

## Proposal of a Melodic Sequence for Music Literacy in Turkey in the Light of Turkish School Music and Kodály Philosophy

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### ABSTRACT

Kodály method has been adapted and used in many countries' music education systems since the 1960s and still is in use with a growing interest. Turkey is one of the countries that began to find its way in music education and brought Kodály related ideas into education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, music educators constantly began to speak about the Kodály philosophy and its applications last three decades. In this study, it is aimed to examine Kodály from a cultural perspective and to discuss how Kodály approach can be better adapted for Turkish school music and Turkish music education system. For this purpose, primarily Turkish school music and its place in music education are reviewed and reported in a historical context. Later, at the end of this examination in the light of Kodály's ideas about folk music and "musical mother tongue", a proposal for melodic sequence is suggested for music literacy in Turkey.

**Key words:** Kodály Philosophy, Melodic Sequence, Music Literacy, Turkish School Music, Turkish Folk Music

### INTRODUCTION

"Music for everyone" is a systematic idea that is designed to improve musicality and clarify how children can learn music better. This gives us a general idea of Kodály's approach to music education. Within this system, Kodály said that singing improves both the ear and the intelligence; in this way, he believed that we can create *musically literate children* who can "see with their ears and hear with their eyes" (Boshkoff, 1991). Based on the idea that children learn language by listening/hearing conversations around them, Kodály emphasized that children can improve their singing skills by listening to model people's singing in the same way. The Kodály approach, which emerged with these ideas, led to the start of the choral music movement in Hungary, and within the framework of this movement, an education system focused on singing in primary school music education was developed (Campbell and Kassner, 1995).

As a Hungarian composer, music educator, and ethnomusicologist, it is seen that Kodály had a productive and effective professional life which had great contributions to his own country's music and music education life as well as throughout the world. Many books and articles have been written about him to reveal his ideas and concept over the years and his philosophy is still welcomed by many country's education systems. As it is stated in most of these sources that Kodály's ideas focus on the child development approach which begins with the known elements by the child and gradually moves to the unfamiliar (Boshkoff, 1991; Choksy, 1988).

Also mentioned that Kodály was particularly interested in the education of young children and believed that education should begin as early as possible. In addition, we read from the sources that Kodály believed that mother tongue is very important for children therefore he was particularly interested in the folk music of his own culture (Casarow, 2011; Dobszay, 1972; Houlahan & Tacka, 2008). In relation to this, following two quotes of Kodály which were reported in the sources give us his understanding of education: 1) "... the folk songs of a child's own linguistic heritage constitute a musical 'mother tongue' and should therefore be the vehicle for all early instruction." 2) "[F]olk songs, themselves valuable as an art form, can give children a sense of cultural identity and continuity with the past" (as cited in Çoban, 2016). As we understood from these sayings, we can say that folk songs are ideal materials for starting early music education since they represent child's native language and musical mother tongue. In this sense, Kodály mentions that "certain nations use two or more systems together. Thus in Hungary the pentatonic system ... is still alive and melted down into a symbiosis with other systems..." (Kodály, 1964). Therefore, pentatonic sequence is also mentioned as the main series of many children's songs in Hungary (usually minor pentatonic character) (Choksy, 1988).

Kodály method has been adapted and used in many countries' music education systems since the 1960s and still is in use with a growing interest. Turkey is one of the countries that began to find its way in music education and brought Kodály

related ideas into education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, music educators constantly began to speak about the Kodály philosophy and its applications last three decades. In this article, the major aim is not to explain Kodály approach and principles in detail, but to examine Kodály from a cultural perspective and to discuss how Kodály approach can be better adapted in Turkish music education system, asking “How can we carry Kodály applications into Turkish music education and Turkish school music?”

## TURKISH SCHOOL MUSIC

Before reviewing the developments in Turkish school music, it would be appropriate to provide information about Turkish music culture. Turkey has two types of cultural and traditional music that are based on the rich folk tradition and cultural heritage of Anatolia. While one of them is Turkish folk music which represents and reflects folk tradition and culture; the other one is Turkish art music mainly comes from the Ottoman past which is described as traditional and urban music composed for artistic purposes (Say, 2008). Both of these types are modal and carry microtones in their structure, therefore, the system called “makam” resembles “modes” in Western structure.

In 1923, when Republic of Turkey was established, there were many developments occurred in different areas, music and music education were no exception. With the idea of modernization, new Republic faced more to the West and as a result, Western music began to be realized officially in the republic period. In 1924, one year after the establishment of the Republic, a music school for teachers (“Musiki Muallim Mektebi” – Music Teacher Training School) was established and became the milestone for the history of music education in Turkey. The same year, in 1924, music lessons were entered into the program of elementary and secondary schools and after 1924, music education curricula in schools were developed gradually in the year of 1926, 1927, 1936, 1948, 1968, 1994, 2006, and finally in 2018 (MEB, 2007; MEB, 2018; Uçan, 2018).

