DIGITAL SOLUTIONS OF COLLECTIVE MUSIC EXPERIENCE FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

Music plays a very important role in student development, it can help them acquire the skills for expressing their opinion and critical assessment of the world as well as foster their self-confidence and learning motivation. It is extremely important to promote the formation of collective musical experience through a creative process that simultaneously develops their instrument playing, socialization and cooperation skills.

Ensuring the process of collective music playing is closely related to the competence and digital literacy of the group leader - teacher. This is particularly important in the context of overcoming the constraints of the crisis since the beginning of 2020.

Due to the fast spread of the COVID-19 pandemic many countries adopted restrictive containment measures limiting assembling in public spaces and introduced social distancing. Amateur culture groups virtually ceased their creative activities. The measures equally affected the groups formed within the framework of the study process in music schools, as well as in universities and interest education groups. This gave rise to the need to study the consequences of the restrictions for musical groups and their participants.

The authors of the study surveyed general education music teachers and teachers of schools majoring in music in Latvia, as well as managers of musical groups asking questions regarding the digital solutions in distance learning. The analysis of the acquired data showed the willingness of the teachers to overcome the crisis and necessity to do so. However, providing distance learning required great effort from the teachers who have worked at their respective schools for many years. The analysis of the questionnaire data showed the necessity for improving professional skills in applying digital tools in the education process. This means that the improvement of digital skills correlates with the continuity of culture studies in musical education which include collective music playing.

Keywords: *teachers' professional qualification, collective music experience, digital solutions*

INTRODUCTION

Latvia stands out among the European states and takes pride in the fact that in the field of music education – despite the rapid social economic changes, affecting the state during the recent decades it has managed to retain its professional and professionally oriented musical education.

At the moment there are 9 professional and 117 professionally oriented music schools [17].

The importance of this type of education in development of professional musicians and music teachers is beyond any doubt, but this importance is the greatest in the sphere of preservation and development of the culture life values in Latvia, through the development of educated music lovers – people who love music and have interest in it, who go to concerts and consider music making in amateur groups an integral part of their lives. Thus the main task of the teachers – leaders of the collective music making groups at an education institution – is to increase the motivation of the students to become involved in music [14]; [27]. Nowadays it is becoming increasingly more difficult to complete the task, as the social changes and the consequences of the pandemic of 2020 – 2021 (distance learning and teaching, crisis in multiple spheres, etc.) also change the value orientation of the modern students, the range of their needs and interests is growing and diversifying, and with it also the sphere of motivation is changing. Presently also the opportunities of the state support for the professional and professionally oriented music education are reduced [11].

The music in education plays an extremely important role in comprehensive development of the students, it can help them acquire skills necessary in order to express their opinions, perform a critical evaluation of their surroundings, but also be more self-assured and motivated. It is especially important to promote the formation of the collective musical experience of the students via creative activity, both developing new and improving the existing musical skills and competences, personality development processes, and also the socialising and collaborative skills [1]; [8]. The professional formation of the collective music-making experience via creative activity of the students is not possible, when the activity is not guided and supervised by a person competent, creative and full of initiative, that is the group leader – teacher.

An integral part of the music-making process is the creation it being the main aim for the development of a creative personality. One of the teaching tasks is to support and promote interest in diverse types of musical activities [5].

Such an interest can only be aroused in the students by a teacher, who himself is interested in development of his or her competencies and qualifications, someone who can use one's own experience to enrich the learning and life experience of the youngsters.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

In the context of research into the topic "Digital solutions of collective music experience for the improvement of teachers' professional qualification" a study was done on the ideas expressed by experts in the fields of psychology, pedagogy in general and music pedagogy in particular, while the further research included a survey of the group leaders - teachers regarding the opportunities for organisation of collective music-making within the distance learning process, and the digital competencies of the teachers.

In order to understand the topicality of the approach, it is necessary to establish not only the applicability of the digital solutions in the study process, along with the opportunities for teachers to improve their professional skills and competencies, but it is also vitally important to explain the role of the collective music-making in culture education and constant improvement of the students' skills.

Study of development and interaction of different musical cultures is of importance for the artistic practice and research of music [28]. In our day, thanks to unlimited potential of technologies, the achievements of national music culture of different nations have become readily accessible. The study of these achievements also plays an important role for handing down the tradition to the next generations

In order for the culture process to develop further, notwithstanding different possible crises in the future, it is necessary not only to understand the potential created by the new technologies, but also use those in teaching work for provision of culture education.

The existence of national music culture is dependent upon activities of multiple generations of the particular nation in the field of creation and performance of musical compositions, for handing down and preservation of the musical experience [29]. Such characterisation of national music culture indicates that the explanation of its structure can be found within its system of social organisation, with its culture specific traditions, within which particular artistic experience is formed, including that of collective music-making.

The national tradition of collective music-making in Latvia is reflected in the General Latvian Song and Dance Festival, along with the Song and Dance Festival of Latvia's School Youth, where amateur choirs, vocal ensembles, and diverse instrumental groups and orchestras take place, with the dance groups participating in large joint concerts.

