

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE OF MONTESSORI MUSIC EDUCATION

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Abstract The Montessori approach places great emphasis on the holistic development of preschool children, to which music education can also make a significant contribution. However, it appears that Montessori kindergartens have difficulty ensuring that music has an equal role in the educational process. This exploratory study, which is a part of larger research on the role of music in Montessori kindergartens in Slovenia and abroad, aimed to further our understanding of music education in Slovenian Montessori kindergartens to recognize the challenges and opportunities for the future of Montessori music education in Slovenia. Slovenian Montessori early childhood education (ECE) teachers, teaching assistants, and principals who also work in the ECE group ($N = 40$) were surveyed about the current use of music in their kindergartens using a questionnaire developed by the researcher. The findings suggest that while there are many good practices for teaching music in Montessori kindergartens, there is room for improvement and further development in the field of music in Montessori kindergartens.

Keywords:

Montessori,
music education,
early childhood,
teachers'
perceptions,
Slovenia

1 Introduction

The public at large is becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of music education and the necessity of cultivating innovative thinking for the development of a progressive society. However, from a pedagogical standpoint, music is often not given enough attention and is not considered equivalent to other fields. The latter is especially relevant to the Montessori approach, which, despite its emphasis on the importance of holistic education of children, struggles with ensuring that music has an equal role in the educational process.

1.1 Montessori approach

The Montessori approach positions the child at the centre of the educational process. It is founded on systematic observation of children, focusing on their developmental needs and characteristics, enabling them to meet their natural development in a prepared environment (Montessori, 2008). According to Montessori (2006), children from birth to approximately age six have a unique, innate capacity, during which period they are open to forming their identity through exposure to the environment. Montessori (2007) believed that a child would exhibit a strong desire to repeat certain activities for no apparent reason until these repetitions lead to a newly acquired skill during so-called sensitive periods when the child absorbs only one feature of his environment and is not receptive to others. In Montessori kindergartens, early childhood education (ECE) teachers make a special effort to tailor lessons and activities to each child's unique needs and sensitive periods.

The Montessori approach sees teachers as facilitators or guides in the educational process. Setting up a conducive classroom environment ensures the children have access to resources that will aid in every facet of their development (Montessori, 2006). Children's learning is scaffolded through the design of Montessori materials and activities, allowing them to learn independently (Isaacs, 2018). Montessori believed that children's levels of interest and focus are important indicators of their ability to learn; therefore, in Montessori kindergartens, teachers regularly observe the children and use those notes as planning tools (Lillard, 1972). In Montessori kindergartens, the learning materials represent curricular content (Isaacs, 2018). The everyday routine in Montessori kindergartens is organised into work and activity

cycles to structure learning, which helps the children follow their natural rhythms while encouraging them to learn on their own and take charge of their actions (Montessori, 2007). As a means of supporting the growth of healthy interpersonal relationships, children in Montessori kindergartens are typically organised into vertical heterogeneous groups of three years (one to three and three to six) (Isaacs, 2018).

When properly implemented, the Montessori approach has been shown to promote children's social and academic skills as much as, if not more than, traditional pedagogical approaches (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006), especially in mathematics and science (Dohrmann et al., 2007).

The first documented implementation of the Montessori approach in Slovenia dates back to 2002, when the Ursuline in Ljubljana opened the country's first private Montessori kindergarten, and to 2004 when the institute started formally implementing a Montessori program (Kordeš Demšar, 2006). The first Slovenian teacher training took place in 2006 in collaboration with the German Montessori organisation Montessori Verband Aachen (Kordeš Demšar, 2006). In 2008, Slovenian Montessori Association (n. d.) was formed to preserve and promote Montessori pedagogy in Slovenia, to accredit institutions that adhere to Montessori pedagogical principles, and to bring together Slovenian Montessori teachers through the organisation of various conferences and workshops. In 2022, there are 17 Montessori-accredited kindergartens in Slovenia, 10 non-accredited Montessori kindergartens, and a few more public kindergartens where the elements of the Montessori approach are implemented in certain groups (Montessori Association, n. d.). Based on the data published by the Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (n. d.), we estimate that roughly 80 Montessori ECE teachers are currently actively working in Montessori kindergartens.

Despite the widespread interest in Montessori pedagogy, there is a severe lack of scientific literature on the topic in Slovenia. A minimal number of academic pieces have been written about Montessori pedagogy, either outlining its core principles (Kordeš Demšar, 2007) or relating them to subject-area instruction (Bučar, 2004; Kavkler, 1997; Župan, 2018).

