

# ATTITUDES OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATORS TOWARD SINGING AS A MUSICAL ACTIVITY IN KINDERGARTEN

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*Abstract:* The paper explores the influence of years of work experience, professional qualifications, additional music education, engaging in musical activities in leisure time, and attending the theatre / classical music concerts on the attitudes of preschool educators toward singing as a musical activity in kindergarten. The research was conducted on a sample of preschool educators from all Croatian counties (N = 405), using a questionnaire composed of two parts: *The General Data Questionnaire and Attitudes Toward Singing as a Musical Activity in Kindergarten*. No differences were found in preschool educators' attitudes toward singing with regard to their professional qualifications and years of work experience. However, the results confirm the influence of additional music education, engaging in musical activities in leisure time, and attending the theatre / classical music concerts on preschool educators' attitudes toward singing as a musical activity in kindergarten.

*Keywords:* musical activities, preschool educator, singing, attitudes.

## STALIŠČA VZGOJITELJEV PREDŠOLSKIH OTROK DO PETJA KOT GLASBENE DEJAVNOSTI V VRTCU

*Izvilleček:* V prispevku je raziskan vpliv delovne dobe, dodatnega glasbenega izobraževanja, ukvarjanja z glasbo v prostem času, obisk gledališča/koncertov klasične glasbe na stališča vzgojiteljev do pevske dejavnosti v vrtcu. V raziskavi, izvedeni na vzorcu vzgojiteljev predšolskih otrok iz vseh hrvaških županij (N = 405), je bil uporabljen dvodelni vprašalnik: *Vprašalnik splošnih podatkov in Stališča o dejavnosti petje*. Rezultati niso pokazali razlik v stališčih vzgojiteljev do dejavnosti petje glede na njihovo strokovno usposobljenost in leta delovne dobe. Potrjen pa je bil vpliv dodatnega glasbenega izobraževanja, ukvarjanja z glasbo v prostem času in obiska gledališča/koncertov klasične glasbe na stališča vzgojiteljev do petja kot glasbene dejavnosti v vrtcu.

*Ključne besede:* glasbene dejavnosti, vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok, petje, stališča

Musical development of early and preschool age children is an integral part of their overall development, including intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development. Musical abilities are a complex phenomenon composed of many skills, such as understanding and remembering melodies, rhythm perception, understanding tonality, determining musical interval, identifying the aesthetic significance of music and perfect pitch. The essence of the conceptual definition of musical abilities refers to the ability to aesthetically experience music, i.e. the ability to aesthetically evaluate music and sensitivity to the artistic quality of a piece of music or its interpretation (Dobrota, 2012, p. 39; as cited in Mirković-Radoš, 1996).

The *National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Preschool Education* (Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta, 2014) provides for the following eight basic competences for lifelong learning: (1) communication in the mother tongue; (2) communication in foreign languages; (3) mathematical competences and basic competences in natural sciences and technology; (4) digital competences; (5) learning to learn; (6) social and civic competences; (7) initiative-taking and entrepreneurship; (8) cultural awareness and expression. Cultural awareness and expression competence is developed “by encouraging the creative expression of a child’s ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of artistic areas including music, dance, theatre, literature, and visual arts” (Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta, 2014, p. 29). It is further stated that such competences are “strengthened by developing children’s awareness of local, national and European cultural heritage and their place in the world” (p. 29).

The basic areas of stimulating the musical sensitivity of children of early and preschool age are singing, synthesis of music and movement, listening to musical compositions, and playing musical instruments (Marić & Goran, 2013). Singing is a natural mode of communication that begins very early in human development (Ilari et al., 2013). Singing is also an expression of lifestyles, values, and belief systems and it transmits sociocultural values and customs to new generations (Nettl, 1983). Richards (1999) states that singing plays an important role in early childhood and preschool education, not only because of the development of musical abilities, but also because of the overall development of the child. Moreover, he points out that the quality and frequency of singing and other musical activities are influenced by many factors, including educators’ attitudes towards musical activities, the development of educators’ musical abilities, and self-assessment of their musical competence (Richards, 1999). Through the activity of singing, the child develops their voice, musical ear, sense of rhythm and speech, and enriches their vocabulary. When choosing songs, it is necessary to pay attention to the text, which must be aesthetically valuable, understandable to the child, written in the standard language or dialect of the area in which the child lives and must not be too long. Additionally, the melody must be simple, of appropriate musical form and melodic range.

