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Developing Musical Reception and Expression Abilities in Preschool Children

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Abstract

The study investigates the contribution of a didactic approach structured around specific music-education content to the development of musical reception and expression abilities in preschool children aged 3–4. A single-group quasi-experimental design with initial and final assessment (pretest–posttest) was used during the 2024–2025 school year with a younger group (N = 16) from a kindergarten in the city of Bacău. The eight-week formative intervention targeted the auditory discrimination of sounds by source, direction, duration, intensity, timbre, and tempo, as well as the performance of songs with appropriate dynamics and tempo, through specific methods (conversation, demonstration, exercise, musical game). Assessment was carried out using a 14-item practical test. The mean score increased from 14.75 (SD = 2.62) to 17.06 points (SD = 1.06); 13 of the 16 children showed progress, and the difference was statistically significant (Wilcoxon test, p = .001). The largest gains were recorded for performing songs with different dynamics and for discriminating tempo and sound duration. The results support the formative value of a gradual, play-based and multisensory approach, but should be interpreted with caution given the absence of a control group.

Keywords: Early childhood education; music education; musical expression; musical reception; preschool children

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1. Introduction

The relationship between art and education is one of reciprocity: education has often been defined as an art, while art, by its very nature, has an educational purpose. Among the functions of art, the educational function confers on it its richest formative potential, since art is "the principal means through which the relationship between human beings and reality is realized" (Nicola & Farcaș, 1991, p. 61), and its educational power stems from the fact that it offers "not only a plastic knowledge (through concrete images), but also an emotive (affective) one" (Nicola & Farcaș, 1991, p. 62). The arguments supporting the necessity of aesthetic education are psychological, ontological and gnoseological: human beings are endowed with an aesthetic "sense," everyday existence is permeated by the aesthetic, and the reception of art requires initiation and education (Momanu, 2002). In the same vein, Cucoș (1996) points out that the so-called crisis of contemporary art is, in essence, a crisis of receptivity, which makes the cultivation of sensitivity to art a priority of education.

Within aesthetic education, music education holds a privileged place at preschool age. Aesthetic education aims to prepare the child "for the act of valorizing (receiving, assimilating) and for that of creating aesthetic values" (Nicola, 1996, p. 311), while music education operates with the values of music and is defined as "the process of continuously shaping skills, knowledge and attitudes through and for music" (Munteanu, 2007, p. 11). In kindergarten, music education does not aim to train artists, but rather pursues "the development of sensitivity and receptivity to the art of sounds, the formation of aesthetic taste and the laying of the foundations for educating the capacity to make value judgments" (Nicola & Farcaș, 1991, p. 69). At this age, music is an object of the child's sensitivity rather than of their intellectual activity; hence the emphasis on affective experience, on the accumulation of impressions and on fostering interest in the art of sounds.

1.1. Musical reception and expression – conceptual and curricular landmarks

The aim of music education in preschool education consists in "developing children's aesthetic sensitivity and their capacities for musical reception and expression, through listening activities and practical activities of vocal and instrumental performance" (Florea, 2007, p. 12). Romanian curricular documents have operationalized this aim through three framework objectives: developing the capacity to receive the world of sounds and music; developing the capacities for expression through music; and becoming acquainted with the great values of national and universal musical creation (Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, 2008). The derived reference objectives target, on the one hand, the auditory discrimination of the timbre, intensity, duration, and pitch of environmental and musical sounds and, on the other hand, song performance, rhythmic accompaniment, the association of movement with music and spontaneous improvisation (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005). The current Curriculum for Early Education (2019) maintains the integrated approach based on experiential domains, with music education being carried out mainly within the Aesthetic and Creative domain.

Musical reception refers to the child's capacity to perceive, discriminate and identify sound phenomena – from environmental sounds to the properties of musical sound. Musical sound differs from noise through regular vibrations with determinate pitch, duration, intensity and timbre; pitch depends on the number of vibrations per second, duration on the temporal continuity of the vibrations, intensity on their amplitude, and timbre on the source producing the sound (Florea, 2007). **Musical expression** in preschoolers comprises vocal singing (individual and collective), rhythmic accompaniment using the body or percussion instruments, movement associated with music and elementary forms of improvisation. The two capacities are interdependent: "by developing children's capacity to perceive sounds, their correct intonation is developed at the same time; as their sense of rhythm is developed, their capacity to coordinate the movements of the whole body also increases" (Dolgoșev & Marinescu, 1977, p. 7).

