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CROATIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS MUSIC LESSONS

Izvirni znanstveni članek / Original Scientific Article

Abstract

This paper has explored the Croatian elementary school students' attitudes towards Music Culture course with regard to age, gender, family background and additional music lessons and the influence of gender and age on preferring different activities of music teaching practice. As a part of the research, a questionnaire of sociodemographic data and a questionnaire of students' attitudes toward the subject were distributed to 225 students attending the second, the third, the seventh and the eighth grade.

The results confirm that music is an important component of the students' life in general, especially for girls. The authors observed a connection between certain aspects of attitudes towards the Music Culture course with family background, additional music lessons and the preference of classical music. Age and gender also proved to be significant predictors of students' attitudes towards the Music Culture course. Thus, younger students and girls have more positive attitudes towards music lessons, compared to older students and boys. Additionally, younger students show greater preferences for singing, while older students tend to be more inclined to listening to music. The authors suggest the possibility of conducting similar research with the high school population with a view of comparing the obtained results.

Keywords: attitudes, elementary school, music lessons, musical preferences

Povzetek

Stališča hrvaških osnovnošolcev do glasbenega pouka

V raziskavi so preučevana stališča hrvaških osnovnošolcev do predmeta *Glasbena kultura* glede na starost, spol, družinsko okolje in dodatni glasbeni pouk. Raziskan je tudi vpliv spola in starosti na preference do različnih dejavnosti glasbenega pouka. Za zbiranje podatkov sta bila uporabljena splošni vprašalnik in vprašalnik za preučevanje stališč učencev do predmeta. Izpolnilo ju je 225 učencev drugega, tretjega, sedmega in osmega razreda osnovne šole.

Rezultati potrjujejo, da ima glasba pomembno vlogo v življenju učencev, še posebej deklet. Opazna je povezava med nekaterimi vidiki stališč do glasbene vzgoje z družinskim okoljem, dodatnim glasbenim poukom in preferencami do klasične glasbe. Prav tako sta se starost in spol izkazala za pomembna napovedovalca stališč učencev do pouka *Glasbene kulture*. Mlajši učenci in dekleta imajo pozitivnejša stališča do glasbenega pouka v primerjavi s starejšimi učenci in fanti. Mlajši učenci izražajo večje preference do petja, medtem ko starejši učenci raje poslušajo glasbo. Avtorici predlagata izvedbo podobne raziskave na srednji šoli z namenom primerjave rezultatov.

Ključne besede: stališča, osnovna šola, glasbeni pouk, glasbene preference

Introduction

The aim of music education in elementary school is “introducing students to music culture, learning the basic elements of music language, developing music creativity, establishing and adopting criteria for (critical and aesthetic) evaluation of music” (*The Curriculum for Elementary Schools*, 2006, p. 66). Music teaching, in the first three grades of elementary school, includes the activities of singing, playing, listening to music and music creativity. In the fourth, fifth and sixth grades, music teaching includes singing, listening to music and introducing to music, performing music and music notation, music games and freely, improvised rhythmisation, moving to music, dance and playing. Music education activities in the seventh and eighth grade of primary school are reduced to singing, listening to music and introducing to music, playing, creativity and computer (optional). The music education program is open, which means that the teacher is free to choose the mode of active music making, while listening to music and introducing to music presents its obligatory part. Song lists should also be understood as a recommendation and the teacher is free to choose listening examples. In addition to regular classes, elementary school music teaching includes elective teaching, extracurricular activities and extracurricular education.

The term of attitude, which most contemporary researchers define as the overall evaluation of an object, is one of the central problems in social psychology, but also in psychology in general. The reason for the great interest of the researchers according to the mentioned problem can be explained by the fact that attitudes govern our behaviour and are important to our social life on an individual, interpersonal and intergroup level (Hewstone, Stroebe, 2001). *The three-component approach model* stems from the idea that “the attitude is a combination of three types of conceptually different reactions to an object: affective, cognitive and conative/behavioural reactions” (Hewstone, Stroebe, 2001, p.197). Shavitt (1989) distinguishes four functions of attitude, namely: the cognitive function, the utilitarian function, the function of social identity, and the function of maintaining self-esteem.