Welch (2012) cites the physical, psychological, social, musical, and educational benefits of singing. The physical benefits are respiratory and cardiac function, the development of fine and gross motor control in the vocal system and neurological functioning. The psychological benefits of singing relate to intra-personal communication and the development of individual identity, both in music and through music, singing as a cathartic activity and inter-personal communication. The social benefits relate to an enhanced sense of social inclusion and musical benefits relate to the realization of our musical potential and the creation of an individual musical repertoire. Finally, an educational benefit of singing is the increasing knowledge, understanding and skills relating to the world around us, both in music and through music (Welch, 2012).

A number of studies have examined the attitudes of preschool educators toward conducting musical activities in kindergarten, and the results confirm that such attitudes primarily depend on the educator's self-assessment of musical abilities and competences (Swain & Bodkin-Allen, 2017). Furthermore, the research results confirm the connection between music education of educators and the frequency of conducting musical activities in kindergarten (Kim & Kemple, 2011). Thus, educators with a higher music education attach more importance to musical activities in kindergarten (Kelly, 1998), while those with prior insufficient music instruction show less interest in engaging in musical activities (Kim, 2013).

Singing is a natural form of children's communication and self-expression; it has a beneficial effect on the child's health and well-being (Powell, 2015) and on the development of their social skills (Good & Russo, 2016). Singing is a natural form of communication and self-expression for young children. It has so many benefits for well-being, impact on learning outcomes, communication, and brain development (Powell, 2019). As emphasized by Welch (2012, p. 2), "singing is one of the most positive forms of human activity, supporting physical, mental and social health, as well as individual development in the same areas. Singing is important because it builds self-confidence, promotes self-esteem, always engages the emotions, promotes social inclusion, supports social skill development, and enables young people of different ages and abilities to come together successfully to create something special in the arts."

#### RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESES

The objective of this research is to examine the impact of years of work experience, professional qualifications, additional music education, engaging in musical activities in leisure time, and attending the theatre / classical music concerts on the attitudes of preschool educators toward singing as a musical activity.

In accordance with this objective, the research problems were defined as follows:

1. To examine whether the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing differ with regard to their years of work experience.
2. To examine whether the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing differ with regard to their professional qualifications.
3. To examine whether the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing differ with regard to their additional music education, engaging in musical activities in leisure time, and attending the theatre / classical music concerts.

Based on the defined research objective and problems, the following hypotheses were set:

- H1: Preschool educators with a shorter work experience, compared to older educators, have more positive attitudes toward the activity of singing.
- H2: Preschool educators with a higher level of education, compared to educators with a lower level of education, have more positive attitudes toward the activity of singing.
- H3: Preschool educators with prior additional music education, in relation to educators without such education, have more positive attitudes toward the activity of singing.
- H4: Preschool educators engaged in musical activities in their leisure time, in relation to educators who are not engaged, have more positive attitudes toward the activity of singing.
- H5: Preschool educators who often attend the theatre / classical music concerts, in relation to educators who rarely or never visit such events, have more positive attitudes toward the activity of singing.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The research was conducted through an online survey on a sample of 405 participants, i.e. preschool educators in all Croatian counties (Table 1).

Out of the total number of participants, 47% of them listen to music one to two hours a day, 43% more hours a day, 8% all day, and only 2% of the total number of participants do not listen to music at all (Table 2). Such results are consistent with the research findings (Särkämö, 2018) that confirm the significant role of music in general in the lives of people of different age groups.

