Musical Preferences of Students in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Snježana Dobrota

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

University of Split, Croatia

Martina Glavaš

Master of Primary Education

Dubravka Čubrić

Master of Primary Education

Abstract

Musical preferences are an extremely complex phenomenon formed under the influence of many factors. The paper investigates whether there are gender- and age-related differences in the preferences of primary school students from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and whether there is a connection between music familiarity and preferences for certain musical excerpts. To examine students' preferences for musical excerpts, a general data questionnaire and an assessment scale were administered to a sample of 253 participants, including second, third, seventh, and eighth grade primary school students from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The results show gender- and age-related differences in the preferences for classical music, whereby female students, compared to male students, and younger students, compared to older students, show higher preferences for classical music. A significant interaction effect of gender and age on classical music preferences was found. Furthermore, the results show that male and female students do not differ in their preferences for world music, while age-related difference was observed, with younger students, compared to older students, showing greater preferences for this musical style. A significant interaction effect of gender and age on world music preferences was found. Finally, it was confirmed that students show higher preferences for familiar musical excerpts compared to unfamiliar musical excerpts. The obtained results represent a significant contribution to the study of musical preferences from the aspect of music psychology and music pedagogy.

Keywords: music pedagogy, musical preferences, world music, classical music, music education.

Introduction

The goal of teaching music at all levels of education is the aesthetic education of students, cultivating a love of music, and acquiring the basic elements of musical language. From 2006 to 2019, music education in primary schools in Croatia was organized on the basis of a document entitled *Curriculum for Primary School* (2006). Conception-wise, this was an open program, which means that listening to and becoming familiar with music was the only mandatory area, while the teacher was free to choose the way of active music-making, including singing, playing, and elements of musical creativity. The openness of the program was especially seen in the teaching unit *Folk Music*, where the teachers could choose in which order they would teach lessons respecting the principle of the homeland. The program relied on two basic principles. The psychological principle related to the assumption that students love music and want to actively engage with it, while the cultural-aesthetic principle was based on the idea that teaching music enables students to become competent users of music.

The year 2019 saw the adoption of a document entitled *Curriculum for the School Subject of Music for Primary Schools and Grammar Schools in the Republic of Croatia* (2019), which was a result of the curricular reform. Unlike the 2006 Curriculum, which covered only primary school, this program covered both primary and secondary school. Furthermore, as opposed to musical activities listed in the 2006 Curriculum (singing, playing, listening to music, elements of musical creativity), the 2019 Curriculum introduced three domains: (A) listening to and becoming familiar with music, (B) expression through music and with music, and (C) music in context. While the 2006 Curriculum lists key concepts and educational achievements, the 2019 Curriculum provides a list of educational outcomes that are realized within each domain. According to the document, music education is based on the following principles: psychological principle, cultural-aesthetic principle, synchronicity principle, and intercultural principle.

There are ten cantons/counties in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entity, each one having its own curriculum. According to the *Curriculum for the Nine-Year Primary Schools in the Croatian Language in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2008), music education takes place within the school subject of Music Culture. Here, too, the basic principle is the psychological one, according to which students love music and want to actively engage with it. Furthermore, the program is open, which means that the teacher has the freedom to conduct lessons according to the abilities and desires of students, while the main emphasis is placed on the cultural aspects of music. The aim of teaching music in primary school is to introduce students to music culture, learn the basic elements of musical language, develop musical creativity, promote general values of community and cooperation, promote a sense of beauty, respect diversity, develop a sense of belonging to the homeland, encourage the expression of emotions, and learn how to distinguish trendy music from permanently valuable classical

works. The tasks of teaching music are getting acquainted with different pieces of music, getting acquainted with the basic elements of musical language, encouraging independent musical activities, and developing musical taste. Teaching areas, key concepts, educational achievements, and proposals for choosing teaching methodology are listed for each grade.

Dobrota and Reić Ercegovac (2016a) point out that the ability to aesthetically evaluate music represents a sensitivity to the artistic quality of the work and its performance. Musical preferences are short-term assessments of liking, while the musical taste presents a relatively stable, long-term behavior and evaluation, or more permanent dispositions that represent the totality of individual preferences (Mirković-Radoš, 1996). The results of many studies confirm that musical preferences are an extremely complex phenomenon, formed under the influence of various factors (Dobrota et al., 2019; Esfandiari & Mansouri, 2014). These factors can be categorized into two groups: music-related characteristics, such as tempo, dynamics, performers, musical style, etc., and listener-related characteristics, such as gender, age, music education, personality traits, etc.