Issue of attitudes is also closely related to education, since “... the development of attitudes, opinions, motivation and will is an integral part of teaching and learning in elementary school” (*The Curriculum for Elementary Schools*, 2006, p. 10). There is a large number of researches that deal with the examination of the students’ attitudes towards the school and to the different school subjects (Haladyna, Thomas, 2015). Holfve-Sabel (2007) conducted research on the population of Swedish elementary school students in order to compare their attitudes towards school, teachers and classmates in the 1960s with their attitudes today. The results indicate that attitudes of modern students are far more positive in relation to attitudes of students in the 1960s, and progress is most evident in different aspects of peer relationships. She explains improving the attitudes towards the school by change in the way of the school organization that has previously been focused on theoretical knowledge, while the current curriculum is more oriented towards interactional aspects of learning.

The results of the researches about students' attitudes towards the Music Culture course generally confirm that students have positive attitudes towards music teaching but as the age increases, interest in subject is in decline (Dobrota, Reić Ercegovac, 2011).

Dobrota and Reić Ercegovac (2011) examined the attitudes of the third graders to music education and to music in general. Two variables were selected, gender and type of school (the school where the students get on-the-job experience and the school where the learning process is performed by a teacher) and their impact on students' attitudes was investigated. The results confirm that students have a positive attitude toward the music education and music in general. Furthermore, female students compared to male students have a more positive attitude toward the music education. The influence of the type of school on attitudes towards music education and music in general is not confirmed, although we have noted a better understanding of the teaching content among the students from the school where the students get on-the-job experience.

Dobrota and Obradović (2012) examined the attitudes of the fourth and eighth graders of elementary school from Splitsko-dalmatinska and Hercegovačko-neretvanska county to music in general and to music teaching. The results confirm the significant influence of gender, age and place of residence on the students' attitudes towards music. Further, the results indicate that students like to listen to the classical music, and that singing is their preferred activity. The authors concluded that students like the music and that it plays an important role in their lives.

Methodology

Aim of Research and Research Problems

The aim of this research was to explore the elementary school students' attitudes towards Music Culture course with regard to age, gender, family background, additional music lessons and the influence of gender and age on preferring different activities of music teaching practice. In order to achieve this aim of the research we attempted to address the following issues:

1. To examine the role of music in a students' leisure time.
2. To examine the impact of family background and additional music lessons on students' attitudes towards Music Culture course.
3. To examine whether there is an influence of age and gender on students' attitudes towards the Music Culture course.
4. To examine whether there is an influence of age and gender on the preferences of different activities of music teaching practice.

Hypotheses

Based on the defined aim and problems of the research, the following hypotheses have been set:

H1: Music is an important component of the students' leisure time, regardless of gender and age.

H2: Students whose parents listen to classical music have more positive attitudes towards the Music Culture course.

H3: Students who have attended or attending additional music lessons have more positive attitudes towards Music Culture course.

H4: Students who prefer classical music have more positive attitudes towards Music Culture course.

H5: Younger students, compared to older ones, have more positive attitudes towards Music Culture course.

H6: Girls, compared to boys, have more positive attitudes towards Music Culture course.

H7: Younger students, compared to older students, prefer singing as music teaching activity, and older students, compared to younger students, prefer listening as music teaching activity.

H8: Girls, compared to boys, prefer singing as a music teaching activity.

Participants

The research was conducted in Split and Stobreč on a sample (N=225) of second-grade students (N=59), third-grade students (N=60), seventh-grade students (N=53) and eighth-grade students (N=52) students (Table 1).

Table 1. Structure of the sample (N=225)

GENDER	N	GRADE	N
M	119	2	60
		3	60
F	141	7	53
		8	52
Total		225	

Instruments

For the purpose of this research, a questionnaire that contains two parts, was prepared. The first part contained questions related to the sociodemographic characteristics of students (gender and age), average daily listening to music, family background, attendance of additional music lessons and classical music preferences. The second part of the questionnaire contained questions that examine students' attitudes towards Music Culture course (the importance of the subject, the estimate of how many subject is burden or relaxing to the student, the weight of the subject, the usefulness of the subject, the subject class and the ranking of the subject in relation to other subjects from the Curriculum), and the question from which we can found out which activity of music teaching they prefer the most.