As for the preferences for classical music, as many as 99% of participants state that they like (some) classical music, while only 1% do not prefer this musical style. Singing is a common musical activity in early childhood and pre-

Table 1. Sample structure

Years of work experience	N	Professional qualifications	N
0-10	188	university degree	110
11-20	100		
21-30	84	college degree	292
31-40	33	high school education	3
Total		405	

Table 2. Listening to music as a leisure time activity, preferences for classical music and frequency of singing as a music activity in kindergarten

Listening to music as a leisure time activity		Preferences for classical music		Frequency of singing as a music activity in kindergarten	
not at all	2%	I don't like classical music	1%	not at all	1%
1-2 hours a day	47%	I like some classical music	41%	sometimes	30%
more than 2 hours a day	43%	I like classical music	58%	often	69%
whole day	8%	I don't like classical music	1%		

school institutions, as 69% of participants state that they often carry out this activity, 30% of them carry it out sometimes, and only 1% of participants never carry out singing as a musical activity (Table 2).

#### *Research Instrument and Procedure*

A questionnaire was constructed for the purpose of this research. In the first part, *The General Data Questionnaire*, sociodemographic data on participants were collected (county and city where the kindergarten is located, years of work experience, professional qualifications, additional music education, engaging in musical activities in leisure time, attending theatre performances and classical music concerts, daily listening to music, preferences for classical music, conducting the musical activity of singing weekly). The second part, *Attitudes Towards Singing as a Musical Activity*, contains eight items that examine the assessment of the importance of singing for the child's development and

relaxation, followed by the self-assessment of educators' competence for conducting the activity of singing and the importance of singing traditional songs for the development of children's intercultural competences. Each item was accompanied by a rating scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = I strongly disagree; 5 = I strongly agree). The psychometric characteristics of the scale are shown in Table 3.

*Table 3. Psychometric characteristics of the scale Attitudes Towards Singing as a Musical Activity*

Item	
1.	Singing is an extremely important musical activity that contributes to the overall development of the child.
2.	Singing is an activity that relaxes the child.
3.	I consider myself competent for the quality realization of the activity of singing.
4.	I find it useful to attend additional lessons in the field of singing.
5.	I think it would be useful to have a music expert come to the kindergarten where I work to help me conduct the activity of singing once a week.
6.	I consider myself competent to select appropriate songs in working with children.
7.	I think that children of early and preschool age, in addition to art music, should sing as often as possible songs that belong to the traditional music of Croatia and other geographical localities.
8.	I believe that by getting to know and performing traditional songs, children begin to develop their intercultural competences (development of tolerance and understanding of different cultures, etc.).
Cronbach $\alpha$	0.86
M (sd)	33.24 (5.10)
range	15-40
average r among items	0.48
K-S d	0.13; $p < 0.01$

## RESEARCH RESULTS

To examine whether the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing differ with regard to years of work experience, the Kruskal-Wallis test was calculated (Table 4).

Table 4. Differences in the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing with regard to years of work experience

Years of work experience	C	H (3, N = 405)	p
0-10	4.25	3.21	0.36
11-20	4.25		
21-30	4.38		
31-40	4.49		

The results confirm no difference in the attitudes of educators toward singing with regard to years of work experience, which made us reject the hypothesis.

Table 5. Differences in the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing with regard to level of education

Professional qualifications	C	H (2, N = 405)	p
high school education	4.72	4.91	0.09
college degree	4.27		
university degree	4.35		

For the purpose of testing the second hypothesis, the Kruskal-Wallis test was recalculated (Table 5). No difference was found in the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing with regard to their professional qualifications. This made us reject the hypothesis.

To examine whether attitudes of preschool educators toward singing differ with regard to attending additional music lessons, the Mann-Whitney U-test was calculated.

Table 6. Differences in the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing with regard to attending additional music lessons

Attending additional music lessons	C	U	z	p
not	4.21	12610.00	-3.68	0.00
yes	4.50			

The results indicate differences in attitudes toward singing with regard to additional music instruction, whereby educators who attended additional music lessons, compared to educators without additional music instruction, have more positive attitudes toward singing as a musical activity (Table 6, Figure 1). Accordingly, the hypothesis was accepted.

