17 years (100%)	All in Grade 11
School	Xiamen No.1: 3 Xiamen No.2: 4 Xiamen No.6: 3	Provincial key high schools
Writing Interest	High: 7 Moderate: 3	Assessed via pre-study survey
Music Training	Formal training: 5 None: 5	Average training: 3.2 years

4.2 Enhanced Ideation through Music

Student (Pseudonym)	Music Piece	Reported Effect on Idea Generation	Example Imagery or Concepts
Mei	Gott Tanzte	“It helped me imagine a war between light and shadows.”	Supernatural themes, inner conflict
Lian	The Castle	“I wrote about a lonely traveler finding an ancient home.”	Isolation, emotional memory
Hao	Gott Tanzte	“I created a new world with laws and powers.”	World-building, speculative fiction
Xinyi	The Castle	“I felt calm and imagined a fading love letter.”	Romance, passage of time

Table 1: Student Responses on Idea Generation and Flexibility of Thought

Many participants shared that listening to the selected compositions prior to or during writing allowed them to explore ideas that felt “beyond the obvious,” leading to imaginative breakthroughs they did not anticipate. The two compositions used in the intervention—Gott Tanzte and The Castle—were distinct in their musical character and produced different cognitive-emotional effects. Gott Tanzte, with its intense percussion and electronic textures, elicited vivid and high-energy imagery in several students. Mei explained, “It helped me imagine a war between light and shadows,” channeling supernatural conflict and inner turmoil into her narrative. Similarly, Hao stated, “I created a new world with laws and powers,” illustrating how the music inspired expansive world-building and speculative fiction. In contrast, The Castle—a melodic, orchestral piece—was more closely associated with introspective and emotionally resonant writing. Lian reflected, “I wrote about a lonely traveler finding an ancient home,” conveying themes of isolation and longing, while Xinyi described how the music led her to “imagine a fading love letter,” invoking romance and the passage of time. These individualized interpretations highlight how music served as a powerful ideational catalyst, helping students move beyond

conventional thinking and into unique creative territory. The breadth of responses suggests that music enhanced all three core components of divergent thinking: fluency, flexibility, and originality. Students generated a wide volume of ideas, shifted seamlessly between thematic genres, and introduced novel elements into their narratives. This aligns with Guilford’s assertion that divergent thinking can be stimulated through sensory and emotional input. Importantly, the emotional and structural qualities of the music appeared to shape the emotional tone and direction of student writing, reinforcing the notion that music is not merely a background influence but an active agent in the ideation process. As students responded differently depending on the piece—ranging from epic battles to nostalgic love stories—it became evident that music helped “stretch” their thinking across different narrative modes. In this sense, musical compositions acted as cognitive scaffolds for lateral thinking, supporting the development of ideas that were not only imaginative but personally meaningful. These findings strengthen the case for integrating music intentionally in writing pedagogy as a means of unlocking deeper layers of creativity and expression.

4.3 Emotional Resonance and Expressive Writing

Student	Emotion Triggered	Type of Music	Expressive Outcome
Jiahui	Melancholy	The Castle	Created a grieving character’s monologue
Wei	Anxiety and urgency	Gott Tanzte	Wrote a suspense scene with fast pacing
Chen	Serenity and nostalgia	The Castle	Composed reflective diary-style entries
Ling	Power and chaos	Gott Tanzte	Developed a dystopian battle sequence

Table 2: Reported Emotional States and Writing Impact

Students frequently highlighted the emotional power of music, describing how it deepened their ability to connect with and articulate feelings during the writing process. Many expressed that music “opened a door” to emotions they often avoided or struggled to access, enabling them to write with greater authenticity and intensity. For instance, Jiahui noted that The Castle made her feel “melancholy,” which led her to write a monologue from the perspective of a grieving character. Similarly, Wei described how the high tempo and tension in Gott Tanzte generated a sense of “anxiety and urgency,” prompting him to craft a suspenseful scene with rapid pacing and fragmented dialogue. These emotional responses were not superficial; several students reported returning to earlier drafts and revising them to better match the emotional tone evoked during their music-listening experience. This act of emotional recalibration reflects a deeper level of engagement, where students not only experience emotions but actively shape their narratives in response to them.

Such outcomes support Koelsch’s findings that music activates areas of the brain responsible for emotion and memory, suggesting a neurological basis for these creative reactions [6]. For students like Chen, who described The Castle as evoking “serenity and nostalgia,” music became a tool for introspection, resulting in diary-style entries that were calm, thoughtful, and deeply reflective. In contrast, Ling channeled the chaotic energy of Gott Tanzte into a dystopian battle sequence that explored themes of destruction and resistance. These examples illustrate how musical compositions can serve as emotional cues, guiding tone, atmosphere, and character development in student writing. Rather than treating emotion as a secondary or decorative element, students positioned it as central to their narratives, using music as both a mirror and a trigger. In this way, music functioned not just as a source of inspiration, but as a medium for emotional literacy—helping students give form to inner experiences that might otherwise remain unexpressed.