1.2 Music education in Montessori approach

Given that Maria Montessori did not have a background in music education, the advancement of Montessori preschool music education is due to her collaboration with music educators such as Maccheroni (1966) and Braun Barnett (1973). In Montessori's view, musical development is analogous to linguistic development; by encountering music in their environment daily, they get the opportunity to develop the skills of listening, reading, and performing music. For this reason, the Montessori approach to music education centres on providing children with meaningful musical experiences before introducing them to musical literacy. The advantage of music instruction in Montessori kindergartens is that it is tailored to the characteristics and needs of children and allows them to participate in individual musical activities based on their interests when they are in the sensitive period for musical development and thus most receptive, positively affecting their motivation (Polk Lillard, 2011).

There is a lack of literature on the role of music in Montessori kindergartens. Rajan (2017) analysed the views of American Montessori school principals on the importance of musical instruction in early childhood education. The results showed that although principals of Montessori schools and kindergartens believe music can be used to promote learning or build multicultural understanding, the possibilities for carrying out musical activities are very limited due to low school budgets and/or time constraints. Essential to the field as a whole is the work of Dansereau and Wyman (2020), who note that many Montessori kindergartens are dominated by didactic materials aimed primarily at developing the child's visual sense. They present the results of action research designed to eliminate the perceived inadequacy of musical education in the Montessori approach by developing and implementing a part of the curriculum that is more consistent with the Montessori philosophy. Together, these studies provide important insights into the current state of music education in Montessori kindergartens and indicate the need for further research on the strengths and challenges that the field of music education in the Montessori approach faces.

1.3 Present study

Numerous studies highlight the benefits of music instruction for children (Collins, 2014; Hallam, 2010; Petress, 2005), particularly in the early years (Alvarez & Cardany, 2011; Trainor & Hannon, 2013; Trehub, 2016; Young, 2016), and show that exposure to music can serve as a means of promoting development in other learning areas (Gill & Rickard, 2012; Mehr et al., 2013; Wolff, 2004). Despite the importance of music in early childhood education and the great interest of researchers and the general public in the Montessori approach, very little attention has been paid to the role of music in Montessori kindergartens.

The main goal of this study was to examine the role of music education in Montessori settings, with a focus on kindergartens in Slovenia, to further our understanding of music education within the Montessori philosophy and practice. Montessori ECE teachers possess the greatest first-hand understanding of the musical environment in which children are learning and experiencing music in the sense of the Montessori philosophy; therefore, this study examines their perceptions and opinions on how music is implemented into the educational process in Montessori kindergartens.

Since music education is not the Montessori approach's primary focus but is seen as a piece of the mosaic for the holistic development of children, we were interested in whether Montessori ECE teachers perceive music education as a part of the curriculum of their institution. These findings can give us an insight into the presence or absence of music education in Montessori settings. Furthermore, this information is especially crucial since a lack of musical instruction in Montessori kindergartens may indicate an inadequate understanding of the Montessori philosophy or inadequate training among the management and the teachers.

According to Rajan's (2017) study in the USA, a substantial proportion of Montessori institutions employ music specialist's, who are most often responsible for teaching music at their institution and who may or may not have expertise in Montessori methodology. We were interested in whether these findings are somehow related to the environmental and cultural context in which the kindergartens are located. Therefore, one of the objectives of our study was to find out who is responsible for teaching music in Slovenian Montessori kindergartens.

These findings will shed light on whether music is integrated into the everyday educational process within the classroom or is taught more as a separate subject.

As mentioned in the literature review, the theoretical works of Maria Montessori give music far less attention compared to other subjects. The Montessori approach is a general pedagogical concept with broad ideas about how the educational process should occur. More concrete guidelines for teaching music can be found in other approaches to music education, like the Edgar Willems approach, Orff Schulwerk, Suzuki, Kodaly, and Dalcroze. Orff Schulwerk is an approach to music education developed by Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman, that emphasises physical experience with rhythm, beat, metre and tempo using specially designed instruments (Collins, 2013). The Suzuki approach emphasises repetition and adaptation of external stimuli to teach children as young as four to play musical instruments (Collins, 2013). The Kodaly approach is a pedagogical system for Hungarian schools, combining elements of folk music, national culture, and contemporary music (Collins, 2013). Furthermore, the Dalcroze combines basic musical elements such as rhythm, melody, and harmony with body movement to provide a multidimensional approach to music learning (Collins, 2013).

We were curious whether Montessori ECE teachers integrate principles of other approaches to music education into their musical instruction in Montessori kindergartens. Furthermore, we aimed to understand which other approaches to music education are most often integrated into music instruction in Montessori kindergartens, as this may indicate which approaches to teaching music are most congruent with the Montessori philosophy.