Among them, music education curricula prepared in 1926, 1936, and 1948 were included principles for ear training, solfege and singing in their structure with some samples of rote singing, singing games, Curwen hand signs as well as music (tone) ladder (MEB, 1948; Sazak et al., 2014). When it is examined in detail, it is seen that solfege in 1936 and 1948 music education curricula, has started with do major tonality. According to this; teaching the pitches of *do-sol* in the first year, *do-mi-sol* in the second year, *do-re-mi-fa-sol* in the third year, and *do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do*’ in the fourth year was suggested (Figure 1). So, *do major tonality* became the main aim to reach at the end of the fourth year in these curricula (MEB, 1948; Sazak et al., 2014).

While these developments were happening at the government level, in the first 30-40 years after the establishment of Republic of Turkey, there was a great interest among composers to write Turkish lyrics for foreign children’s songs due to the fact that school music practices were quite recent at that time and accordingly the original pieces were few in number. These songs were called “adapted songs” (Sun,

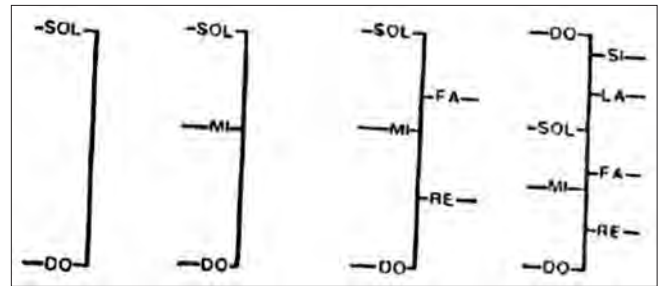


Figure 1. Melodic sequence used in 1936 and 1948 music education curricula (MEB, 1948)

2006). In time, Turkish composers increased their composing activities in the country and they began to compose new children’s songs in major and minor tonalities with Turkish lyrics. Since these songs are not similar to Turkish music in terms of their melodic structure and essence, they were called “emulation songs” (Sun, 2006).

In the 1950s, the years when Kodály worked on his country’s music education, music educators and teachers in Turkey had started to think about folk songs and musical mother tongue like Kodály. They started to discuss how to start teaching music for beginners. Was it a good decision to start with a major or minor tonality in Turkey? Was it possible to start with a local tonality? Due to the reason that the melodic structure of Turkish music is different than Western music, these were important discussions among music educators and composers during that years.

Halil Bedi Yönetken (1899-1968), who was a prominent music educator and musicologist in the 1950s, published an article in 1951 about the practices of solfege and musical reading in different countries. He also stressed the importance of starting from the simple to the complex in education. Accordingly, he stated that it is a natural way for beginners in the Western world to start with do major tonality in solfege. Therefore, in Turkish music education, he discussed whether it was possible to start solfege with a local tone (as cited in Say, 2005). The same year, musicologist Veysel Arseven (1919-1977) stated that school music should be based on the melodic and rhythmic structures of the folk music (as cited in Say, 2005) and he suggested that the “Re scale” should be the starting tone in Turkish music education. In this scale, all degrees are composed of white keys on the piano which is a very common makam (mode) in Turkish folk music, called “Hüseyni” like a Dorian mode in the Western tradition. The difference between a natural minor scale and Hüseyni scale can be identified from its raised sixth note (Figure 2).

In addition to this discussion, in these years, the mentality of composing the school songs began to change in Turkey, like in Hungary. Turkish composers began to compose songs that depended on Turkish folk music. Muammer Sun (1932-2021), a renowned composer and music educator was one of them, used the term “Turkish school songs” for this type of songs raising the idea of using traditional elements in the compositions (both in melody and rhythm). He stated that “Our school music should be based on our *folk songs* and *Turkish school songs*. Also, *adapted* and *emulation* songs should be included. But, the basis of music education should



Figure 2. Re Hüseyini scale

be based on national song repertoire” (Sun, 1969: 230). With this understanding, many other composers also contributed to “Turkish school songs” with their compositions. Besides Muammer Sun, some of these composers are Saip Egüz (1920-1981), Erdoğan Okyay (1933-2017), Sefai Acay (1946-2016), and Salih Aydoğan (1952-...). In the following, two examples of “Turkish school songs” are given in Figure 3.

