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Author: Kamil Wilk, Tomasz Huk

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Kamil Wilk, Tomasz Huk
Poland

Assessment of Chosen Musical Competences of Kindergarten Teachers as an Employment Criterion

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Abstract

The importance of music in the general development of kindergarten children implies that teachers providing education, including music education, should be equipped with elaborate musical skills that, as might be assumed, should become a vital element taken into consideration during preschool teacher interviews. Research conducted in the Silesian region over the years 2014–2015 shows that the surveyed directors of kindergartens view musical skills, in most cases, as an essential supplement to other competences of teachers, among which the ability to play a melodic instrument and vocal skills are, in their opinion, the most important musical competences. The majority of directors only review documents confirming such competences, whereas almost a quarter of the surveyed participants admit to not verifying musical competences of future kindergarten teachers; the surveyed individuals claim, most frequently, that kindergarten teachers are sufficiently prepared to play a role of musical educators for small children, and that kindergarten teachers, instead of specialist musicians, should implement the content stipulated in the core curriculum. What is more, no statistically significant differences between respondents from urban and rural environments were identified.

Keywords: *kindergarten teacher, musical competences, competence evaluation, child, employment*

Introduction – theoretical background for selecting the subject, terminological findings

The contemporary discourse on the role of broadly defined art in shaping attitudes and abilities of a kindergarten child is free of any doubts as to the therapeutic influence of art as the most effective form of education (Popiołek-Rodzińska, 2012, p. 245) (Burdeva, 2005). As I. Popiołek-Rodzińska (2012) claims, in the context of repeated reforms of the education system and changes to core curricula, which result in a dramatic degradation of music (and arts) education, that a kindergarten is admittedly a proper place for shaping the sensitivity of a little human being. It is there – in the “child development space” (Watoła, 2009) – that competent and committed teachers should encourage their pupils to copy and adopt positive models, treating music with due respect – in compliance with provisions of relevant acts of law (Collins, 2014) (Ordinance of the Ministry of Education of 23rd December 2008 ...) – and as an integral element of kindergarten education (Herod, 2012, p. 18). In order to properly implement contents resulting from the core curriculum, it is necessary to have sufficiently prepared teaching staff (Herod, 2012, p. 283 et seq.), since in the contemporary teaching reality it is a kindergarten teacher who, in most cases, plays the role of the only one music educator for pupils (Wilk, 2004, p. 9). With the above in mind, and being familiar with basic conditions determining the child’s musical development, one has to agree with B. Bonna as to the considerable significance of teachers’ competences, music competences included, since a lack of proper musical influences – especially when combined with an improper didactic process caused by lacking skills – may result in the sheer inability to make use of beneficial effects of music in the future (Bonna, 2002, p. 29).

Bearing the above in mind, it becomes obvious that one needs to specify the notion of competence, both in its general sense and in the sense of musical competences. However, it needs to be emphasised that the area is relatively heterogeneous, considerably vast and impossible to be thoroughly discussed in a single article – hence, the authors shall focus solely on a rough description of the most essential approaches to be found in the primary sources.

For the purpose of our further considerations, we can adopt a definition of competence, elaborated by W. Okoń, in which a competence is (...) an ability for determined task areas, perceived (...) as an effect of the learning process (Okoń, 1996). It is also (...) an ability to properly fulfil one’s duties and make right decisions based on (...) knowledge and experience (Inny słownik języka polskiego, 2000); (...) vocational training, knowledge scope, abilities and responsibilities for

performing defined tasks (E. Groźlińska, Szlosek, 1997, p. 52); (...) a balanced mixture of knowledge, capabilities, comprehension and desire (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 1997, p. 88) or (...) an amalgamation of knowledge, skills and attitudes (Kwiatkowski, Bogaj, Baraniak, 2007, p. 61). In other words, it is a set of (...) knowledge, skills, dispositions, as well as attitudes and values necessary for task fulfilment (Kowolik, 2010, p. 146 et seq.).

