



**Investigating attitudes and musical taste  
related to music lessons of primary school  
students in Debrecen**

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**Abstract**

Nowadays, Hungary is famous for its musical pedagogical method, the Kodaly concept, many foreign music lovers, and music teachers travel to our country to get to know and master it. But what do we experience in practice, what are the benefits for the musical tastes of young people? The aim of the study is to provide an insight into the attitudes of music and music in primary school youth and the surrounding social environment. We present a small slice of international research led by Dr. Judit Varadi, in which we examined the results of 4th and 6th grade pupils of five primary schools in Debrecen, 221 students in all. In the course of our research, we used a questionnaire consisting of 46 questions, which examined the family background of young people, the process of singing and music classes, listening habits, attitudes related to music classes, and music itself. Results were analyzed using SPSS 22.0 for Windows. In our observations, we found that parents' previous music studies have a great influence on teaching their children to music. The attitudes toward class music and music and the number of classical music records in the children's home are also positive. In our changing world, the genres of light music have gained a lot of space, the effect of which is reflected in the musical tastes of young people. How to get a full picture of the subject, and then the entire material will be processed.

**Keywords:** music education, attitudes, musical taste

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## **Introduction**

In compliance with the 1995 National Core Curriculum (Nemzeti Alaptanterv), singing and music teaching in Hungary are taught 1 hr a week in the higher grades of high school, being a part of the Arts Studies unit (Nagy Katalin, 2004, 2012) and the subject is taught twice a week in lower grades since September 2016. The curriculum's key elements are based on the musical pedagogical concept devised by Zoltan Kodaly. The concept's main goals are development in skill and ability instead of spreading information, yet aside from modernization, there is room for keeping in touch with tradition, such as learning folk songs related to upcoming festivities. Today's popular music and genres are acknowledged by music teachers; however, teaching is based on folk and classical music that help build character and represent a higher aesthetic value. This point of view is common in Hungary, although a different aspect of music teaching can be observed in the neighboring Slovakia. To keep children motivated, the curriculum there reflects pupils' musical taste and several pop music-related courses are available in higher education institutes for music teachers. Nagy (2012) advises that although our music education is not based on pop culture, it should be a part of it. We must keep up with the times; therefore, it is important to get to know different genres of music such as jazz, popular, and contemporary music, since this is what young people encounter most of the time. In addition, teaching materials also include neighboring and related people's folk music and religious music, the latter suffers no restrictions since the regime change in 1989 (Marosz, 2013; Nagy Katalin, 2012). Marosz (2013) used interviews with teachers in her study to better understand the condition of schools specialized in music. She included a non-specialized institution where she recorded the experiences of a most eager teacher, aside from that, most other places' teachers are in general unmotivated because they believe the curriculum's goals cannot be achieved with 1 hr a week, there is supposedly not enough time to improve the pupils' skills (Marosz, 2013). Perhaps, this may be the reason why Laszlo Norbert Nemes expressed his resentment toward today's music and singing teaching curriculum in Hungary. He states that instead of spreading lexical knowledge, allowing the children to develop an interest for music and experiencing playing music together should be emphasized. There is a disadvantage in music education. He says that similar to Slovakia, there is no differentiation anymore between valuable and less valuable music. Moreover, musical ignorance keeps spreading, which shows in the lack of affinity for classical music, this phenomenon is being fed by the widespread use of the Internet and mass culture (Nemes, 2014). A teacher should aim to present aesthetically valuable music to children, so that they can differentiate between all sorts of music. Nemes (2014) claims there is a problem with pedagogues as well, having a bad attitude and lack of devotion and readiness. The majority of children does not encounter valuable, high standard music neither at home nor in daily life (Marosz, 2013). The subject lost a lot of prestige, which is revealed by a 2002 survey where teaching staff ranked singing class

before last and parents and pupils placed it last on a list (Nagy Katalin, 2004). Studies by Takacs (2001) reveal that pupils in elementary and middle education see singing class the most useless, elementary students declared it to be one the most boring, only grammar was ranked duller (Takacs, 2001).

### *Zoltan Kodaly – The Kodaly concept*

Zoltan Kodaly (1882–1967) was a Hungarian composer, music educator, and ethnomusicologist. After finishing his studies, he composed music and collected folk songs. He was charged with fascism and imprisoned during World War II. After his release, he continued working on his trademark way of music teaching along with his students until his last days. He held high ranking positions in several councils and organizations that influenced music and political life, the most prestigious of which was being president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences between 1946 and 1949 (Eosze, 1956, 1976).

