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Original
research paper

Paper received: Jan 13 2026
Paper accepted: Feb 28 2026
Article Published: Apr 6 2026


The possibilities of providing professional support to primary school teachers in the field of music education in the first cycle of primary education

Extended summary

The aim of the research conducted in 11 primary schools in Belgrade area was to investigate the views of male and female teachers (N=172) regarding the need for professional support in Music Education lessons in the first cycle of primary education, with the aim of improving the quality of music education teaching. The focus was on improving professional development – vocal skills and support in building music literacy, and finding an answer to the question whether accredited seminars provide primary school teachers with the type of support that they need.

Foreign papers discussing the issue of entrusting the subject of Music Education to teachers who do not have formal music education (Rogers et al., 2008; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Saarelainen & Juvonen, 2017) and the ways of overcoming the obstacles in teaching caused by a lack of musical experience (Rogers et al., 2008; Holden & Button, 2006; Sirek & Sefton, 2024) were used as the starting point in this research. The specificities of teacher education in Serbia are pointed out, as well as the contribution of music experts who dealt with the issue of introducing elementary musical literacy, developing the vocal abilities of students in the lower grades of primary school, as well as teacher competencies that ensure the successful music lessons. The similarities between research results in Serbia and abroad have been identified.

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The research, which was conducted in 11 primary schools in the Belgrade area, was based on the descriptive method, and the research techniques included surveying (questionnaire as an instrument), testing (one question involving song recognition based on musical notation), and scaling (Likert-type scale). The questionnaire was constructed for the purposes of the research and it contains nine questions (close, open, and combined types). The questions refer to: the frequency and ease of singing with/for children, the method and type of accompaniment, if any (CD, playing accompaniment with one or both hands), the respondents' musical literacy (they had to state what causes uncertainty about the accuracy of performing unknown songs), the most demanding area of work within the subject Music Education), the frequency of the need for advice and/or practical assistance from a music expert, their views on the existing accredited seminars in the field of music as support in their work, and stating the type of support for their work in the field of music that they would like to receive (the name of the seminar they propose, cooperation with a music teacher and/or attending consultations with professors and associates for music subjects from the Faculty of Music/Music Academy or Faculty of Education). For the closed-ended questions, the data were processed quantitatively, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v22) and descriptive statistics. The correlation of the variables was examined using Pearson's correlation. The responses to the open-ended questions were subjected to qualitative analysis.

The results of the research showed that the majority of the respondents needed a certain type of support that can influence their musical (career) development. While singing for or with students, they mainly rely on music recorded on CDs (64.5%), and only 11% are able to perform accompaniment on the piano, synthesizer or accordion, playing with both hands. In their work with students, the most demanding task for teachers is the musical literacy of students (70.3%). When it comes to the frequency of practical assistance from a professional, the majority stated that it is sporadic (44.2%). Among the types of support offered in the open-ended question, the respondents stated that they (40.7%) would like: cooperation with a music teacher (43.6%), attending an accredited seminar (22.7%), attending consultations with professors and assistants for music subjects from the faculty of music/music academy or faculty of teacher education (8.1%), all three types of support (7.6%), or some other type of support (1.7%).

The contribution of the conducted research, the purpose of which is to identify the factors that influence the quality of performance and musical achievement, is reflected in determining the type of support that primary school teachers need to teach Music Education classes and indicating several potential modalities of additional support, in line with the expressed needs. Ensuring the availability of an expert (music education teacher, music professor or associate from the Faculty of Music/Music Academy or Faculty of Education) for advice and practical assistance is one potential mode. There are also other possibilities: periodical consultations with professors or associates teaching music subjects at the above-mentioned institutions, organising lectures (once a year or more often) on a given topic, and organising seminars that will cater for the needs of primary school teachers.

Keywords: music education, teaching, primary school teachers, methodological competencies, professional development

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