M. Kołodziejski rightly claims that music education, including early music education (authors' note) in its present shape is (...) a process of educating and upbringing through music and for music (...). Thus, music education is shaped by various musical activities (Kołodziejski, 2011, p. 11), which requires teachers to possess musical competences of a high level (this matter was also raised by other renowned authors, such as K. Lewandowska (1988, p. 20), R. Ławrowska (2003, p. 6), M. Kisiel (2011, 153,160), B. Podolska (1987, p. 5), W. A. Sacher (2011) et al.). The required level of musical competences is so high that – as stated by M. Biliński (2006, p. 102) – few individuals are able to meet the criteria (this opinion is shared by B. Bonna (2006, p. 65), R. Ławrowska (2003, p. 67) and W. Sacher (1997, 19–21). M. Suświłło (2001, pp. 185, 248–249, 274) believes that vocational training of teachers in early education should deal with both pedagogical competences (referring to the capability of preparing and carrying out a didactic process – authors' note) and music competences, while the latter should be – due to their immense significance in early-year music education – as broad as possible. M. Suświłło elaborated an interesting model of an early education music teacher, encompassing – apart from intellectual, psychological, pedagogical and ethical competences – music competences, among which there are basic musical skills (pitch-related hearing, analytical hearing, music-related memory and sense of rhythm), musical knowledge (knowledge of the history of music, music literature and theoretical background for music education), methodology-related skills connected to early-year music education (ability to use basic forms of music activities, knowledge of current curricula and concepts in music education), knowledge of the musical development of the child and its determinants, ability to diagnose the levels of pupils' musical abilities and achievements, ability to work with children with special music-related needs, and an ability to use technical devices as well as music-related interests. On the basis of the assumed teacher model, and for the purpose of the presented research findings, the authors determined the following musical competence areas, the perception of which the authors attempted to determine in the sample group:

- ability to play a melodic instrument;
- vocal skills;
- dancing skills;

- knowledge of music theory and musical notation;
- knowledge of music literature in its broad sense;
- knowledge of music literature for children (songs, counting-out rhymes, etc.)

The theoretically indisputable and strong position of music education among other contents resulting from the kindergarten core curriculum, standing in sharp contrast with the above-mentioned conviction of authorities as to a frequent lack of sufficient musical background among kindergarten teachers, was a drive and justification for the research findings presented herein, particularly as the authors had not met any similar inquiries in the primary sources.

Methodological assumptions of the authors' own research

The aim of the research stipulated herein was to reach a diagnosis, followed by a summary (Skulicz, 2010, pp. 221–236) of an assessment, made by potential employers, of selected musical competences of kindergarten teachers as a criterion determining their employment. In other words, the authors attempted to determine to what extent the said employers would take into consideration candidates' musical skills, identified as a result of the recruitment process, which among the above-mentioned areas the employers regarded as a crucial area for working with children, and whether and how they would verify these skills. The authors attempted to find out whether the respondents would, on the basis of their experiences, perceive musical competences of kindergarten teachers as sufficient for a proper implementation of musical contents in the core curriculum, whether the respondents would identify any discrepancies between an assumed and a real model of these competences, what – in their opinion – would be a cause of any possible differences between models, as well as who – they believed – would be a main children educator: a kindergarten teacher or a specialist musician? Furthermore – by means of hypotheses verification (as stipulated hereunder) – the authors compared the research findings against two categories of respondents, established on the basis of a differentiating factor which referred, in this case, to types of environment: urban or rural (Skulicz, 2010, p. 232).

Research problems, arising from the above-mentioned objectives, took a form of the following research questions:

1. To what extent do potential employers take into account determined musical competences of a candidate for a kindergarten teacher?
2. Which of the determined musical competences do potential employers regard as essential for working in kindergarten?

3. Do potential employers really assess candidates' musical competences during the recruitment processes? If yes, what does the assessment involve?
4. Do kindergarten teachers – in the opinion of potential employers – possess musical competences allowing them to implement in a proper way the content contained in the core curriculum?
5. Is there a difference – in the opinion of potential employers – between assumed and real levels of musical competences of kindergarten teachers? If yes, what does the difference involve? What are – in the respondents' opinion – its origins?
6. Who – in the respondents' opinion – should be a main musical educator for small children: a kindergarten education teacher or a specialist musician?
7. In order to compare results obtained from two categories of respondents, selected due to a differentiating factor – i.e. urban or rural areas – a hypothesis was adopted (Juszczuk, 2005, pp. 72–75; King, Minium, 2009, p. 271) that there was a statistically significant difference between answers to the above-mentioned questions given by respondents from urban and rural environments, which was reviewed by means of the chi-squared test (Juszczuk, 2005, p. 241).