Since there are various contexts in which musical education might take place, we were interested in finding out whether Montessori kindergartens provide any supplemental musical instruction in the form of extra-curricular activities. We aimed to determine whether these activities are offered at no cost or require payment to participate. This could provide insight into whether children from various socioeconomic backgrounds have equal access to extracurricular musical activities in Montessori kindergartens.

This study also aimed to determine the specifics of musical education in Slovenian Montessori kindergartens more precisely. Since the guidelines for preschool music education emphasise the importance of equal representation of all musical genres, we wanted to find out how often Montessori ECE teachers listen to different genres of music with their students during music lessons. Since young children were found to be more receptive to various musical genres than older individuals (Brittin, 2000; Siebenaler, 1999; Todd & Mishra, 2013), it is crucial that preschool children are exposed to diverse music during their preschool years. In order to find out how music is taught in Montessori kindergartens, one of this study's goals was to investigate how often Montessori ECE teachers use different methods and forms of teaching and learning during music activities. We assumed that children have many opportunities to work individually with didactic materials, as this is a well-known feature of educational work in Montessori kindergartens. Since the Montessori method is widely recognized for its emphasis on encouraging the growth of analytical thinking, it stands to reason that Montessori ECE teachers would also gravitate toward methods that support this goal.

The findings of this study should make an important contribution to the field of Montessori education as well as the field of early childhood music education. Based on our understanding of the current state of practice in Montessori early music education, we will be able to recognize the challenges and opportunities for the future of Montessori music education in Slovenia.

2 Method

Since the role of music in Montessori early childhood education in Slovenia has not yet been thoroughly studied, we used an exploratory research design to answer our research questions. Exploratory research is defined as the investigation of a problem that has not been clearly defined (Stebbins, 2001). Exploratory research does not produce definitive results; rather, it identifies themes, new areas of interest, and research topics for future investigation.

2.1 Participants

A random sample of 40 ECE teachers from Montessori kindergartens in Slovenia was used.

Of the participants, 38 ($f\% = 95$) were female and 2 were male ($f\% = 5$). The average age of the participants was 36.08 years, with the youngest participant being 23 years old and the oldest being 54 years old. Regarding job position, 19 ($f\% = 45$) of them were ECE teachers, 18 ($f\% = 47.5$) ECE teaching assistants, and 3 ($f\% = 7.5$) principals who also worked in the ECE group. Regarding the degree of their education, 2 ($f\% = 5$) of the participants have obtained secondary professional education, 6 ($f\% = 15$) of them secondary general education (gymnasium), 1 ($f\% = 2.5$) of them junior college, 9 ($f\% = 22.5$) of them higher vocational college, 3 ($f\% = 7.5$) of them bachelor's degree, 17 ($f\% = 42.5$) of them master's degree, and 2 ($f\% = 5$) of them a PhD or postgraduate specialist degree. Regarding the field of their education, only 13 ($f = 32.5$) of them have obtained their education in educational sciences and teacher education.

2.2 Survey instrument

To study the role of music in Slovenian Montessori kindergartens, we developed a survey questionnaire for Montessori ECE teachers. The survey, which had 34 closed-ended questions, was completed electronically by the participants. Only one section of the study's data and one analysis's findings (concerning the formal circumstances of the implementation of music activities) are reported in this paper. The data was collected in 2020 as part of a doctoral thesis that aimed to study music's current role in Montessori kindergartens in Slovenia and abroad.

2.3 Procedures

The collection was completed using the e-version of the instrument in collaboration with the Slovenian Montessori Association, which forwarded the questionnaires to all Montessori ECE teacher members in Slovenia. The data was gathered anonymously. In the results sections, we present descriptive statistics related to the context in which music is implemented in Montessori kindergartens in Slovenia. To analyse the differences between the frequencies of use of particular teaching and learning forms, methods, and the frequency of listening to different genres by Slovenian Montessori ECE teachers when teaching music to preschool children, the Friedman test of two-way analysis of variance by ranks was used.

3 Results

Slovenian Montessori ECE teachers outlined which art disciplines are part of the curriculum of their kindergarten. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Art disciplines that are part of the Montessori kindergarten curriculum

	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %
Film	2	5.0
Music	34	85.0
Theatre	17	42.5
Visual arts	35	87.5
Literary arts	17	42.5
Dance	27	67.5

Most ECE teachers state that music ($f\% = 85.0$) and visual arts ($f\% = 87.5$) are part of the kindergarten curriculum where they work. Less than half of the ECE teachers report that their institution’s curriculum includes theatre ($f\% = 42.5$), literary arts ($f\% = 42.5$), or film ($f\% = 5.0$). Surprisingly, among the Montessori ECE teachers in Slovenia, there is still a relatively high percentage ($f\% = 15$) of those who believe that music is not a part of their Montessori preschool curriculum.

