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Early Children Education through Arts: Pre-school Teachers Views on Types and Frequency of Young Children Engagement in Music Education Activities in Pre-school Settings in Greece

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Abstract:

The aim of the present study was to examine the frequency of implementing musical activities in the weekly pre-school settings program and the type of musical activities that pre-school teachers choose to implement. Factors that may influence the frequency of implementing musical activities were also investigated. In addition, some indications and changes recommended by pre-school teachers themselves, which would support and facilitate a more frequent implementation of musical activities in the pre-school setting program, were also reported.

The Mixed Method Research (MMR) was preferred for this study, which is besides considered a more appropriate method for research in highly multi-factorial areas such as education. The questionnaire was preferred as a basic tool to collect the quantitative data of the study in the quantitative research process. Similarly, qualitative data were explored using the semi-structured interview as the main tool.

The study results showed that the majority of the pre-school teachers performed musical activities daily (64.1%). Among the main factors that seem to influence the frequency of music activity involvement, statistically significant differences were only seen between years of service and the age of the pre-school teachers. Some of the pre-school teachers' observations that would benefit from the more frequent implementation of activities from the field of music education were the presence of music educators in the pre-school classrooms, the organization of special training seminars, and providing schools with music education materials suitable for the implementation of relevant activities. Reference was also made to the need to adjust the regulations governing the operation of pre-school settings and the curriculum of the university departments of pre-school education with more music courses.

Keywords: Pre-school music education, frequency of musical activities, types of musical activities, frequency of involvement of infant/pre-school classes

1. Introduction

Music is a language that connects all people from different civilizations and cultures and is considered the most basic way of expressing emotions, thoughts, and communication. Through music, people live and connect exclusively with it as it helps them to truly experience a moment and bring an emotion to life (Montagu, 2017). Music is also particularly beneficial in situations of intense pressure and stress (Volchegorskaya & Nogina, 2014). Similarly, helps significantly in relieving stressful situations of everyday life, as through it, people can more easily express their moods and emotions (Schulkin & Raglan, 2014). Another effect of children's use and engagement with music is the fact that it enhances their social (pro-social) behavior (Trainor et al., 2012). Moreover, when music is combined with musical-motor movement activities, it contributes positively to the improvement of the child's coordination of movements and self-regulation in terms of emotional and cognitive processes (Williams, 2018). The presence of music education in the lives of pre-school children contributes significantly to the combination of entertainment and learning. Children adopt a more positive attitude toward learning, become more effective, and enjoy the early stages of their musical education in a constructive way (Koops & Kuebel, 2018).

Children's first musical experiences begin in the family environment, where infants come into contact with the mother's infant singing, thereby strengthening the bond between them. Listening to music provides pleasure for young children and tender moments with the family as communication develops through music and enables the creation of a stronger bond (Steinhoff, 2016). Even before the birth of a child, music seems to become a means of communication between the mother and the fetus, a means to calm and soothe them (Gudmundsdottir, 2017).

All this extended to more organized and targeted musical activities in the pre-school setting, having the main objective of enhancing children's developmental skills. In pre-school education and training, all pedagogical activities are

more enjoyable and creative for the child when accompanied by music. Music can be used either to introduce children to a new song or a game, even when children need to calm down after an intense activity (Lee & Welch, 2017).

The purpose of music education in pre-school education is the development and cultivation of musical feeling, aesthetic ability, sensitivity, the understanding of music, entertainment, and the release of children's creative ability. This is achieved through organized forms of expression and music activities suitable for preschoolers. Musical activities are known to be a key element of fun, creative and effortless learning for young children. There are many early childhood teachers who, while believing that music is a key tool that motivates and supports children to develop in all areas of their development, feel that they lack the qualifications and skills to implement and use music activities in the learning and development process of children (Paynter, 2002). They often emphasize the inability to perform musical activities due to a lack of basic equipment and support from specialized personnel (Drummond, 2001). Some other factors that provide a lack of self-confidence in their musical abilities are the limited resources and means to carry out such activities and also the guidance with targeted activities from the respective pre-school curricula (Rajan, 2017). In addition, some of the teachers lack knowledge regarding the selection and implementation of musical activities and declare that they need training and guidance regarding the implementation and inclusion of activities related to music education in their school curriculum (Stolić, 2015). However, it has been found that pre-school teachers who have been involved in music at some stages of their education are more likely to implement musical activities with children, while those with less experience do not feel they have the necessary knowledge to engage and therefore perform a musical activity (Bolduc & Evrard, 2017).

