

Original scientific paper

Received: January 18, 2025.

Revised: March 14, 2025.

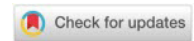
Accepted: March 20, 2025.

UDC:

373.21.091.3::78

784.4

 10.23947/2334-8496-2025-13-1-83-95



# Educators' Views on the Impact of Traditional Music on the Socio-Emotional Competencies of Preschool-Aged Children

Biljana Jeremić<sup>1</sup> , Snežana Gordić<sup>1</sup> , Aleksandra Trbojević<sup>1\*</sup> , Filip Jović Vujaković<sup>1</sup> , Miona Tubić<sup>1</sup> 

Milica Vojvodić Savić<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Education in Sombor, University of Novi Sad, Serbia, e-mail: [mrbiljana@gmail.com](mailto:mrbiljana@gmail.com); [gordicsnezana@gmail.com](mailto:gordicsnezana@gmail.com); [portrbojevic@gmail.com](mailto:portrbojevic@gmail.com); [vujaborkovac@gmail.com](mailto:vujaborkovac@gmail.com); [ilic\\_miona@yahoo.com](mailto:ilic_miona@yahoo.com); [mlcvojvodic@yahoo.com](mailto:mlcvojvodic@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** This study aims to present educators' views on the importance of incorporating traditional music during activities with preschool-aged children to develop their socio-emotional competencies. The sample consisted of 88 educators from preschool institutions in the Republic of Serbia. The results showed that most educators frequently use traditional music in their work. Its significance for the development of emotional intelligence, social skills, and cultural awareness in children was particularly emphasized. The analysis showed that educators who regularly incorporate traditional music content report higher levels of socio-emotional competencies in children, highlighting the importance of this practice. Although the educators' age, work experience, and place of residence did not have a statistically significant impact, regional differences were observed. Educators in different parts of Serbia assessed socio-emotional competencies in a specific way, reflecting the cultural and pedagogical particularities of those regions. The conclusions confirm the importance of integrating traditional music into preschool curricula as a way to develop socio-emotional competencies and children's cultural identity. The research contributes to the understanding of the role of cultural heritage in the contemporary educational context, providing recommendations for further improvement of pedagogical practices.

**Keywords:** *music education, socio-emotional development, cultural heritage, musical content.*

## Introduction

The preservation of a nation's identity is contingent upon the safeguarding of its traditions, customs, and historical legacy. Traditional music occupies a distinctive position within this cultural framework, serving as an invaluable component of the nation's intangible heritage. The lyrical content, melodic structures, and rhythmic patterns of traditional music serve as reflections of the cultural identity of the communities that have created it and the geographical regions in which it has developed. Across diverse cultural contexts, traditional music functions as a conduit for storytelling, emotional expression, and the transmission of values and beliefs. Examples of this include European folk ballads, African drumming traditions, and Asian court music. These traditions have been used by societies to foster a sense of community and continuity across generations.

The role of traditional music in cultural heritage is multifaceted and deeply embedded in various aspects of cultural identity. Elements such as folk songs, dances, and instruments shape communal experiences and preserve historical narratives. Beyond performance, these traditions extend to costumes, customs, and rituals, reinforcing connections to cultural roots. Ethnomusicologists highlight that traditional music serves as an educational and socializing tool, transmitting knowledge, values, and customs across generations (Nettl, 2005). This function underscores its essential role in preserving and perpetuating cultural heritage. It is widely acknowledged that traditional music, and folk music in particular, serves as a vital medium for the expression and maintenance of cultural identity. Research indicates that exposure to traditional music and play has a significant impact on child development, addressing their fundamental

\*Corresponding author: [portrbojevic@gmail.com](mailto:portrbojevic@gmail.com)



needs for creative expression and physical movement (Pavlović and Trakilović Milićević, 2013). As an integral part of cultural expression, it not only serves as a core element of heritage, but also encompasses various other cultural aspects and traditions (Özdek, 2015). The interplay between heritage narratives, the roles of those who engage with them and the material aspects associated with them has a significant impact on how heritage is interpreted, maintained and passed down through generations (Brandellero and Jansen, 2014). In Serbia, as in many other countries, traditional music constitutes a crucial component of national heritage. The incorporation of fundamental movement elements, such as walking, running and jumping, in folk dances like “kolo” and “poskok”, offers a multifaceted approach to physical and social well-being. These types of activities strengthen the sense of community and belonging, which is particularly important in forming a positive attitude towards one’s own culture and tradition (Jeremić and Milenović, 2020). Such dance forms are not unique to Serbia; they can be found across the globe in diverse cultural expressions, including Ireland’s céilí dancing, Greece’s syrtos, and Argentina’s zamba. These examples underscore the global significance of traditional music in fostering a sense of belonging and identity. The Kodály concept and the Táncház method have been formally recognised by UNESCO for their role in preserving cultural heritage. Despite the influence of digital media on contemporary students, folk traditions remain essential components in educational curricula. Research findings provide insights into students’ musical literacy and their connection to Hungary’s cultural heritage (Buzás and Sagrillo, 2019).

