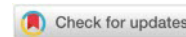


AESTHETIC EDUCATION THROUGH MUSIC: PERSPECTIVES OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATORS

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Abstract: Music plays a significant role in the aesthetic education of pre-school children, contributing to their emotional, cognitive, and social development. Aesthetic education fosters children's sensitivity to beauty in art, nature, and everyday life, with music uniquely shaping their sensibility and creative expression. Musical activities such as listening, singing, rhythmic exercises, and improvisation help children develop a sense of harmony, balance, and emotional expression through aesthetic enjoyment. Educators play a key role in this process, as their selection of musical content and teaching methods significantly influences the quality of aesthetic education in pre-school settings.

The empirical part of this study is based on qualitative research conducted through interviews with three pre-school educators. Their responses were analysed to gain insight into their perceptions and practices regarding the integration of music into aesthetic education. The findings indicate that educators recognise the multifaceted value of music in early childhood education, particularly in fostering children's emotional expression, communication skills, and creativity. However, they also highlighted challenges such as limited resources, a lack of formal training in music pedagogy, and the need for additional professional development programmes to enhance the quality of music integration in pre-school settings.

The study's conclusions confirm that music is not only a form of artistic expression but also a powerful pedagogical tool that enriches children's experiences and contributes to their overall development. To fully harness the aesthetic potential of music, educators should be further empowered through training and the provision of high-quality materials and resources. Strengthening the integration of musical activities into pre-school curricula can create an inspiring environment that supports children's aesthetic development and prepares them for future educational and emotional growth.

Keywords: Aesthetic development, Early childhood education, Music education, Pre-school children, Qualitative research, Role of educators.

Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

Aesthetic education through music in early childhood education plays a crucial role in fostering children's sensitivity to art and creative expression. Music not only stimulates children's imagination and emotional expression but also contributes to the development of key cognitive and social skills. Through experiential learning, children develop a sense of rhythm, melody, and harmony, which positively influences their perception of beauty and ability for aesthetic appreciation. In addition to supporting individual expression, music also strengthens collective spirit through group singing, rhythmic activities, and musical collaboration, promoting social interaction and cooperative learning.

Despite the widely recognised benefits of music-based aesthetic education, its implementation in early childhood education often depends on the competencies and available resources of educators. Numerous studies highlight the importance of their professional development and the need for support in the form of training and didactic materials that would enable a more systematic integration of musical activities into the curriculum. However, in practice, music is often used intuitively in preschool education, without a clearly structured approach or integrated methodological guidelines.

The aim of this study is to explore the role of music in the aesthetic education of preschool children and examine educators' perceptions regarding the significance and implementation of musical activities. A qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with preschool educators will provide deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities of aesthetic education through music, as well as identify the need for additional professional training and improved resource availability.

This paper is structured into several sections. The first section presents the theoretical framework, analysing the concept of aesthetic education and its connection with music. This is followed by an overview of the research methodology, describing the qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with educators. The empirical section provides an analysis of the obtained results, focusing on educators' perceptions, the benefits of music-based aesthetic education, and challenges in its implementation. Finally, the concluding

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section summarises key findings and offers recommendations for enhancing music-based aesthetic education in early childhood settings.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Aesthetic education is a fundamental aspect of early childhood education, fostering children's sensitivity to beauty, artistic expression, and creativity (Pejaković, 2016). It enables children to experience, understand, and evaluate aesthetic phenomena not only through the perception of art but also through active participation in artistic activities (Lim, 2004). Theoretical foundations of aesthetic education stem from various pedagogical approaches—Dewey (1934) emphasised the connection between aesthetic experiences and learning, whereas Vygotsky (1971) highlighted its social aspect, where creativity develops through interaction with the environment (Lim, 2004). Contemporary perspectives view aesthetic education not merely as a segment of arts education but as a comprehensive process shaping children's perception, sensitivity, and aesthetic judgment (Acer & Ömeroğlu, 2008).

According to the National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education in Croatia (2015), aesthetic education incorporates various artistic expressions—including visual arts, movement, drama, and music—to facilitate holistic learning and the development of children's expressive abilities. Music holds a particularly significant role in this process, encouraging exploration of sound, rhythm, and harmony, thereby contributing to children's emotional, social, and cognitive development (Hodijah & Kurniawati, 2021). Beyond serving as a medium of expression, music nurtures perception and the evaluation of aesthetic values (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2023).

Empirical research confirms that structured music education positively influences children's aesthetic development. A study by Acer and Ömeroğlu (2008) found that a well-structured aesthetic education programme significantly enhances six-year-olds' aesthetic judgment. Children exposed to musical activities demonstrate greater ability to recognise and interpret aesthetic elements in music, suggesting that aesthetic experiences through music shape their perception of artistic values. Furthermore, Lim (2005) argues that aesthetic experience develops through a dynamic cycle of perception, expression, and reflection, particularly evident in musical activities such as singing, playing instruments, and improvisation (Pironi, 2017). These processes enhance children's sensitivity to sound, rhythm, and harmony while fostering creativity and aesthetic evaluation skills.

