

The First International Conference
Psychology and Music – Interdisciplinary Encounters
Pre-conference Program October 21–23, 2019
Conference Program October 24–26, 2019

Main Organizer

Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade

Co-organizers

Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade
Psychology of Music Section, Serbian Psychological Society

How to cite this volume

Bogunović, B. & Nikolić, S. (Eds.) (2020). *Proceedings of PAM-IE Belgrade 2019*. Belgrade: Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade.

Proceedings of the First International Conference
Psychology and Music – Interdisciplinary Encounters

Editors

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Publisher

Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade, Kralja Milana 50, Belgrade

For Publisher

Dean of the Faculty of Music
Ljiljana Nestorovska

Editor-in-Chief of the Faculty of Music Publications

Gordana Karan

Executive Editor

Marija Tomić

Cover Design

Stefan Ignjatović

Technical Editor and Pre-press

Dušan Ćasić

ISBN 978-86-81340-20-2

PAM-IE Belgrade 2019 Conference and this publication were supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

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PROCEEDINGS

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UNIVERSITY OF ARTS IN BELGRADE
FACULTY OF MUSIC

Belgrade, 2020

The Relation Between Musical Activities, Attitudes, and Music Education of Pre-school Teachers

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Abstract

The importance of preschool for the development of musical abilities of children is proportionally increasing in accordance with the existence of various possibilities, such as stimulation of the creative potential of the child, the development of music education as an incentive asset in personal development. In the beginning, it is necessary to have a developed awareness of the educators about the existence of critical periods in the music development, then to introduce the child as a person and an individual psychological entity as well as to have adequate knowledge of music as the basic agent of musical development. The main goal of this research is to examine the relation between the frequency of realization of certain forms of musical activities in preschool groups and attitudes towards the importance of music in the life of preschool children, depending on the music education of educators and their self-evaluation of musical abilities. The research sample consists of 184 female educators, aged from 24 to 63 ($M = 43.15$; $SD = 9.96$) from which 93 said that they know how to play a musical instrument, whereas 92 said that they do not know how to play on any musical instrument. Participants' working experience ranged from 1 to 40 years ($M = 16.34$; $SD = 9.81$), where the majority have completed high school (68.6%) and college (17.8%). A questionnaire is designed for the purpose of this research, aiming to explore the issues related to the music interests of children, the perception of music, music activities, and basic data related to educators and working conditions of the institution. The survey was conducted in early March 2019. The assumed role of the importance of preschool teacher's music education for more successful work is partly confirmed. It is demonstrated that musical activities in a preschool are more frequent if educators evaluate their skills as advanced. The reason for this may lie in motivation, stemming from a feeling of personal competence, for the more frequent organization of these kinds of activities that lead to the formation of

a positive attitude, which is in accordance with the theoretical assumptions of this paper.

Introduction

Attendance periods for preschool groups coincide with an important developmental period of the child's cognitive, sensory, motor, and socio-emotional abilities. During this period, developmentally important changes are taking place, such as "an increase in game activity, an expansion of the development of symbolic functions and imagination and intuitive thinking. During this period, speech develops, plays form, internalization occurs" (Brković, 2011: 179).

It is often stated that the preschool age of the child is optimal for the development of musical abilities in children (Flohr & Hodges, 2006: 40–71; Flohr & Persellin, 2011: 3–22; Grujić-Garić, 2009). The importance of preschool for the development of musical abilities of children is proportionally increasing in accordance with the existence of various possibilities, such as stimulation of the creative potential of the child, the development of music education as an incentive asset in personal development (Bašić, 1987; Matić & Mirković-Radoš, 1986). In the beginning, it is necessary to have a developed awareness of the educators about the existence of critical periods in the music development, then to introduce the child as a person and an individual psychological entity as well as to have adequate knowledge of music as the basic agent of musical development (Nešić, Nešić, Milićević, & Todorović, 2006). However, recent findings suggest that the preschool period is optimal, not critical, for the development of musical abilities (Flohr & Hodges, 2006), which certainly does

not diminish the importance and indicate the need for continued work in this area. Numerous studies since the beginning of the last century have noted the positive effects of music education on the development of musical abilities in children, but also effects in other developmental fields (Sokolović-Ignjačević, 2019: 17–23). Thus, various studies have confirmed that attending such classes and programs can have positive effects on the development of vocal abilities (Demorest, Nichols, & Pfordresher, 2018; Svec, 2018), rhythm (Jordan-Decarbo & Galliford, 2011) and the ability to perceive music and discrimination (Cohrdes, Grolig, & Schroeder, 2018; Corrigan & Trainor, 2009; Morrongiello, Roes, & Donnelly, 1989), as well as their overall musical potential (Flohr, 1981).

Music education of pre-school teachers is one of the basic conditions for the successful implementation of educational programs within pre-school groups and pre-school activities. If a person possesses better knowledge in the field of music, we presume that he/she will be more successful in activities in the field of music (Nejgauz, 1970). In the pre-school programs, we most commonly distinguish two types: academic, subject-oriented, teacher-oriented programs aimed at preparing for school; and comprehensive, holistic programs aimed at the child, aiming at providing conditions for holistic child development through learning through personal initiative, supporting the free choice and expression of each child (Krnjaja & Pavlovic-Breneselović, 2014). It is thought that more simplicity and more freedom on the part of the teacher, who would take a holistic approach to the educational program, could offer more to the child and implement higher quality educational programs.