Table 2 displays the extracurricular activities offered in the Montessori kindergartens where surveyed ECE teachers work.

Table 2: Extracurricular activities that are in Montessori kindergartens offered free of charge

	Free of charge		At a charge	
	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %
Edgar Willems music lessons	22	55.0	13	32.5
Preschool music school	0	0	4	10.0
Other music-related activities	10	25.0	5	12.5
Preschool dance lessons	10	25.0	17	42.5
Choir	4	12.7	1	2.5
No extracurricular activities	11	27.5	13	32.5

Table 2 shows that in most Montessori kindergartens in Slovenia, children are offered some kind of music-related extracurricular activity, either free of charge or for a fee. More than two-thirds of the kindergartens where the surveyed ECE teachers work offer free musical enrichment programs. However, over one-fourth of the ECE teachers report that their kindergartens do not offer extracurricular

activities. The results lead us to conclude that Edgar Willems music lessons are the most commonly offered free-of-charge music-related extracurricular activity, and preschool dance lessons are the most commonly offered music-related extracurricular activity offered at a charge in Montessori kindergartens in Slovenia.

Table 3 shows the position of the staff member who, according to the Montessori ECE teachers, is responsible for teaching music in their institution.

Table 3: Position of the employee who is responsible for teaching music in Slovenian Montessori kindergartens

	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %
Head teacher	27	67.5
Assistant	13	32.5
Music specialist	24	60.0

Most surveyed ECE teachers believe that the head teacher is responsible for teaching music in their kindergarten ($f\% = 67.5$), followed by the music specialist ($f\% = 60.0$). Less than a third of the surveyed teachers believe that the teacher's assistant is also responsible for teaching music in their kindergarten ($f\% = 32.5$). There is cause for concern over the significant proportion of kindergarten educators who declare that music education is not the responsibility of the head teacher, music specialist, or assistant. This information suggests that no one is responsible for teaching music in certain Montessori kindergartens. Consequently, this may indicate that some Montessori kindergartens do not place enough emphasis on music education.

Table 4 shows the information the ECE teachers surveyed provided on whether they integrate elements from other approaches to music instruction into their music lessons.

Nearly half of Montessori ECE teachers integrate elements of other pedagogical concepts into their music instruction. The most commonly used pedagogical approach for integration is Edgar Willems' approach. These findings may indicate that many Montessori ECE teachers believe that the Montessori approach to music does not provide sufficient resources for effective music instruction for preschool children and thus need to integrate elements of other approaches.

Table 4: Integration of the elements of other approaches to teaching music into their music instruction

		<i>f</i>	<i>f%</i>
Yes		17	44.7
	<i>Edgar Willem's</i>	17	100.0
	<i>Suzuki</i>	1	5.8
	<i>Orff Schulwerk</i>	1	5.8
	<i>Dalcroze</i>	1	5.8
	<i>Kodaly</i>	1	5.8
	<i>Music together</i>	1	5.8
No		8	21.1
I do not know		13	34.2

Figure 1 shows how frequently Montessori ECE teachers listen to various musical genres with their children.

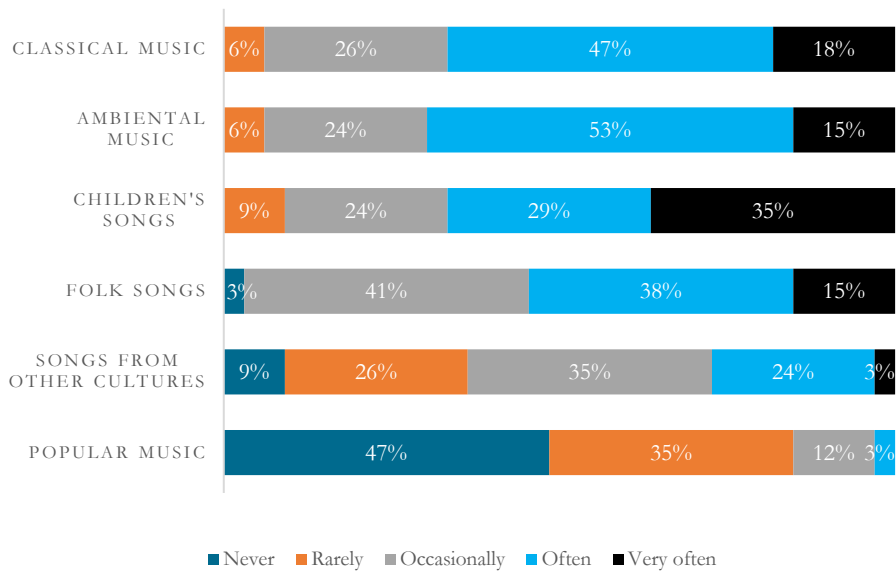


Figure 1: Frequency of listening to different musical genres with children

Montessori ECE teachers reported listening to children’s music more often than other genres ($M = 3.94$) and far less frequently to popular music ($M = 1.94$) with their pupils. Almost half of the surveyed ECE teachers ($f\% = 47$) never listen to popular music.