Florea (2007) proposes a systematization of the ways of developing these capacities along six directions: (a) auditory discrimination of various sounds (environmental sounds, produced sounds, direction of propagation, spoken and sung sounds); (b) auditory and vocal discrimination of sound durations and of certain rhythmic patterns; (c) discrimination of intensities (loud–soft) and performance of songs with appropriate dynamics; (d) timbral and spatial discrimination of sounds; (e) discrimination of melodic direction (ascending, descending); (f) discrimination of contrasting tempi (slow–fast) and performance of songs at the appropriate tempo. This systematization constituted the conceptual framework of the experimental approach presented in this study.

In addition to general didactic principles, music education relies on a series of specific principles: education through authentic values, deep and creative perception of works of art, unified perception of content and form, and the understanding and contextual situating of the aesthetic phenomenon (Jinga & Istrate, 2001). At kindergarten level, the first principle translates into a careful selection of the repertoire, in terms of both melody and lyrics, and the second into cultivating genuine experience rather than mere mechanical reproduction: the perception of a work of art involves "both the capacity to understand a work of art, or some aspects of it, in a personal sense, and the capacity to bring aesthetic knowledge or experience to bear" (Jinga & Istrate, 2001, p. 164). From this perspective, children's reactions of joy and delight when listening to and performing songs become indicators of authentic reception. The principle of the unified perception of content and form, in turn, requires a balance between melody, lyrics, and the emotional experiences that the kindergarten teacher manages to evoke.

1.2. Psychological characteristics of younger preschoolers

The preschool period is a stage of sensory acquisitions, characterized by a marked development of sensory sensitivity and receptivity and of vocal-auditory abilities (Munteanu, 2009). The preschooler's auditory organ is anatomically and physiologically developed, while auditory sensitivity is still developing; therefore, initial activities should start with contrasting sounds situated at wide intervals (adult voice–child voice, drum–piano), which are the easiest to discriminate (Dolgoșev & Marinescu, 1977). At the same time, preschoolers "understand auditory artistic images with difficulty or not at all, however accessible these may be for adults" (Dolgoșev & Marinescu, 1977, p. 8), which is why song lyrics and visual support mediate access to melodic content.

In vocal terms, the child's phonatory apparatus differs significantly from that of the adult: the larynx is several times smaller, the vocal folds are shorter and less elastic, and the laryngeal and respiratory musculature is poorly developed, which accounts for the reduced vocal volume, short breath, and unstable intonation (Dolgoșev & Marinescu, 1977). The younger group is characterized by low vocal volume, short breath, deficient pronunciation, and a limited capacity to sing collectively, whereas in the older group breathing becomes regulated, intonation more accurate, and sound perception more differentiated (Glava, Tătaru & Chiș, 2014). Moreover, singing, unlike speaking, is a conscious, cortically directed activity requiring voluntary effort (Dolgoșev & Marinescu, 1977). From an international perspective, Welch (2016) describes vocal development as a process that begins in the prenatal period and is strongly influenced by the sociocultural environment; negative comments from adults, including educators, may inhibit singing behavior, whereas a supportive environment fosters progress. These characteristics call for songs with a narrow vocal range, short phrases, and moderate tempo, as well as careful breathing training.

1.3. The contribution of early music education to child development

The international literature provides arguments for the formative value of early musical experiences beyond the strictly musical domain. In a randomized study, infants who participated in active music classes for six months acquired sensitivity to tonality earlier and displayed more

preverbal communicative gestures and positive social behaviors than those passively exposed to music (Gerry, Unrau & Trainor, 2012). In four-year-old children, joint singing and movement were associated with a higher frequency of prosocial cooperative and helping behaviors (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010), although a subsequent attempt to replicate the effect of synchrony on helping behavior did not confirm the result (Baier, Wöllner & Wolf, 2021), which calls for caution. In preschoolers, a 20-week music program produced gains in phonological awareness comparable to those achieved through a dedicated phonological program (Degé & Schwarzer, 2011), and music training lasting only 20 days was associated with improvements in verbal intelligence and changes in brain activity during executive-function tasks (Moreno et al., 2011).

Recent syntheses qualify these findings. Analyzing 46 studies, Dumont, Syurina, Feron and van Hooren (2017) identify suggestive beneficial effects of music interventions on child development, but emphasize that firm conclusions cannot be drawn owing to methodological heterogeneity. A meta-analysis focusing on children aged 3–6 reports small-to-moderate positive effects on inhibitory control, working memory and cognitive flexibility, with effects depending on the duration, frequency and length of sessions (Lu, Shi & Musib, 2025). Consequently, current research supports the value of early music education but calls for a rigorous description of interventions and assessment instruments.

