

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Use of Works of Musical Art in Preschool Education: A Slovak Perspective

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received February 28, 2023


Accepted June 06, 2023

Published Online July 3, 2023

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**How to cite:** Rochovská, I., Dolinská, E., & Švábová, B. (2023). The Use of Works of Musical Art in Preschool Education: A Slovak Perspective. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 12(3): 79-102.



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ABSTRACT

**Background/purpose** – Musical art has great potential for developing a child's personality. Research around the world confirms that the inclusion of musical art stimuli has a positive impact on preschool children and brings multiple benefits. However, it needs to be led by a teacher who is competent pedagogically, but who is also equally competent artistically. The aim of the research was to examine the use of works of musical art in preschool education in Slovakia from the perspective of preschool teachers.

**Materials/methods** – Questioning was used to meet the survey aim. The research tool was a questionnaire constructed by the authors. In total, 366 kindergarten teachers responded to the questionnaire. A quantitative research design was employed in the study.

**Results** – From the results of the research, it is possible to state that there is a higher than average level of the current status of musical art used in preschool education. The opportunities for kindergarten teachers to acquire knowledge of musical art in their preservice training or other forms of education were found to be below average. The attitude of kindergarten teachers towards musical art can also be described as below average. Opportunities to gain expertise in musical art were shown to statistically, significantly, and positively predict kindergarten teachers' attitudes toward musical art. It was also confirmed that the kindergarten teachers' attitude towards musical art statistically, significantly, and positively predicts the use of works of musical art in preschool education.

**Conclusion** – The research findings point to the need to increase opportunities for kindergarten teachers to acquire professional knowledge in musical art. The results of the research may be a stimulus for further research, such as analysis of preschool teachers' responses in terms of their age and pedagogical practice in order to estimate the development of the current state of using works of musical art in preschool education.

**Keywords** – music, musical art, preschool education, kindergarten.

To link to this article– <https://dx.doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2023.123.4>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Preschool education is a period of a child's special accumulation of knowledge from the surrounding reality, while simultaneously it is also the time of their first emotional experiences. It is in kindergarten and primary school that, as a result of educational practices, including various artistic activities, the development of the child's personality and creative abilities is initiated, esthetic sensitivity is formed, and the child is thus prepared for active participation in the world around them. Musical art contributes to the enrichment of a child's intellect, reflects their emotions, stimulates their imagination, and arouses their interest in the beauty around them. However, the musical development of children is not simple and straightforward. Although art comes from its essence, in order to fully realize its pedagogical function, it is first necessary to develop a child's esthetic perception, to develop in them an artistic imagination which gives them the opportunity to understand and experience the ideas and feelings expressed (among other things) through works of art. Music education, as an esthetic educational discipline, emphasizes the emotions and experience of a child, which is reflected in their behavior, actions, and in the implementation of various musical activities to creatively and actively express themselves.

Music, like other types of art, can greatly appeal to and capture a child's attention. They can respond spontaneously to music, and the variety of musical genres and forms opens the way for them to enter into its secrets.

Musical art does not belong, as has often been claimed, to a hypothetical, elusive, intuitive, private, and non-transferable world, but instead is a symbolic mode of expression, with its own logic, which is markedly different from the logic of discursive language. Communication with art requires learning in order to understand the forms in which it is presented, and learning to be "esthetically surprised" by a work of art that is of real value to human beings. Thus, art education is an essential element of communication with art that stimulates the functioning of a child's cognitive and, more especially, affective areas in order to learn the language of art and to be able to refer to it in the future (Draves, 2021). Sensitivity to the beauty that music represents as art stimulates a child's cognitive activities, which play a very important role in the formation of an open mind and a personality capable of continuous development.

A child can respond spontaneously to music and a variety of musical genres and forms, opening the way for them to enter the secrets of the world of music, a world of imagination, and a world that changes thinking, enriched with new situations never experienced before that results in positive emotions.

Music education, due to its creative and exploratory activity character, is mainly directed to its fundamentals in cultivating creativity: it develops fluency and flexibility in handling musical material. A proven medium for this pedagogical process is play at different levels of the development of a child's psyche. In the access and pedagogical interpretation of music, the metaphor, simile, pictorial vivid analogy with nature, and the achieved level of authentic childhood experience is an effective mediator that prevents the perceived whole of music from disintegrating into a meaningless and cluttered accumulation of incoherent facts and information. Music is not to be represented as an artificial world with exclusive rules, but as a part of life and its expression (music as an organism and its growth). Therefore, in addition to the interconnectedness of vocal, instrumental, musical-motor, and receptive activities, music education, as an integral part of preschool education, increasingly and consistently seeks links

with a child's mother tongue as well as with other educational disciplines (Hemming & Westvall, 2010).

In the opinion of several pedagogues (Daniel & Parkes, 2013; Kenny, 2017), we should begin to prepare children at preschool age for the conscious reception of works of art, as this is an important resource that inspires their independent creativity – from this source they draw ideas for their own personal and original artistic expression.

Music, as a specific type of art, affects both the cognitive and affective areas of a child and can reveal all manner of emotions and abilities in the form of entertainment. By interacting with music, a child can learn to communicate their problems and experiences, even gaining awareness of their own psyche, which has a significant impact on their socialization and cooperation in terms of being in a group with other children, and participating in various games and activities (Lewis, 2020). An interesting, well-organized, and systematic music education at the kindergarten level can contribute to the prevention of educational problems later in school life. In this process, what is extremely important is the role of the teacher who, through the introduction of musical activities, helps to develop a child's perception, abstract thinking, vocabulary, and skills and sensitivity to the esthetics of the environment (Hemming & Westvall, 2010).