Procedure

Testing was conducted in the period from April to May 2017, in the school classrooms according to pre-arranged schedule. Investigation was collectively. The purpose of conducting research was briefly explained, the anonymity was guaranteed and the participants were asked to honestly and accurately answer the questions.

Results and Discussion

H1: Music is an important component of the students' leisure time, regardless of gender and age.

To test the differences in listening to music considering gender and age (one teacher education/subject teaching) two Mann-Whitney tests were performed.

Table 2: *Differences in time spent on listening to music according to age and gender*

	U	z	p	C _{o.t.e.}	C _{s.t.}
Age	6190.0	0.239	0.81	2	2
				C _{boys}	C _{girls}
Gender	4502.5	3.95	0.00	2	3

It is evident that music is an important component of students' leisure time. Furthermore, there were no differences in the time spent on listening to music considering age, but there was a difference in the time spent on listening to music considering gender, whereby girls spend more time listening to music than boys. According to that, the first hypothesis is only partially confirmed.

The results of numerous researches confirm the significant role of music in young people's lives (Miranda, 2013). In addition, Crowther and Durkin (2006) have conducted a research on a sample of students between the ages of twelve to eighteen and noticed that girls have more positive attitudes toward music than boys, especially in younger age groups, and that they more frequently participate in various musical activities.

H2: Students whose parents listen to classical music have more positive attitudes towards the Music Culture course.

To test the differences between students whose parents listen to classical music (N = 45) and students whose parents do not listen to classical music (N = 180) with regard to attitudes towards Music Culture course, seven Mann-Whitney U tests were performed.

Table 3: Differences in attitudes towards the Music Culture course according to the family background

Dependent Variable	U	z	p
Listening to the music on a daily basis	3591.5	1.25	0.21
Classical music preferences	1889.0	5.92	0.00
Importance of Music Culture course	3622.5	1.48	0.14
Effect (relaxing/burdening) of Music Culture course	3555.0	-2.25	0.02
Weight of Music Culture course	3982.5	-0.44	0.66
Usefulness of Music Culture course	3397.5	2.55	0.01
Classes per week of Music Culture course	3510.0	1.60	0.11

Students whose parents listen to classical music have higher preference for classical music. Furthermore, students whose parents listen to classical music estimate subject of Music Culture course as a subject that relaxes them and does not burdens them, more than students whose parents do not listen to classical music. And, finally, there are also differences in estimation of the usefulness of the Music Culture course. Students whose parents listen to classical music estimate Music Culture course as more useful than other students. There were no differences between the two groups of students in the other variables according to that we can conclude that the second hypothesis is also partially confirmed.

These results are in accordance with the results of numerous researches that are confirming the important role of socioeconomic status, on the one hand, and musical preferences and attitudes towards music lessons, on the other (Pegg, 1984).

H3: Students who have attended or attending additional music school (lessons) have more positive attitudes towards Music Culture course.

To test the differences between students who attended or attending a music school (N = 35) and those who did not attend (N = 190) considering the attitudes towards the Music Culture course, seven Mann-Whitney U tests were performed.

Table 4. Differences between attitudes towards the Music Culture course according to additional music lessons

Dependent Variable	U	z	p
Listening to the music on a daily basis	2976.5	1.05	0.29
Classical music preferences	3005.0	0.97	0.33
Importance of Music Culture course	2717.5	2.32	0.02
Effect (relaxing/burdening) of Music Culture course	3077.5	-1.24	0.21
Weight of Music Culture course	3310.0	-0.11	0.92
Usefulness of Music Culture course	2876.5	1.97	0.05
Classes per week of Music Culture course	3067.5	0.47	0.40

Significant differences between the two groups of students in the importance of Music Culture course have been identified, since students who attended or still attending a music school evaluate the Music Culture course as a more important subject. Further, differences in the usefulness of the subject have also been identified, where students who attended or still attending a music school estimate the subject as more useful. There are no differences in other variables, therefore we can conclude that the third hypothesis is partially confirmed.