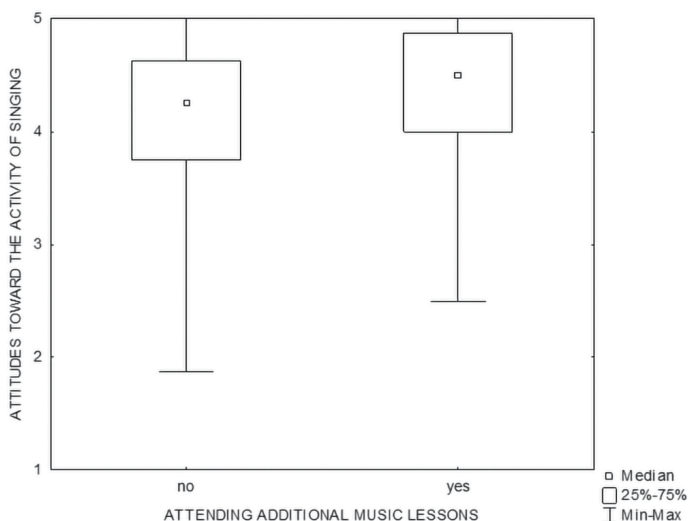


Figure 1. Differences in the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing with regard to attending additional music lessons

To test the fourth hypothesis, the Mann-Whitney U-test was recalculated.

Table 7. Differences in the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing with regard to engaging in musical activities in their leisure time

Engaging in musical activities in leisure time	C	U	z	p
not	4.11	14518.00	-5.03	0.00
yes	4.38			

The results show that educators who engage in musical activities in their leisure time (singing in a choir or a “klapa”), compared to educators who do not engage in such activities, have more positive attitudes toward singing in kindergarten (Table 7, Figure 2). This confirmed the hypothesis.





Figure 2. Differences in the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing with regard to engaging in musical activities in their leisure time

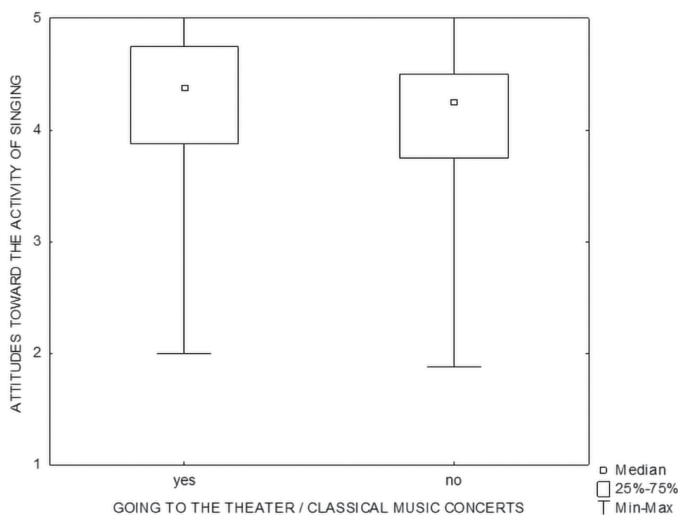


Figure 3. Differences in the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing with regard to going to the theatre/ classical music concerts

In order to examine whether the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing differ with regard to going to the theatre / concerts of classical music, the Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted (Table 8, Figure 3).

*Table 8. Differences in the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing with regard to going to the theatre / classical music concerts*

Going to the theatre / classical music concerts	C	U	z	p
not	4,25	16073,00	3,67	0,00
yes	4,34			

The results confirm that educators of preschool children who often go to the theatre and concerts of classical music, compared to other educators, have more positive attitudes toward the activity of singing, which confirms the above hypothesis.

## DISCUSSION

The main research problem was to examine the attitudes of preschool educators toward the activity of singing in kindergarten, with regard to years of work experience, professional qualifications, additional music instruction, engaging in musical activities in leisure time, and going to the theatre / classical music concerts.

Although we assumed that educators with fewer years of experience would have more positive attitudes toward singing, due to better-quality music education during their studies, the results did not confirm the existence of such differences.