A Friedman test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the frequency of listening among the genres. Table 2 presents the results of the Friedman test.

Table 5: Friedman test

Variable	Mean Rank	χ^2	df	p
Classical music	4.17	89.069	5	.000
Ambiental music with sounds of nature	4.17			
Children’s songs	4.65			
Folk music	4.08			
Songs of other cultures	2.61			
Popular music	1.33			

The results of the Friedman test were statistically significant based on an alpha value of .05 ($\chi^2(5) = 89.069, p < .001$), indicating statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of the variables. Pairwise comparisons with adjusted p-values showed that there were significant differences between the frequencies of listening to popular music compared to all other musical genres except to songs of other cultures ($p < .001$) and between the frequencies of listening to songs of other cultures compared to all other musical genres except popular music ($p \leq .021$). For each comparison, ECE teachers are less likely to listen to popular music and songs of other cultures with their pupils.

Figure 2 shows how frequently Montessori ECE teachers use different forms of teaching and learning (individual learning, working in pairs, working in groups, and frontal instruction) when teaching music to preschool children.

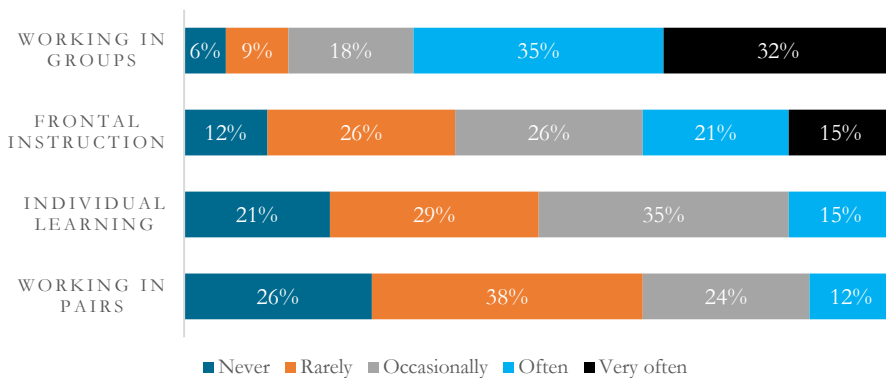


Figure 2: Frequency of use of different teaching and learning forms

Most Montessori ECE teachers ($M = 3.79, SD = 1.175$) claim that working in groups is the teaching and learning form they use most often with their students, whereas the fewest prefer working in pairs ($M = 2.21, SD = .978$). Almost a third of the ECE teachers very often work in groups (32.0%). Surveyed ECE teachers use the individual form of work ($M = 2.44, SD = .991$) more frequently than working in pairs ($M = 2.52, SD = .978$) when teaching music.

A Friedman test was run to determine if there were significant differences in frequency of use among different teaching and learning forms used by Montessori teachers. Table 2 presents the results of the Friedman test.

Table 6: Friedman test

Variable	Mean Rank	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Group work	3.32	29.453	3	.000
Frontal instruction	2.54			
Individual learning	2.21			
Work in pairs	1.93			

The results of the Friedman test were statistically significant based on an alpha value of .05 ($\chi^2(3) = 29.453, p < .001$), indicating statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of the following variables: individual learning, work in pairs, group work and frontal instruction. Pairwise comparisons with adjusted p-values showed that there were significant differences between the frequencies of use of pair work compared to group work ($p < .001$) and between individual work and group work ($p = .002$). For each comparison, ECE teachers are more likely to prefer using group work.

Figure 2 shows how frequently Montessori ECE teachers use different teaching methods when teaching music to preschool children.