4.4 Structural Development and Narrative Coherence

Student	Strategy Employed	Music Used	Structural Outcome
Rui	Mirrored music tempo in story pacing	Gott Tanzte	Rising tension and fast climax
Ming	Followed emotional arc of the melody	The Castle	Gradual buildup to emotional resolution
Tian	Used musical shifts as scene changes	Both	Clear sectioning and plot segmentation
Kai	Wrote in parallel with musical phrasing	The Castle	Smooth transitions between narrative parts

Table 3: Use of Music for Narrative Structure and Coherence

Beyond idea generation and emotional expression, students consistently reported that music contributed to the structural development of their writing. Music was not merely a source of mood or inspiration; it served as an organizational guide that helped them map the rhythm, pacing, and flow of their narratives. For example, Rui explained that he “mirrored the tempo of Gott Tanzte in his story pacing,” producing a sequence marked by rising tension and culminating in a fast-paced climax. Others, like Ming, used the emotional arc of The Castle to shape the emotional progression of their stories, stating that “the music helped me build toward something, like a quiet sadness that slowly takes over.” In these instances, students did not rely solely on conventional writing templates; instead, they used the music as a scaffold, creating organic

story arcs that reflected the auditory dynamics they experienced during listening.

Such approaches underscore a deeper cognitive alignment with Torrance's emphasis on elaboration as a creative trait—defined as the ability to expand upon and refine an idea ^[5]. Students like Tian, who used shifts in music as cues for scene changes, demonstrated clear segmentation and logical sequencing in their narratives, while Kai described writing “in parallel with musical phrasing,” which helped produce smooth transitions between story sections. These strategies led to more coherent plots, better pacing, and enhanced narrative clarity. Rather than viewing structure as imposed from outside, students allowed musical structure to inform their internal creative logic. The result was storytelling that felt both intuitively paced and emotionally consistent. These patterns suggest that when students engage with music intentionally, it can provide not just inspiration but also cognitive rhythm—acting as a blueprint for organizing narrative complexity with greater fluidity and cohesion.

4.5 Student Reflections on Music-Integrated Writing

When students reflected on their experiences with music-integrated writing, most conveyed enthusiasm and a sense of novelty. They described the approach using words like “refreshing,” “motivating,” and “more personal” than traditional prompts. Mei, for instance, stated, “It felt like the music was speaking to me, not just giving me an assignment. That made me want to write more.” For several students, the process not only unlocked creativity but also fostered emotional authenticity. Chen shared, “I usually worry about getting it right, but with music, I just focused on how I felt—it took away the pressure.” Students expressed that music helped reduce the fear of failure or judgment, allowing them to take creative risks and express themselves more freely. Some even voiced a desire to incorporate this method into their own routines. Hao mentioned, “I want to keep doing this at home. It's not just for school—it helps me think clearly.”

The study revealed music's benefits for brainstorming and drafting, but a notable minority—including Lian, Wei, and Xinyi—reported it hindered their revision process. Lian explained, “It worked when I was brainstorming, but during editing, the music got in the way.” This divergence reflects the different cognitive demands of creative generation versus analytical revision. Music's emotional and associative qualities aid divergent thinking during ideation, yet its presence may overwhelm working memory during the convergent thinking required for editing tasks like grammar correction and structural refinement. Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 2011) suggests auditory stimuli during precision-focused tasks could create competing cognitive demands, particularly for students struggling with verbal multitasking. These findings recommend pedagogical adaptations including allowing students to disable music during revision, using minimal ambient tracks for editing phases, or implementing structured music-free revision periods to accommodate varying cognitive styles.

4.6 Implications for Pedagogical Practice

The findings from this study suggest that integrating music into the creative writing process can significantly enhance students' divergent thinking, emotional engagement, and narrative construction. Students demonstrated increased fluency, originality, and flexibility in their writing when inspired by music, with many aligning their story structure and tone to the dynamic qualities of the compositions. This reinforces the view that music is not merely a background enhancer but a viable pedagogical tool that stimulates multiple cognitive pathways. When used intentionally, music can serve as a scaffold for ideation, helping students move beyond formulaic thinking and into imaginative exploration. Educators seeking to foster creativity in their classrooms can leverage music as a form of non-verbal stimulus that activates both emotional depth and conceptual elaboration—two critical components of meaningful writing.