The process of collective music-making helps in achieving the most diverse positive results, understanding of that is reflected in different political documents [7]; [25]; [24]. It has also been acknowledged in a substantial number of studies

[26]; [12]. Participation in music groups, orchestras, choirs is of special importance for development of social skills and formation of united groups. Such a view is also supported by academic research, revealing the fact that the music-making process when organised in groups, promotes social unification, well-being and acquisition of social skills [3]; [20]; [23]; [15]; [12]. Creation of music exerts positive influence on prosociality, it promotes collaboration and prosocial behaviour within the group [13]; [18]; [21]. Thus musical activities become an effective field of activities, they create positive collective experience for many people, creating both a link between the performers and an intuitive feeling of community. Thus collective music-making not only creates a higher level of co-ordination in comparison to other non-musical group's activities, but also urges to reflect a common ain, strengthening the feeling of joint action of the group's members [15]. It is believed that joint music- making diminishes bias towards foreigners, as the language of music can be comprehensible and easily understood, also easily recognised, and music as such is international [22].

The aspects of cultural participation provide an opportunity for participation in the process of creation of music and art, promoting the research of aesthetics of music, thus helping the youths to take part in musical artistic processes. Teachers of music can position participatory culture both as an aim, and a means so as to use interpretation of music in order to urge the youths to think and act imaginatively [9]; [10]. This means to provide help to the students in development of their skills and comprehension for participation in culture involvement, and also to urge the youth to engage in the study of issues of aesthetic, ethical and sociocultural nature, this being an important aspect of teaching and learning. Thus the collective music-making realizes this handing down of experience, promoting the continuity of tradition inheritance, function of teaching and learning, and that of unification of a social collective body [2].

For the leader of collective music-making – the teacher it is important to possess not only the skill of music-making, knowledge of peculiarities of music-making, but also to possess the skills necessary for teaching this music-making, facilitating the students' task of learning it. It is necessary to be able to see the meaning of diverse methodological techniques, the purposefulness of their use under different circumstances. The teacher must find pedagogical and musical ideas useable in the practical work. Thus the teacher must possess some specific knowledge of both the practical and methodological, and theoretical issue of one's profession. This understanding of the aforementioned necessity is the basis of both the system of teacher education and that of their further skill development. Any teacher must develop oneself as a rich cultural personality. This process never stops [27].

The regulation Nr. 569 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Republic of Latvia (enters into force 14.08.2018.) states that teachers of general, professional and non-formal education are responsible for the improvement and development of

their professional competence. The professional competence is improved by studying a programme of at least 36 hours within a period of three years [19].

The crisis situation created by the pandemic urges the teachers to not only get acquainted with new study content and methods, but even more emphasises the necessity to acquire and develop the digital skills necessary for implementation of the distance collective music-making activities. With the digital age in full swing and new technologies constantly appearing, along with new mass media, it is important for the teachers to create a link between the social media, participation culture and the participants to the collective music making [6]. With it learning of the digital technologies by music teachers gains special importance, aiming to use the knowledge in culture education, constantly promoting the handing down of both the traditions and values of world culture, along with experience of collective music-making to the next generations.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

With the rapid spread of the COVID – 19 pandemic in the world in the first half of 2020 and the even worse situation in autumn, the governments of most countries made decisions limiting socialising, accepting the principles of social distancing. Due to the Covid-19 crisis in Latvia, not only all of the public culture events and festivals were cancelled – also the School Youth Song and Dance Festival planned and prepared for years was postponed. In spring 2020 all rehearsals of both amateur and professional art groups was suspended for 3 months. It has not been restarted fully even now – in mid-2021 [4].

The education process moved to the distance or online mode, but the culture process was not up to the challenge. The culture groups stopped their creative process. This process of artistic activity was also stopped for the groups involved in provision of education both at music schools and higher education institutions, and non-formal education alike [16].

The authors of the present study performed a survey among the music teachers of Latvia's general education institutions, professional music oriented education institutions and leaders of performing groups regarding the use of digital solutions in conducting distance music lessons.