An important element in such an approach is the personality of the teacher who, in preparing for their profession, should be able to handle this diversity in unison. In this way, the musicodramatic understanding of a child about music (through fairytales, stories, dialogical situations, contrasts, repetitions, minutiae, expressive-affective gestures, etc., as an expression of moods, feelings, and communication patterns) becomes an activating and unifying factor. During the university preparation of future kindergarten teachers, study in the field of musical art is conceived as a complex area and as the interconnection of the pedagogical and instrumental interpretation of a piece of music, along with simultaneous practical training. The basis of practical training is the rigorous integration of the theoretical background offered through lectures and seminars, or that which is acquired through individual study with a deliberate professional exploration of real school praxis and self-reflection of a student's activities in the role of a teacher. Emphasis is placed on constructing one's own conception of teaching.

In the context of lifelong learning, projects conducted in countries other than Slovakia are mainly based on the implementation of teachers' meetings aimed at discussing methodologies for teaching music at the level of preschool education. This approach has proven to be particularly effective, as it draws upon the experiences and realities of each, thus contributing to a collective knowledge (Wolffenbüttel, 2019). Despite understanding the importance of offering continuous education activities for teachers, according to various research studies (e.g., Del Ben & Hentschke, 2002; Schon, 2000), systematic data on the music education practices of music teachers in schools are still scarce. Previous research has shown that little is known still about the methodological practices employed by music teachers, nor about the difficulties and challenges they face in the school context; therefore, it is important that this area is thoroughly examined in order to understand how teachers develop their music education practices in the school context. This knowledge could support the development of intervention projects and curricula, as well as policies for initial and further education that meet the needs, characteristics, limitations, and opportunities of both schools and teachers.

### 1.1. Overview of Related Research

A survey of the Web of Science international online database over the past 6 years revealed a number of studies with a focus on music art in the context of preschool education or the university training of preschool teachers, both across the countries of Europe and globally. These various studies have focused, for example, on students' perspectives on the implementation of musical activities in preschool education (Stramkale, 2018), preschool teaching students' self-assessment of their music competencies (Susic, 2018), the formation of emotional intelligence preservice preschool teachers (Kovalchuk et al., 2020), teaching music theory to preservice preschool teachers (Muntean, 2019), distance and online music education practices of preservice preschool teachers (Novakovic et al., 2022; Yilmaz et al., 2021), developing music-choreographic competence of preservice preschool teachers (Pushkar et al., 2022), preschool teachers' musical competencies (Herzog et al., 2018; Susic, 2018), preschool teachers' professional development in music (Bautista & Ho, 2021, 2022; Wong et al., 2023), preschool teachers' dance educational experiences (Gripson et al., 2022), preschool teachers' self-assessment of their digital competencies and their implementation in musical activities with preschool children (Susic & Aplic, 2022), the work of preschool teachers with musically gifted children (Znidrasic et al., 2021), the concept of pedagogical content in preschool music education (Bremmer, 2020), preschool music curricula (Li, 2019; Hui, 2020), music pedagogy as an aid to integration (Gustavsson & Ehrlin, 2018), the promotion of preschool children's musicality (Liduma, 2020), children's self-organized musical activities (Lizacic & Susic, 2020), music teaching practice in university studies of preschool teaching (Zhang, 2022), popular music in the educational space of preschools (Kondracka-Szala & Michalak, 2019), and the recommendation of resources and suggestions for more intentional and extended integration of music-making in preschools (Barret et al., 2022).

Most of the papers that have been published in relation to the topic, according to the international databases, were from researchers in Croatia (Herzog et al., 2018; Lizacic & Susic, 2020; Novakovic et al., 2022; Susic, 2018; Susic & Palic, 2022), China (Bautista & Ho, 2021, 2022; Hui, 2020; Li, 2019; Wong et al., 2023; Zhang, 2022), as well as representation from Latvia (Liduma, 2020; Stramkale, 2018), Sweden (Gripson et al., 2022; Gustavsson & Ehrlin, 2018), Poland (Kondracka-Szala & Michalak, 2019), Slovenia (Znidrasic et al., 2021), the Ukraine (Kovalchuk et al., 2020; Pushkar et al., 2022), Romania (Muntean, 2019), the Netherlands (Bremmer, 2020), Spain (Bello & Villodre, 2021), Turkey (Yilmaz et al., 2021), and the United States (Barret et al., 2022).

Research has not only been conducted with preschool age children (Barret et al., 2022; Liduma, 2020; Znidrasic et al., 2021), but also on preschool pedagogy students (Bello & Villodre, 2021; Muntean, 2019; Novakovic et al., 2022; Pushkar et al., 2022; Stramkale, 2018; Susic, 2018; Yilmaz et al., 2021; Zhang, 2022). Several research studies have focused on preschool teachers' views on the use of music art in education and their competences in music (Bremmer, 2020; Gripson et al., 2022; Kondracka-Szala & Michalak, 2019; Wong et al., 2023; Znidrasic et al., 2021).

Questioning method and quantitative research design were found to dominate in the published research (Bautista & Ho, 2021; Bremmer, 2020; Herzog et al., 2018; Kondracka-Szala & Michalak, 2019; Muntean, 2019; Novakovic et al., 2022; Stramkale, 2018; Susic, 2018; Susic & Palic, 2022; Wong et al., 2023; Znidrasic et al., 2021), especially in exploring educators' views on the issue. However, studies based on theoretical research (Kovalchuk et al., 2020; Li, 2019), observation (Muntean, 2019; Liduma, 2020), experimental research

(Kovalchuk et al., 2020), interview (Gripson et al., 2022; Gustavsson & Ehrlin, 2018), content analysis (Bautista & Ho, 2022; Hui, 2020), and action research (Lizacic & Susic, 2020) were also represented, whilst qualitative research design was found to have been used rarely (Bello & Villodre, 2021; Yilmaz et al., 2021).

