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Preschool Children's Music Preferences for Classical Music and World Music

Abstract

Musical activities in early and preschool age significantly contribute to the overall development of the child. The paper has explored music preferences of preschool children for classical music and *world music*. As a part of the research, a general data questionnaire and music preferences questionnaire were used. The research was conducted in Split, Croatia, on a sample of 126 children of early and preschool age children – three to six years old. The results show that there was no difference in children's music preferences with regard to age. Furthermore, no difference was found in children's music preferences with regard to gender. The obtained results have significant musical-pedagogical implications for the organization and conception of musical activities during early and preschool education. Musical contents for listening to music and singing can include various examples of *world music*. In this way, children will develop intercultural competencies from the earliest days.

Keywords: music preferences, musical activities, early and preschool education

Introduction

Music plays a significant role in the life of every child. The results of several studies confirm that engagement with music significantly contributes to overall development of the child (Jentschke & Koelsch, 2009). Hallam (2010) believes that active music engagement has a positive impact on the personal and social development of the child only in case of positive learning experiences, which has a number of implications for theory and practice of music pedagogy:

In early childhood there seem to be benefits for the development of perceptual skills which affect language learning and which subsequently impact on literacy. Opportunities to be able to co-ordinate rhythmically also seem important for the acquisition of literacy skills. Fine motor co-ordination is also improved through learning to play an instrument. Music also seems to improve spatial reasoning, one aspect of general intelligence, which is related to some of the skills required in mathematics. While general attainment is clearly affected by literacy and numeracy skills, motivation, which depends on self-esteem, self-efficacy and aspirations, is also important in the amount of effort given to studying. Engagement with music can enhance self-perceptions, but only if it provides positive learning experiences which are rewarding. (Hallam, 2010, pp. 281-282)

While some musical abilities are present in children from their birth, others reach a higher level only in older individuals, with longer musical experience. Thus, sensitivity to melodic contour and relative pitch appear already in early childhood, while other musical abilities, such as sensitivity to harmony, develop more significantly only in late childhood (Trainor, 2005). Earlier research has shown that musical abilities change throughout childhood and depend on musical experiences,

such as everyday exposure to culture-specific music, called enculturation (Hannon & Trainor, 2007). Formal music instruction appears to encourage the development of musical abilities by shaping domain-specific perceptual and cognitive representations (Hannon & Trainor, 2007).

Early-age and preschool children are introduced to music through game, singing, listening, playing an instrument, taking part in musical games and counting-out rhymes. Listening to music has special importance in the aesthetic education and children's introduction to the world of classical and traditional music.

The National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Preschool Education in Croatia (Ministry of Science and Education, 2015) encourages the development of eight key competences for lifelong learning: Communication in her/his mother tongue; Communication in foreign languages; Mathematical competence and basic competences in natural sciences and technology; Digital competences; Learning to learn; Social and civic competences; Initiative-taking and entrepreneurship; Cultural awareness and expression. Introducing different musical styles, primarily classical and traditional Croatian music as well as various forms of *world music*, significantly contributes to strengthening the competence related to children's cultural awareness and expression, but also their social and civic competence.

The results of research on children's musical preferences generally show that children prefer almost all musical styles, but that such preferences decrease with age (Brittin, 2000; McCrary, 2000). Consequently, the period of early and preschool education is the optimal time to introduce children to different musical styles, primarily classical music, Croatian traditional music, and various forms of *world music*. Roulston (2006) explored children's preferences and concluded that children show distinct preferences for an eclectic range of music from very early ages, that they prefer rock and popular music, that music listening at that age was characterized by a reliance on diverse technologies, with listening inextricably interwoven with viewing, and that music listening and experiences in the home varied considerably from what was offered in the school and daycare settings.

Peery and Peery (1986) assessed musical preferences of 45 preschool children (mean age 4.7 years). The study incorporated an experimental design with parallel groups. Six classical and two popular pieces were evaluated. All children showed high preferences for all pieces during the pretest. The experimental group received weekly 45-minute classes during which they listened to classical music, sang classical themes, played musical games, learned the names and sounds of various instruments, etc. Posttest results indicate the experimental group preferred the classical selections significantly more than the control group, who experienced a decline in preference for the classical pieces. The authors conclude that repeated listening to music, along with the appropriate methodological design of music listening activities, significantly contributes to increasing children's musical preferences.

