

Rūta Girdzijauskienė, Lorraine O'Connell, Karla Stolle (Eds.)

Mapping School Music Education

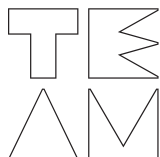
Across European Landscapes



Rūta Girdzijauskienė, Lorraine O'Connell, Karla Stolle (eds.)

Mapping School Music Education

Across European Landscapes



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Mapping School Music Education Across European Landscapes **European Perspectives on Music Education 15**

edited by Rūta Girdzijauskienė, Lorraine O'Connell & Karla Louisa Stolle

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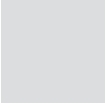
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Table of Contents

Rūta Girdzijauskienė, Lorraine O'Connell & Karla Louisa Stolle Exploring the Polyphonic Landscape of School Music Education in Europe	7
Isolde Malmberg (Austria) Music Education in Schools in Austria: A Land of Music on the Path of Modernisation	11
Thomas De Baets, Bert Appermont, Ann-Sophie De Praitere, Amber Deckers, Thomas Geudens, Wiebe Koopal & Mathias Moors (Belgium) 'Under Pressure': Music's Place in Flemish Primary and Secondary Schools	27
Jelena Martinović-Bogojević (Montenegro) & Nermin Ploskić (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Shared Yugoslav Origins and Contemporary Pathways of Music Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro	39
Blaženka Bačlija Sušić, Nikola Sebastian Jambrošić & Marko Čupić (Croatia) Music Education in Croatia: Between National Tradition, Curriculum Reform, and Specialised Schooling	53
Natassa Economidou Stavrou & Nopi Nicolaou Telemachou (Cyprus) Music Education in Cypriot Schools: Current Status, Challenges, and Opportunities	63
Marek Sedláček & Ondřej Musil (Czech Republic) From Heritage to Horizon: Czech Music Education Through the Lens of Historical Development, Current Trends, and Future Challenges	75
Kadi Kaja, Urve Läänemets & Kristi Kiilu (Estonia) From Tradition to Innovation: Music Education in Estonia	85

Marja-Leena Juntunen (Finland) Diversity, Participation, and Personal Relationship with Music: Core Principles of Nationally Steered Music Education in Finnish Schools	97
Karla Louisa Stolle & Annette Ziegenmeyer (Germany) Unity in Diversity? Music Education Across Germany's Sixteen Federal States	107
Elissavet Perakaki, Anthoula Koliadi-Tiliakou, Dimitra Koniari & Josephine Papalamprou (Greece) Music in Greek (Hellenic) Public Schools: From Early Foundations to Contemporary Practices	123
Andrea Asztalos (Hungary) Between Tradition and Transformation: Music Education in Hungary	135
Rūta Girdzijauskienė (Lithuania) Music Education in Lithuania as a Living Cultural Practice	145
Demosthenes Dimitrakoulakos (Luxembourg) A Multilingual and Cross-Cultural Landscape of Music Education in Luxembourg	157
Jens Knigge & Kirsti Nørstebø (Norway) Music Education in Norwegian Schools	169
Aleksandra Stanković & Milena Petrović (Serbia) Music Education in Serbia: Historical Development and Contemporary Challenges	185
Martina Krušinská & Mária Strenáčiková (Slovakia) The Landscape of Music Education in Slovakia	197
Branka Rotar Pance (Slovenia) The Artistry and Diversity of School Music in Slovenia	207

Laia Viladot & Albert Casals (Spain)	
The Recipe for Music in Catalan Schools: Open Curriculum, School Autonomy, and Specialist Teachers	219
Anna Houmann, Erik Lundahl & Lina Van Dooren (Sweden)	
Music Education in Sweden: Creativity within a Decentralised System	231
Sabine Chatelain, Ruth Frischknecht & Dieter Ringli (Switzerland)	
Harmonising Diversity: School Music Education in Multilingual Switzerland	243
Sezen Özeke & Hatice Çeliktaş (Türkiye)	
School Music Education in Türkiye: Policies, Practices, and Pathways	255
The Editors	267
The Authors	268



Rūta Girdzijauskienė,
Lorraine O'Connell & Karla Louisa Stolle

Exploring the Polyphonic Landscape of School Music Education in Europe

Music education in Europe presents as a diverse and layered educational landscape as opposed to a single, coherent terrain. As such, it is best understood through the interplay of cultural traditions, institutional frameworks, and educational experiences, rather than through a uniform structural lens. Across the continent, school music is informed by different traditions and educational logics, including choral practices, instrumental training, creative and digital approaches, and local, folk, and popular repertoires. These approaches coexist within and across national education systems, grounded in distinct cultural values, political priorities, and long-standing educational trajectories. This diversity is at times vibrant and expansive; at others, it is marked by fragility or marginalisation, as music competes for space, time, and recognition within compulsory schooling. Rather than converging towards a unified model, European school music education is continuously negotiated within specific cultural and educational contexts. This results in a shifting terrain whose contours are traced through structures of governance, pedagogical realities, and lived educational experience.

This book captures school music education in Europe at a particularly dynamic moment. Across the continent, long-established traditions – often rooted in particular notions of musical canon, national culture, and general education – are encountering significant transformation. Digitalisation, artificial intelligence, inclusion, democracy, sustainability, and increasingly diverse classrooms are reshaping what counts as music, how it is learned, and who is qualified to teach it. At the same time, music education is confronted with structural pressures, including curriculum reforms, accountability regimes, challenges in teacher education, and uneven political support. Europe's music classrooms are thus shaped by the simultaneous presence of continuity and change, heritage and innovation – forces that coexist in a dynamic and at times uneasy balance. Understanding school

music education in Europe requires a perspective that goes beyond national borders, since it cannot be adequately brought into view through isolated national accounts alone. Educational systems evolve in dialogue with shared historical legacies, policy discourses, and transnational agendas. A broader European panorama thus allows both common concerns and context-specific responses to become visible and provides a necessary frame for understanding how local practices are shaped in relation to wider social, cultural, and political developments.

The point of departure for this volume is the Erasmus+-funded project *TEAM – Teacher Education Academy for Music: Future-Making, Mobility and Networking in Europe*¹. *TEAM* brings together 13 partner institutions, a broad network of associated partners and numerous NGOs from across Europe, all united by a shared commitment to strengthening both music teacher education and school music education. By fostering sustained dialogue across borders, the project creates spaces in which national experiences can be examined in relation to one another rather than in isolation. In this sense, the volume builds on and extends earlier European research initiatives in the field, most notably the *meNet* project, which offered one of the first systematic overviews of music education across Europe.² Re-visiting this terrain today is particularly timely, as educational priorities, societal conditions, and musical practices have undergone substantial change over the past two decades, calling for renewed comparative reflection and updated perspectives.

To facilitate dialogue and comparability, all chapters follow a shared structural framework. Each contribution situates music education in its historical and cultural contexts, examines music in schools (including organisational structures, time allocation, extracurricular activities, teachers, and resources), analyses music curricula and assessment, and reflects on current trends, challenges, and research. This common structure establishes a basis for comparison while allowing authors to foreground issues that are particularly significant within their own national or regional contexts.

Structural overviews provide an essential point of orientation, but they are not sufficient on their own. While formal descriptions can outline systems and frameworks, they cannot fully capture how these are interpreted, negotiated, or sometimes resisted in everyday educational practice. Music education does not exist solely in policy documents; it is enacted in classrooms, rehearsal spaces, teacher education institutions, and professional discourses. This volume therefore moves beyond structural description towards interpretative understanding, situating school music education within its historical, cultural, and educational contexts.

¹ <https://teacher-academy-music.eu/>

² More information about *meNet* can be found in the publication of Rodríguez Quiles y García, J. A., & Dogani, K. (2011) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235935364_Music_in_schools_across_Europe_analysis_interpretation_and_guidelines_for_music_education_in_the_framework_of_the_European_Union

Building on this stance, we, the editors, invite readers to engage with these chapters, not as isolated national reports or components of a linear comparison, but as interconnected perspectives within a broader European conversation. Attention is directed to how the historical, cultural, and political contexts discussed (by the authors) shape both the possibilities and the constraints of music education in schools, and to how formal structures are translated into everyday practice. The chapters foreground teachers' professional agency, patterns of continuity and disruption within educational traditions, and the often subtle tensions between disciplinary integrity and interdisciplinary demands. Equally, they illuminate what is less visible, including gaps or 'silences' in time allocation, disparities in accessing music learning opportunities, and the fragile positioning of music within broader educational priorities.

The chapters are authored by national representatives with first-hand knowledge of their respective educational contexts. Some were written by individual experts; others emerged from collaborative work within national teams. This plurality of authorship reflects both practical realities and a deliberate effort to represent each national situation as accurately and responsibly as possible. The resulting insights are particularly valuable because they combine structural knowledge with situated professional experience.

Collectively, the chapters map a richly textured European soundscape. They document systems under pressure, such as contexts where music is increasingly absorbed into interdisciplinary arts subjects, alongside systems sustained by strong parallel institutions such as municipal or part-time music schools. They highlight tensions between specialist and generalist teaching, between curricular ambition and limited timetabled allocation, and between tradition and innovation. At the same time, the contributions showcase creative responses to contemporary challenges, including curriculum renewal, practitioner research, digital experimentation, and community-based approaches. Across all contexts, a shared concern emerges: how can music education remain educationally meaningful and socially relevant in rapidly changing conditions?

This book is intended for music education researchers, teacher educators, practising teachers, students, and policymakers. It may serve as a reference point for comparative research, a resource for teacher education programmes, and a contextual guide for curriculum development and educational reform. By bringing together diverse national perspectives within a single volume, the book aims to support informed dialogue across borders and professional communities, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the field, identifying emerging trends, and inspiring thoughtful future developments in school music education.

The chapters that follow do not propose a single European model of music education. Rather, they invite readers to listen attentively to tensions, resonances, and dissonances that emerge across contexts, and to reflect on what these might mean for the future of music education in schools. Taken together, the contributions invite us to

step inside the European music education landscape: to hear its sounds more closely, to question its boundaries, and to imagine new trajectories. In doing so, this book presents music education in Europe not as a fixed arrangement to be preserved, but as a dynamic cultural and educational practice, one that is continually renegotiated in a world very much in transition.

We wish to recognise the contributing authors and their research teams for their scholarly commitment and deep engagement with their national contexts. Their sustained work and careful analysis made it possible to develop chapters that move beyond description towards thoughtful and contextually grounded interpretations. In several countries, national experts supported this process by sharing information, offering contextual insights, and commenting on draft versions, thereby contributing to the accuracy and breadth of the chapters. The reviewers read the manuscript from an international perspective, helping to clarify national specificities and strengthen the overall coherence of the book. Through this combined effort, the volume has taken shape as a coherent and interconnected whole, offering a balanced perspective on contemporary music education across diverse national contexts.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the *TEAM* project, whose collaborative framework created the structural and intellectual conditions for this publication to take shape. Through sustained dialogue, comparative inquiry, and ongoing exchange, the project fostered a shared space for reflection and knowledge development. The collective expertise and professional engagement within this framework laid the foundation for the multifaceted picture of school music education presented in this volume. We hope that readers will recognise the distinctive qualities of each national context and find inspiration in the diverse perspectives that continue to place music at the heart of holistic education.

Isolde Malmberg

Music Education in Schools in Austria

A Land of Music on the Path of Modernisation

Abstract

This chapter examines music education in Austrian schools against the backdrop of Austria's strong self-concept as a 'country of music'. It outlines historical, cultural, and institutional foundations that continue to shape school music education, while situating current developments within ongoing educational reforms toward competency-based, inclusive curricula. The chapter analyses structures across primary and secondary education, interactions between schools and Austria's extensive extracurricular music sector, and material and human resources. Particular attention is given to curriculum reform, teacher education, and persistent challenges such as teacher shortages, equity, digitalisation, and inclusion. The chapter concludes by identifying future-oriented perspectives for strengthening music education within Austria's distinctive cultural ecosystem.

Austria's Self-Concept of Being a Country of Music

Austria is a small country in the heart of Europe. It is often referred to as a country of music, both from the outside and from within. What does it mean for a country's school music education if the country defines itself strongly through music, and how does it show? The following chapter on music education in Austria's schools is an attempt to write with the necessary introspection as an Austrian music educator, teacher educator and researcher, while still highlighting what from the outside might be seen as specific to Austria.

This chapter starts with the music-historical context and institutional and educational foundations, because this offers insightful features to understanding what continues

to influence music education today. Music education in Austria is deeply shaped by the country's cultural heritage as well as an ongoing educational reform towards an inclusive, competency-based model. Over the past fifty years, historical, cultural, and social developments have refined school music, balancing tradition with modern pedagogical aims. While challenges such as teacher shortages persist, the system continues to align school curricula with the country's vibrant cultural life.

Background: From Foundations to Contemporary School Music Education

Austria's international reputation as a musical centre (at first sight mainly in the classical sector, from the so-called First Viennese School¹ to the Second Viennese School²) has long framed music education in the direction of mostly Western classical musical excellence and a strong cultural preservation. Viennese Classical music is still considered an important focal point for learning Western classical music in many parts of the world. In many countries, learning this genre is still *the* starting point for a brilliant music career. This may seem honourable for Austria, but it may also influence how far a country can move away from such strongly historically influenced images and develop further.

Selected Educational Political and Institutional Foundations

Who are the important institutional drivers for quality of music as a school subject in Austria today? On the one hand, these are the music teacher education institutions (offering teacher training and further education as well as research) and, on the (education) political hand, the ministries, in particular the Austrian Education Directorates. Curricular commissions and the educationally appointed school textbook commissions – i.e. those people who decide whether a textbook may be used in Austrian schools – can be considered as the extended arm of the institutional control of music education in schools.

Austria is a federal, parliamentary-democratic, specifically a semi-presidential republic consisting of nine federal states.³ In Austria, education matters are traditionally a federal responsibility and are mainly handled by the Ministry of Education. However, primary education and one part of *Mittelschule* (lower secondary education), are state matters, while *Gymnasium* (the other form of lower and higher secondary school) is organised federally.

¹ The First Viennese School or Viennese Classicism primarily refers to three composers of the classical era in the late 18th and early 19th centuries: Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven. Franz Schubert is sometimes included in the list.

² The so-called Second Viennese School, or New Viennese School, refers to a circle of composers at the beginning of the 20th century that formed around Arnold Schoenberg and invented the dodecaphony.

³ According to the Federal Constitution of 1920 in the version of 1929, which was reinstated in 1945.

This means that federal schools and state schools have different employment laws. This constellation has been one of the central aspects of comprehensive education reform for many years. Due to the European-wide and Bologna process driven professionalisation of the education sector (university degree for all teachers), the distinction between federal and state teachers is increasingly losing its purpose.⁴

Austria's Current Orientation in Music Education:

First Synthesis of Grounding Factors

Factors influencing how music lessons are actually delivered in schools are:

- (1) who on the educational policy level makes decisions, and to what extent, regarding resources and content (educational policy decision-making structures)
- (2) the content requirements (curriculum)
- (3) how narrowly the content requirements are defined (framework or detailed curriculum)
- (4) how closely their implementation is required and whether or how their effect on children's skill acquisition is monitored (teacher and/or student assessment or supervision)
- (5) how well the teachers are trained and continue to develop
- (6) what resources (time, space, personnel, and equipment) are made available.
- (7) In addition, there are soft factors such as
- (8) recognition of the subject within the canon of subjects at the school or
- (9) recognition of the teaching profession or
- (10) recognition of the subject of music/learning music.

All of these factors can largely shape the motivation of learners and teachers. Following these nine factors, Austrian school music education in 2026 pursues the following general aims:

- Aesthetic appreciation of both classical heritage and contemporary/hybrid forms.
- Creativity and performance; there is a strong emphasis on singing and the learning of instruments. In response to the 'from doing to understanding' principle, composition and improvisation are increasingly taught, especially in the lower grades.
- Cultural identity and diversity, preserving national traditions while integrating plural musical perspectives.
- Personal development, supporting emotional intelligence and self-expression

⁴ Local and school levels play a comparatively minor role in the public school system; in administrative practice, the number of decisions is distributed between the federal and state levels 55 %, 14 % at the municipal level and 31 % at the school level. Private schools are much more independent in administration.

- Integration of current and future cross-cutting themes, such as sustainable development goals, democracy education, and future skills.
- Lifelong engagement, linking school, community ensembles, and music schools. This ensures that school music is closely tied to Austria's wider cultural ecosystem.

Interplays: Between Classroom, Specialised Education, Music Schools and Musical Life

In principle, Austria has a comparatively well-established structure in school music education, both in terms of staffing and hours. In the following sub-sections, these structures are presented in more detail. I will also show that general music education benefits from extracurricular, informal and non-formal music education. However, the planning of music lessons depends on the availability of a sufficient number of trained music teachers. Austria, like many other countries, faces an acute shortage of music teachers, which will likely continue to increase in the future at least in some regions.

Types of General Schools, Number of Music Lessons and Teacher Education

Music is both a stand-alone subject in primary school (ages 6–10) and an aspect that should be incorporated into as many other subject areas as possible by generalist music teachers. In secondary school (ages 10–18), music is a stand-alone subject where specially trained music teachers teach (specialist teachers).⁵

Music education is embedded across all levels of general education, beginning before school, in *Kindergarten* (pre-school, ages 1–6, obligatory 5–6), where music forms part of *Ästhetik* (aesthetic domain) – aiming to nurture children's early musical experiences through movement, sound, and creative play. At *Volksschule* (primary school, ages 6–10), the national curriculum prescribes at least one hour per week of *Musik* (music education), focusing on singing, music-making, listening, movement, dance, and creativity. These lessons are taught by generalist teachers, leading to regional variation in quality. Some primary schools offer extracurricular choir or ensemble activities.

In lower secondary school (ages 10–14), students attend either a *Mittelschule* (MS) or *Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule* (AHS) also called *Gymnasium*, both mandating at one to two hours of music per week. AHS and some MS institutions offer extracurricular or expanded music opportunities, such as choirs, orchestras, or bands. At the upper secondary level students may continue in *AHS Oberstufe* (ages 14–18), or attend BMS/BHS (vocational

⁵ Tertiary-level school music teacher education is provided by state music universities (Vienna, Graz, Salzburg & Innsbruck), private music universities (e.g., Linz), and pedagogical universities (all three forms are mostly organised in regional collaborative clusters).

secondary schools) (ages 14–19). While AHS includes between one/two up to five hours per week of music instruction and opportunities for specialisation, many BMS/BHS offer little to no music education.

In the last years before the *Reifeprüfung* (school leaving and university entrance examination), students can individually choose the extent of music lessons; in most AHS, students choose between music and art in grades 11 and 12. If they choose art, their time for music instruction is reduced to grades 9 and 10. In contrast, in the last three years before the *Reifeprüfung*, schools offer the option of elective subjects, allowing interested students to focus even more on music.

There are also schools with a special musical focus in all age groups (6–19). In lower secondary these are the *Musikmittelschulen* (ages 10–14). In upper secondary the *Oberstufenrealgymnasien* (ORG) (ages 14–19) provide intensive instrumental and ensemble training embedded in the school curriculum. In the ORG, both specialist music teachers and instrumental teachers teach music. Their curriculum is regulated by the state, but the schools are comparatively autonomous in their form and focus. They offer free instrumental lessons, or more project lessons than normal schools.⁶ These general schools with a musical focus are very popular with parents and the registration pages are long.

Both the aforementioned levels of teacher education and the number of music lessons required or planned at school depend on whether there are enough qualified teachers. Unfortunately, Austria, like many other European countries, currently has a shortage of qualified teachers. It must therefore be assumed that 1) in many places (particularly in *Mittelschulen*), less music is being taught than the timetable foresees, 2) that non-qualified individuals (students, unqualified teachers, or career changers) are teaching music, and 3) that there are frequent teacher changes. This seriously jeopardises quality music education.

Targeted Support: Specialised General Music Schools and Special Needs

The needs in each child's music education are heterogeneous. Austria is addressing this with highly specialised schools on the one hand, and with special needs schools and inclusion programmes on the other.

For all those who are willing to devote a lot of time to music and an instrument, who strive for a career as a musician, and are looking for a strong musical focus, there are so-called *Musikgymnasien* (music high schools) in Austria (Vienna, Salzburg, Graz, Linz and Innsbruck) (ages 10–18 or 14–19). Students are required to sit an entrance exam (e.g. listening and singing skills, instrumental skills) and the schools offer special education for young talents, including a wide range of musical disciplines, individual support, and close cooperation with professional musicians and institutions (e.g. pre-colleges at music universities). Students receive a comprehensive musical education (4–5 hours music per

⁶ E.g. for secondary II: Art-ORG St. Ursula, Salzburg <https://st-ursula-salzburg.at/art-org/>

week, professional orchestral and choral projects, a *Reifeprüfung* (final exam) in music at a high level, and are given possibilities to stay away from school for music performances. In several cities we find the tradition of special schools for choirboys / choir children (e.g. *Wiener Sängerknaben* or *St. Florianer Sängerknaben*) for primarily upper voice choirs. These boarding schools offer tuition for students aged 8–18. Girls also have been accepted for a few years. The school lessons are specially tailored to enable the students to prepare thoroughly for big concerts and to go on concert tours. They receive comprehensive choir and voice training and continue to be taught choir lessons during and after maturation.

At the request of the parents or guardians, children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) can be taught either in a special school (e.g. school for visually impaired children or for children with severe additional needs) or in an integrated form in a regular school. The SEN is determined either at the request of the guardians or ex officio by the Education Directorate and the appropriate special educational support for students is provided through the application of specific curricula. Qualified teachers work in both special schools and inclusive education. The aim of individualised instruction is to enable students to complete further vocational training or attend secondary schools through basic general education.

Extracurricular Offerings in School

In Austria, many general schools offer extracurricular opportunities in the music sector, the quantity and content of which vary from school to school and are strongly dependent on regional characteristics, school priorities, student interests, or the expertise of music teachers. Examples of these *Freigegenstände* (optional subjects) include school choirs, instrumental ensembles (school bands, brass bands, orchestras), musical groups, dancing groups, and opportunities to avail of instrumental/vocal teaching outside of the general curriculum. Music is a major part of school life at many Austrian schools. Bands or orchestras provide the background music for school festivals or organise school masses, and there are musical Christmas parties, Christmas concerts, school festivals, and national choir competitions. School choirs take part in choral, band, or dance competitions. Some school choirs have Erasmus partnerships with other choirs in Europe, allowing them to exchange ideas. This extracurricular teaching is largely included in the teaching obligation of the music teachers; sometimes they are organised and sometimes partly funded by parents, or by external bodies coming to school (e.g. private or public music schools).

Material Resources for Teaching Music in School

Material resources for music teachers in Austrian primary and lower-secondary schools are characterised by a mixture of nationally coordinated provision (notably curricula and textbook funding) and pronounced regional/federal variation in physical infrastructure and extra-project funding. At the national level, Austria's excellent and long-running schoolbook scheme, which was established in the 1970s, ensures that approved teaching materials – including music textbooks and songbooks and increasingly digital components – are provided to pupils free of charge, thereby securing an important baseline of instructional resources (Schulbuchaktion, n.d.). Per-pupil limits and annual book lists are central mechanisms that help schools obtain curriculum-aligned music texts and workbooks without direct cost to families.

Digitalisation initiatives implemented under the Ministry's "8-Point Plan" have strengthened lower-secondary access to devices and platforms. The national programme to equip cohorts with notebooks/tablets and to standardise digital learning infrastructure has expanded teachers' capacity to use music apps, notation software and basic DAW tools in lessons, thus enhancing opportunities for composition, recording and listening activities. Audit-level reporting has noted implementation challenges during rollout, yet the overall effect is an enhanced digital baseline for many schools (Parliament of Austria, 2024).

At the level of physical rooms and instruments, provision is highly heterogeneous. Some federal regulations specify minimum room types. In smaller or more remote schools, music is commonly taught in multi-purpose classrooms lacking storage for instruments, PA systems or appropriate acoustic treatment – limitations that constrain ensemble work and high-quality sound instruction. Funding streams for additional projects – school-based concerts, external artist residencies, or instrument purchases – are available through cultural-education programmes (e.g., OeAD Initiative *Kultur:Bildung*, n.d.) and via municipal music school collaborations, which loan instruments or provide visiting teachers. Such schemes reduce inequities but are competitive or locally dependent, so their reach varies considerably between municipalities.

In a European comparison, Austria performs well in guaranteeing equitable access to material through its schoolbook scheme and in recent investments into device distribution and digital platforms (Schulbuchaktion, n.d.). Conversely, Austria sits in the mid-range regarding nationally mandated physical infrastructure for arts education. Across Europe, arts provision and facility standards show large cross-country differences, and Austria's federal system results in regional disparities rather than uniform national minima for music rooms and instrument stocks (Eurydice, 2009; OECD, 2020). Consequently, while Austrian music teachers enjoy secure textbook support and improving digital resources, pedagogical breadth – especially ensemble performance and technology-rich production – remains contingent on local facilities, municipal partnerships and targeted project funding.

The Supportive Power of Informal and Non-Formal Music Learning

In addition, there are informal and non-formal opportunities for music education in childhood and adolescence. Parallel to the school system, Austria boasts a music school (*Musikschule*) network which is a comparatively well-developed system for Europe. It contains around 370 publicly funded institutions offering musical early education, instrument lessons, ensemble practice, music theory and performance opportunities (KOMU, 2024). These serve children from roughly age 5 upward and are supported by federal states and/or municipalities (mica / Music Austria, n.d.). However, the funding levels vary from state to state. During the last two decades, many forms of cooperation between music schools and schools have emerged, enabling many children to participate. Almost every rural community has brass bands or wind ensembles that are very successful in fostering young talent. As a result, even in remote parts of Austria, children and young people experience music as an integral part of their social lives. Finally, the music education sector in concert halls and theatres has grown significantly – particularly in metropolitan areas – and not only as elitist offerings, but also reflects a strong focus on community music and social cohesion (Petri-Preis & Voit, 2023; Petri-Preis & Ziegenmeyer, 2025).

Curriculum: Implementation, Structure, Content, and Assessment

In the following section I mainly refer to curriculum content of general education in music as this is the path most children are following in Austria. However, I refer to extra-curricular or specialised music education where relevant.

The Process of Implementation During the Current Curricular Reform

Austria is currently undergoing a nationwide curriculum reform led by the *Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung* (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research). Following the development of general educational objectives, competency frameworks, and cross-cutting themes, subject-specific expert groups including representatives from universities and schools have been revising curricula for all education levels since spring 2019. The new music curricula, gradually implemented across *Volksschule* (primary school) and *Mittelschule / AHS Unterstufe* (lower secondary school) emphasise competency orientation, coherence across levels, and alignment with the standards of the competency-based *Reifeprüfung* (final examination). Implementation began in the 2023–24 academic year and will be completed by 2026–27.

All approved curricula are accessible via Austria's Legal Information System (*Rechtsinformationssystem des Bundes – RIS*, n.d.) with supporting materials available through the *Pädagogik Paket* (Pedagogical Package, n.d.) and *schule.at* (*schule.at*, n.d.).

Structure and Content of the Music Curricula

All new subject curricula – therefore also music – have to contain four parts:

- (1) a competency model
- (2) leading didactical-content concepts
- (3) descriptors of the competencies to be achieved (per school level or semester)
- (4) content areas in which the competencies can be acquired (*Anwendungsfelder*).

All curricula also have to implement guiding principles: scientific orientation, sustainability, digitality and media and health, resilience, and well-being. These guiding principles form the background for the creation of all parts of the curricula. In addition, the ministry defined 13 overarching themes that are to be integrated as far as possible.⁷ These form the basis for learning across subject boundaries, so that the connections and interactions of social phenomena become comprehensible to students.

The current reform marks the first time that Austrian music curricula have fully adopted a competency-based approach. Although Austria joined this development somewhat later than other European countries, important groundwork had already been laid by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Musikerziehung Österreich (AGMÖ, 2013), which published a gradual competency model for music education in 2013. The present reform builds directly on this framework, as illustrated in Fig. 1 for lower secondary education.

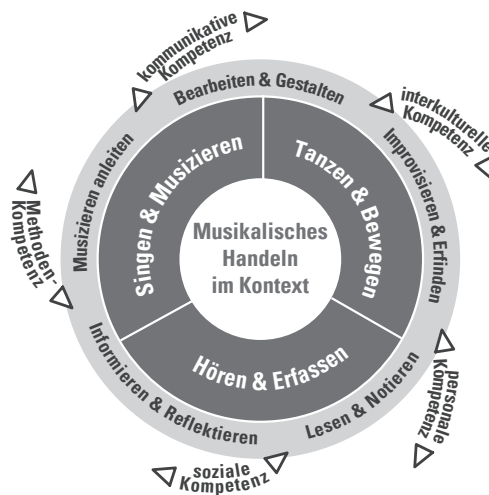


Fig. 1: Model of Competencies for Music in Secondary I (AGMÖ, 2013, p. 13)

⁷ These themes are: 1. Educational, career and life orientation, 2. Entrepreneurship education, 3. Health promotion, 4. Information technology education, 5. Intercultural education, 6. Media education, 7. Political education, 8. Reflexive gender education and equality, 9. Language education and reading, 10. Environmental education for sustainable development, 11. Transport and mobility education, 12. Economic, financial and consumer education, 13. Science propaedeutics (only in Secondary II).

In the red circle, the competency model defines the three central fields of activity “Singing & Making Music”, “Dancing & Performing”, and “Listening & Understanding”, which lead to the overarching competence in the middle “Musical Action in the Context”. The other fields of activity in the yellow circle are to be integrated into the three central fields of activity, with learning taking place in social, personal, intercultural, and communicative dimensions. Methodological learning also occurs within this sphere. (Donat, 2022; Gruber & Donat, 2023).

It would be beyond the scope of this text to analyse the music curricula in detail. However, I would like to outline and briefly contextualise a few basic aspects:

- From ages 6 to 18 (in some cases 19), we find a strong focus on music making as the basis for musical knowledge. This is a major strength of the curriculum. However, since there was a stronger focus on content in previous years, and especially in primary schools, but also due to teacher shortages in many places, musical competence among teachers is lacking, this can only be partially realised.
- The curriculum offers a very broad scope of possible content and activities (framework curriculum): This strength can also lead to arbitrariness; what is done remains heavily dependent on teachers and students, and lessons sometimes risk offering everything and nothing at all.
- Once qualified teachers begin working at the school, there is little feedback or helpful evaluation of their performance and almost no monitoring. Professional development opportunities have also been scarce in recent years. While this can lead to excellent and independent work by ambitious and self-reflective colleagues, it also leaves individual teachers with little support.
- The curriculum aims to develop a wide range of children’s competencies, particularly in music-making and open, creative work methods. However, standard assessment guidelines barely address this. As a result, music teachers are largely unsupported when it comes to providing helpful and effective assessments (Malmberg, 2022).

Current Trends: Practice and Research in School Music Education

Current Tasks and Key Challenges

Broad Implementation of the new curricula including new content/competency fields. The next few years will be characterised by the concrete implementation of what was envisaged in the curriculum reform in the music rooms. New and future-oriented topics in particular still require the dissemination of materials and further training for teachers and training institutions, cf. Future skills and sustainability in the music class (Malmberg & Gall, 2025).

Music Education for an increasingly diversified student body, migrant, socio-emotional challenges. Several waves of immigration and refugees have brought many children with very different backgrounds to Austria's schools. Coherent teaching concepts, such as culturally responsive music education, are only slowly finding their way into music classes, and research on this topic is more likely to be found in Germany than in Austria.

Teacher shortages and primary-level specialist gap and equity. A broad national teacher shortage is acute in music. University and sector reports note vacancies in general schools and specialised instrumental teaching; centres project annual needs that outstrip graduates. This compromises continuity of programmes (choir, band, music-specialised tracks) and pressures non-specialists to cover music, especially in primary schools.

Post-pandemic participation and well-being. Regional music-school reports and sector analyses document recovery but also lingering participation dips in some age groups and ensembles – keeping attention on outreach, affordability, and community rebuilding.

Dual system: general schools and a dense extracurricular network. A distinctive Austrian feature is the powerful role of public music schools alongside general schooling. While cooperation is growing, governance, financing, and timetabling often hinder systematic integration (e.g., aligning instrumental lessons with all-day school schedules, transport, and fees). Sector studies underline the need for more coherent pathways and recognition of learning across settings (Hahn, 2016, p. 12).

Digital turn – now normal, but uneven. Digital quality and assessment, especially in light of AI. Distance learning accelerated the adoption of digital tools for creating, recording, and sharing music. Austrian projects documented both opportunities (creative production, access) and gaps (equipment, didactic models). Outside the music-specific sphere, recent school-wide surveys indicate high device availability and usage but relatively low proportions of lesson time that are digitally supported – mirrored in music education where creative uses coexist with patchy implementation (Aigner et al. 2021, p. 49; Kruse-Weber et al., 2023, p. 4). The availability of devices does not automatically yield deep learning, and teachers cite time, assessment models for creative digital work, and CPD as barriers. Research in Austrian contexts calls for clearer didactic frameworks for technology-supported composing, producing, and ensemble work (Aigner et al. *ibid.*).

Inclusion, diversity, and community engagement. Tertiary programmes increasingly embed inclusive musicianship and community-based practice; specialist courses signal mainstreaming of universal design in music learning. Teacher Education Institutions foreground diversity-sensitive pedagogy and partnerships with schools and communities.

Relevant Research and Scholarship in the Field of School Music Education

Austria's scientific music education discourse is closely linked to neighbouring Germany (less so with the relatively small German-speaking part of Switzerland). Numerous important developments in music education have occurred and continue to occur in the

German-speaking countries in a similar way. Only in the last few years, Austrian researchers have been publishing in English, which makes the discourse more accessible. Austrian music-education scholarship is organised within the *MFÖ (Musikpädagogische Forschung Österreich)*. It spans formal, non-formal, and community contexts, and while quite fragmented and diverse, some selected themes can be mentioned:

- Policy and sector research.
- Teaching, learning and mentoring music. Studies document reflective, collaborative teacher learning and transitions from university to school, with mentoring highlighted as crucial in preventing attrition (Kruse-Weber et al., 2023, p. 6; Malmberg, 2017, p. 79).
- Research on the effects of music. (Schneider et al., 2023)
- Digitalisation. The MUDIL project and related higher-education research track acceptance and practices in digital music teaching, showing mixed readiness but clear creative potential (Aigner et al., 2021, p. 49).
- Inclusion and diversity. Programme-level innovation (inclusive musicianship) connects to international scholarship on inclusive music pedagogy and resonance-based approaches, increasingly visible in Austrian teacher education.

Possible Highlights for the Future

No one can predict the future. But we can identify a few points whose fulfilment is likely in the future, for example, because important stakeholders are vehemently demanding them, because some steps in this direction have already been taken, or because they are the current focus of education policy.

- *Specialist capacity at primary level.* Addressing shortages requires dual pathways: (a) expanding music-specialist training and targeted scholarships; (b) upskilling generalists via micro-credentials and mentoring anchored in classroom-ready repertoires and digital creativity.
- *Digital creativity as a core musicianship.* The likely winning strategy is not more devices but better pedagogy: loop-based composition, multimodal portfolios, and accessible production workflows that include live instruments and voices. Assessment should value process (ideation, revision, collaboration) alongside performance. AI will stress this fact very quickly. Research points to the need for structured teacher CPD and school-based communities of practice to translate this into day-to-day teaching (Aigner et al., 2021, p. 50.).

- *Inclusion beyond access.* Inclusive futures go further than support measures; they re-design ensembles and curricula so heterogeneous ability, culture, and language are musical assets. Austrian higher-education programmes in inclusion offer a lever to transform school practices if paired with school-based mentoring and resource allocation.
- *From “one hour a week” to rich, integrated ecosystems.* A realistic future recognises that a single or even a double weekly lesson cannot meet ambitious aims (creativity, culture, inclusion, digital literacies). Policy could formalise school–music-school partnerships, resulting in co-planning repertoire/projects; shared assessment of extracurricular learning; and timetabling that embeds instrumental/vocal tuition into the all-day school. Pilots exist locally and scaling them would address equity and continuity
- *Targeted research for Austrian music education.* Research on Austrian music education is quite fragmented. The Austria research association MFÖ is currently launching its own journal, *SPEKTRUM MUSIKPÄDAGOGIK*. This, along with clear research networks with defined goals, could strengthen knowledge about music education in schools and better support its high-quality implementation than before.
- *Culture, identity, and repertoire.* Austrian music education can lead by pairing strong classical traditions with living, student-owned musical cultures (Austropop, migrant musics, global genres). This shall widen participation in the future as it reflects contemporary Austria without abandoning core musicianship.

In summary, it can be concluded that Austria’s school music education is characterised by a productive tension between a rich musical heritage and the demands of contemporary, competency-based and inclusive education. Its future development will depend on successfully addressing teacher shortages, further strengthening cooperation between schools and extracurricular music institutions, and translating curricular ambitions into sustainable classroom practice.

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‘Under Pressure’

Music’s Place in Flemish Primary and Secondary Schools

Abstract

While music education in Flemish primary and secondary schools is undoubtedly ‘under pressure’, there is also resilience and innovation within the professional field. In this chapter, we explore the historical background of music in schools, and explain how music education is organised and reflected in learning objectives and curricula. We also refer to the strong network of music schools, and consider its possible impact on music within compulsory education. The chapter concludes with recent research and the current challenges we identify at Flanders, a small region at the heart of Europe.

Introduction

In this chapter, we aim to provide an accurate overview of music education in Flemish schools in 2025, spanning from kindergarten to upper secondary education. Our focus is on Flanders, the Dutch-speaking northern region of the federal state Belgium in which the Dutch-, French-, and German-speaking communities each have their own Ministry of Education for which no overarching national guidelines apply. Consequently, in our daily work in music education, interactions with the two other Belgian communities are limited and comparable to our collaborations with international partners outside Belgium.

After briefly exploring the historical background, we introduce how music education in schools is organised. We also discuss the impact of the well-established network of music schools offering extra-curricular music education. We conclude the chapter by

introducing recent research and outlining current challenges. Given the limited number of publications on Flemish music education, this chapter is the result of a collaborative effort, aimed at consolidating available information and perspectives.

From Past to Contemporary Music Education in Flanders

A small region in the heart of Europe, Flanders has always been influenced by its surrounding countries. Flemish music education bears the marks of influences from the French-, German-, and English-speaking worlds. French influences underlie the origins of most music schools and conservatoires, notably through the enduring use of fixed-do solfège. However, in post-war Flanders, which slowly gained educational independence in the last decades of the twentieth century, music in schools was heavily influenced by the German *musische Erziehung* (Geudens & De Baets, 2025). Such ideas of an active, holistic and folk-based music education were introduced by Marcel Andries and several of his colleagues at the Lemmens Institute, which remained the sole institution offering such a programme until the 1990s (Geudens & De Baets, 2025). *Orff Schulwerk* had a notable impact, and its typical melodical and rhythmical percussion instruments, along with the recorder, found their way into many classrooms. Although this approach had been abandoned in Germany for many years, it remained popular in Flanders until the turn of the century.

Since the 1990s, more music teacher education institutions have been established. These schools, which were unrelated to Flanders' conservatoires, took popular music rather than classical music as their musical point of departure (Geudens & De Baets, 2025). This shift toward popular music, along with the integration of research into higher music education, led to an increased orientation toward English-speaking countries. A notable addition to the curricula was creating 'your own' music through improvisation, composition, and songwriting. In recent decades, music curricula have broadened considerably, shifting away from prescribed details toward a set of generic goals aimed at fostering children's musical, artistic, and/or cultural competencies. Genre choices are not specified but left to the teacher's discretion. This evolution has given substantial freedom to music teachers, resulting in a regional landscape that defies capture in one comprehensive picture.

Today, a combination of evolutions is placing considerable pressure on music in Flemish schools. A central issue is the integration of music into interdisciplinary art subjects. This tendency appears typical for the Dutch-speaking countries, where it is more prominent than the integration of the arts into non-artistic subjects (Geudens & Overmeer, 2023). This integration has triggered a paradigm shift from artistic practice to cultural participation, marking a move away from subject-specific skill development (Geudens & Overmeer, 2023). As a result, music in schools is facing a decrease of instructional time, while fading ambitions and disrupted learning pathways contribute to an increased sense

of aimlessness (de Vugt & De Baets, 2022). In recent years, the Catholic school network, which oversees about 70 % of Flemish schools, has implemented several reductions in the time allocated to artistic subjects. These changes are largely driven by both neo-cognitive policies responding to declining PISA results and policy dissonances between the Flemish Government and the Catholic school network (Geudens, 2023). In primary education, however, the renewed focus on educational quality has recently led to the formulation of *minimum goals* for music, which are more detailed and ambitious (Flemish Parliament, 2025). We will return to this when discussing the curriculum.

Music in Schools: From Classroom Time to Specialised Education

Music as a Subject and Time Allocation

In early childhood education (ages 2.5 to 6), music is expected to be woven into daily routines, such as morning welcome rituals or playtime. In primary schools (ages 6 to 12), music is not treated as a standalone subject but is integrated within a broader framework of *muzische vorming* (creative and expressive education), alongside drama, media, visual arts, and dance. As part of this subject, music is compulsory in primary education. The curriculum allocates two hours of *muzische vorming* per week, but that time is shared between all art disciplines.

Secondary schools have the autonomy to decide whether, and how, to include music in their curricula. In the first two years (ages 12 to 14), schools may choose to offer either a dedicated music course (one hour per week), or an integrated *artistieke vorming* (artistic education) course that includes at least two art disciplines – not necessarily music. Nevertheless, *music* and *visual arts* are most commonly included, reflecting longstanding traditions and the influence of previous curricular structures. In the four upper secondary grades (ages 14 to 18), schools decide on a grade-by-grade basis whether to include one hour of artistic education. Policy approaches vary across school networks. In government-run schools, artistic education tends to have a more secure place than in the recent curricula of independent Catholic schools (Geudens, 2023).

The Music Teacher

In primary schools (ages 2.5 to 12), music is taught by the generalist classroom teacher. Whereas the importance of music is somewhat more recognised in early childhood education, many primary school teachers feel unqualified to teach music due to the limited attention it receives in their teacher education (Bamford, 2007; Deckers et al., 2021). A recent review of bachelor-level music teacher education programmes ($n=8$) shows that the domain of *muzische vorming* – including the development of both musical and music pedagogical skills for future generalists – is allocated only 3 to 12 ECTS credits within

the 180-credit programme, and these are usually even shared with other art disciplines (Van Stappen, 2025). Although music educators have long advocated for a specialist music teacher in Flemish primary schools (e.g., Katholiek Nationaal Onderwijs, 1971), this proposal has yet to gain political traction.

In secondary schools, art subjects are usually taught by specialist teachers. These teachers may hold a bachelor's degree in music education or fine arts education – always in combination with a second teaching subject – or a master's degree in a single discipline obtained from a school of arts. Compared to generalist primary school teachers, secondary art teachers tend to demonstrate greater confidence. However, time constraints within music teacher education programmes hinder the development of a sufficiently robust foundation (Bamford, 2007). The three-year bachelor's programme is considered overcrowded due to the mandatory combination with a second subject – not necessarily an artistic one. Meanwhile, the 60 ECTS credits teaching qualification for master's graduates in the arts is content-heavy, as it must encompass both general music education and the diverse subjects taught in music schools.

In the specific context of the abovementioned integrated artistic education subject, concerns have been raised regarding the competence of the teaching staff (de Vugt & De Baets, 2022; Geudens & Overmeer, 2022). Over the past decade, teacher education has deployed various initiatives to incorporate integrated arts pedagogies, but these are rarely scaffolded by artistic competence that extends beyond the teacher's own discipline.

Resources

In primary schools, music lessons typically take place in the regular classroom, where resources are often limited. A neglected Orff instrument collection – if present – has often been supplemented with small percussion. Playful instruments such as boomwhackers may complete the picture. A limited number of textbooks are available, which teachers may use alongside their own materials.

Unlike in primary education, secondary schools generally provide a dedicated music classroom equipped with audio systems, a piano, and a selection of other instruments. Several schools have invested in a collection of popular music instruments, typically including a single drum set, one bass guitar, a few guitars and keyboards, and occasionally microphones. Music-making with computers – using DAWs or other digital tools – is not widespread, and such equipment is rarely found in the music classroom. Due to the open nature of the curricula, the availability of classroom resources depends largely on the teachers' preferences, their musical background, and the willingness of school leadership to invest. The teaching materials and repertoire also vary considerably. For the first two years of secondary education, several music textbooks are available and well used, although some teachers prefer to work with their own materials. For the integrated artistic education subject, no handbooks currently exist.

Several funding strands exist to bring additional art and culture into schools. One notable initiative is *Kunstkuur* (Art Caprice), which will be discussed in more detail later. Although Flanders lacks a strong music teacher association, informal online communities and platforms such as *Cultuurkuur* (the organisation behind *Kunstkuur*) and Facebook groups such as *Muziek in het secundair onderwijs* (Music in secondary education) facilitate professional exchange.

Extra-curricular Music Education in Schools

Extra-curricular music activities are not standard and vary from school to school. Some schools offer a choir, an instrumental ensemble, or organise musicals, but overall, the number of schools providing such activities seems limited. At least, it has not been clearly documented, and therefore good practices may remain invisible. Certain artistic and musical goals in secondary schools can be achieved through project-based activities, such as concert visits. Schools have the autonomy to decide if and how to organise these.

Specialised Schools

The relatively low status of music as a subject in primary and secondary education stands in sharp contrast to the success of music schools in Flanders. An estimated 15 % (De Baets & Vanvolsem, 2021) of Flemish students in compulsory education also attend art academies (including music schools) in their leisure time – a figure skewed towards children from privileged backgrounds (Court of Audit, 2021).

Flemish music schools are “part of part-time art education” (deeltijds kunstonderwijs, dko), which also includes drama, dance, and visual arts. This sector is regulated by the Flemish Government in a way that closely resembles secondary education. As a result, teachers enjoy strong employment conditions, are subject to the same diploma requirements, and receive salaries equivalent to secondary school teachers. Yearly, the Flemish Government allocates a significant 2.1 percent of the education budget to part-time arts education (Department of Education, 2022). This favourable situation is quite unique in a European context (see e.g. Goossens & Neele, 2025). The curriculum of part-time arts education is government-regulated and therefore consistent across Flanders (Flemish Government, 2018).

In addition to music schools, seven secondary schools in Flanders offer a dedicated music track for students aged 14 to 18. In these programmes, students typically receive around ten to twelve hours of music lessons per week, alongside their general education. Most schools focus on classical music, although popular music is gradually gaining ground. The curriculum generally includes instrument and ensemble lessons, music theory, solfège, and other music-related subjects, depending on each school’s specific focus.

The Music Curriculum: Structure, Implementation, and Assessment

Learning Goals

In Flanders, almost all primary and secondary schools follow a general curriculum developed by one of the autonomous educational networks¹. These networks occupy a strong intermediate position between government and schools and play a very decisive role in shaping education. Their curricula are developed by expert teams. These teams typically include representatives of the network, teachers, and subject specialists.

Their curricula are aligned with the official minimum objectives set by the Flemish Government (n.d.). These objectives define the minimum knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes that students should acquire at each educational level. While networks and schools have pedagogical freedom in how they achieve these objectives, they are legally required to ensure that students meet them.

In kindergarten, music is explicitly included in the so-called *ontwikkelingsdoelen* (developmental goals). In primary education, (compulsory) music-specific *minimumdoelen* (minimum goals) are formulated as part of the learning domain *muzische vorming* (creative and expressive education). In secondary education, however, music is only mentioned as one among many art forms that may be taught – at the discretion of the school – in relation to the key competence ‘cultural awareness and expression’ (Onderwijsdoelen, n.d.).

Special mention should be made of the various method schools active in Flanders, for example Montessori, Steiner, Freinet, and Jenaplan. These schools operate based on specific pedagogical philosophies. Some of these philosophies place a strong emphasis on music in their curricula, valuing creativity, self-expression, and holistic development.

Content of the Music Curriculum

In kindergarten, young children are expected to experience and recognise sounds, rhythms, and moods in music. They are encouraged to mimic musical elements, develop vocal control, and experiment with sound and instruments. These objectives aim to foster creativity and emotional expression through music (Onderwijsdoelen, n.d.).

In primary education, students are expected to listen to and engage with music, explore sound sources, and participate in musical play (Onderwijsdoelen, n.d.). They are encouraged to be open to music from different cultures and historical periods, and to use music-making as a form of expression.

¹ Gemeenschapsonderwijs (GO!), Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen, Onderwijsvereniging van Steden en Gemeenten (OVSG), and several smaller networks, mainly consisting of specific method schools.

In secondary education, students are expected to reflect on artistic expressions, contextualise artworks, and engage in creative processes. Specific and autonomous musical goals are no longer delineated, but music remains in most schools a vital component of interdisciplinary artistic education (Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen, n.d.).

At the same time, educational networks encourage secondary schools to embed transversal themes into artistic and music education. Common examples include sustainability, citizenship, inclusion, and personal development (Onderwijsdoelen, n.d.). Conversely, within the STEM discourse, we witness a growing tendency to evolve STEM into STEAM, emphasising the connections between the 'hard' science learning domains and the arts, including music.

The Music Curriculum in Practice

Teachers in Flanders enjoy considerable discretion in implementing the music curriculum, given that the governmentally decreed learning goals – as well as their curricular translation by education networks – are broadly formulated. On the one hand, this autonomy fosters curricular and pedagogical creativity. On the other hand, it may lead to inconsistent realisation of goals – both in secondary education, where music is increasingly omitted from the curriculum, and in kindergarten and primary education, where most teachers are generalists.

Although student voice is not formally embedded in the curriculum, teachers are expected to encourage students to express their individual style, preferences and creativity. As textbooks are not prescribed, teachers use a combination of self-developed materials and existing publications, often emphasising experiential, playful learning and active music-making over theoretical instruction. Attention to reading and writing music notation is quite exceptional, which might be related to the existence of the well-developed system of music schools. While this is a strength of the Flemish music-educational landscape, we suspect it might have contributed to a further marginalisation of music within compulsory education.

The Kunstkuur Project

A notable initiative supporting art curriculum implementation is *Kunstkuur*² (Art Caprice), a three-year partnership between a school and a music school, sometimes involving a third external organisation. *Kunstkuur* projects aim to: (1) strengthen cultural awareness and expression among students, (2) foster sustainable networks between general and arts education (not limited to music), and (3) encourage students with artistic talent and ambition to pursue further education (in Flemish part-time art education).

² www.cultuurkuur.be/kunstkuur

Each year, dozens of new *Kunstkuur* collaborations are launched across Flanders. Many of these projects enable specialised music educators to co-teach, sharing their expertise with the classroom teacher, and develop innovative lessons that integrate music into broader contexts. Active exchange between both teachers and mutual professional development remain ongoing challenges (Decuypere, 2023).