1.1. Aim of the Study

The aim of the present study is to investigate the frequency of the implementation of musical activities in the weekly program of the pre-school setting in Greece, which concerns children aged 0.5–4 years. Additionally, it investigated the type of activities that pre-school teachers most often implement in their classrooms.

2. Methodology

The Mixed Method Research (MMR), which was preferred for this study, is considered more appropriate for research in highly multi-factorial areas such as education (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Thus, they are able to use the findings of the quantitative part of the research to inform the qualitative part and vice versa (Onwegbuzie & Leech, 2004). In addition, using multiple methods in a study provides greater certainty to the researcher about the results of the study and its conclusions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

To collect the quantitative data of the study in the quantitative research process, the questionnaire was preferred as a basic tool. Similarly, qualitative data were explored using the semi-structured interview as the main tool. Pre-school teachers were asked about the frequency of engagement and performance of musical activities in the pre-school setting weekly program. They were also asked about the types of musical activities that are most frequently implemented in the pre-school classroom. Additionally, they took a stand and gave their views on the factors that may influence the frequent implementation of musical activities in the weekly program of the pre-school settings. All these data were analyzed by using the method of content analysis.

To conduct the results of this study, the 'convergence design,' according to Creswell & Plano Clark (2011), was adopted. Parallel data collection was carried out by the researcher, which was analyzed and taken into account in drawing conclusions having equal priority. Finally, a mixture of the results was also carried out to conduct the research in a safer way and to better understand the results.

The data analysis that was collected from the questionnaires was performed using SPSSv.23.0 software, and the statistical significance was set equal to 0.05 in all cases. ANOVA test was used to detect differences between 3 or more different groups and continuous measures, while the Pearson Chi-Square test was used to detect correlations between two categorical measures (Belle et al., 2004).

2.1. Nature of Music Education at a National Level

At this point, it is worth mentioning that in Greece, there is a government-issued curriculum for the pre-schools published by the Ministry. The curriculum contains proposed activities from the fields of knowledge concerning early childhood, the day program, and the tasks of early childhood educators. Educators can consult the curricula for planning the weekly program of activities having great flexibility and freedom in choosing, organizing, and executing different school activities.

The teaching of music in early childhood seems to follow the general aims of education and educational potential. According to the curriculum guide for pre-school education, music lessons emphasize the musical practice of infants with their voices and with simple musical instruments. Active listening, musical games, and the planned course of teaching a song are also mentioned. In addition, ideas for musical instrument construction, rhythmic activities, and examples of sound recordings are given. In the updated curriculum guide, music education is intended to contribute, along with other arts, to the child's communication and free expression. Therefore, in line with modern teaching styles and curricula, teachers in music education are encouraged to provide more freedom for children to experience and participate in the various musical activities performed in the classroom.

2.2. Sample

Convenience sampling was carried out on pre-school teachers working in pre-school settings. The majority of participants were female (97.9%) and working in public pre-school settings (63.8%). 76.2% of participants were

University graduates, 13.0% were 2-year graduates, 10.4% were postgraduates, and only 0.4% were Ph.D. holders. The average age of the sample is 39 years, and the average years of experience is 13.4 years.

2.3. Research Questions

- What is the frequency of engagement and performance of musical activities in the pre-school classroom?
- Which of the types of musical activities are most frequently implemented by pre-school teachers, and what are their qualitative characteristics?
- What factors may influence the frequent implementation of musical activities in the weekly program of the pre-school setting?