The integration of traditional music into early childhood education is of pivotal significance in the realms of both cultural preservation and child development. In Serbia, the preschool education system is structured to promote children’s holistic development, encompassing cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical growth. A significant initiative in this regard is the “Year of Advancement in Preschool Education,” a program introduced to modernize and enhance the quality of preschool education. This initiative entails a paradigm shift from rigid, teacher-centred instruction to a child-centred approach, fostering creativity, exploration, and active learning. The initiative is designed not only to facilitate knowledge acquisition but also to encourage the practical application of skills, creativity, and cultural awareness (Vukićević, Golubović Ilić, and Stanojević, 2016). The Year of Advancement in Preschool Education signifies a substantial reform in Serbia’s early childhood education system, aligning with key international documents such as the [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(1989\)](#) and incorporating contemporary pedagogical approaches. The programme has been developed to redefine the role of preschool education by emphasising the child’s active participation, individuality, and creativity. It is argued that this approach fosters holistic development, ensuring that children are prepared for formal schooling and develop essential skills for lifelong learning. These competencies encompass communication in the mother tongue, mathematical, scientific, and technological literacy, cultural awareness, and creative expression (Pavlović, and Trakilović Milićević, 2013). Despite the fact that the programme under discussion is not directly related to traditional music, it is mentioned in this study because the research was conducted in a preschool institution that applies its principles. Comprehension of its framework is imperative for contextualising the influence of novel teaching methodologies on children’s cultural development. The Year of Advancement programme is predicated on child-led, exploratory learning, and the integration of traditional music is congruent with its pedagogical foundations insofar as it offers opportunities for self-expression, creativity and social interaction. Despite the considerable advances made by this programme in the field of child-centred education, the connection to traditional music remains largely unexplored. It is widely acknowledged that early childhood is a formative period for developing a sense of cultural identity. Consequently, the incorporation of traditional music into preschool curricula provides children with a meaningful and interactive way to engage with their heritage. Activities such as singing folk songs, participating in traditional dances, and playing folk instruments offer children opportunities for creative expression, while also facilitating the development of critical social and emotional skills, including cooperation, empathy, and confidence.

A plethora of research has been conducted on the subject of the benefits of traditional music in early childhood education, with a particular emphasis on its role in fostering emotional expression, creativity, and motor skills. The active nature of children is evident in their spontaneous musical exploration, which helps them understand rhythm, melody, and movement while engaging in social interaction. It is further suggested that early exposure to traditional music encourages children to develop a connection with their cultural background while also fostering appreciation for other cultures. Customs, Folk Costumes, Song, and Dance are woven into all aspects of life and, as such, are passed down through generations as the identity of a people. The significance of folk tradition for the lives and work of people, in general, is de-

picted through the daily routine, which includes inherited elements woven into actions that individuals may not even notice. Preserving national identity and traditional values in times of general identity and cultural crises is a complex and crucial task in all segments and stages of the educational process (Vukićević, Golubović Ilić, and Stanojević, 2016). Through play and song, people have always expressed their feelings and linked them to everyday magical and religious rituals. Even in that period, the importance of play for both the individual and the community can be seen. The exact time of the origin of play cannot be determined, as it is lost in the distant past, where the first visual sources are found in cave paintings from the Stone Age. Regardless of the time of origin of folk games and folk tradition in general, one's tradition and culture must first be recognized, and this should be done "in early childhood, or in the younger school age. To achieve this, students need to encounter these contents through various subjects, while also utilizing the opportunity for correlation" (Sudzilovska, Čalić, and Ivanović, 2012, p. 258). Children at an early age, through play and song, spontaneously absorb the spirit of folk music, learning about its specifics, rhythms, and steps of traditional dances. This fosters a sense of belonging to cultural heritage and a positive attitude toward other cultural heritages.

## Theoretical Foundations

The influence of traditional music on the development of socio-emotional competencies (SEC) in preschool children necessitates the integration of theoretical and empirical perspectives, connecting cultural tradition, music, and early childhood development. This section draws from multiple theories and their concepts to establish a comprehensive framework.

### *The Theory of Socio-Emotional Development*

The Social Emotional Competence (SEC) is a pivotal component of children's comprehensive development, encompassing the capacity to recognise and manage emotions, establish relationships, demonstrate empathy, and engage in cooperative activities. In accordance with Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory, interaction with the environment and learning through joint activities play a crucial role in development. Traditional music, as a medium of socialisation and cultural heritage, has the potential to facilitate socio-emotional learning, particularly through group activities such as singing and games. Engaging in such musical activities enables children to acquire essential competencies, fostering cooperation, empathy, and self-expression. This theoretical foundation underscores the notion that children thrive through active engagement in social and cultural activities. The application of these principles within the context of early childhood education facilitates a more profound comprehension of the role of traditional music in facilitating learning through interaction and the sharing of experiences. Empirical evidence has demonstrated that music engagement in early childhood fosters socio-emotional and identity development (Barrett, 2011; Custodero, 2005).

### *The Role of Music in Child Development*

Music is a universal medium that encourages emotional expression, develops creativity, and facilitates the establishment of social bonds. According to research by Elliott and Silverman (2015), music in early childhood contributes to the development of a sense of belonging, empathy, and positive emotional experiences. Singing and traditional music-related games allow children to express their emotions and enhance teamwork abilities. Research in music psychology highlights its ability to promote positive emotions, reduce stress, and improve interpersonal relationships (Thaut, 2007). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that structured musical activities contribute to emotional intelligence and cooperative behaviours in early childhood education (Koops, 2014; Hallam, 2010). It is evident that traditional music, with its uncomplicated rhythms and melodies, is particularly well-suited to young children, providing an accessible point of entry into the domain of music-making (Good et al, 2021; Li, 2013). Through the medium of singing and musical games, children are able to express their emotions, develop teamwork skills, and refine movement coordination.

