

# Peculiarities of Future Primary School Teachers' Musical Competence

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**Abstract:** Musical education belongs to significant spheres of personality development and human expression. Music develops human imagination, enhances the emotional experience, evokes the human ability to perceive the organised world of sounds and stimulates the esthetical experience of this world. Many studies have shown that the importance of musical education is more important for primary school pupils than in later years. If before this age, in the families or schools the music education is not given enough attention, the child loses a lot (musical receptiveness, specific visual thinking), and later this kind of abilities for various reasons (disharmony of physical, emotional development, etc.) are more suppressed. Therefore, much of significance must be devoted to the musical education of future primary school teachers. The research data from qualitative and quantitative study analysis have highlighted the peculiarities of musical and pedagogical psychological competencies of primary school teachers.

**Keywords:** primary school teacher, musical competence, music education, impotence of music

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## Introduction

The first four years of school education are the most important for the development of human musical culture. Primary school (Classes 1 to 4 in Lithuania) is a development period that allows directing the young person's mental and physical powers for the continuous and purposeful learning, to comprehend and understand, appreciate the world, create and admire the beauty. It is at this age that the child's need for a more conscious, rational understanding of the surrounding environment, and his or her aesthetic relationship with the world, begins to manifest. One of the most important areas of children's aesthetic culture education is music education. Many studies have shown that the importance of musical education is more important for primary school pupils than in later years (Herbst, de Wet, and Rijdsdijk, 2005; Abril and Goult, 2006 etc.). Rinkevičius (2005) calls this period a "golden" (sensational) period because it is the most successful way to develop singing abilities, intonational hearing, musicality and musical perception, and musical thinking. Younger school-age children are particularly receptive to music and many theorists say (Gordon, 1998; De Vries, 2015 etc.), their musical abilities are developing the fastest. If before this age, in the families or schools the music education is not given enough attention, the child loses a lot (musical receptiveness, specific visual thinking), and later this kind of abilities for various reasons (disharmony of physical, emotional development, etc.) are more suppressed. Primary mental abilities are declining with age, but the higher mental activities do not; adults may maintain or even increase their mental abilities in the various areas of expertise including music (Pieters, 1996; Hallam, 2012). The primary school teacher and his or her musical training, therefore, plays an important role. Teacher training has its own specifications: teachers need to acquire the competencies necessary for their new role - the learning organizer, the creative educator, the creator of opportunities, the facilitator, the counsellor, the partner, the mediator between the pupil and various modern sources of information (Concept of Teacher Qualification Improvement, 2012). The music teacher should not lack the competence, creativity, talent and ability to make pupils fascinated with both the subject of music and the teacher. For these reasons, the teacher should build a new educational paradigm and look at science as a lifelong process, creating attractive and diverse learning environments for students (Damaševičienė, Strakšienė, Urniežius, 2009).

Music in Lithuanian society has been important since ancient times. The musical education of Lithuanian children was basically based on folk singing and its traditions. These traditions have been created and passed on

from generation to generation by simple people, who on most cases didn't know how to read or write, but felt a huge need to sing. It was a strong and solid way of learning. Nowadays, we are also singing a lot, but the current life in the city limits and hinders this process. Singing, especially folk songs, is pushed away by urban life, television, listening to newest pop songs on the radio and many other type of entertainment. Naturally, the songs that accompany the work are also changing: they are either used for repertoire of folklore ensembles, or simply disappear. It can be said that the outcomes of the new global world are more negative than positive. As in the world societies, there are a number of manifestations of the spiritual crisis. The society determines not only the aesthetic consciousness of the personality, the artistic musical thinking, its perception of value, but also the elementary ability to listen and to hear (Rinkevičius, 2005). From an early age, a child begins to get used to a noisy background, which is not an element of musical education but just a brain irritant. The hearing skill became obsolete for people who are living in an active societies. Therefore, the musical educational system in Lithuania is like a tree, with lots of branches which soon to will be blooming.