Assessment

Assessment is flexible and tailored to the learning context. Music teachers are fully autonomous in shaping the evaluation of their subject. Since music is not necessarily taught as a standalone subject in schools, specific competencies such as performance, listening, or composition are not necessarily formally assessed. Teachers are expected to evaluate students based on the broad curriculum goals using methods that best capture learning outcomes. The educational networks offer assessment inspiration and tools on their websites and in their curricula.

Evaluation serves to make learning visible and to inform feedback, rather than to rank or grade students (Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen, n.d.). However, according to limited research, many teachers in primary education perceive assessment as a mandatory task that conflicts with their belief that music should primarily be about enjoyment, often viewing evaluation and musical pleasure as mutually exclusive (Deckers et al., 2021). Teachers often approach assessment in a summative way, and because lessons tend to start from a creative task rather than from clearly defined learning objectives, the evaluation process lacks consistency and depth.

There are no state examinations in music. Upon completion of secondary education, students receive a diploma corresponding to EQF level 4 (general education) or EQF level 3 (vocational education), depending on their track (Onderwijsdoelen, n.d.).

Current Trends: Challenges and Research

Challenges

The most pressing issue facing music education in Flemish schools today is nothing less than its continued existence – music's place is clearly 'under pressure'. In primary education, the subject 'music' no longer exists as a standalone discipline; instead, it is part of a broader learning domain. In secondary education, the subject 'music' has long been a steadfast part of the curriculum, but it is now also under pressure from interdisciplinary tendencies and lesson time cuts. Unfortunately, we have learned, from both cases, that the integration of music into broader interdisciplinary subjects does not ensure that specific musical-artistic objectives are achieved. Moreover, music is frequently taught without the expertise of a specialised music teacher.

The activities of the Facebook group *Neen tegen nog minder Artistieke vakken in het secundair!* ('No to even fewer art subjects in secondary education'), which has over 7,300 members, illustrate the ongoing societal debate. Unfortunately, this existential issue tends to overshadow excellent practices and other challenges in music education. Music lessons are also sensitive to general educational trends that are not inherently musical, such as digitisation, inclusion, and sustainability.

There is, however, also a positive development trend worth noting: *Koor&Stem*³, the organisation for vocal music in Flanders, is an advocate for reintegrating singing into the school, particularly in primary education. The organisation provides support to schools aspiring to become so-called 'singing schools', and more than 95 Flemish schools have already joined their network.

Research

In Flanders, research in music education remains limited, and existing research groups rarely focus exclusively on music education in schools. Instead, their work often explores the interrelations and comparisons between formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts.

Recently, Verneert et al. (2024, 2026) demonstrated the successful integration of collective free improvisation in secondary education. In their large-scale study, they aimed at 'bridging the gap' between community music practices and formal music education. The first study (2024) identified the pedagogical-artistic strategies used by facilitators in a specific community music project, *The Ostend Street Orchestra*. The second study (2026) examined the lived experiences of secondary school students ($n=1,282$) and their teachers ($n=14$) engaging in collective free improvisation, using a flow state scale. Given the generally high flow scores, the tested strategies appear well-suited for use in secondary education.

Aside from formal research, numerous bachelor's and master's theses are produced in the field of music education. However, these have not been systematically mapped. What is clear, though, is that attention to music within compulsory education remains limited, as our students tend to favour part-time art education and non-formal contexts. Currently, we encourage them to engage in research on the significance of music lessons for secondary school students, with a particular focus on how these students perceive their own learning. At present, there are no definite findings to report.

Furthermore, additional research data are needed to gain an understanding of what is actually happening in music lessons in primary and secondary schools. This is particularly important given that music education can take many forms, may be delivered by diverse professionals, and, as previously discussed, is often taught with considerable freedom.

³ www.koorenstem.be

These factors make it challenging to answer the seemingly simple question of what music education in schools looks like in Flanders in 2025.

Practitioner Research to Face Current and Future Challenges

In a challenging educational landscape, Flemish music education calls for strong, self-critical, entrepreneurial, reflective, and perhaps even visionary music teachers. These teachers must be able to embrace change and innovation, take initiative, and confidently advocate for their discipline.

To effectively meet these demands, we believe music teachers should be educated as reflective practitioners. One way to foster this mindset is by engaging in forms of practitioner research during their teacher education. Therefore, in our bachelor's and master's programmes, we have deliberately chosen to establish practitioner research as the research paradigm (De Baets et al., 2023). This approach encourages our students to connect their practical experiences with the existing body of knowledge, and to contribute meaningfully to it. We can only hope that this new generation of music educators will help strengthen the currently unstable position of music in schools by offering engaging music education and demonstrating its impact on learners.

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Shared Yugoslav Origins and Contemporary Pathways of Music Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro

Abstract

This chapter offers a comparative analysis of music education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, selected for their significant structural similarities and shared historical legacy as former Yugoslav republics. It examines the organisation of music education at primary and secondary levels, emphasising both points of convergence and divergence between the two countries. The chapter concludes with a critical evaluation of systemic limitations and the persistent challenges that continue to influence the development and implementation of music education in both countries.

Introduction

Music education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro is rooted in the educational structures of the former Yugoslavia, reflecting common historical, political, and cultural legacies. In both countries, nine-year primary schools provide generalist-led foundational music instruction, while specialist teachers assume responsibility in higher grades and in gymnasiums, ensuring continuity into more advanced study. Differences exist in curriculum flexibility, regional application, and the availability of specialised professional development programmes for music teachers. These two countries were specifically selected for comparison not only because of their shared structural foundations and historical experiences, but also due to the substantial similarities that continue to shape their music education systems today.

From Past to Contemporary Music Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro

The development of music education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro was shaped by the Yugoslav educational legacy. During the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–1990), particularly after the 1959 reform, music became compulsory at primary and secondary levels. Although policy was formally centralised, responsibilities were gradually transferred to the republics (Zorić, 2014), reflecting cultural diversity. Curricula integrated the folkloric traditions of all republics and provinces, promoting both pluralism and a shared Yugoslav identity. Music thus reinforced collective values and cultural identity (Vesić et al., 2023).

Classroom practice centred on singing, fostering musical skills and cohesion, while pupils were also introduced to Western European music, situating local traditions in a wider continuum (Jeremić, 2009; Novačić et al., 1987). Choirs were widespread in schools, providing opportunities for performance, festivals, and competitions, and promoting discipline and aesthetic sensibilities (Republic Pedagogical Institute of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1962). At the same time, Yugoslav unity was promoted through a broad repertoire of partisan, patriotic, and songs dedicated to President Tito, encompassing both authored compositions and those that emerged spontaneously among the people. These songs formed an integral and regular component of school music curricula and were employed as a means of transmitting values of collective identity, socialist ideology, the legacy of the anti-fascist struggle, and loyalty to the state (Republic Pedagogical Institute of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1972). The corpus of songs created during the period of widespread social affirmation of Tito frequently revealed elements of a personality cult, at times accompanied by poetic idealisation and heightened symbolic imagery.

Attention was also given to the education and professional preparation of music teachers, particularly when a lack of adequately qualified staff posed a significant obstacle to the successful implementation of the curriculum (Vesić et al., 2023). Numerous composers created original songs and works for children, while textbooks and music didactics were refined. Several notable music educators emerged, introducing innovative pedagogical approaches that advanced classroom practice across the federation (e.g., Bašić, Oblak, Tomerlin, Matjan, and Vasiljević).

A distinctive feature of the Yugoslav model was the network of public, state-funded specialised music schools. Characterised by high standards, these institutions provided systematic professional education from an early age. By removing socio-economic barriers, they contributed to the democratisation of music education and nurtured generations of performers, composers, and pedagogues. This institutional model has endured in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, underscoring its resilience and the continuing cultural value attached to specialised training.

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, both countries entered a period of reform in the early 2000s (Ministry of Education and Science of Montenegro, 2001; Office of the PAR Coordinator, 2005; Reškovac & Bešić, 2012). Curricula were restructured in line with European frameworks while addressing the cultural and political priorities of newly independent states. In music education, this transition marked a shift away from centrally imposed models toward learner-centred approaches that emphasised creativity, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness. Curricular reforms balanced national traditions with global repertoires, while pedagogical practice expanded to include singing, active music-making, and analytical listening.

Taken together, these trajectories reveal the dual legacy of Yugoslav music education. On the one hand, institutional structures and practices established in the socialist era continue to influence music education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. On the other hand, contemporary reforms reflect processes of Europeanisation and globalisation, aiming to align teaching with international pedagogical standards while safeguarding the distinctiveness of national and regional traditions.

Music in Schools: From Classroom Time to Specialised Education

In both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, music occupies a compulsory place within early education, yet the overall provision is characterised by limited instructional time and varying consistency across educational levels.

In preschool institutions, music is mandatory in Bosnia and Herzegovina and integrated into broader activities in Montenegro; in neither case is a precise number of hours formally prescribed. Instead, the frequency and scope of engagement are adapted to the developmental needs of children.

At the level of primary education, limited instructional time remains a shared characteristic, though organised differently in each country. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, pupils in the lower grades most often receive two lessons per week, while in the upper grades this is reduced to one. In addition, certain regions have introduced models in which music is grouped with visual arts and physical education in the early years (Federal Ministry of Education and Science, 2003; Ministry of Education, Canton Sarajevo, 2024; Republic Pedagogical Institute of Republika Srpska, n.d.). By contrast, Montenegro maintains a uniform framework across all nine grades of primary school, with music taught once per week (Bureau for Educational Services, 2020b). Although provision exists for an elective subject in workshop format offering two additional hours, this option is rarely implemented.

At the secondary level, music is limited to gymnasiums in both countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is taught during the first two years, while in Montenegro, it is limited to one year, with optional continuation (Bureau for Educational Services, 2020c). Vocational and technical schools in both countries generally omit music.

Alongside general education, professional music education in both countries is offered through specialised primary and secondary music schools, providing a parallel pathway for musically talented pupils. Thus, structured and systematic music education is concentrated in primary education and in specialised institutions.

The organisation of teaching staff in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro follows broadly comparable patterns. In the early grades of primary education, music is taught by generalist classroom teachers with a broad pedagogical profile. From the middle grades onwards, typically between the fourth and sixth grade, depending on the system, responsibility passes to subject specialists who have completed higher education in music pedagogy. At the secondary level, instruction is carried out exclusively by such specialists (European Commission/Eurydice, 2024; Ministry of Education of Montenegro, 2019; Ministry of Education, Canton Sarajevo, 2024). This gradual transition from generalist to specialist instruction represents a structural feature common to both countries and raises important questions regarding continuity and the quality of early musical experiences. In particular, it highlights ongoing debate over whether music teaching might be delivered by specialist music teachers from an earlier age, in order to support greater continuity, depth, and pedagogical coherence in music learning.

Material conditions for music education remain uneven in both countries, though shaped by different governance models. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the decentralised system produces pronounced regional disparities, while in Montenegro, financing is centrally organised; nevertheless, schools in both contexts often face shortages of instruments, equipment, and suitable classrooms (European Commission/Eurydice, 2023, 2025; Guthrie et al., 2022; Ploskić, 2025b). Teacher salaries are secured and free textbooks or methodological guides are available, but practical resources for active music-making are not consistently provided. Schools may therefore depend on parental or municipal support, as well as international or donor-funded projects. Partnerships with cultural institutions occasionally enrich provision, though such opportunities are more accessible in urban centres, while smaller communities remain at a disadvantage.

Beyond formal instruction, extracurricular and co-curricular activities play an important role in sustaining musical engagement in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Choirs are the most widespread form, active in both primary and secondary schools, and regularly perform at school celebrations, national holidays, and cultural events. Instrumental ensembles also exist, though their establishment depends on local conditions and teacher expertise. Pupils who simultaneously attend specialised music schools often contribute their instrumental skills to events in general education schools,

further strengthening the musical environment. In both countries, particular emphasis is placed on traditional and folk music, which functions as both an educational and cultural resource, reflecting the multicultural composition of the societies. Through these channels, extracurricular activities partially compensate for limited classroom hours, ensuring that music continues to hold a visible presence in school life (Bureau for Educational Services, 2020b; Ministry of Education, Canton Sarajevo, 2024).

Specialised music schools provide a structured pathway for pupils with aptitude or a strong interest in music. In both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, these institutions are predominantly state-funded and free of charge. Primary music education functions in parallel with general primary education, while secondary music education provides curricula that encompass both specialised music and general education subjects (Assembly of Sarajevo Canton, 2024; Assembly of Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2008/2017; Government of Montenegro, 2023). Admission is determined through entrance examinations, after which students follow a curriculum that combines theoretical subjects with individual lessons in instrumental or vocal performance, ensemble work, and music history. Provision exists at both primary and secondary levels, ensuring continuity of training. Graduates are prepared for progression to higher music education and, during their schooling, actively contribute to the cultural life of their communities through concerts, competitions, and festivals. While most institutions are public, a small number of private schools also operate, though they remain the exception. Therefore, these specialised schools guarantee systematic education for musically gifted pupils, complementing the more limited opportunities within the general school system.

The Music Curriculum: Structure, Implementation, and Assessment

The position of music within the general curriculum in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro reflects broader characteristics of their respective educational systems, particularly in terms of governance and regulation.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, curricular development is fragmented across entities, cantons, and the Brčko District, each of which maintains responsibility for its own frameworks. Overarching guidelines are provided at the state level, most notably through the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education and the outcome-based Common Core Curricula, but these remain advisory rather than prescriptive. In Montenegro, by contrast, curricula are administered centrally through the Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation, the National Council for Education, and the Bureau for Educational Services, ensuring greater uniformity in policy and practice nationwide. In both countries, music is firmly embedded within the general curriculum, however, the mechanisms of regulation and the degree of consistency in implementation differ. Consequently, Bosnia and

Herzegovina shows differentiated patterns of curriculum implementation across its administrative units, whereas Montenegro's centralised framework facilitates greater coherence at the national level.

The structure and content of music curricula in both countries are broadly comparable, particularly in their emphasis on performance, listening, and creative activity. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the school subject *Muzička kultura* (Music Culture) aims to cultivate aesthetic awareness, musical literacy, and engagement with both national heritage and international repertoires. At primary level, learning outcomes include singing, playing simple instruments, recognising basic musical parameters, and the gradual introduction of notation. By the end of secondary education, students are expected to analyse music, perform at a higher level, and attempt composition or arrangement (Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education, 2018; Federal Ministry of Education and Science, 2003; Republic Pedagogical Institute of Republika Srpska, n.d.). In Montenegro, *Muzička kultura* (Music Culture) is structured around three domains: performance, creation, and listening (Bureau for Educational Services, 2020b). Practical activity predominates, particularly in the early cycles, with outcomes progressing from recognising sound and rhythm to polyphonic singing, elementary instrumental skills, and analytical listening. At the secondary level, *Muzička umjetnost* (Music Art) places greater emphasis on repertoire interpretation, historical contextualisation, and appreciation of national and global traditions, while the elective *Muzika moj jezik* (Music My Language) expands opportunities for improvisation, composition, and personal expression (Bureau for Educational Services, 2020a, 2020c). In both countries, curricular frameworks also provide adaptations for students with additional educational needs.

Curriculum implementation in both systems combines prescribed structures with varying degrees of pedagogical autonomy. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, curricular documents define content areas and learning outcomes, while teachers retain responsibility for selecting supplementary materials and teaching methods. Textbooks approved by the ministries of education are obligatory, although teachers may choose among different editions and employ recordings, sheet music, or digital platforms. Considerable disparities nevertheless exist between better and less resourced regions. In Montenegro, approximately fifteen to twenty percent of lesson time may be independently planned by teachers. In practice, this flexible component of the curriculum is most often used to respond to local community needs, fostering cultural diversity and supporting intercultural approaches in music education. Centrally issued textbooks and manuals provide a common framework, but the absence of a mandatory canon allows flexibility in repertoire selection and, in some cases, student participation in determining content. In both countries, cross-curricular projects and community engagement extend music education beyond the classroom, reinforcing its social as well as artistic role.

Assessment practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro reveal parallel tendencies, despite differences in structure and terminology. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, assessment follows outcome-based models and combines continuous monitoring, descriptive feedback, and numerical grading. Methods include oral and written examinations, observation of performance, analysis of creative work, projects, portfolios, and self- or peer assessment, with a gradual shift from practical to more theoretical competencies in higher grades. While no state-level standardised examinations exist, students complete general secondary education with a diploma (Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2010). In Montenegro, assessment begins descriptively, with learning outcomes categorised as partially, mostly, or fully achieved, before transitioning to numerical grading on a five-point scale from the fourth grade onwards. The criteria emphasise independence, creativity, and accuracy. Gymnasium students are assessed through both compulsory and elective subjects, with “Music My Language” included in the graduation standard. In both countries, the final secondary qualification corresponds to EQF level 4 (European Commission/Eurydice, 2025).

Taken together, the music curricula of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro reflect shared pedagogical principles despite differences in governance structures and instructional detail. Both systems are organised around performance, listening, and creativity; they seek to balance national cultural heritage with broader repertoires; and increasingly rely on outcome-based frameworks that allow space for teacher adaptation. Although implementation is shaped by uneven resources and structural constraints, both contexts permit degrees of autonomy and the incorporation of student voice. Assessment practices, while differently articulated, similarly combine formative processes with summative judgements. Overall, the position of music within the curriculum remains clearly defined, even as both countries continue to face challenges related to limited instructional time, resource disparities, and the need for sustained professional support for teachers.

Exploring Current Trends in Music Education: Challenges and Research

The current state of music education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro is shaped by a combination of structural constraints, evolving pedagogical approaches, and the gradual integration of digital technologies. In both countries, the most persistent challenge remains the limited allocation of instructional time, which restricts musical engagement largely to basic competencies and leaves little room for more advanced activities such as improvisation, composition, or extended performance practice. This limitation is further compounded by resource disparities: while urban schools and better-funded regions may provide access to instruments, audio equipment, and cultural opportunities, rural

schools and less affluent areas frequently struggle with outdated or insufficient provision. As a result, pupils' experiences of music education vary considerably and remain strongly dependent on local conditions.

Teacher capacity represents another shared concern, although it manifests differently in each context. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, educators are generally well qualified, but formal in-service professional development remains sporadic and fragmented. In Montenegro, the relatively small size of the teaching community, combined with regional disparities, has resulted in shortages of subject specialists, particularly in rural areas. Consequently, both countries recognise the need for more structured in-service training, especially in relation to digital integration and the development of creative approaches to music learning.

A further prominent trend in both countries is the growing integration of digital tools and multimedia in music education. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, curricular reforms have encouraged the use of digital textbooks and interactive platforms, and schools are gradually adopting music software and online resources. In Montenegro, a nationwide initiative launched in 2025 equipped all schools with digital resources intended to enhance teaching and learning. In both contexts, teacher preparation in this area is developing through professional development programmes, although provision remains uneven. Digitalisation, referring to the integration of digital tools and resources into music teaching, is widely regarded as a means of increasing student engagement and diversifying pedagogical strategies; however, disparities in technological infrastructure continue to limit the full effectiveness of these innovations.

Collaboration with cultural institutions also plays an important role in enriching music education in both countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, partnerships with music academies, orchestras, and cultural organisations expose pupils to professional performance, workshops, and concert attendance, which in some regions has become a compulsory component of music education. In Montenegro, cooperation with the Montenegrin Music Centre and children's music festivals serves a comparable function. Such initiatives strengthen the connection between school-based learning and the broader cultural environment.

Research and scholarship provide further insight into current developments, though the scope and focus differ between the two contexts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, recent publications have addressed a wide range of topics, including lifelong learning in music education, the use of information and communication technologies for developing teachers' digital competences, the role of creativity and emotions in music classes, and the pedagogical potential of improvisation and sound games in early education. Additional studies have examined the effects of long-term instrumental playing on auditory perception and the impact of music-kinaesthetic programmes for children with developmental difficulties. Collectively, this body of work reflects both methodological diversity

and a growing interest in evidence-based analysis of teaching practices (Akšamija, 2024; Akšamija & Ploskić, 2023; Hadžihasanović et al., 2022; Zećo, 2024; Ploskić, 2025a, 2025b). In Montenegro, research activity has been more limited in volume but has focused strongly on creativity in the classroom (Martinović Bogojević & Rotar Pance, 2022) and on teacher education programmes (Marković & Vučetić-Obadović, 2025).

Beyond publications, international symposia and conferences play an essential role in advancing music pedagogy in both countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the biennial international symposium *Music in Society*, jointly organised by the Musicological Society of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Sarajevo Music Academy since 1998, provides a long-standing platform for multidisciplinary dialogue and scholarly exchange. In Montenegro, the Music Academy of the University of Montenegro has organised the biennial international symposium on music pedagogy (SIMPED) since 2018, creating a professional forum dedicated to current challenges, innovations, and inspirations in music education.

Perspectives on the future of music education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro combine elements of continuity and reform, though policy priorities differ in emphasis. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, curricular revisions aligned with the Common Core aim to harmonise learning outcomes while strengthening inclusivity, outcome-based assessment, and contemporary teaching methods. In Montenegro, recent reforms have reduced weekly lesson allocations, prompting concern among educators, while ongoing discussions focus on methodological improvement and the expansion of creative activities. In both countries, policy debates highlight the need to secure adequate resources, enhance teacher preparation, and further integrate improvisation, composition, and digital tools into everyday practice.

Despite enduring challenges, such as restricted instructional time, uneven resources, and limited access to professional development, both contexts also demonstrate clear signs of innovation. Digitalisation, collaboration with cultural institutions, and the promotion of creative pedagogies point to a capacity for renewal. The future trajectory of music education will therefore depend on sustaining these positive initiatives while systematically addressing persistent obstacles. If such a balance is achieved, music education can continue to function as a dynamic field that fosters creativity, cultural identity, and lifelong engagement with music.

Conclusion

The importance of music education in schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro is evident in its historical and pedagogical development along a continuum that extends from a shared Yugoslav educational framework to contemporary reforms and increasingly

diversified methodological approaches. Across both systems, music education continues to be shaped by structural constraints – particularly limited instructional time – uneven material conditions, and differing levels of institutional support, which together influence the scope and depth of musical learning experiences.

At the same time, evolving pedagogical orientations and the gradual integration of digital technologies signal ongoing adaptation within both contexts. While disparities in resources and access persist, there is a growing recognition of the need to strengthen teacher capacity through more coherent and sustained forms of in-service professional development, particularly in relation to creative practices and digital integration.

Nevertheless, this chapter concludes on an optimistic note. In both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, music education remains a compulsory subject in primary schools and gymnasiums and is complemented by a well-established system of specialised music schools. In addition, extracurricular activities, collaborative performances, and project-based initiatives provide pupils with opportunities to engage with music beyond formal classroom instruction. Such experiences support the development of musical competencies and contribute to sustained engagement with music and its cultural significance, underscoring the longer-term educational and social relevance of music education within these societies.

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Music Education in Croatia

Between National Tradition, Curriculum Reform, and Specialised Schooling

Abstract

This chapter examines music education in Croatia as a dynamic system shaped by national musical traditions, curriculum reforms, and a strong network of specialised music schools. It examines developments in curriculum frameworks, instructional time, teacher autonomy, and the provision of resources in general and specialised education. Particular attention is given to recent reforms, including the All-Day School model, extracurricular initiatives, and Functional Music Pedagogy. The chapter situates Croatian music education within broader European agendas, highlighting strengths, tensions, and future challenges related to equity, inclusivity, and sustainability.

Introduction

Music education occupies a unique position within Croatia's national education system. It is shaped by the country's rich musical heritage, robust institutional framework, and extensive network of specialised music schools. This chapter explores music education in Croatian schools as a dynamic and evolving field situated between long-standing cultural traditions and contemporary curricular reforms. It examines the historical development of music teaching in general and specialised education, and how national curriculum documents frame learning outcomes, teaching approaches, and assessment. Particular attention is given to structural characteristics that distinguish the Croatian context, such as limited time allocated to music lessons in general education, teachers' pedagogical autonomy and the prominent role of extracurricular and specialised music education. Recent trends and

future directions are also considered, focusing on how Croatian music education responds to European educational standards and agendas promoting inclusivity and technological developments (Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia [MZO], 2019; Narodne novine, 2019). In this context, policy initiatives such as the All-Day School model are being piloted in selected Croatian schools as part of an experimental program, preceding an evaluation to determine its potential for broader implementation (MZO, 2023).

Historical Foundations and Educational Transitions in Croatian Music Education

In Croatia, pedagogical reforms have gradually influenced music education, with schools increasingly aligning with contemporary educational needs and placing students at the centre of the learning process (Senjan, 2017). Traditional models of music instruction that emphasise passive content reception have been reconsidered in favour of approaches that integrate listening, performance, and creative activities.

The *Music Culture* and *Music Arts curriculum* documents, adopted in 2019, emphasise students' exposure to, experience with, and understanding of music from diverse styles and cultural backgrounds (National Curriculum for Music Culture and Music Arts, NN 7/2019). According to the official curriculum, students actively encounter and learn about various types, styles, and genres of music through the "Listening and Music Acquaintance" domain, where they listen to and analyse musical works, learning about the expressive and organizational elements of music. In the domain of "Expressing in and through music", students engage in practical music-making activities, such as singing, instrumental performance, music games, music creation, and movement with music. These activities support the development of musical skills and creativity. The curriculum also defines "Music in Context" as a domain that encourages students to explore the cultural and social roles of music, connect it to other art forms and cultures, and develop a broader understanding of culture and interdisciplinary learning. Within this framework, "Music in Context" involves learning about music as a cultural phenomenon embedded in history, tradition, and everyday life, as well as understanding music within its relevant social and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the curriculum explicitly supports learner autonomy and varied instructional strategies, enabling teachers to adapt content, methods, and activities to their students' interests and abilities (National Curriculum for Music Culture and Music Arts, NN 7/2019). These contemporary pedagogical approaches reflect long-term developments in Croatian music education. Reform processes gradually unfolded during the 1990s and 2000s. Significant changes in instructional structure and methodological approaches were implemented through curricular revisions beginning in the early 2000s. These changes

culminated in the current 2019 curriculum (MZO, 2006; National Curriculum for Music Culture and Music Arts, NN 7/2019).

The Croatian system currently has a dual-pathway structure. Music is compulsory in primary and secondary schools, giving all pupils a grounding in music. A parallel system of specialised music schools offers intensive programmes for those wishing to pursue advanced musical development. This structure has been supported by the gradual development of national curriculum frameworks and regulatory documents, which seek to balance centralised educational standards with increasing pedagogical autonomy at school and teacher levels. While this system provides broad access to music education and supports the development of musical expertise among motivated learners, it also highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing general music education, which has limited instructional time, with the intensive, selective nature of specialised music schooling (Bačlija Sušić, 2017; MZO, 2019).

Music Instruction Time and Its Educational Implications: Time Allocation in Primary and Secondary Schools

In Croatian primary schools, one lesson per week is typically dedicated to music education for pupils in Years 1 to 8. This time is dedicated to developing students' musical skills and knowledge. In the lower grades (Years 1–3), generalist classroom teachers introduce students to singing, rhythmic movement, and listening activities, thereby laying the foundation for musical literacy. From Year 4 onwards, specialist teachers with university degrees in music pedagogy provide more advanced instruction in performance, theory, history, and music literacy (MZO, 2011; MZO, 2019).

In the context of ongoing reforms, the All-Day School model is being piloted in select Croatian primary schools as part of an experimental programme prior to being evaluated for broader implementation (MZO, 2023). This model aims to extend learning and teaching time, as well as increasing the overall number of instructional hours. Notably, in the first four years of primary education, the weekly allocation for the Artistic area (including Music Culture) is expected to increase, with Music specifically allocated 1.5 hours per week in the experimental programme. This expected 0.5-hour increase could reshape the role of music in general education (MZO, 2023).

In secondary schools, allocation varies by programme. Classical and language-oriented gymnasiums typically teach music for all four years, while science and maths-oriented programmes mainly offer it in the first two years or only in the final year. Some schools also provide elective music courses with longer weekly lessons, though these are not universal (Senjan, 2017). The limited instructional time across grades restricts the development of musical skills, ensemble experience and creative exploration, which could affect long-term musical literacy, creativity and aesthetic development (Gergorić, 2024).

Teacher Qualifications and Educational Implications

Teacher qualifications and pedagogical autonomy are crucial factors in ensuring the quality of music education. In Croatia, music teachers are highly qualified, with credentials aligned to the level they teach, and all classes are conducted by trained educators. While the national curriculum defines learning objectives and content, it also gives teachers considerable autonomy in selecting repertoire, teaching strategies and learning materials (Bačlija Sušić, 2017; MZO, 2011; MZO, 2019).

This autonomy supports both consistency and adaptability. In schools with limited lesson time or fewer resources, the quality of music education often hinges on the teacher's creativity, expertise, and engagement. Their professional judgement often determines the richness and depth of pupils' musical experiences. Maintaining a balance between structured curricular expectations and pedagogical initiative ensures that students receive meaningful musical experiences in a variety of school settings.

Access to teaching resources and digital platforms

Access to teaching resources and digital platforms varies between Croatian schools, depending on factors such as size, institutional support, and available infrastructure. While some schools have dedicated music classrooms equipped with pianos, percussion instruments, audio-visual equipment, and digital technologies, others have more limited resources, meaning teachers must rely on their own instruments or improvised solutions. Digital tools, such as tablets and computers, are increasingly being used to supplement physical resources and provide students with interactive musical experiences.

Textbooks and teacher guides are aligned with the national curriculum and regulated by the Ministry of Science and Education (MZO). Schools procure textbooks, while teachers select supplementary materials according to pedagogical priorities. Additional resources, including audio and video recordings, music anthologies and methodological publications, help teachers to deliver engaging and diverse lessons.

Adoption of e-learning platforms such as Edutorium accelerated during the pandemic, providing access to video lessons and nationally produced digital content (CARNET, n.d.; Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, 2024; MZO, 2023). However, the effectiveness of these platforms depends on reliable internet access, teacher training, and school infrastructure, which can result in varying experiences across schools.

Despite differences in available resources, many schools demonstrate creative approaches to music education, enabling pupils to engage in meaningful musical activities, develop skills and cultivate an appreciation of music. Qualified teachers, pedagogical autonomy and a diverse range of resources contribute to pupils' comprehensive musical, cognitive and socio-emotional development in Croatian schools.

Extracurricular Music Education and Cultural Programmes

In addition to formal classes, Croatia promotes music education through extracurricular and cultural programmes designed to develop students' musical skills, creativity, and cultural awareness beyond the limited hours of formal instruction. Major concert halls and cultural institutions support these initiatives, including the Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall in Zagreb, Croatian House Split, the Croatian Music Institute in Zagreb, and the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka. These institutions offer educational programmes that introduce children and young people to different musical styles and instruments. Through educational concerts, interactive workshops, school group series, and collaborations with music associations, these programmes foster active listening, musical literacy, and creative participation.

Organisations such as *Croatian Musical Youth* play a pivotal role in nurturing young talent, preserving the nation's musical heritage, and promoting contemporary music. They also foster collaboration between schools, music educators, and cultural institutions. These programmes often include masterclasses, competitions, and joint performances, providing students with opportunities to apply their skills in real-world contexts. They also facilitate international exchange, enabling students to participate in festivals, concerts, and workshops abroad and broadening their cultural perspectives in the process.

Media initiatives can contribute significantly to pupils' musical education. For example, the educational television series *Notica* introduces primary and secondary school pupils to music from all historical periods, showcasing renowned musicians and virtuosos. Meanwhile, digital platforms such as Edutorium and online music libraries offer video lessons, interactive exercises and curated digital collections, supporting both self-directed learning and classroom instruction (CARNET, n. d.; Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, 2024; MZO, 2023).

Another important national initiative is the *Backpack Full of Culture* programme, which aims to make art and culture accessible to children and young people, especially those in areas with limited access to such content. The programme offers numerous events annually, drawn from a variety of specially developed activities. Examples include up to 43 programmes implemented in island pilot areas. These include interactive concerts, music workshops, and performance projects that engage students directly with classical and contemporary music traditions.

Additionally, numerous specialised music workshops, summer schools, and community-based projects complement formal instruction. These initiatives often focus on specific skills such as composition, improvisation, orchestral and ensemble performance, and contemporary music technology. They encourage collaborative learning, peer mentoring and creative experimentation, which are less feasible within standard classroom hours.

These extracurricular and cultural programmes also strengthen students' socio-emotional development. Participation in concerts, competitions, and collaborative projects

builds confidence, teamwork skills, and cultural awareness. Schools and local music institutions frequently collaborate with professional musicians and cultural organisations to provide mentorship and guidance, ensuring high-quality musical experiences.

Together, these programmes supplement formal instruction, providing more opportunities for students to develop musical literacy, technical proficiency, and aesthetic appreciation. However, research suggests that their effectiveness could be enhanced further by increasing the variety, duration and accessibility of activities, and by strengthening teacher training to fully engage students and support sustained musical growth (Gergorić, 2024).

In recent years, the Government of the Republic of Croatia has introduced additional measures to encourage youth participation in cultural activities. Starting January 1, 2026, the *Culture Card* initiative will provide individuals aged 18 and over with a € 100 voucher for cultural activities, including theater performances, concerts, museum visits, and similar events. This measure aims to strengthen young people's engagement in cultural life and promote sustained participation in the arts by granting them direct access to cultural content.

Extending Music Learning Beyond the Classroom and Specialised Music Schools

Extracurricular programmes play a crucial role in enriching music education and complementing formal classroom instruction. Activities such as school choirs, orchestras and ensembles allow students to develop their collaborative skills, hone their performance abilities and engage with music in a creative way. These activities also foster social cohesion and community participation (Gergorić, 2024). Extracurricular activities and national initiatives promote student engagement in music, encouraging creativity, collaboration, and cultural awareness (CARNET, n.d.; MZO, 2023).

Specialised music schools offer intensive, state-funded programmes for children and young people from early childhood through to secondary education. Primary programmes usually last six years, combining instrumental lessons with theoretical subjects such as solfège, music theory, and ensemble activities, including choir participation. Secondary programmes span four years and include 14–20 weekly lessons in core subjects such as harmony, counterpoint, music history, ensemble and chamber music, and piano accompaniment. These schools prepare students for higher education and professional music careers by fostering technical proficiency, musical literacy and performance experience.

Child-centred education employs Functional Music Pedagogy (FMP), which was developed by the Croatian music educator and ethnomusicologist Elly Bašić (1908–1998). FMP is grounded in a humanistic philosophy of learning that emphasises so-called spontaneous improvisation as a natural and creative means of musical development, nurturing self-expression, creativity, and freedom rather than technical skills. It upholds every child's right to music, innate sense of pitch and rhythm, and creative imagination. These principles are reflected in the lack of entrance exams and conventional grading.

The organisational structure of FMP spans from preschool to secondary level, thereby ensuring continuity in musical development. Individual instrumental instruction follows a staged programme model, introducing A and B tracks in the third stage to cater to students' abilities and developmental needs. A distinctive feature of FMP is its functional solfège method, which, alongside improvisation, encourages creativity, autonomy, and musical thinking throughout all levels of study (Bačlija Sušić, 2016a; Bačlija Sušić, 2016b).

By integrating extracurricular programmes, specialised schools and innovative pedagogical approaches, Croatia demonstrates its commitment to providing diverse pathways for musical development. Students benefit from enriched learning environments that combine technical mastery, creative exploration, and holistic personal growth. As well as developing artistic skills, these programmes foster cultural awareness, civic engagement, and a sense of community. Recent trends reflect alignment with European standards and contemporary pedagogy, emphasising active engagement through singing, instrumental practice, listening and creative music-making, as well as inclusivity and interdisciplinarity. International collaborations and research projects further enhance students' experiences, improve teaching quality and promote professional development. This contributes to a dynamic system that fosters lifelong engagement with music.

Music education within the national framework

Within the broader Croatian national curricula, *Glazbena kultura* (Music Culture in primary schools) and *Glazbena umjetnost* (Music Art in secondary schools) provide a systematically structured, inclusive, and accessible framework for music education at all levels. Learning is organised around three key domains: listening to and learning about music; expressing oneself through music; and understanding music in cultural and social contexts. The curriculum emphasises equality, inclusion, diversity, democratic engagement and the preservation of musical heritage (MZO, 2019). Interdisciplinary links and project-based learning are encouraged through thematic weeks, school events and collaborative projects, which are supported by teachers' initiatives, professional associations and cultural partnerships (HDGPP, n.d.).

Assessment is criterion-based and aligned with curricular objectives, encompassing listening, performance, creativity, knowledge, and cultural understanding through formative and summative approaches. Specialised music schools conduct more frequent and structured evaluations due to the intensive instruction, while secondary school students can opt to take Music in the State Matura. Primary schools primarily rely on internal, teacher-led assessments (MZO, 2019; Narodne novine, 2019).

Recent trends reflect an alignment with European standards and contemporary pedagogy, with a focus on active, inclusive and interdisciplinary learning. Students engage in singing, instrumental practice, listening, and creative music-making, supported by digital resources and technology. Programmes are increasingly accommodating all learners,

including children with disabilities. Combined with extracurricular initiatives, international collaborations and research projects, these elements enrich students' experiences, improve teaching quality and promote professional development. This demonstrates a dynamic system that fosters creativity, inclusion and lifelong engagement with music (Senjan, 2017; CARNET, n.d.; MZO, 2023).

Conclusion

Croatian music education strikes a unique balance between historical traditions, national curricular frameworks and innovative pedagogical approaches. The dual structure, which combines compulsory general music instruction in primary and secondary schools with intensive training in specialist music schools, allows for the development of both broad-based musical literacy and advanced musical skills. Historical continuity in musical traditions and community-based practices remains an integral part of the curriculum, while reforms have introduced student-centred learning, creativity and interdisciplinary connections (Senjan, 2017; MZO, 2019).

Despite these achievements, challenges persist. Limited classroom time and variations in available teaching resources highlight ongoing gaps in equity and inclusion. Concurrently, extracurricular programmes, national initiatives such as *Backpack Full of Culture*, and innovative pedagogical methods such as Functional Music Pedagogy at the Elly Bašić Music School enrich student engagement, creativity, and holistic musical development (Bačlija Sušić, 2017; Vasilj, 2021).

Current trends emphasise inclusivity and interdisciplinary learning. In conclusion, Croatian music education is a dynamic and evolving system. Its strength lies in its combination of national traditions, structured curricula, teacher autonomy, and innovative pedagogical approaches that foster student creativity, inclusivity, and lifelong engagement with music. By addressing existing challenges and building on current trends, Croatian schools can continue to cultivate musical skills, cultural awareness, and artistic potential in all students.

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Music Education in Cypriot Schools

Current Status, Challenges, and Opportunities

Abstract

This chapter examines the contemporary landscape of music education in Cyprus, focusing on curriculum design and implementation, current challenges, and the organisation of Music as a school subject in primary and secondary education. Particular attention is given to the National Music Curriculum, which promotes the development of musical skills, active learning, creativity, and cultural diversity, among other aims. While the curriculum articulates a democratic, student-centred vision, tensions emerge in practice, particularly around implementation guidelines, teacher autonomy, and the meaningful inclusion of student voice. Drawing on recent research, this chapter highlights the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities and discusses the professional learning and structural support needed to foster teacher agency and ensure inclusive, relevant, and responsive music education.

Introduction

Cyprus, a small island in the Eastern Mediterranean, has a diverse musical heritage shaped by its strategic position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Since 1974, the island has remained divided, yet the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus maintains authority over the areas under its effective control. Education operates within a highly centralised system. Following a brief historical overview, this chapter outlines the organisation and curricular framework of music education in public schools, situating the discussion within broader debates on cultural identity, diversity, social cohesion, student voice, and democracy.

From Past to Contemporary Music Education in Cyprus

Cyprus's geopolitical position has historically exposed the island to successive conquests, resulting in a complex cultural and musical landscape shaped by Byzantine chant, folk traditions, and Western classical music introduced through colonial and European influences (Telemachou, 1998). Although Greek Cypriots constitute the majority, minority communities, including Maronites, Armenians, Latins, and Turkish Cypriots, have long contributed to Cyprus's cultural life. Following the division of the island in 1974, Greek became the dominant language of education and public life, with minority children primarily attending Greek public schools. These social and cultural dynamics continue to influence educational priorities, including music education (Karagiorgis, 1986; Persianis & Polyviou, 1992; Trimikliniotis, 2004).

Cyprus's education system developed through Ottoman, British, and post-independence phases, each shaping music education in distinct ways. For centuries, musical learning was transmitted orally through religious and community contexts, particularly in folk and ecclesiastical traditions. Under British rule, Western educational models were introduced, and music, listed as *Odeki* (singing), was added to the curriculum, with a limited focus on choral singing (Telemachou Nicolaou, 1998). The 1893 teacher training college offered courses in music, Byzantine music, and solfège, providing early institutional support. By the mid-twentieth century, conservatories, choirs, orchestras, and bands had formed, and Western art music gained greater prominence. School music programmes gradually expanded to include listening activities and, later, instrumental instruction (Panayiotou, 1985).

Following independence in 1960, Cyprus sought to establish a unified national education system in which music supported nation-building by emphasising patriotic and Greek folk songs, thereby reinforcing cultural identity (Persianis & Polyviou, 1992; Koutsellini-loanninou, 1997; Philippou & Klerides, 2010). Limited resources meant that music education remained largely teacher-led and focused on shaping national consciousness (Karagiorgis, 1986; Koutsellini, 1997), while also laying the foundations for later curricular diversification (Hajisoteriou, Neophytou & Angelides, 2012).

The 1974 invasion and division of the island devastated education: 40 % of schools were destroyed, and many teachers and students were displaced. However, classes resumed within months, sometimes in tents. The Pedagogical Academy soon launched a pre-primary teacher education programme (1975–78). In the late 1970s, curriculum reform became urgent and was guided by theories of Tyler and Bloom. The 1981 curriculum emphasised holistic development, cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor, and redefined the teacher as a facilitator. It reflected international approaches such as “sound before symbol”, creativity and self-expression, integration of movement, listening, classroom instruments, and composition. It promoted child-centred, workshop-style teaching, with concrete activities

and assessment tools, positioning music as a subject that nurtures creativity, expression, and aesthetic appreciation (Economidou, 2004).

A significant milestone in consolidating these reforms was the establishment of the Pedagogical Institute in 1972, which assumed a central role in curriculum development, teacher education, research, and policy implementation. Further developments in the early 2000s included the creation of specialised secondary music schools, offering advanced studies in both Western art music and Cypriot musical traditions. Following Cyprus's accession to the European Union in 2004, music education became increasingly aligned with European priorities, emphasising creativity, cultural diversity, and lifelong learning. Together, these developments reflect the evolution of music education in Cyprus from post-independence reconstruction to a contemporary system shaped by local traditions, educational reform, and European integration.

Music as a Subject in Cypriot Schools

In Cyprus, as already mentioned, music education in schools is centrally overseen by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, with a clearly outlined allocation of time for each subject. In kindergarten, although a general framework of the school day's timetable exists, there are no specific guidelines or requirements regarding the frequency with which each subject area is taught. The decision is primarily left to the professional judgment of individual educators.

In primary school (ages 6–12), music is a required course taught twice a week. This ensures that all children receive consistent and regular exposure to music throughout their six years of primary education. In secondary schools, the approach differs slightly. During the first three years of secondary education, in the Gymnasium (ages 12–15), music remains a mandatory subject. It is taught twice a week in the first two years and once a week in the third year. During the last three years of secondary education, the Lyceum (ages 15–18), Music is compulsory only in the first year, taught once a week, and is offered as an elective or as a concentration subject for interested students in the final two years.

The profiles of teachers responsible for teaching music in schools differ between the primary and secondary levels. In primary schools, Music has traditionally been taught by generalist teachers who are responsible for all subjects in their classrooms, including Music. These teachers are usually trained as primary school teachers rather than as music specialists. Between 1988 and 1998, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth introduced music specialists into primary schools. About ninety conservatory-trained musicians were hired to teach in the upper grades of primary education. However, this arrangement lasted only a decade, after which responsibility for teaching music in primary schools reverted entirely to generalist teachers. In secondary schools, the situation has always been different.

Music is taught by specialised university music graduates who are appointed to schools after completing a year of pre-service training organised by the University of Cyprus. This programme prepares prospective teachers with pedagogical knowledge, subject-specific teaching methodologies, and school-based practicum experience. These teachers are solely responsible for music education and do not teach other subjects.

Teachers' qualifications reflect this difference. Primary school teachers typically hold bachelor's degrees in primary education, with most graduates from the University of Cyprus, a public university, and from other private universities in Cyprus. Their music training is limited to a required music methods course and the option to take one or two additional courses. As a result, their musical preparation is basic and lacks the depth of knowledge typically held by specialists. The conservatory-trained musicians appointed in primary schools between 1988 and 1998 had strong qualifications in performance, theory, or composition, mainly earned at Greek or Cypriot conservatories or afternoon music schools, but they did not receive pedagogical training. In contrast, secondary school teachers generally hold university degrees in music with various specialisations or a focus on music education. Before 2005, these degrees were usually obtained from universities abroad, especially in Greece, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Germany, Austria, Hungary, or Bulgaria, because Cyprus did not have its own music departments. Since 2005, Cypriot private universities have offered an undergraduate music programme, providing an additional option for Cypriot students.

Regarding resources, primary schools typically have a dedicated music room for all students, though it may also serve as a regular classroom when space is limited. Since 2008, new school designs have included music labs in primary schools, often alongside computer labs, allowing multiple teachers to use them without scheduling conflicts. Most schools are well-equipped through a coordinated, multi-year plan that prioritises essentials such as alto and bass xylophones, metallophones, a quality digital piano, and a variety of untuned classroom percussion instruments. All secondary schools in Cyprus have a dedicated, well-equipped music laboratory, often featuring a wide range of instruments and digital technologies (e.g., notation software and recording tools). Digital technology resources are gradually increasing in both primary and secondary schools, but their availability depends on teachers' initiative, familiarity with the technology, and the equipment they have access to.

Music teachers in both primary and secondary schools are expected to plan their lessons in line with the official Cyprus Music Curriculum. The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth provides textbooks and other educational resources for teaching music in schools, most of which are available through the Ministry's online music education hubs. Music teachers can also find earlier textbooks and other materials. Secondary school music teachers can access a wide selection of books, including textbooks and supplementary materials, published over the past 40 years to support music education in secondary schools

in Cyprus and Greece. These include older secondary school music textbooks, song anthologies, solfège, ear-training, and harmony books, as well as instrumental ensemble scores. In primary schools during the late 1990s, a series of official textbooks was developed for each grade level, along with accompanying teachers' guides. These books were used in schools until the early 2010s. Over the past decade, with the redesign of the Cyprus Music Curriculum and its updates in 2016 and 2024, new books and supplementary educational materials have been developed for teaching music in primary education, aligned with the philosophy, objectives, methodology, and suggested content of the National Music Curriculum.

Music teachers also receive support through professional development opportunities organised by the Primary and Secondary School offices at the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, and by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, which provides seminars, workshops, and in-service training sessions. These seminars introduce music teachers to innovative methods of teaching and learning music.

The Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth supports a range of extracurricular music activities. These activities are guided by the mission of the Offices of Primary and Secondary Music Education, which aim to provide a modern, multifaceted education that values personal expression, embraces diversity, and connects schools with the broader cultural life of the community. These initiatives promote the development of students' twenty-first-century key skills while enriching cultural life across the island. Both offices regularly collaborate to design and host educational concerts with the Cyprus Symphony Orchestra for their students. In secondary education, initiatives such as MusEd Tech encourage the creative use of digital tools. Meanwhile, performance opportunities in small and large ensembles, including the Pan-Cypriot Secondary School Orchestra, the VOX VENUS Pan-Cypriot Girls' Choir, and the annual Cypriots' Concert in Vienna, connect students with both local and international audiences. Educational concerts with the Cyprus Symphony Orchestra, community programmes offering free wind and string instruments, the Marios Tokas-Costas Montis Composition Festival, competitions, Musical Synergies with cultural partners, and participation in the International Music Olympiad demonstrate how music education extends beyond the classroom.

Beyond extracurricular activities, Cyprus also offers formal opportunities for students to deepen their musical engagement through specialised music schools, which play a vital role in the island's education system by combining artistic and academic learning. Established in 2006, these schools aim to provide musically talented young people with the opportunity to deepen their musical studies without neglecting their general education. The first school opened in Nicosia, and the model quickly expanded to other major cities, ensuring that opportunities were not limited to one region. Today, there are five music gymnasiums with corresponding music lyceums across the island. Admission is competitive, with each school accepting up to 25 new students annually into the first grade of

the gymnasium, who then continue through a six-year programme. Successful applicants earn a diploma and a specialised music qualification upon completion. The curriculum at these music schools differs from the Cyprus Music Curriculum for general schools. It is designed to balance individual lessons, ensemble work, and theoretical studies, while also introducing students to Cypriot and Byzantine traditions and current topics such as music technology. This approach fosters creativity and versatility, preparing students for diverse careers in performance, composition, or related fields. Outside of class, students often participate in festivals, choir workshops, collaborations with leading ensembles, and international performances, offering valuable exposure to diverse audiences.

The Cyprus Music Curriculum: Structure, Assessment, and Implementation

Over the past fifteen years, Cyprus has implemented a comprehensive educational reform, developing new national curricula across all subjects. Rooted in theoretical and philosophical foundations yet adapted to the local context, the reform fosters a humanistic and democratic school environment. It emphasises equity, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, cultural diversity, and environmental responsibility, aligning with European and global priorities for twenty-first-century skills and lifelong learning. Introduced in 2009, revised in 2016, and continuing through 2025, the initiative organises learning around Learning Objectives and Attainment Targets, which specify expected learning outcomes and achievement levels, thereby linking curriculum content, teaching, and assessment.

Within this framework, the kindergarten curriculum operates independently, guided by early childhood education philosophy. Rooted in free and structured play, it supports holistic development and reflects the work of Froebel, Vygotsky, and the Reggio Emilia approach. Broad developmental goals, aligned with international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), emphasise children's agency and participation rather than narrowly defined objectives.

The Music Curriculum, spanning from early childhood through upper secondary education, reflects an overarching aim of fostering lifelong engagement with music (Green, 2008; Wright, 2019). Its emphasis extends beyond discrete skills to the holistic development of students as listeners, performers, and creators, aligning with calls to nurture individual and collective musical agency (Burnard & Murphy, 2013). Accordingly, objectives progressively develop aural perception, critical listening, vocal and instrumental performance, and creative practices (improvisation and composition), alongside music literacy, integrating the cognitive, affective, and social domains (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). Structured into four developmental stages from Grade 1 of primary school to Grade 1 of lyceum, it ensures coherence and progression:

- Level 1: Grades 1–2 (primary)
- Level 2: Grades 3–4 (primary)
- Level 3: Grade 5 (primary) – Grade 1 (gymnasium)
- Level 4: Grades 2 (gymnasium) – Grade 1 (lyceum)

The Curriculum document is structured into several interconnected sections: an introduction; the general aim and objectives; the general aim by grade level; content; methodology; and assessment. It also includes a section on Learning Objectives and Attainment Targets, organised across the music skills of Performance (vocal and instrumental), Listening, and Creation (improvisation, composition and creative response to music).