Hungarian music education is based on the principles designed by Zoltan Kodaly. This trend was coined “Kodaly Method” in the literature, Hungarian and otherwise, although the term is now discarded and is called the Kodaly Concept instead. Even though Kodaly had firm ideas about improving music education, his efforts, on the other hand, came to a halt on a theoretic level. The actualization of the methodology is attributed to Jenő Adam. Helga Szabo supports this idea, saying “Kodaly had never written a methodology” (Virág, 2015).

The Kodaly Concept forms the foundation of our public education and specialized adulation. The world-renowned composer did not summarize his teaching principles, but his thoughts gathered from interviews, announcements, writings, letters, and notes provide us with generous amount information. Kodaly relied on both his peers and his students in his life’s work, aside from the material already available in European music literature. This knowledge of nearly a millennium implies one of the cornerstones of the Kodaly Concept – the relative solmization, which has been made applicable in practical music education starting from kindergarten. The central paradigm of this concept is singing-based education, which states that musical literacy should be acquired vocally, through musical experience. Tonal singing is the most basic element of musical self-expression, the use of which can help improve tonal hearing and learning how to read and write music (Comeau, 1995). Choir singing is one of the basic principles of the Kodaly Concept. The most expressive musical form of cohesion is choral singing, as it creates a bridge over the differences between the layers of society (Dohány, 2010).

The educational concept was applied effectively to the entire school system – including kindergarten – with the help of textbooks written by Kodaly and the book written by his student, Jenő Adam: *Growing in Music with Movable Do*. Along with Jenő Adam, György

Kerenyi and Benjamin Rajeczky, joined later by Erzsebet Szonyi, Katalin Forrai, Laszlo Dobszay, and Helga Szabo, made Hungarian music education complete (Gonczy, 2009). The Kodaly Concept only became the official part of state education from 1948. The *Adam-Kodaly Singing Book* and the later published books based on it formed the concept of Hungarian music educations, since there was no official curriculum until 1995; these works defined the content of singing and music education (Nagy Katalin, 2004). The educational curriculum was first specified in the 1995 National Core Curriculum, which has since seen significant changes.

After the death of Kodaly, problems of the practical application of the master's concept appeared at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, as musical communion was already far from the idea of Kodaly. In addition, the number of weekly vocal and music lessons in non-vocal schools did not support the general enforcement of Kodaly's principles. Those who are dealing with this topic raise a number of questions about the validity of the concept in the present, but research based on scientific needs – with reference to its transfer effects – clearly supports its usefulness (Gonczy, 2009).

#### *Music-listening habits and musical tastes of elementary-school pupils*

It is safe to say that Zoltan Kodaly placed great emphasis on improving the musical culture of the Hungarian people. His goal was not only to train musicians but to educate through valuable material (nursery rhymes, folks song, and finally classical masterpieces) and help children grow up to be valuable, emotional, and concert-going adults. The following literary review aims to measure the effectiveness of Zoltan Kodaly's concept by assessing the changes in musical taste of elementary-school pupils.

One of the main goals of music education is to form a habit of active listening to music in young people. Along with singing, this is our most direct connection to music (Mason, 1963). The *Curriculum and Instructions* came in effect in 1962 in public education and it had a positive influence on music and singing education. From thereafter, listening to music became an organic part of the curriculum, in contrast with the former practice in education, music educators were required to adapt a reformed and progressive point of view. It was suggested in the plans for further education that public educational institutions should establish an active relationship with schools of music and choirs to introduce live music experience (Kiss, 2013). Varadi (2015) mentions the effects of recent technological advancements and the accelerated information flow. The phenomenon's consequences were evaluated in studies observing children's music-listening habits and other cultural studies. Most of these reveal a greatly receding tendency of live music listening and the popularization of electronic music (Hausmann, 2011), the latter being widespread by mass communication platforms, especially the Internet. Music of different

qualities can be accessed limitlessly and without discrimination, overwhelming today's youth. Active music listening is overshadowed by passive listening in daily life. It is the singing and music educator's duty to show an example to children in this changing cultural environment and for its widened musical palette, to point out valuable music and educate them to achieve an affinity for classical music ([Asztalos & Csapo, 2015](#); [Hausmann, 2011](#); [Varadi, 2015](#)).