### *Traditional Music as a Cultural Resource*

Traditional music integrates elements of cultural heritage and customs that play an important role in the formation of identity. From the perspective of the theory of multicultural education (Banks, 2016), familiarity with national musical heritage influences the development of children's cultural and socio-emotional identity, fostering tolerance and acceptance of other cultures. Traditional music is a significant aspect of cultural identity and social heritage. Its place in the life of an individual and a community is not only a source of aesthetic enjoyment but also a means of transmitting values and customs across generations (Pavlović, and Trakilović Milićević, 2013). From the standpoint of the theory of multicultural education, introducing children to national musical heritage promotes a sense of belonging and openness toward different cultures (Banks, 2016). Research further supports this argument by demonstrating that traditional songs and games contribute to the formation of cultural identity in early childhood education (Marsh, 2010). Nursery rhymes, with their unique compositional characteristics, have been identified as a potent medium for fostering intercultural values. These rhymes not only facilitate the comprehension of one's own cultural values but also promote the recognition of cultural characteristics in other cultures (Villodre, 2014).

### *Psychological Effects of Music*

According to research in the field of music psychology, musical content can stimulate the release of happiness hormones (endorphins), which influence positive mood and stress reduction (Thaut, 2007). Traditional music, with its simple rhythms and melodies, is particularly suited for children, creating an environment that promotes joy and social interaction. Traditional music, with its repetitive and melodic characteristics, provides children with a sense of security and encourages social interaction. These aspects are particularly crucial in early childhood, as children learn through emotional experiences and play. Studies indicate that music engagement fosters positive mental well-being and reduces anxiety, supporting children's overall development (Hallam, 2010).

### *Practical Applications in Preschool Education*

Activities that involve traditional music allow preschool children to develop key competencies. For example, group singing and performing folk dances encourage the development of social skills, such as cooperation, listening to others, and movement coordination. The social aspect of teaching (socializing, group work), as well as the sense of empathy in children (self-esteem, sense of personal worth), is an important factor in their motivation, achieved through singing and performing traditional folk songs (Jeremić, Milenović, Petrović, and Markov, 2022). Practical applications of traditional music in preschool education include activities such as group singing, dancing, and performing folk games. These activities enable children to develop cooperation, coordination of movements, and social awareness (Elliott and Silverman, 2015). Authors (Sudzilovski, and Tanasković, 2022) emphasize the importance of content correlation in education, where traditional music can be integrated into various subjects, ensuring the holistic development of the child. Additionally, incorporating musical activities enhances cognitive, emotional, and social learning, supporting a well-rounded educational approach (Good, 2021).

### *Role of Traditional Games in Child Development*

Traditional games represent not only physical activity but also a significant social phenomenon that encourages a sense of community. They involve basic movements such as walking, running, and jumping, while simultaneously developing both the physical and social aspects of a child's personality (Pavlović and Trakilović Milićević, 2013). Introducing traditional games through singing and playing contributes to a child's overall development. (Jeremić and Milenović, 2020). Traditional games help kids learn social skills, emotional management, strategic thinking, and problem-solving. Ashar et al. (2024) emphasise that traditional games play a crucial role in enhancing children's socio-emotional skills, fostering teamwork, and promoting cultural identity. Similarly, Krishnaveni and Shahin (2022) highlight how traditional games encourage cooperative play, improve interpersonal skills, and reinforce cultural traditions in early childhood education. Research highlights the importance of music, particularly through singing and structured play, in enhancing socio-emotional competencies (SEC) in preschool children. Berk (2009) discusses

how structured play, including musical activities, helps children develop emotional intelligence and social skills such as cooperation, turn-taking, and empathy. Structured musical games promote peer interactions and teach basic life skills in a fun and engaging way. Music helps in developing social skills such as sharing, cooperation, and turn-taking. In light of this, research was conducted to examine the connection between the inclusion of traditional music in activities with children and the formation and development of their socio-emotional competencies. Given the extensive research material, this paper presents results that respond to the question of how preschool teachers in the Republic of Serbia — especially in relation to age, experience, and regional affiliation — evaluate the significance of including traditional music in developing children's SEC.

## Methodology

### *Research Goal*

The main goal of this research is to examine the role of traditional music in fostering the socio-emotional development of preschool children, as perceived by preschool teachers. The study will explore how traditional music is integrated into preschool activities and its perceived impact on children's social skills, emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness.

### *Research Tasks*

To achieve the main goal of this research, the following specific tasks have been defined:

1. Examine the frequency and methods preschool educators use to incorporate traditional music into their teaching practices.
2. Analyze preschool educators' perceptions regarding the impact of traditional music on children's socio-emotional competencies.
3. Identify challenges and barriers that may hinder the integration of traditional music into preschool education.

### *Hypothesis*

The following hypotheses were formulated based on the main tasks and goals, which aim to explore the role of traditional music in promoting socio-emotional development in preschool children.

- $H_0$ : Preschool teachers perceive that the inclusion of traditional music in preschool education has no significant impact on children's socio-emotional development.
- $H_1$ : There are significant differences in the preschool teachers' perception of the impact of traditional music on the socio-emotional development of preschool children, depending on the frequency of its application in preschool education.
- $H_2$ : There are no significant differences in the preschool teachers' perception of the impact of traditional music on preschool children's socio-emotional competencies based on their years of work experience.
- $H_3$ : There are no significant differences in the preschool teachers' perceptions of the impact of traditional music on children's socio-emotional competencies based on their geographic location (urban vs. rural area).
- $H_4$ : There are no significant differences in preschool teachers' perceptions of the impact of traditional music on children's socio-emotional development based on their age.
- $H_5$ : Preschool teachers from different geographical regions of Serbia have varying opinions on the role of traditional music in children's socio-emotional development.

### *Data Collection and Research Procedure*

The research was conducted during December 2022, employing a quantitative methodology. Data were collected through the distribution of an online questionnaire, which was shared with preschool teach-

ers across Serbia. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire was designed to gather educators' insights into the use of traditional music in preschool settings and its perceived impact on children's socio-emotional development.