H4: Students who prefer classical music have more positive attitudes towards Music Culture course.

In order to test this hypothesis, five Kruskal-Wallis variance analysis were performed.

Table 5. Differences between attitudes towards the Music Culture course according to classical music preferences

Dependent Variable	H (2,N=225)	p
Importance of Music Culture course	22.24	.00
Effect (relaxing/burdening) of Music Culture course	7.77	.02
Weight of Music Culture course	1.43	.49
Usefulness of Music Culture course	10.86	.00
Classes per week of Music Culture course	4.93	.08

Students who have different classical music preferences (*I don't like it at all* N = 61; *I prefer only some classical music* N = 97; *I like it* N = 67) differ in estimating the importance and usefulness of the subject Music Culture course. Students who prefer classical music and those who prefer only some classical music estimate Music Culture course more as important and usefulness than students who do not like classical music. According to this, the fourth hypothesis is partly confirmed.

The obtained results are in accordance with Dobrota's results, whose research has confirmed the positive impact of exposure to classical music on attitudes towards classical music and music teaching (Dobrota, 2016).

H5: Younger students, compared to older students, have more positive attitudes towards Music Culture course.

In order to test the differences between classroom teaching students (N = 120) and subject teaching students (N = 105) in attitudes towards the Music Culture course, seven Mann-Whitney U tests were performed.

Table 6. Influence of age on attitudes towards the Music Culture course

Dependent Variable	U	z	p
Listening to the music on a daily basis	6190.0	0.24	0.81
Classical music preferences	4298.0	4.39	0.00
Importance of Music Culture course	4297.5	5.56	0.00
Effect (relaxing/burdening) of Music Culture course	5692.5	-2.21	0.02
Weight of Music Culture course	6142.0	0.80	0.41
Usefulness of Music Culture course	4747.5	4.86	0.00
Classes per week of Music Culture course	6060.0	0.60	0.56

There were significant differences between the two groups of students in the preference of classical music, where younger students more prefer classical music than older ones. Furthermore, younger students estimate the subject of Music Culture course as more important than older students. There were also differences in the effect of Music Culture course on the students and the estimation of the usefulness of the subject, whereby the younger students estimate more that the subject relaxes them and consider it more useful. There are no differences in other variables, therefore we can conclude that the fifth hypothesis is partially confirmed.

Examining attitudes towards music teaching among students attending the fourth and eighth grades of elementary school, Dobrota and Obradović (2012) also notice more positive attitudes among younger students. Such results can be explained by the fact that younger students are more open to different musical styles, and also to classical music that makes the majority of music teaching content. Haladyna and Thomas (2015) explored the attitudes of elementary school students towards the school in general and towards teaching subjects. The results indicate a significant drop in the attitudes towards the school with students age, especially in the sixth-grade, seventh-grade and eighth-grade students, also on the extremely negative attitudes of students towards subjects in the field of social sciences and on the significant influence of gender on the attitudes of the students, with a drastic decrease in attitudes towards school, especially among boys.

Regarding the ranking of Music Culture course, both in the one teacher education (Figure 1) and the subject teaching (Figure 2), classroom students prefer Physical training, followed by Fine Arts and third is the Music Culture course. In the subject teaching Music Culture course is again in the third place, behind Physical training and Biology.