In her dissertation, Hausmann Alice observed the musical taste of Hungarian middle-school students in Romania. The subjects were asked to rank quotes of lyrics from different music genres. The results showed that rhythm and blues (R'n'B) and Rock quotes were most preferred. The second most rejected quotes were from classical opera. Despite the evident preference for popular music, the difference was not as significant as the author previously suggested. The difference can be related to the parents' level of highest education ([Hausmann, 2011](#)). A British study (1997) had similar results and the participants were between 9 and >50 years. Pop and rock were the most popular in the >50 age group, they gave it a near maximum score (9–10 points), whereas classical music reached 2–3 points with the younger age groups. Hargreaves and North ([1997](#)) point out the relation of knowledge and preference for certain genres. A study was conducted merely 5 years after Zoltan Kodaly's death ([Jozsa, 1995](#)), so to speak, in the golden age of Hungarian music education and it revealed an interesting tendency in musical taste. The study design is not representative; however, it serves as an interesting addition. One hundred and sixty-three out of the 563 persons involved were completely uninterested in classical or folk music, whereas 33 people listened to it frequently. Similar results were seen in Marta Janurik's study in 2009, which involved elementary- and middle-school pupils. Eight percent of the 230 pupils seldom or never listen to classical music and 34% of them reject it entirely. Only 3% of elementary-school students and 2% of students in middle education listen to classical music daily. An obviously more positive attitude can be observed in students who at one point entered specialized schools for music. They enjoy music class more and listen to it more often at home, they even have several records of it. Nearly 40% of the families involved do not have any records in this genre, regardless of the parents' highest level of education, which points out that in most parents' mind, being an educated person does not involve the development of a refined musical taste ([Janurik, 2009](#)). Music schools, along with elementary schools and schools of middle education, naturally play a great part in musical education. Pupils learning in music schools get in touch with the world of music through many new surfaces and receive more impulses from it. The next part of this study allows the reader to take a look in the world of music schools. The number of such schools and their students are discussed briefly according to the studies of Homor ([2009](#)).

### *The organization and role of music schools*

Homor (2009) conducted a study about the number of music schools and the number of pupils that studied there from 1989 to 2009. The number of students increased over threefold during these 20 years, which may be due to the incorporation of other artistic studies, such as dance, arts and crafts, puppetry, and drama.

The term “music school” was changed to “basic art school,” since the school year 2000/2001. The expansion of such schools is reflected by the fact that 107,147 out of 249,456 pupils studied music in a specialized institution in the school year 2008/2009. Music was still the most popular, followed by dance, arts and crafts, and puppetry and drama, respectively. Certainly, this difference is not based on the value of these art forms; it merely supports the fact that music education is still the most widely supported form of art studies in Hungary. Those who wish to enter an art school’s course are required to pay schooling or tuition fee. The former is paid for children under 6 or above 22 years. Tuition fee is to be paid when the applicant is aged between 6 and 22 years (Homor, 2009). As one can see, participating in art education costs money, but these expenses may be supported by the state. Still, some families cannot afford to send their children to a basic art school. Education is free for those suffering from multiple social handicaps or who are otherwise challenged (Palocz, 2013).

*“The goal of music education is to help to develop a personality that understands and appreciates music, to create a future audience and to enkindle talent”* (Varadi, 2010, p. 126). Moreover, as it is not part of mandatory education, an entrance examination must be conducted to gain admission; therefore, art schools are considered as prestigious places. It is easier to develop talents in individual sessions or in small groups when compared to elementary-school education and the educator’s role is even more crucial. A close personal connection may boost the pupil’s advancement, if the proper atmosphere is not established; however, this may have a negative effect (Varadi, 2010).

### **Our Research**

In our research, we were looking for answers to several questions. Parents and family play a decisive role in the lives of children but how parents’ music school study does influence the teaching of their own children to music? Most of the vocal and music classes dealing with Hungarian folk music and classical music (leastwise the curriculum requires this). Our question is that children who love music lessons in primary school have more classical music records? We were not concerned about causal factors in this study. The change in musical taste is common nowadays; the genres of popular music have grown (Hausmann, 2011; Janurik, 2009). We would like to highlight that how it is reflected in children’s musical taste.



We conducted our studies in five schools in Debrecen, three of which are religious schools, and two are state-owned. Two hundred and twenty-one pupils aged between 9 and 14 years were included. Most of the participants were 10 years of age (85 pupils, 43%), 11 years of age (28.5%), and 12 years of age (17.6%). This study is the part of an international research project led by Dr. Judit Varadi, the results of which were presented at the ECER Conference in Dublin, 2016 and several other, Hungarian events. The questionnaire currently involves Hungarian regions mainly with some neighboring areas.

We used a questionnaire consisting of 46 questions compiled by Judit Varadi, head of research. First part of the questions were about students' data (age, class, and gender), and then about their parents' qualifications, followed by questions related to music school studies and then to school-music-related attitudes. At the end of the test, music-listening habits, as well as school and family cultural habits, and cultural consumption were included.