Jautakytė (1998), and Balčytis, (2012) research has shown that music is not a primary subject taught by primary school teachers and it is often mistakenly attributed to a group of 'non-core' or 'unimportant' subject. It is commonly believed that the most important thing in the primary school is to teach how to read, write and count and if the time allows, what's left could be used to teach how to sing, draw or do some sport. Velička (2001), says that in Lithuanian primary schools the musical education is the weakest part, because of the lack of primary school teachers' musical literacy and quite often of the complete illiteracy. Analyzing the research conducted by many authors, it appears that the situation of musical education in primary schools is not promising: the number of students studying music is decreasing and one of the reasons why this happens in the academic literature is mentioned it is due to the low quality of primary school teachers' musical competence (Hennessy, Rolfe, and Chedzoy, 2001; Glover and Ward, 2004; Holden and Button, 2006; Hennessy, 2000, 2017 etc.). Some teachers teach music with very poor musical hearing, no rhythm sensation, weak singing, etc. That is why it raises many questions on whether primary school teachers are sufficiently competent and fully prepared for music education activities, which is an integral part of pedagogical work.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The aim of the musical subject in Lithuanian primary school is to foster the natural child's musicality, to develop creative and performing abilities, aesthetic judgment, to develop areas of emotions and feelings, intelligence (The General Curriculum of Primary Education, 2008). In order to achieve this, the relevant competencies identified in the General Curriculum of Primary Education, where the art is considered some sort of a language and a means of communication, for which to understand and to be in use, it requires artistic and aesthetic competence. It is therefore understandable that music teachers' musical competence becomes a prerequisite for the program requirements implementation. Any primary teacher who wants to properly teach music must be both an educator and a musician (Antila, 2007). Obviously, in the absence of relevant competencies, it is impossible to teach the content, which is defined in the main subjects of education (Lasauskienė, 2010). All the above facts gave an impulse for this research and for raising the following problem questions: what is musical competence; what is primary school teacher's musical competence, and what musical competencies are necessary for teaching music in primary school. By identifying the latter, the process of musical education could be improved, and the links between the transfer of theoretical knowledge and the development of practical skills could be improved. This would help for students who are currently studying or intending to study, to analyze their existing musical competencies, select the right learning materials, and to look for the opportunities to improve the primary class teachers' training in the future.

## **Purpose of the Research**

The main purpose of of this research is to reveal the peculiarities of musical competence of future primary school teachers. This will help to improve the process of music education and will improve primary school teachers' training programs.

## **Organization of the Research**

In total, the study involved 63 2nd year students, future primary school teachers from Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania. Data were collected in 2014-2017, by answering written questions. The questions were both quantitative and qualitative, requiring detailed answers. The students were asked: Are students interested and why they are interested in music? What musical competences do they think a primary school teacher should have? How do students evaluate their musical competencies?

## **Research Ethics**

All students agreed to participate voluntarily. The confidentiality was kept during research. The research topic, problem, purpose and nature were presented to the participants of the study. The consent of the participants was obtained, as well as the aspect of free decision-making was considered - the respondent's ability to refuse to participate in the survey.