The results of research on gender-related differences in musical preferences generally confirm that women prefer romantic music, with a high level of emotional content, while men are more prone to complex, heavy styles (Esfandiari & Mansouri, 2014). According to research by Crowther and Durkin (1982), women listen to music more intensely and more often than men. Such a discrepancy is associated with differences in the ways men and women use music (North & Hargreaves, 2008). Namely, it is often pointed out that the importance of music for men lies in its role in the social and affective relationships they establish with peers and society, while women listen to music to improve their mood and express their thoughts and feelings. In their research on the musical preferences and functions of music on a sample of Slovenian and Croatian students, Dobrota et al. (2019) confirm there are gender differences in both variables, with women preferring the Reflective-Complex musical style and men the Intense-Rebellious style of music.

As for the relationship between musical preferences and age, the results of the research confirm that children of early and preschool age and lower primary school students are extremely open and flexible toward different, unconventional musical styles. Such a phenomenon in music pedagogy and music psychology is known as the open-earedness hypothesis (Hargreaves, 1982). LeBlanc (1991) defines this hypothesis in terms of listeners' tolerance of different musical styles and proposes four hypotheses: (1) younger children are more open to different music; (2) openness decreases with entering adolescence; (3) there is a partial switch in terms of openness as the listener matures from adolescence to younger adulthood; (4) openness declines as the listener matures and enters old age (LeBlanc, 1991, 2). LeBlanc et al. (1993) tested these hypotheses on participants aged 6 to 91 years, and his results

indicate a decline in adolescent preferences, a rise of preferences toward adulthood, and finally a decline in older age.

Another variable that represents a significant predictor of musical preferences is music familiarity (Dobrota & Reić Ercegovac, 2016b; North & Hargreaves, 2008). While popular, less complex music initially attracts more attention from the listener, the attention decreases with the increasing music familiarity. In contrast, more complex types of music, such as classical music, require multiple, active listening if we want to perceive such music, understand it and, consequently, increase the preferences for such music.

Research Objective, Problem, and Hypotheses

The research objective is to investigate whether there are gender- and age-related differences in the preferences of primary school students for classical music and world music and whether there is a connection between music familiarity and musical preferences.

Based on the defined objective, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Younger students, compared to older students, and girls, compared to boys, show greater preferences for classical music.

H2: Younger students, compared to older students, and girls, compared to boys, show greater preferences for world music.

H3: Students show greater preferences for familiar music compared to music they are unfamiliar with.

Method

Participants

The survey was conducted on a sample of 253 participants, including third, fourth, seventh, and eighth grade students of Spinut Primary School (Split, Croatia) (N = 75), Antun Branko Šimić Primary School (Zagreb, Croatia) (N = 70), and Antun Branko and Stanislav Šimić Primary School (Drinovci, Bosnia and Herzegovina) (N = 108) (Table 1). Third and fourth grade students were put into one group, and seventh and eighth grade students into another group of participants. Out of the total number of participants, only 13% attended or are attending additional music lessons, and 25% of participants engage with music in their free time.

Table 1. Sample structure (N =253)

GENDER	N	GRADE	N
M	119	3	36
		4	31
		7	33
		8	19

F	134	3	34
		4	35
		7	42
		8	23
Total	253		

Research instrument and procedure

A questionnaire was constructed for the purpose of this research. In the first part, the *General Data Questionnaire*, socio-demographic data on participants were collected (gender, primary school, grade, additional music lessons, engagement with music in free time). The second part is the *Musical Preferences Questionnaire*. The task of the participants was to listen to a particular piece of music, indicate whether they liked the piece on the Likert-type scale by marking the numbers from one to five (1 = I don't like it at all; 5 = I really like it), and indicate whether they were familiar with the piece of music.

A compact disc containing five instrumental excerpts of classical music and five instrumental excerpts of world music, each lasting about one minute, was used in the research. The CD was made exclusively for the purposes of this research, and the criteria for the selection of musical excerpts were the research problems. The psychometric characteristics of the questionnaire are shown in Table 2. Since the distribution of total scores of preferences for musical excerpts differs significantly from the normal distribution (K-S d=0.06; p>0.05), non-parametric statistical procedures will be used in further analyzes.