The questionnaires were sent to the institutions participating in the research on paper, by post.

We postulated three hypotheses, listed below:

*H1: Parents who went to music school enrol their children (Agocs, 2010; Szucs, 2017).*

*H2: Children's who likes music lesson have classical records at home (Janurik, 2009).*

*H3: Almost every pupil listen to music and pop music is preferred over classical or folk music (Hausmann, 2011; Janurik, 2009).*

For statistical analysis, SPSS 22.0 (IBM Corporation, Endicott, New York, NY, USA) for Windows was applied. To measure the differences in the proportion of the different groups,  $\chi^2$  tests were applied.

The following part is concerned with the parents' effect on their children's musical activity, the institutionalized music education, and the children's attitude toward music.

#### *Correlations between parents' and their children's musical education*

Seeking the answer to our first hypothesis, we assessed the parents' background in music education and its relation to their children's musical studies (Table 1). According to Szucs (2017), the rate of children's cultural consumption is largely determined by cultural consumption of the parents, which includes children's music-learning aspirations. This is determined by the level of parents who have previously attended a music school, and whether the frequency of music playing at home.

Table 1. Comparison of parents' and children's music education

			Do you go to music school?		Total
			Yes	No	
Did your parents go to music school?	Yes, both of them did	<i>n</i>	10	4	14
		%	71.4	28.6	100.0
	Yes, one of them did	<i>n</i>	22	24	46
		%	47.8	52.2	100.0
	Neither did	<i>n</i>	26	90	116
		%	22.4	77.6	100.0
	I don't know	<i>n</i>	8	34	42
		%	19.0	81.0	100.0
Total		<i>n</i>	66	152	218
		%	30.3	69.7	100.0

Two hundred and eighteen of the pupils involved chose to answer the question whether they are willing to go to music school, of which only 152 of them attended. Both parents went to music school in 14 families, the children in only 4 of these families attended music school, while the other 10 families did not send their children to music education. The majority was formed by those 116 pupils whose parents did not attend music school and 77% of these children attend. We concluded no significant relation ( $p < .001$ ) between the parents' musical education history and the attendance rate of their children. There are many pupils attending music school even though their parents did not attend at all (Table 1).

#### *Number of pupils owning classical records at home*

Extracurricular music learning can positively influence the perception of classical music among young people. While the average of the pupils who learn the instrument is higher than the average, a separate session with music helps them to enjoy other music-related activities (Janurik, 2009). We would like to find out the relation between motivation toward music lesson and owning classical records at home.

Table 2 shows that 176 (83%) of the 212 pupils replied that they like music class. Ninety-nine answered that they have classical records at home and 93 of them also liked music class, the result is highly significant ( $p < .001$ ). Although 68 pupils had no knowledge of having classical records at home, we may assume that their parents do not listen to this genre. We assume that the high rate of "I don't know" answers shows that students are not involved and not interested in music.



Table 2. The relationship between owning classical records at home and the pupils' attitude toward singing and music class

			Do you like music class?		Total
			Yes	No	
Do you have classical music records at home?	Yes	<i>n</i>	93	6	99
		%	93.9	6.1	100.0
	No	<i>n</i>	27	18	45
		%	60.0	40.0	100.0
	I don't know	<i>n</i>	56	12	68
		%	82.4	17.6	100.0
Total		<i>n</i>	176	36	212
		%	83.0	17.0	100.0

*Frequency of listening to music and genres preferred*

The majority of children (81.4%) often listened to music at home. Only 5 (2.3%) out of the 221 pupils replied they do not listen to music (Table 3).

We also wished to evaluate the children's reason for listening to music; we included five choices in the questionnaire and left an open-ended answer opportunity. Most pupils – almost half of them – listen to music because it brings them joy. Many of them listen to it because they are disturbed by silence; others need it to help them study while 66 children associate listening to music with daydreaming. Ten pupils use it as a social barrier, so they do not have to interact with others. It would be interesting to further evaluate the answers' correlation with other factors as well (Table 4).