## **Primary School Teachers' Musical Competence**

In Lithuania music lessons in a primary school (school year from 1 to 4) take place twice a week and are conducted by a music teacher (specialist music teacher) or class teacher (generalist music teacher). In general practise around the world, the question of who should lead the music lessons in the primary school is dealt with in two ways: sometimes the music lessons are led by specialists, and sometimes - by primary school teachers with strong musical preparation. According to Balčytis (2012), music classes in primary school should be conducted by music professionals, especially by singing specialists. Likewise, Flash (1993) and Binns (1994) believe that every teacher can teach and should not be inhibited by the absence of this support. Also, it should be noted that a lot of research has been done on this issue (Russell-Bowie, 2009; Garvis, 2013; Bremner, 2013; Hennessy, 2017, King, 2018, etc.), but no common agreement was found. Thus, to successfully carry out a musical pedagogical process, a primary school teacher must be specially prepared and ready to educate pupils for a pursuit of a pedagogical goal in a planned, methodical and desirable way (Rinkevičius, 2005). The importance of primary school teachers' musical competence for teaching success is emphasized by many authors (Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008; et al.). According to the authors, the primary school teacher must have a good knowledge of musical writing, playing with the piano or with any other musical instrument, singing and getting to know the suitable repertoire for the children, knowing the methodology, being communicative and having a good musical hearing. However, a primary school teacher must not only have a good knowledge of the subject, but also a broad and comprehensive musical culture that includes musicality, artistic and pedagogical intuition, pedagogical thinking, and personal pedagogical position (Rinkevičius, 2005). However, according to Rinkevičius (2005), this is not a major obstacle to teach children to sing beautifully, to fully listen to music and to love it. Most importantly, that singing, listening to the music and creative expression would give him or her and to the pupil's creative joy, so that the music lessons would be aesthetic and spiritual satisfaction, not a pointless burden that could be left aside and that time left would be used for "more important" things instead. According to Henley (2017), primary school teachers have to be musically active, have to have related musical experiences in creating music, have to be musical and have to make musical contributions and develop musical expertise. According to Antilla (2007), the main primary school teachers' competencies include: vocal training involving polyphonic exercises; performing rhythmic and melodic tasks with string instruments; communication of the key concepts related to musical elements: rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics, tone and shape – all of which are taught in the context of music playing and singing; vocal and instrumental music repertoire, as well as

different music subjects and genres. It is obvious, that only those teachers who have graduated from a primary music school could meet such criteria. Those teachers who lack the required musical preparation, knowledge or skills should have a music specialist in the classroom helping to assist during the work. But not every music specialist knows the psychology of primary school pupils and current pedagogy.

### Primary School Teachers' Musical Preparation and Professional Development

In Lithuania, in order to work as a teacher, it is necessary to complete the first cycle pedagogical studies and to get a diploma. In the Teacher Training Regulation (2018) it is mentioned that the pedagogical studies are integrated into the first cycle of the study programs in the university or college, where the main purpose is to train teachers and these study programs are registered as pedagogical study programs. The teachers training in Lithuania is one of the most relevant challenges in education policies and is the subject of ongoing discussions. Most scholars (Monkevičienė, 2009; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Henley, 2017, etc.) argue that the teacher training is far from society demands for educators, a lack of teacher training programs, teacher training is oriented to the theoretical knowledge, there is no licensing system, weak relationship between colleges, universities, higher education institutions and the general education schools, the content of studies is poorly oriented to the development of the new skills and competencies, the change of pedagogical paradigm is necessary. Vytautas Magnus University offers a Primary education pedagogy studying program. The curriculum of this Primary education program is very specific and complex, it is focused on developing the student's practical and artistic skills. The majority of future primary school teachers' in Lithuania have studied music only in general education schools. Many do not know how to play any instrument and also are afraid to sing. Their musical abilities are not tested when they join the university. For the preparation of the primary school teacher at Vytautas Magnus University, 10 credits are going for studies for a compulsory music language and didactics during the semester. Piano lessons are also included in the same hours. These studies are, limited if we take into account that after that students can play the piano and other instruments that are used in schools, have the necessary knowledge of music theory, history and music didactics, as well as have mastered the repertoire of singing, playing and listening. In addition, students should learn the necessary practical pedagogical skills and get a realistic and positive understanding of their skills as a music teacher. It is unfortunate, that while studying Primary education, at the university, future teachers who have not previously studied music receive a whole set of fundamental qualities and knowledge that are completely inadequate for a professional primary school teacher.

### Results and Discussion

All prospective primary school teachers studied music in university, three-quarters (79%) were interested in music. Most likely that future teachers will also want to strengthen their music interests at school. Further on, the students had to explain why they were interested in music.