Yim et al. (2014) have examined children's musical preference in Hong Kong and in South Australia by applying a data mining technique (Self Organising Maps), which is a clustering method that groups similar data objects together. The sample was composed of 228 young children aged 4-5 years and their parents/caregivers in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China and in the Adelaide city of South Australia (SA). The results have shown

that dancing/moving is the most preferred musical activity among all children in the investigation, but dancing/moving is a more preferred activity by children in HKSAR than in SA. More HKSAR children indicated their clear and strong preference in playing instruments. South Australian children are more likely to indicate their least preferred musical activity than HKSAR children.

Arriaga-Sanz et al. (2017) have analysed the musical preferences of children in early childhood education and have tried to determine the learning environment where these preferences develop, as well as to identify both teachers' and families' degree of knowledge of these preferences. The study was conducted on the Spanish sample and a total of 286 five-year-old children, their parents and their teachers participated.

Research on children's musical preferences is mainly oriented toward educational settings, i.e., examining children's musical preferences in school or kindergarten. However, some researchers focus on the home environment and observe the types of musical activities and the impact of the media to which children are exposed at home. Custodero et al. (2003) investigated how parents describe children's engagement with music at home, while Custodero (2006) also conducted in-depth ethnographic accounts of the singing practices of families with young children. The above studies provide an insight into children's engagement with music at home, especially into their singing and listening practices.

Research aim, problems, and hypotheses

The aim of this research is to examine early-age and preschool children's musical preferences for classical music and *world music*.

In accordance with the stated aim, the following research problems were formulated:

1. to investigate the influence of age on the preferences for classical and *world music*; and
2. to investigate the influence of gender on the preferences for classical and *world music*.

In accordance with the defined research problems, the following hypotheses were set up:

H1: *Younger children, compared to older children, show greater preferences for classical and world music.*

H2: *Girls, compared to boys, show greater preferences for classical and world music.*

Method

Participants

The study was conducted in two kindergartens in the city of Split: *Grigor Vitez Kindergarten* and *Marjan Kindergarten*. A total of 126 children of early and preschool age (F=66, M=60), three to six years old, participated in the research.

Research instrument and procedure

For the purposes of the research, a two-part questionnaire was constructed as well. The first part contains questions related to the socio-demographic

characteristics of the participants (gender, age). The second part of the questionnaire related to the research of music preferences which were examined using a personal computer, speakers and 10 musical fragments. The participants' task was to listen to a piece and assess the degree of liking it on a Likert-type scale marking the appropriate emoticon. The compact disc was designed exclusively for the purposes of this research, and the criteria for music selections were the above hypotheses.

A compact disc with five classical pieces was used in the research (P. I. Čajkovski: Trepak (Russian Dance), Nutcracker; J. Brahms: Hungarian Dance No. 5 in G Minor; J. Offenbach: Can Can, Orpheus in the Underworld; W. A. Mozart: Sonata No. 11 in A Major, K. 331, Alla Turca; G. Rossini: William Tell, ouverture) along with five pieces of *world music* (Danilushka & Natasha: Casatschok; Dark Isle Bagpiper: Scotland the Brave; Zorba's Dance (Sirtaki); Will Glahé Orchestra: Clarinet Polka; Akwaaba Traditional African Drum and Dance Ensemble in Bedford). The Cronbach α for the classical music subscale is 0.77, and for the *world music* subscale 0.79. Since the distribution of preferences for music selections differs significantly from the normal distribution (K-S $d=0.14$; $p<0.01$), nonparametric statistics procedures will be applied in further analyzes.

Data analysis

Apart from descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, Cronbach α), in data analysis a Chi-square test was used to check whether children's musical preferences differ with respect to gender and age. For data analysis statistic application STATISTICA 13 was used.

Results

As for the average degree of preference for the music pieces, the children rated the highest P. I. Čajkovski: Trepak (Russian Dance), Nutcracker (4.30), and the lowest J. Brahms: Hungarian Dance No. 5 in G Minor (3.87).

H1: *Younger children, compared to older children, show greater preferences for classical and world music.*

To examine whether the preferences for classical music and *world music* differ with respect to children's age, the χ^2 test was conducted. The results indicate that there is no difference in children's musical preferences with respect to age ($\chi^2=17,96$; $df=12$; $p=0,12$), which made us reject the first hypothesis.

H2: *Girls, compared to boys, show greater preferences for classical and world music.*

To test the above hypothesis, the χ^2 test was performed. The results show that there is no difference in children's musical preferences with respect to gender ($\chi^2=4,51$; $df=4$; $p=0,34$), which made us reject the second hypothesis.

