

# Formative Impacts on Music Education in Croatian Primary Schools

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**Abstract**— This paper provides an overview of the influences that have shaped music education in Croatian primary schools, from the introduction of music as a compulsory subject in the mid-19th century to the present day. Music became a mandatory subject in primary schools based on the ideas of prominent educators from earlier periods (such as Pestalozzi and Rousseau) and the philanthropic pedagogy of the 18th century, with the foundation in singing (primarily folk songs). Music literacy was incorporated into the curriculum in the 1930s which was significantly later than in more developed European countries. After World War II, additional activities such as instrumental performance, listening, musical creativity, and musicological content in general were included in music education. By the end of the 20th century, the curriculum had become overcrowded with a variety of activities, and the limited class hours and excessive teacher workload have made it rather unrealistic and unfeasible. The 21st century saw changes marked by the adoption of European standards. In 2006, a curriculum was introduced based on an open model in which listening to music was established as the core activity of music education. The most recent curriculum, introduced in 2019, represents another step towards the modernization of music education, focusing on student competencies and achievements rather than content, as was previously the case. Emphasis is thus placed on individual student development and a creativity-oriented approaches.

**Index Terms:** music education, curriculum, primary school, music pedagogy.

## I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Music education in Croatian primary schools has a long and fascinating history. It has undergone numerous changes that reflect the social, political, cultural, and music-pedagogical contexts of specific periods. The aim of this paper is to present the key stages in the development of music education, highlight the changes in approaches and content throughout history, and analyze the influences of various social contexts, since a number of factors impact the goals, philosophy, and conception of music education. The analysis is based on a review of school curricula, as well as the perspectives and reflections held by prominent music educators and authors. Their insights help us understand the developmental trajectory of music education during certain periods. Understanding the historical development and identifying the influences can help critically assess the current situation, suggest improvements, and identify developmental patterns to predict future trends. To comprehend contemporary music education, it is necessary familiarize oneself with its historical evolution. Among the existing research on the development of music education, we highlight the brief overviews of teaching plans provided by P. Rojko in the book *Metodics of music education. Theoretical and thematic aspects* from 1996, and V. Svalina in *Music curriculum and teachers' competences for teaching music* from 2015, with several other authors who have partially addressed this topic in their works. We hope that this overview will be valuable to those studying music pedagogy, music education, the history of music education, and the history of Croatian and European schooling.

## II. XIX CENTURY

In the 19th century, the territory of Croatia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This period was marked by the implementation of Enlightenment ideas aimed at the modernization and democratization of education, with the state assuming responsibility for the institutionalization of general schooling. Music was included among the compulsory subjects in primary education, as outlined in the *Systema scholarum elementarium* document of 1845. During the 19th century, music education was conducted exclusively through singing activities. The idea of singing as the foundation of music instruction is rooted in earlier centuries, and it was particularly influenced by prominent educators such as J. H. Pestalozzi (1746-1827), who believed that singing was especially important for the development of a child's character, and J. J. Rousseau (1712-1778), who advocated that children should actively engage in music-making before being introduced to music theory [1], [2]. By the end of the 19th century, the first Croatian school law was enacted in 1874, which established the philosophy of music education based on the use of folk songs. This reflects the influence of 18th-century philanthropic pedagogy, which focused on individual development and was instrumental in replacing church music with folk songs, arguing for the cultivation, preservation, and strengthening of national consciousness. The Croatian revival movement, which advocated for these ideas throughout the 19th century, including the promotion of the Croatian language in public use, also influenced the emphasis on folk songs as the foundation of music education. Prominent Croatian music

educators of this period, particularly Franjo Kuhač (1834-1911) and Vjenceslav Novak (1859-1905), emphasized the importance of folk songs in music education in their writings. Moreover, Novak went a step further, critically addressing the music education that was limited to singing and expressing the need to redefine the aims and objectives of music teaching. He believed that the goal of music education should be the awakening and strengthening of noble-like feelings and the gradual development of musical abilities. In fact, he suggested that singing could also serve other purposes [3]. Music education in Croatia during the 19th and early 20th centuries lagged behind European developments for it was primarily limited to singing (mostly) folk songs, while the inclusion of other elements in music education was to be realized only in subsequent periods, mainly focusing on musical literacy of students.