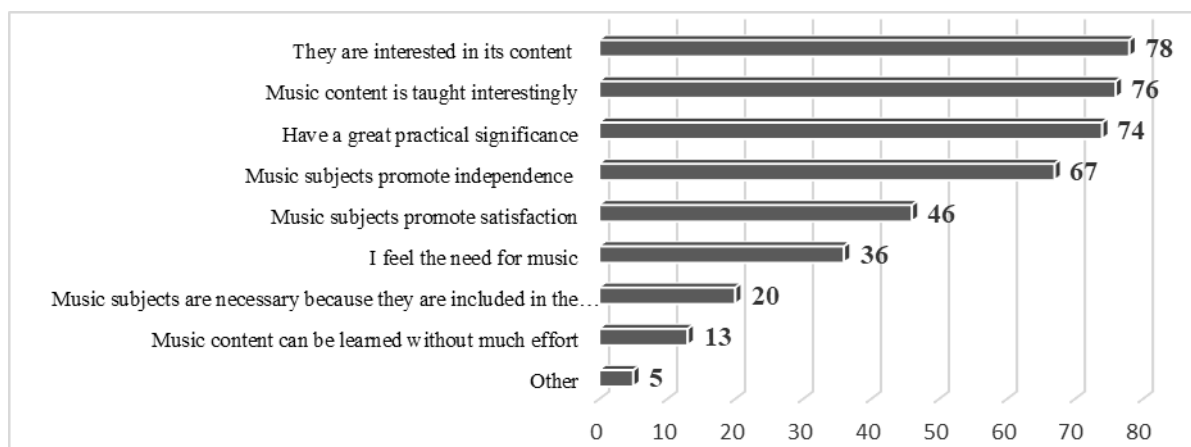


Figure 1. The reason for studying music (%)

Figure 1 shows that more than three-quarters of students think they are interested in music because they are interested in its content, this music content is taught interestingly, and have a great practical significance. More than half of the students believe that music subjects promote independence and satisfaction. Only around one-tenth of students think that the music content can be learned without much effort.

Further on, the aim was to find out what kind of musical competences the students think that the primary school teacher should have. After the content analysis, the main answers about the peculiarities of the primary school teachers' musical competence were identified. Two qualitative categories have been distinguished: musical subject competence and pedagogical psychological competence.

The research data revealed that the primary school teachers need the following musical subject competence (Table 1): to have a musical hearing; to be able to sing, solfed and to hear the rhythm; know the theory of music; to be creative; be able to play with one or two musical instruments; to have the knowledge of music history; to know the specifics of youngster's voices; to know the repertoire of children's songs; to be able to second with the musical instrument for the children's songs; to have knowledge of folklore and the folk songs; to be able to organise extra-curricular events; to use ICT. The subcategory "The ability to create" is most frequently mentioned. According to the respondents, this competence is revealed through the ability to "...apply improvisation..."; "...express yourself in music"; "...Ignite the love of music"; "Music is Creation"; "The teacher should be able to develop, be innovative..."; "Music is the word of expression and freedom in the creative process". Students have also emphasized the importance of ICT ("Teaching ICT is very important to use ICT"; "...educators should be able to use modern technologies").

Table 1. Primary school teachers' musical competence

Category	Subcategory	Supporting statements*
Musical competence	To have musical hearing	"Music teacher must have a musical hearing..."; "...musical hearing is important..."; "...musical hearing is very important...", "...must have a good musical hearing."
	To know how to sign, solfeggio, to hear the rhythm	"to know how to sing..."; "...should be able to sing beautifully"; "...must know the musical notes"; "...must know how to do the rhythm".
	To know music theory	"... know the music theory"; "The teacher must know the music language.", "... must be able to read musical notes"; "It is important to have a theoretical music foundation...".
	The ability to create	"...apply improvisation..."; "Music is the creation"; "The teacher should be able to develop, be innovative..."; "Music is the word of expression and freedom in the creative process"; "...express yourself in music"; "...to ignite the love for music".
	To be able to play with one or two music instruments	"... to be able to play at least with a few musical instruments..."; "...must be able to play at least with one musical instrument"; "...be able to play not just with one instrument".
	To have knowledge about the music theory	"The teacher should know music history...".
	To have knowledge about the specifics of the youngster's voice	"to know the foundation of voice control...".
	To know the songs repertoire for the children	"The music teacher should know many songs for youngsters".
	To be able to second with the music instrument	"...to be able to second songs with the piano or a flute".
	To have knowledge about folklore, to know folk music	"... it is very important to teach traditional songs..."; "...you need to know Lithuanian folk traditions and

