# University of Pécs "Education and Society" Doctoral School of Education Sociology of Education Program

### Brigitta Nagyné Árgány

# Complex Study of the Components of Musical Background among Preschool and Primary School Teacher Training BA Students at Kaposvár University

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation



#### **Consultants:**

Prof. Dr. Lakner Tamás professor

Dr. Habil. Bertalan Péter PhD associate professor

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#### 1. Introduction

Recent findings of international and national research (transfer research, neuroscience research) confirm convincingly the complex developing effect of intensive, systematic music education (starting from early chidhood) on intellectual and emotional abilities. The idea that music education is essential for the personal development of a healthy and harmonious person dates back to the Antiquity.

The emphasis on music education as one of the most excellent means of personality formation has long been associated with Zoltán Kodály's music pedagogy in Hungary. The fundamental aim of the Kodály Concept is to establish the musical mother tongue from the earliest age possible, to eliminate musical illiteracy and thus, to educate a musical audience, mainly based on our national musical traditions, on singing as the main musical activity and on the acquisition of basic musical literacy. Furthermore, the aim of his ideas is to make music positively influence other areas of school education and personality development. Nowadays, however, even the most basic elements of this philosophy may seem illusory in music education, which has shrunk to only one lesson per week. Studies focusing on the effectiveness of music education have shown that there are deficiencies in the effective development of basic skills in this area as well. (TURMEZEYNÉ–MÁTH, 2014) Earlier research has linked this to the weakness of teachers' music education (mainly primary school ones).

I have been participating in the music education of teacher training students since 1989. I have found that the musical knowledge level of students entering preschool and primary school teacher training makes it necessary to correct the deficiencies of secondary - or in the case of music education – primary education. These deficiencies of the students' musical education mean new challenges, as we have to make up for arrears of decades when their intellect is more receptive to musical knowledge, but the possibility to develop some of their musical abilities is limited by age. These sectors of teacher training are seldom at the focus of research, the only studies in higher education have been conducted to diagnose the effectiveness of lower educational levels. Moreover, this topic is unique because no complex research has been carried out so far at a national or international level to reveal the factors influencing musical background and their appearance in a special educational environment. The research presented in the dissertation is basic and applied research as it may reveal segments in the scientific paradigm system that formulate new knowledge about the fundamental basis of phenomena, and on which further interdisciplinary research can be built. In addition, the results of the research can be used in multiple ways for a specific practical purpose.

### 2. Literary Theoretical Background, Framework of Interpretation 2.1 By Kodály – After Kodály

Zoltán Kodály's principles on music education are put into practice to the fullest extent in primary schools specialized in music, so their professional work is the central topic of Hungarian transfer research on music education. Continuing earlier basic research (KOKAS, 1972; BÁCSKAI E. – MANCHIN R. – SÁGI M. – VITÁNYI I., 1972; BARKÓCZI – PLÉH, 1977; LACZÓ, 1987,1991), interdisciplinary studies – starting from the beginning of the 2000s and going on to the present day – deal with the impact of music education on other areas. Since the 21st century, neuroscience research – using state-of-the-art technology, and developing dynamically (HÁMORI, 2002; GRUHN, 2004; MILLER, 2008; OVERY, 2018; CSÉPE, 2010) – has created new opportunities and research areas to explore the effects of music education as well.

Among the transfer and neuroscience research listed in the dissertation, the following results should be highlighted concerning the ideas of Kodály and the topic of the research:

• experience gained in learning music has a positive effect on the acquisition of other teaching materials,

- teachers' personality and professional qualification are crucial in making music attractive to students,
- music must be taught through music,
- know-how is much more appropriate in musical acquisition than formal (know-what) knowledge,
- musical activity causes structural and functional differences in the brain,
- while developing musical skills, a lot of opportunities and time must be provided to process the experiences,
- learning music is the most effective when positive emotions are associated with the learning process.

In his work entitled 'A Hundred-Year Plan' , Zoltán Kodály gave a summary of the road already taken and of the goal whose achievement he planned for nearly a century, and in which he intended teachers to have a prominent role. In the centre of his statements there are the topics which summarize the starting points and conditions of his ideas, and the results and difficulties of their implementation. Among the latter, concerning teacher training, the most frequent aspects are the music education of music teachers at university and of students in preschool and primary school teacher training.