The Content section states that teaching should be organised into units that connect musical skills and knowledge with music as a means of communication with others, the community, and oneself. It recommends exposure to both local (Cypriot and Greek) and global musical cultures to cultivate musically engaged citizens who value diversity while strengthening cultural identity. Teachers are advised to design units around thematic areas that support the development of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours aligned with the Learning Objectives and Attainment Targets. They are also advised to plan age-appropriate lessons grounded in students' interests and centred on listening, performing, and creating. Furthermore, teaching units are expected to be planned with reference to the following proposed thematic areas: musical identities (ours and others); music of the past and present (Greek, Cypriot, world, Western, popular); music and society; music and the environment; music and other arts; music and sciences; music and emotions; music and communication; music and traditions; and music and entrepreneurship. The curriculum also outlines how music can contribute to the eight key competences for lifelong learning (Council of the European Union, 2018), including cultural awareness and expression, communication, digital skills, and learning to learn.

For effective teaching and learning, the Methodologies section promotes experiential, student-centred approaches in which sound precedes symbols and learning progresses from enactive to symbolic modes. Within this framework, teachers, supported by autonomy and professional development, act as facilitators who foster creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. Informal practices, digital tools, and interdisciplinary links enhance engagement and support lifelong participation. The section highlights key pedagogical approaches (Dalcroze, Kodály, Orff, Gordon, Green) alongside intercultural, collaborative, and differentiated methods suitable for inclusive classrooms. Digital technologies are presented as essential for enhancing creativity, performance, listening, and critical thinking, and for providing flexible multimodal resources. Connections with other subjects and the use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) from early years through secondary education are also recommended to support student-centred learning linked to real-world challenges.

Assessment is presented as integral to learning, with an emphasis on formative approaches such as rubrics, portfolios, recordings, and peer and self-assessment, complemented by summative practices. Aligned with constructivist pedagogy, assessment supports reflection, motivation, and metacognitive development, while electronic documentation and continuity across educational levels reflect contemporary principles of assessment for learning.

To implement the Music Curriculum, the Music Inspection Offices provide separate guidelines for primary and secondary Education, which may vary depending on the office's personnel. The Ministry itself does not conduct systematic research on implementation; instead, this is primarily undertaken through private academic initiatives.

Regarding curriculum implementation in primary schools, teachers must follow the Cyprus Music Curriculum, which sets out the learning goals and thematic areas for each grade level. To support this, they are encouraged to use textbooks and materials prepared by colleagues appointed to the respective Offices of Primary and Secondary Music Education, as well as resources available on the official Music Education website. At the same time, teachers have the flexibility to enhance their lessons by creating their own teaching plans and student voice activities, provided these remain aligned with the curriculum. This approach ensures consistency in what children are taught across schools while also allowing room for creativity and adaptation to the specific needs of each class.

The guidelines issued by the Secondary Education Inspector's Office for curriculum implementation appear to conflict with the philosophy of the Cyprus Music Curriculum document. While the curriculum emphasises flexibility, teacher autonomy, and the meaningful inclusion of students' voices, the guidelines prescribe fixed, repertoire-focused thematic units with detailed plans for each grade and semester, specifying both sequence and repertoire. They do not consider student input or allow teachers the freedom to design thematic units tailored to their students' needs and their own teaching styles. These implementation challenges also raise broader questions about how music education in Cyprus evolves in practice, questions that recent research and current trends seek to investigate and address.

Current Trends and Research

Key questions guide this section: does music education in Cyprus, including its curriculum, theory, and practice, reflect students' current musical interests and promote their voice and agency? Do teachers have the freedom to design innovative, learner-responsive lessons? Is knowledge gained through active engagement, and is there space for diverse pedagogies, such as informal and non-formal learning?

On paper, the Music Curriculum appears modern; however, in practice, its implementation often reveals gaps between what is intended and what is achieved. Student voices in Cyprus point to a clear direction, as shown by studies investigating students' views on their music education in school. Secondary school students value Music as a subject but seek greater participation in music-making, broader instrumental options, repertoire that reflects their listening preferences, authentic group work, creative use of technology, and opportunities to contribute to content and assessment. This is not a call for less rigour but for negotiated, relevant, and meaningful experiences (Economidou Stavrou & Papageorgi, 2021). Research in the music schools' context echoes these perspectives: students value practical, performance-based, and collaborative learning, highlighting individual lessons, ensembles, concerts, exchanges, and cultural trips as transformative milestones that build confidence, identity, and real-world readiness. While students recognise the value of subjects such as Byzantine and traditional music, they would engage more if these were connected to contemporary practice. Recommendations include broadening instrumental choices and modern ensemble pathways (e.g., pop/rock), integrating creative studies (such as composition, orchestration, and conducting), linking theory and practice through project-based work, and investing in regular performances and inter-school collaborations to align education with students' interests and emerging careers (Economidou Stavrou, Konstantakou & Neofytou, 2025).

Realising the vision of considering, and where possible, addressing young people's needs, requests, and desires in music teaching and learning depends on teacher agency. Music teachers are expected to act as curriculum designers, transforming curricula by considering their students' experiences, co-negotiating content with students, and designing meaningful musical activities for them (Economidou Stavrou & O'Connell, 2022; Economidou Stavrou, Telemachou & Neokleous, 2025). However, a qualitative study of 12 Cypriot primary and secondary school music teachers highlights ongoing issues of over-prescription, content overload, and unclear assessment of creativity. After years of centralised control, some teachers feel unprepared or insecure when exercising professional autonomy. Standardised materials provide reassurance, but, as Economidou and Telemachou (2023) illustrate, they can restrict those seeking to connect teaching with students' voices and current practices. These challenges are even more significant for generalist teachers, many of whom lack a strong musical background and express a need for targeted support. They emphasise the importance of deepening their musical knowledge, enhancing their understanding of the curriculum, and engaging in ongoing, substantial professional development (Economidou Stavrou & Telemachou, 2023). Such growth cannot be achieved through a single annual seminar; it requires systematic, continuous opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and shared practice, such as critical friendships and professional learning communities.

Conclusion

Contemporary music education in Cyprus, as outlined in the official National Curriculum for Music and its revisions (2009, 2016, and 2024), is inherently open and democratic. This vision should not remain “on paper” but be reflected in all stages, guidelines, and actions of the key stakeholders responsible for its implementation in schools. Given the centralised nature of the educational system in Cyprus, the implementation process and the guidelines that music teachers must follow are the sole responsibility of the relevant inspectors for primary and secondary education and their teams. Providing guidance and organising ongoing professional development seminars and workshops on the methods and approaches outlined in the curriculum document are essential for teachers to gain in-depth knowledge and confidence to explore new ideas. Student and teacher agency does not emerge automatically; music teachers need space, flexibility, and continuous support to foster both teacher and student agency. Many generalist primary school teachers also need additional support to develop their music skills and pedagogical knowledge for teaching music.

All of the above will empower music teachers to experiment with innovative approaches and exercise professional agency in responding to the diverse needs, interests, and abilities of their students. However, in a highly centralised education system, such autonomy is not entirely within their control.

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Marek Sedláček & Ondřej Musil

From Heritage to Horizon

Czech Music Education

Through the Lens of Historical Development, Current Trends, and Future Challenges

Abstract

The presented study provides an overview of the Czech music education system, tracing its historical evolution, and examining its contemporary structure across general and specialised schools. Beginning with an overview of key developmental milestones of the past fifty years, the study outlines how music education has evolved and what its key characteristics are. The central part maps the current organisation of music education within the national curriculum, with particular attention to general music education in compulsory schooling and specialised pathways leading to professional artistic training. Building on this structural analysis, the text identifies current trends with a special focus on the ongoing revision of the so-called Framework Educational Programmes, assessing the implications for music education in terms of competencies, content, and interdisciplinary integration. Finally, the study discusses the future perspectives of Czech music education.

Introduction

Music education in the Czech Republic is embedded in a complex educational system in which general and artistic education are closely interconnected. This chapter discusses the organisation of music education across different educational stages, including time allocation, age groups, teacher preparation, and available teaching resources. It highlights both the specific national characteristics of the Czech system and the influence of international educational trends, while also considering how developments of recent decades are reflected in contemporary educational practice.

An important part of the chapter is devoted to basic art schools, which play a distinctive role in the Czech context by offering a long-established and structured pathway for artistic education alongside general schooling. Particular emphasis is placed on recent changes and ongoing processes within the Czech educational system, especially those related to the revision of the national curriculum. The chapter addresses the challenges these reforms pose for music education and illustrates current developments through references to recent research and selected examples of good practice.

Context: From Past to Contemporary Music Education in the Czech Republic

The country comprises 14 partly self-governing regions and three main historical areas (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia). Nonetheless, the educational system is centralised through one national curriculum (in general, and thus also for music education) and applies to all of them. Currently, a certain autonomy is granted only to higher education (see below).

Today's general educational trends in music are mainly influenced by principles made by important personalities of Czech (Czecho-Slovak) music pedagogy in the late 1970s. The new conception of music education, started with the school year 1976–1977 and revised six years later, aimed to bring the content of music education closer to practice, i.e., towards an active involvement of students in the educational process and their complex musical development (Sedlák, 1985).

The need for change was prompted by the inconsistencies in the concept of education at that time. Moreover, experts pointed to an increasing passivity in students, which was caused by the progress of communication and information technologies, and the growing influence of background music both in public places and in households (Gregor & Sedlický, 1990, pp. 136–137). However, in terms of music, the reconstruction of the curriculum was generally carried out primarily in the spirit of greater social and cultural engagement in the 1970s. In addition to schools, this was also facilitated by leading state institutions and societies, including concert ensembles (especially the Czech Philharmonic), theatres, television, radio, etc. (Gregor & Sedlický, 1990).

The activity-based approach has its roots in the broader pedagogical and musical-didactic trends of the twentieth century. The main inspiration and conceptual source was Carl Orff's *Schulwerk*, which composers and educators Petr Eben and Ilja Hurník adapted into the *Česká Orffova škola* (*Czech Orff School*) in the 1960s (Holas, 2004). These changes defined the four main areas/activities of music education (Sedlák, 1985): 1) vocal, 2) instrumental, 3) musical movement, and 4) listening.

The presented model persisted after 1989 (during the change of political regime) and became the basis for later curricular reforms, including the latest national standards:

Framework Educational Programmes (FEP; approved 2004, implemented 2007) (EACEA, 2008). The aims of music education set by the FEP further built on the concept of activity in music education. Of course, there were conceptual changes and renewals towards modern music-educational approaches (see below for more information on music in the FEPs).

Specialised music schools had a relatively autonomous development, but their historical importance and influence on culture and musical life in the Czech lands are given by their long-term operation, connection to rich musical traditions and significant composers and musical personalities, and the ability of these schools to adapt to the requirements of modern education.

Music in Schools: From Classroom Time to Specialised Education

In the Czech Republic, music is integrated into the educational system from early childhood to upper secondary levels, with varying degrees of emphasis and specialisation. The time allocated to music education in Czech schools varies by educational level and institutional type. The following overview presents the division of educational levels according to ISCED (2011), which applies to the Czech system (EACEA, 2008):

- Early Childhood Education for children from 3 to 6 years of age, with variable time allocation for compulsory music lessons. Music is integrated into general activities and is not taught as a separate subject.
- Primary Education (age 6–11) with one hour of compulsory music education per week. Music is part of the national curriculum that focusses on basic skills and appreciation of musical values.
- Lower Secondary (age 11–15) with one hour of compulsory music education per week that builds on primary education with more theory, history, and practical skills.
- Upper Secondary (age 15–19) with zero to two hours of music education which is elective; grammar schools students choose either Music or Fine Arts; some schools offer specialised programmes.

While the national curriculum provides a standardised framework, implementation can vary slightly between regions and school types. Regions with a rich cultural heritage or strong emphasis on music – such as South Moravia – may allocate more hours to music education, thanks to the so-called disposable hours. These represent a certain number of teaching hours beyond the standard curriculum, which the principal can use to include optional subjects, extra-curricular activities, to support exceptionally gifted students, etc. (Národní pedagogický institut České republiky, n.d.).

As for music teachers, in pre-primary (ages 3–6) and primary education (ages 6–11), music is taught predominantly by generalist teachers, reflecting its integration into broader developmental and educational activities. However, in primary schools with a strong arts focus, music specialists may be involved to enrich the curriculum, especially in the higher grades. In lower secondary schools (ages 7–15), music instruction is typically provided by qualified specialists with formal training in music education. In upper secondary schools (ages 15–19), the situation varies; music may be taught by specialists or teachers with additional qualifications, depending on the school's profile and resources. This structure ensures that music education is developmentally appropriate and responds to students' growing musical needs and interests of students.

Resources for Teaching Music: Where Multimedia and Multisensory Teaching Meet

Schools in the Czech Republic use a variety of resources for music education, including textbooks and books, which are not strictly prescribed, allowing teachers to choose from a range of didactic materials that best suit their teaching approach and the needs of their students. Multimedia resources, such as videos and audio recordings, are commonly used to enhance music lessons and provide students with diverse learning experiences. Schools are also equipped with musical instruments to facilitate hands-on learning, ranging from basic percussion (Orff instruments, boomwhackers, drumbens, etc.) to classic instruments like pianos and guitars. Additionally, digital tools and online platforms are being increasingly integrated into music education, including educational, recording, and notation software and interactive music-making applications (Košut et al., 2017).

In addition to school-based resources, various funded cultural projects and initiatives support music education in the Czech Republic. For example, the Czech Philharmonic's *Hudba do škol* (Music in Schools) project provides opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development and share best practice. This project also includes free concert visits and other cultural activities that enrich the music education experience.

Choirs and Live Performance as a Central Point of Extra-Curricular Music Education

In the Czech Republic, students have numerous opportunities to participate in extra-curricular music activities. These often include choirs¹, instrumental ensembles, and even musical theatre, allowing students to develop their musical talents beyond the regular curriculum. Furthermore, schools frequently organise concerts, talent shows, or competitions. Music is also often incorporated into interdisciplinary projects, such as those that combine music

¹ Choirs (amateur, semi-professional or professional) have a rich tradition in this country, which goes back deep into the past and is often associated with the greatest Czech composers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

with subjects such as history, literature, or technology. These projects help students understand the broader context of music and its connections to other fields of study.

Basic Art Schools: Extension of Compulsory Music Education

Currently, there are more than 500 basic art schools in the Czech Republic as specialised (public or private) institutions providing advanced education to artistically gifted children and young people in parallel to general education. These schools offer programmes in music, dance, visual arts, and literature-drama. The primary goal of basic art schools is to provide students with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills beyond the standard curriculum. Concerning music, lessons consist of playing an instrument or singing, playing in an ensemble or singing in a choir, and musical theory. Students perform at concerts and advance exams, young talents can participate in renowned international competitions (Krčková & Stárek, 2010). The uniqueness of these institutions lies primarily in state support, a unified curriculum in their own FEP (for Basic Art Education), and national-wide coverage.

Music conservatories (upper secondary school level, ages 15–19; EACEA, 2008) include 12 public, five private, and three church institutions and offer four- to six-year programmes that combine music and general education (Rámcový vzdělávací program pro střední odborné vzdělávání, 2010). Graduates of these programmes are qualified for a career of performing artists, as well as to teach at basic art schools. Conservatories provide rigorous music education, including both theoretical and practical training in various music disciplines.

The last level of specialised music education is represented by music academies (in Prague and in Brno) providing a higher music education and, at the same time, the highest obtainable formal music education in the country. Graduates are professionally trained musicians with advance knowledge of music history, theory, and other disciplines. In most cases, they become soloists, members of professional musical ensembles, theatre groups, or (often in parallel with their practice as performing musicians) teachers at basic art schools or conservatories.

Aims and Structure of the Czech Music Curriculum

Schools in the Czech Republic follow a general national curriculum, which is defined by *Framework Educational Programmes* (FEPs), obligatory documents that represent the national level. These contain school curricula for all levels of education, excluding universities and other higher education institutions which are autonomous in this respect. At the school level, each school creates its own *School Educational Programme* (SEP) based on the guidelines provided by the FEP that aims at concrete steps for fulfilling the FEPs (Jeřábek & Tupý, 2007).

Music, together with Fine Arts, is traditionally treated as a standalone subject in Czech schools, with the exception of pre-school education, where musical activities tend to be integrated into various areas, as stated above. However, the recent revision of the *Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education* introduces a more integrated and competence-oriented approach to music education in the Czech Republic. Under this reform, music education will be grouped with dance and drama within a unified educational area, while Fine Arts will be merged with Film Education. The revised FEP BE defines three main categories of educational content for Music, Dance, and Drama (Národní pedagogický institut České republiky, n.d.b):

- (1) Interpretation, Own Creation, and Sharing
- (2) Reception and Reflection of Artistic Work
- (3) Cultural Awareness and Behaviour

Furthermore, the reform expands the concept of key competencies, reflecting current social and educational developments. The recent inclusion of *cultural competence* strengthens the role of the arts within general education (Národní pedagogický institut České republiky, n.d.c). Implementation of the revised FEP BE will be gradual and is planned to continue until 2031 (first phase of implementation in 2027). Before full adoption, the new model will be piloted in selected schools, after which the remaining Framework Educational Programmes will be updated accordingly (MŠMT, n.d.).

Current Challenges, Research and Innovation

Besides the above mentioned FEP revisions, one of the main challenges faced by Czech schools is finding a balance between traditional music education, which focuses on music theory and reproduction, and modern approaches that emphasise creativity and entrepreneurship. This reflects a larger shift in educational priorities, with the aim of aligning music education with contemporary student interests and learning styles. The expanding training and resources for music teachers is another challenge. Many educators report limited access to modern teaching materials and technologies, which hampers their ability to engage students effectively (Sedláček, 2018). This shortage affects both the quality and inclusivity of music education, particularly in schools with fewer resources.

When it comes to research, it is primarily associated with universities in connection with doctoral study programmes. For instance, the research team of academic staff and doctoral students of the Department of Music, Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, has conducted several studies in the field of school music education in the last ten years, with the focus on digital technologies, (Košťat et al., 2017), music preferences (Sedláček, 2016),

teaching music theory at basic art schools (Kučerová et al., 2018), folk song (Kučerová et al., 2019), and attitudes of music teachers towards folk music (Sedláček & Kučerová, 2022).

A study by Alois Daněk (2024) from AMBIS University entitled *Music Education: The Path to Social Justice* is also worth mentioning. Drawing on the El Sistema programme and the Suzuki Method, the research highlights the social and educational benefits of inclusive music education while also providing critical insights. Additionally, Jiřina Jiříčková from Charles University highlights the piano as a multifunctional and effective teaching tool in lower primary music education in her study *Klavír jako didaktický prostředek v hudební výchově na 1. stupni základní školy (Piano as a Didactic Tool in Music Education at Primary Schools)* (2024). The research advocates for better piano training in teacher education, especially for generalist teachers, to fully utilise the instrument's didactic potential.

The aforementioned research studies naturally reflect current trends and innovations. Generally, innovative practices are increasingly shaping music education in the Czech Republic. Inspired by the Finnish education model, some schools have adopted interactive and movement-based activities that enhance student engagement. The integration of multimedia technologies – such as electronic instruments, music software, and other digital tools – has also become more prevalent, making music learning more dynamic and accessible. As already stated, new FEP versions encourage students to go beyond mere reproduction and They aim to deepen students' understanding of music and to support their personal artistic development.

This clearly represents the future perspective of music education in the Czech Republic. The 2030+ Strategy, which aims to modernise the education system, focuses on revising the music curriculum to emphasise creativity, critical thinking, and practical application of knowledge. It also highlights the integration of digital tools and technologies, such as multimedia and music software, to make learning more engaging and interactive for students. There is also significant discourse surrounding the use of AI tools in music education. In addition, there is a strong emphasis on professional growth for teachers, providing them with opportunities to improve their skills and adopt innovative teaching methods.

Promoting equality, special educational needs, and inclusion is another key aspect, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have equal access to high quality (music) education. These initiatives aim to create a more dynamic, inclusive, and engaging music education system, preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Current research and, increasingly, pedagogical practice go hand in hand with these initiatives. A good example of this may be the new music textbooks that reflect current trends in music education. The series of music textbooks for primary schools, entitled *Hravá hudební výchova (Playful Music Education)* (2020–2023), authored by a collective led by Daniela Taylor, exemplifies modern music education resources with its visually appealing

design and high-quality illustrations, photographs, and music examples (e.g., Taylor et al., 2023). This series is closely linked with a methodological guide and workbooks that provide a clear lesson structure, making it accessible even to less experienced teachers.

In addition, professional didactic materials have been developed in the Czech Republic to support inclusive music education. For example, the publication *Hudba v inkluzivním vzdělávání (Music in Inclusive Education)* (Kružíková, 2020) offers a comprehensive overview of theoretical foundations, current research, and practical experiences, including examples of good practice. These resources are invaluable to educators aiming to implement inclusive strategies in their music teaching.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to introduce the reader to key aspects of the Czech music education, which stem from the rich musical history of the country as well as the cultural and social context, and to the perspectives and challenges that the Czech music education faces today. This study demonstrates that the Czech education system has undergone major changes in the past few decades. The artistic component of the general education currently has to overcome one of the greatest challenges in a long time, namely the integration of several artistic disciplines and the creation of a functional whole, which will more or less transform the content and outputs of the two traditional disciplines – music and fine arts. However, whatever form the final concept of art education takes, it is likely that specialised music schools remain an integral part of the Czech music education.

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Kadi Kaja, Urve Läänemets & Kristi Kiilu

From Tradition to Innovation

Music Education in Estonia

Abstract

This chapter examines the development and current state of music education in Estonian schools within integration of formal, non-formal and informal music learning. Music has been a compulsory subject since the nineteenth century and has significantly contributed to national identity, and the sustainability of professional music culture. This chapter outlines how history has shaped music education and analyses contemporary practices, including curricula, teacher education, extracurricular activities, and specialised music schools. Attention is given to competency-based education, digital integration, and inclusive approaches. Current challenges are discussed alongside future perspectives emphasising creativity, accessibility, and long-term sustainability of music education. Music teachers in Estonia have developed professional pride in the extraordinary cultural ecosystem that supports music education from early childhood through gymnasias and beyond.

Introduction

Estonian general education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research, which oversees state policy in the fields of formal and informal education, research, teacher training and legal developments in education. Music has been a compulsory subject since the nineteenth century and has significantly contributed to national identity, and the sustainability of professional music culture. Currently there are approximately 500 general comprehensive schools (330 basic schools, 28 state gymnasias, 130 municipal gymnasias), and 30 vocational schools and centres (Haridussilm 2025). The availability of

music education as a part of general education has played a significant role in the social cohesion of all learners from kindergartens up to the end of gymnasia (full cycle¹). Municipalities enjoy great autonomy when considering the content in curricula, selection of study aids, and development of learning environments, in which technological solutions play an important part for educational innovation. Local authorities are responsible for inclusive education for all ages (Government of the Republic of Estonia 2023). This chapter is structured as follows: historical context; music education in schools; formal and informal music education; national curricula/syllabi; current trends, challenges and research; and future prospects.

Historical Context

The Estonian experience of teaching music is pedagogically rich and long considering its history. Music education has been based on the theoretical and practical ideas of Riho Päts and Heino Kaljuste (Päts 1989/2010; Kangron 2011; Raudsepp 2013) since Estonian statehood was established in 1918. The best practices in Estonian school music are diverse and culturally relevant. Music education in schools has created a solid basis for music culture in Estonia, which has allowed the preservation of several traditions, the most significant of which is the regularly organised Song Celebrations (est. 1869). Music education has been a compulsory subject in schools since 1874. The present system of music education has been developed during three different historical periods. Between 1918–1940 a national education system was established in which music had a great role in enhancing national identity and citizenship. Since then, music education has been based on singing, which enables practitioners to teach different musical knowledge and musical skills, building musical literacy consisting of various components.

Differentiated music education also creates a foundation for the sustainability of professional musicianship (composers, interpreters etc.) Without the full cycle of music education in schools, professional music culture would not be sustainable.

In 1940–1991 Estonia was annexed to the Soviet Union. Despite new ideology, Estonian educationists managed to preserve the best in the national school culture, including compulsory music education. During this period specialised (music)classes and schools were also established. The role of supportive activities (different choirs, song and folkdance festivals, orchestras etc.) created a meaningful resistance culture² (Ruutsoo 2002). After

¹ Full cycle means kindergarten, compulsory school in three stages: grades 1–3; 4–6; 7–9 and gymnasia grades 10–12.

² The term “resistance culture” was first used by the historian and political scientist Rein Ruutsoo in his doctoral dissertation, *Civil Society and Nation Building in Estonia and the Baltic States: Impact of Traditions on Mobilization and Transition, 1986–2000*.

the ISME World Conference in 1964, a new system of learning music was implemented in Estonia following Hungarian experience (Zoltán Kodály's relative system).

After regained independence (1991), music education in Estonian schools has been following international trends and a competence-based approach has been introduced, leading to the development of cultural awareness and self-expression. Music being a compulsory subject in all schools (grades 1–12) means that all students have free access to this field of arts education, enriching their personality. Traditional music education has been meaningfully integrated with innovation and so-called shaping trends (diverse ethnic music traditions, inclusive education etc.). In addition to public schools, there are also private schools and international schools, functioning in Estonia now as a part of the education system. Private schools follow the general core curriculum and find their distinctiveness through extracurricular education. In recent years, learning environments in all types of schools have greatly benefited from the integration of diverse musical instruments and the expanded use of various technologies.

Teacher education combines professional pre-service and in-service training, both of which are provided at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. However, new courses equipping teachers with enhanced professional skills to keep up with modern trends would be beneficial. There is a clear need for teachers to receive broader training, particularly to integrate creative methods such as improvisation, composition, and music-making activities involving diverse instruments and technologies. Such an approach would not only enhance students' musical skills but also facilitate critical thinking, collaboration, and emotional expression. Music education builds a foundation for a sustainable professional musical culture that unites different age groups, the value of which is widely recognised by the population. This can be seen in the frequent integration of music at different social events.

Music in Schools

Music is taught from kindergartens up to the end of gymnasia (from age 3 up to 18). The number of music lessons provided in each school year is determined by the national curricula. However, it is possible to add an extra music lesson, depending on the institution's profile and the optional subjects offered. There are two weekly music lessons in primary grades (1–4) and one from grade 5 up to the end on gymnasia (Kiilu 2010; Kiilu & Sepp 2014). The total time allocated for learning music is ca. 560 lessons of 45 minutes.

Music teachers are expected to have a master's degree in music education, which guarantees them a permanent employment contract and a slightly higher salary. Professional music teachers are trained mainly in Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and Tallinn University. Training music teachers is expensive and takes usually longer than that of other subject teachers. They usually complete a children's music school (seven years)

or a specialised class in music before entering university and studying for five more years. It also requires hard work and musical talent. Through training, music teachers acquire versatile and high-level vocal and instrumental skills, and the ability to conduct and lead choirs and ensembles. Professional music teachers can perform as singers, play several instruments (majoring in one), conduct choirs and supervise music groups and ensembles. Two universities provide two-year pedagogical courses for all teachers, including professional instrumentalists who are willing to become teachers.

Music education requires special resources such as textbooks, videos, audio equipment, instruments, and digital resources. Municipalities act as principal school owners (except for specialised or private schools) and are responsible for financing and supplying schools with essential teaching materials, so covering implementation of the national curricula. In addition to allocated funding from municipalities or the state, the schools seek additional funding through projects and grants. The European Union and international funds play a significant role supporting technological and educational reforms.

Schools decide and order necessary teaching materials annually. Significant attention has been given to their continuous updating. This process was especially intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, when interactive technology (IT) tools became essential for remote learning. At that time, the web platform Opiq³ was also developed, providing textbooks and training materials for all school subjects.

Despite some discrepancies between schools and regions, our institutions are reasonably well equipped with study aids and other materials. They are available for all age groups and several textbook options for primary grades (three sets), for basic school and gymnasias (two sets), all based on the national music syllabus. There are also handbooks for teachers, who have the right to select all study aids, including audio and video recordings, music collections, methodological books and so on. Teachers use these resources as well as learning websites (Opiq, E-School, Studium etc.) at their own discretion, depending on the type or preferences of the school.

Cultural projects and free concert visits for students are commonly used as part of the country's broader effort to enrich education through cultural experiences. There are foundations such as "Cultural Schoolbag" and Pille Lill's foundation, which cover costs for organising concerts and inviting recognised musicians to schools, aimed to foster cultural awareness, creativity, and artistic appreciation among students.

Schools collaborate with cultural organisations, theatres and museums, organising educational visits and interactive activities. The Estonian Concert Centre and National Opera often offer tailored programmes adapted for younger audiences. Municipalities also support regional cultural projects, making them accessible to schools, thereby providing exposure to Estonia's rich cultural heritage and contemporary arts while integrating arts into education.

³ <https://www.opiq.ee/>

Extra-Curricular Music Education in Schools, Specialised Schools and Classes

Depending on a schools' local context, they offer a wide range of extracurricular activities to support students' holistic development, foster creativity, social well-being and provide opportunities for students to explore and develop their talents. The most common activities organised at schools are choirs and ensembles which often participate in local and national events. The Estonian Song Celebrations are the most prestigious cultural events, held every four years and recognised by UNESCO. Schools usually have different choirs and ensembles ranging from instrumental groups to smaller vocal, folk and pop music ensembles that combine singing, dancing, and playing traditional instruments. Public events usually start with a musical performance to give students an opportunity to show their skills. Cross-curricular projects link music with subjects such as history, literature, and art. Students often participate in talent shows, concerts, and festivals.

Although all schools have to follow the national curriculum, it is also possible to combine formal and informal music education in music studios or offer specialised classes with individualised or school specific music courses. There are the following schools with in-depth music studies: Tallinn School No. 21⁴, Tallinn Westholm Gymnasium⁵, Tartu Karlova School⁶. There are also some schools offering music education at pre-professional level, e.g. Tallinn Music and Ballet School⁷ and Tallinn Old Town College⁸. In these five schools in Estonia general education is combined with semi-professional music instruction.

There are also about 90 music schools for children that provide informal music education for individual students with activities organised mainly in the afternoon. These schools are partly financed by parents and supported by local municipalities. The studies last seven years and follow specified curricula. Graduates of these schools are welcome to study music at higher level. Furthermore, there are private music studios which mostly offer hobby activities.

Music and National Curricula

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for development of national curricula, and they check their implementation by requesting documentation at school level. Curriculum documents set the standards and guidelines for educational activities from early childhood through the end of gymnasias and all of these activities are project based.

⁴ <https://21k.ee/>

⁵ <https://westholm.ee/>

⁶ <https://www.karlova.tartu.ee/>

⁷ MUBA-<https://muba.edu.ee/>. The predecessor of present MUBA (uniting former Georg Ots Music School, Tallinn Music High School and Tallinn Ballet School) is Tallinn Music High School established in 1961.

⁸ <https://www.vhk.ee/>

National curricula are regularly updated by the Ministry of Education, but all educational institutions enjoy considerable autonomy in developing the content and processes of learning, taking their specific conditions into account. Local authorities are responsible for creating learning environments, including digital environments. State gymnasia are financed by the Ministry of Education and Research directly.

There are national curricula for kindergartens, basic schools, and gymnasia and they can adapt their local curricula to their context and available resources. Regional authorities are responsible for the methodological quality of curriculum implementation and adjustments, based on local needs.

The Ministry chooses and contracts experts who design the syllabi of different subjects. These expert teams refine the expected outcomes and guidelines, ensuring alignment with national goals and internationally recognised principles of art education. Key stakeholders (including Estonian Society of Music Education, higher music education institutions etc.) provide input based on classroom experience and pedagogical best practices.

The Estonian National Curriculum consists of a general part and subject syllabi organised into 8 fields, of which music belongs to the Art Field (Appendix 3). The music syllabus is structured as follows (Government of the Republic of Estonia 2023):

1. General Principles
 - 1.1. Field-related competencies
 - 1.2. Estimated volume of subjects in the Subject Field
 - 1.3. Description of the Subject Field and Integration within the Subject Field
 - 1.4. Opportunities for cross-disciplinary integration to support the formation of general competencies and to address leading topics of the curriculum
 - 1.5. Planning and organising learning activities
 - 1.6. Assessment
 - 1.7. Learning environment
2. Syllabi
 - 2.1. Art (this includes some subcategories which are not mentioned here)
 - 2.2. Music
 - 2.2.1. Description of the subject
 - 2.2.2. Knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired by the end of the school stage
 - 2.2.3. Learning Outcomes Stage I Music-making: singing, playing an instrument, musical movement, original musical composition. All music skills are specified separately.

In addition to the basic documents there are recommendations characterising the process of learning a particular subject with proposals for selection of the content. However, recommendations are optional for teachers, and they enjoy great autonomy when compiling their local school curricula, considering local conditions for implementation.

The purpose of music education is to create opportunities for pupils to experience the joy of making music, especially singing which has a long tradition in Estonia. Music education also develops students' musical aesthetic experiences and helps them explore their potential for broadening their musical and cultural horizons. In Estonia, the aim of music education is to develop creative, independent, critically reflective, musically and culturally educated individuals. In each subject (including music), students develop 8 competences based on the European Framework 2018: cultural awareness; social and citizenship competence; self-awareness; learning skills-competence; communication competence; STEM competence; entrepreneurship competence; digital competence. Music education focuses mostly on the following:

- (1) Cultural Awareness is developed by enhancing students' cognitive skills (listening), history of music and musicking (playing instruments, singing etc.). They also learn to analyse musical works and relate them to their own experiences.
- (2) Social and citizenship competence is fostered through identity building using musical cultural landmarks and learning to perform them. Students participate in activities of musical groups (choirs, ensembles etc.) developing their identity, self-awareness and co-operation skills. They also learn to understand musical notation, digitised music, cybersecurity and copyright requirements.
- (3) Communication competence: allows students to understand the meaning of music in social communication, the significance of music in society as a symbolic power that unites communities. They study the national anthem, songs with cultural significance and know the ethical and legal use of music.
- (4) Digital Competence: helps students learn to use technological devices for various musical activities, including information search, presentations and virtual performances.

Learning outcomes are described for each age group (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary), with articulated objectives to achieve. The music syllabi have five areas of outcomes: singing, playing instruments, musical movement, music creation (composing or writing lyrics), music listening. They are all specified by school levels (grades 1–3; grades 4–6; grades 7–9; gymnasium grades 10–12).

Music education promotes awareness of traditional Estonian music as a cultural heritage. The principles of democracy and global citizenship are embedded through encouraging participatory learning. Teaching music as a universal language connects individuals across cultures, fostering a sense of shared respect for different cultures globally. These principles align with international education goals and reflect an emphasis on developing a coherent, inclusive and forward-looking education system. Estonian education is not only focused on academic and artistic development, but also on nurturing the individual development of young people, enabling them to become socially conscious and culturally sensitive citizens.

Current Trends, Challenges and Research

One of the key issues is the increasing demand for professional music teachers, especially in rural areas. Recruitment and retention in the profession are ongoing challenges, with efforts to improve teacher competencies and making music education more inclusive, considering children with special educational needs. Unfortunately, the overall teacher shortage remains a significant concern, endangering the balance of different age groups of professionals represented in the sector.

Another important issue is the decline in choir participation, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, choral singing remains a key part of the Estonian's musical identity. Choirs are deeply embedded in Estonia's cultural heritage, and they are supported by various organisations. In order to highlight the position of choir conductors as professionals, a qualification system consisting of eight levels has been created, which has boosted the motivation of those willing to work with choirs, orchestras, and ensembles.

The integration of digital learning resources and technology in music classrooms has developed in response to changing educational needs and opportunities. This includes video lessons and other online resources aimed at making music education more accessible. However, the pressure from broader educational policies, such as the emphasis on core subjects in the curriculum, continues to challenge music's position in schools. Recent research has proven links between music education and general human development (Tervaniemi et al 2018, Huotilainen 2019) and suggests that music should be preserved as a compulsory subject throughout the school cycle (Kaja 2024; Kaja 2025). The specialised classes still provide in-depth music education for students with outstanding potential as preparation to become a professional musician.

In Estonia, all research, including educational studies, are grant-based, which makes it challenging to obtain funding for research projects in the field of music education. Accordingly, researchers often must balance their lecturing and practical musicking with mostly unpaid scientific activities. Some publications of recent years, produced in

combined efforts from academic institutions and practicing educators have been focused on bridging the gap between research and practice with an emphasis on promoting creative teaching methods (Läänemets 2013; Läänemets 2021).

Conclusion and recommendations

Considering the lack of qualified teachers in schools across all subjects, there is an urgent need for increased investment also in music teacher training. Training programmes for music educators could be expanded and diversified. The development of innovative approaches – such as mentoring and peer collaboration – could support less experienced teachers. There is a clear demand for updated study aids offering new ideas and environments for efficient music education.

We strongly support the idea that music education should remain inclusive and available to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background. All talents should be discovered, and hobby activities should be made widely accessible. It is important to meaningfully unite formal, informal, and non-formal music education. Greater attention should be paid to offering free or low-cost extracurricular music opportunities to ensure equality of access to different kinds of music education. Highly talented music students should be given wider opportunities to participate in competitions and music olympiads, supporting their aspirations and offering possibilities to become professional musicians in the future.

As modern technologies have become widely available, the integration and use of digital resources, including AI, could increase students' learning opportunities. Although music should primarily be performed live, multiple and diverse learning environments can offer wider opportunities to experience deeper emotions and a sense of belonging (Läänemets et al., 2021).

Finally, more attention should be paid to research on music education in Estonia and probably beyond. Sustained funding and a focus on research into effective content and the processes of music education are essential for both learning and students' achievement, as they can provide new methodological approaches. This means that school-level research should be restarted, offering insights into students' present potential and motivation for learning music. It can be based on prior experience to gather feedback about required improvements. Researchers should continue to address the gap between general goals and the practical implementation of the national curricula. State funding for music education, including research on teachers' professional development and social issues, should become a priority. Hopefully, regional cooperation between the Baltic countries could also provide opportunities for broader and more meaningful educational research.

If pursued effectively, these directions and recommendations have the potential to strengthen music education in Estonia and beyond, ensuring that music remains a vibrant, accessible, and integral part of students' educational experience, supporting cohesion and cultural development in societies.

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Diversity, Participation, and Personal Relationship with Music

Core Principles of Nationally Steered Music Education in Finnish Schools

Abstract

This chapter examines music education in Finnish schools from pre-primary to upper secondary levels. It outlines the historical development, the resources available for music instruction, and the learning objectives and content areas defined in the National Core Curricula. The chapter highlights the diversity in music education and its emphasis on students' active participation in music-making, taught by class teachers in primary school and subject-specialist teachers in secondary school. It addresses the balance between national guidance and local autonomy and discusses current developments that present both challenges and opportunities, including declining teacher education resources and the strengthening of music's status through its inclusion in the matriculation examination.

Introduction

This chapter examines music education in Finland across pre-primary, primary (grades 1–6), lower secondary (grades 7–9), and general upper secondary education (grades 10–12). It begins with a concise overview of the historical and developmental trajectories of music education. This is followed by an outline of the aims and content areas articulated in the National Core Curricula, along with an examination of the resources available for music instruction and music teacher education. The chapter ends with a discussion of recent policy developments.

From singing to diverse music activities and repertoires in Finnish classrooms

In Finland, music has been an elementary school subject since the establishment of the elementary school system in 1866. Initially, the focus was on church music, as education was the responsibility of the church. Following Finland's independence (1917), music teaching included a focus on building national identity through patriotic and national songs. Singing remained the core content of instruction, integrating the study of music history, music theory, and solfège. From the 1950s onwards, teaching gradually evolved into increasingly diverse repertoires and forms of music-making. For a long time, music in schools featured Western classical, Finnish traditional, and church music, but over the past 50 years it has expanded to include a broad diversity of musical styles.

The most transformative development in Finnish education was the school reform in the 1970s, which merged previous school systems into a single nine-year comprehensive school (called 'basic education' since 1999). This reform aligned with Nordic welfare state ideals of equality and accessibility of education for all. With the reform, music became a compulsory subject in grades 1–7. With the reform, the name of the subject changed from 'singing' to 'music'. An essential change regarding the teaching of the subject was that lower secondary school (grades 7–9) became the main area of work for specialist music teachers (previously starting in grade 3 or 5), and the positions were often shared with upper secondary school (grades 10–12). Since the reform, the amount of music lessons has varied but the subject has retained its position as a school subject. Today, music is taught as a compulsory or optional subject through comprehensive education.¹ Music has had – and continues to have – a strong role in promoting a sense of community in school celebrations, and preparing musical performances for school events remains a significant part of music teachers' work in schools. Extra-curricular music education, mostly instrumental tuition, is primarily offered by numerous music schools.

Provision and Resources of Music Education in Schools

In pre-primary education (for six-year-old children), music is part of the Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (ECE) and is taught by early childhood educators. Music is part of the subarea of cultural competence. It is integrated into the ECE activities rather than exist as a specific subject, and linked to such areas as language development, social and motor skills, and emotional expression. Music activities are diverse and multisensory, aiming to strengthen children's interest in and relationship with music. Children learn songs, explore different musical styles and instruments, and engage in play, experimentation,

¹ In Finland, education is compulsory for all 6–18-year-olds. After basic education (grade 9), students continue in either general upper secondary or vocational education.

and improvisation. Teaching emphasises shared music-making, encouraging collaboration and enjoyment. Throughout grades 1 to 7 (or 8), music is taught as a compulsory school subject, typically as one group lesson per week.² Additionally, schools may offer music as an optional subject. In grades 1–6, six weekly lessons per year are allocated to arts and skills subjects, and in grades 7–9, five lessons per year. The decision on the use of these optional lessons is taken by the school, and the choices vary. Optional music lessons are often used to offer applied courses (e.g., choir, band activities, or producing a musical). Schools may also provide an extended curriculum in music (*musiikkiluokat*) in grades 3–6 and 7–9, which typically amounts to three or four lessons per week.

General upper secondary (grades 10–12) music education comprises either two or four compulsory courses³, as well as four national elective courses, in addition to which schools may offer locally developed elective courses. Each course is worth two study credits (ECTS), corresponding to approximately 53 hours of work. In addition, 13 schools offer an enhanced music curriculum, typically adding several extra hours of music per week. This additional instruction is integrated into the regular timetable alongside general studies, ensuring that students remain eligible for the matriculation examination.

Education in Finland (FNAE, 2025) is free of charge for all students under 18 years of age. It is co-financed by the state and municipalities, and only a few schools are privately run. The schools decide on the allocation of other educational resources, which vary between municipalities. Music classrooms are typically equipped with audio-visual technology, a PA system, and various music technology equipment, alongside school-owned instruments such as acoustic guitars, ukuleles, keyboards, five-string kanteles, percussion instruments, and standard rock band instruments. The use of textbooks varies and is complemented by audio-visual digital materials. Teachers also prepare teaching materials themselves and use online sources.

Compulsory music studies are typically taught in large groups, with average class sizes ranging from 15 to 30 pupils, and even larger groups in grades 10–12. In addition, many schools organise cultural projects and concert visits which, in basic education, must be free of charge for pupils. Each year, *Art Testers*, a cultural education program, takes all Finnish 8th graders (around 60,000 students and 5,000 teachers) to visit one or two highly esteemed art events across Finland⁴. Schools also collaborate with other institutions and cultural organizations.

² In lower secondary education, compulsory music teaching is offered either as two lessons a week on grade 7 or one lesson a week during grades 7 and 8.

³ Music and visual arts are offered as alternative subjects, and students must complete a total of six courses across these subjects.

⁴ See, <https://taidetestaajat.fi/?lang=en>

National Steering of Education through Core Curricula

The Finnish National Agency for Education prepares the national core curricula for comprehensive education in collaboration with stakeholders, including teachers, researchers, policymakers, and interest groups. The national core curricula consist of general and subject specific guidelines (see FNAE, n.d.). The general guidelines describe mission and general goals of basic education, organisation of schoolwork, support systems and guidelines for school culture. They also define underlying values, cross-curricular themes, and conception of learning, among other things. The current core curricula are grounded in equity, participation, appreciation of (cultural) diversity, and sustainable development, while highlighting student-centred learning, transversal competences, student well-being, and lifelong learning.

The subject-specific guidelines define learning objectives, core content areas, and assessment principles for each subject. This section is prepared under the supervision of subject-specific education counsellors. Based on these guidelines, municipalities and individual schools interpret and adapt these guidelines to their own local curricula, specifying teaching arrangements, local emphases, and learning environments according to their local needs, interests, and resources. The national core curricula aim to ensure coherence and equity across the country, while local curricula allow for flexibility and responsiveness to community needs. This balance of national guidance and local autonomy is a defining feature of Finnish education, supporting both consistency in learning goals and diversity in pedagogical approaches.

Comprehensive and Rigorous Core Curricula in Music

The national core curricula conceptualise music education as an experience-oriented, participatory, and pluralistic practice aimed at supporting learners' personal relationship with music through active, creative, and socially embedded musical engagement. The Core Curriculum for Basic Education in music (for grades 1–2, 3–6 and 7–9) specify the objectives of instruction, core content and the transversal competence areas to which the objective is linked as well as assessment criteria. According to the Core Curriculum (FNAE 2014, p. 176, 338), the task of the subject of music in grades 1–9 is:

to create opportunities for versatile musical activities and active cultural participation. The pupils are guided to interpret the multiple meanings of music in different cultures as well as in the activities of individuals and communities. The pupils' musical skills broaden, which also enhances their positive attitude towards music and lays a foundation for a lifelong interest in music. The teaching and learning of music guide the pupils to appreciate and be curious about music and cultural diversity.

A functional approach to the teaching and learning of music promotes the development of the pupils' musical skills and understanding as well as holistic growth and cooperation skills. These skills are reinforced by incorporating the pupils' musical interests, other school subjects, integrative themes, school festivities and events

as well as activities outside of school into the teaching and learning of music. The pupils are guided in developing their thinking skills and perception by regularly providing them with opportunities for working with sound and music as well as for composing and other creative production. The pupils learn music in many different ways, which promotes the development of their expression skills.

Objectives of instruction are defined in areas of (1) Participation, (2) Musical knowledge and skills, (3) Music creation (such as, improvisation and composition), (4) Cultural understanding and multiliteracy, (5) Safety and wellbeing in music, and (6) Learning-to-learn skills in music. The Core Curriculum also defines objectives related to areas of Learning environments and working methods of music, Guidance, differentiation, and support in music as well as Assessment targets and criteria.

Assessment in all grade levels is expected to be supportive and encouraging, providing feedback and opportunities for self- and group assessment to motivate effort and practice. It focuses on progress in participation, collaboration and music-making skills, as well as understanding basic musical concepts in and through active music-making. Evaluation is based on diverse demonstrations of skills and competence.

Key content areas consist of (1) Making music together, (2) Components of music, (3) Music in the pupils' life, community, and society, and (4) Repertoire. Together they form a continuum in which skills and understanding deepen and diversify as pupils' progress through school. In grades 1–2, the emphasis is on fundamental skills and the joy of music-making: singing, body percussion and simple rhythm instruments, movement with music, and the first steps in active listening. Pupils learn to observe basic elements, such as pitch, duration, dynamics and timbre, while gaining positive early experiences of making music together. In grades 1–2, assessment is verbal and intended to guide and encourage learners, focusing on progress in musical collaboration and ensemble playing skills and understanding basic musical concepts.

In grades 3–6, the content areas broaden towards more varied music-making and understanding of music. Pupils play a wider range of instruments (e.g. kantele, acoustic guitar, band instruments), deepen their grasp of music concepts (rhythm, melody, harmony, form), and explore music from different cultures and eras. Creative production – such as improvising and composing – along with project-based work, becomes more prominent. Pupils are guided to analyse music and its cultural contexts more consciously. The assessment focuses on cooperation in music groups and contributing to joint performances or compositions. By the end of grade 6, assessment is based on national criteria and focuses not on the skill level itself, but on how the pupil can apply even limited skills in music-making and classroom activities. The competence descriptors for grades 5, 7, 8, and 9 on the Finnish 4–10 grading scale, provided by the National Agency for Education, have been used in the assessment conducted at the end of grades 6 and 9 since 2021.

In grades 7–9, the focus shifts to more independent work, deeper analysis, and versatile skills in musical expression. Musical concepts and techniques are applied in multi-disciplinary and project-based productions. Listening and analysis develop into critical engagement, and the students are invited to engage with a variety of musical cultures. Pupils plan and realise their own musical ideas more autonomously, often making use of music technology. Overall, the progression moves from practising foundational skills and experiencing music together towards independent, analytical, and creative engagement with music in collaborative settings, while supporting the development of a strong musical identity. In grades 8–9, optional studies offer advanced or project-based courses.

Assessment emphasises deeper musical competence, personal expression, and creative production. Pupils are expected to apply musical concepts, techniques, and methods more independently, and to demonstrate critical and varied interpretation of music. Assessment also addresses ability to work independently and responsibly as a member of a group. The final assessment (grade 9) defines how well the pupil has achieved the objectives of the Core Curriculum for Basic Education in music. The assessment target areas include (1) Acting as a member of a music-making group; (2) Musical skills and knowledge as well as creative production, including voice control and singing, playing music in a group, moving to music, listening to and discussing music, music creation, and using technology; (3) Cultural competence and multiliteracy, including the use of musical concepts and taking care of one's hearing and the safety; and (4) Learning-to-learn in music.

According to the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (for grades 10–12), the general objective areas of music education are (1) Musical diversity, (2) Musical creativity, (3) The significance of music and musical interaction, and (4) Learning music and democracy (FNAE, 2019). The first compulsory module (Intro – Everyone Plays) focuses on students' musical skills and engagement, while the second (Pulse – Musical Expression) emphasises musical expression, ensemble skills, and creative work. In this module, students explore Finnish and other musical cultures, analyse musical meanings, and undertake creative assignments, including those using music technology. The national optional modules (Genre – Global Curiosity *and* Demo – Creatively Together) deepen learning beyond the compulsory modules by developing understanding of the cultural embeddedness of music, world music cultures, and musical expression, while applied studies consist of school-specific modules. Students may also complete a voluntary upper secondary certificate in music (*lukiodiplomi*) to demonstrate their musical expertise and sustained engagement by carrying out a project or compiling a portfolio that evidences their competence. The outcomes are assessed by the school according to national criteria and recorded in the student's certificate. In specialised upper secondary schools with a national focus on music, the curriculum integrates general upper secondary requirements with extended music instruction. Music studies in these schools are both broad and in-depth, including instrumental tuition and high-quality, goal-oriented choir, orchestra,

and ensemble activities. Students frequently participate in projects, concerts, and collaborations, and the schools often maintain close connections with local music institutions and professional musicians.