	<i>songs"; "...not to forget your traditions".</i>
To do afterschool activities	<i>"...it is very important an informal education and to learning outside of the classroom".</i>
To know how to use ICT	<i>"It is very important to use ICT to teach music"; "...teachers should be able to use modern technology".</i>

\* Supporting statements are used from a written survey, open-ended questions were used, the fragments of the answers from respondents'.

However, more important criteria for musical competence are considered the pedagogical categories of psychological competence. The results of our research confirmed the importance and practical relevance of pedagogical psychological competence, as the data of contextual analysis revealed the following pedagogical psychological competence (Table 2): to know the main principles, methods and means of conducting music lessons, to understand musical possibilities of development of children's talents at various stages of their age; to know the kind of children's musical activities; to know the general principles of developmental and pedagogical psychological fundamentals and to be able to apply it in the musical education; to be creative and to be able to promote the youngsters artistic expressions; to be able to apply music theory practically during the lessons; to have aesthetic taste and artistic sense.

The main competencies are distinguished, which includes a wide range of primary school teachers subjective and pedagogical psychological development. In nowadays context, the primary school music teachers' competencies *becomes relevant to the development of children's music taste, to the understanding of the world of music, to the presentation of spiritual, artistic, musical and cultural values* (in students' opinion), these are the components subjective and pedagogical psychological competence. Summarizing the classifications of the teachers' competencies listed above, it can be said that the same goal of competence development is discussed everywhere - a fully-developed teachers' personality.

Table 2. Primary school teachers' pedagogical psychological competence

Category	Subcategory	Supporting statements
Pedagogical psychological competence	To know the principles, methods and tools of the music lesson	<i>"The music teacher has to know the main questions as soon as he/she comes to the classroom..."; "...should have music knowledge on how to lead the lessons"; "...music lessons require preparation"; "...to be able to differentiate tasks..."; "A teacher who teaches music must have an understanding of music, be interested in it, and teach it not only from the textbooks."</i>
	To understand the musical ability of child development at various stages of their lives	<i>"...should not divide children based on their abilities, looks, results"; "...must know the psychology of the pupils' age", "...to give tasks based on pupils' abilities and skills "; "... every student is different, unique and it is very important to see it".</i>
	To know a child's musical activities	<i>"...should know what kind of music activities should be during the lesson, how to apply, to execute and to present it"; "...to know different musical activities".</i>
	To understand the basics of the developmental and pedagogical psychological foundations	<i>"Music lessons must meet the lesson requirements." "Communication should be warm and friendly"; "Should be able to motivate, engage students in music learning"; "...the ability to understand students..."; "Teacher must promote collaboration between children and their parents"; "...to create an environment that will encourage learning music"; "Should be able to control the class..."; "... should know the peculiarities of communication with children".</i>
	To be able to promote youngsters' artistic self-	<i>"The teacher must be creative in order to make each lesson interesting"; "Every music lesson should be different and</i>

expression	<i>unique"; "the ability to encourage students to play music".</i>
To be able to use music theory practically	<i>"The theory and practice of music organization ...".</i>
To have an aesthetic taste and artistic sense	<i>"It is very important to know that our children are our future, we have to care for them, they depend on us, they will grow up and protect the welfare of Lithuania".</i>

In order to determine the peculiarities of primary school teachers' musical competence, students were asked to assess their own musical competence (Table 3). More than half of the respondents marked as, excellent' their knowledge on how to use ICT (51%), marked as, excellent' their knowledge on the basis of the development and pedagogical psychological foundations (58%), marked as, excellent' the knowledge on the potential of the child's musical abilities and their development at various stages of their life (48%), marked as, excellent' their knowledge on the main types of children's musical activities (46%). One-third of 30% of the students have attended music schools or special music groups. Therefore, more than a third of students appreciate their singing, solfeggio and rhythmic competences (36%). A similar number of students believe that they have excellent music hearing (30%), excellent knowledge on their repertoire of the children's songs (32%) and encourage the artistic pupils' self-expression (32%). However, according to the students, music theory (10%) and the specifics of the children's voices (18%) are not enough for them; children's folklore (25%), music didactics (32%). Weak skills to be accompanied with a musical instrument (9%), to play with one or two musical instruments (28%).