However, the diversity of student responses also underscores the importance of personalization in any music-integrated approach. While many students found music empowering, a few experienced distraction or preferred silence during specific stages of writing. These differences suggest that effective implementation requires flexibility and student choice. Teachers should be encouraged to experiment with music as a creative tool while remaining attentive to students' individual learning preferences. Offering students options—such as choosing between different genres, using music only during brainstorming, or working in silence when needed—can support a differentiated learning environment. More broadly, incorporating music into the curriculum may help redefine the writing classroom as a space for emotional expression, experimentation, and student-centered learning, aligning with 21st-century pedagogical goals that prioritize creativity, well-being, and autonomy.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that integrating music into creative writing instruction can significantly enhance students' divergent thinking, emotional engagement, and narrative construction. The qualitative analysis of high school students' experiences revealed that emotionally rich and structurally distinct compositions—such as Gott Tantzte and The Castle—served as powerful cognitive and affective stimuli, fostering fluency, originality, and flexibility in writing. Students reported that music facilitated imaginative ideation, deepened emotional expression, and provided a structural scaffold for narrative coherence. These findings align with Guilford's and Torrance's theories on divergent thinking, reinforcing the idea that multisensory stimuli can unlock creative potential.

The educational implications of these findings suggest that music holds significant potential beyond mere aesthetic enhancement, serving as an intentional pedagogical tool in writing instruction. Teachers can strategically incorporate music to stimulate student voice, encourage creative risk-taking in narrative development, and cultivate emotional literacy. This approach could involve carefully selecting musical pieces that evoke specific moods or themes relevant to writing tasks, or empowering students to choose music that personally resonates with their creative goals. Additionally, music integration may help reduce writing anxiety and increase engagement, particularly among students who struggle with rigid writing structures, potentially making the writing process more accessible and enjoyable for diverse learners.

While the study offers valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The research focused exclusively on Grade 11 students from three Xiamen high schools with preexisting writing interest, potentially limiting the applicability of findings to broader student populations with varying writing attitudes or cultural backgrounds. The qualitative methodology, while providing rich descriptive data, prevents statistical generalization of results. Future studies would benefit from including a more diverse participant pool across different grade levels and writing proficiency levels, as well as incorporating quantitative measures to assess writing outcomes. These expansions would help determine whether music-integrated writing strategies offer universal benefits or are particularly effective for specific learner profiles.

In light of these limitations, several recommendations for future research are proposed. Mixed-methods studies that combine interviews with quantitative assessments—such as Torrance’s divergent thinking tests or standardized writing rubrics—could offer a more comprehensive view of the impact of music on creativity. Expanding the research to include a broader, more diverse population across different regions and age groups could further validate the results. It would also be valuable to compare the effects of different types of music (e.g., instrumental vs. lyrical, traditional vs. modern) on creative processes. Longitudinal studies could assess whether consistent exposure to music during writing exercises leads to sustained improvements in creativity, writing quality, and self-expression.

This study contributes to a growing recognition of the value of arts-integrated education. Music has demonstrated its capacity to inspire, focus, and emotionally engage learners—elements that are often underutilized in conventional writing instruction. As educators seek new ways to foster creativity in the 21st century, the integration of music into the writing classroom offers a powerful, research-supported method to cultivate imagination, emotional intelligence, and narrative skill in young writers.

References

- [1] J. P. Guilford, “Creativity,” *American Psychologist*, vol. 5, no. 9, pp. 444–454, 1950.
- [2] E. P. Torrance, *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking: Norms—Technical Manual*, Scholastic Testing Service, 1966.
- [3] S. Koelsch, “Brain and Music,” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, vol. 5, no. 6, pp. 605–622, 2014.
- [4] L. Ritchie and A. Williamon, “Music and creativity: Effects of music listening on creative thinking,” *Psychology of Music*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 147–166, 2011.
- [4] J. P. Guilford, “Creativity,” *American Psychologist*, vol. 5, no. 9, pp. 444–454, 1950.
- [5] E. P. Torrance, *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking: Norms—Technical Manual*, Scholastic Testing Service, 1966.
- [6] S. Koelsch, “Brain and Music,” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, vol. 5, no. 6, pp. 605–622, 2014.
- [7] L. Ritchie and A. Williamon, “Music and creativity: Effects of music listening on creative thinking,” *Psychology of Music*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 147–166, 2011.
- [8] E. G. Schellenberg, “Music lessons enhance IQ,” *Psychological Science*, vol. 15, no. 8, pp. 511–514, 2005.
- [9] D. J. Hargreaves and A. C. North, “The functions of music in everyday life: Redefining the social in music psychology,” *Psychology of Music*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 71–83, 1999.
- [10] M. S. Barrett and J. Tafuri, “Creative development: Musical scaffolding for children’s learning,” *Research Studies in Music Education*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 61–73, 2012.