The research mainly involved a method of a diagnostic survey carried out by means of the CSAQ technique (computerized self-administered questionnaire) (Juszczuk, 2005, pp. 81–83). Furthermore, the researchers made use of an uncatagorised direct survey (Łobocki, 2007, pp. 261–266), individual direct conversation (Łobocki, 2007, pp. 273–282) as well as participant observation (Łobocki, 2007, pp. 45–49).

The research object concerned the way how determined musical competences of kindergarten teachers were perceived by their potential employers, with a special emphasis on the importance of the competences for outcomes of the recruitment processes.

The sample group, the research subject, consisted of directors of state kindergartens (also preschool and school complexes) as well as private kindergartens operating within the territory of the Silesian region. Simple random sampling was employed, where the sampling frame covered all preschool education facilities operating over the selected area, stipulated in the form of a list available at www.szkolnictwo.pl.

Results

The surveyed group (N=167, where 80.84% of the respondents – N=135 – come from urban areas, whereas rural areas are represented by 19.16% – N=32) appeared – in compliance with earlier assumptions – to have been almost homogeneous as to sex (women accounted for as many as 97.01% of the respondents). Diversification of the group in relation to their professional development level is presented in Table 1, which shows that certified teachers constituted the considerable majority of the respondents (91.02% of the total; nominated teachers – 8.38% of the total; a mere 1 professor of education – 0.60% of all the respondents).

Table 1. Structure of the surveyed group classified according to levels of professional development

	Nominated teachers		Certified teachers		Professors of education		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
City/Town	11	8.15%	123	91.11%	1	0.74%	135	100%
Village	3	9.37%	29	90.63%	0	0%	32	100%
Total	14	8.38%	152	91.02%	1	0.60%	167	100%

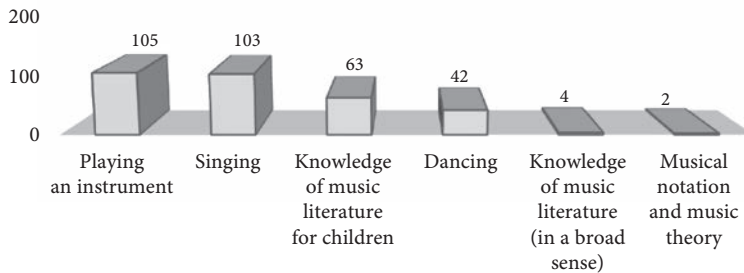
Source: authors' own research

The research findings showed that most respondents (78.44%) believed that musical competences of kindergarten teachers were a valuable supplement to their other skills. Only 18.56% of the surveyed persons pointed out that the musical competences were crucial for finding a job. 1.80% of the directors claimed that musical competences were of marginal importance for the recruitment process, whereas 1.20% of the respondents stated that they were of no importance whatsoever for the employment process. There were assumptions that the importance of teachers' musical competences depended on whether a given kindergarten had already employed a person dealing with music education, or that musical skills could sometimes become a "cover-up" for deficiencies in other areas.

Among determined musical competences (multiple choice), the ability to play a melodic instrument was classified as the most essential competence (106 references), vocal skills (103 references), knowledge of music literature for children (63 references) and dancing skills (42 references). The respondents assigned the

lowest level of importance to the knowledge of music literature in its broad sense (4 references) and knowledge of music theory and musical notation (2 references). There was also one opinion that all these competences were essential and each teacher should have them. One of the respondents claimed that a teacher candidate deprived of these competences should not be admitted to the faculty of education studies. The evaluation of the significance of selected musical competences, according to the surveyed group, is shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1. Evaluation of the significance of selected musical competences of kindergarten teachers.



Source: authors' own source

Most respondents (61.68%) claimed that they verified musical competences of a candidate during the recruitment process. It was thus pointed out that the course of a candidate's earlier professional career was of importance; reluctance to employ a candidate on a permanent basis during the first year of his/her career was a certain sort of "defence mechanism". However, the subject of the procedure (multiple choice) turned out to be, in most cases (79 references), documents that confirmed formal qualifications. The assessment of practical skills mainly involves playing an instrument (41 references), singing (31 references), and then dancing skills (13 references) and knowledge of music literature (10 references). 38.32% of the respondents admitted that during the recruitment process they had failed to assess musical competences of future teachers. In the latter case, it was feared that any assessing activities performed by an employer might have been perceived negatively. Chart 2 presents areas to be assessed during the processes of recruiting kindergarten teachers.