Stemming from the overview the prior research, the current study specifically addressed educators' detailed views on the need to use musical art in preschool education. For this reason, the current research focused specifically on exploring the current state of the issue of using musical art in preschool education (in the case of Slovakia) according to the views of preschool teachers.

## 1.2. Researched Issue

Research around the world confirms that the inclusion of musical art stimuli can have a positive impact on preschool children and brings multiple benefits (Blasco-Magraner et al., 2021; Duke et al., 1997; Georgieva, 2017; Helvacı, 2015; Lewis, 2020; Özmenteş, 2010; Swanwick, 2003). However, this type of educational practice needs to be led by a teacher who is pedagogically competent, but equally competent in artistic terms. Therefore, the question to be asked is whether or not kindergarten teachers feel adequately competent in this area (Rochovská & Švábová, 2021, 2022) and to what extent they incorporate musical art and its stimuli into educational kindergarten activities. Therefore, the research problem in the current study focuses on the use of musical art in preschool education based on the self-reflection of kindergarten teachers. The research problem was also formulated from the experiences of researchers in the field.

## 1.3. Aim and Hypotheses of the Research

The main aim of the research was to reveal the opinions of kindergarten teachers on the use of musical art in preschool education, and to suggest ways in which the practice may be improved. From the research aim, the following objectives emerged:

1. To reveal through self-reflection whether or not kindergarten teachers use works of musical art, and if so, how often.
2. To reveal where kindergarten teachers get their ideas from for working with a piece of music through different musical activities.
3. To reveal how kindergarten teachers evaluate a child's interest in working with works of musical art.
4. To reveal the attitudes of kindergarten teachers towards musical art.
5. To reveal what opportunities exist for kindergarten teachers to acquire professional knowledge in musical art within their preservice training or through other forms of education.
6. To reveal whether or not opportunities for kindergarten teachers to acquire professional knowledge in musical art predicts their attitudes towards musical art.
7. To reveal whether or not kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards musical art predicts their use of musical art in preschool education.

These seven objectives were then translated into research questions and hypotheses:

1. What is the status and frequency of the use of musical art in preschool education?
2. Where do kindergarten teachers get their ideas from for working with works of art, namely in the field of musical art?

3. How do kindergarten teachers evaluate a child's interest in working with musical art?
4. What opportunities exist for kindergarten teachers to acquire professional knowledge in musical art during their preservice training or through other forms of education?
5. What are the attitudes of kindergarten teachers towards musical art?

The following two hypotheses were formulated based on the researchers' field experience and previous empirical experience:

- H1 There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the opportunities of preschool teachers to acquire knowledge of musical art and their level of attitudes towards musical art.
- H2 There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the level of preschool teachers' attitudes towards musical art and their use of musical art in preschool education.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Instruments and Procedures

The method of questioning was used to meet the survey aim. The research instrument was a questionnaire of the authors' construction, and was aimed at ascertaining the participant kindergarten teachers' views on the use of the interpretation of works of art in preschool education. The questionnaire consisted of 32 items related to musical art with an aggregate maximum score of 49 points. Teachers commented on visual/fine, musical, literary, and dramatic arts. The area of musical art was the focus of the current research study.

Individual items were scored. The first research question could be answered based on the responses to the first two items (see Table 1). In Part A, the first semi-closed item, the respondents responded as to whether or not they used any works of art, or their reproductions, in their educational activities with children, choosing from the following: a = *Paintings, sculptures*; b = *Musical compositions*; c = *Theatre performances*; d = *Literary works*; or e = *Other*. Respondents scored one point if "musical composition" was their response.

In the second, single-choice item, the respondents indicated how often they included a work of art in their kindergarten educational activities, namely in the area of musical art. They were given the following choice options: a = *Every day* (5 points); b = *At least once a week* (4 points); c = *At least once a month* (3 points); d = *At least once every 6 months* (2 points); e = *At least once a year* (1 point); f = *Not at all* (0 points); and g = *Other answer* (in which a specific answer was required, and was individually scored with a maximum possible score of 5 points).

**Table 1.** Summary of question scores: Part A – Musical art in preschool education

Question area	Maximum points
1. Use of works of art / musical composition	1
2. Frequency of including works of musical art in education	5
Total	6

The third multiple-answer item was directed towards drawing on the respondents' ideas for working with a work of art, namely in the area of musical art. The choices were: a = *From literature*; b = *From the Internet*; c = *From colleagues*; d = *From conferences and professional seminars, workshops*; e = *From various forms of continuous education*; f = *I make up my own*; and g = *Other answer* (a specific answer was required). One point was awarded for each option selected.

In the following semi-closed item, the respondents expressed whether or not they had enough methodological materials and publications related to musical art in their kindergarten. They had to indicate one of the following options: a = *Yes*; b = *No*; or c = *Other answer* (a specific answer was required). For each answer marked "Yes" they received one point. Option c (*Other answer*) was scored individually, but with a maximum of one point (see Table 2). In order to get a more objective picture of the sufficiency of publications with the aforementioned focus, the participants were asked to indicate the approximate number of publications available in the kindergarten.

**Table 2.** Summary of question scores: Part A – Themes for working with musical art

Question area	Maximum points
3. Sources of themes for working with a work of musical art	7
4. Availability of methodological materials	1
Total	8

In another single-choice item, the respondents indicated how interested the children were in working with a piece of musical art as part of their educational activities (see Table 3). They chose from a range of options and scored their responses accordingly: a = *Very interested* (4 points); b = *Interested* (3 points); c = *Neither interested nor disinterested* (2 points); d = *Mostly disinterested* (1 point); and e = *Totally disinterested* (0 points).