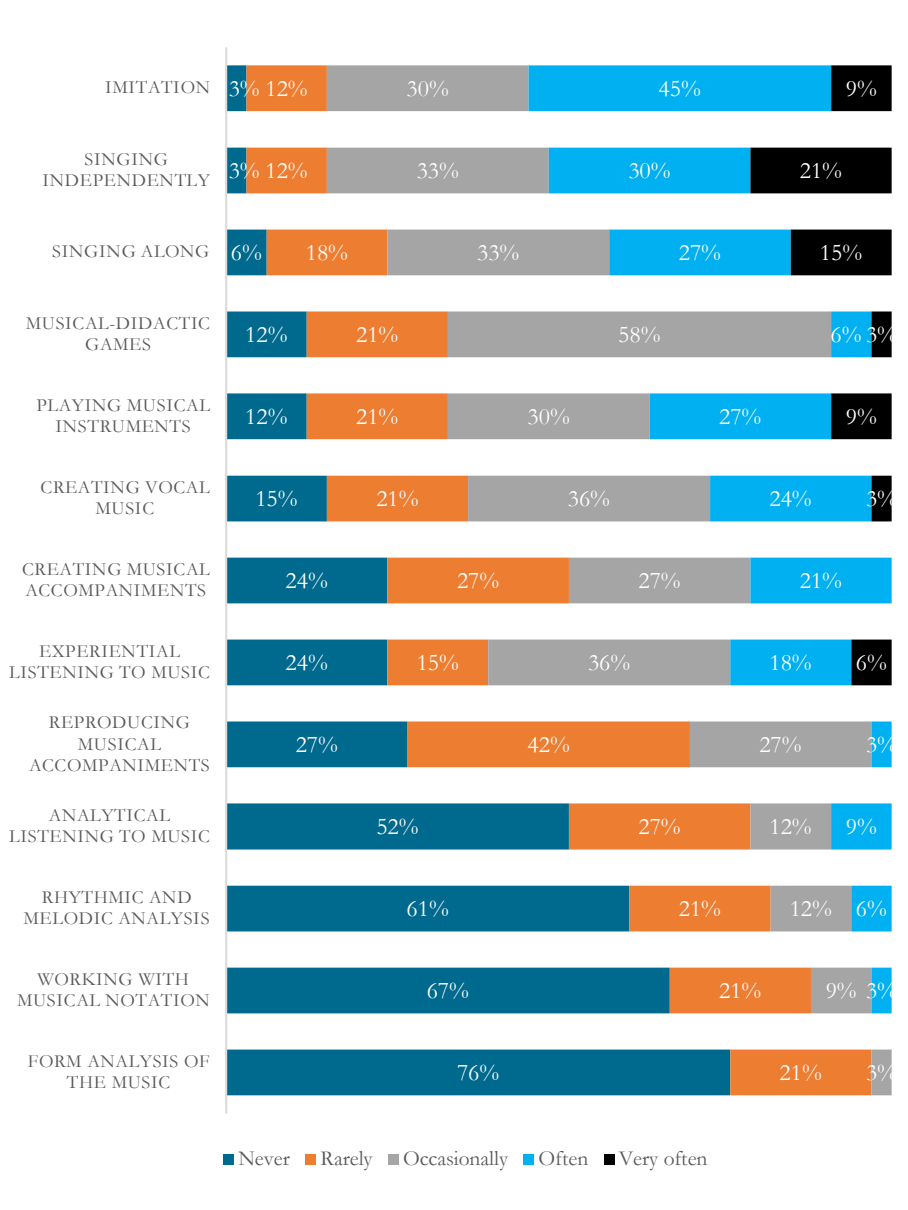


Figure 2: Frequency of use of different methods of teaching

A Friedman test was run to determine if there were significant differences in frequency of use among different methods of instruction used by Montessori ECE teachers. Table 2 presents the results of the Friedman test.

Table 7: Friedman test

Variable	Mean Rank	χ^2	df	p
Imitation	10.03	185.591	12	.000
Singing independently	10.27			
Singing along	9.56			
Playing musical instruments	8.92			
Experiential listening to music	8.00			
Creating vocal music	7.86			
Musical-didactic games	7.56			
Creating musical accompaniments	7.21			
Reproducing musical accompaniments	5.76			
Analytical listening to music	4.68			
Rhythmic and melodic analysis	4.30			
Working with musical notation	3.86			
Form analysis of the music	2.97			

The results of the Friedman test were statistically significant based on an alpha value of .05 ($\chi^2(12) = 185.591$, $p < .001$), indicating statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of the variables. We used pairwise comparisons with adjusted p-values. Slovenian Montessori ECE teachers use form analysis less frequently compared to all other teaching methods except for working with musical notation, rhythmic and melodic analysis, analytical listening and reproducing musical notation ($p \leq .001$). Furthermore, they less frequently use working with musical notation compared to all other teaching methods except for rhythmic and melodic analysis, analytical listening, reproducing musical notation and form analysis ($p \leq .037$). The use of rhythmic and melodic analysis is less likely to be utilised by ECE teachers compared to all other teaching methods except for reproducing musical accompaniments, analytical listening to music, and form analysis ($p \leq .016$). Among Slovenian Montessori ECE teachers, experiential listening is more frequently used than analytical listening. Compared to playing musical instruments, singing along, imitation, and singing independently, analytical listening is more frequently used by Montessori ECE teachers ($p \leq .001$).