As in lower secondary education, assessment in upper secondary education focuses on musical skills, music creation, and participation. Students are assessed through diverse demonstrations, such as performing, composing, and arranging, as well as through reflective and analytical tasks. The evaluation is criterion-referenced, based on the objectives and assessment criteria defined in the local curriculum, and considers both the process and the outcomes of learning.

Implementation: Variations Arising from Teacher Autonomy

Teachers in all levels are expected to follow the guidelines of the National Core Curricula and achieve the learning objectives defined in them. However, teachers' work is not formally monitored, and they have considerable autonomy in enacting the Core Curricula, including the choice of teaching methods, assessment practices, and materials. Teaching is student-centred, and students' voices are considered, particularly regarding repertoire choices. Music teachers receive professional support from the Finnish Association of School Music Teachers, a national organisation that promotes professional development, facilitates peer networking, and provides pedagogical resources.

Learning outcomes and education overall are assessed at the national level by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (see FINEEC, 2025). However, in music education, only one national assessment of learning outcomes has been conducted – at the ninth-grade level in 2011 (Juntunen, 2017). The findings indicated that pupils' learning outcomes at the end of lower secondary school were generally modest, suggesting challenges in achieving the learning objectives in music.

As teachers are granted considerable freedom in implementing the Core Curriculum in music, teaching practices vary across schools and teachers. This flexibility is reflected in the wide variation of teaching content (Juntunen & Arvonen, 2026). Teachers' choices have been systematically examined only in Swedish-speaking primary schools, where deficiencies in the implementation of curriculum objectives have been identified (Björk et al., 2019). Comparable research is lacking for Finnish-speaking schools, yet the limited provision of music studies in class teacher education, addressed later in this text, remains a cause for concern.

According to studies on lower secondary music education, ensemble playing, singing, and listening dominate classroom practices, although repertoire choices are less diverse than those suggested by the curriculum. Popular music prevails in band activities, while listening activities encompass a wider range of genres. Repertoire selection often involves negotiating between students' preferences and institutional expectations. Some areas of the music curriculum receive less attention than intended; in particular, music

creation, music technology, and music-and-movement activities remain marginal. Many teachers report limited skills in music technology and tend to use it primarily to support creative work (Juntunen, 2017; Juntunen & Arvonen, in press).

Teacher Education: Exposure versus Expertise in Music

In the 20th century, musical competence was highly valued as part of class teacher expertise, and training programmes offered an extensive range of music courses. Until the late 1980s, music qualifications even contributed positively to teacher education admissions. Since then, however, there has been a sharp decline in both the number and scope of music courses. After 2015, the number of individuals applying to study class teacher education – and the number of student teachers specialising in music – has decreased significantly. Today, studies include only one compulsory course of 3–6 ECTS credits in music education. Consequently, many class teachers, who are typically responsible for teaching music in grades 1–6, perceive music as a challenging subject to teach (e.g., Suomi et al., 2022).

In contrast, music specialist teacher education, currently offered at three universities, has developed in a relatively stable manner over the past century, although its resources have also decreased in recent years. Music teacher education is an integrated and extended 5.5-year programme leading to both a bachelor's degree (180 ECTS) and a master's degree (150 ECTS), and it prepares teachers primarily for lower and upper secondary schools (grades 7–12). The programmes offer comprehensive and multifaceted studies in music and music education, integrating musical expertise, pedagogy, and research (for more, Westerlund & Juntunen, 2016).

Recent Policy Developments

Equity and inclusion have been central values in Finnish education policy for more than fifty years, yet their realisation in music education has remained partial and uneven. In recent years, several nationwide initiatives have sought to broaden young people's cultural participation and to ensure equal opportunities to study and experience music and other arts, regardless of age, gender, background, or place of residence. In music education, this involves, among other things, considering who is able to participate and on what terms; recognising students' diverse cultural and musical backgrounds; and designing content and activities that respond to students' needs, competencies, and interests. Policies and practices of special support, reasonable accommodation, and differentiation are also essential.

Today, music is increasingly aligned with objectives related to student wellbeing, socio-emotional and interpersonal skills, and overall school welfare as well as language learning. While this development highlights the educational potential of music, it also entails the risk of instrumentalising music to serve broader policy goals. Recent developments

further suggest a shift from value-based and broadly framed curricular guidance toward more goal-, competence-, and assessment-oriented regulation, intended to promote high-quality and equitable practices.

A significant policy step was taken in change to: 2024, when, following a government proposal, the Finnish Parliament decided to include music – together with visual arts and physical education – in the matriculation examination completed at the end of general upper secondary education. The structure and content of the examination are currently being developed, and the reform will take effect in 2029. On the one hand, integrating music into a nationwide assessment system challenges the long-standing non-instrumental value orientation of Finnish music education and narrows teacher autonomy. On the other hand, in the long term the reform is likely to strengthen the status of music and safeguard its continued existence as a school subject.

Conclusion

To conclude, all children in Finland have access to music education at school. Music is taught as a compulsory subject for one lesson per week in grades 1–8 and through a small number of compulsory courses in upper secondary school. In secondary education, music instruction is provided by subject-specialist teachers, whereas in primary school it is taught by class teachers. The Finnish system is characterised by a strong welfare-state orientation, a sustained commitment to equity, and a carefully calibrated interplay between national guidance and local autonomy. Finnish music education is guided by student-centred ideals and an emphasis on participation, inclusion, and wellbeing, while supporting collaborative music-making, lifelong engagement with music, and responsiveness to cultural, technological, and societal change. Current developments present both challenges and opportunities: Reduced resources in teacher education are a concern, while the inclusion of music in the matriculation examination is likely to reinforce its status as a school subject.

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Karla Louisa Stolle & Annette Ziegenmeyer

Unity in Diversity?

Music Education Across Germany's Sixteen Federal States

Abstract

Music education in Germany is shaped by a highly decentralised school system in which 16 federal states hold constitutional responsibility for educational policy. This chapter provides an overview of school music education in Germany, examining structural conditions, time allocation, teacher education, resources, and curricular frameworks. It highlights how federalism and differentiated school types create diverse pathways for musical learning, ranging from general classroom instruction to specialised music schools. Drawing on selected curriculum examples, the chapter discusses competence-oriented approaches, assessment practices, and current developments in research and practice, illustrating both challenges and opportunities within Germany's pluralistic educational landscape.

Introduction

What does school music education sound like in Germany? Sometimes like ukuleles in a bright elementary classroom. Sometimes like silence, when music is taught for two hours in one school semester but disappears entirely from the timetable in the next. And sometimes like a full symphony orchestra in a music-specialised *Gymnasium* (academic secondary school). Across Germany's 16 federal states, music education takes many forms – some shared, many contrasting. This chapter traces the structures, tensions, and possibilities of school music education in Germany. It offers a snapshot of a large and diverse country where educational policy is fragmented, but music remains a valued part of general schooling. In the case of Germany, the comparison means embracing complexity.

Education in Federalism: From Historical Roots to Contemporary Music Education in Germany

To understand the complexity of music education in Germany today, it is necessary to examine how the education system is currently governed and how it developed historically. Germany does not operate a single, unified school system but sixteen parallel systems. Each *Bundesland* (federal state) has its own ministry of education and full constitutional responsibility for cultural and educational affairs. A detailed account of this decentralised structure is provided by the *Kultusministerkonferenz, KMK* (the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs) (Eckhardt, 2021).

This diversity is no coincidence but the product of a political design that is rooted in Germany's historical experience with centralised authoritarian regimes and reflects a deliberate effort to strengthen democratic governance and regional identity (Hepp, 2013). Since the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949, *Kulturhoheit der Länder* (the constitutional principle of cultural sovereignty) has granted each state the authority to define its school legislation, curriculum frameworks, teacher qualification standards, and subject-specific priorities. As a result, music education in Germany is governed not by a single national policy but by a patchwork of regionally distinct frameworks. Each reflects the political will, educational philosophy, and cultural values of the respective state.¹

To maintain a degree of consistency across this federal landscape, all states participate in national coordination through the KMK. This body issues joint recommendations and agreements, including *Bildungsstandards* (national educational standards) or key subjects and structural frameworks for the *Abitur* (school leaving examination and, simultaneously, university entrance examination). Although music is not part of the core assessment framework, it is a compulsory stand-alone subject at the primary and lower secondary levels across all states. The KMK provides guidance on *Lehrplaninhalte* (curriculum content), *Stundentafeln* (lesson distribution), and *Lehrkräftequalifikationen* (teacher qualifications), which influence state-level policies and support a basic level of comparability in music education across Germany (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2021).

In addition to these governmental frameworks, the *Bundesverband Musikunterricht* (German Music Teacher Association, BMU) plays a vital nationwide role in supporting and shaping music education. As an association for music teachers across all federal states, the BMU provides a professional voice in education policy, teacher training and curriculum development. It organises national and regional conferences, offers teaching resources and

¹ Between 1949 and 1990, the existence of two German states – the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG/BRD) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR/DDR) – also shaped music education in distinct ways. While the FRG maintained a federal system with state-specific curricula, the GDR developed a centralised and ideologically guided model (Fröde, 2010; Kraemer, 1992; Timberlake, 2015). Following German reunification in 1990, the former GDR also developed a federal education system.

professional development, and advocates for structural improvements in music teaching conditions and school curricula. Each state has its own *Länderverband* (regional association) that works at the local level to provide training and support.

Music in German Schools: From Weekly Lessons to Specialist Pathways

Just as music is conveyed through various parameters, music education in German schools also develops across different dimensions. This section explores five central aspects: time allocation, teacher preparation, resources, extracurricular programmes, and specialised music schools, revealing the complex score behind music in everyday school life.

Time Allocation for Music

Music is part of the general curriculum in all sixteen *Bundesländer* (federal states), but the actual time allocated to it differs significantly. The most comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the *Stundentafel* (lesson distribution) is provided by the *Deutsches Musikinformationszentrum* (German Music Information Centre, MIZ), which compiles data from all state ministries of education. According to the MIZ (2024a) *Stundentafeln* (lesson distribution) for the 2024–25 school year, primary schools typically offer between 1 and 2 lessons of music per week, depending on grade level and region. In *Sekundarstufe I* (lower secondary education) the amount of music tuition depends on the same variables. But what does that mean exactly? To illustrate how federalism shapes music education in practice, it is helpful to examine the situation in grade 7 of *Sekundarstufe I* (lower secondary education) as an example across different systems. While music is a compulsory subject across all federal states, the actual allocation of lesson time in this specific year group varies significantly.

The following examples are taken from MIZ (2024b). In Bavaria, students in grade 7 typically receive one to two weekly lessons of music, depending on the school type, such as *Mittelschule*, *Realschule* or *Gymnasium* (different types of academic secondary school, see Infobox, p. 4). In *Musikgymnasien* (music-specialised academic secondary schools), students may even receive an additional lesson of instrumental tuition. In Saarland, lesson time in grade 7 ranges from one to four hours per week. While *Gemeinschaftsschulen* (comprehensive schools) offer one weekly lesson, *Gymnasien* (grammar schools) with a specialised music focus typically offer two lessons and may allocate up to four. Other federal states adopt a more limited approach. In Saxony, for instance, students in both *Oberschule* and *Gymnasium* receive one weekly music lesson in grade 7, regardless of school type or curricular orientation. In Bremen, Brandenburg and Hamburg, music is often integrated into broader interdisciplinary fields (e.g. with arts and/or performing arts) and appears in different forms, as a single weekly lesson or semester-based lessons. The

epochale Unterrichtsmodelle (semester-based teaching model) works on a rotational principle whereby different subjects are studied over the course of a semester. While students may benefit from two weekly music lessons in one semester, they would not study music in the next, which disrupts the continuity of tuition and impacts learning.

We can learn from this comparison that federalism in Germany not only manifests in the form of regional policy differences between the *Bundesländer* (federal states) but is further diversified by Germany's differentiated school system. While grade 7 reveals structural variation across the country, the provision of music education in general is heavily influenced by the type of school, its geographic location, and the value assigned to music as a subject.

Infobox

The German education system begins with primary education, which all students attend for four years (six years in some federal states). Primary education provides a common foundation in general education and does not differentiate by academic track. After primary school, the system branches into several parallel forms of general secondary education. These include the *Hauptschule* (lower secondary school), the *Realschule* (intermediate secondary school), the *Gymnasium* (grammar school), and the increasingly widespread *Gemeinschaftsschule* (comprehensive school), which combines multiple educational tracks. In some states, these school types have been merged into new models, such as the *Oberschule* (general secondary school) in Saxony, while other states maintain a clear tripartite division. Each *Schulart* (school type) follows its own curricular focus and structural logic, which directly affects how music is timetabled and taught.

The Music Teacher

A similarly diverse picture emerges regarding music teacher education and employment, which are under the responsibility of the federal states as well. Although music teacher education generally follows a university-based teacher training degree, curricular priorities vary depending on the school type, regional policy, and institutional traits. In most cases, the path to become a fully qualified music teacher in Germany follows a two-phase model. It begins with a university-based degree, a modularised bachelor's and master's programme in which students study music education alongside artistic, scientific, and pedagogical subjects. This is followed by the *Vorbereitungsdienst/Referendariat* (school-based induction phase), typically lasting 12 to 18 months, and concludes with the *Zweites Staatsexamen* (Second State Examination), which qualifies graduates for teaching positions in public schools. Recent academic work has pointed to key challenges in this system. Brunner et al. (2021, p. 55) note that many students experience their training as lacking coherence and fragmented; links between modules are often unclear, disciplinary domains poorly connected, and reflection on the integration of pedagogical and musical learning goals is rarely encouraged. Furthermore, in the 2023–24 school year, nearly one in ten teachers at general schools were lateral entrants or career changers. This highlights the current teacher shortage and the need for alternative pathways into the teaching profession.

To address these kinds of problems and to also meet the growing need for qualified music teachers, one of the recent developments is the expansion and diversification of access to the teaching profession. Thus, in June 2024, the KMK adopted the motion *“Gestaltung von zusätzlichen Wegen ins Lehramt”* (Creating additional pathways into teaching), which outlines new qualification pathways including lateral-entry master's degrees and, notably, dual study programmes that combine academic coursework with early and continuous in-school experience. Given the complexity of regional frameworks, this chapter can only offer a brief overview on music teachers.

Infobox – Resources for teaching music

Financial resources for music education depend on whether schools are funded publicly or privately.

Schulen in staatlicher Trägerschaft (publicly funded schools):

Funding for music education in Germany comes mainly from the federal states via their ministries of education. Each federal state provides a budget for general school operations, including basic resources for music lessons such as instruments, sheet music, and classroom equipment. Funding varies between federal states and often depends on the school type and local municipal contributions. *Musikgymnasien* (music-specialised academic secondary schools) usually receive additional funding for their intensive music programmes. Private sponsorships, foundations, and parent associations may also contribute to the funding at individual schools.

Schulen in privater Trägerschaft (privately funded schools):

The *Statistische Bundesamt* (Federal Statistical Office) provides interactive maps showing the average expenditure per pupil in privately funded schools across Germany. This data offer insights into regional differences in financial resources available in the private sector (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2026). Approximately 5 to 10 percent of students attend private schools across the different federal states.

Extracurricular Music Education in General Schools

In German schools, students have various opportunities to engage in extracurricular music activities. They vary widely depending on the school and the federal state. Common extracurricular activities include choirs or instrumental ensembles such as orchestras and bands. Many schools stage musicals and theatre productions, combining singing, acting, and dancing to offer comprehensive performance opportunities. Beyond the regular curriculum, instrumental and vocal lessons – individually or within groups – are often available, sometimes in partnership with local music schools, allowing students to receive additional instruction on school premises. Furthermore, there are some schools that offer music profiles for students to choose, providing extra music lessons and sometimes even dedicated instrumental instruction lessons (see *Time Allocation for Music* section above). However, nationally binding educational standards have only been developed for core subjects e.g. German, mathematics, and English.

Music, by contrast, is not governed by a unified national standard, which results in greater curricular variation across the federal states.

Specialised Schools

Beyond the options of music profiles within general schools, Germany also hosts *Musikgymnasien* (specialised music schools) providing intensive and focused musical education alongside general academic studies. These institutions represent a distinct educational pathway for young musicians aspiring to professional careers and contribute significantly to the country's rich musical culture. Notable examples include the *Musikgymnasium Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* in Berlin, the *Sächsisches Landesgymnasium für Musik "Carl Maria von Weber"* in Dresden, and the *Musikgymnasium Schloss Belvedere* in Weimar. Admission to these specialised music schools is usually competitive and based on musical aptitude tests, auditions, and academic performance.

Like a complex musical composition, music education in Germany is shaped by many voices: regional policies and time allocations, diverse school types, dedicated teachers, different resources, and vibrant extracurricular activities. So far, we have explored how federal structures and the variety of schools set the notes that ultimately shape the sound of music in schools. Yet it is precisely this diversity that offers opportunities for creative arrangements and innovative approaches to making music accessible to all students. In the following section, we will take a closer look at Germany's music curricula specifically the music curricula of the three federal states Berlin, Brandenburg and Schleswig-Holstein.

Music Curricula in Germany: Structure, Content, Assessment and Implementation

Music and the General Curriculum

In addition to the responsibility of the federal states, the KMK has established nationally applicable educational standards based on the results of international studies (TIMSS, PISA, IGLU). These educational standards serve to ensure the quality of school education across all federal states, especially concerning the requirements for the school-leaving exam necessary for university admission in a joint decree applicable to all 16 states. KMK's guidelines include overarching educational goals, structural frameworks, and, for selected core subjects, binding national educational standards. While states have the autonomy to design their own subject-specific curricula – including music – they are expected to align with these shared principles.

Structure and Content of the Music Curriculum

The number of curricula in each federal state, as well as their periods of validity, differ significantly. The scope is further affected by how plans are assigned to the different grades and how subjects are organised within the plans. Moreover, some curricula include the subject outlines for all disciplines, others cover only music plans (Euler, 2026, p. 47). Some curricula pertain to individual grades, others to both primary and lower secondary education, some to lower secondary alone, and some to both secondary school levels. Despite considerable differences between the federal states, there are also similarities in the music education curricula: almost all curricula are competence-based and align music education with interdisciplinary and subject-specific competencies. They focus on the development of skills in making and creating music (production), perceiving and listening to music (reception), understanding and classifying music (reflection), and transformation into another artistic form (transposition). Dankmar Venus's approaches (first published in 1969) continue to shape many educational and teaching plans to this day: 1. Production of music, 2. Reproduction of music, 3. Reception of music, 4. Transposition of music, and 5. Reflection on music.

Music is firmly established as a subject in the curriculum in all states, mostly from primary to lower secondary. At least in grades 1 to 10, music is part of the timetable in all types of schools, either as a separate compulsory subject or as part of learning areas/subject clusters. From lower secondary or at the latest in upper secondary school, there is the option (nationwide) to choose music as an elective or even as an advanced course. In many states, music is also an optional exam subject for the *Abitur* (final school examination).

Berlin and Brandenburg

The two federal states Berlin and Brandenburg, which form a common educational region, share one *Rahmenlehrplan Musik* (music curriculum). It was published in 2015 and applies jointly to primary schools and lower secondary education (grades 1–10). It follows a competence-oriented approach that is consistent across all subjects and introduces subject-specific guidelines. The curriculum is structured in three main parts: the goals of instruction, subject-specific competences, and a catalogue of competencies and standards linked to thematic areas of teaching. In music, three overarching competence domains are defined: *Wahrnehmen und deuten* (perceiving and interpreting), *Gestalten und aufführen* (creating and performing), and *Reflektieren und kontextualisieren* (reflecting and contextualising). These domains are further specified by competence levels that describe progressive learning outcomes. Instead of being tied to single grade levels, these competence levels are formulated as developmental stages that can, in principle, be achieved at different times depending on the learner's progress. At the same time, they are linked to binding target expectations for different school forms and educational stages, ensuring that by the end of primary and lower secondary education, certain levels should be reached.

This dual design makes it possible to recognise individual learning pathways, and, at the same time, provides a clear orientation for schoolteachers. As highlighted by Hömberg & Krämer (2018), this model of competence progression represents both an opportunity and a challenge: it acknowledges the individuality of learners while demanding precise curricular design to secure coherence and comparability across schools. For *gymnasiale Oberstufe* (upper secondary education), a separate curriculum was introduced in 2022, tailored to the requirements of the qualification phase and ensuring continuity from general music education in lower secondary school.

The music curriculum of Schleswig-Holstein defines the didactic guidelines and requirements in terms of achieving competencies. The subject requirements apply to teaching in primary and secondary schools (comprehensive schools and high schools). The overall structure of both curricula follows the same form and is divided into a general section applicable to all subjects and a subject-specific section. The general section contains information on teaching and learning (e.g. competence orientation), the significance and quality of music education, as well as areas of particular importance that must be considered in the teaching of all subjects. The subject-specific part is divided into the lower secondary and the upper secondary. This part covers:

- the basics and didactic guidelines, as well as the requirements of the subject music
- the competence areas that students are expected to develop
- topics and contents
- school-based subject curriculum
- explanations on assessment.

Music lessons in secondary education cover two *Kompetenzbereiche* (competency areas) that are intertwined and related to each other, and each are subdivided in two more *Handlungsfelder* (fields of action). In the area of competence of *Musik gestalten* (creating music), these fields of action are called *Aktion* (action) and *Transposition* (transposition); in the area of competence of *Musik erschließen* (exploring music), these are called *Rezeption* (reception) and *Reflexion* (reflection). These areas of activity can be traced back to the fundamental approaches to music formulated by Dankmar Venus: production, reproduction, reception, reflection, and transposition (Venus 1984). The competencies should be taught in thematic contexts. Thus, lessons should cover various topics based on the students' experiences and establish interdisciplinary connections (e.g., music and its structure, development, and significance).

Implementation of the Music Curriculum

The development of the music curriculum in Germany is a collaborative process involving educational authorities, expert committees, schools, and public stakeholders. Each federal

state follows its own procedures in shaping the curriculum, resulting in regional differences in implementation and focus. Schools are free to design the subject curriculum – serving as a framework – according to their priorities and possibilities.

Assessment

Assessment in music lessons in Germany takes place in various areas, including practical, oral, and written contributions that should be given equal weight. The *Abitur* in music comprises written and oral examinations based on the requirements for the subject music. The types of tasks include analysis and interpretation, discussion of texts, or creative tasks. Oral examinations include a presentation and examination interview. Additionally, there is also a task called *besondere Lernleistung* / 5. *Prüfungskomponente* (special learning achievement) which is an individual exam that includes written documentation and a presentation. It can involve the production of a written paper or an artistic product, followed by a 30 min colloquium. The specific requirements, however, vary between the federal states.

Shaping the Future: Trends and Research in School Music Education

Composition and improvisation pedagogy is a developing field in Germany, with a growing body of literature and research projects that address many aspects of the creative process. Recent research has examined the facilitation of creative processes of composing in groups in school settings (Kranefeld et al., 2018); tensions between openness and guidance in classroom composing (Buchborn et al., 2019); ideas on composing of students (Meisterernst, 2020), didactic design principles in composition (Theison, 2023); didactic design of group improvisation in music lessons (Treß, 2022); and composing with the use of digital media (Weber & Rolle, 2020).

Furthermore, there has been an increasing use of digital technologies in the music classroom, which has been significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for students to access education remotely has improved the technical resources available in schools, and has resulted in an increased provision of targeted training materials to support teachers in the use of digital media. As a consequence, new didactic concepts have been integrated into classrooms in order to meet the requirements of music education in a digitalised world.

Moreover, the academic discourse on the ecological crises of our time is rising in German-speaking countries. Eusterbrook et al. (2024) brought this issue to the fore in their thematic issue of *Diskussion Musikpädagogik* entitled *Ökologie und Klimakrise* (Ecology and climate crisis).

Cooperation between schools and music schools is another issue that is gaining increasing attention in both research and practice, particularly as many elementary schools collaborate with music schools in order to enable and broaden participation in musical activities. Two notable programmes, *JeKi – Jedem Kind sein Instrument* (An Instrument for Every Child) and *JeKits – Jedem Kind Instrumente, Tanzen, Singen* (Instruments, Dancing, Singing for Every Child), have laid the foundation for integrating music education into everyday school life at an early age, thereby reaching and supporting a wide range of children. *JeKi*, initiated in the Ruhr region focusing on instrumental lessons, was succeeded by *JeKits*. The latter programme has been running statewide in North Rhine-Westphalia since 2015, and, in addition to instrumental lessons, also includes dancing and singing as key components. Another significant initiative that shows how these programmes have evolved, is EMSA. EMSA – *Eine (Musik)Schule für alle* (One (Music)School for all) – is a cooperation model for secondary schools and music schools in North Rhine-Westphalia that expands the opportunities for musical and cultural participation for all students from grade 5 onwards by offering modular music-making and learning opportunities as building blocks that can be adapted to the different levels of previous experience of the students (Ardila-Mantilla et al., 2022).

Finally, the question how to shape cooperations between music in schools and music schools plays a growing role in the concept of full-day schooling, which has become increasingly important in the German-language discourse. Full-day schools help to diversify opportunities in music education and enable improved cultural participation for all children and young people, including those from socio-economically disadvantaged families.

The many trends that are evolving in the music education school discourse can be retraced in supplementary sources such as:

- Position papers edited by the music teacher association BMU e.V. that serve to clarify the stance on specific current topics of music education in school and represent a kind of working and orientation aid for the various actors involved. Topics from the last 5 years include inclusion (2024), democracy education (2024), teacher shortage in music (2023), music education and digitalisation (2019) etc.
- Thematic issues in scientific journals such as *Diskussion Musikpädagogik* address current topics, e.g., inclusion, digital media, intersectionality, etc (see therefore the overview of individual topics in each volume of the magazine *Diskussion Musikpädagogik*.²

² <https://www.junker-verlag.com/dmp-zeitschrift> [18.02.2026].

Conclusion

Music education in Germany does not follow a single score but unfolds as a polyphonic composition shaped by federal structures, diverse school types, and regional priorities. What may appear fragmented at first, reveals itself as a landscape of opportunities, ranging from recorder choirs in primary schools to orchestras in music-specialised *Gymnasien*. While unevenly distributed, music remains a valued subject that reflects both cultural traditions and contemporary challenges. The diversity of Germany's sixteen systems is not merely a complication, it is the very stage on which creativity, identity, and innovation in school music education are being shaped.

Statement on the use of artificial intelligence. For language editing purposes, AI-based tools were used exclusively for translation and clarification of terminology. The AI assisted in refining wording and improving linguistic accuracy. No AI was used for content generation, data analysis, interpretation of results, or development of original arguments. All intellectual content and final responsibility remain with the authors.

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Music in Greek (Hellenic) Public Schools

From Early Foundations to Contemporary Practices

Abstract

The chapter explores the evolution and current state of music education in public schools in Greece (Hellas). It traces the transition from conventional models to a modern, inclusive framework that integrates Greek traditional music, Western classical, and Byzantine music. It outlines the structure, curricula, music teaching resources and extra-curricular activities of general primary and secondary education and specialised Music and Artistic Schools. Despite challenges in infrastructure and funding, the chapter highlights the pivotal role of specialised educators in balancing tradition with innovation. Ultimately, Greek music education is trying to emerge as a transformative force for students' holistic, social, and creative development.

Introduction

Music education in Greece (Hellas) has developed into a dynamic field shaped by the interplay of national traditions and international trends. Over the past fifty years, public school music curricula have undergone significant transformation, evolving from a focus primarily on traditional and religious heritage to a more inclusive approach. The recent framework incorporates Western classical music, traditional Greek and Byzantine music, popular genres, and the integration of digital technologies.

This chapter will focus specifically on public schools, where a centrally defined yet flexible curriculum guides music education. This contrasts with private schools, which may tailor different music curricula, setting specific educational priorities, and with

conservatories, which also play a pivotal role in shaping Greece's musical landscape. However, the conservatory curriculum (Royal Decree 16/1957) concentrates on performance training while somewhat sidelining music education. In the following sections, we will examine the current state of music education in schools, analysing critical elements such as classroom time, the roles of educators, available resources, curricula, and prevailing challenges – all within the broader context of Greece's educational and cultural framework.

From Past to Contemporary Music Education in Greece

Music played a prominent role in ancient times, as it was closely tied to education, philosophy, and public life in general (Stamou, 2002). The subject was introduced into formal education in 1834 under the title *Ωδική* (Odiki, Art of singing). The main aim of the course was to promote discipline and national consciousness through the learning of religious and patriotic songs (Romanou & Barbaki, 2011). Until the 1970s, music education was characterised by a lack of a unified curriculum for music (Kougkas, 2022).

In 1981, after Greece acceded to the European Economic Community, a period of educational reforms began. For the first time, aesthetic education was recognised as a key component of the school curriculum. Secondary education included courses in Visual Arts and Music, acknowledging the role of arts subjects in shaping a person's overall personality (L. 1566/1985). In the same year (1985), the first Department of Music Studies was established at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, laying the foundations for the upgrading of education and the strengthening of the scientific character of the field (Stavrou, 2009). Shortly thereafter, in 1988, Music Schools (at the lower and upper secondary levels) were established, marking a turning point in the history of Greek music education. As it will be mentioned below, for the first time, Western classical and Greek music (traditional and Byzantine) were treated equally, establishing Music Schools as an institution with a decisive contribution to the country's artistic cultivation and cultural identity (Kougkas, 2022).

Moving into the 21st century, the Διαθεματικό Ενιαίο Πλαίσιο Προγραμμάτων Σπουδών (Δ.Ε.Π.Π.Σ) – the Cross-Curricular Unified Curriculum Framework (CUCF) (Ministerial Decision 21072α/Γ2/2003) – was established as the national curriculum framework, introducing interdisciplinarity into the teaching of all subjects in compulsory education, including Music. The CUCF for Music is based on the English curriculum and consists of three pillars: performance, creation, and evaluation. It emphasises concepts such as interdisciplinarity, creativity, collaborative learning, and multiculturalism (Kokkidou, 2009).

The most recent music curricula (Ministerial Decisions, 33171/Δ2/2023, 49652/Δ1/2023) align with broader European strategies, emphasising experiential learning, differentiated instruction, flipped classroom approach, collaboration, creativity, cultural dialogue, and digital literacy. Nevertheless, it continues to face challenges, including

limited instructional time, inadequate infrastructure, and the ongoing need for teacher professional development (Kokkidou, Kondylidou, & Mygdanis, 2021). While these obstacles do not diminish the progress achieved, they underscore the importance of sustained support and renewal to ensure that music education responds effectively to the demands of a multicultural and digital society.

Music from Primary School to Lower Secondary School (Gymnasium)

In Greece, Music is taught from elementary school through lower secondary education. It is an independent subject, offered once a week by a specialised music teacher in both primary and secondary education. During their allocated teaching hours, music teachers may organise choirs and music ensembles to enhance aesthetic education and promote music culture.

Recently, music teachers at primary and secondary schools (including general and Music Schools) are specialised educators, most holding a university degree in Music. They are responsible for delivering group music lessons or one-to-one tuition (only in Music Schools). Their main focus is on developing students' aesthetic awareness and nurturing their natural musicality through activities that form a triptych: music performance (singing and playing instruments), music appreciation, and music creation (improvisation and composition). Additionally, music teachers may lead school ensembles such as choirs and bands and organise school celebrations and other events.

In public schools, funding for music depends on the school's financial resources from the state, municipality, and private donations. Funding decisions involve the principal, teachers, and the parent council. Disparities in funding, leadership priorities, and parental/guardian involvement result in inconsistencies in music education resources, including instruments, technology, and supplementary materials.

Music Education Resources

The Hellenic Ministry of Education, along with the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP), provides standardised music textbooks for public general school students, aligning with the Music Curriculum. These include music theory, songs, activities, and cultural references from Western, Greek traditional, Byzantine, and world music. They are available in print and digital formats, enriching the printed material with media examples and accessibility for visually impaired students (Chrysostomou, 2019). In contrast, Music Schools do not use standardised textbooks. Instead, music teachers develop and provide their own instructional materials, guided by the Music Schools' curriculum and tailored to students' specific needs (Ministerial Decision, 3345/1988).

The IEP has also organised digital educational platforms that contain resources for the music classroom. Such platforms are: i) Aesop¹ (Advanced Electronic Scenarios Operating Platform) (Perakaki, 2016) and ii) Photodentro² (Greek National Aggregator of Educational Content) (Chrysostomou, 2019). Additionally, the Greek Society for Music Education, in collaboration with the Music Library of Greece “Lilian Voudouri” and Gibson Music Awards, with the cooperation of the International Society of Music Education, created the platform “Euterpe: Greek Songs for Schools – Digital Music Anthology”³. It gathers scores of Greek songs for classrooms, with annotations, historical context, and teaching ideas. The above resources are indicative examples, while acknowledging that other similar initiatives also exist and contribute to the enrichment of music education in Greece (Chrysostomou, 2019).

In recent years, the Ministry of Education has implemented frameworks to enrich primary and secondary education through structured and flexible extracurricular initiatives. Each one aims to enhance the student experience, foster personal growth, and promote creativity, innovation, and social responsibility. The three main frameworks are: (a) School Activities, (b) Educational Clubs for Excellence, Creativity, and Innovation, and (c) other initiatives and competitions coordinated by the IEP. Each has specific institutional and legal support, differing in structure and implementation, but all facilitate the integration of music as artistic expression, interdisciplinary learning, and school development.

School Activities

School Activities (SA) are implemented in primary and secondary schools, including Student Career Education Programmes in secondary schools, lasting at least three months. They occur anytime during the school year, up to ten days before it ends. In primary education, activities occur within school hours; in secondary education, they take place after school, aiming to expand topics through an interdisciplinary approach. The topics may include research, art, and community collaboration, often with music as a theme or educational tool. These interdisciplinary, project-based initiatives are completed with events, such as concerts or performances. According to the Ministerial Decision (Γ2/4867/1992 – L. 629/23-10-1992), they are voluntarily designed by teachers focusing on music traditions, practices, or societal roles, fostering cultural literacy, teamwork, and creativity. This initiative is based on the voluntary work of music teachers and the optional participation of students, ensuring that access is free of charge. It operates without external funding, relying instead on the commitment, professional expertise, and collaborative spirit of music educators and the community.

¹ Advanced Electronic Scenarios Operating Platform, <https://aesop.iep.edu.gr/>

² Greek National Aggregator of Educational Content, <http://photodentro.edu.gr/aggregator/>

³ Euterpe: Greek Songs for Schools – Digital Music Anthology <https://www.eeme.gr/euterpe.html>

Educational Clubs for Excellence, Creativity, and Innovation

The Educational Clubs for Excellence, Creativity, and Innovation (ECECI) take place outside the school schedule as a structured extracurricular model to promote student creativity, teamwork, and experiential learning through weekly activities in science, culture, literature, arts, and social sciences. Outlined by Ministerial Decision 102939/ΓΔ4/2022, the framework applies to all public schools, but at the same time, it depends on the teaching staff council's decision. They cover areas like culture, arts, sciences, literature, and environmental education. Students' participation is voluntary but expected to be regular. Conversely, in the Model, Experimental (Ministerial Decision, 78054/Δ6/2020) and Public Onassis Schools (Ministerial Decision, 18175/Δ6/2025), participation is mandatory, with clubs focused on sciences, humanities, languages, arts, culture, and sports. Music clubs, such as vocal or instrumental groups and songwriting laboratories, can be established in primary or secondary schools with sufficient interest and staff expertise.

Institute of Educational Policy Initiatives

In recent years, the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) in Greece has been key in developing school self-evaluation. This mandatory annual process for all public primary and secondary schools is coordinated by the IEP, which also manages national competitions, student conferences, networks, and pilot programmes focused on digital skills, democracy, and STEM. These initiatives often supplement school clubs and activities, aiming to foster a culture of reflection and evidence-based improvement. Schools submit an Annual Internal Evaluation Report, documenting findings and planning next steps. IEP-sponsored competitions encompass music and audiovisual categories, and music educators participate in professional development courses focused on digital education, inclusive teaching, and interdisciplinary learning with musical elements⁴.

From General Education to Specialisation: Artistic and Music Schools

In Greece, there are two kinds of specialised public schools: a) Artistic Schools (AS), and b) Music Schools (MS). Both types of schools aim to combine general education with arts training, promote creativity and cultural identity, enhance performance and teamwork skills, and encourage aesthetic appreciation. Both are funded by the state, and students can attend free of charge.

Artistic Schools

Artistic Schools (AS) in Greece are a unique sector of public secondary education established in 2003, designed to foster artistic talent in three sections: Visual Arts, Theatre–Cinema, and Dance, while covering the full general curriculum. Their primary objectives

⁴ <https://www2.iep.edu.gr/el/psifiako-apothetirio/skill-labs/913-dimiourgo-kai-kainotomo>

are to foster students' interest and skills in the arts, support their artistic development, and encourage deep engagement. The Artistic Schools' curriculum was established in 2016 (7885/Δ2/2016, Ministerial Decision 7888/Δ2/2016). Although it is not a separate section, music, an autonomous subject and as an art form, is incorporated into the curriculum and into cross-curricular projects with theatre, dance, or visual arts. Music is embedded in theatre and dance curricula through performances and integrated projects, with many events featuring musical performances or collaborations. The timetable allows schools to dedicate significant time to music, which connects the arts and emphasises creativity, performance, and collaboration, offering students a more profound exploration than in general schools.

Music Schools

Music Schools (MS) are public lower (Gymnasium) and upper secondary schools (Lyceum) combining general education with specialised music training (L. 649/B/07-09-1988). They nurture students' musical talents, uphold academic standards, and foster artistic growth. Staffed by specialised teachers, MS admit students through a competitive test that assesses musical aptitude, rhythm, acoustics, and voice, allowing those without prior training to join. Objectives include identifying and developing musical skills, providing a broad education, and creating pathways to higher music studies. MS offer a dual curriculum, including practical skills such as instrumental and vocal performance, ensemble practice, and theoretical subjects like music theory, ear training, and music history. They also focus on developing musicianship, creativity, and cultural awareness, collaborating with general education schools, music universities, and cultural organisations. Their work enhances interdisciplinary learning and cultural heritage, making them valuable in modern music education and society (Koliadi, 2016).

The Music Curriculum in General Education: Structure, Implementation, and Assessment

Music plays a vital role in primary and lower secondary education in Greece, aiming to develop students' musical abilities through listening, performing, and creating. It encourages personal expression, emotional development, cultural understanding, and social interaction. The curriculum is flexible and allows teachers to select the learning outcomes which are suited to their students' needs, supporting personalised and inclusive learning. Music teachers serve as facilitators, guiding and inspiring students through active engagement with music. The music curricula at both levels intend to foster a lifelong connection to music and promote overall growth (Ministerial Decision, 49652/Δ1/2023, 33171/Δ2/2023).

At primary level, the curriculum introduces fundamental concepts such as rhythm, melody, and harmony through engaging activities. Pupils participate by listening, performing, and creating with various instruments, aiming to spark creativity, increase musical awareness, and connect music to daily life. Building on this foundational knowledge, the lower secondary school curriculum enriches students' musical education by exploring complex concepts like harmony, texture, and notation. The integration of music technology and digital tools improves learning and helps students acquire essential modern skills.

Both curricula focus on four thematic areas within a spiral framework for music education. The first, "Understanding Musical Concepts and Elements", covers rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics, texture, form, tempo, and timbre. The second area, "Exploring Music across Time, Places, and Cultures", expands students' exposure to diverse musical genres and traditions, including Greek and global heritages, both historical and modern. The third area, "Connecting Music with Other Arts and Sciences", highlights the cross-curricular and interdisciplinary nature of music. Students explore connections between music and visual arts, theatre, dance, literature, mathematics, and environmental studies, embracing the STEAM approach to foster innovation, critical thinking, and collaboration. The last thematic area, "Music in and Beyond School Life", encourages students to relate music to daily life, cultural events, and personal identity. Activities may include performances, community projects, or soundscape exploration.

Assessment within the music curriculum is primarily formative, supporting students' ongoing learning and providing insights for instructional planning. Instead of concentrating on summative evaluations, the assessment process aims to document and reflect on students' musical growth, engagement, and creativity. Music teachers observe students' participation in musical activities, listen to their performances, review their compositions, and discuss their ideas and reflections. Students are also encouraged to take part in self-assessment and peer assessment processes, which help them develop metacognitive awareness and collaborative skills. The use of portfolios allows students to compile evidence of their progress over time, including recordings, written reflections, and project documentation.

The music curriculum for primary and lower secondary education in Greece envisions music as a dynamic, inclusive, and transformative part of human experience. It encourages active participation, inquiry, and creativity, developing not only skilled musicians but also thoughtful, imaginative, and socially conscious individuals. Whether through simple songs, complex compositions, or collaborations, students experience music as a vital, enriching part of their personal and community lives. In this framework, the current music curriculum (2023) aligns with the up-to-date music education trends, resonating with students' voices and needs.

Exploring Current Trends in Music Education: Challenges and Research

Global socio-economic and digital changes are impacting music education in Greece, transforming how education and music are delivered. It is quickly adapting and innovating due to technological advancements, the effects of the pandemic, and collaborations among schools, universities, and cultural groups. Research conducted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic reveals that teachers rapidly adopted digital platforms to sustain learning, highlighting inequalities in access to and ICT skills among educators and students (Chrysostomou & Triantafyllaki, 2021; Akoyunoglou & Koniari, 2023). Platforms like e-Class and Padlet have evolved from emergency tools to key resources, enriching materials, and facilitating learning while preserving the social aspects of music education. AI tools are also being explored for composition and personalised learning, with concerns about bias.

One more contemporary trend is strengthening formal partnerships, either among schools or between schools and higher education institutions. These are institutionalised through supervised teaching practicums in undergraduate curricula and professional development courses (Kougkas, 2022). Additionally, music organisations, associations, and professionals increasingly engage with schools. Foundations, ensembles, and non-profit organisations collaborate on repertoire, community projects, residencies, and after-school activities, supporting curriculum relevance and enriching students' musical experiences. The literature review argues that educational institutions should prioritise collaboration to develop twenty-first-century skills, and a collaborative culture is vital for educational and systemic improvement, connecting schools to their broader social contexts (Koliadi-Tiliakou, 2023).

In recent years, Greek music education has embraced several pedagogical innovations that promote inclusive, pluralistic, and embodied learning philosophies. One key development has been the incorporation of differentiated learning strategies and inclusive assessment, which have become central responses to the challenges of diverse classrooms. Music educators across primary and secondary schools are encouraged to apply differentiated learning to meet the learning needs of students, thereby ensuring equitable access to musical instruction. Recent research shows how flexible materials and multimodal resources can support learners with different abilities, including those facing learning challenges (Chalkiadaki & Akoyunoglou, 2019), and how music teachers demonstrate practices and heightened awareness of differentiated pedagogies in everyday classroom settings (Keramida & Vaiouli, 2019).

The flipped learning approach has gradually gained ground in Greek schools, being implemented in all levels and types of education (Perakaki et al., 2023; Perakaki, 2025). This approach enables students to familiarise themselves with theoretical concepts, repertoire, or listening tasks at home (pre-class), allowing valuable classroom time to be used for active music-making, performance practice, and creative exploration (in-class). Although

the flipped classroom encourages student autonomy and deeper engagement, its implementation in Greece faces challenges related to digital infrastructure, teacher training, and unequal access to technology among students (Perakaki, 2025).

Greek music educators are increasingly adopting multimodal, multisensory, and maker-oriented strategies as innovative classroom practices, reinforcing theoretical concepts through embodied experiences – including tactile, visual, and kinaesthetic engagement – while preserving the interactive essence of music education (Kokkidou, Kondylidou, & Mygdanis, 2021). In recent years, they have also gained the opportunity to select from a diverse range of textbooks, a process that is still ongoing. In practice, music educators will have the opportunity to combine the open music curriculum with multiple school textbooks, adopting an approach that offers flexibility rather than relying on a single resource for all students.

A significant challenge in Greek music education is that music has not been offered as a formal subject in upper secondary general education since the 2020–21 school year. While primary and lower secondary education provide structured music instruction, students in the final years of schooling lack regular access to music learning, limiting opportunities for continued skill development, creative expression, and engagement with diverse musical practices. This gap can hinder the continuity of musical literacy and participation, as well as the cultivation of students' social and cultural awareness through music.

Conclusion

Looking ahead, funding and policy in Greece point to three interlocking priorities for the future of school music: a) consolidating partnerships that embed research into school practice and widen student pathways; b) governing the ethical and equitable use of AI and various digital tools so they support differentiated, culturally responsive pedagogy; and c) sustaining the experiential core of music education while leveraging digital platforms to diversify repertoire and access. If these priorities are pursued through collaborative, evidence-based initiatives that include teacher education, curriculum design, and community stakeholders, Greek music education may strike a balance between tradition and innovation in ways that enhance inclusion, professionalism, and artistic vitality.

In conclusion, music education in Greek public schools transcends the formal curriculum, thriving through a diverse range of extracurricular programmes. Central to this process is the specialised music teacher at all levels and types of school, who guides, inspires, and facilitates students' creative exploration, shaping both their musical skills and their personal development. Through their mentorship, music becomes more than a subject: it emerges as a dynamic, integrative force in holistic education, nurturing cognitive, emotional, and social capacities that extend far beyond the classroom.

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Andrea Asztalos

Between Tradition and Transformation

Music Education in Hungary

Abstract

This chapter examines music education in Hungary through the lens of tradition and transformation. Rooted in the pedagogical legacy of Zoltán Kodály, Hungarian music education places strong emphasis on singing, musical literacy, and national cultural heritage. The chapter outlines the historical and institutional foundations of music education, its organisation across general and specialised schooling, and the structure of the national music curriculum. It analyses time allocation, teaching resources, curriculum implementation, and assessment practices, highlighting both strengths and challenges of the centralised system. Recent projects and innovations are discussed as examples of efforts to modernise music education while sustaining its distinctive cultural and educational values.

Introduction

Hungary's musical culture has long been recognised for its exceptional richness and international influence, shaped by composers such as Béla Bartók (1881–1945) and Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967), whose pedagogical legacy continues to define music education today. Music education in Hungary is based on an activity-centred method, following the philosophy of Zoltán Kodály. The centuries-old tradition of Hungarian music culture and its vast melodic wealth provide a rich source of material for all levels of music education. Our musical mother tongue is a fundamental factor in shaping our general culture and our sense of national identity (NAT, 2020). Music education is of paramount importance for the formation of a student's sense of identity and personal development. The cultivation of our

national heritage and identity through the study of Hungarian folk music, the Hungarian regions, their customs, life, sights and dances, which also strengthens the sense of family love, loyalty, and commitment to the homeland, plays an important role. Musical education will be effective if the student develops a musical mother tongue through which they are connected to their homeland and nation both intellectually and emotionally (NAT, 2020). Music holds a prominent place in Hungarian schooling and cultural life, supported by a well-established system of primary and secondary music schools. This chapter provides an overview of how music education in Hungary is organised, tracing its historical and institutional foundations, its curricular framework, and the challenges and innovations shaping current practice.

From Past to Contemporary Music Education in Hungary

Hungary is a Central European country, located in the Carpathian basin and covers an area of 93,030 square km. The population of Hungary is 9,730,772 (as of 1 January 2021). Hungary is a parliamentary republic. Central educational governance or supervision is under the auspices of mainly two ministries, namely *Belügyminisztérium* (Ministry of Interior) and *Kulturális és Innovációs Minisztérium* (Ministry of Culture and Innovation) (Eurydice, 2024). Hungary is a country with a strong musical heritage and a long-standing tradition of music education, closely linked to its national identity and pedagogical reforms.

Music education in Hungary reflects a rich and complex history marked by significant contributions from prominent figures such as Zoltán Kodály and influential cultural institutions that have evolved over the years. Zoltán Kodály was a renowned Hungarian composer, ethnomusicologist, and music educator, famous for developing the internationally recognised Kodály method of music education, which emphasises teaching music through folk songs, singing, and sequential learning to foster deep musical literacy. He was a significant figure in 20th-century Hungarian culture, known for his compositions deeply rooted in Hungarian folk music and his pioneering research into folk songs alongside his contemporary, Béla Bartók. The duality of influences, both German and Hungarian, has played a pivotal role in shaping the music education landscape in the country. Historically, the foundations of music education in Hungary were heavily influenced by German musical traditions and pedagogies, with German being the primary language of instruction until the early twentieth century. In particular, Leo Kestenbergs (1882–1962) educational reforms have been recognised for their parallels with Kodály’s philosophy, highlighting the transition to a distinctly Hungarian music education framework that resonates with cultural identity. Kestenbergs efforts to integrate music education into broader cultural and intellectual discourse laid the foundation for future developments in music pedagogy, highlighting the importance of national identity in educational settings (Mike, 2020; 2023).

Leo Kestenberg was a German-Israeli classical pianist, music educator, and cultural politician. Working for the government in Prussia from 1918, he began a large-scale reform of music education (Kestenberg-Reform) which aimed to teach music to all, beginning with small children, and including the education of their teachers.

Kodály's ideals have had a lasting impact in Hungary and internationally. His approach focuses on the belief that music should be accessible to everyone, which underpins initiatives that ensure that music education extends beyond conservatories into general primary education. This philosophy is supported by evidence of daily music periods established in many state schools across Hungary (Han, 2018; Kildea, 2003). The implications of Kodály's methods have significantly shaped pedagogical practices, fostering the integration of singing, musical literacy, and cultural transmission within educational curricula (Mogyorósi, 2023).

In Hungary, Kodály's philosophy-recognised by UNESCO as a component of the nation's intangible cultural heritage-underpins the framework of music instruction and national curriculum. This comprehensive approach aims not only to improve students' musical skills, such as hearing, singing, and improvisation, but also to foster music literacy and comprehension (Han, 2018; Lukács & Honbolygó, 2019). The Kodály concept highlights the importance of cultural heritage in education, advocating for the integration of local folk music into school programmes, thus promoting national identity through music (Asztalos, 2022; Szabó, 2020). The impact of Kodály's principles can be seen not only in primary education but also in higher education settings, where the focus is increasingly on innovative teaching methods and curriculum reform (Bai, 2023).