**Table 3.** Summary of question scores: Part A – Teachers' views on children's interest in working with musical art

Question area	Maximum points
5. Children's interest in the area of musical art	4

For Part B of the questionnaire – Teachers' opportunities to learn/acquire knowledge of music, the respondent could score a maximum of 12 points in total (see Table 4). The scoring of the answers in Part B of the questionnaire was designed in such a way that the more points the respondent gained, the more opportunities they had for learning in the field of musical art (knowledge, practical artistic activities, theoretical, methodological, and practical ideas for implementing activities with children in kindergarten related to musical art).

The first scored multiple-answer item focused on the respondents' self-reflection on their opportunities to gain knowledge of music during their studies. They chose from a range of options and their responses were scored accordingly: a = *Excellent* (4 points); b = *Very good* (3 points); c = *Good* (2 points); d = *Adequate* (1 point); or e = *Inadequate* (0 points).

The second multiple-answer item asked the respondents to indicate whether or not they could recall any specific courses they had taken in musical art during their secondary school or university education. They were given a choice of options and their answers scored accordingly: a = *Yes, during secondary school* (1 point); b = *Yes, during university* (1 point); c = *No* (0 points); or d = *Can't remember* (0 points).

The third scored semi-closed item was oriented towards finding out whether or not the participants had acquired knowledge of the history and theory of musical art, even after having completed their preservice training, in the form of continuous, non-formal, or informal education (e.g., various courses, workshops, conferences, etc.). They had choice options as follows: a = *Yes, in the form of continuous education* (1 point); b = *Yes, in the form of non-formal education (e.g., courses, workshops)* (1 point); c = *Yes, in the form of informal education (spontaneously acquired knowledge)* (1 point); d = *No* (0 points); or e = *Other answer* (a specific answer was required, which was individually scored with a maximum possible score of 1 point).

In the next item, the respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they had attended any courses, workshops, or seminars aimed at familiarizing themselves with musical art or practical artistic activities (e.g., playing a musical instrument, singing, etc.). They were awarded one point for answering “Yes.”

In the next item, the respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they had attended any courses, workshops, or seminars focused on theoretical, methodological, or practical ideas on how to implement activities with kindergarten children aimed at learning about musical works of art. They were awarded one point for a “Yes” response.

**Table 4.** Summary of questions: Part B – Opportunities for teachers to acquire professional knowledge from musical art

Question area	Maximum points
6. Opportunities to gain professional knowledge in musical art	4
7. Completion of disciplines during secondary school and university	2
8. Acquisition of knowledge through the form of continuous, non-formal, and informal education	4
9. Completion of courses, workshops, or seminars aimed at learning about musical art and practical artistic skills	1
10. Completion of courses, workshops, or seminars focused on theoretical, methodological, or practical themes for the use of musical art in preschool education	1
Total	12

In Part C of the questionnaire, the kindergarten teachers’ attitude towards music was assessed, and from which the respondents could score a maximum of 19 points in total (see Table 5). The scoring of the answers in Part C of the questionnaire was designed in such a way that the more points the respondent scored, the more meaningful musical art was perceived to be for them, and thus the more active they were in musical art and musical expression, not only passively as a receiver but also actively.

In the first multiple-choice item, the respondents answered whether or not they considered musical art to be important in their lives. They chose from the following options: a = *Very significant* (4 points); b = *Significant* (3 points); c = *Somewhat significant* (2 points); d = *Mostly insignificant* (1 point); and e = *Not significant at all* (0 points).

The second multiple-choice item focused on how often the respondents attended various institutions and performances such as classical music concerts, ballet/musical, or opera/opera. They could choose from the following options, and their responses were



scored accordingly: a = *At least once a week* (4 points); b = *At least once a month* (3 points); c = *At least once every 6 months* (2 points); d = *At least once a year* (1 point); and e = *Never* (0 points).

In the third semi-closed item, the respondents were asked to circle the statements that best described them, with one point awarded for marking the following statement: b = *I own musical instruments*.

The fourth multiple-choice item focused on whether or not the respondents were actively engaged in artistic creation, with respondents asked to mark one option for each question. For the question “Do you play a musical instrument?” their responses were scored as: a = *Yes, often* (2 points); b = *Yes, sometimes* (1 point); or c = *Never* (0 points).

**Table 5.** Summary of questions scores: Part C – Teachers’ attitudes towards musical art

Question area	Maximum points
1. Importance of musical art in the life of teachers	4
2. Visiting institutions or events	12
3. Ownership of musical instruments	1
4. Active artistic/esthetic activity of teachers	2
Total	19

Exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the factor structure of the three variables (items related to 1. Using musical art and expression in preschool education, 2. Opportunities for kindergarten teachers to acquire professional knowledge in musical art within their preservice training or from other forms of education, 3. Kindergarten teachers’ attitudes towards musical art). For the first variable the internal consistency was  $\alpha = .679$ , whilst the second was  $\alpha = .551$ , and for the third variable it was  $\alpha = .577$ . The internal consistency was therefore adequately demonstrated.

Validity of the research instrument was based on rational judgement by experts (participants in the project implementation, experts in the field) of the test questionnaire’s content and design, and on its ability to probe in order to reveal the information sought. Reliability was assured through the use of precise instructions, and unambiguous, specific questions.

## 2.2. Sample Selection

Kindergarten teachers who were willing and available to participate in the current research were selected for the sample, i.e., it was an available selection. A total of 366 returned questionnaires (issued via Google Docs and also in paper form) were evaluated. Of these, 96.2% were from female respondents and 0.3% were male respondents, which is consistent with the gender composition of the core sample. Their age ranged from 20 to 64 years old, with a mean age of 42.75 years ( $SD = 11.79$ ). Half of the participant teachers in the sample were aged 42 years or below and the other half were aged over 42 years old ( $Mdn = 42$ ). The most common age was 50 years old ( $n = 16$ ). The number of years of teaching experience of the respondents ranged from 0 to 46 years, with a mean of 19.64 years ( $SD = 14.29$ ). In the sample, half of the teachers reported their experience as 18 years or less whilst the other half reported more than 18 years of experience ( $Mdn = 18$ ). The lowest level of experience was 1 year ( $n = 22$ ).