4 Discussion

In reviewing the literature, little information was found about the context in which music education is implemented in Montessori kindergartens. Furthermore, there is no empirical data on music education in Montessori kindergartens in Slovenia.

This research aimed to answer several questions, the first of which was whether Montessori ECE teachers consider music and other art domains to be components of the Montessori curriculum. Although most Montessori ECE teachers consider music part of their institution's curriculum, the current study shows that there is still a share of Montessori ECE teachers in Slovenia who hold the opposite view. These results are compatible with those of Dansereau and Wayman (2019), who noted that music does not have an equal role as other domains in many Montessori classrooms in the USA. It is also interesting to compare this data with the study by Rajan (2017), who reports that, in the USA, almost all Montessori ECE teachers agree or strongly agree that music is as important as other academic subjects, that having music education in school programs is important, and that music education is a necessary part of the Montessori curriculum. Although the percentage of ECE teachers in Slovenia who do not consider music a part of the curriculum is relatively small, the fact that such attitudes exist at all is concerning, and the reasons for this should be investigated further in the future.

Another important finding of our study is that more than two-thirds of the kindergartens offer free musical enrichment activities, with Edgar Willems' music lessons being the most commonly offered free-of-charge extracurricular activity. These findings appear to align with the current situation in Slovenia, where the Edgar Willems approach to music teaching is the most popular approach for teaching music that is being incorporated into the various levels of the educational system (Jovanovič & Crvenica, 2020). The latter makes sense, considering the overlap between Maria Montessori's teaching methods and those advocated by Edgar Willems and the fact that Willems frequently cited Montessori in his works (Frega, 1995). Our findings suggest that in Slovenia, Montessori preschools seem more likely to charge extra for dance classes than any other music-related activity.

Our research also shows that most Montessori ECE teachers state it is the head teacher's responsibility to teach music to preschool children. However, they are closely followed by those who state that teaching music is the responsibility of a music specialist. This data suggests that many kindergartens continue to delegate music education to a general music teacher who is not necessarily familiar with Montessori methodologies and can only teach music as a separate subject rather than an integral component of the daily curriculum. Latter contrasts Maria Montessori's theoretical writings, arguing that the classroom teacher's role is to provide children

with opportunities to participate in musical activities (Isaacs, 2018). This situation could be the result of Montessori ECE teachers' insecurities and a possible lack of musical expertise. Although music specialists teach music in many Slovenian kindergartens, there are far fewer such kindergartens compared to the United States, where, according to Rajan (2017), nearly all Montessori institutions employ a music specialist.

Another aim of this study was to understand whether Montessori ECE teachers integrate principles of other approaches to music education into their musical instruction in Montessori kindergartens and which of them are most often integrated into the music instruction. The results of this study show that almost half of the surveyed ECE teachers integrate elements of other approaches to teaching music into their music instruction in Montessori kindergartens. The most widely used approach to music education by Montessori ECE teachers is Edgar Willems' approach. These findings may suggest that many Montessori ECE teachers believe that the Montessori approach to music does not provide sufficient resources to teach music effectively to preschool children. These results also confirm that Montessori ECE teachers consider the Edgar Willems approach most compatible with Montessori pedagogy.

The following research question in this study sought to determine how often Montessori ECE teachers play recordings of different musical genres when instructing music. We found that when teaching music to children, Montessori ECE teachers predominantly listen to children's music and rarely listen to popular music. It is interesting to note that among the surveyed ECE teachers, almost half never listen to popular music when instructing children. The analysis of the differences between the frequency of listening to different genres showed that popular music and music of other cultures are statistically the least frequently used by Montessori ECE teachers when teaching music. When teaching music, all musical genres must be given equal attention, as expressing an interest in a particular genre of music might be correlated with listening to that genre of music regularly (Denac, 2008). Given that children are more likely to hear popular music at home, the lower representation of this genre in kindergartens does not seem problematic.

According to our findings, we also note that there are differences between Montessori ECE teachers in the frequency of use of particular forms of teaching and learning when instructing music. Most ECE teachers report using group work most frequently, while only a small percentage favour having students work in pairs. As individual work is a well-known feature of educational work in Montessori kindergartens (Brehony, 2000), it is somewhat surprising that Montessori ECE teachers do not use individual forms of learning and teaching to a greater extent when teaching music. Possible explanations for this observation include a lack of music-related didactic materials that would equip ECE teachers to facilitate children's engagement in such activities.