Figure 1. One teacher education subjects ranks according to affinity

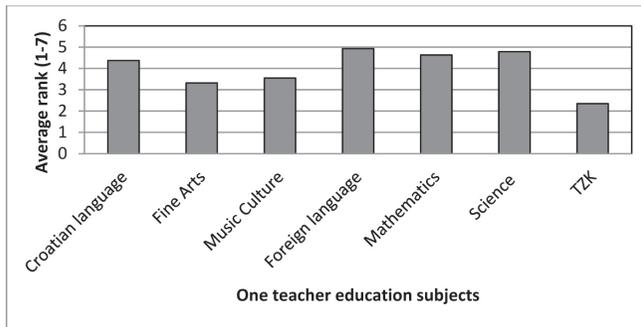
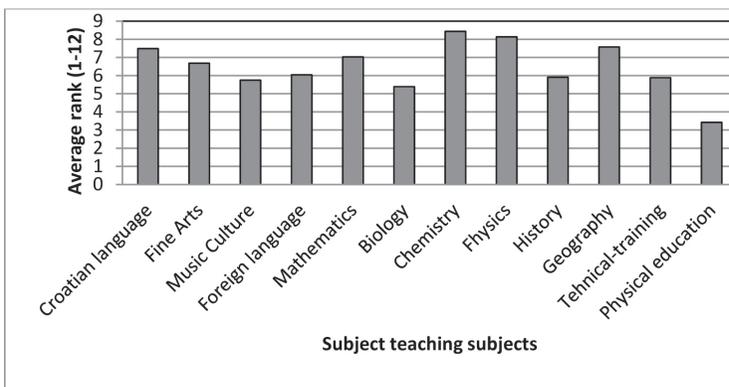


Figure 2. Subject teaching subjects ranks



The obtained results are similar to the findings of Mirkov (2002), which investigated the attitudes of eighth grade pupils towards teaching subjects and noticed that the best ranked subjects were Biology and Physical training, followed by foreign language and Mathematics. Gender differences have also been noticed with regard to attitudes towards teaching subjects, so boys have more positive attitudes towards Technical Culture, Physical training and History, and girls towards mother tongue, foreign languages and Biology.

H6: Girls, compared to boys, have more positive attitudes towards Music Culture course

In order to test the difference between boys ($N = 106$) and girls ($N = 119$) in attitudes towards the Music Culture course, seven Mann-Whitney U tests were performed.

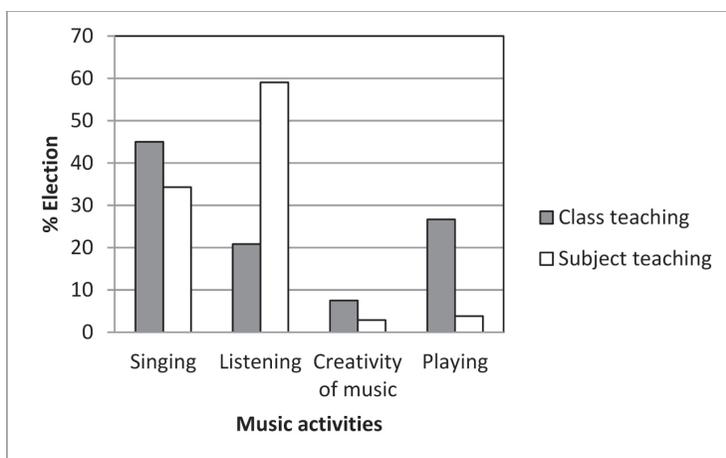
Table 7. Influence of gender on attitudes towards Music Culture course

Dependent Variable	U	z	p
Listening to the music on a daily basis	4502.5	3.95	0.00
Classical music preferences	5031.0	2.80	0.01
Importance of Music Culture course	5119.0	3.29	0.00
Effect (relaxing/burdening) of Music Culture course	5488.0	-2.98	0.00
Weight of Music Culture course	5818.0	2.57	0.01
Usefulness of Music Culture course	5336.5	3.03	0.00
Classes per week of Music Culture course	6016.5	0.69	0.49

There is a difference between boys and girls in almost all variables, where girls are more listening to music and prefer classical music, the subject of Music Culture course estimates more important, more useful, more relaxing and more difficult than boys. There is no difference between boys and girls in estimating the classes per week. According to this results, we can conclude that the sixth hypothesis is mostly confirmed.

These results are in accordance with the results of numerous researches that are confirming that girls have more positive attitudes toward music lessons than boys and that they are more involved in music activities (Harrison, O'Neill, 2003). On the other hand, boys show greater interest in the implementation of music technology in the teaching process (Comber et al., 1993).