**Data Collection Procedure.** The online questionnaire was distributed to various educational institutions throughout Serbia, aiming to capture a diverse sample of preschool educators from different geographic regions. The survey was anonymous to ensure confidentiality and to encourage honest responses from participants.

**Research Instrument.** The primary research instrument for data collection was a structured online questionnaire, which was designed to capture educators' practice and perceptions on the integration of traditional music into preschool activities and its impact on children's socio-emotional development. The questionnaire consisted of several sections:

- **Demographic Information:** This section gathered basic demographic data from participants, including their age, gender, years of teaching experience, and geographical location.
- **Use of Traditional Music:** This section focused on the frequency and methods by which educators incorporate traditional music into their teaching practice. It aimed to assess the extent to which traditional music is integrated into daily preschool activities.
- **Perceived Impact on Children:** In this section, educators were asked to share their perceptions regarding the influence of traditional music on children's cooperation, empathy, self-expression, and cultural identity.
- **Challenges and Barriers:** This section explored any difficulties that educators might face in integrating traditional music into the preschool curricula.
- The questionnaire was designed based on previous studies in early childhood education and music's role in socio-emotional learning, ensuring content validity. The research instrument consists of the Social-Emotional Competence Scale for Students (Jeremić et al., 2015), which was adapted for the purpose of this study. This scale includes 21 items (Table 1) that measure the level of agreement, using a five-point Likert scale, with statements regarding the impact of traditional music on the development of social-emotional competencies (SEC) in children. The statements in the scale are grouped into three thematic areas:

*Social competencies:*

- Cooperation and support through peer interaction: group singing and music making;
- Prosocial behavior: especially towards marginalized children and those with developmental difficulties;
- Building friendships and accepting differences;
  - Learning outside of institutional contexts;

*Emotional competencies:*

- Development of empathy and responsibility: helping others and openly expressing emotions;
- Strengthening self-confidence and self-respect: activities encouraging the expression of opinions and overcoming the fear of public performances;
- Reducing conflicts and negative emotions (anger, frustration, competition situations, etc.);

*Practical application:*

- Traditional music as a bridge to intercultural learning.

### **Data Analysis**

Collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) were used to summarize the participants' responses. To test the research hypotheses, the Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to examine differences between groups, and the Mann-Whitney U test was used for pairwise comparisons. The data obtained through the research were analyzed using the IBM SPSS for Windows statistical package, version 20.0.

### Sample Description

The study was conducted on a sample of 88 preschool teachers from preschool institutions in the Republic of Serbia. The sample predominantly consists of female participants (81 women and 7 men). Regarding geographical distribution, 53% of participants are from urban areas, while 39.8% reside in rural areas (Figure 1).

The participants' ages from 22 to 60 years, with an average age of  $M = 41.34$  years and a standard deviation of  $SD = 9.290$ . The distribution by age categories is as follows:

- 11 participants (12.6%) are younger than 29 years,
- 22 participants (25.3%) are between 30 and 38 years old,
- 25 participants (28.7%) are between 39 and 45 years old,
- 29 participants (33.3%) are 46 years or older.

This sample structure ensures a diverse representation of preschool teachers from different age groups as well as from various geographical regions of Serbia.

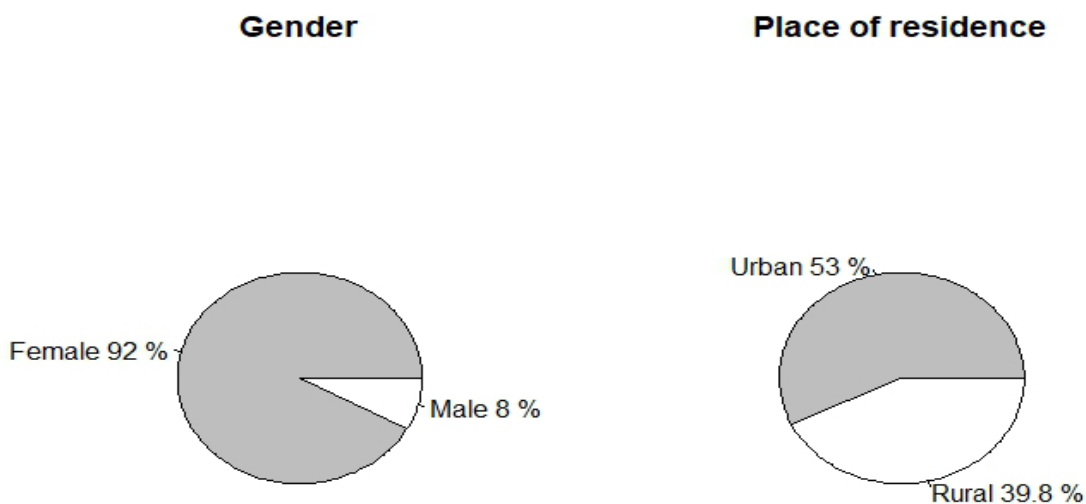


Figure 1. Sample structure by gender and place of residence

The participants' professional experience varies significantly. The average number of years in the profession is  $M = 14.659$ , with a standard deviation of  $SD = 8.7869$ . The experience levels are categorized as follows: 10 participants (11.4%) have up to three years of work experience, 20 participants (22.7%) have between three and ten years of experience, 34 participants (38.6%) have between eleven and eighteen years of experience, and 24 participants (27.3%) have more than eighteen years of experience.

In terms of regional distribution, the majority of participants are from Vojvodina (67 participants, 76.1%), followed by Belgrade (15 participants, 17%), Šumadija and Western Serbia (5 participants, 5.7%), and Southern and Eastern Serbia (1 participant, 1.1%).