### III. XX CENTURY

The socio-political changes that occurred after the end of World War I had significant impacts on education and music instruction. From 1918, Croatia became part of the newly formed State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, which paid little attention to the education system and inherited existing organizational structures and legal foundations. Such policies led to stagnation in various areas, including education [4]. Until the enactment of the so-called *Zakon o narodnim školama* (Law on Public Schools) in 1929, the education system was regulated by decrees from the 19th century. According to the newly-introduced law, the primary role of schools was to foster education in a state spirit that had a pro-Yugoslav orientation [5]. In addition to ideological influences, the impact of the music education profession was also evident, i.e., the 1937 curriculum introduced the teaching of notation-based singing that now started from the first grade, whereas in earlier curricula, learning notation was reserved for higher levels of education [6]. Music literacy, which had been introduced in Western European schools as early as the 19th century, finally entered Croatian schools. The need for music literacy among students was advocated by the previously mentioned J. J. Rousseau, as well as by the German pedagogue H. Kretzschmar (1848-1924).

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, numerous reformist pedagogical movements which opposed traditionalist schooling and formal pedagogy emerged in Europe, influencing both the philosophy and conception of music education. The so-called *Radna škola* (Working School) became the official pedagogical direction in the 1930s, albeit influenced by the politics and ideology of the state at the time [7]. By following these trends, music education in general primary schools during this period was closely aligned with the principles of the new Working School which emphasized independent student work and the creativity of student expression. The influence of the Working School's ideas was evident in the focus on

mastering specific techniques in music education, such as vocal and instrumental skills [2]. While singing remained the central focus and foundation of music education, it was deemed insufficient to meet all the expectations of music instruction. In this context, the initiative *Pokret za umjetnički odgoj* (Movement for Artistic Education) also deserves mention, for it prioritized the experience of the artwork. Art was now positioned at the center of systematic education, with aesthetic education becoming a guiding principle, and with artistic values becoming emphasized across all subjects [1]. The influence of this movement would become more prominent in the period after World War II, as the current focus remained on mastering vocal skills and acquiring music literacy for this purpose. Furthermore, building upon the Movement for Artistic Education, the *Jugendbewegung* (Youth Movement) oriented itself on folk songs. Folk songs and the development of music literacy were central to the work of Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967), who was actively engaged in creating a new music education program, as well as Carl Orff (1895–1982), who emphasized active student participation, and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950), whose method was based on rhythm, movement, and improvisation. While their concepts did not become fully independent within music education in Croatia, certain elements were integrated into the curriculum, particularly in the period after World War II [8]. In fact, other teaching areas, such as musical creativity and instrumental performance, were incorporated into music education after World War II (from 1958 onwards) under the influence of Orff's ideas, which emphasized active student participation in music-making. In the context of the educational continuum, music education was structured into several phases: activities before the recognition of symbols (notation); mastery of relative notation; exercise in absolute (fixed-do) notation; the study of musical culture; training of practical methodologists; and music education for adult amateurs. The first three phases pertain to primary education, focusing on music-making prior to the knowledge of notation and the mastery of notation [9], in accordance with the music-education ideas from the 19th century.

Prominent music educators in the period between the two World Wars confirm that music literacy was introduced as an important element in music education. For example, Stjepan Basariček (1848–1918) emphasized the importance of singing when it comes to the emotional and aesthetic development of the child and supported learning to sing from notation. Similarly, Zlatko Grgošević (1900–1978), while not extensively engaging with the philosophy of the subject, introduced new methods aimed at improving the effectiveness of music instruction. Zlatko Špoljar (1892–1981), who was a strong proponent of the Working School approach, advocated for singing “by ear” while opposing monotonous singing drills and supporting the principles of contemporary pedagogy, which take into account children's

preferences and needs with regards to emphasizing creativity in student expression [10].

After the end of World War II, Croatia became part of the new socialist Yugoslavia. Such socio-political changes influenced the development of the education system, leading to the gradual establishment of compulsory eight-year primary education, which was fully implemented by the late 1950s. Starting from 1958, the subject was renamed into *Muzički odgoj* (Musical Education), and under the influence of the previously mentioned prominent music educators and pedagogical movements, other teaching areas, such as music listening and instrumental performance, were incorporated into it. In this context, it is also important to highlight the impact of the prevailing ideology, which aimed to use music education to enhance the literacy of youth from working-class families, with the goal of creating a new socialist system of music audiences and making music a cultural necessity for every socialist individual [11]. Despite ideological meddling in music education, music pedagogy continued to present its own ideas, which were implemented in new curricula. One such example is Joža Požgaj (1914–1984), who in his book *Metodika muzičke nastave* (Methodology of Music Teaching) from 1950, outlined the goals and objectives of music education. He stated that the aim of music education was to develop students' ability to experience and express music, while the objectives to achieve this aim would include developing students' musical abilities and encouraging active listening to music to cultivate musical hearing. Here, Požgaj referred to the development of sensitivity to auditory imagery and rhythm and their connection with musical notation. It was deemed important for music education to develop students' musical memory, as well as to acquire specific knowledge in music theory. Singing was essential to Požgaj, and – in addition to mastering intonation and rhythm for independent sight-singing – he also emphasized the aesthetic dimension of singing, whereby the objective would be to cultivate students as lovers and connoisseurs of musical art. He further highlighted the significance of children's musical creativity, which was later incorporated into the curriculum as a separate teaching area [12]. According to the 1960 curriculum, music classes were held three times a week, each session lasting thirty minutes, in the first four grades, and twice a week in the subsequent four grades, thus reflecting a significant increase in instructional hours compared to previous periods. The curriculum also emphasized the development of individual traits and the encouragement of the child's overall development. The specified curriculum included the following areas: singing, playing instruments, listening, creativity, music literacy, and musicological content. The greatest emphasis was placed on music literacy in the higher grades, while the other areas were mostly described in a declarative manner [2], [13]. In 1972, the subject was renamed *Glazbeni odgoj* (Music Education), with the stated