Discussion

Generally, younger children, compared to older children, are more open and flexible toward music in general, and thus toward classical music and *world music*. Such results are in line with the results of the research by Dobrota and Sarajčev (2021), which confirm the open-earedness hypothesis, i.e., children's openness to different styles of music.

The obtained results have significant implications for designing musical activities for children of early and preschool age. Bearing in mind children's openness to unknown and new musical styles, musical activities at that age can be designed so as to include children-appropriate pieces of classical music, traditional music, and various forms of *world music*.

Furthermore, the results of this study did not confirm that girls, compared to boys, show greater preferences for classical and *world music*. Such results are inconsistent with the research results confirming that girls, compared to boys, have more positive attitudes toward music and prefer more diverse musical styles, which can be explained by better music education received by girls (Harrison & O'Neill, 2003).

Pollatou et al. (2004) investigated whether there were differences between boys and girls at the age of five concerning their musical aptitude, rhythmic ability and performance in gross motor skills. The results reveal no differences in musical aptitude and gross motor skills performance, but do show differences in rhythmic ability test results in favor of girls. Considering that rhythmic competence is strongly inter-related with children's motor coordination, the concluding authors' suggestion for the preschool physical education curriculum is to incorporate specific rhythmic activities.

We can conclude that music plays an important role in children's life. Music engagement in the early childhood education includes different activities, such as singing, listening, playing instruments and dancing. All these activities contribute to the development of the children's intercultural sensitivity, especially singing and listening to music. Music is an important media that can contribute to the development of the children's musical mind.

Conclusion

The results of this research have significant implications for designing musical activities in kindergarten. The most important scientific contribution of the research is based on the fact that children of early and preschool age are open to different types of music and that their musical taste is not limited to certain musical styles. Therefore, it is possible to include different types of music in the musical activities of children of this age, provided that such music is appropriate to children's abilities.

It is thus possible to introduce children of early and preschool age into the African musical tradition by singing, playing, and listening to African music. As an example, we can use *Che Che Koolay*, a song originally performed by the Fanti tribe from Ghana but sung all over the world. The mode of the song is minor/modal, and main characteristics of the song is that it is movement/dance song, call and response song, with sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth note patterns. This song can be included in all activities (singing, listening, playing an instrument), but also in a complete project aimed to introduce African civilization. Another example can be the song *Salibonani (Hello, how are you?)* from Zimbabwe.

These songs are suitable for children of early and preschool age, who through the activities of singing, playing or listening get to know African music and culture, which enriches their knowledge, but also develops openness and tolerance for the new and unknown. In this way, in addition to the development of musical abilities

and aesthetic education of children, the development of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural attitudes is also encouraged.

Musical activities as well as artistic activities in general represent one of the fundamental modes of expression for children. Children cannot fully express themselves through speech or writing, but they can express themselves through movement, sound, and art in general. They express themselves, but they also learn in that way.

What a child has heard in his first six years of life cannot be eradicated later. Thus it is too late to begin teaching at school, because a child stores a mass of musical impressions before school age, and if what is bad predominates, then his fate, as far as music is concerned, has been sealed for a lifetime.

Zoltán Kodály, Children's Day Speech, 1951

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Appendix

Summary table: Age

Summary table: Observed minus Expected Frequencies. Marked cells have counts > 10 Pearson Chi-square: 17,9645, df=12, p=,116772						
Age	Music preferences 1	Music preferences 2	Music preferences 3	Music preferences 4	Music preferences 5	Row Totals
3	-0,12	-0,12	-0,12	1,31	-0,96	0,00
4	-0,15	0,85	0,85	0,08	-1,62	0,00
5	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	0,38	0,42	0,00
6	0,54	-0,46	-0,46	-1,77	2,15	0,00
All Groups	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00

Summary table: Gender

Summary table: Observed minus Expected Frequencies. Marked cells have counts > 10 Pearson Chi-square: 4,51493, df=4, p=,340781						
Gender	Music preferences 1	Music preferences 2	Music preferences 3	Music preferences 4	Music preferences 5	Row Totals
M	0,65	-0,35	0,65	-0,08	-0,88	-0,00
F	-0,65	0,35	-0,65	0,08	0,88	0,00
All Groups	0,00	0,00	0,00	-0,00	0,00	-0,00