The reliability of the SEC scale used in this study was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which indicated excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha = .978$ ). The assumption of normal distribution for the SEC scale scores was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ( $p = .000$ ), which confirmed that the data do not follow a normal distribution. Consequently, non-parametric statistical methods were employed for data analysis.

## Results

In the sample, 54 (61.4%) respondents report that they often apply traditional music in their educational work in preschool, 29 (33%) respondents report that they rarely apply traditional music, and 5 (5.7%) respondents indicate that they sometimes apply traditional music in their educational work.

The possible range of scores on the SEC scale is from 21 to 105. The obtained scores range from 21 to 105, with a mean value of  $M = 75.8182$  and a standard deviation of  $SD = 22.34553$ . The weighted mean is  $M = 3.6104$  with a standard deviation of  $SD = 1.06407$ . Based on the presented results, we can conclude that the respondents generally agree (agree) on the social-emotional competencies of preschool children. The coefficient of variation  $CV = 29.47$  indicates that the respondents' views are homogeneous.

**Table 1.** *Distribution and Descriptive Measures of Respondents' Answers on the Social-Emotional Competencies of Preschool Children*

Item	f					M	SD	C <sub>v</sub>
	1	2	3	4	5			
SEC1	5 (5.7%)	7 (8.0%)	19 (21.6%)	21 (23.9%)	36 (40.9%)	3.86	1.205	31.21
SEC2	8 (9.1%)	9 (10.2%)	22 (25.0%)	23 (26.1%)	26 (29.5%)	3.57	1.267	35.49
SEC3	5 (5.7%)	10 (11.4%)	17 (19.3%)	14 (15.9%)	42 (47.7%)	3.89	1.281	32.93
SEC4	11 (12.5%)	9 (10.2%)	16 (18.2%)	29 (33.0%)	23 (26.1%)	3.50	1.322	37.77
SEC5	5 (5.7%)	8 (9.1%)	17 (19.3%)	30 (34.1%)	28 (31.8%)	3.77	1.162	30.82
SEC6	6 (6.8%)	13 (14.8%)	21 (23.9%)	24 (27.3%)	24 (27.3%)	3.53	1.231	34.87
SEC7	7 (8.0%)	7 (8.0%)	19 (21.6%)	19 (21.6%)	36 (40.9%)	3.80	1.279	33.66
SEC8	19 (21.6%)	7 (8.0%)	23 (26.1%)	22 (25.0%)	17 (19.3%)	3.13	1.405	44.84
SEC9	15 (17.0%)	7 (8.0%)	17 (19.3%)	16 (18.2%)	33 (37.5%)	3.51	1.486	42.33
SEC10	9 (10.2%)	6 (6.8%)	17 (19.3%)	19 (21.6%)	37 (42.0%)	3.78	1.334	35.29
SEC11	5 (5.7%)	3 (3.4%)	14 (15.9%)	20 (22.7%)	46 (52.9%)	4.13	1.153	27.92
SEC12	5 (5.7%)	5 (5.7%)	12 (13.6%)	16 (18.2%)	50 (56.8%)	4.15	1.199	28.89
SEC13	11 (12.5%)	6 (6.8%)	29 (33%)	21 (23.9%)	21 (23.9%)	3.40	1.273	37.44
SEC14	6 (6.8%)	9 (10.2%)	20 (22.7%)	28 (31.8%)	25 (28.4%)	3.65	1.194	32.71
SEC15	8 (9.1%)	8 (9.1%)	19 (21.6%)	23 (26.1%)	30 (34.1%)	3.67	1.284	34.97
SEC16	14 (15.8%)	7 (8.0%)	25 (28.4%)	25 (28.4%)	17 (19.3%)	3.27	1.311	40.09
SEC17	16 (18.2%)	7 (8.0%)	28 (31.8%)	26 (29.5%)	14 (12.5%)	3.10	1.269	40.94
SEC18	11 (12.5%)	10 (11.4%)	20 (22.7%)	27 (30.7%)	20 (22.7%)	3.40	1.300	38.24
SEC19	5 (5.7%)	12 (13.6%)	17 (19.3%)	19 (21.6%)	35 (39.8%)	3.76	1.268	33.72
SEC20	8 (9.1%)	9 (10.2%)	18 (20.5%)	28 (31.8%)	25 (28.4%)	3.60	1.255	34.86
SEC21	16 (18.2%)	7 (8.0%)	18 (20.5%)	24 (27.3%)	23 (26.1%)	3.35	1.423	42.48

The data (Table 1) show that the respondents agree with the statements SEC1 – SEC7, SEC9 – SEC12, SEC14 – SEC15, and SEC19 – SEC20. The coefficients of variation indicate that the sample of educators is homogeneous when it comes to agreement with statements SEK11 and SEK12.

The Kruskal-Wallis test did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the results on the SEC scale across the four age groups (Group 1 N = 11, ≤29 years; Group 2 N = 22, 30–38 years; Group 3 N = 25, 39–45 years; Group 4 N = 29, 46 years and older),  $c_3(3, N = 87) = 3.108, p = .375$ . The age group (29 years and younger) has the highest median result  $Md = 88$ , the age group from 30 to 38 years has a median result  $Md = 83$ , the age group from 39 to 45 years has a median result  $Md = 72$ , and the age group 46 years and older has a median result  $Md = 83$ .