The research sample consisted of teachers from urban kindergartens (57.9%), from rural kindergartens (36.3%), whilst 5.7% of the respondents did not indicate the type of school with respect to its location. The majority of the respondents (91.3%) worked in state kindergartens, 2.2% in private kindergartens, and 1.6% in religious kindergartens, whilst 4.9% of the respondents did not comment on the type of school at which they worked. From the total number of respondents, 9.8% had graduated in the field of music at a primary art school.

Completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and was only completed by respondents who agreed to participate in the research. They were permitted to withdraw from participating in the research at any point in time. The respondents were instructed that their answers would remain anonymous and would only be used as part of the study's statistical reporting. All procedures performed in the research involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

Analysis of the collected data was conducted using the jamovi 2.3.2 statistical program. Descriptive statistics (absolute frequencies, relative frequencies, mean, standard deviation, median, minimum, and maximum) were used. In the first phase of the data analysis the internal consistency was determined by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. After demonstrating internal consistency, the data were analyzed applying a quantitative approach. Each item was scored and points assigned in accordance to the answers given. In the second phase of data analysis, each questionnaire item was scored in sequential order. Absolute and relative frequencies were determined. The results were tabulated (see Tables 6-10, 12-17, 19-22). In the third data analysis phase, descriptive characteristics were calculated for each variable (see Tables 11, 18, 23). In the fourth phase of data analysis, the study's two hypotheses were tested, with linear regression analysis used to test the hypotheses (see Tables 24-25).

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Using Musical Art and Expression in Preschool Education

The respondents commented on the use of works of art or their reproductions in educational activities with the children (see Table 6). The question had multiple response options. The largest proportion of teachers (81.4%) commented on the use of musical art/expression<sup>1</sup>. In the question, the answers of the respondents can also be considered from the point of view that 70 respondents (18.6%) did not comment at all on the use of musical compositions, which can be considered unacceptable from the point of view of pre-primary didactics. The only reason is that the respondents would not consider musical compositions intended for children to be works of art.

**Table 6.** Teachers' views on using works of art/reproductions in educational activities

Works of art/reproductions	<i>n</i>	%
Paintings, sculptures	149	40.7%
Musical compositions	296	81.4%
Theatre performances	220	60.9%

<sup>1</sup> In the specification of the questionnaire responses, not all of the works listed were within the so-called "high" art, hence the terms musical art and musical expression are included in the interpretation of the results.

Works of art/reproductions	<i>n</i>	%
Literary works/texts	297	81.7%
Other	14	3.8%
No response given	4	1.1%

The respondents further commented on the frequency of using musical artwork in educational activities within the kindergarten (see Table 7). This was a closed-ended, multiple-response question. Based on self-reflection, working with a piece of musical art was the most frequently used by teachers to the level of at least once a week (40.4%).

**Table 7.** Frequency of working with musical art

	Daily	At least once a week	At least once a month	At least once every 6 months	At least once a year	Not at all
<i>n</i>	98	148	70	25	1	3
%	26.8%	40.4%	19.1%	6.8%	0.3%	0.8%

21 teachers did not respond (5.7%)

The current state of the use of musical art given by the two questions (see Table 1) was quantified into a single variable. On average, the teachers used musical art more than the mean of the scale (see Table 8).

**Table 8.** Current state of teachers using musical art

<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Md</i>	<i>SD</i>	min	max
366	4.48	5	1.46	0	6

### 3.2. Drawing on themes to work with a piece of musical art

The respondents also commented on drawing on themes to work with a piece of musical art (see Table 9). This was a multiple-response question. Based on the teachers' self-reflection, almost three quarters of them most often draw ideas for working with a piece of musical art from the Internet (72.7%), but also from literature (37.2%), and from colleagues (32.5%).

It is considered a significant advantage for kindergarten teachers if their own imagination, experience, and creativity allows them to create activities through the application of different types of art that are directly "tailored" to specific children. Teachers who have a positive attitude towards musical arts, and also teachers who have an interest in music but feel less competent in the field, can benefit from attending concerts, musicals, and operettas as part of school trips and excursions, as well as inviting various musical artists directly to visit the kindergarten. It is also considered helpful for teachers to receive expert advice on the quality of the performer or performance in question.

**Table 9.** Drawing themes for working with musical art

	Source					
	Literature	Internet	Colleagues	Conferences, professional seminars, workshops	Various forms of continuous education	I create my own
<i>n</i>	136	266	119	84	86	75
%	37.2%	72.7%	32.5%	23%	23.5%	20.5%
18 teachers did not respond (4.9%)						

The respondents reported on whether or not they had adequate methodological materials in their kindergarten to work with a piece of musical art (see Table 10). This was a closed-ended, multiple-choice question. According to more than half of the participant teachers (64.8%), there were sufficient materials in their kindergarten to work with a piece of musical art. The answers can be seen from the perspective that up to 29.2% of the respondents believed that they lacked adequate methodological materials in the area of musical art.

**Table 10.** Sufficiency/lack of methodological materials for working with musical art

	Yes	No	I don't work with this kind of art	No answer
<i>n</i>	237	107	-	22
%	64.8%	29.2%	-	6%

The respondents were also asked to indicate the approximate number of methodological materials for each type of art (see Table 11). Methodological materials were represented by an average of 7.4 pieces. The median value is 4, which means that half of the teachers reported numbers of methodological materials in the kindergarten of four or more and half of the teachers reported less than four.