Today, in the Turkish school music repertoire, there are numerous “Turkish school songs” which reflect melodic elements and the essence of Anatolia. In these songs, while some simple makam scales in Turkish folk music like Hüseyini, Kürdi, Rast etc. are used, the most referenced scale is Hüseyini scale. For example, in her study, Göher (2006) stated that songs with makam scale are more than tonal structured songs in Turkish school music and she also mentioned that the frequently used makam scale is “Hüseyini”. In 1968, in the preface of his book called “Çocuklar ve Gençler İçin Şarkı Demeti”, Muammer Sun also stated that most of his songs in the book are based on “Hüseyini” because it is considered as the main makam in Turkish folk music (Sun, 1969). In addition, Turkish composer and music theorist, Kemal İlerici, who proposed a quartal harmony system for the harmonization of Turkish music, has discussed Hüseyini scale as the main makam scale with the same idea. As a reason for this preference, İlerici (1981) stated that “Hüseyini makam is a mirror of the character of our nation” and he continued this statement by saying that “many of favored Turkish folk songs are sung” in this makam. Two favorite folk songs in Hüseyini scale are given in Figure 4.

In the 1960s, while individual composers and music educators were still discussing how music education should start in Turkish schools, these discussions were recognized at the official level as well. In a book called “İlkokul Müzik Kılavuzu” (Primary School Music Guide) written by Halil Bedi Yönetken, recognized and published by the Ministry of National Education, it was stated that beginning to teach music with major and minor tonalities like Western and European cultures is not “correct” for Turkish culture (Yönetken, 1966). In the same book, it was also expressed that using folk songs in beginning music education is more pedagogical and appropriate, so, music education should begin with Turkish folk songs. In addition to this, Primary School Curriculum in 1968 suggested starting with the pitches of *la-sol-fa* to teach music since these pitches are the core of the cultural plays and rhymes (Figure 5). In the same curriculum, it was stated that after *la-sol-fa*, *mi-re* pitches should be added explaining that there are many children’s melodies and folk songs that perform with these five pitches (MEB, 1968). The process which started with the 1968 Primary School Curriculum continued with subsequent music education curricula and still has an impact on today’s music education in Turkish schools (MEB, 2018).

Figure 3. Two samples of Turkish school songs (Aydıntan & Egüz, 1954; Sun, 2006)

Figure 4. Two samples of Turkish Folk songs (Sun, 2004)

It could be said that all these developments from the 1960s to the present coincide with Kodály’s music education philosophy. Like Kodály, Turkish music educators and composers also highlighted the importance of “musical mother tongue” and folk melodies. They contributed to the structuring of school music education with their ideas and studies. Besides all of these developments, it can be said that among music education methodologies, Kodály approach has started to recognize by music researchers, educators, and teachers quite recently in Turkey. In music education curricula in 2006 and in 2018, contemporary music education methodologies like Kodály, Orff, etc. were talked for the first time briefly in the curriculum without giving any detailed information about them (MEB, 2007; MEB, 2018). In this context, many studies have done about Kodály approach in music education and the challenges which may arise to use Kodály approach in Turkish music education (Avşar, 2018; Aycan, 2017; Bakkalbaşı, 2019; Çelikleş, 2021; Çoban,



Figure 5. Example of a Turkish rhyme

2016; Gülle, 2019; Kale, 2018; Küçük, 2019; Mete, 2019; Özeke, 2007; Özeke & Çeliktaş, 2021; Saraç, 2014; Şimşek & Bilen, 2017; Türkmen & Göncü, 2018a; Türkmen & Göncü, 2018b). A more recent study conducted by Bakkalbaşı (2019) also talked about Kodály method and its applications for Turkish folk music. In her study, she analyzed Turkish folk song repertoire in Music Lesson Books (1<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade) for the purpose of examining Turkish folk melodies that can be used in school music education by considering the Kodály approach and philosophy. As a result of this study, she also concluded that starting pitches of *la-sol-fa* in melodic teaching is more pedagogical and appropriate.

In the frame of these discussions, when we look at the sources that provides Kodály melodic sequence, Choksy, in her famous book series called “The Kodály Method” gives us clear ideas of how Kodály principals and applications can be adapted and used in US and Canada. These book series are great pioneering sources especially for the people outside of Hungary. In her books she specifically mentions sequences, techniques and materials and she gives us some historical information about other countries’ adaptation processes. In these books, Choksy discusses from which pitch should the pentatonic sequence began to be taught and from which pitches we should reach pentatonic scale? Bringing Kodály ideas into the teaching environment, Choksy mentioned that melodically, the first interval sang by children is a minor third, which is a natural interval that exists in children’s lives therefore, the starting pitch should be *sol-mi*. Later *la*, finally *do* and *re* should be taught (Choksy, 1988) (Figure 6).

In relation to all these discussions, the arguments of this study arise: “How can we bring Kodály ideas into Turkish school music more effectively?” and “Considering Turkish school music, how should melodic sequence evolve in Turkish music education system?”