The Kruskal-Wallis test did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the results on the SEC scale based on the years of experience of educators, divided into four groups (Group 1 N = 10, ≤3 years of experience; Group 2 N = 20, more than 3 but less than 11 years of experience; Group 3 N = 34, 11 to 18 years of experience; Group 4 N = 24, more than 18 years of experience),  $c_3(3, N = 88) = 3.278, p = .351$ . The group with the least work experience (3 years or fewer) has a median result  $Md = 83.5$ , the

group with more than 3 but fewer than 11 years of experience has a median result  $Md = 77.5$ , the group with 11 to 18 years of experience has a median result  $Md = 78.5$ , and the group with 18 or more years of experience has the highest median result  $Md = 85$ .

The Mann-Whitney U test did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the assessment of preschool educators' SEC based on the educators' place of residence,  $U = 774.000$ ,  $z = -1.309$ ,  $p = .190$ . Educators residing in urban areas ( $N = 53$ ) have a median result  $Md = 85$ , while educators residing in rural areas ( $N = 35$ ) have a median result  $Md = 79$ .

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in the results on the SEC scale based on the frequency of applying traditional musical content in preschool activities,  $c2 (2, N = 88) = 11.041$ ,  $p = .004$ . Educators who frequently apply traditional content in preschool activities have a median result  $Md = 86.5$ , educators who rarely apply traditional content in preschool activities have a median result  $Md = 69$ , while educators who occasionally apply traditional content in preschool activities have a median result  $Md = 76$ .

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in the results on the SEC scale based on the region,  $c2 (3, N = 88) = 9.352$ ,  $p = .025$ . Educators working in preschools in Vojvodina have a median result  $Md = 83$ , educators working in preschools in Belgrade have a median result  $Md = 62$ , educators working in preschools in Šumadija and Western Serbia have a median result  $Md = 89$ , while educators working in preschools in Southern and Eastern Serbia have a median result  $Md = 82$ .

## Discussion

The results of the research highlight the significant role of traditional music in preschool education and its impact on the socio-emotional competencies (SEC) of children. The majority of respondents (61.4%) frequently use traditional music in their work with children, indicating its perceived value in the educational process. On the other hand, a significant percentage of educators (33%) rarely use this type of content, which potentially points to the need for additional education or the creation of more stimulating conditions for the application of traditional music.

The research further demonstrates that frequent use of traditional music is associated with higher levels of SEC in children, thereby reinforcing the findings of international studies which show a positive link between music education and the development of cooperation, empathy, and self-regulation (Koelsch, 2014; Marsh, 2010). Research undertaken in Australia and the United States also highlights that structured music programmes enhance children's emotional intelligence and social skills, particularly in early childhood settings (Custodero, 2005; Koops, 2014). These findings suggest that while traditional music is acknowledged as an important educational tool, its use is not universal across all preschools. The variation in the frequency of its application might reflect a lack of awareness about its benefits or insufficient resources to integrate it into the daily routine. Therefore, further training for educators, as well as the development of supportive environments that encourage the inclusion of traditional music, could help maximize its educational potential. Given that traditional music was found to have a significant impact on the socio-emotional development of children,  $H_0$ : *Preschool teachers perceive that the inclusion of traditional music in preschool education has no significant impact on children's socio-emotional development* is rejected.

Moreover, the research demonstrates that frequent use of traditional music is associated with higher levels of SEC in children. This reinforces the idea that music, particularly traditional forms, is not only an aesthetic experience but also a tool for fostering social and emotional skills such as empathy, cooperation, and self-esteem. These skills are vital for the overall development of preschool-aged children, as they lay the foundation for positive social interactions and emotional well-being later in life.

The analysis of the results on the SEC scale showed homogeneity in the attitudes of the educators, with an average value of 75.8182 ( $SD = 22.34553$ ). This result indicates general agreement among the educators regarding the importance of developing SEC in preschool children. The presence of high median values in the groups that frequently use traditional music ( $Md = 86.5$ ) further confirms the positive impact of traditional music content on the socio-emotional development of children.

Furthermore, the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant differences in SEC levels based on the frequency of traditional music's incorporation in preschool activities ( $p = .004$ ). This finding aligns with the observations reported by Krishnaveni and Shahin (2022), who documented that musical activities

have a substantial impact on enhancing children's social behaviour, particularly in cultivating prosocial interactions and mitigating conflicts. Thus,  $H_1$ : *There are significant differences in the preschool teachers' perception of the impact of traditional music on the socio-emotional development of preschool children, depending on the frequency of its application in preschool education* is confirmed.

The data suggest that it is necessary to intensify the use of traditional music as a tool for the development of SEC in all preschool institutions. Additionally, music encourages self-regulation, a key aspect of emotional development. Although the specific impact of traditional music on socio-emotional development has not always been explicitly studied, it is reasonable to assume that traditional music can amplify these effects. Traditional music, which is often shared in cultural or family contexts, provides a meaningful framework for practicing these skills. The knowledge and cultural relevance of traditional songs and games further engage children emotionally and socially. These findings align with research showing that music, particularly with local and traditional elements, fosters emotional intelligence, empathy, and social skills in children (Barrett, 2011; Hallam, 2010; Koelsch, 2014).

Additionally, the data suggest that there were no significant differences in preschool teachers' perceptions of the impact of traditional music on SEC based on their years of work experience or their age, indicating that these factors do not influence how educators perceive the role of traditional music in children's development. As a result,  $H_2$ : *There are no significant differences in the preschool teachers' perception of the impact of traditional music on preschool children's socio-emotional competencies based on their years of work experience* and  $H_4$ : *There are no significant differences in preschool teachers' perceptions of the impact of traditional music on children's socio-emotional development based on their age* are confirmed.