**Table 11.** Numbers of methodological materials reported by respondents<sup>2</sup>

<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mo</i>	<i>SD</i>	min	max
366	7.4	4	2	12.2	0	100

### 3.3. Kindergarten teachers' assessment of children's interest in working with a piece of musical art

The respondents assessed the children's interest in working with a piece of musical art as part of their educational activities (see Table 12). This was a closed-ended, multiple-choice question. More than half of the teachers (56.3%) thought that the children were very interested in working with a piece of musical art and one third of the teachers (33.3%) talked about the children's interest.

<sup>2</sup> The values of the mean and standard deviation were affected by high values, of which there were only a few.

**Table 12.** Teachers' views on children's interest in working with musical art

	Great interest	Interest	Neither interest nor disinterest	Mostly disinterest	Absolute disinterest
<i>n</i>	206	122	18	1	-
%	56.3%	33.3%	4.9%	0.3%	-
19 teachers did not respond (5.2%)					

### 3.4. Opportunities for Kindergarten Teachers to Acquire Professional Knowledge in Musical Art Within Their Preservice Training or in Other Forms of Education

In the first item, the teachers were asked to rate on a scale their ability to acquire professional knowledge in musical art (see Table 13). Almost one-third of the teachers (29.8%) rated their opportunities to acquire knowledge in musical art as very good, and almost one-third (27.6%) considered them as good.

**Table 13.** Respondents' assessment of opportunities to gain expertise in music theory/history

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Insufficient
<i>n</i>	70	109	101	36	21
%	19.1%	29.8%	27.6%	9.8%	5.7%
29 teachers did not respond (7.9%)					

The questionnaire further asked the respondents to indicate whether or not they recalled any specific disciplines that focused on musical art during their secondary schooling or university (see Table 14). This was a multiple-response question. According to the kindergarten teachers' statements, disciplines regarding musical art were taken by half of them during secondary school and one-third (32.2%) during their university education.

**Table 14.** Respondents' views on disciplines/subjects/courses taken in musical art

	Yes, during secondary school studies	Yes, during university studies	No	I don't remember
<i>n</i>	185	118	23	47
%	50.5%	32.2%	6.3%	12.8%
37 teachers did not respond (10.1%)				

The respondents were asked whether they had acquired knowledge in musical art after their preservice training in the form of continuous, non-formal, or informal education (e.g., various courses, workshops, conferences, etc.). This was a multiple-response question (see Table 15). Gaining experience after completing preservice training was either in the form of continuous education (18%) or non-formal education (21%), but mostly through informal education (25.1%).

**Table 15.** Respondents’ views on acquiring knowledge of musical art through continuous, non-formal or informal education

	Yes, through continuous education	Yes, through non-formal education (e.g., courses, workshops)	Yes, through informal education (spontaneously acquired knowledge)	No
<i>n</i>	66	77	92	115
%	18%	21%	25.1%	31.4%
62 teachers did not respond (16.9%)				

The respondents indicated whether or not they had attended any courses, workshops, or seminars aimed at familiarizing themselves with musical art or practical artistic activities. This was presented as a closed question (see Table 16). It can be stated that according to the respondents’ statements, they had attended courses, workshops, or seminars aimed at familiarizing themselves with musical art or practical artistic/esthetic activities only to a small extent; notably, the figures would have been even lower if only the relevant answers had been taken into account.

**Table 16.** Courses/workshops/seminars on musical art or practical artistic/esthetic activities

Frequency			Relative frequency %		
Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
72	123	195	19.7%	33.6%	53.3%

The respondents also expressed whether or not they had attended any courses, workshops, or seminars that had focused on theoretical, methodological, or practical ideas on how to implement activities with children in the kindergarten with a focus on musical art and expression. This was also a closed question.

**Table 17.** Courses/workshops/seminars on how to implement activities on musical art and expression

Frequency			Relative frequency %		
Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
60	121	181	16.4%	33.1%	49.5%

For the summary variable of the kindergarten teachers’ opportunities to acquire knowledge of musical art in their preservice training or in other forms of education (see Table 4), it can be stated that it was in the lower third, and lower than the average (see Table 18).

**Table 18.** Teachers’ opportunities to acquire knowledge of musical art

<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Md</i>	<i>SD</i>	min	max
366	4.14	4	2.19	0	11

### 3.5. Teachers’ Attitudes to Musical Art

In the course of studies, within pedagogical praxis and in everyday life, a kindergarten teacher meets art and develops a certain relationship with it. The respondents evaluated the

importance of musical art in their lives (see Table 19). This was a closed-ended, multiple-choice question. Almost half of the teachers (45.6%) considered musical art to be significant in their lives, whilst more than one-third (37.2%) considered it to be very significant .

**Table 19.** Teachers' attitude towards musical art

	Very significant	Significant	Partly significant	Largely insignificant	Not significant at all
<i>n</i>	136	167	38	2	-
%	37.2%	45.6%	10.4%	0.5%	-
23 teachers did not respond (6.3%)					

In the next question, the respondents commented on how often they visited various institutions or performance events (see Table 20). This was a closed-ended, multiple-response question. More than a third of the teachers (35.2%) reported that they had never attended classical music concerts, and just under a third (28.4%) reported that they attended once a year. Musicals were mentioned by a third of the teachers (34.2%) as having been attended at least once a year, whilst a third (32.5%) reported not having attended any. Opera or operetta was less frequented by the teachers, with only 8.4% stating that they attended at least once a year or more often.

**Table 20.** Frequency of attending institutions and performance events

Classical music concerts	At least once a week	At least once a month	At least once every 6 months	At least once a year	Never
<i>n</i>	3	18	56	104	129
%	0.8%	4.9%	15.3%	28.4%	35.2%
56 teachers did not respond (15.3%)					
Ballet/musical	At least once a week	At least once a month	At least once every 6 months	At least once a year	Never
<i>n</i>	-	9	50	125	119
%	-	2.5%	13.7%	34.2%	32.5%
63 teachers did not respond (17.2%)					
Opera/opерetta	At least once a week	At least once a month	At least once every 6 months	At least once a year	Never
<i>n</i>	-	2	12	17	25
%	-	0.5%	3.3%	4.6%	6.8%
310 teachers did not respond (84.7%)					

The respondents indicated which statements regarding ownership of art-related objects best described them (see Table 21). This was a closed-ended, multiple-response item.