The surveyed individuals mostly claimed that kindergarten teachers had competences that allowed them to implement the musical content in a proper way,

as stipulated in the core curriculum (yes – 20.36%; rather yes – 55.09%; rather no – 20.36%; no – 4.19%). However, spontaneous utterances of the respondents indicated that part of the surveyed individuals valued the vocal skills of the senior staff more highly (graduates from Teacher Training Institutes), perceiving academic background as minimalistic (among deficiencies one can name a few, such as lack of education on how to play a melodic instrument and a low level of methodology of music education). Most respondents (41.32%) claimed that there was no difference between the assumed and real levels of musical competences of kindergarten teachers. 34.73% indicated that the level of assumed musical competences was lower than that of the real ones, whereas 23.95% were of a contrary opinion.

Most respondents (71.86%) indicated that musical content, resulting from the core curriculum for kindergarten education, should be implemented by a kindergarten teacher. An external specialist was chosen solely by 28.14% of the respondents.

The results of the diagnostic surveys were submitted to a statistical analysis that allowed for determining differences between the statements of the directors of urban kindergartens and those of the directors of rural kindergartens (Table 2). The authors determined an empirical test value χ^2 for selected statements of the directors, for statistical significance 0.05, and rejected five alternative hypotheses. Thus, as a result of statistical analysis, it was found out that:

- there is no statistically significant difference between statements made by the urban kindergarten directors and the rural kindergarten directors, which would refer to the significance of musical competences during the recruitment process of a kindergarten teacher.
- there is no statistically significant difference between verifying real musical competences of teacher candidates during the recruitment process.
- there is no statistically significant difference between statements made by the urban kindergarten directors and the rural kindergarten directors, which would refer to the teachers' having competences that would allow them to implement, in a proper way, the musical content determined in the core curriculum.
- there is no statistically significant difference between assumed and real levels of musical competences of kindergarten teachers, in the opinions of the rural and urban kindergarten directors.
- there is no statistically significant difference between statements made by the urban kindergarten directors and the rural kindergarten directors, which would refer to implementing, in a proper way, the musical content determined in the core curriculum.

Table 2. X2 Statistical analysis

Hypothesis	α	χ^2_{emp}	χ^2_{teor}
There is a difference between statements of directors of rural and urban kindergartens as to the significance of musical competences for the process of recruiting kindergarten teachers.	0.05	1.94	7.815
There is a difference concerning the way in which candidates' real musical skills are assessed during the recruitment process.	0.05	1.224	3.841
There is a difference between statements of directors of rural and urban kindergartens as to the musical competences of kindergarten teachers, allowing them to implement, in a proper way, the musical content determined in the core curriculum.	0.05	1.703	3.841
There is a difference between assumed and real levels of musical competences of kindergarten teachers in the opinion of directors of rural and urban kindergartens.	0.05	4.091	5.991
There is a difference between statements of directors of rural and urban kindergartens as to the implementation, in kindergartens, of musical content resulting from the core curriculum.	0.05	0.889	3.841

Conclusions

On the basis of the presented research findings, an assumption may be drawn that although musical competences of kindergarten teachers are perceived by potential employers as a considerable supplement, and only a supplement, to other skills, the said competences may be, more often than not, an important and decisive argument in the recruitment process. One can have considerable reservations as to the way the competences are verified, as the said verification was frequently reduced, in the sample group, to the assessment of formal qualifications. Nonetheless, it needs to be emphasised here that numerous respondents drew attention to the low level of music education at higher education institutions where future child educators were educated. They particularly pointed out that educators' common inability to play a melodic instrument was the most severe deficiency. Among other reasons for the status quo, the respondents mainly pointed out that higher education institutions failed to evaluate teacher candidates as to their musical competences (and also as to skills related to speech therapy), thus proving a predominance of no longer existing teaching studies. A lack of statistically significant differences between the respondents working in urban and rural areas gives rise to a conviction that the level of requirements related to the above-mentioned skills is relatively balanced.

It seems that the research problem mentioned in the paper needs to be subjected to more thorough research, taking into account other regions. Thus, the researchers would surely achieve a deeper insight in this very fragment of Polish education reality.

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