Finally, this research aimed to examine the frequency with which Montessori music educators employ various pedagogical methods when teaching music. The analysis revealed substantial variation in the frequencies of use between particular methods of musical instruction among the Montessori ECE teachers. The less preferred methods when teaching music among the Slovenian Montessori ECE teachers are form analysis, working with musical notation, rhythmic and melodic analysis, and analytical listening. One of the main drawbacks to the widespread adoption of such approaches might be that they call for a higher level of musical expertise on the part of the instructor; as a result, many Montessori ECE teachers could have opted instead to focus on approaches that are more manageable for those without a background in music. Another possible explanation for this could be that Montessori ECE teachers hold the view that in kindergarten, it is preferable to employ teaching methods that emphasise the growth of basic musical skills rather than those heavily tied to analytical thinking. The finding also supports the interpretation that Montessori ECE teachers more often use the method of experiential listening to music compared to analytical listening when teaching music. Since one of the main goals of preschool music education is cultivating a positive attitude towards music and experiencing music as actively as possible (Denac, 2008), this seems like a sensible choice.

5 Conclusions

Since early childhood music education is an essential component of preschool children's holistic development in Montessori kindergartens, our primary objective in conducting this research was to make a meaningful contribution to the advancement of Montessori music education in Slovenia and beyond.

Overall, this study strengthens the idea that there is a need to further develop the field of music in Montessori kindergartens. The results of this study point to several challenges in the field of music education in Montessori kindergartens that need to be discussed and resolved in the future through collaboration between scholars and ECE teachers. Multiple pieces of evidence from our study suggest that Montessori ECE teachers appear to be unaware of current scientific findings in the field of early music education as it relates to the Montessori approach. Another challenge for Montessori early music education's future is that some ECE teachers do not consider music and other art domains to be a part of their institution's curriculum, which may indicate that they do not consider music as significant as other domains.

On the other hand, with this study, we also identified many good practices that occur in teaching music in Montessori kindergartens. It is encouraging that Montessori educators listen to different genres of music when teaching music to children and are aware of the issue of overemphasizing popular music in early childhood settings. In addition to the required curriculum, many Montessori kindergartens also provide extracurricular music classes for the children, which is encouraging, especially if these activities do not require additional payment. We think it is good that many Montessori kindergartens can also offer music-related extracurricular activities to children outside the central pedagogical concept. We also consider it beneficial that Montessori ECE teachers supplement their teaching with resources outside the Montessori approach when they assess that the Montessori approach does not offer them enough guidance in the area of music education. Given the many shared principles between the Montessori approach and Edgar Willems' approach to music education, combining the two seems like a reasonable choice. We applaud that Montessori educators incorporate multiple methods and forms of teaching and learning into their music instruction, even if they are not all used equally often.

When discussing the limitations of our research, it should be noted that the data we obtained about the current position of music education in Montessori kindergartens is based on the subjective opinions and attitudes of the ECE teachers who work there, so objectivity could not be ensured. The scope of this study was also limited in terms of the sample size. Even though there are only a limited number of Montessori kindergartens in Slovenia and, consequently, only a limited number of Montessori ECE teachers working in them, a larger sample could ensure an even better generalisation of findings.

The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature. Our research is one of the few empirical studies in the field of music in Montessori kindergartens, both in Slovenia and beyond. Our study's findings can be used as a reference by future researchers in this field. They will provide Montessori educators with new perspectives on the advantages and challenges of Montessori early music education and offer implications for the practice. We believe precise knowledge about the specifics of musical education in Montessori kindergartens will contribute to the further development of this domain.

In addition, this study's findings have several important implications for future practice. First, we would like to point out that it is necessary to pay more attention to this area through theoretical and empirical studies. More research is needed to examine the planning, implementation, and evaluation of music education in Montessori kindergartens. Research has to support and encourage the development of new didactic materials compatible with the Montessori approach to help fill this gap in this field. Montessori ECE teachers should be offered more education and professional development opportunities in the field of Montessori methodology and in specific subject areas, particularly music. They should be given the opportunity to participate in a variety of different workshops, teacher trainings, and seminars designed to help them develop their musical expertise and gain insight into the best practices for teaching music in Montessori preschools. They could also benefit from the availability of Montessori music instruction guides and other materials, which are, apart from a few Montessori music didactic materials, currently non-existent in Slovenia.

The Montessori method provides a solid foundation as we strive to provide preschool children with the best possible musical education. Despite the obstacles that exist in the field of early childhood music education in Montessori kindergartens, there is reason for optimism about its future.

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