goal of developing students' interest in, and need for listening to, valuable musical works. This would also enable them, within the limits of average children's abilities, to engage in independent music-making. Effectively, this involved singing by ear in the first three grades and music literacy from the fourth to the sixth grades, while in the final two grades of primary school, the focus shifted to musicological content [2], [14]. The 1984 curriculum introduced a further change in the subject's name to *Glazbena kultura* (Music Culture), which has still remained as the name of the subject to this day. There were no significant conceptual changes, but the curriculum outlined tasks related to singing, playing instruments, and listening to music, along with an emphasis on understanding traditional folk music. The ideological aspect was reflected in the efforts of acquainting students with the most important composers, performers, and institutions in Croatia and other Yugoslav republics, thereby contributing to the strengthening of fraternity, unity, and the development of patriotism. Music education is intended to cultivate active listeners and music enthusiasts, and to develop students' performance skills in singing and playing instruments, while students themselves should become familiar with various types of musical expression, elements of music literacy, expressive means of music, and its styles. All forms of music instruction, especially choral singing and other vocal and instrumental ensembles, should foster a sense of collective music-making. Finally, the teaching of music culture should encourage, develop, and nurture the capabilities of children's musical expression and creativity [15].

#### IV. XXI CENTURY

In the early 1990s, Croatia declared independence, fundamentally altering the socio-political landscape once again and, as in previous periods, these changes impacted the development of the educational system. Initially, there was a de-ideologization of curricula, though the subject's conceptual framework and philosophy remained unchanged. Music education faced a reduction in contact hours to just one lesson per week, which rendered the curriculum's stated goals and objectives unachievable within such limited time. This curriculum, labeled as a "jack-of-all-trades" approach, included music literacy, singing by ear, playing instruments, listening, music creation, and learning about music. The conceptualization of the subject was based on the logic of the discipline in general rather than on the goals of music education, and the aforementioned reduction in hours made such efforts rather unrealistic and unattainable [2]. This situation persisted in music education until the introduction of the Croatian National Educational Standard (CNES) in 2006. CNES centered on the student's musical activities, specifically singing, playing, and listening, where music was "experienced and learned on the spot, enriching the student's emotional world and sharpening their artistic sensibility."

The objective of music education was now formulated as introducing students to music culture [16]. The most significant innovation introduced by the Croatian National Educational Standard (CNES) is the openness of the curriculum. Such open model includes a fundamental component which focuses on listening to, and engaging with, music, along with other activities that may be incorporated into the lessons depending on the preferences of both teachers and students [17]. The new curriculum aims to create opportunities for genuine musical experiences in school settings, whether through intensive listening and engagement, singing, or, where possible, playing instruments. Freed from the obligation to cover a little bit of everything, teachers and students can now dedicate themselves to quality singing, and in some cases, instrumental playing [18]. Since 2006, music education in Croatia has been based on two principles: the psychological (students engage in activities they enjoy and find fulfilling) and the cultural-aesthetic (engaging in activities that foster aesthetic development). This change represented a significant step toward modernizing music education in Croatia, with the new model emphasizing active music-making by students, and a shift towards implementing an integrative model that connects different learning units across subjects. A similar approach underlies the current music curriculum introduced in 2019, which brought about changes in the philosophy of music education. The primary feature of this approach is its focus on student competencies and achievements (outcomes), rather than content, as was the case previously. Music education enhances and promotes the aesthetic development of students, fosters their creativity, musical abilities, and interests, and raises awareness of preserving historical and cultural heritage while preparing students for life in a multicultural world. In music classes, students encounter and experience music from various genres, styles, and origins [19]. The teaching and learning of Music Culture align with contemporary scientific insights and trends, emphasizing openness and adaptability in the learning and teaching process, didactic and methodological pluralism, inquiry-based, project-based, and individualized learning, but also the necessity of incorporating information and communication technology. The focus in classes is on the student's encounter with music, with all other verbal information being derived from this experience. Modern music education also includes elements of civic and intercultural education. The 2019 curriculum underscores the importance of elective and optional courses, as well as extracurricular and out-of-school activities, through which students can expand their skills, knowledge, and attitudes while simultaneously developing their interests and achieving substantial artistic growth and development [19]. Today's music education in Croatian primary schools is based on four principles: (1) Psychological Principle – Learning and teaching music fulfills students' need for creative