As a curiosity, here are some examples from pupils who answered this question in their own words, which were listed in the *Other* category:

- “I love it and sing along”
- “Makes me think about things”
- “It cheers me up when I'm in a bad mood”
- “It's relaxing”
- “It clears my head”
- “It calms me, music is my life”
- “When I'm sad and I still have to go to school it's a good idea to start off with music”
- “It frees me”
- “I like dancing to it”
- “I can play games better on my tablet this way”

Table 3. Frequency of listening to music at home

		<i>n</i>	%
Do you listen to music at home?	Yes	5	2.3
	Yes, sometimes	35	15.88
	Yes, often	180	81.4
	N/A	1	0.5
Total		221	100.0

Table 4. Reasons for listening to music

Why are you listening to music?	<i>n</i>	%
It makes me happy	142.0	64.3
It feels good to dream	66.0	29.9
Don't be silence	59.0	26.7
I learn faster with music	57.0	25.8
Else	45.0	20.0
I don't have to talk	10.0	4.5

The dissertation by Alice Hausmann (2011) already revealed which genres are specifically preferred by youth. Our experience is the same. Many pupils did not answer what their favorite song is, so we could not add their results to our data; furthermore, those who did not give a song name or author name properly could not be included in the summary, either. The remaining answers were added to simple groups that still await further elaboration, yet it may represent the participants' musical taste adequately. Most pupils listen to pop songs; electro and rap music also seem popular. Twelve children marked classical music. Ethno-pop entered the scene as well; their main representative being Kis Grofo (Table 5). It should be noted that their favorite songs are constantly changing. It is only hypothetical, since no longitudinal research was conducted with children who gave inadequate answers but perhaps this was the reason why they answered thusly. The groups were created on the basis of the self-declaration of the performers, according to what style of music they classify.

## Summary

This study seeks to unveil correlations between the elementary-school pupils' attitude toward singing and music class and their parents' musical habits, and whether having classical music records at home affects their attitude toward singing and music class.

*Table 5. Genres popular with children according to their favorite songs*

Genres	<i>n</i> ( <i>N</i> = 297)	%
Pop	94	31.6
Electro	36	12.2
Rock	21	7.0
Rap	14	4.7
Classical	12	4.0
Ethno-pop	8	2.6
Animation/movie score	5	1.6
Musical	1	0.3
Non-categorized	40	13.0
N/A	66	22.0

First hypothesis – that parents who went to music school usually have their children attend – was not proven to be true, only 14 music school-goer pupils reported that both their parents going to music school. We intended to compare the parents' level of education to their children's preference for singing. This hypothesis could not be tested since we had no data available on 48% of the fathers' and 42% of the mothers' education. The clear majority of the participants (81%) listen to music at home; 2% replied the complete opposite.

Second hypothesis has been confirmed that there are classical music records in the home for children who love singing and music classes, and the result is significant. There are a number of "I don't know" answers to this question, which allows us to conclude that these children are not really interested in this music genre.

We failed to support or reject our second hypothesis – parents with higher qualifications send their children to music school – due to lack of data worthy of statistical analysis. Our third hypothesis proved to be true; pop and electro music were mostly favored by children. Classical music was the ranked fifth on the list, making up 4% of the participants. Nobody chose to pick folk music and jazz as their favorite.

In this study, we only demonstrated the results of students in Debrecen to get a small slice of the national survey and to provide a basis for future analysis. We would like to expand our studies to as many regions in Hungary as possible and include music schools as well in order to compare different regions and school types. Since foreign schools were also included, an international comparison is justifiable and may yield interesting results.

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## About the Authors

BH is working as a music teacher in two secondary schools specialized in music (Kecskemet, Szekesfehervar), in the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music and in the Hungarian University of Dance. She teaches folk singing, folk music theory, music theory, and history of music. Besides teaching, she spends a lot of time on stage as a folksinger and instrument (tarogato) player. In 2018, she got a Junior Prima Prize in Hungarian folk art and Public Education category. Her research fields are Hungarian music education, especially the career choice and life skills of teenagers in the secondary schools specialized in music.

TSz is a percussion artist and teacher, assistant professor at the Department of Brass and Percussion, Faculty of Music, University of Debrecen, Hungary. He is currently pursuing his doctoral studies at the Doctoral School of Human Sciences at the University of Debrecen. His research topic is the comparison of Orff and Kodály method. He was a speaker at the Hungarian National Conference on Education, and also at ECER conference in 2017 and 2018. He was also a member of the research group called Hungarian Academy of Arts, which is currently conducting research in extracurricular art activities.

The authors conceived the idea for the study concept. Both BH and TSz designed the model and the computational framework. TSz was responsible for the first two chapters of the theoretical part, whereas BH was responsible for the next two chapters of the theoretical part. BH summarized the characteristics of data collection and research and also prepared the abstract of the manuscript. The authors made the statistical analysis together, but TSz took the lead in doing the interpretation of the results. Both authors contributed to the final version of the manuscript. They also had full access to all data in the study and take responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.

## Ethics

The study procedures were carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

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