2.4. Ethical Approval

The questionnaires were distributed to the pre-school settings in person by the researcher after consultation with each pre-school center. During the researcher's visit, the pre-school teachers were informed about the purpose of the study. From the structure of the questionnaire, it was made clear to them that the questionnaires were anonymous and the principle of confidentiality between the researcher and the participants was respected. It was also made clear that their participation in the study was not compulsory, and they could opt out of the process at any time they felt they did not wish to participate.

3. Results

3.1. Frequency of Performing Musical Activities in the Weekly Program of the Pre-school Setting

The participating teachers in the study were asked to respond on how often they implement musical activities in the weekly activity program of the pre-school setting. Their responses ranged between daily, 2-3 times a week, and not at all.

The majority of participants stated that they perform musical activities daily (64.1%). In the subsequent analysis, participants' responses were correlated with the following:

- Specialized knowledge in music
- Amateur knowledge of music
- Amateur involvement in other forms of arts
- Music lessons during studies
- Training in music education outside the framework of studies
- Playing a musical instrument

The statistical analysis of the correlations of the above factors showed no statistically significant difference in the frequency of musical activities in the weekly program of the pre-school setting.

In the second phase, the frequency of performing musical activities was correlated with the following:

The content of music education courses attended during their studies, where they had to choose from the following:

- Singing,
- Learning a musical instrument,
- Music theory/music notation,
- Music and movement
- Listening to sound stories,
- Musical language exercises
- The age of the participants
- The employer (public/private)
- Years of experience
- Level of education

After analyzing the correlations between the above factors, a statistically significant difference was found between the years of experience and the age of the respondents.

3.1.1. Years of Experience

The variance test analysis of the frequency of performing musical activities in the children's weekly activity program, according to the years of experience of the pre-school teachers, shows that there is a statistically significant difference in years of service depending on the frequency of performing musical activities in the children's weekly schedule. From the multiple statistical comparisons, it is clear that the differences are for daily performance with performance 2-3 times/week with $p < .001$. It is shown that years of pre-school teachers' service are significantly less when the frequency of performance is none (1.5 years) compared to performing 2-3 times a week or daily.

3.1.2. Age

The variance test analysis of the frequency of performing musical activities in the children's weekly activity schedule, according to the age of the teacher, shows that there is a statistically significant difference in age according to the frequency of musical activities in the children's weekly schedule. From the multiple comparisons to the statistical analysis,

it is clear that the differences are for daily performance with performance 2-3 times/week with $p=.014$. It is shown that the frequency of performing 2-3 times a week is for pre-school teachers aged 36.21 years on average compared to the age of those who perform musical activities daily with an age of 40.15 years.

3.2. Frequency of Music Activities Performance - Types of Musical Activities

The participants of the survey were also asked to answer which of the musical activities, such as music-movement, singing, music with instruments, sound stories, listening, and music-language activities they perform most often in the weekly program of the pre-school setting. Based on their answers that are shown in table 1, it was found out that music-movement (48.7%) and singing (85.8%) are performed daily. Activities with the use of musical instruments by teachers (63.8%), activities with the use of musical instruments by children (59.5%), sound-stories (50.6%), listening to music (45.7%), and music-language activities (49.4%) are usually performed 2-3 times a week.

Participants' responses in terms of frequency of performance were then correlated with the following:

- Specialized knowledge in music
- Amateur knowledge of music
- Amateur involvement in other forms of arts
- Music lessons during studies
- Training in music outside the framework of studies
- Playing a musical instrument

The content of music education courses attended during their studies where they had to choose from the following:

- Singing
- Learning to play a musical instrument
- Music theory/music notation
- Music and movement
- Sound stories
- Music-linguistic exercises
- The age of the participants
- The employer (public/private)
- Years of experience
- Level of education

The purpose of the correlation of the above factors was to determine whether any of these factors influenced the type of musical activities performed in the classroom, as well as the frequency of their performance in the weekly activity schedule of the pre-school setting.