Table 2. Psychometric features of the Musical Preferences Questionnaire

No. of musical excerpt	Musical excerpt – classical music	Musical excerpt – world music
1.	G. Rossini: *William Tell (overture)*	*The music of Ireland: Jigs and reels* (Ireland)
2.	J. Brahms: *Hungarian Dance no. 5, g-minor*	*Greek Music Bouzouki Instrumental "Summer Time"* (Greece)
3.	G. Bizet: *Carmen (overture)*	*Kalinka* (Russia)
4.	P. I. Tchaikovsky: *Nutcracker, Trepak*	*A Girl from Kumanovo – Traditional Instrumental Macedonian Music* (Macedonia)
5.	A. Khachaturian: *Gayaneh, Saber Dance*	*The Mexican Hat Dance* (Mexico)
Cronbach α	0.69	0.54
M (sd)	20.96 (3,21)	19.72 (3.21)

range	11-25	9-25
average r value among items	0.30	0.19
K-S d	0.14, p<0.01	0.11, p<0.01

Table 3 shows the average degree of preferences for musical excerpts. The participants rated the composition A. Khachaturian: *Gayaneh* with the highest marks and the composition *Kalinka* (Russia) with the lowest.

Table 3. The average degree of preferences for musical excerpts

Musical excerpt	***M***	***min.***	***max.***	***SD***
G. Rossini: *William Tell (overture)*	3.88	1.00	5.00	0.98
The music of Ireland: Jigs and reels (Ireland)	3.93	1.00	5.00	1.08
Greek Music Bouzouki Instrumental "Summer Time" (Greece)	3.77	1.00	5.00	1.04
J. Brahms: *Hungarian Dance no. 5, g-minor*	3.96	1.00	5.00	1.15
G. Bizet: *Carmen (overture)*	4.40	1.00	5.00	0.81
Kalinka (Russia)	3.76	1.00	5.00	1.16
P. I. Tchaikovsky: *Nutcracker, Trepak*	4.28	1.00	5.00	0.91
A Girl from Kumanovo - *Traditional Instrumental Macedonian Music* (Macedonia)	3.87	1.00	5.00	1.22
The Mexican Hat Dance (Mexico)	4.39	1.00	5.00	0.89
A. Khachaturian: *Gayaneh, Saber Dance*	4.45	1.00	5.00	0.92

Results

H1: Younger students, compared to older students, and girls, compared to boys, show greater preferences for classical music.

To investigate whether there are age- and gender-related differences in students' classical music preferences, a two-way analysis of variance was performed. The results show age- and gender-related differences in the preferences for classical music, with girls, compared to boys, and younger students, compared to older students, showing higher preferences for classical music (Table 4). This confirmed the hypothesis. A significant interaction effect of gender and age on the musical preferences of classical music was found, in such a way that a much greater difference was observed between younger and older boys than between younger and older girls.

Table 4. Gender- and age-related differences in students' preferences for classical music

Preferences for classical music		M	N	F	df	p
gender	boys	4.04	119	10.55	1. 249	0.00
	girls	4.28	134			
grade	grades 3 and 4	4.43	136	54.12	1. 249	0.00
	grades 7 and 8	3.89	117			
Interaction gender*grade	boys in grades 3 and 4	4.41	67	7.46	1. 249	0.00
	girls in grades 3 and 4	4.45	69			
	boys in grades 7 and 8	3.68	52			
	girls in grades 7 and 8	4.11	65			

H2: Younger students, compared to older students, and girls, compared to boys, show greater preferences for world music.

To investigate whether there are age- and gender-related differences in students' preferences for world music, a two-way analysis of variance was again performed. The results show that boys and girls do not differ in preferences for world music, while there is age-related difference, with younger students, compared to older students, showing greater preferences for this musical style (Table 5). This partially confirmed the hypothesis. A significant interaction effect of gender and age on the preferences for world music was found. In the case of younger students, boys show greater preferences for world music than girls, while in the case of older students, girls prefer this musical style more than boys.

Table 5. Age- and gender-related differences in students' preferences for world music

Preferences for world music		M	N	F	df	p
gender	boys	3.90	119	0.43	1. 249	0.51
	girls	3.95	134			
grade	grades 3 and 4	4.14	136	30.88	1. 249	0.00
	grades 7 and 8	3.71	117			
Interaction gender*grade	boys in grades 3 and 4	4.20	67	5.39	1. 249	0.02
	girls in grades 3 and 4	4.07	69			
	boys in grades 7 and 8	3.60	52			
	girls in grades 7 and 8	3.82	65			

H3: Students show greater preferences for familiar music compared to music they are unfamiliar with.

To determine whether music familiarity affects students' preferences for musical excerpts, correlations between familiarity and musical preferences were calculated

(Table 6). The existence of such correlations was observed for nine musical excerpts, thus confirming the last hypothesis.