No differences in attitudes toward singing with regard to educators' education were found, although the results of the research (Jeanneret, 1997; Seddon & Biasutti, 2008) generally suggest that a higher level of education, implying better music instruction of preschool educators, results in better self-assessment of their musical abilities, and thus their readiness to carry out various musical activities, including singing.

The results of this research confirmed that educators who attended additional music lessons and educators who engage in musical activities in their leisure time have more positive attitudes toward singing as a musical activity. The obtained results are in line with the results of Jeanneret (1997) who points out the extremely significant influence of music instruction on the self-assessment of the competence of educators and teachers for music teaching and conducting musical activities.

Finally, preschool educators who often go to the theatre / classical music concerts have more positive attitudes toward the activity of singing. Such results are consistent with research findings that confirm the impact of formal as well as non-formal and informal education on the formation of musical pref-

erences and attitudes toward different musical activities (Jenkins, 2011; Hong Ng, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The results of this research confirmed that educators who attended additional music lessons, those who engage in musical activities in leisure time, and those who often go to the theatre / concerts of classical music have more positive attitudes toward singing as a musical activity in kindergarten. Although the research results do not confirm the differences in educators' attitudes toward singing with regard to their level of education, the basic musical-pedagogical implication of this research relates to the need to modernize and raise the quality of music education of students attending programmes in early childhood and preschool education. Quality music education of preschool educators is likely to contribute to increasing their self-assessment of musical competences.

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### *Povzetek*

UDC 373.2-053.4:784.9

Glasbeni razvoj v zgodnjem otroštvu in predšolski dobi je integralni del splošnega razvoja, ki zajema intelektualni, emocionalni, socialni in fizični razvoj otrok. Glasbene sposobnosti so kompleksen pojav, ki povezuje različne veščine, kot so razumevanje in pomnjenje melodij, zaznavanje ritma in čiste intonacije, razumevanje tonalnosti, določanje intervalov in prepoznavanje estetskega pomena glasbe. *Hrvaški nacionalni kurikulum za zgodnjo in predšolsko vzgojo in izobraževanje* (Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta, 2014) upošteva ključne kompetence vseživljenjskega učenja. Temeljna področja spodbujanja glasbene občutljivosti in razvoja otrok so petje, sinteza glasbe in gibanja, igranje na lastna in otroška glasbila, poslušanje glasbe, glasbena ustvarjalnost. Welch (2012) poudarja, da petje vpliva na otrokov fizični, psihološki, socialni, emocionalni in kogni-

tivni razvoj. Številne raziskave preučujejo stališča in odnos vzgojiteljev do glasbenih dejavnosti v vrtcu. Swainova in Bodkin-Allenova (2017) ugotavljata, da se stališča vzgojiteljev povezujejo z njihovo samooceno glasbenih sposobnosti in kompetenc, Kimova in Kemplova (2011) sta v raziskavi potrdili povezanost glasbene izobrazbe vzgojiteljev s številom izvedenih glasbenih dejavnosti v vrtcu.

V raziskavi, v kateri je sodelovalo 405 vzgojiteljev predšolskih otrok iz vseh hrvaških županij, smo preučevali vpliv delovne dobe, dodatnega glasbenega izobraževanja, ukvarjanja z glasbo v prostem času, obisk gledališča/koncertov klasične glasbe na stališča vzgojiteljev do pevske dejavnosti v vrtcu. Podatki so bili pridobljeni z uporabo dvodelnega vprašalnika, ki je zajemal splošne podatke o vzgojiteljih in njihova stališča do petja v vrtcu. Ugotovili smo, da v stališčih vzgojiteljev do dejavnosti petje ni statistično značilnih razlik glede na njihovo strokovno usposobljenost in leta delovne dobe. Rezultati so potrdili vpliv dodatnega glasbenega izobraževanja vzgojiteljev, njihovega ukvarjanja z glasbo v prostem času in obiska gledališča/koncertov klasične glasbe na njihova stališča do petja kot glasbene dejavnosti v vrtcu.