Music in Schools: From Classroom Time to Specialised Education

Time Allocation for Music

In Hungary, primary and lower secondary education (ISCED 1, 2) is organised as a single-structure system in primary (basic) schools (typically for students aged 6–14 years, which cover Grades 1–8). The basic education phase consists of two stages: the primary phase (Grades 1–4) and the lower secondary phase (Grades 5–8) (Eurydice, 2024). In the primary school phase, music is taught by generalist teachers, while from Grade 5 onwards, music is taught exclusively by music specialist teachers. Upper secondary education normally starts in grade 9 and finishes in grade 12. Upper secondary schools provide general knowledge to students and prepare them for the secondary school-leaving examination and higher education studies. In this type of school, there is one music lesson per week in Grades 9 and 10, which must be taught exclusively by a music specialist teacher.

One of the main tasks of primary education is to provide daily arts education, which can also be provided in the afternoon, creating opportunities for the development of various individual and community art activities. In Grades 5 to 12, conditions and opportunities for arts education, both in and out of school, should be continuously provided (NAT, 2020).

In Hungary, music education begins in early childhood education (ages 3–6), where children participate in approximately five hours of musical activities per week. These music sessions last 30–45 minutes and are led by preschool teachers. In primary education (grades 1–4, ages 6–10), pupils receive two weekly music lessons, while in lower secondary (grades 5–8, ages 10–14) the number of lessons decreases to two hours in grade 5 and one hour per week in grades 6–8. In upper secondary education (ages 14–18), music is compulsory in the first two years and optional thereafter, usually with one lesson per week.

Resources for Teaching Music

In Hungary, compulsory music education in schools is free and is subsidised by the state. Most schools are equipped with digital whiteboards and projectors and associated computers, but in many places the lack of stable, fast internet access prevents the smooth and regular use of digital equipment. For music education in schools, free centralised textbooks for compulsory use have been published in 2020, in line with the new national curriculum. Unfortunately, teachers do not have a choice of textbooks. The availability of musical instruments varies widely from school to school, depending on the school's geographical location, and management and maintenance. In addition to textbooks, teachers use videos, pictures, PowerPoint presentations, musical instruments (mainly piano and guitar), rhythm instruments, and various music games.

Beyond classroom teaching, several concert-pedagogical activities are offered for preschool- and school-age children. For decades, the National Philharmonic Society has been offering a variety of youth concerts for school-age children, which are held in concert halls during school hours, with students are accompanied by teachers. There are also occasions when small performing groups and chamber orchestras hold concerts, music sessions, and workshops in schools. Some of the schools have twinning arrangements with the Palace of Arts in Budapest, resulting in very reasonably priced tickets for both students and teachers. The House of Hungarian Music, which opened a few years ago, offers a wide range of valuable, high-quality music programmes and concerts for all ages, including pre-school and school children. Discounted tickets and programmes are available for these concerts. Many Hungarian symphony orchestras (e.g. Budapest Festival Orchestra, Szeged Symphony Orchestra, Ernő Dohnányi Symphony Orchestra) are committed to promoting classical music and offer a wide range of interactive programmes and concerts for young people, including schoolchildren. These programmes are mainly available in the capital and larger cities, where most schools participate in them.

Extra-curricular Music Education in Schools

In Hungary, many primary and secondary schools have choirs as extracurricular activities. Additional extracurricular music activities are provided by music schools that are part of general schools or located nearby.

Pupils between the ages of 6 and 23 can learn instrumental and vocal music and solfège in the Music and Art Schools, where a small tuition fee is charged. Music and Art Schools offer instrumental/vocal and solfège lessons not only in their main buildings but also in primary schools. Music and Art Schools have a choir(s) and orchestra(s) too. Music is an integral part of school life. Live music performances and choral singing enhance school events. Music activities and music making are also essential parts of projects and theme weeks.

Unfortunately, there is no accurate data available on how many students attend music school and how many sing in choirs.

Specialised Schools

Due to Kodály's influence on music education, the establishment of specialised music schools throughout the country flourished. In addition, almost every Hungarian town had a least two choirs a few decades ago. Unfortunately, the number of these specialised music schools has now dramatically decreased; they have either entirely disappeared, or only one specialised music class remains in each school. However, there are still specialised music schools in the country that provide high-quality music education, covering both primary and secondary education and, in many cases, including Music and Art Schools. These schools offer a much higher number of music lessons (4–6 music lessons per week) and include choir as a compulsory part of the curriculum. These schools are run by the state or by churches.

The National Core Curriculum and Music Curriculum

National Core Curriculum

The highest level of content regulation is the *Nemzeti Alaptanterv*, NAT (National Core Curriculum, NCC), which is compiled by a committee of education/curriculum experts and submitted to the Government after professional discussion. The amendments were introduced in a phasing-out system from 1 September 2020 in grades 1, 5 and 9, to the entry points of different educational stages primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary. The National Core Curriculum (2020) is mandatory for all schools to follow (Eurydice, 2024).

The medium level of the content regulation system is the framework curricula, which intend to transpose NAT requirements and spirit into everyday practice. The function of framework curricula is to operationalise the developmental tasks set by the NAT for each

educational phase and to designate the public educational content to be learnt. For each type of school and educational phase, the framework curricula contain goals for teaching and educating children, as well as the system of subjects, the topics to be covered by the subjects, the content of each topic, the subject-related requirements for one or two grades, the tasks of developing fields of cross-curricular knowledge and skills, and the compulsory or recommended time frames available for meeting these requirements (Eurydice, 2024).

Structure and Content of the Music Curriculum

The chapter on the subject of music in the NAT (2020) consists of three main parts: 1. Principles, objectives, 2. Main Topics, 3. Learning outcomes.

The teacher's work has a meaningful role to play in implementing the curriculum with a lifelong impact that extends beyond the walls of the school. Music education also develops specific skills, abilities, and competencies that have an impact on other non-musical skills (transfer effect). Active musical activities such as singing, making music, and creating and participating in music-themed projects help deepen the experience of the Art. They provide scope for self-expression, creativity, and empathy. Literacy in music history, music theory, and cultural literacy in relation to musical experiences and activities fosters meaningful reception and reflective thinking. Students will also be able to see the connections between artistic ideas and the everyday world around them and to understand and accept different perspectives (NAT, 2020).

Effective music education takes into account the age and cognitive abilities of the learner. It bases its educational objectives in the lower and upper grades, as well as in secondary education, on these criteria. Auditory and rhythmic skills are developed more effectively in primary Grades 1–4 due to plasticity of the brain at an early age. This can be built upon in Grades 5–8 and further development of imagination, creativity, musical expression, and emotional intelligence in secondary education (Grades 9–10) (NAT, 2020).

Basic musical literacy is essential. It aims to help the learner sing and understand music as a universal system of signs. Relative solmisation is used primarily to develop clear singing and intonation. Knowing the names of the root tones helps to develop a broader understanding of music and to think logically in terms of the sign system. The teacher can deepen the knowledge of music theory in the free time of the lessons, according to the age and ability of the students (NAT, 2020).

In accordance with the essence of Kodály's principles of music education, which identifies choral singing as the most important source of experience, NAT provides opportunities for the organisation of extra-curricular musical activities such as concert pedagogy, folk dance education, folk choirs, folk choral groups, and chamber ensembles, both within and outside the school framework, for which cooperation between public education and institutions and organisations that mediate culture is necessary (NAT, 2020).

The study of music is primarily a means of developing skills and the abilities which underpin them. Pupils do not start from the same level of ability and do not achieve the same level of success. Therefore, the basis of assessment at all stages of vocal music learning should be essentially the student's activity, enthusiasm, cooperativeness, and changes in learning skills, as well as the student's level of self-development. Music and singing education are based on a balance between intellectual and emotional development. This is also based on the music pedagogical practice rooted in Kodály's principles, which foster the development of the whole person and aims to educate a creative, independent-minded person who respects and preserves Hungarian national values, and is at the same time European literate (NAT, 2020).

The aim of music teaching is to enable the learner to:

- (1) acquire a love of music through the reception of the artistic works studied in this subject;
- (2) to seek, recognise, and appreciate artistic values;
- (3) develop their musical abilities through singing, rhythmic, and aural development, as well as to acquire the basic knowledge of music theory that underpins these;
- (4) develop emotional intelligence, imagination, and creativity, which have an impact on other non-musical skills;
- (5) develop a complex vision by understanding music in its social, historical, and cultural context;
- (6) strengthen national consciousness through the study of Hungarian folk music, folk traditions, as well as the life and customs of the Hungarian regions;
- (7) promote a) independence and self-expression through the cultivation of social and individual creative activities and b) the development of opinion-forming;
- (8) strengthen empathy by working together in musical activities, respectfully accepting each other's musical production, opinions, and tastes (NAT, 2020).

The structure of the music curriculum is: 1) music pieces, vocal material; 2) music pieces, listening to music; 3) musical knowledge, rhythmic development; 4) musical hearing (aural) development; 5) musical writing, reading, and 6) complex musical skills development. This structure applies to all age groups but is filled with content appropriate for the given age group.

The National Curriculum sets out learning outcomes for the music subject for Grades 1–4, Grades 5–8, and Grades 9–10 in the following areas: musical performance skills – singing; rhythmic and musical hearing (aural) development; musical receptiveness; musical creativity; cultural literacy and cultural receptiveness, responsiveness; and developing independent learning (NAT, 2020).

Recent Projects and Innovations in Hungarian Music Education

In Hungary, in recent years, there have been several developments, innovations, and research in school music methodology aimed at modernising school music education and increasing students' motivation. These are presented below.

The "*Move mi Music* offers music teachers an effective way to develop young children's musical skills in musical writing, reading, and part-singing by providing useful tools to help improve inner hearing, musical memory, rhythmic, and writing skills in a playful way" (2022, para. 1).

"The PRESTO project developed multimedia learning resources and best-practice guidelines for flexible teaching and leadership across classroom-based music, instrumental teaching, and choral practice" (2024, para. 2).

Within the framework of the *Aktív zenetanulás* (Active Music Learning) research project, two active music learning methods that harmonise with the Kodály-concept were developed. "The final products of the research group are three handbooks and two multimedia example collections. The present website aims to present the latter. The teaching materials of the 1st and 2nd Models of *Active Music Learning*, along with more than 200 video excerpts and the explanatory texts related to them, and additional documents, are arranged in two separate online example collections, which can be accessed after a short registration" (2020, para. 6).

Conclusion

The chapter shows that Hungarian music education is deeply rooted in the principles of Zoltán Kodály, whose vision continues to shape both the structure and spirit of the national curriculum. Music remains an integral part of general education, with singing, musical literacy, and cultural identity at its core. Despite the centralised system and limited teacher autonomy, Hungary maintains a distinctive balance between tradition and innovation through active projects and research that seek to modernise classroom practice while preserving its strong cultural foundations.

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Rūta Girdzijauskienė

Music Education in Lithuania as a Living Cultural Practice

Abstract

This chapter examines music education in Lithuania within the context of historical, cultural, and educational transformation. It explores how centrally regulated educational structures interact with culturally embedded musical practices, shaping music education across school levels. By analysing curriculum design, implementation, and extracurricular activities, the chapter highlights both national frameworks and local variations. Drawing on recent research, it addresses key challenges such as teacher autonomy, curricular enactment, and inclusion, positioning Lithuanian music education as a culturally grounded and socially meaningful component of general education.

Introduction

Music in Lithuania has long been more than a school subject. It is woven into everyday life, public celebrations, and shared memories, shaping how people relate to one another and to their cultural past. While the organisation of education in Lithuania follows nationally agreed structures and responsibilities, the experience of music in schools is formed just as strongly by local school cultures, teachers' professional choices, and students' engagement. Music in school becomes a space where national frameworks are interpreted in personal and culturally meaningful ways. By exploring school structures, curriculum design, implementation, assessment, and current research, the chapter seeks to illuminate music education as a dynamic field shaped by both shared principles and diverse educational realities in Lithuania.

From Ideological Control to Cultural Agency in Lithuanian Music Education

The current context of music education in Lithuania has been shaped by significant historical, cultural, and social transformations over the past fifty years. These changes are closely linked to the country's experience of political occupation, the restoration of independence, and the continuing role of music as a cultural practice embedded in everyday life. At the core of this development lie two interrelated foundations: the transformation of educational structures following the Soviet period and the culturally embedded understanding of music education as a fundamental element of Lithuanian musical identity.

During the Soviet period (1940–1990), music education operated within a highly centralised and ideologically controlled system. School curricula, teacher practices, and institutional structures were subordinated to political goals, with education serving as a means of shaping the “Soviet citizen” (Girdzijauskienė & Sakadolskienė, 2017). While music was formally well represented in schools (supported by choirs, ensembles, and extensive extracurricular provision), its educational function was constrained by ideological regulation and limited pedagogical autonomy. Teachers were expected to follow prescribed materials closely, leaving little room for contextual interpretation or creative decision-making. Nevertheless, music education also became a space where national identity and cultural continuity were subtly preserved through everyday practices and informal meanings, even when overt expressions were restricted (Balčytis, 2008). For example, in musical repertoires, teachers routinely included songs dedicated to Lithuania or Lithuanian folk songs alongside ideologically oriented pieces. These songs were often performed with particular care and emotional commitment, functioning as a concealed yet meaningful way of safeguarding national identity.

The restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1990 marked a profound reorientation of the education system. Curricular reform and the rejection of ideological content reshaped the aims of music education, aligning it with democratic values, cultural openness, and learner-centred principles (Lukšienė, 2014). Music education increasingly emphasised holistic musical development rather than ideological conformity, while teachers were granted greater responsibility to interpret curricula and adapt content to local contexts. This transition, however, also revealed challenges related to teacher preparedness, uneven implementation, and tensions between inherited practices and contemporary educational expectations (Petrauskaitė, 2009).

Within this evolving educational landscape, music education in Lithuania sought trustworthy foundations that could support both continuity and meaning. These were found primarily in national culture, which had long nurtured musical knowledge, values, and a shared sense of identity. Research shows that this cultural grounding shaped not only informal musical life but also the underlying assumptions of school music education,

influencing how music was taught, learnt, and valued (Gudelis, 2014; Nakienė, 2015). In this sense, Lithuanian music education developed as a culturally rooted practice, where pedagogical choices and learning expectations were closely connected to broader social and historical experiences rather than being defined solely by formal instructional models.

Today, school music education in Lithuania exists in close dialogue with the country's broader musical culture. The long-standing singing tradition continues to shape how music education is understood, valued, and enacted in schools, fostering participatory forms of music-making and strengthening links between formal education and social and cultural life. As a result, Lithuanian music education reflects a layered historical process: a movement away from centralised control toward professional autonomy, alongside the sustained presence of musical practices deeply intertwined with national heritage that connect school music education to society at large.

Organisation of Music Education in Lithuanian Schools

Music education in Lithuanian schools is closely shaped by the structure of the general education system (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of Lithuania, n.d.). Schooling is organised into primary (ages 7–10), lower secondary (ages 11–14), and upper secondary education (ages 15–18), with primary and lower secondary levels typically provided within the same institutions (progymnasiums). Music is taught throughout compulsory schooling, although its role, scope, and organisation differ across educational levels. Accordingly, the following sections examine music education at each level in turn, focusing on lesson time allocated to music, the professional qualifications of music teachers, and the teaching resources used in schools.

In primary education, music is part of the National Curriculum and is allocated two lessons per week in all types of schools. This time allocation is consistent across the country. While the curriculum specifies the learning objectives and content areas, decisions regarding who teaches music at this level are left to individual schools. Depending on the school, music may be taught either by a qualified music teacher or by a primary school generalist. In practice, considerable variation exists; even within the same school, some classes may receive music instruction from a specialist music teacher, while others are taught by classroom teachers. On average, in more than half of Lithuanian schools, music in primary classes is taught by professionally qualified music teachers. However, the number of music specialists working in primary education fluctuates from year to year, and no precise national statistics are available.

Primary education is also the level for which the widest range of teaching resources is provided. Four different textbook sets are approved for use in primary music education,

and teachers may additionally draw on a broad range of supplementary materials. These include resources developed by national institutions, such as the National Education Agency, as well as materials created and shared by individual teachers.

In lower secondary education, music is a compulsory subject allocated one lesson per week, reflecting a broader curricular shift toward subject differentiation. Music is taught by qualified teachers with formal education in music and music pedagogy, ensuring greater consistency in subject-specific content and instructional approaches. The range of approved textbooks at this level is more limited than in primary education, with two textbook sets available nationwide. However, teachers have access to a wide range of supplementary resources, including digital materials, repertoire collections, and pedagogical materials developed by teachers themselves. A noticeable trend is a reduced reliance on textbooks, with increasing use of diverse resources that allow greater flexibility in lesson design and adaptation to students' interests and abilities.

In upper secondary education, music is a compulsory subject for one lesson per week until the age of 16. In the final two years of schooling (ages 17–18), arts education becomes optional, with students able to choose music lessons from a broader arts offer that typically includes music, visual arts, theatre, dance, and technology. Music at this level is taught by qualified music teachers.

Whether music is chosen as an optional subject depends largely on students' interests and, in many cases, on established school traditions. There is no national data indicating the proportion of students who select music at this stage. Participation varies considerably between schools: in some, more than half of the cohort choose music, while in others only a small number of students opt for it. While interdisciplinary or integrated arts provision is possible, it is not common practice, and arts subjects are usually taught as separate disciplines.

Resources and Support for Music Education in Schools

Across the different school levels, funding and resources emerge as key contextual factors shaping music education in Lithuanian schools. Within this framework, schools select and purchase textbooks in agreement with teachers, while teachers flexibly supplement them with audio and video materials, repertoire collections, methodological publications, and nationally recognised digital learning platforms. Music education is financed as part of the general education funding system and involves several institutional levels. Municipalities, as the main school founders, ensure basic infrastructure and teaching facilities, while national authorities, with the National Agency for Education playing a central role, coordinate the provision of curriculum-aligned textbooks, digital tools, and methodological support. At the school level, the effective use and further development of resources depend largely on school traditions and teachers' initiative, particularly in accessing project-based funding, developing supplementary materials, and establishing partnerships.

In addition to school-based funding and teaching resources, music education in Lithuania is supported by publicly funded cultural initiatives that broaden students' access to artistic experiences. Programmes such as *Kultūros pasas* (Culture Passport) enable students from Grades 1 to 12 to participate in free or subsidised cultural activities, including concert attendance, theatre performances, museum visits, and creative workshops. Schools frequently collaborate with cultural institutions – such as orchestras, theatres, and museums – to organise educational visits, performances, and interactive activities aligned with curricular goals. Municipalities also support regional cultural projects, contributing to students' exposure to both Lithuania's cultural heritage and contemporary artistic practices and fostering artistic skills, creativity, and cultural literacy.

Where Music Lives Beyond the Timetable

In Lithuanian schools, music may extend beyond formal lessons into extracurricular activities and everyday school life, although the scope and quality of these opportunities vary considerably between schools. While many schools offer extracurricular activities that support the development of students' musical abilities and contribute to their social and emotional well-being, in other cases such opportunities remain limited due to time constraints, staffing, or institutional priorities.

Choirs and vocal ensembles are the most common forms of extracurricular music-making and often represent the main musical activity within a school. Where conditions allow, school choirs participate in local, regional, and national events, including the Lithuanian Song Festival, held every four years. However, not all schools are able to sustain regular choral activities, and participation often depends on teacher availability and established school traditions. Instrumental ensembles, bands, and folk music groups are less widespread and tend to be present mainly in schools with stronger musical infrastructure or particularly committed staff. In some schools, extracurricular music activities are occasional rather than continuous.

Music also plays an uneven role in broader school life. In some schools, it is meaningfully connected with other subjects through cross-curricular projects and is visible in events such as national commemorations, celebrations, or graduation ceremonies. In others, music remains largely confined to classroom instruction or specific occasions. These differences point to the extent to which extracurricular music-making and the wider presence of music in school life depends on local conditions, school culture, and individual teacher initiative.

Design and Implementation of the Music Curriculum

The music curriculum in Lithuania is developed and implemented within a centrally coordinated national education framework. Overall responsibility for curriculum policy lies with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, which sets national standards and guidelines for general education across all subjects and educational levels. The National Agency for Education plays a key role in designing, reviewing, and updating the general curriculum, including music education. While curriculum development is centrally managed, schools are granted a degree of flexibility in adapting curricular guidelines to local contexts, student needs, and available resources. Against this background, the following section examines the place of music within the general curriculum, the structure and content of the music curriculum, its implementation in schools, and approaches to assessment.

Structure and Content of the Music Curriculum

The Lithuanian music curriculum is embedded within the national General Curriculum framework and is designed as a coherent, competency-oriented document covering all stages of general education (National Agency for Education [NAE], 2022a). The current music curriculum comprises 74 pages and is structured to ensure continuity, progression, and alignment with the overarching aims of general education from primary to upper secondary levels (NAE, 2022b). It consists of a general overview; aims and objectives defined for each age group; the development of competences; areas of achievement and expected outcomes; learning and teaching content; assessment principles; and recommended resources (NAE, 2022b).

The purpose of music education is defined broadly, emphasising the creation of conditions for pupils to experience the joy of music-making, creative engagement, and aesthetic enjoyment (NAE, 2022b). The curriculum seeks to develop pupils' musical sensitivity, creative potential, and cultural awareness, while supporting the formation of musical identity and lifelong engagement with music. The overarching aim is to foster a creative, independent, and critically reflective musical culture, enabling learners to participate consciously in musical life as both listeners and creators (NAE, 2022a; NAE, 2022b).

In line with the general curriculum, music education contributes to the development of seven key competences: cognitive, cultural, creative, civic, communication, digital, and social, emotional, and healthy living (NAE, 2022a). While all seven are addressed, music education places particular emphasis on cognitive, creative, communication, and digital competences (NAE, 2022b). Cognitive competence is developed through music-making, listening, and analysis, encouraging pupils to understand musical elements and structures and to relate them to personal experience. Creative competence is fostered through composition, improvisation, and performance, including the use of both acoustic and digital tools. Communication competence is addressed through collaborative music-making,

ethical use of music, and exploration of music's social and symbolic roles. Digital competence is developed through the use of notation software, digital recording, and reflection on copyright and responsible use of digital resources (NAE, 2022b).

The curriculum defines specific objectives for each educational stage – primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary – with clearly articulated outcomes (NAE, 2022b). Students' achievement is described progressively across grade clusters (1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8, 9–10, and 11–12), allowing teachers to monitor long-term development rather than short-term attainment (NAE, 2022b). Students' achievement is further described across four achievement levels – threshold, satisfactory, basic, and advanced – providing a structured framework for assessing progression in musical learning. The structure and content of the Lithuanian music curriculum reflect a holistic and integrated approach, balancing musical skills, creative processes, cultural understanding, and competence development, while providing a flexible framework for implementation across diverse school contexts (NAE, 2022a; NAE, 2022b). Learning content is organised into four interconnected areas of achievement: music performance, music creation, music cognition, and musical culture contexts (NAE, 2022b). Music performance focuses on singing and instrumental playing as central forms of active participation, supporting emotional expression, technical development, and ensemble skills. Music creation includes improvisation, composition, and arrangement, encouraging experimentation, collaborative work, documentation, and reflection. Music cognition develops students' understanding of musical elements, styles, and meanings, while fostering listening and analytical skills. The area of musical culture contexts situates music within historical, cultural, social, and personal frameworks, highlighting links with other art forms, community practices, and global musical traditions (NAE, 2022b).

From Curriculum to Classroom: Implementation and Assessment

The implementation of the music curriculum in Lithuania is formally characterised by a balance between a centrally defined framework and pedagogical flexibility at school level. While national guidelines establish common goals, areas of achievement, and expected outcomes, teachers are granted autonomy to adapt learning content to their school context, location, and students' needs, including the possibility to modify up to 30 per cent of the curriculum content. In principle, this flexibility allows music education to be responsive and locally meaningful. In practice, however, the extent to which this autonomy can be realised varies considerably between schools and depends on factors such as teacher workload, available resources, and school priorities.

The curriculum does not mandate specific textbooks and encourages the use of diverse teaching materials. To support implementation, the National Agency for Education provides a range of methodological materials, including curriculum-oriented video lessons, digital learning resources, and practical methodological guidelines. These include task collections, examples of learning activities aligned with curriculum outcomes, and

explanatory materials intended to support teachers' planning and assessment practices (NAE, 2022a; 2022b). Professional development opportunities, such as seminars, workshops, and online training sessions, are also offered to familiarise teachers with curriculum principles and support pedagogical renewal. Nevertheless, teachers report that access to and effective use of these resources often depend on individual initiative and available time, and not all teachers are equally able to engage with professional development opportunities alongside their teaching responsibilities.

Although the curriculum explicitly encourages student voice and participation, the implementation of learner-centred and participatory approaches remains uneven. In some schools, students actively contribute to repertoire choices, creative projects, ensemble leadership, and reflection on learning processes. In others, opportunities for student agency are more limited, constrained by rigid timetables, large class sizes, or a focus on meeting minimum curriculum requirements. As a result, the intended emphasis on co-creation and personalised learning paths is realised to differing degrees across school contexts.

Curriculum implementation relies on formative assessment, self-assessment, and summative assessment. Formative assessment supports learning through feedback without grades; self-assessment fosters learner reflection; and summative assessment certifies achievement at key stages. Their coherence depends on teacher responsibility and inclusive school assessment culture (NAE, 2022a; 2022b). While this approach aligns well with developmental aims, teachers often face challenges in documenting progress systematically and communicating assessment outcomes within limited lesson time. In lower secondary education, the use of grades linked to four defined outcome levels introduces greater clarity and comparability. However, the combination of formative intentions and summative grading can create tensions, particularly when assessment practices prioritise predefined outcomes over creative processes or sustained musical engagement. In upper secondary education, the optional status of music may limit continuity, as classes often consist of students with highly diverse musical backgrounds. Across all levels, while the curriculum promotes formative assessment, self-evaluation, and student involvement in assessment processes, their consistent application depends largely on teacher expertise and local assessment cultures.

Exploring Research and Current Trends in Music Education

Current research on music education in Lithuania does not follow clearly demarcated research "schools" or unified theoretical directions. Instead, it is characterised by a set of recurring and interrelated themes that reflect broader educational, cultural, and social transformations. Increasingly, Lithuanian scholars conceptualise music teaching and learning as culturally situated, socially embedded, and professionally reflective practices,

focusing on how music education is lived and experienced in real educational contexts rather than examined only through formal curriculum structures.

A prominent research direction in Lithuanian music education conceptualises teaching and learning as deeply embedded in national musical culture. From the perspective of folk music pedagogy, scholars emphasise the use of folk songs, rhythmic patterns, and traditional instrumental practices as a foundational educational resource, supporting the development of musical thinking, cultural identity, and embodied musical understanding (Velička, 2017, 2024). Closely related research frames singing as a social and cultural practice rather than merely a curricular activity, highlighting its role in building social capital, collective identity, and a sense of belonging (Rūta Girdzijauskienė, 2020; 2021b; 2022). Together, these studies position Lithuanian music education research as attentive to culturally grounded pedagogies, where musical learning is understood as inseparable from shared traditions, social relationships, and processes of cultural continuity.

Another prominent theme concerns assessment in music education, particularly the tension between formative educational intentions and formal accountability requirements. Studies indicate that assessment practices in music often struggle to capture creative processes, long-term musical development, and individual effort (Gabnytė & Daugėlienė, 2013; Volbikienė et al., 2020). Researchers argue for assessment approaches that prioritise reflection, descriptive feedback, and learners' self-evaluation, framing assessment as a pedagogical process that supports musical growth and agency rather than as a tool for measurement alone. Another recurring theme addresses arts education as an interdisciplinary field. Research by Girdzijauskienė and Šmitienė (2020), Girdzijauskienė (2021a), and Budinavičienė (2024) highlights music and the arts as connective spaces linking cognitive, emotional, social, and creative domains. From this perspective, music is positioned not as an isolated subject but as a medium for holistic learning, meaning-making, and cultural understanding, aligning arts education with wider educational goals such as creativity, critical thinking, and cultural literacy. Finally, inclusive education has become an increasingly important theme. Research indicates strong normative support for inclusion alongside uncertainty about practical implementation. Studies by Girdzijauskienė and Sakadolskienė (2018) and Strakšienė (2020) reveal gaps between policy-level commitments and teachers' preparedness to address diverse learners' needs in music classrooms. The research cited indicates strong support for inclusion but also reveals a gap in teachers' preparedness for practical implementation. While awareness of inclusive principles is increasing, evidence of systematic, practice-oriented professional development remains limited, leaving much of the responsibility for implementation at the individual teacher level.

Current research on music education in Lithuania not only documents existing educational practices but also actively informs emerging trends and future-oriented directions. A particularly visible trend is the growing integration of digital technologies in music

education, which research identifies as a means of supporting more flexible, formative, and reflective learning and assessment processes. Digital tools help to differentiate learning pathways, thereby enhancing accessibility, especially in schools with limited resources or in geographically remote areas. Closely related to this development is an increased emphasis on student creativity and inclusive educational practices. Research on interdisciplinarity and inclusion consistently highlights the importance of learner agency, creative participation, and equitable access to musical experiences. At the same time, music education continues to face structural pressures arising from broader education policies that prioritise core academic subjects, often challenging the position of music within the school curriculum. In response, Lithuania increasingly engages in international collaboration and cross-border programmes aimed at strengthening music education and developing more sustainable models of teaching and learning. A concrete example of research-informed practice is the recent initiative of the Music Teachers' Association, which produced a series of ten educational films on organising creative classroom activities, developed collaboratively by over twenty music teachers from across the country (Lithuanian Music Teachers' Association, 2024). Together, these trends reflect a growing recognition that the sustainable development of music education depends on ongoing dialogue between research, policy, and everyday teaching practice.

Conclusions

This chapter examines music education in Lithuania within the context of historical, cultural, and educational transformation. It explores how centrally regulated educational structures interact with musical practices deeply intertwined with national heritage, shaping music education across school levels. By analysing curriculum design, its enactment in everyday teaching, and extracurricular music-making, the chapter highlights both shared national frameworks and locally lived educational realities. Drawing on recent research, it addresses key challenges such as teacher autonomy, pedagogical decision-making, and inclusion, positioning Lithuanian music education as a living process that strives to connect policy with practice, tradition with innovation, and schooling with broader cultural life.

Statement on the use of artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this chapter solely to support language clarity, stylistic consistency, and structural coherence. All substantive content, interpretations, analytical decisions, and conclusions are the sole responsibility of the author.

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Demosthenes Dimitrakoulakos

A Multilingual and Cross-Cultural Landscape of Music Education in Luxembourg

Abstract

This chapter explores music education in Luxembourg, within its unique multilingual and multicultural context. It analyses music provision in public schools, international schools, conservatories, and community-based institutions operating under national educational governance. Drawing on historical developments, curriculum approaches, teaching pathways, and recent policy changes, this chapter examines how long-standing *solfège* and performance traditions can coexist with new innovations such as digital music creation, intercultural repertoires, and competency-based pedagogy. Current concerns such as teacher readiness, instructional time allocation, and equitable access to music education are addressed. This chapter highlights emerging initiatives that can position Luxembourg as a dynamic model of contemporary music education.

Introduction

Luxembourg, the world's only Grand Duchy, is well known for its lively multiculturalism. With a population of just over 672,000 inhabitants, almost half of whom are non-nationals (STATEC, 2024), the country presents an exceptional social context. This diversity results mainly from the presence of numerous European Union institutions and international corporations. Multiculturalism, therefore, plays a significant role in shaping educational policies and practices, both within schools and in society more broadly.

This demographic and institutional diversity has had a direct impact on the organisation of Luxembourg's education system. Government-funded public international schools in Luxembourg have been created to provide multilingual, multicultural, and accessible public education that complements the traditional national school system and accommodates the country's highly diverse and international population. Luxembourg currently operates six international state schools that follow curricula such as the European school system and the Cambridge International AS and A-level system, while some other state schools also follow the International Baccalaureate system, offering instruction in multiple languages (including English, French, and German) and open to all pupils without tuition fees.¹ These schools support linguistic diversity, offer pathways aligned with international standards, and help integrate learners of different mother tongues within the public education framework (MENJE, 2025c).

Within this educational context, this chapter examines music education in Luxembourg across the public school system, including private international schools, as well as the country's network of conservatories. As all institutions fall under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education, Children, and Youth (MENJE, 2024), the chapter also discusses how these structures interact. By outlining the historical background, curriculum design, teacher education, and recent developments, it shows how strong traditions (*solfège* and performance) and innovation (creation, particularly in electronic music production) intersect in Luxembourg's approach to music education.

Context: From Past to Contemporary Music Education in Luxembourg

Music has been an integral part of cultural life in Luxembourg for generations. Community traditions, such as choirs and wind bands (locally known as fanfare societies) in each commune, have traditionally contributed to the nation's cultural heritage for over 150 years (Sagrillo, 2013). Established in 1863, the *Union Grande-Duc Adolphe* (UGDA) represents an amateur musicians' association that serves as an umbrella organisation for choirs, orchestras, and wind bands, and continues to operate in this capacity (UGDA, 2017). These traditions illustrate that in Luxembourg, music can be about more than personal expression and academic offerings; it can also promote a sense of community, civic pride, and even cultural exchange.

¹ For more information, please see: <https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/European-Baccalaureate>; <https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-advanced/cambridge-international-as-and-a-levels>; and <https://www.ibo.org>

Over the last fifty years, music education in Luxembourg has undergone significant development and change. A major milestone was the 1998 law, which established a national framework for music education in the country (Legilux, 1998). Municipal music schools and conservatories became the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth. In addition to musical opportunities within general schools, this law also provided clarity for students to discover music as young children at local and national conservatories, leading to specialisation and completion of a diploma at Level 7 of the European Qualification Framework (European Commission, 2023). Instruction in conservatories and municipal music schools is delivered flexibly in Luxembourgish, German, French, and/or English, reflecting both the country's multilingual environment and the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners.

The most significant change occurred in 2009 with the reform of Luxembourg's basic education, which has since consisted of four cycles of education (Cycle 1, pre-school ages 3–5; Cycle 2, primary school ages 6–7; Cycle 3, primary school ages 8–9; and Cycle 4, primary school ages 10–11). Indeed, this move led to a focus on inclusion and skills-based teaching. As a result of the reform, students could learn in regular schools and in co-responsibility with those in specialised competence centres, sponsored by the Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth (Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, 2009). Music education has also been expected to keep pace with societal developments by addressing concerns such as multilingualism, digital technology, and cultural diversity (Sagrillo, 2013).

Another essential change was introduced in the 2022–23 reform, which stipulated that tuition fees for municipal music schools and conservatories would be free for all children and youth under the age of 18 (MENJE, 2022). The aim was to democratise access to music education and reduce economic barriers (such as the cost of purchasing instruments or sheet music, receiving music theory lessons, paying for private lessons, or gaining access to perform in group ensembles) for children to learn about music, as well as dance and theatre. Approximately 20,500 pupils (about 17 % of the roughly 118,000 students registered in Luxembourg primary and secondary schools) and almost 900 teachers are now participating in and working at municipal music schools in non-formalised music education, external to primary/secondary schools (MENJE, 2024).

Luxembourg's music education system today stands at a meeting point of tradition and innovation. It rests within a continuum of school and community ensembles and classical instrumental education, while increasingly incorporating contemporary practices such as digital creation, intercultural repertoires, multi-genre work, and creative pedagogies. This juxtaposition highlights how music practices and music education have not only transformed over the past fifty years from a communal tradition to an institutionalised and professionalised structure, but also how different aspects of music education are working synergistically, embedded both within schools and in out-of-school settings (Dimitrakoulakos & Sagrillo, 2023).

Music in Schools: From Classroom Time to Specialised Education

Time Allocation for Music

Learning music is obligatory in state schools in early childhood, primary and lower secondary education. Music classes last approximately 1 hour each week for early childhood (ages 4–5), during which children are introduced to music through singing, movement, and play. In primary education (ages 6–11), music and the visual arts are intentionally taught as one combined course (known as the Arts) for approximately an hour each week. In contrast, it is compulsory to teach music for 1 hour per week at the lower secondary level (ages 12–14). However, music instruction can vary depending on the school type (classical or technical/trade schools). Between the ages of 15 and 18, students can choose to study music, for which there is a dedicated musical section (Musical Section F) at the *Athénée de Luxembourg*, a Luxembourgish classical high school, offering up to 15 weekly hours of theory, history, analysis, and playing/training (*Athénée de Luxembourg*, 2025). Furthermore, students may pursue instrumental or vocal studies at the local music schools and national conservatories. There are separate systems (e.g., International Baccalaureate, European Baccalaureate) for private and international schools, and these typically offer time allocation for music that is broadly comparable to that found in the public Musical Section F at the *Athénée de Luxembourg* (Dimitrakoulakos & Sagrillo, 2023; European Schools, 2021; IBO, 2025). This structured approach to time allocation directly shapes the roles and responsibilities of music teachers across different school levels.

The Music Teacher

In primary schools, music is the responsibility of classroom teachers who are generalists, although a small number have specialist qualifications in *solfège* (music theory) or an instrument. However, many primary generalist teachers express anxiety when teaching music, which creates further challenges for music education at this level (Sagrillo, 2019). Secondary specialist music teachers, who are usually conservatory-trained with higher diplomas, also work in schools. The introduction of a dedicated bachelor's degree in music education in 2021, offered by the University of Luxembourg, in conjunction with the national conservatories, has enhanced the profession of music education. As a result, graduates with a Bachelor of Music Education (BME) may teach music after one additional year of study in the Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE) programme (University of Luxembourg, 2021).

Despite these advances, challenges remain. Persistent concerns include reported teacher shortages, uneven access to music specialist expertise, and perceptions of insufficient preparation for teaching in highly diverse classrooms. While professional development is offered, stakeholders have noted concerns about the sufficiency of allocated hours relative to prior provisions. With that in mind, in addition to teachers at public and private

schools, teachers at national and local conservatories also bear an essential responsibility to support music education nationwide (Dimitrakoulakos & Sagrillo, 2023).

Resources for Teaching Music

Beyond the teachers themselves, the success of music education also depends on the resources and institutional support available. Luxembourg's schools and conservatories receive significant public funding. In addition, the Philharmonie Luxembourg also provides free school concerts and a selection of free masterclasses and other musical offerings within schools. Elsewhere, in municipal music schools and conservatories, the teaching of music (including individual and group lessons for instruments, voice, *solfège*, composition, and other creative-based musical subjects) is free for those aged 18 or under (MENJE, 2022). Resource provision varies by school, with some having well-resourced classes with a full range of traditional and digital musical instruments, and others having traditional instruments and textbooks. Digital content and web resources are increasingly becoming integral to the learning environment in music education, marking a shift toward competency-based, innovative learning (SCRIPT, 2025).

Music Beyond the Classroom: From Community Participation to Artistic Pathways

Many musical opportunities exist within the realm of extracurricular activities. Schools often showcase choirs, bands, musicals, and talent shows. Through partnerships with local organisations, students can participate in service-learning programmes, such as performing at hospitals, senior living facilities, non-profit organisations, and other community-related events (Dimitrakoulakos & Sagrillo, 2023). Additional ensembles, such as choirs, orchestras, bands (concert, jazz, rock), and others, are often available, particularly at international schools as part of a rich extracurricular programme. Students at international schools can further participate in international music festivals (Association for Music in International Schools, 2025). Shaped by Luxembourg's tradition of community-building through music, such opportunities not only enhance students' musical skills but also foster civic engagement and service learning.

Luxembourg does not have specialist music schools that are separate from conservatories or music sections in secondary education. Conservatories and municipal music schools offer parallel special education instead. However, the Musical Section F of the *Athénée de Luxembourg* is a strong example of a specialised section within a secondary school, providing students with preparation for future music studies (*Athénée de Luxembourg*, 2025). Overall, a multi-tiered system is in place for music education, encompassing general schooling, conservatories (both local and national, with access to internal and community music-making ensembles, including both instrumental and choral), and private and public international schools, to ensure access to and training for a high level of musical competence.

The Music Curriculum: Structure, Implementation, and Assessment

Curricular Frameworks and Pedagogical Practice in Music Education

Music is an independent school subject in Luxembourg for children ages 4–5, and it is then taught in an integrative manner with visual arts in primary schools for children ages 6–11, before returning as a stand-alone subject at the secondary level for children ages 12 and up. The curriculum at all levels is developed by the Ministry of National Education, Children, and Youth, specifically by the Curriculum Development Division, which oversees all aspects of curriculum development (SCRIPT, 2024). In addition, the curriculum's structure is informed by national committees, teachers, and conservatory representatives (SCRIPT, 2025).

Building upon this general curricular framework, the structure and content of music education in Luxembourg show how these principles are translated into practice across different school levels. The national curriculum provides a continuum from “musical awakening” (ages 4–6) to general training and music specialisation as students develop through the different stages of schooling (MENJE, 2011; MENJE, 2025b). Throughout the primary and secondary school levels, the aim is for students to develop their listening and aural skills, reflect on a variety of music, create and perform music from a varied repertoire, and embrace cultural understandings. Developing overall musicianship skills, which may lead to a lifelong appreciation of music, is an essential part of the curriculum. Given the multilingual and multicultural nature of Luxembourg, the aim is to promote inclusive learning environments and support students' individual needs. The curricula encourage the exploration of Western and non-Western repertoires, jazz, contemporary music and electronic sound production (MENJE, 2024).

In practice, these curricular aims are realised through flexible implementation strategies and teacher autonomy, supported by professional development initiatives. Teachers have broad discretion in classroom materials. There are no “set” textbooks for music history/appreciation. Instead, educators modify resources, create repertoire, and increasingly emphasise student voice through genre selection based on personalised interests. However, implementation and the use of supplementary music resources are supported by the Service for the Coordination of Educational and Technological Research and Innovation, which offers guidance and professional development opportunities for teachers (SCRIPT, 2025).

Finally, assessment practices are designed to reflect the same educational philosophy, encouraging creativity, performance, and reflection rather than rote evaluation. Evaluation of student learning outcomes comprises both formative and summative assessments. The curriculum is structured in progressive levels that lead to larger examination stages in performance and *sofège* at local and national conservatories (MENJE, 2024). This structure reflects Luxembourg's long-standing integration of municipal music education

and national conservatories into the public education system, where progression in music learning has traditionally been organised through graded performance and *solfège* examinations.

Music schools and conservatories organise these examinations in music under ministerial guidance. In general school settings, there may also be provision for more open-ended assessments that explore the development of creativity. At the end of secondary school, students may obtain a range of nationally and internationally recognised qualifications, including the *Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires* (Secondary School Diploma), the *Diplôme du Baccalauréat International* (International Baccalaureate Diploma), the *Baccalauréat Européen* (European Baccalaureate), or the Cambridge AS and A-Levels, depending on the institutional context (public or private schools). Performance, composition, listening skills, theoretical skills, and research skills (e.g., applying theoretical style analysis to pieces and making comparative analyses between pieces, all within the broader historical and cultural context) are areas of assessment. Such rigorous concepts/learning opportunities, and assessment practices strive to ensure alignment with European standards (Cambridge International, 2026; European Schools, 2021; IBO, 2025).

Current Trends in Music Education: Exploring Challenges and Research

The Luxembourg music education system, overall, is characterised by high participation rates alongside structural tensions. Thousands of young musicians join conservatories or community music programmes, whereas school music is offered for only a few hours per week (MENJE, 2024). There is a gap in involvement between extracurricular activities and the limited academic class time schools set aside for music. There is a considerable discussion around *solfège*, which is at the centre of the Luxembourg conservatory programmes. New studies question whether the course content in *solfège* classes not only leads to student attrition but also argue in favour of competency-oriented, creative approaches (Sagrillo, 2015). Studies call for reform of content-driven forms of *solfège*, which are still reliant on oral and aural processes, towards curricula that are more playful, creativity-based, and holistic, and that include movement-based practices and improvisation (Nijs et al., 2024). These calls for reform have inspired a wave of innovative projects that translate theory into practice. In 2026, the Luxembourg government announced a new reform to modernise *solfège* training, which will take effect in the 2026–27 school year (Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, 2026).

Innovation is further being embraced through experiences that include, but are not limited to, student-moderated concerts with the Luxembourg Philharmonic at the Philharmonie Luxembourg, which particularly highlight student agency and intercultural repertoire (Dimitrakoulakos et al., 2024). Another innovative example of supportive

community outreach music education practices includes the in-school residency of the Chamber Orchestra of Luxembourg at the International School of Luxembourg, which provides students across the country with engaging and interactive learning opportunities, such as observing open rehearsals, receiving masterclasses with orchestral members, soloists and conductors, and the ability to attend a range of free concerts (Chronicle, 2024). At the University of Luxembourg, studies focus on the role of music in fostering creativity, supporting movement-based learning, and promoting intercultural integration (University of Luxembourg, 2023). This spirit of innovation has also begun to shape national policy, extending beyond classrooms into broader educational planning.

Policy development includes implementing a Music Production provision in local secondary schools for the 2025–26 school year, demonstrating a commitment to engaging with digital creativity and the wider music business (MENJE, 2025a). This is an innovative response to students' preferences for newer music styles and an expansion of the perceived relevance of music teaching.

More recently, future perspectives have stressed the need for greater integration among schools, conservatories, and community ensembles. In Luxembourg, there have been calls to revitalise the tradition of wind bands and choirs to engage students and teachers in intergenerational music-making. Such approaches may support the social service of music while increasing the quality of education (Dimitrakoulakos & Sagrillo, 2023).

Conclusion

Luxembourg's music education system stands as a reflection of the country itself: small in scale yet remarkably diverse, rooted in community while open to innovation. Across schools, conservatories, and community ensembles, music serves not only as an academic discipline but also as a cultural bridge fostering participation, creativity, and identity. Recent reforms and initiatives demonstrate a clear commitment to accessibility, inclusivity, and digital transformation, ensuring that music learning remains relevant for future generations. As Luxembourg continues to balance its rich musical traditions with contemporary pedagogical and technological developments, it offers an inspiring example of how education can sustain heritage while embracing change.

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Jens Knigge & Kirsti Nørstebø

Music Education in Norwegian Schools

Abstract

Music education in Norwegian schools operates within an equity-oriented system and a competence-based curriculum. Music is compulsory through grade 10, usually taught by generalists in primary school and by specialists in lower secondary, where limited time constrains continuity and progression. A parallel Sámi curriculum enables Sámi-language teaching and positions joik as integral, while Sámi perspectives are also embedded nationally. In upper secondary, music becomes optional via electives or the specialised Music, Dance and Drama track, producing uneven access. Across levels, curriculum ambitions depend on time, teacher competence, resources, and school–municipal arts school collaboration.

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of music education in Norwegian schools, from its historical and cultural context through contemporary classroom practices and specialised programmes. We examine the structure and content of the music curriculum (including adaptations for the indigenous Sámi population), the implementation and assessment of music learning, and current trends and challenges. Throughout the chapter, we integrate recent research and policy insights to illuminate how Norway's music education reflects both longstanding traditions and evolving societal needs.

Context: From Past to Contemporary Music Education in Norway

Norway's education system is built on the principle of equity and inclusivity, with ten years of compulsory schooling for all children aged 6–16. Music has been part of the curriculum since the early development of the national school system, historically rooted in singing (especially hymns and folk songs) as a means of cultural and moral education (Kalsnes, 2017). Over time, music education has expanded into a broader field encompassing instrumental performance, creativity, listening skills, and a broader spectrum of genres. Major curriculum reforms have shaped this evolution. The most recent national reform, *Kunnskapsløftet 2020* (LK20; Knowledge Promotion), emphasises competence-based learning and a holistic educational vision. A key concept in LK20 is *danning* (Norwegian; cf. German *Bildung* – the holistic formation of the individual), translated as “education and all-round development” (Udir, 2020a), which frames schooling not only as knowledge acquisition but also as the cultivation of intellectual freedom, empathy, participation, and democratic values as developed through play, interaction, and aesthetic activities.

In parallel with curricular reform, music teacher education in Norway has also diversified, offering several pathways, ranging from generalist teacher programmes with music specialisations, to dedicated five-year degrees and postgraduate routes. These developments reflect efforts to align teacher preparation with evolving curricular goals and school contexts (Johansen, 2023; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2025a–d).

Norway's legal and cultural frameworks strongly support inclusive education. The *Education Act* (Opplæringslova, 2023) guarantees the right to adapted instruction for all pupils, including those with additional needs. National policy stresses that aesthetic subjects, including music, should be accessible to every child. Culturally, music education is expected to reflect Norway's diversity, including the heritage of the Sámi, the country's Indigenous people. To that end, parallel Sámi-language curriculum documents ensure that Sámi musical forms and cultural expressions (such as *joik*) are taught in Sámi schools (Udir, 2020b). At the same time, Sámi content is also integrated into the national curriculum for all schools, framing folk and Indigenous traditions as part of a shared cultural heritage (Udir, 2020a).

Beyond formal schooling, a vital part of the Norwegian music education infrastructure is the *kulturskole* (municipal school of music and arts) system, which refers to municipal schools of music and performing arts established in 1968. These schools provide after-school music instruction (e.g. instrumental lessons, ensembles), with municipal subsidies keeping costs low. While not part of compulsory schooling, *kulturskoler* reach many children and youth and often supplement the limited music hours in public schools. However, despite its foundational aim of providing arts and cultural education to all children, actual participation remains limited and only around 13 % of Norwegian children are enrolled. This gap between intention and reality has sparked critical discussions about inclusion and equity regarding *kulturskole* offerings (Karlsen et al., 2024). To address

this, new models of collaboration between compulsory schools and *kulturskoler* are being tested; examples include shared staffing, project alignment, or combined teaching roles across school sectors (Fostad & Bandlien, 2024). These efforts aim to strengthen the role of music and arts in both formal and informal learning arenas.

In summary, the contemporary landscape of music education in Norway is shaped by a strong policy commitment to inclusivity and cultural relevance, a competency-based curriculum introduced in 2020, and a legacy of valuing music as part of a holistic education.

Music in Schools: From Classroom Time to Specialised Education

Music is included in compulsory schooling for all pupils in Norway (ages 6–16), but the amount of time allocated and the organisation of provision varies substantially across school levels and pathways. In primary and lower secondary education, music is compulsory; in upper secondary education, it becomes optional and increasingly differentiated.

In primary school (grades 1–7; ages 6–13), pupils receive roughly 285 hours of music instruction across seven years, corresponding to about one hour per week when averaged across the period (Udir, 2020a). Schools have considerable flexibility in distributing these hours across grades and may concentrate music within particular periods or integrate it into broader school projects. Music is typically taught by generalist classroom teachers, who are not required to hold specialised qualifications in music. As a result, classroom practices and the depth of musical work can vary considerably depending on teacher competence and confidence. Common activities include singing, listening, playing classroom instruments (e.g., percussion, recorder, ukulele), movement/dance, and creative tasks such as basic composition (Ellefsen et al., 2023). In Sámi regions, pupils may attend Sámi-language schools with a parallel curriculum that ensures culturally relevant instruction and the inclusion of Sámi musical traditions, including *joik* – a traditional Sámi vocal art form in which a person, animal, or place is musically embodied rather than described – considered one of the oldest living musical traditions in Europe (Udir, 2020b).