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test indicate the absence of statistically significant differences in relation to the educators' place of residence, suggesting the potential universality of these findings across different environments. However, regional differences emphasize the need for tailored approaches in working with children, depending on the local culture and tradition (Vukićević, Golubović Ilić, and Stanojević, 2016). This leads to the confirmation of  $H_3$ : *There are no significant differences in the preschool teachers' perceptions of the impact of traditional music on children's socio-emotional competencies based on their geographic location*.

Notwithstanding the demonstrable benefits, the data indicate significant heterogeneity in the implementation of traditional music across diverse regions within Serbia. This phenomenon of regional variation has been observed in studies conducted in Indonesia and Spain, where cultural differences have been shown to influence the extent to which traditional music is embedded in early childhood education (Ashar et al., 2024; Good, 2021). This finding indicates that, while traditional music is a universal medium for socio-emotional development, its implementation is contingent on contextual factors, including educational policies and cultural traditions. The significance of traditional music as a didactic tool lies not only in its cultural aspect but also in its ability to stimulate the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children. Since the findings indicate variability in teachers' perceptions based on their geographical region,  $H_5$ : *Preschool teachers from different geographical regions of Serbia have varying opinions on the role of traditional music in children's socio-emotional development* is confirmed. These findings highlight the need to improve curricula and provide additional resources for educators in order to optimize the use of traditional music in early childhood education. Socio-cultural activities like drama, sports, dance and folk arts along with traditional games as group participatory events enhances effective communicative abilities, community belonging, interpersonal competence (Krishnaveni and Shahin, 2022).

In conclusion, the results suggest that traditional music plays an essential role in shaping the socio-emotional competencies of young children, and its more consistent application in preschool settings could further enhance these benefits. Future research could explore how specific types of traditional music influence different aspects of socio-emotional development and whether educators' attitudes toward traditional music differ across regions and educational contexts.

## Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that traditional music significantly contributes to the development of socio-emotional competencies (SEC) in preschool children. The majority of educators participating in this research frequently incorporate traditional music into their teaching practices, recognising

its potential as an educational tool. The study confirms that traditional music supports the development of creativity, empathy, and communication skills while fostering cultural appreciation (Ginsburg, 2007; Hal-lam, 2010; Pica, 2011).

A salient finding of this study is that educators who consistently integrate traditional music into preschool activities report higher SEC levels among children. This finding suggests that structured exposure to traditional music enhances emotional intelligence, social integration, and self-expression in early childhood. The study also revealed that while no statistically significant differences were observed based on educators' age, experience, or place of residence, regional variations indicate the need for a more localised and culturally responsive approach to implementing traditional music in preschool education. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies that have underscored the significance of music in cognitive, social, and emotional development. (Koelsch, 2014). Traditional music represents not only a means of transmitting cultural heritage but also a bridge between the past and the future, helping children develop their personal and cultural identity. This music can be a powerful tool for fostering empathy, increasing interest in historical topics, and motivating students during lessons (Trbojević, Jeremić, and Milenović, 2015).

Whilst the present study provides valuable insights into the role of traditional music in early childhood education, it is important to note that it is not without certain limitations. Firstly, the research was conducted within a specific geographical and cultural context, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. Secondly, the study is dependent on educators' perceptions, as opposed to direct observations or assessments of children's responses to traditional music activities. To address these limitations, future research should: Conducting longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of traditional music on socio-emotional development. Furthermore, expanding the scope of research to encompass direct observations of children's engagement and development in response to traditional music could provide more comprehensive insights. A further recommendation is to compare the effects of traditional music with those of other music genres, in order to ascertain its unique contributions to socio-emotional growth. Finally, exploring the role of digital resources in preserving and integrating traditional music into early childhood education would be a valuable avenue for future research. Given the findings of this study, it is recommended that traditional music be strategically and innovatively incorporated into educational programs. This includes training educators, developing appropriate teaching materials, and promoting an interdisciplinary approach (Trbojević, Jeremić, and Milenović, 2015). In an era of globalisation and the universalisation of cultural values, preserving and nurturing traditional music is not only a cultural task but also a crucial contribution to building a more humane and socially integrated society.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support for national minorities/national communities in AP Vojvodina 2024: The project titled Learning Through Play: From Theoretical Constructs to Practical Modalities in School – The Aspect of Initial Education of Future Teachers in AP Vojvodina. Funded by the Decision of the Secretariat No.: 001048327 2024 09418 004 000 000 001.

### **Conflict of interests**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### **Author Contributions**

Conceptualization, Jeremić, B., Trbojević, A. and Tubić, M.; methodology, Goridić, S. and Trbojević, A.; formal analysis, Jović Vujaković, F. and Vojvodić Savić, M.; writing—original draft preparation, Jeremić, B., Tubić, M., Vojvodić Savić, M. and Jović Vujaković, F.; writing—review and editing, Jeremić, B., Trbojević, A., Vojvodić Savić, M. and Goridić, S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## References