Creativity is a key component of aesthetic education and is closely linked to musical activities in early childhood. Research by Đuranović, Klasnić, and Matešić (2020) highlights that children's creativity can be nurtured through diverse activities in preschool settings, with music recognised as a powerful tool for fostering self-expression and imagination. The authors stress that musical activities enable children to explore sounds and rhythms, promoting not only aesthetic perception but also communication and social skills. Additionally, an individualised approach to each child and the adaptation of musical activities to their interests further support the development of creative potential.

Music also shapes the learning environment. According to Nislev (2015), aesthetically designed environments, including auditory elements, play a crucial role in fostering children's creativity and expressive abilities. Pedagogical practices that promote aesthetic education use music to encourage spontaneous artistic responses and emotional expression, allowing children to explore their creativity. However, the successful implementation of music-based aesthetic education depends on the competencies of educators and their approach to aesthetic education. Research conducted among Taiwanese preschool educators indicates the need for a deeper integration of aesthetic education in teacher training programmes, particularly in developing awareness of artistic expression and creative pedagogical practices (Lee & Chao, 2023).

Music-based aesthetic education encourages children to engage in conscious listening, analysis, and interpretation of sound, fostering a deeper connection with artistic expression (Muzyka et al., 2021). This aspect is particularly emphasised in curricular guidelines advocating for multisensory learning, where music is integrated with movement and visual arts (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2023). The key to successful aesthetic education lies in creating an interactive and experiential learning environment where children can experiment with music and art through free expression (Badham, 2020). This approach combines structured and unstructured musical activities, allowing for an individualised development of aesthetic sensitivity.

Special emphasis is placed on the role of educators in music-based aesthetic education. According to Lim (2005), educators serve as key facilitators in shaping children's aesthetic experiences. Their ability to create an inspiring environment rich in musical content is essential for fostering children's creativity, sense of rhythm, and sensitivity to musical beauty.

Aesthetic education and music are deeply interconnected—music serves as a medium for exploration, expression, and the development of children's aesthetic sensitivity. Research confirms that incorporating musical activities into aesthetic education promotes the development of perception, critical thinking, and creativity in children (Acer & Ömeroğlu, 2008; Lim, 2005). To fully harness the potential of music, the following measures should be ensured:

- Structured and experiential music education that encourages perception and creative interpretation of sound.
- Support for educators through training and methodological guidelines for implementing music-based aesthetic activities.
- A rich aesthetic environment that includes diverse musical content and fosters spontaneous exploration.

In conclusion, music is not merely a source of entertainment but a powerful pedagogical tool that shapes children's aesthetic sensitivity and contributes to their overall development (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2023; Nislev, 2015). A high-quality music-based aesthetic education can only be achieved through systematic support for educators and the promotion of their competencies in the field of aesthetic education (Lee & Chao, 2023).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at gaining deeper insights into preschool educators' perceptions and experiences regarding the role of music in aesthetic education for young children. The research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with three educators from Kindergarten "Trogir" (Trogir, Croatia). The focus of the study was on understanding their views on the implementation of musical activities, the challenges associated with aesthetic education through music, and their professional needs related to music education.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring the inclusion of educators with extensive experience in early childhood education. The interviews gathered data on their pedagogical practices, personal attitudes towards music and aesthetic education, as well as the conditions under which musical activities are conducted in preschool settings.

The collected data were analysed using qualitative content analysis, with key thematic categories identified. The analysis was based on interpreting the participants' responses, with a focus on recurring patterns and shared perspectives regarding the role of music in children's aesthetic development. Categorisation of responses provided insights into the frequency of music-based activities, the perceived benefits of music in children's development, and the obstacles educators encounter in their work.

One of the key elements of the analysis was examining how educators use musical activities to foster children's creativity, emotional expression, and social interaction. Additionally, their suggestions for improving music education and their need for professional development in this area were analysed.

The main research objective was to explore how educators perceive the role of music in children's aesthetic education and to identify both challenges and opportunities in the implementation of music-based activities in preschool education. Specific research objectives included:

- Analysing educators' perceptions of the significance of music in children's aesthetic development.
- Examining the frequency and types of musical activities used in working with children.
- Identifying obstacles and challenges in the implementation of music education.
- Determining educators' needs for additional professional development in the field of music education.

The data analysis process involved transcribing and thematically analysing the interviews, grouping participants' responses according to key themes to construct a clear understanding of their experiences and perspectives. The findings were presented through a descriptive approach, emphasising the interpretation of observed patterns in educators' responses.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of interviews conducted with preschool educators indicate that most participants recognise music as a fundamental element of aesthetic education. However, the extent of their involvement in musical activities varies significantly. All educators emphasised the immense value of music in developing children's sensitivity to aesthetic values, yet the way music is integrated into daily activities largely depends on their personal competencies and the resources available within their preschool institutions.

Some participants reported using music through listening to songs, singing, and simple rhythmic activities, while others attempted to expand the range of activities through improvisation and sound exploration. Educators who had undergone additional training in music education felt more confident in conducting music-aesthetic activities, aligning with previous studies highlighting the importance of professional development in this field (Lee & Chao, 2023).