In lower secondary school (*ungdomsskole*; grades 8–10; ages 13–16), music remains compulsory, but the overall allocation is reduced to approximately 85 hours across the three years (Udir, 2020a). Teaching is typically delivered by subject specialists, reflecting national qualification requirements for this level (commonly operationalised as a minimum of 30 ECTS in the subject area). In practice, lower secondary music often prioritises practical, group-based music-making, frequently drawing on band-instrument formats (e.g., guitar, bass, drums, keyboards), alongside listening activities and creative work that may include improvisation or digital music production (Ellefsen et al., 2023). The limited time allocation can nevertheless make continuity challenging, particularly for sustained ensemble development or longer-term projects.

To offer additional arts learning opportunities within lower secondary schooling, many schools provide elective subjects. A prominent example is *Produksjon for scene* (*Stage Production*), a practical and collaborative elective that integrates elements from music, drama, and dance and is typically taught for about two hours per week (Udir, 2020e). Students work in teams on performance-related processes and may take on roles as performers, musicians, or production crew. National mapping indicates that roughly 12 % of lower secondary students choose this elective (Kolaas & Knigge, 2021). While the subject is not exclusively music-focused, it may function as an important extension of musical participation and performance experience for interested pupils.

In upper secondary education (*videregående*; grades 11–13, ages 16–19), music education becomes optional and differentiates between (a) students who pursue music as an elective within a general pathway and (b) students who enrol in specialised arts programmes. In the general academic track (*studiespesialiserende*), music is not mandatory; where offered, music may appear as a programme subject elective (often extending over one to two years, commonly 1–3 hours per week, depending on local organisation). Under LK20, *Musikk fordypning* (*Music Specialisation*) was introduced as one possible elective option at this level and may be offered to students in both academic and vocational tracks (Udir, 2021). Importantly, availability of music electives varies widely between schools; some offer *Musikk fordypning* and/or other music programme subjects, whereas others, particularly smaller schools, may offer no music electives due to staffing constraints or limited student demand. Consequently, for a substantial proportion of students, formal school-based music education effectively ends after grade 10.

For students seeking intensive music study, the main pathway is the upper secondary *Musikk, dans og drama* (Music, Dance and Drama; MDD) programme, where music can be selected as a specialisation (Udir, 2020d). Compared with elective provision, MDD represents a qualitatively different form of schooling, typically involving a large concentration of arts subjects. In the music specialisation, students may receive up to approximately 22 hours per week in music and music-related subjects within the programme structure (Udir, 2020d). Such provision generally requires dedicated facilities (e.g., ensemble rooms, practice spaces) and highly qualified staff. Access may be uneven geographically; MDD programmes are more common and often more extensive in urban areas, while students in rural regions may face longer travel distances or limited local provision.

Overall, Norway's school music provision can be characterised as a broad compulsory base in the early years, followed by a sharper differentiation in upper secondary education. While all pupils encounter music as part of compulsory schooling, sustained and advanced pathways depend on elective availability and specialised programme access, which may vary by local capacity and context.

The Music Curriculum: Structure, Implementation, and Assessment

Structure

Norway's national curriculum is defined by the Ministry of Education and Research and specified through subject curricula published by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (*Utdanningsdirektoratet*). The LK20 reform frames all subjects, including music, within a competence-based and values-driven model that emphasises learning as both knowledge acquisition and broader formation (*danning*) (Udir, 2020a). In curriculum terms, music is structured through an interplay of overarching values, subject-defining core elements, competence aims at specified stages, and guidance that intentionally leaves room for local interpretation and professional judgement (Udir, 2020a).

At the overarching level, music is anchored in the national core values and cross-curricular priorities that apply to the entire curriculum. These include human dignity; cultural diversity; sustainability; democracy and participation; and public health and life skills, all of which imply that music education is expected to contribute to inclusion, belonging, and democratic engagement rather than being reduced to technical skills alone (Udir, 2020a). In practice, the curriculum's value framework legitimises a broad repertoire and encourages engagement with diverse musical cultures, including minority and Indigenous traditions, alongside attention to classroom participation and equitable access.

At the subject level, the compulsory music curriculum (MUS01-02) is organised around core elements that define the "essence" of the subject and are meant to balance different dimensions of musical learning (Udir, 2020a). These elements can be summarised as performing (active music-making through voice, instruments, movement, and ensemble work), creating (improvisation, composition, and creative work with digital tools), experiencing (listening and reflective engagement with musical encounters), and cultural understanding (connecting music to social, cultural, and historical contexts) (Udir, 2020a). This structure aligns with research emphasising music as a multifaceted school subject characterised by breadth, complexity, and shifting practices in contemporary society (Ellefsen et al., 2023). Rather than prescribing specific content lists, LK20 positions these core elements as organising principles that teachers should address over time through age-appropriate activities and contexts.

Competence aims translate these principles into expected learning outcomes at key stages of compulsory schooling (after grades 2, 4, 7, and 10) and within upper secondary courses (Udir, 2020a). At the end of lower secondary education, the competence aims expect pupils to demonstrate ability to participate in performance, engage in creative processes, and articulate reflective perspectives on music in cultural and societal contexts, with room for different repertoires and working methods (Udir, 2020a). Importantly, LK20 is often described as semi-prescriptive: it defines what pupils should develop competence in, but not exactly how teachers must reach those aims (Udir, 2020a). This flexibility is

deliberate and reflects the Norwegian tradition of local curricular enactment and teacher professionalism, while also emphasising adaptation so that all pupils can participate meaningfully, including students with disabilities and students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Udir, 2020a).

At upper secondary level, the curriculum landscape becomes more differentiated, as music appears in distinct courses and programmes. The specialised arts programme *Musikk, dans og drama* (MDD) has separate curriculum documents, combining shared programme structures with discipline-specific specialisation and interdisciplinary collaboration (Udir, 2020d). In addition, *Musikk fordypning* (Music Specialisation) provides an option focused on deeper creative work and the development of an individual artistic voice through longer-term composition, arranging, and improvisation processes, sometimes also connected to community or local music contexts (Udir, 2021). These upper secondary curricula retain the same general LK20 orientation toward competence aims and values, but they place substantially greater emphasis on sustained artistic work and depth of engagement (Udir, 2020d; Udir, 2021).

A parallel Sámi music curriculum ensures that music education is available in the Sámi language and that Sámi musical expressions are treated as legitimate and central rather than peripheral. The Sámi version aligns with the same overarching structure but includes explicit attention to Sámi musical forms, including joik (Udir, 2020b). At the same time, Sámi culture is not confined to Sámi schools; the national curriculum requires all pupils to learn about Sámi culture as part of Norway's shared cultural heritage, and music is one arena in which this inclusion is articulated (Udir, 2020a). The Sámi curriculum thus functions both as linguistic-cultural safeguarding and as a curricular guarantee of equal status for Sámi music in education (Udir, 2020b).

Implementation in classrooms and resourcing

How the music curriculum is realised in practice depends strongly on teacher expertise, local priorities, and material conditions (Ellefsen et al., 2023). Even within a common national framework, schools vary in how much they invest in music as an everyday classroom practice, and implementation can be uneven where time, staffing, or competence are constrained. Resourcing is generally characterised by basic provision of instruments and equipment (e.g., keyboards, guitars, percussion, and in some cases band instruments), while digital tools have become increasingly common through access to tablets/laptops and music software for recording, sequencing, and notation (Ellefsen et al., 2023). Many schools have a dedicated music room with basic audio equipment; larger schools may also have rehearsal rooms or modest recording facilities. However, access to and the quality of resources varies locally, and may shape the type of musical activities that are feasible.

Cultural policy initiatives also intersect with curriculum enactment by providing experiences that schools could not easily produce on their own. A prominent example is *Den kulturelle skolesekken* (The Cultural Schoolbag), established to ensure that all pupils encounter professional arts and culture as part of schooling (Hauge & Christophersen, 2023). Music-related events and workshops can support curriculum intentions by broadening repertoires and strengthening experiential dimensions of learning, particularly in contexts where local provision is limited (Hauge & Christophersen, 2023). Rather than being “extra” entertainment, such initiatives are often framed as contributions to cultural citizenship and aesthetic formation consistent with LK20’s values orientation (Udir, 2020a; Hauge & Christophersen, 2023).

Teacher assignment and competence requirements are addressed elsewhere in this chapter in relation to school structure; here it is sufficient to note two implementation-relevant points. Firstly, music in primary education is commonly taught by generalist teachers, which makes teacher confidence and competence a significant factor shaping curriculum enactment (Nguyen et al., 2025). Research indicates that not all generalist teachers feel equally prepared to teach music, and this can contribute to variation in how music is prioritised and what forms of activity dominate (Nysæther et al., 2021). Secondly, in lower and upper secondary settings where music is taught by specialists, implementation often enables more sustained ensemble work and more advanced practical instruction, but it also becomes vulnerable to staffing capacity. As such, the availability of qualified music specialists affects whether schools can offer electives and advanced courses consistently.

Assessment

Assessment in Norwegian music education is framed by LK20’s emphasis on formative assessment as support for learning and pupil development (Udir, 2020a). Teachers are encouraged to provide feedback during practical music-making and creative processes, involve pupils in reflection, and use assessment dialogue to strengthen learning strategies and motivation. This approach is intended to be compatible with creativity and experimentation, so that assessment does not discourage risk-taking in performing and composing (Udir, 2020a). Summative assessment in compulsory schooling typically culminates in the teacher-awarded grade at the end of grade 10, with no national high-stakes music exam in compulsory schooling. Teachers are expected to base judgments on broad evidence of competence, potentially including performances, creative projects, and oral reflection rather than relying on written tests alone (Udir, 2020a).

In upper secondary education, assessment practices vary with course type and programme. In general-track music electives, students receive course grades and may be selected for an oral/practical exam depending on the broader examination system and subject selection procedures (Udir, 2021). In MDD programmes, assessment often includes performance-based evaluations and practical examinations or juries alongside ongoing

coursework, reflecting the programme's intensive artistic orientation (Udir, 2020d). Across levels, criteria are largely qualitative and require professional interpretation, which makes moderation and collegial calibration important, while also leaving a degree of subjectivity as an inherent feature of evaluating artistic and musical competence.

Implementation Challenges

Several persistent challenges shape curriculum enactment. Limited instructional time (particularly in lower secondary compulsory provision) constrains opportunities for sustained progression and for balanced attention to all core elements over time (Udir, 2020a). The breadth of musical cultures and genres implied by the curriculum's diversity emphasis also requires selection, and teachers' curricular choices can either strengthen or weaken inclusion depending on how pupil repertoires and local contexts are recognised (Udir, 2020a). A related challenge concerns the expectation that Sámi culture and musical traditions are addressed for all pupils. For many non-Sámi teachers, especially generalist teachers, limited prior preparation and scarce didactic resources may lead to insecurity, superficial treatment, or "event-based" inclusion rather than sustained curricular integration (Holand & Haugan, 2024). Recent policy responses acknowledge competence needs and point to expanding support structures, including national resources and continuing education initiatives. Technology represents both an opportunity and a challenge: digital tools can broaden participation and creative possibilities, but uneven teacher competence and resource access may limit implementation of digital composition and production (Ellefsen et al., 2023). Finally, the government's agenda for "a more practical, active school" has supported investments in equipment and learning environments, which may benefit music where such resources translate into meaningful teaching time and pedagogical development (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2024).

Exploring Current Trends in Music Education: Challenges and Research

Contemporary music education in Norway finds itself navigating several significant trends and challenges. On one hand, there is increased recognition of the value of music and arts in educating well-rounded, creative, and emotionally healthy students, and it remains high on the political agenda (e.g., Meld. St. 34, 2023–2024). On the other hand, music educators face the perennial challenge of defending and justifying music's place in a curriculum crowded with core academic subjects (Kultur- og likestillingsdepartementet, 2025, p. 83). Recent debates and policy discussions shine a light on this tension. In Norway, as in many countries, practical and aesthetic subjects like music, arts & crafts, and drama are sometimes perceived as less important than "core" subjects such as mathematics, science, and languages. This perception can lead to reductions in time allocation, fewer resources,

or the marginalisation of music in school priorities. Indeed, the limited time devoted to music in Norwegian schools (especially after primary level) is often cited as evidence of this lower prioritisation. Arts educators and researchers have been vocal in arguing that music and the arts are essential for a holistic education. They point out that music can engage students who struggle in academic areas, providing a sense of achievement and motivation that spills over into other subjects (Kolaas & Angelo, 2022). Thus, a key trend in the discourse is advocacy for the arts as core components of twenty-first-century skills, not merely expendable extras.

Reflecting upon this, the Norwegian government has signaled support for making education more practical and active in recent years. In 2024, a governmental white paper titled "*En mer praktisk skole – Bedre læring, motivasjon og trivsel*" ("A more practical school – better learning, motivation and well-being"; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2024) was presented to Parliament, focusing on grades 5–10. This initiative promises investments in equipment and learning spaces to facilitate practical learning across all subjects. For music, this trend is encouraging, as a "practical school" inherently values doing and creating, which are at music's core. The policy includes the awarding of grants to schools for the purchase of musical instruments and sound equipment, as well as support for hands-on pedagogies. However, some observers caution that without concurrently increasing time for arts subjects, simply providing more equipment may not fully achieve the goal of a more practical education (Utdanningsforbundet, 2023). The coming years will likely show how these policies are translated into actual practice, revealing whether schools allocate more curriculum hours to music/arts or integrate practical approaches in other subjects (for example, using music in cross-curricular projects to teach language or history).

Another significant trend is a push for greater collaboration between schools and community arts institutions. (E.g., a closer collaboration between *kulturskole* and regular schools is a highlighted development area.) The rationale behind this change is that such partnerships can enrich the school music programme; *kulturskole* teachers might provide specialist instruction or lead ensembles that a regular teacher cannot, and students can get credit or recognition in school for their extracurricular music achievements. Some municipalities have experimented with models where *kulturskole* activities are scheduled adjacent to the school day or even integrated as electives. Research studies such as the OutMus project (Nørstebø, 2025), examined learning outcomes in primary school that occur when students receive group-based instrumental tuition (delivered by *kulturskole* teachers) compared to ordinary music lessons (delivered by primary school music teachers). The findings indicate that the broad competence aims of compulsory music education are equally addressed through such didactic approaches, fostering substantial competence development (Nørstebø, 2025).

The *OutMus* study connects to a broader concern about equity in music education. If meaningful music learning is increasingly happening in elective or extracurricular settings, there's a risk that only children with supportive families and certain socio-economic advantages benefit, while others miss out, thus exacerbating inequality. This concern is at the heart of the DYNAMUS project, which investigates how music education can both include and exclude, and how it relates to social mobility (Research Council of Norway, n.d.). Findings from this project highlight that there are "battles" over cultural capital in music education; for instance, the question of whose music is considered legitimate or valuable in school. If a school's music curriculum or a teacher's taste leans heavily toward Western classical or Norwegian folk music and overlooks the musical styles of minority or immigrant students (such as pop, hip-hop, or music of their heritage), some students may feel alienated, which is a form of exclusion. Similarly, if participation in advanced music opportunities (such as school band, choir, or *kulturskole*) requires fees or parental involvement, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds may be left out, which over time contributes to social (im)mobility (Nielsen et al., 2025). Recognising this, Norwegian educators are increasingly focusing on diversity and inclusion in music education. The new curriculum's emphasis on diversity is one response. Additionally, professional development courses for music teachers now often include components on intercultural music pedagogy and gender inclusion.

Technology and digital media represent another important trend. The pandemic period accelerated the use of digital tools in Norwegian schools, including in music. Teachers who had to teach music remotely started using online collaborative platforms, music apps, and video recordings as part of instruction. Many have kept these tools in their practice. Digital music production (using software like GarageBand, Soundtrap, etc.) is increasingly common, especially as it appeals to students who may be less inclined to sing or play traditional instruments. It also opens possibilities for genre expansion, as students can make hip-hop beats or electronic music in class, connecting schoolwork with youth culture. The curriculum's competence aims give room for this. Research from the FUTURED project also suggests that integrating digital and physical music environments can create "hybrid spaces" that engage a wider range of student competencies and interests (Christophersen et al., 2023). For instance, a student who is quiet in band class might shine when producing a track on a computer, thus finding their voice in music. Embracing such technology is seen as one way to modernise music education and make it more inclusive of different learning styles.

A crucial trend on the professional side is the reflection on and reform of music teacher education for the future. The FUTURED project brought together music education researchers in Norway to critically examine generalist teacher education programmes and envision improvements (Christophersen et al., 2023). One of the striking findings from FUTURED's studies is that there is a "pervasive demographic homogeneity"

in music teacher education students, and a tendency to reproduce cultural inequalities (Christophersen et al., 2023). In other words, those who choose to become (generalist) teachers with an interest in music often come from the majority (ethnic Norwegian, middle-class) backgrounds and have tastes and competencies in western mainstream or classical music, which may not fully equip them to connect with an increasingly diverse student population. The project's researchers argue that change is necessary to prepare future music teachers for a more pluralistic society. They highlight several dimensions where transformation is needed: values and traditions (rethinking what is considered essential music knowledge; demographics (recruiting more diverse teacher candidates); educational practices (making pedagogy more student-centred and innovative); curricula (both at school and in teacher education, to include broader content); and the relationship between education and society. One output of FUTURED was a visionary framework for music teacher education, which emphasises that change should not be for its own sake but aimed at greater quality and relevance. Fostering critical reflection and democratic capacities in pre-service teachers rather than just technical proficiency would be one example of such changes would be one example of such change (Christophersen et al., 2023).

Within higher music education, another notable development is the growth of music education research as a field, which informs school practices. The oldest Norwegian PhD programme in music education at the Norwegian Academy of Music just marked its 25th anniversary in 2023. Christensen et al. (2023) document how the doctoral programme in music education was established in the late 1990s and evolved through the 2000s and 2010s, adapting to international trends and local needs. Over the past 25 years, a substantial number of music educators have earned PhDs at Norwegian higher education institutions, creating a strong scholarly community. This means that much of the current discussion on school music is informed by research evidence. The presence of this research community ensures that debates on the future of music education in Norway are grounded in data and theory, rather than ideology. It also means that school music teachers have access to professional development that connects with the latest knowledge.

Conclusion

Norwegian music education combines a strong policy commitment to equity and cultural inclusion with a competency-based curriculum that grants schools and teachers substantial professional autonomy. Compulsory provision ensures a shared musical foundation through lower secondary education, but opportunities for continued and advanced learning depend heavily on local capacity and students' elective choices, which can reinforce unequal access. The parallel Sámi curriculum and the integration of Sámi perspectives in the

national curriculum exemplify ambitious cultural recognition goals, while also highlighting ongoing needs for teacher competence development and resourcing. Overall, the chapter illustrates how curriculum intentions become inclusive practice only when supported by time, staff expertise, infrastructure, and coherent collaboration between schools and *kulturskole*.

Statement on the use of artificial intelligence. In preparing this chapter, the authors made use of AI-assisted tools (Claude, Anthropic) for the following purposes: translating Norwegian- and German-language terms and passages into English; performing language and style checks on the English-language text; cross-checking in-text citations against the reference list; and generating revision suggestions in response to editorial and reviewer feedback. All AI-generated content was critically reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the final text.

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Aleksandra Stanković & Milena Petrović

Music Education in Serbia

Historical Development and Contemporary Challenges

Abstract

This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of music education in Serbia, tracing its historical foundations in socialist Yugoslavia, through the systemic crisis of the 1990s, to the reforms and modernisation of the post-2000 period. It examines institutional frameworks, teaching conditions, and resource disparities, while highlighting differences between urban and rural contexts. Particular attention is devoted to specialised music schools, their curricula, and their contribution to Serbia's international reputation. The national curriculum embodies tensions between cultural heritage and contemporary genres, while recent research underscores the psychological, social, and pedagogical benefits of musical activities, including choral singing, innovative methodologies, and digital tools. The chapter concludes that Serbian music education remains a vital yet challenged domain, requiring stronger institutional support, fuller integration, and innovative approaches to sustain its role within the wider educational system.

Introduction

Serbia, a Western Balkan country with nearly 6.6 million inhabitants, maintains a unified education system across 1,680 institutions, including about 70 music schools; most are state-funded, with only four private. Fourteen are located in Belgrade, while others span urban and regional centres. Higher music education is offered solely by public faculties in five cities, reflecting a centralised model. Guided by the *Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System* (2017–2025), Serbian music pedagogy has evolved over the past fifty years, shaped by shifting cultural values, political transitions, and educational priorities from socialist Yugoslavia to contemporary practice.

Continuity and Change in Serbian Music Education

The development of music education in Serbia reflects enduring traditions and the challenges of modernisation. Shaped by cultural, political, and social forces, it has evolved from the socialist era of Yugoslavia, through the turbulence of the 1990s, to the reforms of the early twenty-first century.

In socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1990), music education was conceived as a central instrument of cultural policy and nation-building. The state invested heavily in specialised music schools, ensuring that artistic training was integrated into the broader educational framework. Music occupied a privileged position in the curriculum, not only as an aesthetic discipline but also as a vehicle for ideological formation. Choral singing of partisan, folk, and labour songs, reinforced collective identity and historical memory, while structured listening and rhythm-based exercises cultivated auditory perception and musical literacy. Exposure to classical composers and folk traditions further strengthened cultural continuity, embedding music education within both national heritage and socialist ideals (Duraković et al., 2018).

The collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, accompanied by sanctions, armed conflict, and economic decline, profoundly destabilised this system. Cultural institutions deteriorated under severe budgetary constraints, and music schools and academies struggled to maintain basic operations. Within the general curriculum, artistic subjects, such as music and visual arts, were marginalised as priorities shifted toward core academic disciplines. Interest in classical music waned, while commercial genres gained prominence among younger generations, reflecting broader social dislocation. This period represented a significant regression for music education in Serbia, as systemic instability undermined pedagogical continuity and access to cultural resources. Yet, despite these conditions, certain institutions and educators managed to preserve essential values of music pedagogy, safeguarding traditions that would later support recovery.

Following the political changes of 2000 and Serbia's formal independence in 2006, the country embarked on a transition aimed at aligning its educational system with European Union standards (Ivić & Pešikan, 2012). Reform initiatives sought to modernise teaching practices and introduce new curricula, but music education continued to face persistent obstacles. Chronic underfunding limited programme sustainability, while schools outside major urban centres struggled with shortages of qualified staff and adequate resources. Implementation of curricular reforms was hindered by inadequate infrastructure and insufficient teacher training, slowing the pace of modernisation. Nevertheless, the post-2000 period opened space for renewed dialogue on the role of music education in a contemporary, inclusive, and culturally diverse society.

Despite ongoing challenges, gradual improvements have emerged. The resilience of educators and institutions underscores the enduring importance of music pedagogy in Serbia, which continues to adapt to shifting cultural values, political transitions, and social needs. Today, music education reflects both the legacy of its historical foundations and the demands of modern educational standards, ensuring that the art of music remains accessible, relevant, and meaningful for future generations.

While the historical trajectory of Serbian music education reveals patterns of continuity and change, its present form is equally shaped by institutional structures and everyday practices. The organisation of curricula, the role of teachers, the distribution of resources, and the parallel system of specialised schools now determine how music is taught and valued across the country, highlighting both the strengths of Serbia's educational framework and the persistent inequalities that affect access, quality, and prestige.

Structures of Contemporary Music Education in Serbia

In examining the current structures of Serbian music education, attention turns to how curricula, teachers, resources, and specialised schools shape both the accessibility and quality of musical learning today. These institutional and practical dimensions reveal not only the strengths of Serbia's educational framework but also the persistent inequalities that continue to affect how music is taught, valued, and sustained across different regions.

The development of music education in Serbia has been deeply intertwined with cultural values and traditions. These factors reflect both the richness of the national musical heritage and the evolving preferences of younger generations, underscoring the continuing importance of culture in shaping educational practices and priorities. At the same time, social conditions significantly influence accessibility and quality. One of the most persistent challenges is the low social prestige attributed to arts subjects. Broader societal trends tend to prioritise disciplines such as computer science, economics, and technical fields, while music is frequently perceived as recreational or non-essential, often lacking rigorous evaluation and institutional support.

Access to music education remains uneven. Urban areas provide children with opportunities in music schools, choirs, and orchestras, while rural and disadvantaged regions often lack instruments, trained teachers, and proper facilities. Educators face systemic challenges – limited resources, scarce professional development, and inadequate space – which hinder motivation and widen the gap in educational quality across regions (Stanković, n.d.-b).¹ These disparities are further reflected in how time for music instruction is formally allocated within the school system.

¹ <https://eas-music.org/countries/serbia/music-in-schools-rs/>

Within Serbia's primary education system, which spans eight years and encompasses students aged 7 to 15, the subject Music Culture is typically allocated one class period per week, with the exception of the fifth grade where instruction occurs twice weekly. During the initial four years of schooling, music is taught by generalist educators responsible for the entire curriculum. From the fifth grade onward, instructional responsibility transitions to a dedicated subject specialist, marking a deliberate shift toward discipline-specific pedagogy. In gymnasiums, students follow one of three academic tracks: music is taught throughout all four years in the socio-linguistic track, while the natural sciences, mathematics and general education tracks include it only in the first two years, reflecting a reduced emphasis on the arts (*Rulebook on the Curriculum and Teaching Programme for Gymnasium*, 2018–2020). This allocation of time also highlights the pivotal role of teachers, whose qualifications and training determine how effectively music is delivered across different school levels.

Music educators follow a demanding professional path, usually spanning about fifteen years: six years of elementary and four of secondary music education, four years of undergraduate studies, and a year of master's specialisation. Their training at the Faculty of Music covers pedagogy, theory, musicology, ethnomusicology, conducting, composition, and performance. Teachers in specialised music schools follow the same academic route but are assigned to subjects that match their expertise; for example, instrumentalists teach their instrument, while conductors lead choirs or ensembles (*Law on the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia*, 2018–2023). Beyond formal qualifications, teachers are expected to nurture creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, and cultural awareness, connecting students with both national heritage and contemporary practice. Their effectiveness, however, depends not only on expertise but also on the availability of adequate resources and institutional support.

Resources for music education are unevenly distributed. While most schools have a music room with a piano, keyboard, or accordion, many lack dedicated classrooms or sufficient equipment. Curriculum implementation often depends on teachers' initiative and personal effort, with limited institutional support. This disparity highlights the contrast between general schools, which often struggle with minimal facilities, and specialised music schools, which are designed to provide comprehensive resources and targeted instruction.

General schools provide limited exposure to music, often restricted to a single weekly class, whereas specialised schools offer systematic training across multiple subjects with stronger institutional backing. This dual structure ensures inclusivity by exposing all students to music, but it also reinforces inequalities: mainstream education fosters only basic literacy and appreciation, while specialised schools cultivate professional competence, performance opportunities, and pathways to higher education (Perković, 2016).

Serbia maintains a well-developed network of specialised music schools dedicated to the systematic education of children and youth. Operating as a parallel system to mainstream schooling, they serve both as a foundation for training future professional musicians and as nurturing environments for young people with a passion for music. Entrance examinations typically test aural perception, rhythmic precision, and musicality, and many candidates prepare through individual instruction or structured preparatory programmes. These schools, public or private, offer six years of elementary training and four years of secondary education.

Students enrolled in specialised music schools attend regular primary or secondary education simultaneously (*Law on Secondary Education*, 2013–2025). Elementary schools focus on children with pronounced aptitude for instrumental study, while also offering programmes in solo and traditional (ethno) vocal performance. The core curriculum includes instrumental instruction, solfège, chamber music, choir, and music theory. Larger urban centres provide a wide range of departments, whereas smaller towns often offer only a limited selection. Instruction is generally organised into two class periods per week (*Rulebook on the Curriculum and Teaching Programme for Primary Music Education*, 2019–2020).

Secondary music schools serve as formative institutions for students pursuing professional careers. Admission usually follows completion of elementary music education and a successful entrance exam, though exceptionally, candidates who have privately mastered the six-year curriculum in instrumental training and solfège may also be admitted. In addition to instrumental departments, secondary schools offer specialised programmes in music theory, vocal performance, music production, jazz studies, traditional music (focused on folk repertoire and cultural heritage), early music (covering medieval to Baroque works, historically informed performance, and period instruments), and church music. Curricula are tailored to each area of study, with schedules typically arranged in two weekly sessions, allowing for both continuity and depth in artistic and theoretical development (*Rulebook on the Curriculum and Teaching Programme of Arts Education for Secondary Music School*, 2020).

Specialised music schools actively foster artistic growth through concerts, festivals, and competitions, while maintaining close ties with faculties of music. Their students regularly participate in national, European, and international events, affirming the high standards of Serbian music education and strengthening its reputation within the global cultural community. Beyond their achievements, specialised music schools in Serbia balance tradition with innovation, offering rigorous training for professional pathways in performance, theory, and pedagogy. Their structured approach underscores the importance of curriculum design and evaluation, which will be addressed in the following section.

Music Curriculum in Serbia: Objectives, Content, and Assessment

The music curriculum in Serbia reflects the country's attempt to balance heritage, institutional excellence, and contemporary cultural influences. It encompasses objectives, competencies, learning outcomes, and grade-specific content, while integrating activities such as listening, performance, creativity, choir, and ensemble work. Folk traditions, classical institutions, and popular genres are all present, though unevenly represented, revealing tensions between national identity and students' everyday musical experiences. The curriculum outlines developmental goals ranging from aesthetic sensitivity and creativity to teamwork, discipline, and cultural awareness (*Rulebook on Standards of Educational Achievements for the End of the First Cycle of Primary Education and for the End of Primary Education*, 2024). Yet implementation remains uneven: general schools often struggle with limited resources and sporadic engagement with cultural institutions, while specialised schools provide rigorous training and closer ties to professional practice (Stanković, n. d.-a).² The curriculum aim, consistent across all grades, is defined in the following quotation:

The objective of Music Culture in primary school is to cultivate students' interest in and appreciation for music through both individual and group musical experiences. These experiences are designed to encourage the development of creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, and a sense of community, as well as to foster a responsible attitude toward preserving the musical heritage and cultural traditions of their own and other nations. (Rulebook on the Curriculum and Teaching Programme for the Fourth Grade of Primary Education and Upbringing, 2019, p. 109)

Students in Serbia engage with music through active participation – singing, playing, listening, and creative expression – supported by literacy and historical context. These experiences foster respect for heritage while also building aesthetic awareness, emotional expression, discipline, and social responsibility. Digital tools expand opportunities for creativity, and learning outcomes progress from basic knowledge to creative application in line with Bloom's taxonomy.

Framed by Serbia's *Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System* (2017–2025), music education contributes to cross-curricular competencies such as problem-solving, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, and social responsibility, positioning the subject as both an artistic discipline and a vital element of holistic development.

Despite these broad aims, folk traditions such as epic poetry, songs, trumpet melodies, and instruments like the *gusle* and *frula* remain underused. Their potential to connect students with cultural roots and foster intercultural understanding is not fully realised. Classical music and its institutions, including the Faculty of Music, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Belgrade Music Festival

² <https://eas-music.org/countries/serbia/music-teacher-training-rs/>

(BEMUS), contribute significantly to national prestige, but their influence is largely confined to specialised education. Meanwhile, contemporary genres such as pop and turbo folk dominate youth preferences but are seldom included in classrooms, creating a disconnect between students' musical worlds and formal education.

In practice, the curriculum is structured around themes that evolve across grade levels. In grades 1 to 4, students focus on listening to short pieces, singing and playing, and creating simple rhythmic patterns. From grades 5 to 8, instruction expands to include historical perspectives on music, classification of instruments, listening linked to historical content, performance, and creativity through composition. In gymnasiums, the curriculum is organised by musical epochs, tracing music history from prehistory to contemporary practice (*Rulebook on Standards of Educational Achievements for the End of Secondary Education*, 2024). Choir and orchestra are included, though most schools offer only choir due to limited instruments.

Assessment in Serbian music education follows the national five-point grading system, but its application reveals sharp contrasts between general and specialised schools. In mainstream education, evaluation is continuous and broad, combining oral questioning, written tasks, and practical demonstrations. While this approach emphasises participation, creativity, and literacy, it often lacks rigour and consistency, reflecting limited resources and uneven institutional support. Specialised music schools, by contrast, employ demanding examinations in performance, solfège, theory, and ensemble work, with entrance and progression tests designed to uphold professional standards. Across both systems, assessment aims to remain fair and objective, balancing individual abilities with curricular expectations, yet the dual structure sustains both inclusivity and excellence while simultaneously reinforcing inequalities. Students in general schools may receive only superficial exposure to music, whereas those in specialised institutions benefit from structured training, better resources, and stronger ties to cultural life. The challenge lies in bridging this divide, ensuring that assessment not only measures technical achievement but also supports creativity, cultural awareness, and equitable access.

The curriculum's limitations – uneven implementation, underuse of folk heritage, exclusion of contemporary genres, and disparities between general and specialised schools – underscore the need for continued reflection and reform. These challenges are not static; they evolve alongside shifting cultural values, technological innovations, and educational priorities. To understand how Serbian music education is adapting to these pressures, the next section turns to current trends, persistent challenges, and the growing body of research that seeks to inform policy and practice.

Exploring Current Trends in Music Education: Challenges and Research

Contemporary research highlights the key challenges and emerging practices shaping Serbian music education today. The system continues to navigate between heritage and innovation, yet faces persistent obstacles: limited resources, uneven access between urban and rural schools, the low prestige of arts subjects, and the need to integrate students' everyday musical experiences into formal curricula. Current studies therefore focus on how music education can support wellbeing, adapt to digital environments, enhance rhythmic and motor skills, and embrace more diverse repertoires.

Research demonstrates the psychological and social benefits of musical engagement. Regular exposure to classical concerts aids relaxation, emotional regulation, and socialisation, while the *Schools@Concerts* project confirmed that live performances broaden students' preferences and relieve stress, underscoring the value of sustained cultural participation (Petrović, Vidulin & Konkol, 2020). Studies on choral singing reveal its role in fostering companionship, emotional expression, and community, showing that amateur singers valued musical knowledge the most, while music students emphasised voice development and social interaction (Ristivojević & Mirović, 2020). Investigations into children's choirs highlighted social benefits such as honour, relaxation, and belonging (Petrović, 2023), while biomarker analysis suggested that choral singing modulates oxytocin and cortisol, offering a low-cost intervention for children's emotional and social wellbeing (Petrović et al., 2025).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated experimentation with online learning. Research on distance solfeggio classes identified obstacles such as unstable internet, reduced communication, and difficulties in supporting weaker students, yet also revealed teachers' commitment to adapting methods (Škojo & Ristivojević, 2021). Other pedagogical innovations include Dalcroze-based activities, which significantly improved rhythmic ability in elementary solfeggio lessons, pointing to the importance of movement in musical learning (Ačić et al., 2019). At the higher education level, interdisciplinary approaches have integrated popular music into solfeggio classes, making instruction more relevant to students' cultural experiences and demonstrating how traditional frameworks can be enriched by contemporary genres (Petrović, 2022).

Together, these studies demonstrate the diverse directions in which Serbian music education is evolving, while also pointing to unresolved challenges. Innovations remain unevenly implemented, and systemic barriers continue to limit their reach. Further scientific research will be essential to clarify these issues and to guide future pedagogical and policy developments.

Conclusion

Music education in Serbia reflects a complex interplay of historical legacies, cultural values, and contemporary reforms. From its privileged role in socialist Yugoslavia, through the systemic decline of the 1990s, to gradual modernisation after 2000, the field has continually adapted to shifting political, social, and cultural contexts. Today, the system seeks to balance heritage and innovation: specialised schools uphold rigorous professional standards, while general education faces persistent challenges of limited resources, uneven access, and the reduced prestige of the arts. Contemporary research underscores both the developmental benefits of music and the urgent need for stronger institutional support, broader integration of diverse repertoires, and closer collaboration with cultural institutions. Serbian music education thus remains vital yet vulnerable, with its future dependent on sustaining tradition while embracing modern pedagogical practices. Continued scientific inquiry will be essential to guide policy, inform teaching, and reinforce the role of music education in shaping cultural and social development.

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Martina Krušinská & Mária Strenáčiková

The Landscape of Music Education in Slovakia

Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of music education in the Slovak Republic, examining general music education in primary *general* schools and specialised training in primary *art* schools. It situates music education within the national education system and outlines its historical development, highlighting key policy milestones, including post-1989 reforms and alignment with ISCED. The analysis addresses curricular objectives, instructional time, teacher education, assessment practices, and recent reforms, with particular attention given to the 2023 State Curriculum for Primary General Schools. The chapter also explores the distinctive role of primary art schools as providers of professionally oriented, non-formal music education. Current trends and challenges such as inclusion, teacher qualifications, limited instructional time, and funding constraints are discussed, emphasising the need for continued research and professional cooperation.

Introduction

The current educational system of the Slovak Republic comprises two main sectors: regional education and higher education. The system of regional education consists of kindergartens, primary general schools, secondary schools, special schools for children with disabilities, and primary art schools – in addition to regular schooling. Higher education is provided by universities and other higher education institutions and leads to internationally recognised academic degrees.

In Slovakia, compulsory schooling lasts ten years. The basic structure of the educational system is as follows: early childhood care from 6 months to 3 years of age (nurseries); kindergartens, catering for those aged 3 to 6 years/ISCED 0 (with compulsory enrolment in kindergarten at the age of 5); first level of primary general school covering grades 1–5/ISCED 1; second level of primary general school covering grades 6–9/ISCED 2; general and vocational secondary education (including conservatories)/ISCED 3. Specialised non-formal education is provided by primary art schools, which are attended by students of any age after regular school classes.

In this chapter, we focus primarily on music in primary general schools and in primary art schools. We only partially address other types of schools as well. In this context, we consider it important to draw the reader's attention to the fact that in the Slovak education system, the term "primary school" refers to ISCED 1 and ISCED 2.

From the Past to Contemporary Education

Music education in Slovakia began in church schools and private lessons, then became part of compulsory schooling under Maria Theresa's reforms in the 18th century.¹ Later, music appeared as a subject in general education public schools. After World War II, music became compulsory in general education schools. At the same time, primary art schools expanded rapidly and vocational high schools (conservatories) emerged.

In the 1970s, a nationwide concept of music education for primary general schools was developed. This framework emphasised an activity-based and artistic approach to music instruction, highlighting a system of musical activities such as singing, instrumental performance, music listening, and movement-based activities, all grounded in direct experience of musical works. During the 1980s, a model of primary general schools with extended music instruction was introduced, placing particular emphasis on singing and recorder playing, along with a range of additional activities within students' music-dramatic projects.

Profound societal and educational changes followed the political transformation known as the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Since the 1990s, strategies for the further development of music education have increasingly been addressed in an international context. Slovakia has engaged in cooperation with international organizations. These initiatives are coordinated by the Slovak Association of Music Teachers. Issues related to the

¹ Ratio Educationis in 1777, which placed education under state control, rather than exclusively under the church, introduced compulsory school attendance for children (usually from ages 6 to 12), established a three-level school system (trivial, main, and normal schools), unified curricula, textbooks, and the organisation of teaching, initiated systematic teacher training.

implementation of music education are discussed at national and international symposia, conferences, seminars, and training courses.

Among the most important changes in Slovakia after 1989 are the following (Medňanská, 2001; Langsteinová, 2002; Krušinská & Zeleiová, 2006):

- the innovation of music education curricula in primary general schools, emphasising the concept of sounding music and the student's active participation in line with the principles of artistic education (five core musical activities);
- the creation of new music education textbooks for grades 1–9 in primary general schools, integrating relative solmization with hand signs as well as music-dramatic activities;
- the development of new forms, methods, and concepts, together with their empirical and experimental exploration (e.g., Montessori pedagogy, extended music education, extended regional education, Yamaha Music School, among others);
- opportunities for children and youth to engage with music through leisure centres and extracurricular activity centres affiliated with primary general schools;
- the teaching of music theory in primary art schools through creative workshops and music-educational projects;
- the establishment of private and church-affiliated primary art schools, conservatories, and programmes in church music at universities;
- the creation of combined schools, administratively linking primary general schools with primary art schools;
- the development of teacher-training programmes that integrate music education with specializations in singing or instrumental performance, among others;
- the expansion of the system of continuing education.

Another fundamental change in Slovakia was introduced through the school reform of 2008 (revised in 2015), which established a two-level model of education (state curriculum and school curriculum) and aligned educational stages with the ISCED. The reform applied to kindergartens (ISCED 0), primary general schools (ISCED 1, ISCED 2), primary art schools (ISCED 1, ISCED 2), secondary schools (ISCED 3 including conservatories). The most recent reform of primary general schools initiated in 2023, is currently undergoing pilot testing and will become mandatory for all schools in the 2026–27 school year. This reform does not apply to primary art schools.

Music Education in Primary General Schools

Time Allocation

Music educators continuously struggle to secure the subject's rightful place within the general education system, advocating for at least one lesson per week across all grade levels. At present, at primary schools, Music Education is a compulsory and independent subject within the curricular area Arts and Culture (which also includes visual arts). According to the 2023 national curriculum, Music is allotted one lesson per week in primary education (grades 1–5) and one lesson per week in lower secondary education (grades 6–8), while it is absent in grade 9. Music Education is also a compulsory subject in the currently valid 2016 state curriculum for pre-primary education; however, no specific time allocation is defined at this level. In preschool (pre-primary) settings, music is expected to accompany the child throughout the day within the full range of musical activities.

At secondary general schools, Music is not included as a standalone subject. Instead, it appears in an integrated format under the title Arts and Culture, where it can be selected as an elective subject for the school-leaving examination. The music-educational content of this subject focuses on the history of musical art within the spectrum of all other arts.

Music Teachers

Teacher education for pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary education takes place at universities within the field of Teacher Training and Education Science. Students enrolled in the programme Preschool and Primary Pedagogy (B. A.-Bachelor of Arts, 3 years) may, upon completion, work as teachers at ISCED 0. Students enrolled in Teacher Training for Primary Education (M. A.-Master of Arts, additional 2 years) may teach at ISCED 1. Within these programmes, music is included among the compulsory courses. If they wish, students may take an optional advanced course in music during their university studies. As part of their final state examinations, students are required to take an oral exam in music education theory, while demonstrating practical skills in singing, instrumental performance, and pedagogical competencies during their studies.

Students enrolled in the programme Teacher Training in Music Education in combination with another subject, or Teacher Training in Music Arts with a specialisation in instrumental performance or voice (B. A., 3 years + M. A., 2 years), may teach at ISCED levels 2 and 3. Admission to these programmes requires passing an entrance examination in musical aptitude. The level of musical proficiency, particularly among graduates of the Teacher Training in Music Arts programme, is generally very high. However, these graduates often choose to pursue careers in primary art schools rather than in general education.

Teaching Resources

The 2023 State Curriculum is a binding document for all primary general schools. All other documents (including appendices), even those endorsed by the Ministry of Education, are considered advisory materials. Currently, schools may choose from a variety of music education textbook series, both updated and entirely new, approved by the Ministry of Education. These materials are complemented by interactive workbooks, collections of music-educational activities, and methodological guides.

Among the available textbooks, particular attention is given to the series for grades 1–7, which are also designed for schools implementing an extended music education model. New music education textbooks have also been produced for grades 5–8. Many resources incorporate references to live performances or original recordings, sometimes provided via QR codes, enabling teachers to bring high-quality music directly into the classroom using interactive whiteboards.

Music Education Curriculum

The National Educational Programme for Primary General Schools 2023 is currently in experimental implementation and will be effective from the 2026–27 school year. Its main aim is to build core musical skills such as singing, instrumental performance, listening, music-movement and music-drama expression, while encouraging creative expression. Also, pupils learn to explore historical and contemporary music, from both Slovak and global cultures, to communicate and evaluate musical content, and to appreciate national heritage alongside world diversity. In theoretical level, they apply music theory concepts in sounding music, learn about the history of music and use digital tools responsibly. In various music activities, they develop creativity, cooperation, empathy, and self-reflection, which integrates music within the pupils' community and society at large.

The curriculum encompasses a set of mandatory musical components: singing, instrumental performance, music listening, music-movement expression, and music-drama expression. Each component is analysed in terms of content and performance standards across the different educational cycles: the first cycle covering grades 1–3, the second cycle covering grades 4–5, and the third cycle covering grades 6–9.

Originally, performance standards in the 2008 State Curriculum were defined for each individual grade. The current approach establishes standards for each educational cycle, providing greater flexibility for teachers. The programme emphasises vocal intonation, performance on elementary musical instruments (Orff instruments), and ensemble music-making. Overall, it highlights the importance of the student's own creative expression.

Assessment

In primary general schools, the assessment is guided by directives issued by the Ministry of Education. The decision regarding the form of assessment – whether through grading, descriptive evaluation, or a combination of both – is often determined by the school curriculum and internal school regulations. In arts subjects, descriptive evaluation is more commonly used in primary education. Report cards frequently indicate the student's achievement with the term “completed”. In lower secondary education, formal grading is more common, with students evaluated on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents the highest level of achievement. Teachers of arts subjects are granted a degree of flexibility in selecting assessment methods, particularly in the context of formative or ongoing evaluation.

Current Trends

Music education is increasingly embracing innovative instructional approaches and methods, including the principle of inclusion. Since the 1990s, Slovakia has implemented several school reforms that have repeatedly emphasised the activity-based and artistic nature of music instruction. Teachers have opportunities to deepen their competencies within a relatively well-established system of continuing professional development. The number and diversity of music-pedagogical teaching resources are steadily increasing. However, several weaknesses persist in the music education system, including uneven teacher skills, many unqualified lower-secondary teachers, no music classes in grade 9 or as a standalone subject in secondary schools, lack of specialised classrooms, and limited research due to financial constraints.

In recent years, the Slovak music pedagogical academic community has been focusing in its publications on music education during the pandemic; music psychological topics with a focus on pre-school education and inclusion in schools; music education in the context of folk regional culture; and the development of textbooks and methodological manuals in the context of curriculum reform.

Music Education in Primary Art Schools

Professional music education in Slovakia is provided at primary art schools, conservatories, and higher education institutions with a focus on music. Primary art schools offer additional music training on top of general education music classes. Students are admitted from early childhood and they attend these schools in the afternoons, after they finish their regular school day in compulsory general education school. Here, they receive training in the performing arts, including instruction on string, keyboard, wind, and percussion instruments; solo and choral singing; chamber and orchestral performance; and conducting.

Primary art schools prepare students for further study at conservatories or other secondary schools offering music instruction, as well as for higher education in artistic or arts-pedagogy programmes. They also cater to future amateur musicians, providing the skills to play instruments, sing, create music, and engage thoughtfully with artistic works. The study programmes are organised in multiple levels: preparatory study up to 2 years for gifted young children; basic study lasting up to 13 years in total; extended study for exceptionally talented students; accelerated study for entrance exams preparation to higher music schools; and adult study for adult learners seeking formal music training.

Individual subjects are taught by trained educators – graduates of conservatories or higher education institutions with a focus on performance, who have supplemented their training with additional pedagogical studies. Graduates of conservatories or higher education institutions are expected to be prepared for lifelong learning and the continuous development of their professional knowledge and skills in the arts. They should be able to practice independently, select and study artistic works, perform on an instrument or sing, and actively participate in musical ensembles as soloists or accompanying musicians. Graduates should have a thorough understanding of technical, expressive, and interpretive aspects of music, possess knowledge of music theory and music history, understand the historical and aesthetic principles of the arts, and be able to interpret works in accordance with these principles.

Music Curriculum and Future Trends

In primary art schools, the emphasis is primarily on individual, and occasionally small-group, practical instruction (e.g. instrumental performance, chamber music, ensemble playing.). Students attend lessons according to their specialization and grade level, averaging 1.5–2.5 hours per week during the first four years of study, and approximately 2.5 hours per week thereafter.

The curriculum is primarily oriented toward performance activities. Students acquire expressive tools of musical art, develop instrumental or vocal technique, refine their interpretive skills, and foster creativity. In addition to the core practical lessons, students participate in collective theoretical instruction, typically one hour per week during the first four years and 1.5 hours per week thereafter (except for the final year). The content of theoretical subjects primarily includes basic knowledge of music theory, music history, musical forms, and the study of instruments.

Student competencies are regularly assessed by the teacher of the profile subject based on the student's systematic work, home preparation (practice), performance at concerts and competitions, and, at the end of each level, through an examination before a jury.

Slovak primary art schools face several challenges, including insufficient funding, which threatens the sustainability of many of them. Teaching practice increasingly emphasises individualised learning and consideration of students' diverse needs, as music

education has become more inclusive. Children with special educational needs study at primary art schools; therefore, it is important to provide them with appropriate support while maintaining the same standards for all students. For this purpose, further research in professional music education would be beneficial. However, such research remains limited in Slovakia, currently focusing mainly on creativity, pedagogical analysis of musical works, methodological approaches, performer preparation, digital technologies, and interdisciplinary integration. Despite these challenges, Slovak primary art schools maintain a high standard of education and the quality of artistic training.

Conclusion

This chapter reports on the structure, quality and main problems of music education in Slovakia, with an emphasis on music education in primary general schools within formal education and specialised music education in primary art schools within non-formal education. In particular, the system of specialised music education in Slovakia continues to maintain a high level of quality.

As highlighted in the chapter, current trends in both areas include innovative teaching approaches, a focus on inclusion, and the development of students' own creative musical expression. At the same time, these efforts are constrained by limited instructional time, disparities in teacher qualifications at primary general schools, and insufficient funding for primary art schools.

Music is a *sui generis* area and requires a specific educational environment. To preserve its dignified status within the broader education system, it is essential that professionals at all levels and types of music education not only in Slovakia collaborate to advocate for improved solutions, ensuring high-quality music education for present and future generations.

Statement on the use of artificial intelligence. Selected portions of the manuscript were translated using artificial intelligence-based tools to support linguistic editing and the formal formatting of references.

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Branka Rotar Pance

The Artistry and Diversity of School Music in Slovenia

Abstract

This chapter reviews general music education in Slovenia from the socialist era to the recent curriculum renewal. It summarises the nineyear primary and secondary curricula, core activities (performing, creating, listening), teacher roles, classroom resources, and extracurricular choir and ensemble practice. The chapter highlights reforms that emphasise holistic learning, cultural preservation, inclusion, digital competence, and teacher autonomy, and it identifies implementation challenges – most notably shortages of qualified teachers, uneven professional development, and loosely defined learning standards. Recommended priorities include strengthened teacher training and inservice support, clearer practical guidance for classrooms, and sustained collaboration between policymakers, educators, and community arts programmes.