- Ashar, S., Mania, S., Ibrahim, M. M., Syamsudduha, S., Sadaruddin, & Dewi, A. C. (2024). The impact of traditional games on social-emotional development: A comprehensive review of existing research. *Journal of Learning and Development Studies*, 4(2), 39-51. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jlds.2024.4.2.5>
- Brandellero, A. & Jansen, S. (2014) Popular music as cultural heritage: scoping out the field of practice. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 20(3), 224-240 Online first February 2013: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2013.779294>
- Banks, J. A. (2016). Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching (6th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315622255>
- Barrett, M. S. (2010). Musical narratives: A study of a young child's identity work in and through music-making. *Psychology of Music*, 39(4), 403–423. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735610373054>
- Berk, L. E. (2009). Child development (8th ed.). Pearson.
- Buzás, Z., & Sagrillo, D. (2019). The role of cultural heritage in 21st-century music education. *Civic Review*, 15(Special Issue), 317–328. <https://doi.org/10.24307/psz.2020.0218>
- Custodero, L. A. (2005). Observable indicators of flow experience: A developmental perspective on musical engagement in young children from infancy to school age. *Music Education Research*, 7(2), 185–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613800500169431>
- Elliott, D. J., & Silverman, M. (2015). Music matters: A philosophy of music education (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Ginsburg, K. R. (2007). The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics*, 119(1), 182–191. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2006-2697>
- Good, A., Sims, L., Clarke, K., & Russo, F. A. (2021). Indigenous youth reconnect with cultural identity: The evaluation of a community-and school-based traditional music program. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 49(2), 588-604.
- Hallam, S. (2010). The power of music: Its impact on the intellectual, social, and personal development of children and young people. *International Journal of Music Education*, 28(3), 269-289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761410370658>
- Jeremić, B., Markov, Z., & Nikolić, L. (2023). Traditional music in preschool and the development of social-emotional competencies of preschool children. *Društvene i humanističke studije*, 8(2), 541-556. <https://www.dhs.ff.unizg.hr/index.php/home/article/view/10203>
- Jeremić, B., Milenović, Ž., Petrović, J., & Markov, Z. (2022). Partnership of parents of children who need additional support in learning and preschool teachers in preschool institutions from the perspective of the integrated approach to learning. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education (IJCRSEE)*, 10(1), 29-34. <https://doi.org/10.23947/2334-8496-2022-10-1-29-34>
- Jeremić, B., Milenović, Ž. (2020). Društveni kontekst nastave muzičke kulture u funkciji negovanja tradicionalnog narodnog stvaralaštva Srba. *Baština*, 30(52), 441-461. <https://doi.org/10.5937/bastina30-29205>
- Jeremić, B., Šimonji-Cernak, R., Markov, Z., & Pantić, J. (2015). The Effects of Applying the Vocal Performance Teaching Method on the Social-Emotional Competencies (SEC) of Children in Early Education. *Croatian Journal of Education*, 17(3), 151-185. <https://doi.org/10.15516/cje.v17i0.1125>
- Koelsch, S. (2014). Brain and music. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 5(6), 605-622. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1316>
- Koops, L. H. (2014). The enjoyment cycle: A phenomenology of musical enjoyment of 3- to 5-year-olds. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 62(4), 396–414.
- Krishnaveni, K., & Shahin, A. (2022). Role of traditional games in influencing social skills among children. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, 10(9). <https://www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2209022.pdf>
- Li, M. (2013). Traditional music as “intangible cultural heritage” in the postmodern world.
- Marsh, K. (2010). The musical playground: Global tradition and change in children's songs and games. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195308983.001.0001>
- Nettl, B. (2005). The study of ethnomusicology: Thirty-one issues and concepts (2nd ed.). University of Illinois Press.
- Özdek, A. (2015). The role of folk music as cultural heritage in the curriculum of vocational high schools of music: pattern of Azerbaijan-Turkey. *Anadolu Journal of Educational Sciences International (AJESI)*, 5(3), 84-112.
- Pavlović, B.D., Krnjaja, Ž., Backović, S. (2022) Vodič za uređenje prostora u dečjem vrtiću - prostor u skladu sa osnovama programa PVO 'Godine uzleta'. Ministarstvo prosvete, nauke i tehnološkog razvoja
- Pavlović, B. M., & Trakilović-Milićević, J. (2013). Negovanje i značaj tradicionalnih narodnih igara sa pevanjem u nastavi muzičke kulture. *Uzdanica (Jagodina)*, 10(1), 217-232. <https://pefja.kg.ac.rs/uzdanica-god-x-br-1-jun-2013/>
- Pica, R. (2011). Moving and learning across the curriculum: More than 300 activities and games to make learning fun. Pearson.
- Regulation on the Fundamentals of Preschool Education and Upbringing Program (2018). *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, 88(17) and 27(18). <https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/pg/ministarstva/pravilnik/2018/16/1>
- Sudzilovski, D. M., & Tanasković, M. K. (2022). Nacionalni identitet u udžbenicima muzičke kulture. *Baština*, 58, 419-430. <https://doi.org/10.5937/bastina32-40599>

- Thaut, M. (2007). *Rhythm, music, and the brain: Scientific foundations and clinical applications* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203958827>
- Trbojević, A., Jeremić, B., & Milenović, Ž. (2015). Multimedia approach to the development of social concepts in class teaching – a view from the students' perspective. *Temе*, 39(3), 867–885. <https://teme2.junis.ni.ac.rs/index.php/TEME/article/view/68/49>
- Villodre, M. B. (2014). Cultural identity and using music in the intercultural educational process. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 132, 235–240. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.304>
- Vukićević, N. Golubović Ilić, I. & Stanojević, V. (2016). Predškolsko vaspitanje u funkciji očuvanja narodne tradicije u savremenom društvu. U: Emina Kopas-Vukašinović i Biljana Stojanović (ur.) *Nacionalni naučni skup sa međunarodnim učešćem Savremeno predškolsko vaspitanje I obrazovanje: IZAZOVI I DILEME*. 167–181. [https://pefja.kg.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Zbornik\\_radova\\_Savremeno\\_predskolsko\\_vaspitanje\\_i\\_obrazovanje\\_Izazovi\\_i\\_dileme\\_2016.pdf](https://pefja.kg.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Zbornik_radova_Savremeno_predskolsko_vaspitanje_i_obrazovanje_Izazovi_i_dileme_2016.pdf)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 20 (1989). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>. Accessed 12 December 2024
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.