The musical activities associated with the above factors were:

- music and movement
- singing
- music with the use of instruments by the pre-school teachers
- music using instruments by children
- sound stories
- listening and
- music-language activities

		Count	Column N %
How often do you perform music and movement activities in the classroom?	None	2	0,9%
	Seldom	7	3,0%
	2-3 times a week	110	47,4%
	Daily	113	48,7%
How often do you use singing in the classroom activity program?	None	0	0,0%
	Seldom	4	1,7%
	2-3 times a week	30	12,8%
	Daily	201	85,5%
How often do you organize activities in which you use musical instruments yourself?	None	3	1,3%
	Seldom	61	26,0%
	2-3 times a week	150	63,8%
	Daily	21	8,9%
How often do you organize activities in which children use musical instruments?	None	5	2,2%
	Seldom	79	34,1%
	2-3 times a week	138	59,5%
	Daily	10	4,3%
How often do you use sound stories in music education?	None	6	2,6%
	Seldom	74	31,8%
	2-3 times a week	118	50,6%
	Daily	35	15,0%

		Count	Column N %
How often do you implement music listening activities in the children's activity?	None	1	0,4%
	Seldom	41	17,5%
	2-3 times a week	107	45,7%
	Daily	85	36,3%
How often do you implement music-language activities in the children's activity program?	None	14	6,0%
	Seldom	67	28,8%
	2-3 times a week	115	49,4%
	Daily	37	15,9%

Table 1: Frequency of Music Activities Performance - Types of Musical Activities

In order to merge the statistically significant results of the correlations of the above factors with the types of musical activities and the frequency of their performance, table 2 was created. The table shows the types of musical activities with the factors that the statistical analysis showed to be positively correlated.

	Music and movement	Song	Use of Instruments (Teachers)	Use of Instruments (Children)	Sound-Stories	listening	Music-Language Activities
Specialized musical knowledge							
Amateur involvement with music			✓				
Amateur occupation in other forms of Arts	✓			✓			
Music lessons during the studies	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Training in music education outside the framework of studies			✓		✓		✓
If they play a musical instrument			✓		✓		
Content of music lessons during the studies	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Age	✓	✓	✓				
Labor institution	✓						
Years of experience	✓	✓					
Level of study				✓		✓	

Table 2: Statistically Significant Results of the Correlations

The statistical results obtained from the respective correlations noted above proved that factors such as amateur involvement with both music and other forms of Arts, or knowledge of a musical instrument, are positively related to the frequency of musical activities (e.g., music and movement, use of musical instruments, sound stories). Participants' age and years of experience showed a positive correlation, especially in the performance of singing and music-motor activities. Two of the factors that seemed to have a more significant role in the frequency of performing the different musical activities were the music lessons during the studies and the content of the lessons taught by the study participants. As the statistical analysis showed, these were positively related to all types of musical activities, except singing in the case of the content of the lessons during studies. This exception possibly indicates the pre-school setting teacher's belief that they can implement singing activities without having specialized knowledge in singing. Possibly, singing appears to them as an activity that does not require specialized knowledge in terms of designing and implementing in the daily activity program, ignoring the correct course of performance as well as the multidimensional importance of singing in children's lives. The fact that the pre-school teachers consider themselves capable of implementing singing activities in the classroom without having received specific training beforehand perhaps reveals their inability to realize their weaknesses and the need for training and continuous personal development.

However, training in music seemed to be positively related to the performance of sound stories, music-language activities, and activities using musical instruments. Finally, it is worth mentioning the negative correlation of specialized

knowledge in music, as it did not seem to influence at all the frequency, but rather, the type of musical activities implemented in the weekly program of the pre-school setting.

3.3. Frequency of Performing Musical Activities - Infant/Pre-school Age Groups

In the area of more frequent involvement in activities preferred by the pre-school teachers, they were also asked whether they implement musical activities as often in the infant (0.5-2.5 years) and pre-school setting (2.5- 4 years) classes, respectively. In the results of the study, as shown in table 3, it appeared that the majority of respondents performed musical activities equally often in infant and pre-school setting classes (59.7%).