Table 3. Future primary school teachers' self-assessment in their musical competence (%)

Competency		Excellent	Very good	Good	Insufficient
Musical competence	I have musical hearing	30	32	33	5
	I know how to sing, solfeggio and rhythm sensation	36	33	25	6
	I know music theory	10	32	46	12
	I am creative	38	35	24	3
	I know how to play with one or two music instruments	28	32	35	5
	I have the knowledge in music history	25	37	38	0
	I understand the specifics about the children's voice	18	35	45	2
	I know the repertoire of the songs	32	34	32	2
	I know how to accompany with music instrument to the children's songs	9	28	48	15
	I have the knowledge in the folklore and I know folks' songs	18	33	38	11
I know how to organise after-class activities	23	33	38	6	

	I know how to use ICT	51	45	4	0
Pedagogical psychological competence	I know the school children's musical development principles, methods and tools	32	34	32	2
	I understand the potential of the child's musical abilities and their development at various stages of their life	48	44	8	0
	I know the main types of musical activities	46	42	12	0
	I know the basics of the developmental and pedagogical psychological foundations	58	42	0	0
	I know how to excel pupil's artistic self-expression	32	38	30	0
	I know how to use the music theory in practise	25	37	38	0

Music education at the university is adapted for those who have already studied in music schools or in special music groups and already are able to play or sing. Thus, for students who have not previously studied music, it is difficult to learn in a short time. It would be best to have the musicians with the required musical and pedagogical competence. However, unfortunately, it won't be implemented that quickly. Therefore, a compromise should be sought to address this problem. Therefore, it is necessary to improve primary school teachers' musical training.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The analysis of the scientific literature has revealed that the primary competence of primary school teachers is a good knowledge of the music subject, the ability to act, determined by knowledge, skills, attitudes, personality traits and values. The analysis of the sources from music pedagogy authors has shown that music education in primary school needs to be improved.

The research data from qualitative content analysis have highlighted the peculiarities of musical and pedagogical psychological competencies of primary school teachers. According to the respondents opinion, a primary school teacher should have a musical hearing; to be able to sing; to know how to solfeggio; to feel rhythm; to know music theory; to be creative; to be able to play with one or two musical instruments; to have knowledge of music history; to know the specifics of the children's voices; to know the repertoire of children's songs; to be able to second with a musical instrument for children's songs; have knowledge of the folklore; be able to organize extra-curricular activities; to use ICT. Also, according to the respondents, it is important to know the basic principles, methods and tools of organising music lessons; to understand the development of the children's musical abilities; to know the types of children's musical activities; to be creative and to be able to promote the pupil's artistic self-expression; to have aesthetic taste and artistic sense.

The data from the quantitative study analysis revealed that the future primary school teachers are interested in the music subjects because they are taught interestingly, interested in its content, have great practical significance and encouraged for self-search. Research data showed the following related peculiarities: future primary school teachers' insufficient musical competences; their lack of knowledge in methods of teaching music, lack of music history and theory, as well as lack of instrumental playing skills; low musical preparedness of the graduates entering the Primary education specialty due to lack of musical knowledge gained at secondary schools and too little of musical skills.



In order to improve the primary education curriculum, it would be worth differentiating teaching and forming different groups based on skills; the volume of the study programs in music pedagogy should be considerably higher; to check students' musical skills when entering the university; the primary school teachers' training should be developed in such a way that any primary school teacher who has studied music could complete the Primary Education Framework Program.

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