H7: Younger students, compared to older students, prefer singing as music teaching activity, and older students, compared to younger students, prefer listening to music as music teaching activity.

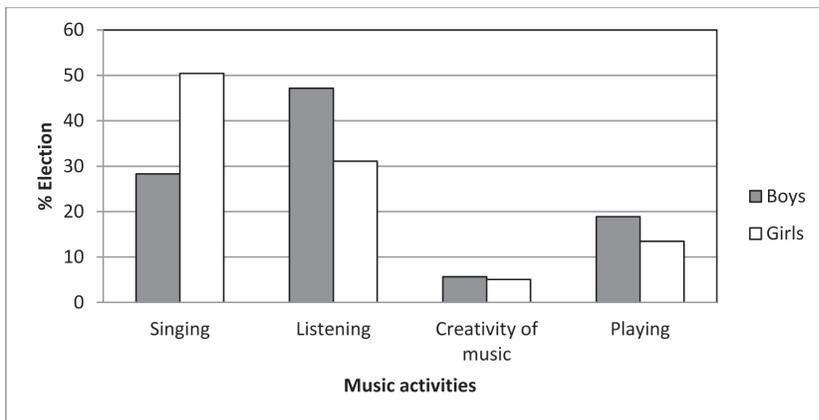
Figure 3. Favourite music activities considering students' age

The results of the Chi-Square test of age and music activities showed a significant difference between one teacher education and subject teaching according to given preference for music activities ($\chi^2 = 43.31$; $df = 3$; $p = .000$). Almost 45% of one teacher education students and 34.29% of the subject teaching students chose singing as their favourite music teaching activity. Listening to music was chosen by 20.83% of one teacher education students and 59.05% of subject teaching students. The music creativity was chosen by 7.50% one teacher education students and only 2.86% of the subject teaching students, and playing of instruments 26.67% of the one teacher education students and 3.81% of the subject teaching students (Figure 3). According to this results, this hypothesis is confirmed.

Rojko (2012) points out that young people generally like to sing, but not those songs that they sing at school. On the other hand, Klausmeier, Eckhardt and Lück (in Rojko, 2012) think that as age increase, young people are singing less and their enthusiasm for singing also decreases.

H8: Girls, compared to boys, prefer singing as a music teaching activity.

Figure 4. *Favourite music activities considering students' gender*



Based on the results of a Chi-Square test with variables of gender and musical activities ($\chi^2 = 11.67$; $df = 3$; $p = .008$), it is confirmed that girls, compared to boys, prefer singing as the music teaching activity. About 28.30% of boys chose singing as the favourite musical activity and as much as 50.42% of girls. However, boys chose listening to music as their favourite musical activity in 47.17%, which made it 31.09% of girls. Only 5.66% of boys and 5.04% of girls chose music creativity as their favourite activity, while 18.87% boys and 13.45% girls selected playing as the favourite music teaching activity (Figure 4). According to these results the eight hypothesis is confirmed.

Dobrota and Obradović (2012) noticed that girls prefer singing and boys listening to music. The results of Sunara's research show that there is no significant difference in the

preference of singing as a teaching activity with regard to the gender of the students (Sunara, 2016). However, when the participants' responses were grouped into two groups, the first of which include singing and the second include other musical activities, it was noticed that girls, compared to boys, prefer singing as the activities of music teaching.

Conclusion

This research confirms that music is an important part of the students' leisure time, and that girls, compared to boys, spend more time daily on listening to music. The influence of a stimulating family background on the preference of classical music, the evaluation of the effects of subjects on students (burden/relaxation) and the evaluation of the usefulness of the subject, is also determined. Furthermore, the positive impact of additional music lessons and the preference of classical music on estimation of importance and usefulness of Music Culture course have been noted. Younger students, compared to older students, prefer classical music, consider the subject of Music Culture course more important and more useful, and as the subject that relaxes them. Music culture course is ranked third by favour, both in one teacher education and in subject teaching. Regarding gender differences, there was a difference in almost all components of attitudes towards the Music Culture course, except in estimating the classes per week of the course. And, finally, it is confirmed that younger boys and girls prefer singing, and older students listening to music as a music teaching activities.