For the last thirty years, in professional journals several articles have been published on the efficiency of music education of young people entering higher education; these works mostly diagnosed the current situation (DARABOSNÉ, 1988; RÉTI, 1989; TURMEZEYNÉ, 2007) from the aspect of musical abilities or of changes in student numbers (KISNÉ, 2010). Until the end of the eighties, the lack of success in music education was attributed to the inadequate curriculum, the low number of lessons and inadequately trained teachers. The research of the nineties was mainly characterised by debates about the implementation of the Kodály Concept, and after the 2000s other aspects came to the fore as well (TAKÁCS, 2001; DOHÁNY, 2013).

Nowadays, emphasis has been put on seeking ways to advance, in which the experiences and the motivation to learn are in focus. (JANURIK, 2007)

# 2.2 Components of Musical Background in the Light of Curricula – with a European Overview

Musical background, outlined in the dissertation, includes knowledge acquired at different levels and institutions of public education, in addition, knowledge of different quantity and quality originating from the narrower and broader environment, and also from self-education.

Having gone through the stages of public education, what kind of musical background do the majority of students acquire from their school studies nowadays?

In parallel with the introduction of core curricula, publications interpreting them were published in music pedagogical literature, of which the analyses of Katalin L. Nagy and Anikó Fehér highlight mostly the challenges of teaching music. (L. NAGY, 1996a. és 1996b. 2002, 2004a. és 2004b; FEHÉR, 2009)

The majority of students participating in the studies of the dissertation obtained their elementary level musical background based on the Hungarian National Core Curriculum published in 1995, which could result mostly in declarative knowledge.

The structure of music education in the European countries mentioned in the dissertation includes contents and forms of education similar to Hungarian music education, but with different emphasis and time frames. However, several other factors can influence the music education of individual countries (e.g. the different school structure). As for higher education, in these European countries both primary and secondary level music education are carried out by teachers who specialised in music

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Zoltán Kodály's writing, 'A Hundred-Year Plan' was published in 1947 in the journal *Énekszó*, and later in the volume Retrospection I

education at university, thus we cannot say that European youngsters obtain the same bases in this field. (QUILES – DOGANI, 2011)

#### 2.3 The International Research Background of the Topic

International studies appearing in foreign publications on the musical background of prospective teachers are usually based on different public education systems, use varied research methods and different approaches; at the same time, this topic currently does not belong to the widely studied music education fields. In several cases, the starting points of these studies are similar or complementary to the topic of this dissertation. According to their findings, one reason for the little success in basic level music education is the poor musical training of primary school teachers (GIFFORD, 1993; ÖZMENTEÚA – GÜRGENB, 2010), another reason is the reduction in the time frame of art classes; while others expain it with the lack of students' confidence and their poor, minimal musical background. (HOLDENLAND – BUTTON, 2006; KOUTSOUPIDOU, 2010; RUSSELL – BOWIE, 2010; SUŠIĆ, 2018) The various research methods prove that the effectiveness of music education is influenced by the interactions of different other factors. The suggestions for the solution of the problems reveal several new perspectives, in each case going far beyond the diagnosis of the particular problem.

#### 3. The Methodology of the Research

#### 3.1 The Aim, Relevance and Basic Data of the Research

The aim of the research is to explore the components of musical background, their differentiating background variables and the relationships between them in the particular areas of teacher training; furthermore, to summarize the tendencies which appear in the musical background of the students participating in the study. In the light of the findings, a further aim is to formulate suggestions and research directions to increase the efficiency of several years' music education of BA students, and in the long term, to improve the quality of teacher training and to renew its scientific paradigm system. In addition, the studies related to the achievement of the research aim may contribute to the development of the pedagogical approach of teacher trainers in teacher training institutions, and the findings of the study can support the relevance of phenomena experienced in practice, and thus they can help and promote further qualitative improvement of research in the field of music education.

#### **Research Questions**

Research questions related to the aim of the research:

**K1** How can the development level of musical abilities of applicants for teacher and preschool training be characterized?

**K2** What tendencies can be observed in the case of full-time preschool training students in this area at the beginning of the training?

**K3** What are the main components of teacher and preschool training students' musical background, what relationships can be found between these components, and to what extent can the individual components be formed by certain background variables?