expression, meaning that through participation in musical activities, students emotionally respond to music and strengthen their personal connection with it; (2) Cultural-Aesthetic Principle – Through either direct or indirect encounters with musical works, students develop musical taste, acquire criteria for evaluating music, and cultivate the ability to express their own views on music; (3) Principle of Synchronicity – The focus is on music observed from all aspects, rather than exclusively from a historical perspective; (4) Principle of Interculturality – By exploring the music of their own culture and the music of the world, students develop an awareness of diverse but equally valuable individuals, nations, cultures, religions, and customs [19]. Furthermore, the organization of music instruction and the position of the subject Music Culture within the curriculum are derived from the inherent nature of music, which is characterized as follows: (1) Open – Learning and teaching are adapted to the interests and abilities of students, as well as the preferences of teachers, thus allowing for a high degree of freedom in selecting and shaping educational content, applying diverse learning and teaching strategies and methods, and employing various approaches to assessment; (2) Integrative – The domains and educational outcomes of the subject are interconnected and mutually reinforcing; (3) Interdisciplinary – There is a strong connection with other fields within the arts, with numerous potential intercorrelations with other subjects, areas, and cross-curricular themes that are welcomed [19]. Finally, the educational objectives of learning and teaching music can be summarized as follows: (a) To facilitate the social-emotional development of all students, including those who are gifted and those with learning difficulties.; (b) To encourage the development of musical abilities in all students according to their individual capacities; (c) To motivate students to actively engage with music and participate in the cultural life of their community; (d) To introduce students to musical art through high-quality and representative works from various origins, styles, and genres; (e) To foster the development of musical taste and critical thinking; (f) To promote an understanding of the interdisciplinary characteristics and the potential of music; (g) To raise awareness of the value of regional, national, and European cultural heritage within the context of global culture; (h) To develop cultural understanding and intercultural competencies by fostering a relationship with one's own musical culture along with an open approach to other musical traditions [19]. In this context, the new curriculum for music education establishes domains, or areas of instructional organization, educational outcomes, as well as approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment [20]. The music education in Croatia nowadays aligns with contemporary European trends in the field of music pedagogy. In Croatian music classes, as in many European countries, students engage in singing, listening to music, playing instruments, and creating music, often

following the model of active music-making or an integrative teaching approach [21]. Key themes that are currently relevant and will doubtlessly shape the future development of music education include: inclusivity in music education, which aims to enable all students, regardless of their abilities, to participate in musical activities; interdisciplinarity, which seeks to establish a connection between music and other subjects and disciplines; and the use of modern technologies in teaching, the primary goal of which is to ultimately improve the educational process.

## V. CONCLUSION

Since its introduction as a mandatory subject in the primary school curriculum, music education in Croatia has undergone significant development, evolving from traditional approaches to contemporary methods. Various influences have shaped music education, which in earlier periods were equally ideological as they were pedagogical. During the 19th century, music classes were based on folk songs, with singing being the only activity included in the curriculum. Gradually, influenced by European pedagogical movements and music-educational ideas, music literacy was introduced into the curriculum, though it arrived in Croatia several decades later than in the rest of Europe, i.e., in the interwar period. In the post-World War II period, alongside the advancement of music-pedagogical thought and technological development, additional areas such as music listening, playing instruments, music creation, and musicological content were incorporated into the curriculum. Such educational expansion in music classes soon resulted in a curriculum overloaded with diverse content, which, given the limited class hours, became unrealistic and unfeasible. In the 21st century, music education in Croatia has undergone significant modernization, with the curriculum introducing an open model of instruction in 2006, where music listening became the core activity, and the focus shifted towards active music-making by students, easing the workload for both students and teachers. Music literacy was phased out, as it was no longer deemed the sole means of engaging students with music. The current curriculum, introduced in 2019, places a particular emphasis on student competencies and outcomes as opposed to the content-driven approach that was previously in place. Today, music education in Croatian primary schools aligns with the latest pedagogical insights and European standards, aiming to develop creativity, social skills, and individual musical abilities. Music instruction is now conducted through various activities, including singing, listening to music, playing instruments, musical games, and musical creativity [22]. Emphasis now resides on active learning, diverse content, and using information and communication technology in music classes.

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