		Count	Column N %
If you work (or have worked) in an infant (0.5-2.5 years) and pre-school setting (2.5- 4 years) classes, you usually perform musical activities:	More often in the pre-school setting classes	63	29,9%
	More often in the infant sections	22	10,4%
	Equally often	126	59,7%

Table 3: Frequency of Performing Musical Activities - Infant/Pre-School Age Groups

As reflected in the quotes from the following interviews, the pre-school teachers perform musical activities in both age groups equally often, showing that they appreciate the value of music in children's development from infancy.

Researcher:I would like you to tell me, in the infant and toddler classes, respectively, would you say that you implement musical activities with equal frequency in both age groups of children?'

Pre-school teacher: I think I would say the same because music has that, music has that magic that any age can respond to.

(M.....)

Pre-school teacher: Two years ago, I was in the infant classes, and we performed musical activities and all that. I think infant children need it just as much as toddlers. It is just what happens with slightly older kids. You can create because of their age and emotional maturity. You can take it a little bit further. Not to say that infants do not need them. They need them just as much as you are preparing them for the next classes.

(A.....)

Summarizing the above, it is easy to see from the quantitative data and from the content of the interviews that the pre-school teachers apply musical activities with the same frequency in the infant and toddler sections, respectively. What possibly changes are both the type and the degree of difficulty of the activities performed in the respective sections. What may also change is the proportion of musical activities in relation to other activities, as there are many more possibilities in the sections with older children.

Notes and changes that the pre-school teachers would like to see regarding the frequency of musical activities.

During the interviews, the participants often felt the need to talk about their own suggestions for how the music pedagogical reality in the pre-school settings could be improved, as it could facilitate the more frequent performance of musical activities. Thus, most of them said that they would like the assistance of a musician who could perform more specific activities with the children, but also so that they could learn and get ideas from him/her. In addition, they stated that an operating regulation with more guidelines, explicitly stated objectives, and strategies and practices would greatly help improve the music education provided.

The need to organize and attend music education seminars by people who can help them in a more practical direction was also mentioned. Equipping pre-school settings with material and technical equipment suitable for musical activities and the better configuration of the premises is also considered necessary for the more frequent, higher quality, and more varied and balanced performance of musical activities by pre-school teachers. A reference was also made to the academic studies of the participants, in which they said that they would prefer more music courses with a more practical direction, better adapted to their future needs.

3.3.1. Music Teachers

Pre-school teacher: It wouldn't be bad to have one expert and staff involved. That is to have a musician who would come and act for the children once in a while, periodically, and children would be exposed.

Researcher: Then, more specialized music education can be performed.

Pre-school teacher: It will do more specialized work, which will be undertaken once a year for children's performances, an event, a summer event, and a Christmas event; this way, children will be exposed to different things even more thoroughly.

(M x.....)

Pre-school teacher: Someone to guide and lead us. It would make our work more complete. It would definitely help. You always need to refresh, and when someone has the knowledge, he/she is more specialized.

(D.....)

3.3.2. Curriculum with Proposed Musical Activities

Researcher: Do you have any suggestions that you would like to make that would, in your opinion, make it easier for you and your colleagues to implement music activities in the classroom with greater frequency

Pre-school teacher: It does not give any direction, and I think anyone who is studying now and takes the regulation to get into the business, practically, is a failure because the regulation does not say anything.

(B.....)

Pre-school teacher: The curriculum gives us more guidelines and ideas to use music activities in a more organized way

(M.....)

3.3.3. Training Seminars

Researcher: Do you have any suggestions that you would like to make that would, in your opinion, make it easier for you and your colleagues to implement music activities more confidently in the classroom?

Pre-school teacher: To organize and do some seminars about music.

(D...)

Pre-school teacher: Certainly, training, to have more seminars, and now, in the curriculum guides, there are some courses. Beyond that, the materials, there should definitely be materials in the school, but again, okay, you find ways to do that as well. The training, the training I think, is the most important thing.