In order to achieve the research aim and to answer the research questions I used inductive research strategies, including descriptive (K1 and K2) and correlation exploratory (K3) research strategies. Data were collected and analysed using quantitative and qualitative research methods. (Table 1) Data gained during quantitative research were analysed using mathematical statistical methods, applying the IBM SPSS Statistics 22 Program and the Microsoft Word 2010 Excel Program, while the results of the qualitative research were processed using the method of content analysis.

In terms of duration, the research was carried out in several stages. In selecting the research areas, the primary aspect was to approach the examined topics in the most complex way possible along the research questions. A great number of students had to be involved in the studies, which meant the expansion of the research in time.

During sampling several samples were involved due to the broad spectrum of the study. The sample was the smallest in the case of ability assessment, and the largest in the case of the questionnaire survey.

Most data were gained while analysing the suitability entrance examination sheets.

Table 1: Research methods related to the research questions, research intervals, number of students involved and a comprehensive table of the analysed documents (my own table)

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Number of research	Name of research method	Research interval (year)	Element number of the research (n) and grades (years) involved in the research	
K1	analysis of documents: analysis and comparison of suitability entrance exam sheets	2006,2007, 2008,2009, 2011,2012	950 pieces	
K2	assessment of musical abilities	from Sept 2011 to March 2012	46 persons 1st	
К3	pilot study: questionnaire query	2009, 2011	78 persons 1st	
	questionnaire survey	2015	278 persons 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th	
	Having an essay written entitled 'Music and Me' with suggested aspects to include	Sept 2012, 2014	78 persons 1st	

The venue of the research was Kaposvár University for every examination.

As tools for data collection, I used official documents, compiled a questionnaire survey, formulated thematic essay questions and compiled and applied a musical ability test to measure input. The research areas were constructed and linked as follows:

The most accurate information about pre-training musical knowledge is available from the suitability entrance examination sheets. The analysis of these documents is further deepened by the complex, career-based surveys of basic music abilities among first-year students. Simultaneously with these studies, there was a questionnaire survey on the musical background of students already doing the training. To complement and more deeply approach the data of quantitative studies, the students were made to write a thematic essay.

In examining the first research question, the quantitative analysis of the official documents of the compulsory musical suitability entrance exams and the multi-level comparison of the data were made, based on the following aspects:

- the proportion of suitable and unsuitable candidates in the given year, compared to the total number of candidates present,
- the degree of the candidates' musical ability level,
- the distribution of the levels of musical ability in the case of candidates who have passed the suitability exam, and the tendencies that can be read from these comparing the years.

The data for each of the examined years were grouped according to these aspects, then presented in tables and analysed in an increasingly differentiated way according to the research criteria. After that, I formulated the main tendencies which characterize the distribution of the candidates' musical abilities regarding the examined years.

The examination of the second research question was based on the assessment of first-year full-time preschool teacher students' musical basic abilities. During this I applied tasks covering different musical competencies, selected from the written and oral tests prepared by Istvánné Erős and her colleagues, which were related to the qualification requirements and the expectations formulated by Katalin Forrai. All tasks were recorded in the case of each student, and then processed by a computer. On the evaluation sheets, the results of each student appeared per task, and then in a summarized form as well. The results were divided into categories, then analysed according to level and type of task.

The examination of the third group of questions was done based on a pilot study, using a questionnaire survey conducted on a larger sample, in addition with the content analysis of essays written by first-year full-time preschool teacher students. During the survey the questionnaires were filled in anonymously, on paper, at a given time. During the processing of the obtained test results I carried out univariate and multivariate analyses; in addition to descriptive statistical tests, I used chi-squared test, Fisher's exact test, two-sample t-test and variance analysis to examine the relationships between the variables. I did the calculation of average, mean, minimum and maximum values for the duration of music school activity and choir activity. In the case of answers to essay questions I did content analysis, during which I highlighted occurring tendencies and frequencies and classified the obtained results in relation with the given research area. (NADASI, 2011) Some questions contained categorical variables, while others contained continuous ones. For several questions I asked for the justification of the answers, and the students' independent opinion on the issue. When summarizing the examination results, I highlighted the correlations that determined the musical background and then grouped them, based on their strength. According to the margin of the answers, the questionnaire contained closed and open questions and a mixture of these two types.