Introduction

The Republic of Slovenia is a young European democratic state. It achieved independence in 1991 and has been a member of the EU since 2004. Slovenia has a public education system. The language of instruction at all levels of education is Slovenian, and in ethnically mixed areas, it is bilingual.¹ The share of private educational institutions is very small compared

¹ In areas where the Italian ethnic community lives, the first language of instruction is Italian, and Slovenian is the language of the environment. The situation is similar in areas where the Hungarian ethnic community lives.

to other European countries. The state and municipalities also fund music schools. In the 2024–25 school year, 13.8% of primary school students were educated in music schools (Taštanoska et al, 2025). Professional music education begins at upper secondary school specialising in music and continues at the Academy of Music, University of Ljubljana (Rotar Pance, 2019). In this chapter, we focus on music in general education in Slovenia, rather than within the specialised music school system.

This chapter surveys the structure, history, and current practice of music education in Slovenia, from its development under the socialist system to reforms after independence and the most recent curriculum renewal. It describes how music is organised across nine-year primary schools and upper secondary school programmes, the roles of generalist and specialist teachers, classroom resources and extracurricular activities (notably choirs), and the balance between preserving Slovenian musical heritage and embracing broader world music. The chapter also examines recent curriculum changes, implementation challenges – especially staffing shortages and teacher professional development needs – and policy implications for ensuring quality, equity, and pedagogical autonomy in Slovenian school music.

From Music Education in the Socialist System to the Democratisation of Education

Over the past five decades Slovenian music education evolved under two contrasting political systems, which shaped educational policy, school structures, staffing and teacher education. Until 1991 Slovenia was the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (SRS) within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). While overarching educational legislation in the SFRY reflected communist and socialist ideology, each republic implemented its own school laws and reforms. The last major school reform in the SRS was completed in 1984. Its primary school curriculum comprised six educational areas, including the language and arts area that encompassed music education. Music was a mandatory subject in all grades of the eight-year primary school and featured a content-based curriculum that promoted an active concept of music education centring on performance, listening and creativity.

After independence in 1991, Slovenia restructured its school system to reflect democratic values, professional and technological development, and new social expectations. Responsibility for school policy and programmes from kindergarten through upper secondary was assigned to the Ministry of Education, while the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia took on professional development, quality implementation of educational programmes, and curriculum development.

The first post-independence school reform was enacted in 1998 and introduced new preschool, primary and secondary curricula. The former mandatory eight-year primary school was replaced by a nine-year programme for students aged 6 to 14. The philosophical shift in general education moved from traditional, teacher-led models to humanistic-constructivist, holistic, and activity-based approaches. Learning-by-doing became central; goal-oriented and process-development planning replaced traditional content-driven course planning. Curricula specified general and operational objectives and knowledge standards, while teachers were granted greater professional autonomy in selecting content and teaching methods (Oblak, 1995, 1997; Sicherl-Kafol, 2001, 2015a).

Assessment practices were revised as well. Descriptive assessment was introduced in the first cycle (grades 1–3), while in higher grades knowledge was assessed with numerical marks on a scale of 1 to 5 (Razdevšek-Pučko, 1999; Sicherl-Kafol, 2015b). From the 2000–01 school year regular external assessment for ninth-grade primary students began, organised by the National Examinations Centre. Currently, a national examination in Slovene and mathematics is held annually in the ninth grade; the Minister of Education selects a third mandatory subject from among other subjects (Rotar Pance, 2007, 2016). Music education has been chosen as that third subject in several years (2012, 2014, 2018 and 2023), thus receiving national-level assessment attention. National knowledge testing is also administered at the end of grades 3 and 6, but does not include music education.

A central figure in the development of modern Slovenian music didactics is Breda Oblak.² Between 1983 and 2004 she published didactic textbooks and teaching materials for all grades of primary school – initially for the eight-year system and later adapted for the nine-year system. Oblak introduced new methods of teaching music in primary schools, brought didactic innovations into music teacher training at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana, and significantly influenced continuous professional development for general and music teachers. She authored curricula for music education in primary and upper secondary schools and for music theory instruction (Bohak Adam, 2017; Borota, 2017; Sicherl-Kafol, 2017).

Music Education in Slovenia's Primary and Secondary Schools

A nine-year primary school, attended by students aged 6 to 14, is mandatory. The educational programme of the primary school is determined by the curriculum for mandatory and elective subjects, along with several other government documents. This nine-year primary education is structured into three cycles: the 1st cycle (grades 1–3), the 2nd cycle (grades 4–6), and the 3rd cycle (grades 7–9).

² In 1987, with her dissertation on creative learning in music education at the primary level, Oblak became the first person in Slovenia and the SFRY to obtain a doctoral degree in music pedagogy.

Music is a mandatory subject throughout all nine grades. Until 2011, the subject was titled *Glasbena vzgoja* [Music Education], but in 2012, it was renamed *Glasbena umetnost* [Musical Arts]. The weekly allocation of music lessons decreases gradually: from 2 hours per week in the 1st cycle to 1.5 hours per week in grades 4 and 5, and to 1 hour per week in grades 6 to 9. In grades 7 to 9, students have the option to select additional music subjects.

In the 1st cycle, music, like other subjects, is taught by generalist teachers, with preschool teachers assisting in half of the grade 1 lessons. In grades 4 and 5, music education can be taught by either generalist or specialised music teachers. From grades 6 to 9, music teachers implement classes. The choice of whether music is taught by a generalist or a specialised teacher depends on factors such as the school's staffing structure, size, and the professional interests of the educators. Both generalist and music teachers are required to hold a master's degree in accordance with Slovenian legislation.

Each classroom is equipped with a piano or synthesizer, Orff instruments, a *cajón*, a ukulele, and other musical instruments. Textbooks are provided for every grade, and teachers have the flexibility to select which textbooks they wish to use. Furthermore, classrooms are outfitted with a computer connected to a smartboard, along with high-quality speakers for optimal music playback. Music encyclopaedias and other musical works are also accessible to students, and teachers supplement lessons with additional materials available through the course's online platform.

In the 3rd cycle, students can opt for elective music subjects with published curricula. These one-year courses include options such as *Glasba – Ansambelska igra* [Music – Ensemble Playing], *Glasba – Glasbena dela* [Music – Musical Works], and *Glasba – Glasbeni projekt* [Music – Music Project]. There are also two- to three-year options such as *Klaviatura in računalnik* [Keyboard and Computer].

As part of the expanded primary education curriculum, children's and youth choirs are established in each school, with music teachers dedicating 6 hours per week to lead these choirs. The curriculum for choral singing emphasises the many benefits of this activity, including the acquisition of knowledge about Slovenian and global choral music, the development of vocal skills, enhancement of musical abilities, and the promotion of teamwork and collective problem-solving. Choral singing not only provides aesthetic enjoyment for both performers and audiences but also fulfils the need for self-actualisation and positively influences psychological well-being. Additionally, it raises awareness of multiculturalism and contributes to cultural heritage preservation (Žvar, 2002).

Individual primary schools, in addition to choirs, may offer various extracurricular activities related to music, such as Orff instrument classes, school ensembles, and folklore programmes. The implementation of these activities relies on each school's traditions, the headmaster's support, and the enthusiasm of the music teacher. Students and teachers participate in concerts, cultural events within local communities, choir festivals, and competitions. Music lessons at school are fully funded by the state. However, during special

activity days like cultural, technical, and activity days, parents are responsible for purchasing tickets to concerts and cultural events. Teachers select providers that organise youth concerts, such as *Glasbena mladina Slovenije / Jeunesses Musicales Slovenia*.

Several projects promote free attendance at concerts, hosting musicians in schools, and visiting cultural institutions, all of which fall under cultural-art education. Among them is the comprehensive SKUM project (*Developing Communication Competencies through Cultural-Art Education*), which ran from 2017 to 2022. This initiative fostered new models and approaches for interactions between children and youth with artists across six artistic fields, providing artistic experiences in visual arts, dance, literature, performing arts, music, and multimedia. All activities within the SKUM project were offered free of charge to students (Rotar Pance, 2022).

In Slovenia, only a small number of private primary schools operate with publicly recognised programmes. Music lessons in these schools vary depending on their specific educational philosophies, such as Waldorf or Montessori education. At Alojzij Šuštar Primary School, which is the only Catholic primary school in Slovenia, the dedication to music education is notably greater than in public schools, highlighting the importance of music lessons. With class choirs established in the first three grade levels and choir lessons conducted twice a week, students are not only introduced to musical skills early on but also encouraged to express themselves artistically within a supportive community. As students progress, they can join two specialised choirs: the children's choir for singers aged 9 and 10, and youth choir for those aged 11–14.

At the secondary education level, categorised under ISCED level 3, students aged 15 to 18 are enrolled in various programmes. Although secondary education is not legally mandatory, most young people attend. Within the upper secondary school programme *Gimnazija*, the subject *Glasba [Music]* is a mandatory part of the curriculum and is implemented in the first year for a total of 70 hours.³ Of these, 52 hours are taught in regular weekly classes, and 18 hours are included as part of mandatory elective content outside regular class hours. Students actively participate in various concert events, engage in cultural days, and partake in projects that integrate music.

Musical subjects are included in the curricula of some other four-year secondary school programmes. The largest number of musical subjects is offered by Art Grammar School (*gimnazija* with a music major). Students can study within the modules A: composition (theoretical orientation), B: singing or instrument and C: jazz and popular music. In addition to the extensive music curriculum, education also includes general education subjects that lead to the completion of education with a matura exam (Rotar Pance, 2019).

³ *Gimnazija* prepares students predominantly for further studies at universities and other tertiary education institutions.

Musical subjects are also included in the four-year secondary school programmes specialising in performing arts: a programme specialised in dance and a programme specialised in theatre and drama. In the curriculum of the four-year vocational programme Secondary Preschool Education, more hours are dedicated to music compared to *Gimnazija*. It has the status of a mandatory subject and is part of the compulsory and optional modules. Music is also represented to a modest extent in the curricula of some other secondary vocational and secondary vocational-technical education programmes.

Until the 2022–23 school year, secondary schools operated choirs as part of the enhanced programme. From the 2022–23 school year onward, the music teacher who leads the school choir has 2 to a maximum of 6 hours per week dedicated to working with the choir. This applies to school choirs that are not a mandatory part of the secondary school educational program.

Music Curriculum in Primary and Secondary Schools

In Slovenian general education, the music curricula for primary schools (2011) and gymnasiums (2008) are closely related.⁴ Both have a standardised structure that includes definitions of the subject, general and operational objectives, proposed content, and knowledge standards. Didactic recommendations outline the realisation of learning objectives in the areas of performance, listening, and creation. They emphasise individualisation and differentiation, interdisciplinary connections, assessment and evaluation of knowledge, and the use of information technology. Both music curricula are built around three core activities: performing, creating, and listening. Performing encompasses singing, playing instruments, and the rhythmic speech (articulation) of texts. Creating involves improvisation, composition, interpretation, and cross-media expression. Listening focuses on experiencing and analysing a diverse range of musical works. Additionally, the primary school curriculum includes dance and movement. This field is also partly included in the subject of Sport, but with different aims, activities, and content. The operational goals in all cycles and areas of the primary school music curriculum are developed progressively, reflecting students' age, musical development, and interests, supplemented by suggested musical content (Sicherl-Kafol, 2001, 2015a).

In the 1st cycle, the curriculum is designed to ensure that students engage in activities such as singing a repertoire of folk, artistic, domestic, and foreign songs, imitating rhythmic and melodic patterns, and creating simple accompaniments and melodic motifs. Through musical activities and by exploring sounds, students acquire basic musical concepts that they build on and expand in the 2nd cycle.

⁴ Both curricula will be implemented for the last time in the 2025/26 school year.

In the 2nd cycle, the curriculum content is connected to musical literacy. Through musical activities, students learn elementary rhythmic elements (tone durations, pauses, meter) and engage with pitches and melodies (names of the notes, G-clef, F-clef, pentatonic scale, diatonic scale). Students study standard notation and develop singing by score and playing the Orff and other instruments for children at a very elementary level. In doing so, they learn about different musical environments, musical creators and performers, instruments and musical ensembles, and selected musical forms and genres.

The 3rd cycle examines the development of music over time. In grade 7, students listen to, perform, and create music from the ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque periods. In grade 8, they focus on music from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Classical and Romantic periods). In grade 9, they study music from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In all grades, they deepen their understanding of musical forms, ensembles, genres, and styles, while developing their performing, listening, and creative skills.

The curriculum for the subject *Glasba [Music]* in the upper secondary school programme *Gimnazija* includes four areas: listening, performing, creating, and musical language. The objectives outlined in this fourth area emphasise the student's development across various aspects of music education. They aim for students to gain a deeper understanding of Slovenian and global music history, recognise and analyse the characteristics of contemporary music, and enhance their understanding of musical design elements. Students are expected to utilise musical notation and terminology, engage critically with musical events, and be aware of the media's influence on music. Additionally, the objectives encourage students to comprehend and use concert-related materials and creatively apply musical information in both school and extracurricular contexts.

The curricula emphasise several key strategies and goals, including: flexibility in the learning process to allow for openness; a holistic approach to education that addresses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development, including metacognition; the development of competencies in students, such as critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem-solving, risk assessment, decision-making, and emotional control; autonomy for both teachers and students; a focus on a learning-targeted, process-oriented teaching model; ensuring quality knowledge that enhances student achievements and metacognitive skills; fostering interconnections between various subjects and disciplines; and incorporating ICT knowledge.

The music curricula for primary and upper secondary school *Gimnazija* do not prescribe a specific repertoire for performance and listening. Musical concepts are outlined in connection with the definition of learning objectives in each area of activity. The primary school music curriculum defines minimum and basic knowledge standards for separate for 1st, 2nd and 3rd cycle. These standards are written loosely, allowing teachers to consider individual differences in students concerning their musical progress and demonstrated

learning achievements. The upper secondary school curriculum defines the expected achievements of students, which, like the learning outcomes in primary school, are written very generally. Teachers autonomously design learning topics and individual lessons. This professional autonomy allows them to choose different musical content, teaching methods, and forms of work to achieve the set operational goals.

Renewing the Music Curriculum in Slovenia: Structure and Challenges

In 2022, the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia embarked on the task of renewing the curricula for all general education programmes, from kindergarten through upper secondary schools. The revision of the curricula for primary and upper secondary schools considered the basic principles of goal-oriented curricula and institutional autonomy and professional autonomy of teachers; horizontal and vertical coherence of curricula; internal consistency of curricula; the principle of individualisation and promotion of an inclusive approach; and the principle of integrating common programme objectives into the curricula of individual subjects (Rojc & Slivar, 2022). Common goals were set for all general education programmes: 1. Language, citizenship, culture, and art; 2. Sustainable development; 3. Health and well-being; 4. Digital competence; and 5. Entrepreneurship (including financial literacy). The renewal process of educational programmes was completed in 2025. The renewed curricula for primary and upper secondary schools will be implemented in the 2026–27 school year (*Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo. Prenova [The National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia. Renovation], 2022*).

The most important and largest structural difference in the revised curriculum for music in primary school is the separation into two parts. The creators of the curriculum renewal decided that the curriculum for all subjects taught by classroom teachers in the 1st cycle (grades 1–3) will be common. The revised music curriculum for the 2nd and 3rd cycles initially defines the purpose of the subject, aiming to help students experience and understand music through authentic learning methods rooted in the core aspects of musical art: production, reproduction, and reception. By focusing on developing students' musical communication through performance, creation, and active listening, the curriculum enables a comprehensive exploration of music across various genres and contexts. This holistic approach not only nurtures students' musical abilities, skills, and knowledge but also promotes cultural-artistic expression, higher cultural needs, aesthetic values, critical thinking, social awareness, and personal identity. Furthermore, a key component of the subject is the preservation and understanding of Slovenian musical art and culture, ensuring that students are connected to their cultural heritage while engaging with music.

The revised music curriculum for *Gimnazija* is based on the same guidelines but expands its focus to include a wider variety of world music. Furthermore, it encourages students to engage in a greater degree of independent research. The revised curriculum will be introduced in the Slovenian school system at a time when there is a significant shortage

of qualified teachers. Particularly in primary schools, staffing gaps are being filled with unqualified personnel. This raises the question among Slovenian music educators of whether a differently structured curriculum with loosely defined learning objectives and knowledge standards will truly support teachers. Didactic recommendations with presented models from practice on how to achieve specific learning objectives will not be sufficient. There is also concern that publishers with newly issued textbooks will limit teachers' autonomy in choosing musical activities and content.

Conclusion

The renewal of Slovenia's general education curricula presents both a timely opportunity and a serious challenge for music education. The revised frameworks foreground important contemporary aims – holistic musical learning, cultural preservation, inclusion, digital competence, and autonomy for teachers – yet their success depends on the availability of qualified staff, clear practical guidance, and safeguards for teacher professional judgment. The Department of Music Pedagogy at the Academy of Music, University of Ljubljana, together with other university departments and research groups, is well-positioned to support this transition through teacher training, applied research, symposia, and publications. Continued collaboration between policy makers, teacher-educators, schools, and publishers will be essential to translate broad curricular aims into classroom practices that foster musical skills, aesthetic understanding, and social and cultural engagement in learners. Strengthening research capacity, expanding professional development for in-service teachers, and protecting pedagogical autonomy should therefore be priorities to ensure that the renewed curriculum enhances both the quality and equity of music education across Slovenia.

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Laia Viladot & Albert Casals

The Recipe for Music in Catalan Schools

Open Curriculum, School Autonomy, and Specialist Teachers

Abstract

This chapter analyses the school music education in Catalonia within the framework of Spain's decentralised education system. It traces the historical development of Catalan music pedagogy and examines the effects of recent competency-based reforms that grant schools and teachers wide curricular autonomy. The chapter describes how music is organised in primary and secondary education, highlighting differences in instructional time, resources, and continuity. Attention is paid to the central role of specialist teachers and the resulting variability between schools. Music's integration into interdisciplinary projects, cultural initiatives, and community-based programmes is also explored, alongside persistent challenges related to teacher preparation, equity, and the status of music within the curriculum.

Introduction

Spain is a politically decentralised state in which national legislation coexists with the authority of 17 autonomous communities and two autonomous cities. Although the central government sets the overarching legal framework, each region has its own institutions and can adapt national policies to local needs. This decentralised structure is especially visible in the education system, where national guidelines provide the foundation, but regional governments hold significant responsibility for implementation and

curricular adaptation¹. As a result, there are notable regional differences in curriculum implementation.

In Catalonia (Catalunya), a historic region in the northeast of Spain, Decree 175/2022 defines the subject content, competences and expected learning outcomes for compulsory education. The Catalan government also encourages schools to collaborate with community music organisations, host cultural events, and adapt music education to reflect regional identity.

This chapter focuses on Catalonia, analysing how music education is structured and implemented within its specific educational context, and concludes by outlining current trends and offering reflections informed by ongoing research.

Context: From Past to Contemporary Music Education in Catalonia

Music education in Spain, and particularly in Catalonia, has its roots in the pedagogical innovations of the early twentieth century, marked by the incorporation of international active methodologies such as those of Dalcroze, Willems, Martenot, Orff and Suzuki (Arnaus et al., 2022), as well as the national *Escola de Pedagogia Musical – Mètode Ireneu Segarra* (School of Musical Pedagogy – Ireneu Segarra Method) (Gelabert & Motilla, 2020).

Manuel Borgeñó and Joan Llongueras were key music pedagogues at the beginning of the twentieth century in Catalonia (Arango, 2025; Heredia, 2013). Llongueras adapted Dalcroze and Willems' methodologies to our context and promoted and contributed to a more innovative compulsory education in the region. After the long hiatus imposed by the Franco dictatorship, when music education was restricted to patriotic and folkloristic purposes, the 1970s and 1980s saw a gradual recognition of its educational value (Fernández Biel, 2001). This growing interest culminated in the 1990 legislative reform (*Ley Orgánica General del Sistema Educativo*, LOGSE, 1990) (Organic Law 1/1990, on the General Organisation of the Education System (LOGSE)), which established music as a compulsory subject and introduced the figure of the music specialist teacher. For the first time, it was considered necessary to educate teachers with solid musical and didactic foundations, both in primary education (ages 6–12) and in compulsory secondary education (ages 12–16).

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, music education has become more competency-based, and curricula are increasingly adaptable and less prescriptive. Within the framework of a flexible and open curriculum, the current *Ley Orgánica de Modificación de la Ley Orgánica de Educación* – LOMLOE (2020) (Organic Law 3/2020, amending

¹ See an overview of the Spanish educational system in: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/eurypedia/spain/overview>. In addition, see the curricula for every autonomous community in Spain here: <https://educagob.educacionfp.pydeportes.gob.es/curriculo/curriculo-lomloe/menu-curriculos-basicos.html>

Organic on Education (LOMLOE)) also grants schools considerable autonomy to design their own educational projects. Consequently, there is great diversity in the importance attached to music education and in the number of hours allocated, since the curriculum merely stipulates minimum requirements. The value attributed to music is often linked to the socio-economic context: in high-performing or elite schools, music is regarded as a means of fostering creativity and intellectual capacities, whereas in schools with high socio-economic needs it becomes a key strategy for promoting social cohesion, inclusion and emotional well-being (González-Mediel et al., 2016; Piernagorda, 2023).

At the same time, social and cultural changes arising from globalisation and the influence of ethnomusicological perspectives have broadened repertoires and classroom practices. Western classical music and traditional notation have lost prominence, while popular, traditional and world music, as well as practices such as *batucada*, rap or *glosa*², have gained prestige. In addition, recent years have seen a significant rise in innovative projects, some of them linked to music and often associated with new technologies or collaborations with music schools.

Music can serve as a catalyst for interdisciplinary and globalised learning, promoting collaboration and cultural engagement, but its inherently collective and auditory nature may make it less compatible with approaches emphasising individual autonomy or quiet learning environments. The past few decades have also witnessed the expansion of inter-school and performance-based projects. Large-scale programmes such as *Cantània* or *Dansa Ara*, alongside initiatives like *RockIn* or *araArt*, have strengthened the community and performative dimensions of school music, complemented by school-specific projects and activities connected to festive occasions.

Mapping Music Across the School Curriculum

Making Space for Music Education

Music holds varying degrees of relevance and instructional time depending on the autonomy of each school, ranging from highly integrated practices in Early Childhood Education to more subject-based teaching in primary and especially secondary education. Nevertheless, the limited number of compulsory instructional hours and the insufficient training of some specialists can restrict the depth of musical learning, as will be discussed later.

² *Batucada* is a Brazilian percussion ensemble known for its energetic, rhythmic drumming, and some schools in Catalonia are now promoting batucada groups as part of their music education. *Glosa* is a form of improvised oral poetry, and some schools in Catalonia are now introducing glosa activities as part of their music and cultural education.

In general, schools work from five musical learning contexts: voice and singing, movement, instrumental work, listening, and creation. The overarching aim is to foster holistic development while addressing the diversity of the student population. Teachers enjoy considerable autonomy in designing musical learning experiences and selecting materials, as there are no mandatory textbooks for music. This flexibility supports innovation and responsiveness to student interests, and learners are encouraged to participate in shaping projects, choosing repertoire, and expressing their personal musical backgrounds, thereby fostering engagement, ownership, and autonomy. However, such an open and flexible curriculum, combined with high levels of teacher autonomy, demands substantial experience and pedagogical knowledge. Less experienced or insufficiently trained teachers may struggle to provide depth, coherence, and meaningful learning opportunities, potentially limiting the benefits of these freedoms.

Recent curricular trends position music within broader educational frameworks such as STEAM, reinforcing its value for creativity and problem-solving. Some secondary schools link music with technology through the use of digital editing and performance platforms. Music also contributes to social and emotional learning, well-being, and community cohesion. Beyond the music classroom, it is frequently integrated into other subjects and school-wide initiatives. In language learning, songs support vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation, while in social sciences, students explore world cultures through traditional music. Music is also incorporated into well-being education programmes, serving as a tool for emotional regulation and group bonding.

Catalan schools make extensive use of music as a means of connecting students to local heritage. Cultural events and seasonal festivals, such as *La Castanyada* (autumn festival) or Carnival, provide opportunities for students to perform regional songs and dances, reinforcing both musical competence and cultural identity. This combination of curricular flexibility, cultural engagement, and interdisciplinary practice helps make space for music as an artistic discipline and as a vehicle for broader educational goals.

Assessment in music follows a formative and summative approach, aligned with national and regional guidelines. Students are evaluated on performance skills (e.g., accuracy, expression), creativity and composition, listening and analysis, and theoretical knowledge. Formative strategies – such as peer feedback, self-assessment, and teacher observation – play a central role in encouraging reflective learning. Summative tools include written tests, performances, and portfolios. While not subject to high-stakes national exams, music is recognised as a vital contributor to students' holistic development. In Catalonia, where music is interwoven with language, culture, and identity, assessment reflects not only technical proficiency but also students' creative voice and cultural engagement.

Music Education in Primary School

Primary Education spanning six academic years (ages 6–12), marks the first stage of compulsory schooling in Catalonia and provides structured opportunities for music learning. While music in Early Childhood Education (ages 0–6) is generally transversal and integrated across learning areas, in Primary schools it becomes a more defined subject.

At the Primary Education level, students typically receive between 1–2 hours per week. Music is included under the broader umbrella of Artistic Education, alongside visual, audiovisual, and performing arts, allowing for creative interplay among disciplines. The national framework fixes a minimum of 500 hours for Arts Education across all six primary years, which schools may allocate flexibly between music and visual arts. Additional hours may be devoted to interdisciplinary projects incorporating music to varying degrees. While this flexibility supports local adaptation and integration, it can also limit the depth of music-specific content and result in uneven provision, depending on school priorities, teacher availability, and resource allocation.

The primary music curriculum is structured around several core components that together foster both technical skill and creative expression. Vocal and instrumental practice – including singing, body percussion, and instrumental performance – develops students’ technical proficiency, coordination, and ensemble skills. Listening and appreciation activities expose learners to a wide range of musical traditions, cultivating cultural awareness and critical aural skills. Basic music theory, covering rhythm, melody, and notation, provides the foundational language for understanding and communicating musical ideas. Complementing these elements, introduction to composition and improvisation – undertaken individually and collaboratively – encourages creativity, problem-solving, and active engagement, allowing students to experiment with musical ideas and express their personal musical voices within a structured pedagogical framework.

As shown below, music is generally taught by specialist teachers who have completed a Bachelor in Primary Education with a specialisation in music. These educators often lead school-wide music initiatives such as choirs, performances, or interdisciplinary projects. Teaching methods are experiential and inclusive, with a focus on creativity, movement, and cultural relevance.

Music Education in Secondary School

Secondary Education in Spain includes Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO – European Qualifications Framework – Level 2) from ages 12 to 16, and Post-Compulsory Education (*Bachillerato* – EQF Level 4) from 16 to 18.

Music is a compulsory subject in ESO. Students generally receive 1.5 hours per week in two out of the first three years. In the fourth year, music becomes optional. This structure often leads to discontinuity in musical learning, particularly for those not enrolled in extra-curricular or specialised programmes. In Upper Secondary Education, music is

offered only as an optional subject within specific academic tracks. Students following an arts-based programme may have access to between 4 and 12 hours per week, depending on the pathway chosen. However, limited classroom time remains a structural challenge, especially for students who do not choose music as an elective in the later years. To compensate, some schools offer extra-curricular ensembles, interdisciplinary projects, or collaborate with local conservatories, enriching students' access to musical experiences.

According to Royal Decree 217/2022 (ESO) and Royal Decree 817/2021 (*Bachillerato*), the music curriculum at this stage aims to deepen students' artistic understanding, support personal expression, and prepare them for lifelong cultural engagement. Music becomes a more specialised and structured subject, building on the foundations established in Primary schools. The curriculum encompasses performance – both vocal and instrumental – listening and music analysis, composition and improvisation, music theory and history, and an introduction to digital music tools. These activities develop not only musical skills but also transversal competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy. Lessons increasingly incorporate contemporary practices, including sound design, digital production, and STEAM-based projects, particularly in innovative schools.

Pedagogically, music education at this level emphasises student-centred approaches, providing flexibility in content and method. Teachers are encouraged to connect music with students' experiences, interests, and cultural backgrounds, fostering inclusive and engaging learning environments. Regional music, language, and traditions remain integral components of classroom practice, linking students' musical development with broader cultural and identity formation.

Specialised Schools

In addition to general and semi-private schools, Catalonia offers two public specialised schools that integrate general education with formal music education. These institutions enable students with strong musical interests to pursue high-level study without needing to attend a separate conservatory.

One of the most well-known examples is IEA Oriol Martorell in Barcelona, which offers integrated academic and music education from primary through secondary levels. Another prominent institution is the Escolania de Montserrat, a historic choir school that provides rigorous musical and academic instruction to boys selected for their vocal talents. These schools represent a distinct pathway for musically-gifted students and exemplify best practices in merging curricular excellence with artistic specialisation.

Supporting Music Teaching: Educators and Resources

The Music Teacher

The role of the music specialist has become not merely important but structurally decisive in shaping and understanding the current school and cultural context. This prominence must be read against the limited musical education of the general population, and of teachers in particular, which has contributed to a systemic reliance on specialist. As a result, generalist educators are professionally and pedagogically unprepared to teach this discipline (Fernández-Barros & Casals, 2025).

In primary schools, there tends to be only one music specialist, a situation that effectively centralises musical decision-making in a single individual. Such dependency on a single specialist introduces significant power-laden structural and methodological implications. Their expertise and preferences can determine curricular content and pedagogy (Sambola & Casals, 2020). They can also shape how the space is used. In this way, students' musical experiences are influenced in ways that are rarely transparent or collectively negotiated. As a result, market variation emerges between schools. This raises important questions about equity and consistency in music provision. For instance, a teacher with an instrumental background may prioritise instrumental work, potentially marginalising vocal activities. In secondary education, teachers have greater autonomy to design their teaching according to their own criteria. However, this individualised autonomy can hinder the development of coherent departmental cultures, making it difficult to build cohesive teams and shared methodologies capable of sustaining long-term curricular continuity.

Teacher qualifications vary by educational stage. In early childhood education, music is generally taught by generalist teachers. While some may have specific education or a strong interest in music, others may lack formal preparation, which affects the consistency and quality of music instruction. However, in a significant number of schools, the primary music specialist also teaches music to children aged 3 to 6. In such cases, subject expertise is ensured, although a specific pedagogical approach for this age group may sometimes be lacking. Emphasis at this level is often on songs, rhythm games, and simple musical experiences.

In primary education, music is typically taught by specialists who have completed a primary education degree with a specialisation in music. This credential includes coursework in instrumental practice, vocal training, music pedagogy, and classroom management. These specialists often coordinate school-wide music events and contribute to the broader artistic life of the school.

Secondary education requires a higher level of specialisation. Teachers are expected to hold a degree in music or music pedagogy, followed by a master's in teacher education. Despite their qualifications, many encounter difficulties as a result of the limited amount of didactics training provided within the one-year master's programme. The profile of this

teaching staff tends to be closely connected to the performative aspects of music and is often associated with greater technological knowledge related to music. This is reflected in the way the music subject is approached in secondary schools. For a deeper understanding of the competencies required of Primary and Secondary music teachers, see the studies by Carrillo (2015) and Fernández-Barros & Casals (2025).

Resources for Teaching Music

Access to resources for music education in Catalonia is uneven and largely dependent on each school's funding structure. Basic resources found in many schools include Orff instruments, recorders, ukuleles, guitars, and small percussion instruments. Some schools also have keyboards, digital pianos, or classroom sets of tablets. Technology is playing an increasingly central role, with software such as GarageBand, Flat.io, and other music composition or rhythm-training apps being used to supplement instruction.

More advanced programmes – particularly in urban areas – may feature ensembles, school orchestras, or extracurricular music clubs. These are often supported by cultural collaborations. Partnerships with institutions such as *L'Auditori* (Concert Hall of Barcelona and *El Gran Teatre del Liceu* (Opera Hall)) provide students with access to professional performances, workshops, and community-based music-making projects.³ For example, *Cantània*, coordinated by *L'Auditori*, involves thousands of upper-primary students in preparing a newly commissioned choral work, culminating in a performance at a professional venue. Similarly, *El Monstre al Laberint*, organised by the *Liceu*, engages secondary students in a collaborative opera project alongside professional musicians, fostering inclusion and artistic excellence.

Conservatories and music schools also collaborate with public schools, offering visiting artist programmes, masterclasses, and shared concerts. These partnerships enrich school-based music education and create pathways for students interested in advanced musical study.

Given the often-limited time for music during school hours, many Catalan schools promote extra-curricular music activities to supplement learning. These may include choirs, school bands, instrumental lessons, music clubs, and musicals or interdisciplinary projects. Activities typically take place before or after school and are led either by school staff or external music educators. These programmes offer critical opportunities for sustained engagement with music, especially for students not enrolled in specialised institutions. They also contribute to school identity and community cohesion through performances and festivals.

³ See: <https://www.auditori.cat/en/educational/> and <https://www.liceubarcelona.cat/en/liceuapren>

Exploring Current Trends in Music Education: Challenges and Research

As has been shown throughout the chapter, in Catalonia several current trends and initiatives are shaping the landscape of music education in schools. These developments focus on enhancing access to music, integrating new technologies, and fostering creativity among students.

From the research standpoint, a recent publication provides an overview of music education research conducted in recent years in Catalonia and outlines some of its main challenges (Casals et al., 2024). The key issues highlighted span several areas that should be considered and brought together to ensure a high-quality future in music education. These dimensions can be broadly defined as follows: sociocultural, political and administrative, and education and professional.

Sociocultural dimension

The regional government Generalitat de Catalunya and cultural institutions are promoting arts and culture initiatives that include music, as outlined in Section 3. These initiatives often focus on giving students access to live performances, musical workshops, and opportunities to collaborate with professional musicians. This trend highlights the value of experiential learning in music education, helping students connect theory with practice and experience learning that leaves a lasting impact on people's lives (Carrillo et al. 2017; Casals & Viladot, 2021).

Moreover, globalisation has prompted schools to broaden their music curricula beyond classical traditions to include genres such as jazz, rock, and electronic music. This shift reflects a commitment to cultural diversity, global awareness, and modernised, inclusive, and technology-enhanced music education. One of the spearheads in this field is the pedagogy of world music (González-Martín & Escoda, 2024).

Political and administrative dimension

Recent educational reforms have aimed to make learning more student-centred and promote holistic development, placing a strong emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. In music education, these reforms have encouraged a more integrated approach, embedding arts education across the curriculum.

In addition, there is a growing emphasis on inclusion and diversity in education. Consequently, schools are striving to ensure that music education is accessible to all students, including those with special educational needs. Aligned with principles of Universal Design for Learning adaptive teaching methods and tools are being introduced to make music learning more inclusive, helping students from different backgrounds and abilities participate in musical activities. For instances, music teachers can incorporate a mix of visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic activities to accommodate different learning preferences – such

as combining listening tasks with hands-on instrument playing and movement. They also usually provide accessible digital instruments or simplify parts within ensemble settings to help learners with physical or cognitive challenges participate in performance activities.

Education and professional dimension

A notable development within this dimension is the growing integration of digital technologies. Schools are increasingly incorporating music production software, digital instruments, and online learning platforms, enabling students to compose, produce, and perform music using contemporary tools. These digital resources also enhance the teaching of music theory and composition, providing innovative ways to connect traditional musical knowledge with modern practices.

However, challenges remain. Many generalist teachers lack formal musical training and feel insecure about singing, dancing, or leading musical activities. At the secondary school level, music teachers often face limitations in their didactic foundation and opportunities for innovation.

On a more positive note, recent years have seen significant contributions to the professional and educational landscape of music in schools. These include the promotion of school projects in which music plays a central role, the creation of interdisciplinary initiatives driven by music, the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies, and an increasing emphasis on making music a meaningful and accessible experience for all students.

To conclude the chapter, it is worth emphasising that music education in Catalonia is heterogeneous and constantly evolving within a changing society and educational system in which the arts are often not regarded as a priority. The curriculum nonetheless seeks to recognise the value of music as a vehicle for personal and social development. Given that school and teacher autonomy is also promoted, this mission is ultimately enacted through a wide variety of perspectives, repertoires, and methodologies. In this context, several important challenges remain, including strengthening the preparation of specialist teachers, establishing shared educational frameworks that reflect musical, social, and cultural change, and achieving a balance between music as part of interdisciplinary projects and as a discipline in its own right.

AI Use Statement. During the preparation of this chapter, generative AI tools were used to support language editing, improve clarity of expression, assist with translation of official legal terminology into English. The AI tools were not used to generate original arguments, analysis, or interpretations. All content was reviewed, validated, and approved by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the final text.

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Anna Houmann, Erik Lundahl & Lina Van Dooren

Music Education in Sweden

Creativity within a Decentralised System

Abstract

This chapter outlines the development and current landscape of music education in Sweden, where a national curriculum is combined with decentralised implementation across municipalities and schools. We trace historical foundations from early choral and nation-building traditions to today's emphasis on creativity, cultural diversity, and digital practices. Concrete examples illustrate how teachers adapt content, resources, and assessment within varied local conditions. The chapter also highlights persistent challenges – such as unequal resources and differing curriculum interpretations – alongside innovations including electronic digital instruments, interdisciplinary collaborations, and practice-based research. Together, these perspectives depict a dynamic system balancing innovation and inclusion.

Introduction

Sweden is a geographically expansive and culturally diverse country with a centralised educational framework governed by national curricula. Despite this centralised structure, the implementation of educational policies – including music education – is shaped by local municipalities, resulting in varied practices across regions and schools. This chapter offers a contextualised exploration of school music education in Sweden, drawing on national data, policy documents, and practitioner insights.

Our contribution is intentionally selective rather than exhaustive. It reflects our professional perspectives as educators and researchers within the Swedish music education landscape. We acknowledge that this chapter does not encompass all voices, particularly those of Indigenous Sámi communities or other minority groups, whose perspectives merit dedicated attention. By focusing on key structures, trends, and challenges, we aim to provide a meaningful overview of how music is taught, experienced, and valued in Swedish schools today.

From Policy to Practice: Swedish Music Education in Context

Sweden's educational system is characterised by democratic governance and decentralised responsibility: the Swedish parliament formulates overarching educational frameworks, while 290 municipalities interpret and enact these frameworks in local schools. This structure produces regional variation in how music education is organised and delivered, even with a shared national curriculum.

Five national agencies – including the Swedish National Agency for Education, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate and the National Agency for Special Needs Education – provide guidance, research, quality assurance and support for equitable and inclusive arts education.

Compulsory, tax-funded schooling and legislation such as the Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800), and the Discrimination Act (SFS 2008:567), and the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) in 2020, frame music education as a right within an inclusive school system. At the same time, Sweden's partially marketised school model, where parents may choose between municipal and independent schools, enables the establishment of music-profiled schools but also raises concerns about equity and segregation (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Fjellman et al., 2019).

A Brief Trajectory: How Music Education Became What It Is Today

Today's policy landscape is layered upon a long historical development in Swedish music education. Since the introduction of the public school system in 1842, music (initially through singing) held a central but ideologically shifting role. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Swedish school music was strongly tied to Christian morality, nation-building, and collective singing traditions, including psalms, folk songs and patriotic repertoire (Bouij, 2014). These ideals dominated until mid-century.

During the post-war period and the introduction of the comprehensive school (Sweden National Agency for Education, 1962), progressive pedagogies inspired by John Dewey (1916/1999) shifted the focus toward creativity, children's needs, and personal

development. This is visible in early curricula such as the Curriculum for the compulsory school, Lgr 62 (Swedish National Agency for Education, 1962), which framed music as a means to enrich pupils' lives through aesthetic-practical education, and Lgr 69, which emphasised relevant repertoire and global musical influences. By the time of Lgr 80, music education was positioned as part of students' active knowledge-building and cultural understanding (Swedish National Agency for Education, 1962/1969/1980).

A more substantial reorientation occurred in the Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the preschool class and the school age educare, Lpo 94 (Swedish National Agency for Education, 1994), where Sweden adopted outcome-based governance and a constructivist view of knowledge. Here music was described as a subject with its own core knowledge – music-making, listening, understanding, and creating – rather than merely supporting other school subjects. The curriculum, Lgr 11 (with revisions in 2019) (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2019), continued this trend toward explicit goals and knowledge requirements, but research shows that its breadth and detail sometimes push teachers toward surface-level coverage rather than depth (Zandén & Thorgersen, 2015). At the same time, music remains one of the subjects with the least guaranteed teaching time in the national timetable (230 hours across nine years).

How the policy landscape shape practice in music education

Music education in Sweden reflects its intertwined historical, political and cultural influences. The decentralised system gives municipalities and schools considerable flexibility to shape music teaching according to local needs and traditions. Yet this also leads to significant variation, and research highlights challenges related to uneven resources, differing interpretations of the curriculum, and the tension between practical music-making and measurable learning outcomes.

Teachers navigate expectations that music should both cultivate cultural heritage and support democratic and multicultural values. They also manage competing visions of the subject – whether music's value lies in aesthetic experience, personal expression, social belonging, or disciplinary knowledge – echoing long-standing debates in Swedish and international music education. As historical analyses show, these tensions are not new: they have roots in earlier framings of music as moral education, national cultivation, self-expression, or practical training.

In practice, Swedish music teachers often blend these traditions, fostering creativity, participation and collaborative music-making while also responding to the curriculum's explicit learning goals. National agencies provide structure for consistency, but everyday practice is shaped by local decisions, historical legacies, and teachers' professional judgement.

Music in Schools: From Classroom Time to Specialised Profiles

Music education in Swedish schools is shaped by national curriculum guidelines but implemented with flexibility at the local level. In practice, music educators exercise considerable professional judgement over pedagogy and repertoire, which are frequently adapted to the student group and the school's context. Music is a compulsory subject throughout primary and lower secondary education, with structured time allocations that vary across stages. In preschool, music is integrated into broader aesthetic learning, emphasising creative expression through singing, movement, and play. Although there is no prescribed time allocation in preschool, music is widely regarded as essential to early childhood development.

In compulsory schooling (ages 6–15), students receive a total of 240 hours of music education, distributed across years 1–3, 4–6, and 7–9. Schools decide how to organise these hours, often rotating with other arts subjects. For example, music may be taught intensively during one term, containing a wide range of focus areas such as ensemble and instrumental performance, music reading, artistic expression and music history then to be replaced with visual arts in the following term. This flexibility allows schools to tailor arts education to their resources and pedagogical priorities.

Within the compulsory years, ensemble work and repertoire are deliberately broad. Typical projects include pop-band instrument groups, body-percussion and drum ensembles, and whole-class arrangements of Swedish traditional songs alongside contemporary student-selected hits. Teachers frequently co-curate repertoire with students to support motivation, voice, and identity work.

At upper secondary level (ages 16–18), music becomes optional unless students enrol in the Aesthetic Programme with a specialised music profile. These students complete a full 2,500-credit three-year programme that combines general subjects, aesthetic core subjects, and specialised music courses. Depending on profile and local expertise, programmes may include ensemble performance, music theory, songwriting, music production, choir, instrument/voice, EDI, and more, often at progressive levels. Some schools also run advanced/gifted strands, offering weekly one-to-one instrumental tuition, chamber coaching, or collaborations with municipal arts schools, typically culminating in public performances at local venues or festivals.

International schools (municipal or independent) serve pupils with limited residency in Sweden or Swedish pupils returning from abroad. International schools do not follow the national curriculum, but instead offer international programmes, like the International Baccalaureate (IBO, n.d.), or another country's national curriculum (SFS 2010:800). Music education at these schools thus varies greatly, from basic lessons to specialised string tuition, and due to the high turn-over often accommodate complete beginners as well as highly proficient learners in the same class.

Teacher qualifications are regulated nationally. In preschool and the early primary years, generalist teachers often deliver music; specialist music teachers are more common from the later primary years onwards. Upper secondary music teachers typically hold specialised degrees with an instrument/genre focus and often teach across levels or combined school roles with work in municipal music and arts schools, strengthening progression pathways.

Resources for music education vary significantly between municipalities and schools. Local authorities provide most funding; national grants, such as *Skapande Skola* (Creating School), support long-term arts collaboration. Provision can range from digitally equipped studios with a class set of MIDI keyboards and microphones, to settings where teachers rely on one guitar, handheld percussion, and a portable speaker. While most schools are publicly funded, independent schools may have distinct art profiles and access to different resources, contributing to disparities in musical provision.

Extra-curricular music is widespread and often teacher- or student-initiated. Schools commonly run choirs, bands, musicals, and instrumental groups, sometimes integrated into after-school programmes or in collaboration with local arts schools. Annual events such as Saint Lucy's Day, are traditional highlights in many schools. In some cases, upper secondary students perform in compulsory schools as part of ensemble learning and outreach. Furthermore, extra-curricular activities also include those initiated by students, where they act as initiators, subsequently assuming responsibility for planning and implementing such activities. Producing musicals, student revues, organising open mics and working in association-based programmes providing access to rehearsal spaces beyond regular school hours are common. In such cases schools typically support such activities by making facilities and equipment available. Several municipalities also offer summer employment programmes for young musicians, who plan and perform outdoor city-square concerts, host interactive rhythm workshops in libraries, and bring live music to eldercare and early-years settings.

Specialised music schools offer enriched programmes for highly motivated students. Notable examples include *Adolf Fredriks Musikklasser* (Stockholm) – renowned for daily choral work and frequent public performances – and *Oxievångsskolan* (Malmö), which integrates ensemble projects and collaborations with local professional musicians. The diversity of offerings reflects both the cultural value placed on music and the decentralised nature of educational governance.

Curriculum and Assessment: Structure, Implementation, and Equity

Music education in Sweden is governed by a national curriculum developed by the Swedish National Agency for Education. The curriculum outlines the rationale, aims, core content, and assessment criteria for music across school levels. They emphasise music as aesthetic expression, cultural participation, and personal development, highlighting creativity, communication, identity, and increasing digital competence.

In compulsory school, the music curricula (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2024a; 2024b) is commonly structured around three progressive thematic areas:

- (1) Making and creating music (singing, playing, composing, arranging, improvising),
- (2) Tools of music (elements of music, notation and symbols, instrument technique, digital tools),
- (3) Context and functions of music (listening, analysing, and understanding music across cultural and historical settings).

Concrete classroom examples include:

- Songwriting units where pupils co-write lyrics and melodies, record demos in GarageBand, Soundtrap, or BandLab, and present drafts for peer feedback;
- Beat-making projects using DAWs in urban schools with strong hip-hop cultures;
- Listening inquiries on film music and protest songs, linking to Swedish, social studies, or civics;
- Cross-curricular work with science (e.g., sound waves, acoustics) or modern language (analysing lyric content and translation).

At upper secondary school, music is divided into multiple subjects: e.g., ensemble, music theory, ear training, choir, songwriting, music production, and instrument/voice – each with distinct aims, content, and level progression. Access to the full range typically requires enrolment in the Aesthetic programme (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2025), although individual schools nuance their subject menu based on profile, resources, and staff expertise. It is common for instance, for one school to foreground rock and pop ensemble and arranging, while another prioritises choral traditions or music production.

Teacher autonomy is substantial; there are no prescribed textbooks, and teachers decide repertoire, sequencing, and methods. This supports innovation and cultural responsiveness but presumes strong professional competence and access to adequate resources. In practice, many educators co-create units with students, integrate local traditions (e.g., Sámi musical forms in northern municipalities), and adjust pedagogy to students' needs (e.g., flexible groupings, scaffolded parts, and multimodal materials).

Student voice is an explicit principle in Swedish curricula. The national curriculum includes a section on pupils' responsibilities and influence, encouraging participatory learning environments. However, implementation varies: in some school students co-select performance repertoire, propose thematic units (film music, identity and music, global beats), or participate in arts councils that help plan events. Elsewhere, it appears more informally through choice tasks and classroom dialogue (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2015).

Assessment blends formative and summative approaches and typically triangulates performance, creation, and reflection. Evidence may include:

- Live or recorded performances (solo/ensemble) with self- and peer-feedback;
- Original compositions/productions, score or DAW projects with process commentaries;
- Listening journals or analytic essays that situate music in cultural/historical contexts.

There are no national standardised exams in music; grades are awarded against national criteria. Teachers might use clear rubrics, stepwise success criteria, and student conferencing to make expectations transparent.

Equity and inclusion are threaded through the curriculum's value base (democracy, equality, participation). In music, inclusive practice is visible in differentiated parts, adaptive instruments, color-coded or simplified notation, choice-based tasks, and varied evidence types (audio, video, notation, text). Schools with limited resources often prioritise high-impact, low-cost ensembles (e.g., body percussion, classroom percussion) while applying for *Skapande skola* fund to bring in visiting artists, run workshops, or co-produce performances that extend the school's capacity. Although global citizenship is not explicitly addressed in the national curriculum, it is often reflected in the mission statements of international and independent schools along with a focus on social and environmental sustainability.

Professional learning remains critical amid curricular updates and evolving practices. Teachers engage through subject associations, initial teacher education partnerships, and local networks (often inter-school) to share repertoire banks, assessment approaches, digital workflows, and inclusion strategies. Support for music teachers is also available through national associations and teacher education institutions, although the visibility and impact of these networks vary. Continued professional development and collaboration are essential for maintaining high-quality music education, especially in light of curriculum reforms and evolving pedagogical practices.

Challenges and Innovations in Swedish Music Education

Swedish music education is undergoing a period of transformation, shaped by evolving pedagogical practices, curriculum reforms, and broader societal shifts. While the national curriculum provides a strong foundation for inclusive and creative music learning, several challenges persist in its implementation across schools (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2015; 2024a; 2024b; 2025).

One of the most pressing issues is the unequal distribution of resources. Municipalities vary widely in their capacity to fund music education, resulting in disparities in access to instruments, rehearsal spaces, and digital tools. In some cases, music teachers report having budgets so limited that they can only afford basic maintenance, such as replacing guitar strings (Ruin, 2023). These constraints affect the quality and breadth of musical experiences available to students, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas.

Curriculum implementation also presents challenges. A 2019 report from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate revealed that not all elements of the national music syllabus are consistently represented in upper secondary classrooms. While creative activities such as composition are present, they are often underdeveloped due to limited time, space, and teacher support. Stable working conditions, professional collaboration, and access to appropriate facilities are essential for realising the curriculum's full potential.

Despite these challenges, Swedish music education is marked by a spirit of innovation. There has been a notable shift toward incorporating popular music and informal learning practices, aiming to increase student engagement and relevance (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010). This approach recognises students' musical identities and encourages exploration beyond traditional genres and methods such as introducing electronic digital instruments (Houmann, Barfalk, Lundahl & Berlin Englund, 2025). The introduction of electronic digital instruments, or EDI, stems from the idea of creating space for all musical identities of music students within the framework of their music education. EDI serves as an example on how Swedish music education innovations advances the field of music education, EDI is as of 1 July 2025 formally a subject within the curriculum of the upper secondary education reform Gy25 (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2025).