(A....)

Researcher: In closing, would you like to suggest some changes/directions that would make it easier for pre-school teachers to carry out music activities?

In addition, two of the participating pre-school teachers also gave a new dimension to the training, as shown in the following extracts. They raise both the issue of liking and personal quest and interest. They also mention that a room in the pre-school setting equipped with appropriate musical material equipment would be ideal for performing a variety of musical activities.

Pre-school teacher: I think they don't like it; there's no information, there's no personal search.

Researcher: When you say information or personal search, what exactly do you mean?

Pre-school teacher: There is no personal search of things; things are well done, the way I know, the way I know, my schedule works out well for me, and I don't need to change anything. There's no training; there's no motivation to train; there's no appetite; I don't know how else to explain it. There is no desire.

Researcher: Finally, would you like to point out any changes or directions that could support pre-school teachers to perform musical activities more frequently in the pre-school setting?

Pre-school teacher: In the pre-school setting, there is an event hall; that's where usually the celebrations take place when the weather does not allow it. A very big celebration, like a Christmas celebration for the pre-school setting, is the big party of the pre-school setting. However, why not have? I'm thinking out loud, why not use the event hall on many more other occasions? We don't need a huge infrastructure, but only a small space where the children can do music and movement activities. Why is this hall not used anyway? There could be cushions inside; there could be musical instruments inside; there could be our CDs, our cassette player, our microphone, hearing his voice, great!

Researcher: To equip a room, you would say, with appropriate pedagogical material and space configuration.

Pre-school teacher: Exactly. We're used to the corner, corner, corner, which has become miserable, to the point of being marginalized, to the point of being incomplete; at least, that's what my experience tells me within pre-school settings. My suggestion... my imagination, I would very much like to realize a dream; it is a dream.

(Vou.....)

3.3.4. Music Education Material

In all interviews, participants mentioned the importance of music education materials. Mainly here, they mean appropriate musical instruments (Orff instruments) and music books. The way these are placed in the classroom also seems to be important.

Researcher: Would you like to suggest any changes/directions that would somehow facilitate the implementation of musical activities in the pre-school setting?

Pre-school teacher: Yes, to make more music for the children, I would definitely need more musical instruments in the classroom and a bigger music corner.

(X.....)

Pre-school teacher:clearly, every pre-school setting should have the appropriate equipment for musical instruments.

(A....)

Pre-school teacher: A pre-school setting must be very well-organized with music pedagogical material. The educators must have the necessary material to proceed with the musical activities. This means that there should be enriched music corners in every classroom.

(F.....)

3.3.5. Academic Studies

The interviews highlighted the importance of upgrading the music course during the pre-school setting of nurses' studies.

Pre-school teacher: Maybe during academic studies. There should be music in more semesters, and it would have been understood and given to the students that this is something that you're going to need; don't let it slip that, nothing, okay, I presented a song, I learned it by heart parroting.

(X.....)

Researcher: In general, do you have any changes or directions that you can suggest that would make it easier for pre-school teachers to implement musical activities more often?

Pre-school teacher: University curricula should have music, and music should be a compulsory subject, not to be considered inferior to other subjects, pedagogy

(M.....)

4. Discussion

In contrast to the older daycare programs in pre-school settings, the modern programs have as their main purpose daycare education, smooth socialization, and comprehensive children development. The first preschool-setting daycare programs in Greece were more of a welfare nature and paid more attention to the daycare and smoother socialization of the children accommodated in them. Over the years, different updates were made to the operating regulations of the country. The latest update on the purpose of the operation of pre-school settings in Greece as places for the education and training of pre-school children was completed in the publication of the latest operating regulations in December 2017. The educational staff of the pre-school settings is now required to perform daily educational activities aimed at the smooth and all-round development of children. The choice of activities made by the pre-school teachers in Greece is based on the operating regulations, which, however, provide a great deal of flexibility and freedom to the educators regarding the formulation and implementation of the children's daily program of activities. According to Lorenzo et al. (2014), in pre-school centers, the teachers of each classroom are also responsible for continuously updating, finding, and performing musical activities with the children in the classroom. Additionally, regarding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of music education, pre-school teachers must take into account the specific characteristics of pre-school children's development and learning, defining individual cognitive domains of activities each time (Denac, 2009).