The succession of the questions was provided by the following question groups:

- sociodemographic data: basic data related to the research (questions 1-18),
- questions about primary school music studies (questions 19-23),
- questions about secondary school music studies (questions 24-26),
- favourite folk song, favourite composer, attending concerts (questions 27-30),
- questions about extracurricular music education (questions 31-36),
- questions concerning the subjective assessment of some abilities and attitudes related to the future profession, also, questions about leisure activities and the most significant musical experience so far (questions 37-44).

To supplement the data obtained during the quantitative studies, and to get a deeper insight into personal relationships and attitudes to music and music education, I used a qualitative method: I made the students write a thematic essay entitled 'Music and Me', in which they were expected to discuss the following topics:

- My music education so far
- Music in our family
- Music in my everyday life
- Music on special occasions

#### 4. The Most Significant Research Results

Regarding the first research question, the findings of the research are mostly unique, as they approach the literature listed within the framework of interpretation from a new perspective: they diagnose the musical background of students applying to the courses, as a new approach, based on the multi-level analysis of the students' performance on suitability entrance exams.

Based on these studies, the tendency is that an increasing proportion of "suitable" students appearing in the suitability examination meet the level of musical skill expected at the lowest level.

As for the second research question, its tasks, the testing and the evaluation of the results may throw new light upon related research and may approach it in a more differentiated way. The overall results of the students involved in the study are well below the 'average' category in several areas (nearly 50 %), and in fewer areas they are above it (just over 10 %). Among the basic abilities, in the case of musical hearing the weakest ones were the reproduction of intervals and melodies, in the field of music reading the weakest ability was singing from sheets, and in the field of musical communication musical notation proved to be the weakest one. Strengths include the rhythm hearing area and the reproduction of rhythm lines.

The results show that the basic abilities of students entering training in the given period tend towards minimum performance.

In connection with the third research question, the examined sample proved that among the levels of public education primary education has a decisive role in the development of musical background.

It did not only concern the acquisition of the particular music material, but also the popularity of music lessons, during the lessons the priority of singing, and extracurricular musical activities. Based on the results, the connection between the popularity of music as subject and the possession of a musical experience can be demonstrated: a greater proportion of those students who like music lessons have some musical experience. The proportion of those who gave the highest marks on the preference scale of music lessons was much higher among those who had previously attended music school, so the two areas are in close interaction with each other, that is, there is a strong correlation between the popularity of music lessons and music school studies. Furthermore, there is a clear connection between the popularity of music lessons and choir activity, the strength of which lies in community experiences associated with choir singing.

As for secondary school music education, the results confirm the low-level popularity of the subject, completing the previously revealed relationships with the fact that the most frequent reasons for the unpopularity of the subject were the predominance of theoretical knowledge, followed by the teacher's personality. Based on the findings, it can also be stated that the proportion of musical activities changes significantly going forward at different school levels, which tendency may partly explain the decrease in the prestige of the music subject, especially in the field of secondary education. Students's opinions obtained during the qualitative study confirmed and supplemented the results of the questionnaire survey: they mainly wrote about their musical experiences, the majority of which was related to primary education and basic art studies.

Among the unique research findings related to extracurricular music education, the following ones should be highlighted in the context of the literature:

- The proportion of students with musical experience is much higher among former music school pupils.
- The majority of regular concert attendees have music school and/or choir background.
- There is a strong link between music school studies and the existence of a favourite classical composer.
- Music school activity is associated with primary school choir activity in a high proportion, and there is an even stronger link between the two activities in the long term.
- Music school studies provide greater confidence concerning singing ability, more secure ability to read music and the musical background required for the major. The effect of choir activity on concert attendance habits can be seen as a result of long-term choir work.
- Long-term choir activity results in greater confidence in the ability to sing folk songs, to read music and to better judge the musical background required for the major.

• The pursuit of choir activity has a more significant and differentiated impact on musical background in the case of several variables than music school studies.

Among the strongest correlations (p<0.001) three are related to choir activity (reading music, singing folk songs, and the popularity of the subject), and two are related to music school studies (attending classical music concerts, musical experiences).

In terms of the immediate family environment, there is a link between parents' highest level of education and the child's music school activity.

In addition, there is a link between music school studies and the type of settlement where the sudents lived during their primary education. The type of students' residence can be decisive for the attandance of classical music concerts: that is, according to the present study, the bigger the settlement is where the person lives, the more likely it is that he/she attends classical music concerts. At the same time, there is no significant correlation between primary choir activity and the type of settlement during primary education. It can be considered a significant finding as it confirms Kodály's ideas on choir activity.