Digitalisation is another area of growth. Teachers increasingly use digital tools for music production, notation, performance and collaborative learning. Online platforms and software have expanded the possibilities for creative expression and made music education more accessible, especially in remote or under-resourced schools. The norm, particularly in upper secondary schools, of providing a digital device per student enabled a greater and equitable access to digital tools and software. The increased access has contributed to a more systematic use of digital tools and pushed the development of innovative music education practices by teachers and empowered a wider range for students to engage with

music in. Commonly, students engage in and collaborate creatively online in an informal international music community via social media and video chat forums developing new methods and approaches for musical collaboration and creation.

Inclusivity remains a central concern. Research highlights the role of music in fostering belonging and social cohesion, particularly for newly arrived immigrant students. Projects such as *Tvåornas kör* (Choir for second graders) (e.g. Lundeborg, 2025) and *Hela skolan sjunger* (The whole school sings) (e.g. Lundahl, 2019) exemplify how music can build community and support integration. Similarly, initiatives like *Libravoice* (Royal College of Music, 2025) and *El Sistema Sweden* (el Sistema, n.d.) aim to counteract segregation and promote equal access to cultural participation.

Recent curriculum reforms in both compulsory and upper secondary education reflect a broader commitment to sustainability, digital competence, and critical thinking (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2024a; 2024b; 2025). These changes align with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) and signal a shift toward more holistic and future-oriented education. However, successful implementation depends on ongoing professional development, adequate funding, and inclusive pedagogical strategies.

In summary, Swedish music education faces structural and practical challenges, but it is also a site of dynamic innovation. Through collaborative efforts among educators, researchers, and policymakers, the field continues to evolve in response to the needs of students and society. One promising avenue for addressing these challenges is the integration of practice-based research through the national initiative ULF (Education, Learning, Research)(ULF-avtal, 2025). At the Malmö Academy of Music ULF has enabled long-term collaborations between researchers, school practitioners and music teacher training, fostering projects that explore digital instruments in music education and the evolving role of the music teacher (Malmö Academy of Music, 2025). These initiatives have not only strengthened the scientific foundation of music in schools and teacher education but also created new spaces for dialogue and co-creation where educators, music teacher students, and researchers collectively shape future directions for music education and music education research. Similarly, the Royal College of Music in Stockholm (KMH) has engaged in ULF through partnerships with schools like *Kulturama* and *Fryshuset*, focusing on ensemble interaction, performance anxiety, and collegial development. These projects, rooted in teachers' lived experiences, exemplify how practice-based research can inform and transform music education in meaningful ways (Kungliga Musikhögskolan, n.d.).

Conclusion

Music education in Sweden is characterised by a dynamic interplay between national policy, local implementation, and cultural values. While the centralised curriculum provides a coherent framework for teaching and learning, the decentralised implementation allows for diverse interpretations and practices across municipalities and schools. This flexibility supports innovation but also contributes to disparities in access and quality.

Throughout this chapter, we have highlighted the strengths of Swedish music education, including its emphasis on creativity, inclusion, and student agency. We have also addressed persistent challenges, such as unequal resource distribution, limited professional support, and the need for more consistent curriculum implementation. At the same time, we have seen how educators, institutions, and communities are responding with innovative practices that promote equity, engagement, and cultural participation.

As Sweden continues to reform its educational system and align with global goals for sustainable development, music education remains a vital space for fostering personal growth, social cohesion, and democratic values. The future of music education in Sweden will depend on sustained investment, collaborative research, and a commitment to an inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy.

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Harmonising Diversity

School Music Education in Multilingual Switzerland

Abstract

Music education in Switzerland, a federal state with three official languages, is shaped by its political and multilinguistic context. This chapter will provide information about the evolution of music as a teaching subject in compulsory and upper secondary schools and its specificities due to the recent introduction of regional curricula in the German, French and Italian-speaking regions. Moreover, we present some challenges linked to a unique situation in Europe: since 2012, an article of the Federal Constitution sets out key objectives for extracurricular and school music education. Finally, trends of recent and current challenges in practice and research will be discussed.

Introduction

Switzerland is a multilingual and federalist country with a democratic political system where 26 cantons have a high degree of responsibility and autonomy in the organisation and administration of schools. Due to this structure, Switzerland faces the challenge of trying to harmonise curricula between the German, French and Italian-speaking regions.¹ Yet it is also the only country in Europe integrating an article into the Federal Constitution which sets out key objectives for extracurricular and school music

¹ The fourth national language is Romansh, but only German, French, and Italian are fully official languages for federal administration, requiring all federal laws and documents including national curricula to be published in them.

education. Our contribution will outline some historical and contemporary aspects of Swiss school music education which are shaped by this political and multilingual context.

From Past to Contemporary Swiss Music Education

Until the 1970s, music education in schools in Switzerland was focussed on singing (Joliat, 2009; Kleinen, 2006). The repertoire in primary schools consisted of songs from multilingual Switzerland, neighbouring countries and around the world, while secondary schools mainly focused on folk songs, classical pieces or choral works. The repertoire proposed in song books since 1900 in the different linguistic regions can be considered as a politico-historical choice as it reflects cultural values promoted through music education as highlighted by Joliat and Stadler Elmer (2022). A shift towards a multicultural and more pop-music oriented repertoire can be observed during the 1980s, a period where song books with a broad repertoire were available and student-centred teaching methods were implemented.

Thanks to the broadened notion of music, which encompasses popular music genres, instrumental music and music-and-movement, school music has grown significantly, accompanied by not only performative but also dance-like, compositional, and creative approaches to music. The subject, which was previously referred to as “singing” in some cantons, was renamed as *Musik* (German), *musique* (French), *educazione musicale* (Italian) (Marty, 2021).

Different collaborations have led to some new initiatives in school music education, such as the establishment of wind and string classes in some primary schools in partnership with music schools after 2010. These short-term-projects are based on co-teaching between the generalist classroom teacher and an instrumental teacher. Depending on regional financial support this offer is limited but became common practice from 2000 onwards. A special programme with 4–5 lessons per week has been implemented in several primary and secondary schools across Switzerland since 1988, based on the assumption that intensive music education can improve pupils’ overall performance (Weber et al. 1993).

Even if some benefits on socio-emotional competencies have been shown by research, the experience was not further generalised, but over the next decades, the programme was continued under slightly adapted forms (Zulauf, 2007), the year 2012 is considered key for music education in Switzerland, as Article 67a was added to the Federal Constitution following a referendum held in September 2012. This additional article sets out the objectives of music education in five key areas which require the promotion of music education, especially for children and young people. The article addresses musically gifted children, as well as the improvement of equal opportunities and quality in the promotion of broad-based and talented musicians. For school music education, the article

states that high-quality music education in schools should be ensured and that the federal government and cantons should foster harmonisation of music education objectives. A national curriculum for secondary schools has been progressively introduced since the 2010s. As a first tangible result, the school curricula were harmonised, but substantial differences remain between the cantons, mostly in teacher education and resources allocated for general music education (Ineichen, 2021). We acknowledge that the goals for a high-quality music education in schools have not yet been realised, which is partially due to the federalist structure of the educational system with a large autonomy for each canton.

Evolving Structures, Roles and Resources

Music Education as a Component of General Education

Music education is embedded in the Swiss compulsory school system which comprises three main levels: kindergarten/pre-primary (about 4 to 5-year-old students), primary (6 to 12-year-old) and lower secondary (13 to 15-year-old)². One or two lessons are taught to the whole class at primary level, usually by the classroom teacher. In addition to music lessons, courses combining music and movement are taught by specialist teachers in various formats and under different names in nursery and primary schools: Music-and-Movement (*Musik und Bewegung*) in the German-speaking areas, which is often taught in smaller groups, or Dalcroze Eurythmics (*Rythmique*) in the French-speaking regions. These classes are usually held once or twice a week and are voluntary for pupils in German-speaking cantons, but usually integrated into the teaching schedule. This firm anchoring in the timetable was drastically reduced in some cantons with the introduction of the new national curricula (since the 2010s) and has significantly weakened the quality of basic music education.

During the three years of lower secondary, music is taught by a semi-specialist or specialist music, mostly one lesson per week. However, in some cantons, music education is only required during the first year and thereafter offered as an elective course. That means that some basic competencies differ from one region to another and this had led to actual challenges for curricula harmonisation.

In upper secondary schools (15/16 to 18-year-old students), the elective status is reinforced as students can choose between music and visual arts. Nevertheless, specific optional courses with 4–5 lessons per week are offered during the 3 or 4 years of this level where students are taught by a highly qualified music teacher. Only in German-speaking regions schools do offer individual instrumental or singing lessons as part of the music curriculum, although an attempt was made recently to adopt this practice in all linguistic regions.

² Slight differences can be found in each region.

Promoting Musical Talents through Partnerships with Other Institutions

The promotion of talent was enshrined in Switzerland with the adoption of Article 67a of the Federal Constitution, which sets out specific measures. Most cantons have a programme to support musically talented pupils called *Junge Talente Musik* (Young Musical Talents). These programmes have led to the creation of talent classes in state schools, partnerships with music schools, and pre-college courses for particularly gifted pupils.

Due to this initiative, children and young people in rural areas and regions can also benefit from state support to develop their musical skills. The quality of the Young Musical Talents programme is continuously monitored by the Federal Office of Culture, the cantons and the municipalities. This example of political engagement on different levels for specialist music education could serve as a model for cooperation in the field of general music education.

Music Teachers' Multiple Roles and Profiles

The Swiss education system is characterised by the presence of generalist teachers who have undergone training specifically designed for primary education where music is one subject among many others. These educators who work as classroom teachers receive their musical instruction at institutions of teacher education, with some programmes offering a specialisation in Music-and-Movement (Ineichen, 2021).

The subject teacher principle is applicable at the secondary level, be it a one-subject teacher with a bachelor's degree in music, followed by a master's degree in education – as in the French and Italian speaking regions – or a four-subject trained teacher as in the German part of the country. For upper secondary level across the country, school music teachers are trained with bachelor's and master's degrees in music which are offered at music colleges, usually in cooperation with a teacher training college in the region.

Teachers of the additional subjects of Music-and-Movement/Dalcroze Eurhythmics complete their studies at music colleges. This university degree confers comprehensive training in instrumental, methodological, and didactic domains. However, it should be noted that the training programmes offered by these institutions are not formally recognised by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education. This is primarily because the generalist training provided by teacher training colleges is considered more suitable for primary school teaching by the cantons.

Resources in Transition

Regarding the resources made available for music education, the aspects of designing the classroom, medias, and teaching material, as well as further training, should be highlighted with this content. It is evident that schools on all levels are not equipped with standardised instruments. Nevertheless, it is common practice for music classrooms to be

equipped with a keyboard instrument, either a piano or a keyboard, and an audio system. The instruments of Carl Orff's music education programme, namely mallet instruments and small percussion instruments, are also utilised extensively. In secondary schools, pupils frequently have access to band instruments and even band rooms that are permanently equipped.

In accordance with the national education strategy, the cantons receive support to help them navigate the changes brought about by digitalisation in the education system. With the implementation of the curriculum, primary school pupils are furnished with the requisite digital media. However, at the secondary level, many schools adopt a bring-your-own-device (BYOD) strategy. To ensure equal opportunities for all, pupils receive material support if necessary.

The harmonisation of the curriculum has precipitated the development of new teaching materials in numerous cantons, with some of these materials being mandated for use in schools. Nevertheless, there has been no development of a comprehensive national teaching resource. The effective use of educational resources provided by the cantons can be linked to the professional profile of the teachers and may depend on the perceived competence for music teaching. A prevalent sentiment among generalist teachers in primary music education is a perceived lack of confidence in their ability to utilise scores, work sheets or play instruments to accompany their students (Chardonnens & Pasquier, 2025). Even if it is encouraging to observe that educators are granted a significant degree of autonomy in the selection of teaching materials, it is often challenging for novice teachers and generalist teachers to use or to compile teaching materials independently (Chardonnens & Pasquier, 2025; Schumacher, 2002). As audio devices are currently used to sustain song-based activities, a critical view and specific training on how to employ these resources is needed (Savona, 2021).

In addition, teachers are increasingly searching for teaching materials on social media and in specialist group chats. AI support for teaching, whether in planning or for teaching materials, is for now a matter of current teaching practice and therefore a challenge for teacher training all over Switzerland.

Teachers of all levels have the opportunity to undertake regular further training through courses offered by teacher training colleges, music colleges, private educational publishers and associations. It is incumbent upon educational institutions to provide a certain amount of financial support for the continuing professional development of their teaching staff. The offerings range from project support like children's choirs in schools to individual coaching and the nationwide *School Music Forum*.

Towards Harmonisation of Music Curricula

Restructuring of Curricula for Compulsory Schools

The progressive introduction of a national curriculum since the 2010s marked a significant development in the harmonisation of music education for primary and lower secondary schools across the culturally diverse landscape of the country (EDK, 2010). As a result, a common framework curriculum in three languages was developed: the German-language *Lehrplan 21* (LP21), the French-language *Plan d'études romand* (PER), and the Italian-language *Piano di studio* (PdS).

Despite the development of distinct curricula for each of the three language regions, all three programmes are structured around a few central themes and have some commonalities: music listening, singing, playing, music creation (sound exploration, improvising, composing, and the use of other art forms to express musical features), and theoretical knowledge as integrated into musical practice. The creative dimension has become increasingly important in recent years but still needs to be implemented more specifically in schools, which also requires adequate subject-specific teacher training. Music creation is based on sound exploration and basic melodic and rhythmic improvisation in the first years (primary school). More complex projects may be realised in lower secondary, whereas the upper secondary curriculum introduced music creation in terms of improvising, composing and producing only in 2023 (Chatelain, 2023). Music perception is described as a separate category in all three curricula, with the development of listening skills being the focus. Technical skills related to the voice such as chanting and singing are developed in more detail in the German version than in the two other programmes, but singing continues to occupy an important place in all three versions. The requirements for music theory knowledge, such as reading music and notation, which are anchored in the curriculum, remain open, as no uniform competence levels have been established. This also applies to the role of culture, which can encompass both music history and music sociology aspects.

At present, the curriculum is the subject of much debate, particularly because, as in many institutions, music teacher training programmes have been reduced in recent years. In order to assure the competencies necessary to deliver high-quality music lessons, a nation-wide collaboration among Swiss music academies, teacher training colleges, and teachers' associations was started in 2025. Under the guidance of a steering group coordinated by the Swiss Music Council, this project aims to conduct research and enhance the quality of music education according to the article 67a of the Swiss constitution.

A New Framework for Upper Secondary Schools

As a result of the competence orientation of the harmonised school curricula for primary and lower secondary schools, a new supra-regional framework curriculum is currently being developed for upper secondary schools (EDK, 2024). Since these schools fall under federal jurisdiction, an assessment regulation with a recommended framework curriculum for the cantons was already developed for this level in 1994. Still upper secondary schools will continue to have a high degree of autonomy even with the new version as cantonal or even individual school guidelines will be elaborated.

Music education has been divided into the following areas of competence: performance, creation, perception/reception, and reflection/analysis (EDK, 2024, pp. 103–104). It is based on a broad concept of music and enables a diverse approach to music, with an action-oriented method being mandatory. In addition to subject-specific competences, the subject's contribution to the development of interdisciplinary competences such as cooperation, critical thinking, communication, and general study skills is outlined. This puts music on an equal footing with other subjects.

Assessment as a Challenge for Teachers

Since the introduction of the competence-based curriculum, there has been active discussion about appropriate formative and summative assessments. In compulsory schools, musical competencies are assessed in various ways. During the first years of primary school, a descriptive assessment is provided whereas grades are progressively introduced later. The issue of assessment in music is a recurring topic of discussion in teacher education. On the one hand, the curricula are relatively open, leaving room for individual interpretation of the content. On the other hand, this freedom can also lead to very different content being taught and assessed. These assessments must comply with certain cantonal requirements, which sometimes contradict subject-specific didactic approaches to assessment and established teaching practice.

Formal final examinations exist at upper secondary level if music is chosen as a supplementary or major subject. In this case, the respective schools set their examination requirements in line with the topics covered in their individual school curriculum or in the curriculum based on the regional framework. Evaluating musical performances is part of the subject-specific teaching content of music at primary and secondary school level. The assessment of singing has recently been discussed in a doctoral study to provide teachers with research-based tools in the German-speaking regions (Imthurn, 2023). Closer inter-regional collaboration on this subject is currently being developed.

Exploring Current Trends and Challenges for Swiss Music Education

One of the main challenges for music education in Switzerland is maintaining the quality of music teaching in primary schools. Moreover, music education in lower secondary schools faces a lack of qualified teachers as observed in some cantons, but no recent statistical information is available (Ehrismann, 2023). Some of these problems were highlighted by Ineichen (2021) in her research about the basic music education in Switzerland, showing the gap between existing practice and political ambitions as formulated in the constitutional article 67a. To address this shortcoming, the aforementioned project led by the Swiss Music Council, which is currently underway, calls on associations and organisations to collect structured data in order to stimulate discussion with the relevant education policy authorities and enable appropriate measures to be taken in coordination between all cantons.

In recent years, inclusive approaches should have been introduced on all levels and in all subjects of education in line with the requirements of general educational policy. In music education, it must be noted that this topic needs to be developed both in teacher training programmes and in research. This challenge could serve as a catalyst for collaboration between teacher training institutions and strengthen research.

Music education research has been developed increasingly since the establishment of universities of teacher education in the 2000s with a growing number of doctoral dissertations, mostly realised in international collaboration (Chatelain & Huber, 2023). Although progress is being made in the development of research programmes, the major challenge lies in continuing to develop these relatively new offerings despite significant financial cutbacks. Nevertheless, there is a wide range of actual and current projects which are also influenced by the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Swiss educational landscape.

The collaborative research *The song leading capacity – developing professionalism in teacher education* led by Stefanie Stadler Elmer and François Joliat between 2018 and 2022 was an exemplary collaboration between German-and French-speaking researchers and doctoral students. This research investigated the song-leading practices of pre-service teachers in primary music education in different teacher training institutions. Other doctoral studies or research projects explored the challenges for generalist teachers in primary education, for example creativity in music teaching, teaching skills for music listening and, within an intercantonal project in the French-speaking part (2017–2021), skill acquisition in rhythm learning. Current projects in primary music education are focused on generalist teachers' professional competencies including creative music teaching.

Research in lower secondary music education was mostly performed through institutional or individual projects about various themes like music education for all, assessment of singing, interdisciplinary approaches to music learning, cultural diversity in music education, teacher identity formation, or the role of embodiment in teaching collective music creation.

The investigation of practice, knowledge production and discourses in music education has been a key aspect in German-speaking music education research since 2010 (Huber et al., 2021). This topic is currently being explored on the level of upper secondary education through a large, funded project which is focussed on music teaching and teacher education. *Gymnasialer Musikunterricht als Spiegel einer praxisbasierten Didaktik* (High school music education as a reflection of practice-based teaching methods; Camp et al., 2023–2027) is a large collaborative study involving three Swiss German universities and colleges which is investigating music lessons at upper secondary schools and aims to identify the knowledge constructed through practice and discourse.

As a part of the ‘Strengthening the Focus on Science’ initiative by Swiss universities from 2021 to 2024, music education research, teaching, and the corresponding professional field will be networked even more closely in central Switzerland. Regular exchanges will be initiated for research-based further development of music education internships.

A common goal of research efforts is to contribute to the establishment of scientific, systematic investigation of issues in music education, a domain which has been largely shaped by practice in Switzerland (Blanchard, 2025; Huber & Marty, 2021). In our view, a more extensive interregional collaboration would be desirable, both for teacher training and for research.

Conclusion

Switzerland, as a multilingual country with a federal structure, presents some challenges for a progressive and high-quality music education for all. Music is established as a subject in the curriculum, but despite harmonised curricula for compulsory schools, music education remains disparate between the regions. As requested by several professional associations, its quality should be subject to more thorough monitoring and review. In this context, greater attention should be paid to content and volume of teacher training programmes, especially as these are increasingly being cut back. In this perspective, the implementation of the article 67a of the Federal Constitution, unique in Europe, remains a major challenge for music education in Switzerland. Strengthening the link between practice and research as well as further interregional collaboration between teacher training colleges, music academies, professional and political associations could contribute to this objective.

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School Music Education in Türkiye

Policies, Practices, and Pathways

Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of school music education in Türkiye by examining the interaction between historical developments, institutional arrangements, and curricular frameworks. Tracing the evolution of music education from the early Republican period to recent reforms, it situates school music within a centrally organised education system shaped by both continuity and change. The chapter addresses key structural dimensions of school music education, including curricular organisation, teaching conditions, and learning opportunities across different school contexts. It concludes by outlining current developments associated with the introduction of the 2025 Music Curriculum and highlighting emerging directions and ongoing challenges in Turkish school music education.

Introduction

Türkiye is a sovereign republic with a centralised education system, and Turkish is the official language. The Ministry of National Education (*Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı*, [MEB]) is the main authority for formulating, implementing, and supervising education policies. Its structure comprises a central organisation, provincial directorates, and overseas offices. The central organisation includes departments overseeing curriculum development, primary and secondary education, vocational and technical training, and special education and lifelong learning. Provincial directorates manage education locally, while overseas offices provide services for citizens abroad (MEB, 2025a). Since education in Türkiye is organised within this

highly centralised and standardised framework, school subjects – including music – are shaped by national policies, curricula, and implementation practices defined by MEB.

Accordingly, this chapter offers a comprehensive overview of school music education in Türkiye, tracing its development from historical foundations to contemporary practices. It explores how music education is organised within the school system, including lesson time, teacher profiles, resources, extra-curricular activities, and specialised schools. The chapter also examines the structure and implementation of the national music curriculum, approaches to assessment, and recent curricular reforms, concluding with a discussion of current trends and emerging directions shaped by the introduction of the 2025 Music Curriculum.

Context: From Past to Contemporary Music Education in Türkiye

Following the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923, music education in Türkiye has evolved in close relation to the cultural and educational reforms shaping the new Republic. Guided by a broader modernisation agenda, the new Republic oriented itself toward Western musical and pedagogical practices, which in turn led to the formal incorporation of Western music into the national music education system.

An early milestone was the establishment of the *Musiki Muallim Mektebi* (Music Teacher Training School) in 1924, the first institution dedicated to training music teachers and professional musicians. In the same year, the first music curriculum was introduced, formally incorporating music into primary education with an initial emphasis on singing and basic music theory (Uçan, 2005). Revisions in 1936 and 1948 shifted attention towards musical literacy by foregrounding pedagogical practices such as teaching songs by ear, using singing games, and developing inner hearing as a foundational skill (MEB, 1948; Sazak et al., 2014). The 1968 curriculum marked an important reorientation by strengthening systematic vocal training, group singing, and choral activities, and by enriching the repertoire with folk and school songs alongside Western music examples, thereby fostering collective music-making and a shared musical culture in schools (MEB, 1971; Sun, 1969; Say, 2005; Uçan, 2005). The 1994 programme introduced a more structured design, organising content into units with defined objectives, measurable behaviours, and suggested teaching, assessment, and evaluation procedures, reflecting an increased focus on learning outcomes (Özgül, 2021). In line with broader educational reforms, the 2006 curriculum brought a significant shift toward a constructivist and student-centred approach, explicitly integrating creativity into music education for the first time (Kalyoncu & Özeke, 2016). Within this framework, an activity-based, learning-by-doing approach was introduced to teachers in all subjects, including music. This approach encouraged improvisation, composition, movement, and technology-supported practices, while also

referencing international pedagogical models such as Dacroze, Orff, and Kodaly, thereby connecting Turkish practice to global trends (MEB, 2007; Albuz & Demirci, 2018). The 2018 curriculum retained this student-centred orientation while also highlighting musical heritage (Turkish folk and art music), values education, and the use of digital resources, aiming to balance the preservation of national identity with openness to international repertoires and perspectives (MEB, 2018). Notably, one of the learning fields of the 2006 curriculum – listening, singing, and playing – was revised in 2018 by removing the “playing” component, so that instrumental performance was no longer included in the programme. Although no explicit justification is provided in the curriculum documents, this change may be associated with practical constraints in school settings, such as large class sizes and the challenges of implementing instrumental instruction within limited instructional time and resources.

By late 2025, a new national music curriculum had been introduced and was being implemented in phases, beginning with Grades 1, 5, and 9. Accordingly, the main discussion in this chapter draws on the 2018 curriculum, while the concepts and innovations of the 2025 curriculum are briefly addressed in the “Current Trends” section below. Considered alongside earlier curricular phases – from early Republican efforts shaped by modernisation ideals to establish a shared musical culture, through periods emphasising systematic instruction, learning outcomes, creativity, and student-centred approaches – the evolution of music curricula in Türkiye reveals a sustained negotiation between the preservation of cultural heritage and pedagogical innovation.

Music in Schools: From Classroom Time to Specialised Education

Türkiye has a twelve-year compulsory education system, commonly referred to as the “4+4+4” model. This structure consists of three stages: four years of primary school (*ilkokul*, Grades 1–4), four years of lower secondary school (*ortaokul*, Grades 5–8), and four years of upper secondary school (*lise*, Grades 9–12). Preschool education (36–68 months), however, remains optional under this model. Introduced in 2012, this model replaced the previously unified eight-year compulsory education structure (Grades 1–8) with a twelve-year system (Grades 1–12) organised into three successive stages (MEB, 2012). Within this broader structure, music education occupies a defined but evolving place.

Time Allocation for Music

The instructional time allocated to Music lessons in the school shows varieties at different educational levels. At the primary (6–10 years) and lower secondary (10–14 years) levels, music is a compulsory subject taught for one hour per week, with additional elective hours available at the lower secondary level depending on school resources (MEB, 2025b). At the upper secondary level (14–17 years), music is optional and offered either as an alternative

to visual arts or within elective arts courses, with weekly instruction varying by school type and offered for up to three hours. These courses may include choral activities and individual or group instrumental instruction in instruments such as piano, *bağlama*, *kaval*, *tar*, *kemane*, *ney*, *ud*, *kanun*, violin, clarinet, guitar, and flute (MEB, 2025c).

When considering the allocation of time for music education in Türkiye, regional disparities and institutional variations play a significant role. While urban schools generally offer greater access to ensembles, orchestras, and extracurricular activities, rural schools often experience limitations related to teacher availability, instructional time, and material resources (Kalyoncu & Özeke, 2016). Private schools, while varying considerably in scope, may offer more flexible scheduling and additional music-related activities depending on institutional priorities and resources. These differences shape not only the quantity of music instruction offered but also the extent to which schools can support sustained musical engagement beyond the classroom, contributing to uneven learning conditions across regions.

The Music Teacher

Beyond time allocation, the profile of the teacher responsible for music education varies across school levels. At the primary school level, a distinction is observed between public and private institutions. In public schools, music is generally taught by classroom teachers (MEB, 2014, Art. 43/3), while in private schools, which are particularly prevalent in metropolitan areas, it is more common for specialised music teachers to be employed.

From lower secondary education onwards, music instruction is officially assigned to music teachers who have received formal training in the field, at the undergraduate level in music education (MEB, 2016, Art. 4/1). At both lower and upper secondary levels, specialised teachers deliver the curriculum, which typically includes singing, listening, music theory, and – in certain institutions – instrumental training. This reliance on specialist teachers ensures a more structured and consistent approach to music education in the later stages of schooling, though challenges remain regarding the availability of teachers, regional distribution, and access to continuous professional development.

Resources for teaching music

In addition to teacher qualifications, resources for music education in Türkiye vary across schools and contexts and are shaped by institutional conditions, available teaching materials, and supplementary learning opportunities. There is no budget allocated exclusively for music education; instead, schools rely on general funds distributed by the Provincial Directorates of National Education and allocate resources according to institutional priorities. School–parent associations and school leadership play an important role in supporting

music activities through contributions to the purchase of instruments and equipment, as well as the organisation of performances and extracurricular programmes (MEB, 2023). Additional targeted funding is available in Science and Art Centres (*Bilim ve Sanat Merkezi*, [BİLSEM]), where music is supported within thematic budgets for gifted education (MEB, 2022). Beyond financial resources, MEB provides free music textbooks and digital support through the Educational Information Network (EBA), which offers mainly listening-based materials such as video lessons, interactive activities, and theoretical content. The educational impact of these resources depends largely on teachers' instructional choices and classroom integration (EBA, 2025).

Additionally, schools may also benefit from participation in funded projects, such as Erasmus+ and local initiatives, which can provide additional financial support for music education. Nevertheless, the scope and quality of resources for music vary across schools, largely depending on the initiative of administrators and the socio-economic conditions of the school community.

Extracurricular Music Education in Schools

Extracurricular music activities vary notably between public and private schools. Public schools most often organise choirs for national holidays, ceremonies, or competitions; in some cases, these ensembles are formed on a project basis around specific events, while in others they function as ongoing choirs depending on school culture, teacher initiative, and available resources. Instrumental ensembles or large-scale productions, however, are relatively limited due to institutional constraints, and regular instrumental or vocal training is generally unavailable within public schools, except in fine arts high schools and BİLSEM. As a result, many students pursue music education beyond the formal school setting.

Private schools, by contrast, tend to offer more structured extracurricular programmes, including choirs, orchestras, musicals, and individual instrument lessons such as piano, violin, or guitar. In addition to school-based provision, extracurricular music learning is widely supported through non-formal education offered by MEB-affiliated public courses and private music institutions, which primarily provide amateur music education in the form of individual instrument instruction and music workshops for children and adults. These non-formal settings – often more than schools themselves – play a key role in preparing students for international music examinations and certifications, such as those offered by The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and Trinity College London.

Across both public and private school contexts, music also contributes to school culture through performances at national celebrations (including Republic Day on October 29 and National Sovereignty and Children's Day on April 23), graduation ceremonies, and interdisciplinary projects, reinforcing its visibility and social function within educational communities. In addition, associations – such as MÜZED (The Music Educators

Association), the Anatolian Orff-Schulwerk Association (Orffder), and the Choral Culture Association – play a significant role in supporting music education through seminars, courses, workshops, and festivals, organised for music teachers.

Specialised Schools

In contrast to regular schools, there are specialised schools dedicated to music education that operate within the formal education system as full-time institutions. These schools provide more intensive programmes and performance-oriented curricula than regular primary and secondary schools by combining general academic subjects with comprehensive music education. Such institutions may be either state-funded or privately funded and share similar organisational and pedagogical structures. State-funded examples include fine arts high schools and state conservatories (MEB, 2016; MEB, 2025d; Resmi Gazete, 2015, Art. 6), while private institutions function in a comparable manner by offering full-time, conservatory-based programmes with rigorous curricula and an international outlook (e.g. the Bilkent University Music Preparatory School). Unlike state-funded institutions, these private schools operate on a tuition-based model, and their programmes reflect conservatory-based traditions. Admission to these specialised schools is based on entrance examinations or auditions, and their curricula typically include instrumental instruction, ensemble performance, music theory, and composition.

In addition, Science and Art Centres (BİLSEM) provide individualised music education for gifted students identified through talent examinations; however, they function as supplementary institutions alongside students' regular schooling, rather than operating as full-time music schools (MEB, 2022). All of these specialised institutions differ from regular schools by offering intensive, systematic training aimed at preparing students for higher music education and professional careers in the field.

The Music Curriculum in Türkiye: Structure, Implementation, and Assessment

As mentioned above, all schools in Türkiye provide education based on the national curriculum developed by MEB. The institution responsible for preparing and updating the curriculum is the Board of Education (*Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı*), which operates under MEB. In addition to preparing curricula and textbooks, this board conducts research and establishes commissions for special projects that include teachers, academics, public institutions, and representatives of non-governmental organisations (Resmi Gazete, 2022). In this way, the music curriculum is shaped in line with both academic expertise and classroom needs.

Structure of the National Music Curriculum (2018)

The official Music curricula for primary and secondary education in Türkiye are designed as separate programmes for different grade levels yet grounded in a shared constructivist and student-centred pedagogical framework. Within this framework, music is conceptualised as a means of personal, cultural, and aesthetic development, aiming to foster creativity, self-expression, and cultural awareness alongside national identity and openness to global traditions. These aims are aligned with the Turkish Qualifications Framework and supported by key competencies such as communication, creativity, critical thinking, and digital literacy.

Consistent with contemporary music education approaches, the curriculum prioritises learning-by-doing and experiential engagement, encouraging students to encounter musical concepts through singing, listening, movement, improvisation, and creative sound exploration before formalisation. Practices such as body percussion, sound imitation, rhythmic movement, and basic composition activities are particularly emphasised in the early grades (MEB, 2018). This experiential orientation is supported by a spiral curriculum design in which musical concepts are revisited at increasing levels of complexity: initial learning experiences focus on sound exploration, imitation, and movement-based activities, while later grades progressively incorporate music literacy, form, tonality, *makams* (modal melodic frameworks in Turkish music), structured listening, and guided creative tasks such as rhythm and melody creation.

The curriculum is structured around four learning fields: listening and singing; musical perception and knowledge; musical creativity; and music culture. Learning outcomes across these fields are designed to support a balanced development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. While listening and singing occupy a central position across all grade levels, the inclusion of musical creativity and music culture ensures that expressive, creative, and cultural dimensions of music learning are addressed alongside perceptual and theoretical knowledge. Teaching guidelines support this structure by promoting flexible, student-centred practices, encouraging interdisciplinary connections, and recommending the use of digital resources such as the Educational Information Network (EBA) to adapt learning activities to diverse classroom contexts (MEB, 2018).

From a critical perspective, the curriculum is pedagogically coherent and comprehensive in its design. However, its effective implementation is shaped by contextual factors such as variations in school facilities, regional conditions, and teachers' musical and pedagogical competencies. Although in-service training programmes provided by the MEB aim to support implementation, the realisation of the curriculum's experiential and creative dimensions often depends on the initiative of individual schools and teachers. At the primary level (Grades 1–4), music instruction is largely delivered by generalist classroom teachers rather than specialists, which may affect continuity and the consistent application of the curriculum's spiral structure in lower secondary education (Grades 5–8). In this respect, the curriculum's pedagogical effectiveness is closely linked not only to its design but also to structural and instructional conditions within the education system.

Curriculum Implementation and Assessment Practices

The implementation of music education is shaped by national curriculum guidelines, yet the degree of teacher autonomy varies depending on education levels and institutional regulations. While the curriculum provides a structured framework with core learning objectives and assessment criteria aligned with MEB guidelines, teachers retain flexibility in teaching methods, classroom activities, and repertoire selection. In public schools, the use of MEB-approved textbooks and instructional materials is encouraged to ensure standardisation; however, teachers may also enrich lessons with supplementary resources such as recordings, digital content, and alternative materials. Increasing emphasis is placed on incorporating student voice through active learning approaches, where learners engage in composition, improvisation, project-based tasks, and collaborative performances, thus fostering creativity and participation in shaping their musical experiences.

Assessment practices in school music curricula reflect a flexible and process-oriented approach. Teachers are encouraged to use a range of tools – such as observation forms, performance scales, project and portfolio evaluations, and self- and peer-assessment – alongside traditional exams and tests. Process-oriented, formative, and ongoing assessment is prioritised over summative testing, integrating evaluation into everyday instruction and allowing teachers to adapt their teaching while providing individualised feedback (MEB, 2018). In this context, assessment focuses on students' active musical engagement, including individual and group singing, listening and aural skills, rhythmic accuracy, basic musical knowledge, creative responses such as improvisation or simple composition, and participation in classroom music-making activities.

Current Development in Turkish Music Education

A major current development in Turkish music education is the introduction of the 2025 Music Curriculum. As outlined in the curriculum document, the programme defines its aims in terms of holistic student development, cultural heritage, and active participation, and situates these within contemporary educational approaches. By incorporating a national repertoire and allowing space for school-based planning, the 2025 curriculum sets the tone for ongoing discussions about both opportunities and challenges in music education.

The structure of the 2025 Music Curriculum is organised around two central themes – Music Language and Music Culture – which are addressed in an integrated manner throughout the academic year. The Music Language strand focuses on the development of fundamental musical skills, including listening, singing, and basic music literacy, with an emphasis on rhythmic awareness and expression through body percussion and movement. This strand also includes the performance of shared national repertoire pieces

such as folk songs, marches, and the national anthem. The Music Culture strand, on the other hand, emphasises broader knowledge and appreciation of music by addressing instruments, vocal and ensemble practices, musical genres, music technologies, and local musical traditions.

An important innovation of the programme is the inclusion of a prescribed national repertoire at each grade level. This repertoire – presented as a shared list of songs, folk tunes, and marches to be used primarily for singing and listening activities – serves as a pedagogical resource while also supporting the transmission of a shared musical heritage. While earlier curricula, including the 2018 programme, incorporated national and traditional songs within course materials, they did not define a shared national repertoire across grade levels. In this respect, the 2025 curriculum represents a more explicit and structured approach to the use of common repertoire.

The curriculum introduces school-based planning as a new flexible and student-centred element. School-based planning refers to the allocation of 10% of total lesson hours, allowing teachers to adapt the national curriculum to their specific context. This flexibility allows teachers to design activities that address local needs, integrate community projects, highlight regional musical traditions, or respond to students' specific interests. In this way, the curriculum becomes more adaptable and relevant to diverse school environments. Overall, the 2025 Music Curriculum represents a blending of national cultural priorities with contemporary pedagogical practices, illustrating both the opportunities and the challenges that lie ahead for teachers, policymakers, and researchers in shaping the future of music education (MEB, 2025e).

Conclusion

Overall, school music education in Türkiye reflects a dynamic interplay between long-standing educational traditions, centralised policy frameworks, and evolving pedagogical priorities. Within this structure, the system incorporates a wide range of practice-oriented elements – such as singing, listening, movement, creative activities, and performance-based learning – while also making visible efforts to engage with contemporary trends in music education. The introduction of the 2025 Music Curriculum signals a renewed emphasis on pedagogical coherence, cultural continuity, and flexibility, while at the same time opening new questions about how these orientations will shape classroom practices and school-based musical experiences in the coming years. When curricular design is considered alongside extracurricular practices, everyday musical life in schools, and community-based opportunities, school music education in Türkiye emerges as a lively and evolving field, offering meaningful and promising spaces for musical engagement.

Statement on the use of artificial intelligence. AI was used for occasional translation, language editing, and stylistic refinement to improve clarity and expression during the preparation of this section.

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Martina Krušinská studied musicology with a focus on music pedagogy at Comenius University in Bratislava, where she also completed her doctoral studies. She has taught at several elementary schools and art schools as a music teacher. Her work focuses on innovative approaches in both the theory and practice of music education. She leads regular music-and-movement workshops for children aged 1+ with their parents, as well as music-creative workshops for teachers in Slovakia. She teaches music-didactic subjects at the Catholic University in Ružomberok in Slovakia. She is the author of *Music Education in the School of Maria Montessori* (2009) and *Muzilienka: Musical Encounters with Toddlers Aged 1+* (2018), and co-author of *Music-Educational and Music-Therapeutic Modules* (2011).



Urve Läänemets

Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre – Estonia

Urve Läänemets is an Estonian scholar and pedagogue with extensive contributions to curriculum theory, educational policy, and teacher education. She has held academic and advisory roles at Tallinn University of Technology and as an adviser at the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, and has served as a docent at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. Her research encompasses curriculum development, educational policy making, national education content, and the intersection of identity and schooling. Läänemets has published widely on curriculum theory, educational policy, and pedagogical practice, and has supervised several doctoral research projects in educational sciences.



Erik Lundahl

Ystad Gymnasium – Sweden

Erik Lundahl is lead music teacher at the Aesthetic programme at Ystad Gymnasium in Ystad, Sweden, where he teaches EDI and other music courses. He holds an MA in Music Education (2013). From 2021–24 he was part of the research project “The Digital Student – challenges and opportunities using the computer as main instrument in music education in Sweden”. He is interested in songwriting, music production, and pedagogical methods for nurturing students; and has interests in music within music education. Erik has been the *EAS* National Coordinator for Sweden since 2023.



Isolde Malmberg

University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna – Austria

Isolde Malmberg is full Professor of Music Education at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (mdw), Austria, where she leads the study programme for music education in secondary schools. She holds a master’s degree in Music Education and French, and a PhD in Music Education – both from mdw. She is past president of the *EAS*, led the *meNet* project / COMENIUS-3-Network *meNet*, and is currently leading the Erasmus Plus Teacher Academies project *TEAM* (*Teacher Education Academy for Music*), running 2023–26 and connecting 14 music teacher education institutions from 11 countries. Research interests: mentoring in music, teacher professionalisation in school internships, sustainability, transculturality and design-based research.



Jelena Martinović-Bogojević

Music Academy of the University of Montenegro – Montenegro

Jelena Martinović Bogojević is a Professor at the Music Academy of the University of Montenegro. Her research focuses on musical creativity, integrative teaching, intercultural competence development, historical foundations of music pedagogy, and piano pedagogy. She has authored four primary music textbook series, two monographs, a multimedia poetry collection for children, and numerous peer-reviewed articles. She serves on the Quality Assurance Committee at the University of Montenegro, is a founding member of SIMPED, a member of RNPAM, and Montenegro's National Coordinator for the European Association for Music in Schools. In 2025, she was elected to the *EAS* Board.



Mathias Moors

LUCA School of Arts & KU Leuven – Belgium

Mathias Moors is a PhD candidate at LUCA School of Arts, Associated Faculty of the Arts, KU Leuven, Belgium. His research focuses on the phenomenology and professional development of pedagogical improvisation in music education. He holds a master's degree in Psychology with a specialisation in music psychology. On the educational master's in Music and Performing Arts, Mathias supervises master's theses and teaches research methodology and music psychology. Additionally, he teaches electric bass guitar in the Bachelor's programme in Music Education at LUCA School of Arts, and at the secondary art school Lemmensinstituut in Leuven.



Ondřej Musil

Masaryk University and the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts – Czech Republic

Ondřej Musil is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Music, Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, and the Department of Composition and Multimedia Creation, Faculty of Music, Janáček Academy of Performing Arts. His research and teaching activities aim primarily at film music, audio-visual production, and music hardware and software. Additionally, he gives lectures on music and general pedagogy. At Janáček Academy, he is currently in charge of the general pedagogical education for all fields of study, including final exams for bachelor's studies.



Nopi Nicolaou Telemachou

University of Cyprus – Cyprus

Nopi Nicolaou Telemachou is a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Educational Sciences at the University of Cyprus, where she teaches music education for early years and primary education. She holds a BM (University of Texas at Austin), an MA in Music Education (Institute of Education, University of London), and a PhD (University of Exeter). Her research interests include music teacher education, curriculum implementation, the development of artistic activities in early childhood settings, and the design and development of educational concerts and participatory performances for children and student teachers. She has served on the Board of Directors of the Cyprus Symphony Orchestra and is Chairwoman of the University of Cyprus Music Academy for young learners.



Kirsti Nørstebø

Nord University – Norway

Kirsti Nørstebø is an Associate Professor at Nord University's Department of Music. She holds a PhD in music education. Her work explores children's musical development and competence, primarily using quantitative approaches. Her research interests include primary and secondary education, schools of music and performing arts, and higher music education, as well as broader questions of access to, participation in, and the value of arts and culture for children and young people.



Sezen Özeke

Bursa Uludağ University – Türkiye

Sezen Özeke is a Professor at Bursa Uludağ University in Türkiye, where she holds a position within the Music Education Department, specialising in music education methodologies. Her research interests encompass various aspects of music education, including music teacher training, comparative and cultural studies, and community music education. She has presented research papers and conducted workshops at numerous conferences and teacher training institutions across Europe, Asia, and the USA. She served as a board member of the European Association for Music in Schools (EAS) between 2019–2025.



Iosifina Papalamprou

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki – Greece

Iosifina Papalamprou is a graduate of the Department of Music Science and Art at the University of Macedonia, specialising in Music Education. She is currently pursuing an MA in “Education Sciences: Research and Practice in Changing Learning Environments” at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, focusing on Arts in Education. Professionally, she teaches piano and music theory at conservatories and works as a music educator in kindergartens. She is a member of the board of the Greek Society for Music Education (GSME), participating regularly in its initiatives.



Elissavet Perakaki

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens – Greece

Elissavet Perakaki is a member of the music education teaching and research staff at the University of Athens, Department of Musical Studies (Greece). Her research interests include music in infancy, innovative teaching methods in formal and informal settings, creativity, training music teachers, and lifelong learning. She organises music educational programmes for infants, caregivers, children, and adults. She participates in various European (recently in the *TEAM* project) and local projects related to music education. She is the author (*Fagotto*: 2008, 2009) and co-author (*Fagotto*: 2018 & 2023; *Ellinoekdotiki*, 2021) of five books in Greek. She is the president of the Greek Society for Music Education (GSME) and currently serves as the chair of ISME's Music in the Schools & Teacher Education Commission (MISTEC) for 2024–2026.



Milena Petrović

Faculty of Music in Belgrade – Serbia

Milena Petrović is a Professor at the Department of Solfeggio and Music Education, Faculty of Music in Belgrade. Her research interests include music education, musical theatre, the psychology of music – particularly perception and cognition – the origin of music, music linguistics, and zoomusicology. She is the author of three books and numerous scholarly articles, and has presented her work at national conferences in Belgrade, Kragujevac, Niš, and Novi Sad, as well as at international gatherings in Austria, Poland, Germany, Estonia, Italy, the United Kingdom, Greece, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska.



Nermin Ploskić

University of Sarajevo – Bosnia and Herzegovina

Nermin Ploskić is a Senior Assistant at the University of Sarajevo – Academy of Music, where he teaches Methodology of Music Teaching. He holds BA and MA degrees in Music Theory and Pedagogy and is a PhD candidate in Music Pedagogy. He is the author of digital content for the first digital music textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina and of Music Culture textbooks for primary education. Since 2020, he has served as National Coordinator for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the European Association for Music in Schools (EAS) and coordinates national participation in the European Day of Music in Schools (EuDaMuS).



Dieter Ringli

Zurich University of the Arts – Switzerland

Dieter Ringli studied ethnomusicology and musicology in Zurich, worked at the University of Zurich and Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, and is now a lecturer and research assistant at Zurich University of the Arts and a musician. His research focuses on Swiss folk music, music sociology and school music.



Branka Rotar Pance

University of Ljubljana – Slovenia

Branka Rotar Pance is Professor at the Department of Music Education at the Academy of Music (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia). She gives lectures on music didactics on the bachelor's and master's programmes and supervises doctoral students. Her research activities focus on working with gifted students, musical creativity, competitions in music education, ICT in music education, motivation of the music teachers, lifelong learning, arts and cultural education, and the history of Slovenian music pedagogy. She serves as the coordinator of the International EAS Student Forum. She is the coordinator of the Slovene Music Olympiad and a jury member at the International Music Olympiads. She also works as a reviewer and editor.



Marek Sedláček

Masaryk University – Czech Republic

Marek Sedláček is an Associate Professor and head of the Department of Music at the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, focusing primarily on musical aesthetics, semiotics, relationships between arts, popular music, and also on piano and keyboard playing. He lectured on philosophy of art at Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno and on music software at the University of Ostrava. Within education, he integrates digital technologies into music and explores contemporary music with an emphasis on semantic interpretation and receptive approaches. He currently holds the position of *EAS* National Coordinator for the Czech Republic.



Aleksandra Stanković

Institute for the Improvement of Education in Belgrade – Serbia

Aleksandra Stanković has dedicated 36 years to working as a music teacher and pedagogical advisor in one of Belgrade's 202 elementary schools. She conducted her school choirs, leading them to perform at national and international events. As the founder and president of the Association of Music Teachers of Serbia, she organises school choir concerts across the country and has authored several large-scale projects involving students from Serbia and abroad. Aleksandra has delivered numerous seminars both domestically and internationally and has presented at several international conferences focused on improving education. Since January 2025, she has served as Advisor and Coordinator at the Centre for Curriculum and Textbook Development within the Institute for the Improvement of Education.



Mária Strenáčiková

The Academy of Arts and the Conservatory of J.L. Bella – Slovakia

Mária Strenáčiková studied Music and Mathematics Education, Pedagogical Science and Psychology. Currently, she teaches at the Faculty of Performing Arts at the Academy of Arts and at the Conservatory of J.L. Bella in Slovakia. She focuses primarily on music education and music psychology. She is also an active publisher. Her publications include numerous monographs, textbooks, journal articles, papers in conference proceedings. She is a reviewer and a member of editorial boards of different journals, conference proceedings and publications. She regularly participates at international scientific conferences, cooperates with teacher's colleges as a teacher leader, gives lectures at workshops for musicians and is a member of various music organisations.



Lina Van Dooren

Malmö Academy of Music – Sweden

Lina Van Dooren is a PhD candidate at the Malmö Academy of Music and a member of the Agenda 2030 Graduate School at Lund University. Her research focuses on sustainability in school music education. She holds a master's degree and a degree in advanced studies in music education from LUCA School of Arts, Belgium. Before relocating to Sweden, she worked as a music teacher, solfège teacher, and assistant researcher. In Sweden, she taught music at international schools and held leadership roles in arts education programmes at those schools. Since 2015, she has served as a board member for *EAS* and is co-founder of the SFG *SustainME*.



Laia Viladot

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona – Spain

Laia Viladot is Head of the Department of Teaching of Musical, Artistic and Corporal Expression at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) since 2021. Prior to start work at UAB in 2005, Laia taught in both music schools and secondary schools for several years. Her research interests centre on didactics, interaction in the music classroom, peer learning, and collective music composition. She has led and participated in national and European research projects. Laia has been a guest lecturer in various countries, published several book chapters and educational materials, and has authored numerous research articles in both national and international journals. She is the national coordinator representing Spain in *EAS* since 2023.



Annette Ziegenmeyer

University of Music Lübeck – Germany

Annette Ziegenmeyer is a Professor of Music Education at the University of Music Lübeck, where she also serves as Head of the Centre for Teacher Education (Zentrum für Lehrkräftebildung). Her main areas of work and research include community music/music and social work, music in prisons and composition pedagogy (international perspectives). Beyond her active participation in music teacher education networks she has set up further training in music and social work/ community music, and co-edits the journal *Diskussion Musikpädagogik*.

Rūta Girdzijauskienė, Lorraine O'Connell, Karla Stolle (Eds.)

Mapping School Music Education Across European Landscapes

This volume offers an exploration of the rich and evolving landscape of school music education across 21 European countries. Drawing on diverse national perspectives, it maps how historical and cultural traditions, educational systems, and contemporary challenges shape music learning in schools today. Each chapter provides a clear yet nuanced insight into how music education is organised and experienced within each cultural setting, examining such topics as provision, curriculum and assessment, current trends, and ongoing developments and research. Authored by national experts, it provides an insightful resource for educators, music education students, researchers and policymakers.



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