**Table 21.** Ownership of art-related objects

Statements on the ownership of art-related objects	<i>n</i>	%
I have art paintings/sculptures or reproductions of them in my home	135	36.9%
I own musical instruments	240	65.6%
I have artistic literature in my library	206	56.3%
I own video recordings of theatre performances	53	14.5%
I own other art objects	42	11.5%

Finally, the respondents were asked whether or not they had actively engaged in artistic creation (see Table 22). This was a closed-ended, multiple-choice question. Almost half of the participant teachers (48.4%) stated that they played a musical instrument occasionally, whilst only 19.1% played often. Several of the respondents added that it was mainly as part of their work in the kindergarten. In this case, we cannot speak about the so-called high art, rather about the musical expression or esthetic activity of the respondents.

**Table 22.** Teachers' active artistic/esthetic works

Response to:	Yes, often	Yes, occasionally	Never
Do you play a musical instrument?			
<i>n</i>	70	177	70
%	19.1%	48.4%	19.1%
49 teachers did not respond (13.4%)			

For the summary variable of the kindergarten teachers' attitude towards musical art (see Table 5), it can be stated that it was shown to be in the lower half of the scoring scale (see Table 23).

**Table 23.** Teachers' attitudes towards musical art

<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Md</i>	<i>SD</i>	min	max
366	6.18	6	2.76	0	13

### 3.6. Testing Hypothesis H1

A simple regression analysis was used to calculate the predictors of the kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards musical art by their opportunities to acquire knowledge in musical art. A statistically significant effect was found, ( $F(1, 364) = 104, p < .001$ ) with  $R^2 = .222$ . Opportunities to acquire knowledge were shown to positively predict the kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards musical art ( $t = 10.2, p < .001$ ). As the opportunity to acquire knowledge in musical art increased by 1 point, the attitudes also increased by 0.596 points. Therefore, hypothesis H1 was confirmed (see Table 24).



**Table 24.** Regression analysis: Knowledge acquisition as predictor of teachers' attitudes towards music

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	3.712	0.2735		13.6	< .001
Opportunities to gain knowledge	0.596	0.0584	0.471	10.2	< .001

### 3.7. Testing Hypothesis H2

A simple regression analysis was used to calculate the predictors of the use of musical art in preschool education through the level of the kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards musical art. A statistically significant effect was revealed, ( $F(1, 364) = 27.4, p = < .001$ ) with  $R^2 = .0699$ . The kindergarten teachers' attitudes positively predicted their use of musical art in preschool education ( $t = 5.23, p < .001$ ). As the attitudes increased by one unit, kindergarten teachers' use of musical art in preschool increased by 0.139 points. Therefore, hypothesis H2 was confirmed (see Table 25).

**Table 25.** Regression analysis: Teachers' attitudes towards musical art as predictor of musical art used in preschool education

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	3.617	0.1803		20.6	< .001
Attitudes towards musical art	0.139	0.0266	0.264	5.23	< .001

## 4. DISCUSSION

Almost half of the kindergarten teachers in the current research considered musical art to be important in their lives, and more than a third considered it to be very important. The importance of music and attitudes towards music art can also be developed during university education. In research by Li (2019), about 55% of students were shown to have been interested in studying music courses, 35% showed a genuine love with it, and only 10% of the students held no interest in studying music courses.

The kindergarten teachers in the current research also reportedly applied music art within the educational activities they taught at kindergarten, with 81.4% of the teachers having commented, especially at a frequency of once a week. The use of works of art was mainly found to be included in esthetic-educational activities, in connection with which can be mentioned some of the results of research undertaken by Kollárová (2016). In their study, 58.06% of kindergarten teachers included esthetic games in a variety of activities throughout the day, and among these esthetic games, musical activities had the most frequent representation (46.45%), which is in line with the results of the current research.

In response to the current study's questionnaire, 29.2% of the respondent teachers stated there being a lack of professional and methodological literature that focused on musical art and musical expression. Similarly, in 2009, Derevjaníková (2009) stated there being a lack of methodological literature in music education for the preschool age. Today, the situation is already changing, with many high-quality publications coming on the market

which also reflect the issues of musical art and musical expression in education. The current research also showed that teachers have an interest in such publications. Similarly, Kollárová (2016) reported that kindergarten teachers expressed an interest in supplementing the methodological and professional literature in the area of esthetic games for children.

More than half of the teachers in the current study stated that they thought children were very interested in activities that focused on musical interpretation and musical expression. However, when evaluating this finding, it should be stressed that these were the opinions of the respondents and their views on the children's interest in working with a piece of musical art, and not the actual status surveyed in the children. According to Liduma (2020), a child's positive attitude to their musicality development is promoted due to scientifically substantiated music content being introduced that meets the child's needs, as well as their teacher's orientation and skill to create equality-based collaboration with their students.

The kindergarten teachers involved in the current research had opportunities to acquire professional knowledge in musical art during their time at secondary school, since 41% of them graduated from a secondary school of education that has, within its curriculum, subjects focused on musical art, and the methodology of esthetic activities based on the stimuli of musical art. The majority of the respondents (62.4%) reported having completed a university degree. For those who graduated in preschool and elementary education (which is also a prerequisite qualification to be a kindergarten teacher in Slovakia), it can be assumed that the participants would have encountered several disciplines focused on musical art and musical expression during their studies. It is questionable, therefore, whether in the study by Liduma (2020) that priority was given to knowledge about the art itself or that focused more towards its didactic treatment and its potential for educating children. The results of other research should also be mentioned here, such as Herzog et al. (2018) reporting that teachers who graduated from grammar schools evaluated their teaching competences in music higher than those who graduated from secondary art schools.