Nearly 82% of the teachers and group leaders participating in the survey did not see any opportunity to work with the participants of collective music-making individually. At the same time 80% of the respondents expressed willingness to acquire additional knowledge in the field of ICT. Within the framework of the present study the available information on the use of digital solutions in the music educations study process was researched in detail (Microsoft Teams, ZOOM, Skype, WEBex, etc.) in both the general education and music professional orientation education programmes.
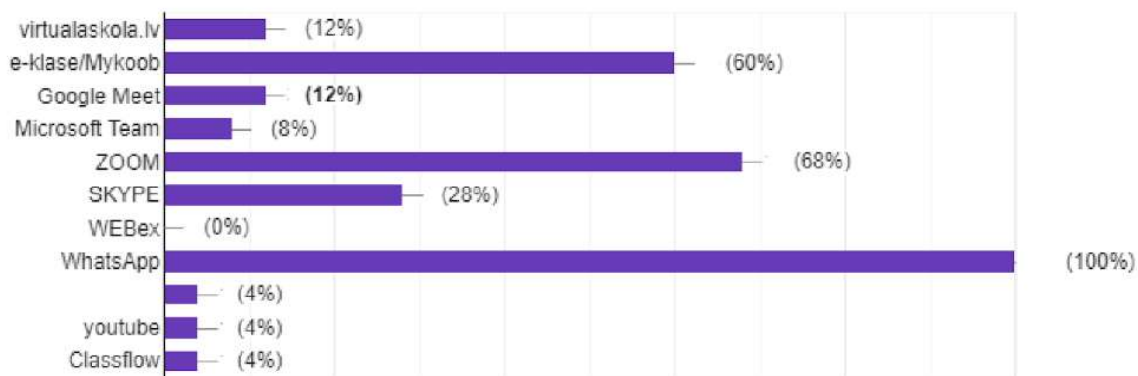
Fig. 1. *Digital solutions in the music educations study process.*

For data processing the IBM SPSS Statistics 22 software was used. In order to perform the quantitative data processing, the credibility factor was calculated first. The appropriateness of the questionnaire (*Reliability analysis*), using the Cronbach alpha test, showed the factor of α = 0,587. In order to establish the manifestation level of the actions by the teachers involved in the survey and to find the reserves not yet used, using the calculations of descriptive statistics the general mean values were found. The calculations show that the highest mean value m = 3,84 is that of the variable corresponding to the question: *Has your work-load increased or decreased because of the COVID – 19 pandemic-related restrictions?* Most of the teachers (92%) explain the increase in their workload with the need to prepare the various teaching materials for the lessons, additional explanations to be provided to the students, overcoming technology-related obstacles. At the same time some teachers mention that that their workload has decreased (the collective music-making activities cannot be organised in the distanced fashion) or stayed on the previous level. On the other hand, the lowest general mean level was registered for the variable corresponding to the question: *Did you take the opportunity to take part in local or international scale music projects or events during the state of emergency?* m = 1,68. Most of the teachers had not taken part in such music projects, explaining the fact with lack of information, as well as the excessive workload performing their teaching duties. Still some teachers had not only found the ways necessary to prepare their students, but also participated in contests with them.

Prior to performing the correlation calculations, the data distribution check was performed, using Kolmogorov – Smirnov test. It was found that the data are spread non-parametrically, and in further calculation of correlations the Spearman test was used.

The calculations show that a very tight correlation is between the variables corresponding to the survey questions: *What digital solutions did you use in your distance teaching activities?* and *Did you take the opportunity to take part in local or international scale music projects or events during the state of emergency?* rs = 0,410. Besides close interrelations were found between the variable

corresponding to the question: *Do you consider an option, when working with a group, to organise the music-making process remotely?* with the following

- Which digital solutions did you use in your distance teaching work? rs = 0,265;
- Did you manage to perform a successful transition to distance study process after the introduction of the state of emergency? rs = 0,311;
- Has your work-load increased or decreased because of the COVID − 19 pandemic-related restrictions? rs = 0,337.

The teachers who were not actively using some digital solutions were less interested in participation in diverse online projects and events. Thus the teachers who convincingly employ digital solutions for provision of distance study process, review different opportunities for overcoming the restrictions caused by the pandemic, in order to continue the group's activities. The analysis of the acquired data showed the willingness and necessity of the teachers to overcome the crisis, notwithstanding the problems related to 1) network bandwidth and quality of the connection, 2) the incomplete range of technological means available at education institutions, 3) lack of ICT knowledge and skills for the teachers' own work.

The analysis of the questionnaire data showed the necessity for improvement of the professional skills in application of digital tools in the education process. This improvement of digital skills correlates with the continuity of culture studies in musical education. The improvement of digital skills provides opportunities to conduct interdisciplinary lessons, integrating them into the study process. Organisation of study process with the help of technologies aids the creation of interactive study content. The teachers especially emphasised the need for the improvement of the teachers' digital expertise in the digital environment aimed at study management solutions and the use of integrated cloud services. The advancement of digital expertise would create an inter-relationship with the principles of positive education in the digital age, also substantially decreasing the risk of professional burn-out for teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

Currently the music teachers are in need of further education courses providing them with information on the new technologies, digital solutions, as well as the application of online music programs.

It is necessary to integrate the learning of the basics of digital technologies into the study process of music pedagogy.

The support of the sector's management, the municipalities and the management of the particular educational institution for wider use of digital technologies in the education process and the availability of the respective

software for general and vocational education, non-formal education, as well as for the cultural process of amateur groups would be of very great importance.

As a result of the research, it was concluded that with the increasing teacher workload, the risk of burnout of teachers is increasing; this requires another specific in-depth research into this direction, especially linking it to the development of teachers' digital skills.

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