Research data with regard to the frequency of involvement in musical activities showed that the majority of the participants claimed to perform musical activities on a daily basis. Specific analysis of the data showed that the main factors mostly associated with the frequency of performing musical activities were age, years of service, whether the pre-school teachers had attended music courses during their academic studies, and the content of the music courses they attended. The study showed that pre-school teachers, who are over 40 years of age and with more than 15 years of experience, perform music activities more often in the weekly activity program of the pre-school setting. This may possibly be a result of and directly related to the academic education of pre-school teachers (Heyning, 2011). It is further noted that music education courses in Greek university departments of pre-school education are compulsory courses to be attended during the students' study cycle. In recent years, students have been taught the music lesson during their studies as it is established through the curricula. Correspondingly, in the previous university curricula of the respective departments, music was taught in six academic semesters. Finally, another issue also emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the participants: music classes in Greek university departments of pre-school education seem to decrease gradually in both the hours of teaching per week and the semesters of study in which the subject is taught. Another reason why older pre-school teachers with more years of experience perform music activities more often in the weekly activity program of the pre-school setting is that in recent years, new subjects have been added to the education courses in Greek university departments of pre-school education, and, consequently, new categories of actions that can be implemented in pre-school settings. Today, it seems that there are many objects in the new programs that limit music activities or take precedence over some that seem more directly utilitarian (Bautista, Yeung, McLaren & Ilari, 2022). However, the older teachers still have a sense of the joy of music that has value in itself.

On the other hand, this may also correspond to the fact that in the earlier regulations for the operation of pre-school settings in Greece, reference was often made to the use of music in leisure time for relaxation, so it may be that the use of music had become established and that this is how they continued to use it. Besides, as we move into the past, music had a more important role in everyday engagement with children outside of formal institutionalized settings (e.g., at home, in the neighborhood), so there may be a stronger imprint of this reality. Nowadays, according to modern teaching styles and curricula, pre-school teachers are encouraged to provide more freedom for children to experience and participate in the various musical activities performed in the classroom. The musical experience in the classroom can take many forms, such as performing, listening, or improvising (Koutsoupidou, 2010).

At the same time, in terms of the frequency of music in infant and toddler classes, the study participants claimed that they performed musical activities with the same frequency in both infant and toddler classes. This fact is surprising since one would expect them to use musical activities more often in the infant classes due to the limited number of activities from other cognitive fields that are addressed to this age group. Moreover, it has been found in the studies conducted by Dionysiou (2014), Jucan & Simion (2015), Gerry, Unrau & Trainor (2012) that the use of music in infancy may act as a key communicative factor between the infant and the caregiver. According to Harman (2019), Portowitz & Klein (2007), Jucan & Simion (2015), Hallam (2010), Bowman (2017), and Volchegorskaya & Nogina (2014), the use of

music creates an ideal atmosphere in the school setting, which is instrumental in helping infants to adjust more smoothly and cope with separation anxiety.

Something worth noting at this point is the reference by the pre-school teachers to the use of music as a key tool during the period of adaptation of the children in the pre-school setting. Kelly (1998) points out that music seems particularly useful to pre-school teachers during transitional periods, such as when children are adjusting to a pre-school setting. Besides, it is argued that music generally helps to create a pleasant atmosphere in the school environment. In addition, it strengthens social bonds and teamwork, offering an excellent opportunity for children to integrate more smoothly into the school community (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010). Therefore, we can assume that the use of music is very important for children in pre-school centers and perhaps even more so where, for example, the use of language and explanation may not be able to have such a decisive effect.

Therefore, international research data supports the report of the pre-school teachers in this study to use music as a more appropriate tool for smoother adjustment of children and optimal coping with separation anxiety.

5. References

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