Furthermore, educators expressed concerns that aesthetic education is often undervalued within preschool curricula and that musical activities are primarily implemented as part of a broader programme, rather than through a structured methodological approach. This finding aligns with the study by Đuranović, Klasnić, and Matešić (2020), which emphasised that fostering creativity through music is often left to the individual initiatives of educators rather than being explicitly defined within the curriculum.

Participants generally agreed that music has multiple positive effects on children in preschool settings, particularly in their emotional, social, and cognitive development. Educators highlighted that musical activities contribute to the development of children's emotional intelligence by allowing them to express emotions through rhythm, melody, and movement, which corresponds with the findings of Hodijah & Kurniawati (2021). Additionally, it was observed that children regularly engaged in musical activities develop better concentration, memory, and listening skills.

One of the key benefits of music-aesthetic education, as noted by participants, is the enhancement of children's social skills. Children who participate in collective music-making develop a sense of belonging and teamwork, supporting previous research that points to the positive impact of musical activities on the development of cooperative skills and empathy (Muzyka et al., 2021). Group music activities also encourage children to listen to one another, take turns, and coordinate with others, fostering social interaction.

Moreover, several educators emphasised that music plays a crucial role in nurturing children's creativity. Through musical activities, children explore sounds, rhythm, and melodies and have the opportunity to improvise, stimulating their imagination and aesthetic sensitivity. This claim is supported by the study of Acer & Ömeroğlu (2008), which underscores the essential role of musical activities in developing children's creative thinking.

Despite recognising numerous benefits of music-aesthetic education, participants also identified several practical challenges that hinder its implementation in preschool settings. The most frequently mentioned issue was the lack of formal training for educators in music-aesthetic education. The majority of participants stated that they had not had the opportunity to acquire sufficient practical musical skills during their education, which aligns with the findings of Lee & Chao (2023).

Additionally, the lack of material resources was highlighted as a significant obstacle. Some educators noted that their institutions lack musical instruments or quality materials for use in musical activities, limiting the variety and richness of experiences provided to children. This issue is further emphasised in the study by Pironi (2017), which points out that access to musical resources directly affects the quality of music-aesthetic education.

Another challenge relates to the lack of time within the daily preschool schedule, as musical activities are often perceived as secondary compared to other educational content. Educators suggested that more attention should be given to aesthetic education within the curriculum and that additional time should be allocated for the systematic implementation of musical activities (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2023).

To improve the implementation of music-aesthetic education, educators proposed several possible solutions. Firstly, they highlighted the need for continuous professional development that would enable them to acquire additional musical and pedagogical skills (Nislev, 2015). Secondly, they recommended increasing the availability of material resources, including the procurement of musical instruments and quality teaching materials, to ensure that children can engage in richer musical activities. Lastly, better integration of music-aesthetic activities within preschool curricula would facilitate their systematic implementation rather than relying solely on individual educator initiatives (Đuranović, Klasnić & Matešić, 2020).

In conclusion, although music-aesthetic education has a significant impact on children's development, its implementation still largely depends on individual approaches and available resources. Given the numerous benefits of music in early childhood education, it is crucial to provide better support for educators to ensure that music education becomes an integral part of children's aesthetic development in preschool institutions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has confirmed that music plays a fundamental role in the aesthetic education of preschool children, contributing to their emotional, cognitive, and social development. Through the analysis of interviews with preschool educators, it was established that they recognise music as a powerful medium for aesthetic expression and shaping children's perception of beauty. Musical activities, such as singing, listening to music, and rhythmic exercises, stimulate creativity, develop emotional intelligence, and enhance children's social integration. However, the research findings also highlighted several challenges in the implementation of music-aesthetic education, including limited material resources, a lack of systematic training for educators in music pedagogy, and the need for better integration of musical activities into preschool curricula.

To enhance music-aesthetic education in preschool institutions, it is essential to provide continuous education and professional development for educators in the field of music pedagogy. Professional training programmes should cover methods for working with children, techniques for fostering musical creativity, and strategies for integrating music into the daily curriculum. Additionally, it is necessary to improve material conditions in preschools by ensuring better access to musical instruments and didactic materials that support a diverse range of musical activities. Furthermore, increasing awareness of the importance of aesthetic education through music and systematically incorporating it into national preschool education programmes is strongly recommended.

For future research, expanding the sample of participants would provide a broader perspective on the practices and challenges in implementing music-aesthetic education. Additionally, further studies could explore the specific effects of different musical methods on children's aesthetic development, as well as the long-term impact of systematically applying musical activities in preschool education. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how continuous music education influences the development of creativity, emotional intelligence, and social skills in later stages of education.

In conclusion, music is not only a form of artistic expression but also a powerful pedagogical tool that enriches children's aesthetic experiences and supports their overall development. The key to successfully implementing music-aesthetic education lies in empowering educators, ensuring adequate resources, and integrating music as an essential part of the curriculum, thereby providing high-quality aesthetic education in early childhood.

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