### PROPOSAL OF A MELODIC SEQUENCE FOR TURKISH SCHOOL MUSIC AND TURKISH MUSIC EDUCATION

As discussed earlier, Kodály believes that melodic sequence should start from a well-known phenomenon that is already widely used in his own country, as a result, Kodály himself has composed many educational materials to support this idea. However, when we want to apply Kodály approach in music lessons in our music education system, it is seen that the melodic sequence which starts the pitches of *sol-mi* is not common in Turkish rhymes and songs. From all the



Figure 6. Melodic sequence according to Kodály approach<sup>1</sup> (Choksy, 1988)

discussions, we understand that Turkish music has its own taste, structure, melodic contour which usually are composed with the pitches of *la-sol-fa*. In the light of all these discussions, the following melodic sequence for Turkish school music repertoire is suggested (Figure 7).

In this suggestion, primarily melodic sequence starts with the *la-sol-fa* trichord. This starting point is suitable for both Turkish school music and music education curricula. After this trichord, the pitches of *la-sol-fa-re* are added to the sequence which is described as “pentatonic tetrachord” (Houlahan & Tacka, 2008). Thus, minor pentatonic effect is heard for the first time. After this phase, *la-sol-fa-mi-re* are added to the sequence which could be named either as Hüseyini pentachord or as minor pentachord since the pitches are the same in two of these pentachords. Turkish folk music and Turkish school music have numerous songs to represent this pentachord. Later, adding *do*, major hexachord is heard and thus besides Hüseyini, major tonality is introduced. After the major hexachord, adding high *do*, high *re* and later *ti*, both major scale and Hüseyini scale are reached which gives flexibility to use both scales alternately. Finally, adding low *la* and low *ti*, natural minor is reached.

This melodic sequence is proposed considering the melodic structure of Turkish folk music and Turkish school music inspired by Kodály’s child development approach. Maybe, one can say that primarily it is not important to state the order of sequence. However, when applying Kodály in Turkish school music, starting pitches and the sequences become a hot topic to discuss. Therefore, it can be said that this suggestion starting with *la-sol-fa* in Turkish music education is more accurate than starting with *sol-mi* in terms of applying Kodály’s ideas of “musical mother tongue” and folk music.

<sup>1</sup> The melodic sequence schemes (Figure 6 and Figure 7) have been created by the author. Each of the tone sets in the melodic sequence scheme should be read vertically. Only the first letters of the notes have been used as shown in the solmization system and the red color has been used for each newly added note.



**Figure 7.** Proposal of a melodic sequence

## CONCLUSION

Kodály sequence seems a very detailed and well-designed sequence which music teachers can use; however, the cultures need to adapt this system in their structure considering their own musical environment. Beyond all that, gaining the love of music-making to students and enabling them to make sense of the music they sing, play, or listen are among the most important goals of music education (Houlahan & Tacka, 2008). Since music literacy plays an essential role in making sense of the music performed, the selection of the song repertoire for music lessons should follow a logical sequence in terms of their melodic and rhythmic structures. In this article, from the point of Kodály's ideas of folk traditions, musical mother tongue, and music literacy, some discussions were presented, and in light of these discussions, a melodic sequence proposal for Turkish school music was made. The melodic sequence proposed in the study has been obtained only through the historical journey and general review of Turkish school music. When we look at the Turkish school song repertoire from past to present, we see that the repertoire gives us many clues about the melodic structure and melodic sequence that can be followed for music teaching. Therefore, this study can be supported and developed with further research that brings together Turkish school songs, examines them in detail, and reveals their melodic features.

When we look at the countries that have applied the Kodaly philosophy and adapted his method to their music education systems, we see that almost all of them have gone through similar processes. While some music educators (i.e. in America and in Canada) have used Hungarian folk songs by adapting them to their own language, music educators in some countries (i.e. in Japan) have tried to create sources suitable for the Kodály method by systematically listing their folk songs (Liu, 2008). Some music educators (i.e. in Estonia) needed to write songs that could be used in the beginning stage since there were no examples of pentatonic melodies in their culture (Liu, 2008). On the other hand, some music educators, who argued that starting with *sol-mi* is not suitable for their own culture and folk songs, suggested starting with different sounds at the beginning (for example American music educator John Feierabend suggested that teaching should begin with *mi-re-do*) (Sheridan, 2019). These examples, which consist of only a few countries trying to adapt the Kodály method to their music education systems, can be multiplied. As understood from all, there are ongoing discussions are on these topics around the world. As Turkish music educators, since we are on the road to using

Kodály approach in music lessons, the ideas of Kodály and how we can adapt these ideas into Turkish school music needs more attention for music educators.

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