Based on the quantitative studies, the number of siblings, the parents'/relatives' professional musical career or amateur artistic activity, self-learning or involvement in other artistic fields have no significant impact on musical background.

The students' attitudes to music are fundamentally positive, they all consider music education important to their major. Besides, many of them mentioned their concert experiences and their own musical activities. The results of the qualitative study confirmed that most of them cherish positive memories of their musical education, especially regarding the active forms of music.

Based on the results of the quantitative studies and examining them at multiple levels, it can be established that the musical background of the students participating in the study is determined by several factors, whose interrelation and interaction with each other can be demonstrated by using mathematical statistical methods. It can also be stated that the interaction of background variables associated with musical background can have a significant impact on the development of the individual's musical education and on his/her attitude to musical training. The published research results can serve as a basis for the quality reform of music education in this field of teacher training, and for finding and applying procedures and methods which can effectively manage the strengths and weaknesses of students' musical background.

#### 5. Suggestions and Further Possible Research Directions

In primary education, active, collective music, diverse musical activities and musical experiences, and the emphasis on musical self-expression should always be an essential aspect and methodological principle, as this could provide the basis for students' positive attitude towards music education. It is also important to keep singing as a primary, active musical activity in the focus, to avoid the predominance of theoretical knowledge and to transfer knowledge in an experience-centred way, which suits the personality of children. According to the results, primary education plays a crucial role in the acquisition of musical material (e.g. folk songs). At the same time, more efforts should be made to encourage true singing and precise song literacy, also, continuous and planned, conscious and varied practice of already known songs. At this level of education it would be important to emphasize the importance of the creation and continuous presence of choirs in school life, to involve music school students in choir work, as the results show that these two areas are able to strengthen each other and thus the evolving musical background as well.

According to the findings, primary art education has a great impact on the existence of musical experiences, so it would be advisable to preserve and enrich this treasure. However, people living in smaller settlements have less access to music school education. To address this problem, one solution

could be to focus on a school approach that supports art education, and another one to involve music professionals more actively.

In the case of secondary education, the predominance of theoretical knowledge is a major factor of the unpopularity of music education. In any case, it would be worth conducting basic research in this direction, in which the rethinking of forms of knowledge transfer, of the content and purpose of the documents regulating school work would be timely, by analysing good practices and making them public, by putting more emphasis on this educational approach based on experiences. Firstly, it could mean the support of secondary school choirs, and secondly, the promotion of initiatives which represent not only singing but also other forms and spheres of music and self-expression, possibly cooperating with other branches of art.

In higher education, the majority of the problem areas identified by suitability entrance exams and capability assessments arise on other BA majors, concerning other basic abilities as well, so it may indicate a systemic weakness, which could endanger the quality of training in the long term. To prevent this, before entering the training, applicants who intend to study these fields of pedagogy should be encouraged to participate in preparatory courses for the suitability entrance exams and to take a pre-suitability exam. According to the results of the study, several areas of musical ability can be identified, which may need to be professionally developed through regular practice, in small groups, from the beginning of the training.

When developing curriculum courses, it is possible to continuously develop the students' musical basic abilities, based on the main tendencies of the suitability examination, with differentiated content for the given major. At the same time, they need to be encouraged to participate more actively in optional courses, emphasizing that these courses mostly offer them the experience of self-expression and joint creation, presenting a wide range of artistic means of expression. Furthermore, self-organizing, music-related activities can be supported and encouraged. Other alternatives to music education can be film clubs and concerts. In the world of the internet we can encourage its use (e.g. smartphones, online interfaces for self-learning). Following the completion of foundation subjects, the creation of a portfolio or of thematic projects can be used to close a longer period, and these forms of assessment can support individual learning paths.

The efficiency of artistic and professional work could be enhanced by the reorganization and strengthening of professional networks, which used to function earlier in this area. This could increase the scope for cooperation, the wider creation and dissemination of research networks and results in the context of study in this area of higher education.

All these efforts could be harmonized with the latest and most up-to-date research trends, the results of which emphasize the importance of developing a positive attitude to music, of the transfer effect of music education, and the need for methodological research. (JANURIK, 2018)

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