In other research, Ekizoglu and Ekizoglu (2009) revealed that although the majority of the teachers expressed being in favor of playing a musical instrument (similar to the findings of the current research), few used these instruments as accompaniment to their students' singing. The teachers mentioned playing the recorder, the organ, and a few played the accordion. Given that the teachers considered themselves inadequate in playing musical instruments, it is assumed that they were reluctant to conduct activities based on the music itself.

In the current study, one third of the teachers rated the opportunities they had to acquire knowledge of music as very good, whilst 27.6% stated their opportunities as being good, 9.7% as only adequate, and 6% reported the level of opportunity as inadequate. This self-reflection demonstrates that several of the respondents were aware of their low competency within this area. On the other hand, given the curricula of both secondary school and university studies in preschool education, it would be ideal if graduates ended up with an excellent knowledge of musical art and were aware of this in their own self-reflection. In research by Susic (2018), the majority of respondents (46.8%) assessed their music literacy as good, indicating that almost half of the respondents considered themselves to be musically literate and therefore capable of conducting musical activities in the classroom. However, their self-assessment of practical competence and an expressed desire for improvement indicated an awareness of the need for further development of their musical competencies. According to Craw (2015), preservice preschool teachers, who having completed their 3-year

university degree, have few opportunities to develop a deeper and broader knowledge and understanding of wider contexts across disciplines, including the arts, as well as within curricula documents, nor do they have the relevant opportunities to make meaningful connections to social and cultural praxis within the arts.

The low percentage of affirmative responses in the current study in the items concerning having attended courses, workshops, or seminars focused on musical art and musical expression may be due to the respondents' lack of interest in further education in the field of musical art, or perhaps because that those respondents who did not comment on attending these events were simply already satisfied with the education they had received in theoretical, methodological, or practical themes, based on the stimuli of the arts during their secondary school or university studies.

It was established that opportunities to acquire knowledge positively predicts kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards musical art. Consequently, the kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards musical art positively predicted the use of musical art in preschool education. Similarly, in a study by Stramkale (2018) it was reported that a correlation exists between the competence of preschool teachers in the field of music and the implementation of musical activities in preschool education.

The novelty that the current study would like to add to the literature lies in the description of the current state of using musical art in preschool education in Slovakia. It also lies in the recommendations for educational practice; to increase the awareness of preschool teachers about the validity of musical art interpretation in preschool education; to pay more attention to the didactic use of musical art; and to apply more specific stimuli to the preparation of those entering the profession than simply working with musical art didactically. It is also recommended to increase the competencies of preschool teachers in the area of musical art. This would also be expected to increase the interest of preschool teachers to include musical art and its stimuli in esthetic activities (either as recipients or creators) into their lives and into their preschool education activities. It is recommended to offer preschool teachers methodological guidelines and practical ideas on how to conduct interpretive activities with children during preschool education; to provide more aids (books, musical instruments) and methodological publications; and to cooperate with primary art schools from the given locality and region, and to organize jointly held events.

The limitations of the current research lie in the fact that completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and was therefore most probably completed by those teachers who had an affinity with (musical) art and felt the need to express themselves regarding the topic. The "real situation," as such, may therefore be quite different than the study's findings describe, especially in terms of the current state of the use of musical art and musical expression in kindergartens and the respondents' relationship to musical art. Another limitation of the current research was the available limited research sample.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Music pedagogues assume that the positive effect of music education not only awakens a child's interest in music and develops their musical abilities, but that practical musical activities can gradually lead to further positive changes in various non-musical areas. Music education at an early age is seen to be gaining more and more in its importance. Therefore, the question of preschool teachers' competency clearly arises in connection with education based on music, and in particular, music education for preschool age children.

The results of the current research has shown that based upon the self-reflection of kindergarten teachers, the current status of the use of musical art in preschool education is higher than the average of the scale used to make the assessment. The opportunities for kindergarten teachers to acquire knowledge about musical art as part of their preservice teacher training or in other forms of education were found to be below average based on their self-reflection. The attitude of kindergarten teachers towards musical art can equally be described as below average. The current research confirmed that opportunities to acquire professional knowledge in the area of musical art are statistically, significantly, and positively predictive of kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards musical art. It was also confirmed that the kindergarten teachers' attitude towards musical art statistically, significantly, and positively predicts the use of musical art in preschool education.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS

Benefits and recommendations for pedagogical praxis are derived from the research results. The first is to increase kindergarten teachers' awareness of the opportunities of making use the stimuli of musical art. As already mentioned in prior studies about future kindergarten teachers, more attention should be paid to the didactic use of musical art and more specific suggestions asked on how to work didactically with musical art in preparing preservice teachers for the profession. Methodological guidelines and practical suggestions should be offered to kindergarten teachers on how to conduct activities using music for kindergarten aged children. Based on the results of the current research, it can also be recommended to implement elements of music and musical art into kindergarten curricula.

The impetus for further research is to conduct case studies of specific kindergarten teachers who successfully implement elements of musical art into their educational praxis, and the resulting creation of methodological materials with further application research of their implementation into wider educational praxis.

## DECLARATIONS

**Author Contributions:** I.R.: Literature review, conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the results, review-editing and writing, original manuscript preparation. E.D.: Literature review, data analysis. B.Š.: Literature review, data collection, data analysis. All authors have read and approved the publishing of the final version of the article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Funding:** Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, project KEGA No. 016KU-4/2022.

**Ethical Approval:** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee.

**Data Availability Statement:** The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

**Acknowledgments:** The research was conducted as part of KEGA project No. 016KU-4/2022 "The Applying of Creative Drama Methods in the Process of Preschool Education."

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