Table 6. Correlations between music familiarity and musical preferences

Musical excerpt	Unfamiliar (f)	Familiar (f)	Correlation between liking and familiarity
G. Rossini: *William Tell (overture)*	127	126	0.12
The music of Ireland: Jigs and reels (Ireland)	189	64	0.20*
Greek Music Bouzouki Instrumental "Summer Time" (Greece)	166	87	0.28*
J. Brahms: *Hungarian Dance no. 5, g-minor*	125	128	0.25*
G. Bizet: *Carmen (overture)*	51	202	0.17*
Kalinka (Russia)	145	108	0.18*
P. I. Tchaikovsky: *Nutcracker, Trepak*	52	201	0.21*
A Girl from Kumanovo - *Traditional Instrumental Macedonian Music (Macedonia)*	154	99	0.30*
The Mexican Hat Dance (Mexico)	48	205	0.26*
A. Khachaturian: *Gayaneh, Saber Dance*	20	233	0,35*

*$p < 0,05$

Discussion

The results of this research confirmed there are age-related differences in the preferences for classical music and world music, whereby younger students, compared to older students, show greater preferences for both musical styles. Such results are consistent with the results of many studies confirming that younger children are more open to different, unconventional musical styles (Dobrota & Srajačev, 2021; Hargreaves et al., 1995; Kopiez & Lehmann, 2008). Kopiez and Lehmann (2008) investigated musical preferences of first, second, third, and fourth

grade students and noticed a decline in openness to unconventional musical styles (classical, ethnic, avant-garde music) when transitioning from first to second grade. However, such an effect disappeared when classical music was excluded from further analysis. Hargreaves (1995) investigated the influence of age, gender, and music education on the preferences for different musical styles of participants aged 11–12 and 15–16 years. He noticed a decline in the level of musical preferences with age, especially in the case of art music.

Louven (2012) believes that the concepts of musical preference and openness are not synonymous, because one can show low preferences for a particular piece of music, but at the same time be open to it. Investigating the trend of developing openness in a sample of high school and university students, he confirms the significant influence of age and music education on the formation of musical preferences. Still, he notes that openness to different music is a relatively stable category. Therefore, he views this category as openness to new experiences. i.e. as a personality trait from the five-factor personality model (Big Five theory of personality).

Regarding the influence of gender on the preferences for classical music, it was noticed that girls, compared to boys, show higher preferences for classical music, while in the case of world music there was no gender-related difference in the preferences. The results of research generally confirm that women, compared to men, show preferences for a larger number of musical styles, which is explained by the fact that female students have better music education than male students (Hargreaves et al., 1995). Exploring the musical preferences of primary school students for classical music, world music, and 20th-century music, Dobrota and Sarajčev (2001) also find no gender-related differences in the preferences for world music. A possible explanation for such a finding is that students, regardless of gender, were not often in contact with world music and therefore were not able to get familiar with such music. Exploring the influence of age, gender, and music education on musical preferences, Hargreaves (1995) notices that female students show preferences for a greater number of musical styles than male students, especially in the case of art music.

In this research, a significant interaction effect of gender and age on the preferences for classical music was observed, in such a way that a much greater difference between younger and older students was observed in boys than in girls. The interaction effect of gender and age on the musical preferences for world music is also significant, whereby younger boys show greater preferences for world music than younger girls, while older girls prefer this musical style.

The results of this research confirmed that music familiarity is a significant predictor of preferences for classical music and world music. This is in line with the results of many studies which show that getting to know and repeatedly, actively listening to music, especially the music of more complex structure, increases the preferences for such music (Dobrota & Sarajčev, 2021; Ward et al., 2014).

Conclusion

The results of this research have significant implications for music pedagogy and music psychology. One of the most significant results relates to the fact that younger children are open to different music, even the music that adults consider unconventional.

Openness to unknown experiences is generally a fundamental premise of understanding human behavior. If such knowledge is considered in the context of music pedagogy and music psychology, we can notice that understanding the course and dynamics of the development of the aesthetic response to music is a very important factor influencing the design of music classes.

For music pedagogues, the fact that children are open to different music specifically means that teaching content they present to children can be enriched with different music, which, in addition to art music, includes popular music, world music, and traditional music of the region children come from. When children become familiar with different types of music, they become aware that pieces of music differ both in their structure and in the function that they have in society and yet they have equal aesthetic values and high quality. This develops tolerance and reduces exclusivity in children, not only in the field of choice of music and other artistic content but also in their relationships with peers and members of different cultures, if they come into contact with them. Such intercultural music education is a response to contemporary life in all its complexity.

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