The fact that classroom students have positive attitudes towards music teaching and are open and flexible to listen to music of different styles, including classical music, is very supportive and encouraging for classroom teachers. Children should be surrounded by high-quality musical works from the earliest days and we should also allow them to enjoy in the world of music.

Our results are in accordance with the results of the researches that confirm the decrease of interest in music lessons with age (Boal-Palheiros, Hargreaves, 2001). The reasons for decreased interest in music teaching are mostly explained by the fact that the content of the subject is not adapted to the challenges and changes of the modern society in which students live, then with great discrepancy in the choice of music at home and in the school. Listening to music in home and in school have different functions: the first one is connected with enjoyment, emotional mood and social relationships, while the second one is linked to motivation for learning and teaching content (Boal-Palheiros, Hargreaves, 2001). Furthermore, the decrease in interest for music teaching can be explained by differences in student motivation for learning different subjects at different stages of development, but also in the inflexibility of music pedagogues trained within the Western European classical music tradition and are largely reluctant to adapt and modernize their curriculum. Related to this, it would be interesting to explore the attitudes of high school students towards music classes, and to compare them with attitudes of elementary school students.

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Povzetek

Cilji glasbenega pouka v hrvaški osnovni šoli so: uvajanje učencev v glasbeno kulturo, spoznavanje osnovnih elementov glasbenega jezika, razvijanje glasbene ustvarjalnosti, vzpostavljanje in usvajanje meril za kritično in estetsko vrednotenje glasbe. Učni načrt predmeta *Glasbena kultura* je odprt, kar pomeni, da učitelj svobodno izbira načine aktivnega muziciranja. Poslušanje in spoznavanje glasbe sodi v obvezen del kurikula.

V raziskavi so bila preučevana stališča osnovnošolcev do predmeta *Glasbena kultura* glede na spol, starost, družinsko okolje in dodatni glasbeni pouk. Preučevan je bil vpliv spola in starosti na preference do različnih glasbenih dejavnosti pri glasbenem pouku. Kot merska instrumenta sta bila uporabljena splošni vprašalnik in vprašalnik za preučevanje stališč učencev do predmeta *Glasbena kultura*. V aprilu in maju 2017 ju je izpolnilo 225 učencev drugega, tretjega, sedmega in osmega razreda osnovnih šol v Splitu in Stobreču.

Rezultati so pokazali, da ima glasba zelo pomembno vlogo v življenju učencev, še posebej deklet. V primerjavi s fanti več časa dnevno namenjajo poslušanju glasbe. Potrjen je bil vpliv družinskega okolja na dajanje prednosti klasični glasbi, na oceno delovanja predmeta na učence (obremenitev/sprostitev) in na oceno koristnosti predmeta. Razviden je tudi pozitiven vpliv izvenšolskega glasbenega pouka na dajanje prednosti klasični glasbi in na oceno pomena in koristnosti predmeta *Glasbena kultura*. Mlajši učenci so v primerjavi s starejšimi učenci bolj dajali prednost klasični glasbi ter zaznavali predmet kot pomemben, koristen in sproščujoč. *Glasbena kultura* je bila glede priljubljenosti rangirana na tretjem mestu tako na razredni stopnji kot na predmetni stopnji osnovne šole. Razlike glede na spol so bile potrjene pri skoraj vseh komponentah stališč do *Glasbene kulture*, razen pri ocenjevanju tedenskega fonda ur predmeta. Rezultati so pokazali, da mlajši učenci in dekleta raje pojejo, starejši učenci pa imajo kot glasbeno dejavnost najraje poslušanje glasbe. Dejstvo, da imajo učenci na nižji stopnji pri razrednem pouku zelo pozitivna stališča do glasbenega pouka in da so odprti ter fleksibilni za poslušanje različnih glasbenih zvrsti - med njimi tudi klasične glasbe -, je zelo spodbudno za razredne učitelje. Otroke mora že v najzgodnejšem obdobju obkrožati kakovostna glasba, v njih buditi pozitivna doživetja in užitek v njej.