Study Aims

The subject of this research is to examine the relation between the frequency of realization of certain forms of musical activities in preschool groups and attitudes towards the importance of music in the life of preschool children, depending on the music education of educators and their self-evaluation of musical abilities. The

problem of research is based on the questions: is the frequency of certain forms of musical activities in kindergartens dependent on whether educators know/do not know how to play a musical instrument; is there a connection between the self-evaluation of the knowledge of playing on a musical instrument and singing with certain forms of musical activities, as well as attitudes towards the importance of music in the life of pre-school children.

Method

The research sample consists of 184 female educators, aged from 24 to 63 ($M = 43.15$; $SD = 9.96$) from which 93 said that they know to play a musical instrument, whereas 92 said that they do not know how to play on any musical instrument. Participants have been working experience from 1 to 40 years ($M = 16.34$; $SD = 9.81$), where the majority have completed high school (68.6%) and college (17.8%). A questionnaire is designed for the purpose of this research, aiming to explore the issues related to the music interests of children, the perception of music, music activities, and basic data related to educators and working conditions of the institution. The survey was conducted in early March 2019.

Results

Table 1 presents the basic descriptive statistical measures related to the research variables.

Educators who play a musical instrument have recognized that musical activities significantly help children in easier acquiring of knowledge in other areas of educational work ($t(181) = 1.829$, $p < .000$).

This attitude correlates with the self-evaluation of instrumental playing skills ($r = .168$, $p = .023$) and self-evaluation of singing skills ($r = .225$, $p = .002$), while singing skills correlate with assuming highly important role of music in the life of a preschool child ($r = .268$, $p < .000$). Correlation was obtained, between the preschool teachers' self-evaluation of singing skills and: the frequency of musical activities with children ($r = .172$, $p = .020$), musical accompaniment when children sing ($r = .195$, $p = .008$) and children's singing with rhythmic instruments accompa-

niment ($r = .243, p = .001$). Higher estimation of music instrument skills correlates only with more frequent child singing with musical accompaniment ($r = .176, p = .018$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistical measures of research variables.

Variable	Min	Max	M	SD
Knowing how to play an instrument	1.00	5.00	2.38	0.94
Knowing how to sing	1.00	5.00	3.49	0.93
Importance of music	3.00	5.00	4.54	0.54
Easier acquiring of new knowledge	1.00	5.00	4.09	0.64

The results of the regression analysis ($R^2 = .113, F(4,159) = 5.080, p = .001$) have shown that the positive attitudes towards the role of music in the life of a preschool child ($\beta = 0.201, t = 2.487, p = .01$) and the attitude that music helps children to acquire knowledge more easily in other areas of educational work ($\beta = 0.173, t = 2.152, p = .03$), were statistically significant predictors of a frequency of musical activity. The difference in the degrees of freedom shown, which differs from the total sample, is the result of missing answers.

Discussion

The study expected that there was a correlation between the frequency of realization of certain forms of music activities in preschool groups and attitudes towards the importance of music in the life of preschool children, depending on the music education of the teachers and their self-assessment of musical abilities.

The results confirmed the correlation that the attitude that music activities significantly help children in acquiring knowledge from other educational areas will be more positive for educators who have completed music education, i.e. for those who know how to play an instrument, which is also accompanied by the

higher self-assessment of playing and singing skills. Thus, this attitude may be the result of education and a higher appreciation of musical ability by educators. Such a result can be significant in the field of educator education, as it demonstrates a direct connection with the formation of a positive attitude towards children's music education.

Furthermore, self-assessment of singing skills has been shown to be related to the importance of the role of music in the life of a preschooler. It has also been confirmed that musicians of different types are more present in teachers with higher self-assessment of singing and playing skills. This again points to the conclusion that when educating educators for the job, it would be especially important to pay attention to developing their creative potential in musical terms, to support their vocal abilities, but also in general education in the direction of developing musical skills.

Although we cannot speak of causality, the links obtained make it quite clear that the preschool education of musicians can be important for two reasons: in forming an attitude towards the importance of music in the life of a preschool child, and for more frequent engaging in music activities, the benefits of which we have stated in the introductory part. The benefits of music education in this regard are more than obvious to educators and children alike.

Conclusion

The assumed role of the importance of preschool teacher's music education for more successful work is partly confirmed. It is demonstrated that musical activities in a preschool are more frequent if educators evaluated their skills as advanced. The reason for this may lie in motivation, stemming from a feeling of personal competence, for the more frequent organization of these kinds of activities that lead to the formation of a positive attitude, which is in accordance with the theoretical assumptions of this paper.

However, in future research, it would be advisable to include different types of assessment in relation to more objective indicators

of music education and music skills, instead of self-assessment, although the data obtained may serve as an excellent guide and basis for future research in this field.

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