1.4. Research problem and objectives

In kindergarten practice, songs and musical games are often used as transition routines, without explicit planning of progression in musical reception and expression. Against this background, the present study aims to examine whether a didactic approach structured around the specific contents proposed by Florea (2007), adapted to the characteristics of the younger group, is associated with measurable progress in these capacities. The research objectives were:

1. to assess the initial level of musical reception and expression abilities in preschoolers from the younger group;
2. to design and implement specific didactic strategies (methods, teaching aids, forms of organization) in music education activities;
3. to carry out the final assessment and compare the results, both globally and by specific content.

The research hypothesis was formulated as follows: the use of specific didactic strategies, gradually organized around music-education content, contributes to the development of musical reception and expression abilities in preschoolers from the younger group. The independent variable was represented by the specific didactic strategies applied during the formative stage, and the dependent variable by the level of musical reception and expression abilities, as measured by the practical test.

The following research questions were addressed:

(1) What is the initial level of the targeted abilities?

(2) Does the overall score change significantly after the intervention?

(3) For which specific contents is the greatest progress recorded?

2. Methodology

The study employed a single-group quasi-experimental design with repeated measures (pretest–intervention–posttest), of the ascertaining-formative type. The formative experiment involves intervening in the educational group by introducing certain “progress factors”; the factor manipulated by the experimenter constitutes the independent variable, whereas the changes produced constitute the dependent variable (Dumitriu, 2004). The research was carried out in three stages: ascertaining, ameliorative (formative), and final assessment (Dumitriu, 2004).

2.1. Participants

The research sample consisted of a younger group of 16 preschoolers (13 girls and 3 boys), formed at the beginning of the 2024–2025 school year in a kindergarten in the city of Bacău. When the group was formed, the children's ages ranged from 2 years 6 months to 3 years; six children were under three years of age upon entering kindergarten. This is a convenience sample, corresponding to the entire group. With one exception (a single-parent family), the children came from families in which both parents were involved in their upbringing and education, with an average material standard of living. The period of adaptation to the kindergarten environment led to an extension of the initial assessment stage. To protect confidentiality, the children are identified in this article by codes (C1–C16). Informed consent was obtained from the parents, and approval was granted by the management of the educational institution.

2.2. Research instrument

To measure the level of musical reception and expression abilities, a practical test was developed with reference to the specific contents described by Florea (2007). The choice of practical tests is justified by the fact that they make it possible to identify the capacity to apply knowledge and the degree to which abilities and skills have been internalized, assessing not only the product but also the learning process (Cucoș, 2008). The test comprised 14 items, formulated as playful tasks, each corresponding to a specific content (Table 1). Items were scored with 1 or 2 points, depending on task complexity (e.g., 1 point for correct inhalation and 1 point for correct exhalation in the breathing exercise). The declared maximum score of the test was 18 points.

Table 1. *Structure of the test assessing musical reception and expression abilities*

Specific content	Item (playful task)	Score	Form of implementation
Breathing	"Blow up the balloon!" / "Blow on the dandelion!"	2	Game-exercise
Environmental sounds	"Tell me what you heard!"	1/sound	Listening
Sound sources	"Tell me what you heard!"	1/sound	Listening
Direction of propagation	"Tell me which direction the sound is coming from!"	1	Listening
Sounds of different durations	"Tell me what the sound is like!"	1/answer	Listening
Rhythmic patterns	"Beat the drum like me!"	1	Game-exercise
Alternating intensities	"Tell me which toy sounds softer and which sounds louder!"	1	Listening
Performance – dynamics	"Sing as loudly/softly as I do!"	1	Performance exercise
Vocal timbre	"Tell me who called you!"	1	Game-exercise
Instrumental timbre	"Tell me which instrument you heard!"	1	Listening
Sounds produced by sounding objects	"Which object made the sound?"	1–2	Listening
Body movements	"Stop at the signal!"	1	Movement game
Song tempo	"Do the movement that matches the song!"	1	Musical game with movement
Performance – tempo	"Sing as slowly/quickly as I do!"	1	Performance exercise

Source: author's own elaboration, based on the specific contents proposed by Florea (2007)

Individual results were classified into five developmental levels: very low (1–3 points), low (4–7), medium (8–11), high (12–15), and very high (16–18 points). The same test, with items of equivalent structure, was administered at both the initial and the final assessment.

2.3. Procedure

The pretest stage (October 2024 – January 2025) consisted of the staggered administration of the initial assessment test, item by item, during regular activities, in order to respect the children's pace of adaptation.

The ameliorative stage (9 February – 3 April 2025, eight weeks) involved formative-educational activities correlated with the annual study themes and with module-based planning.

The posttest stage (2–12 June 2025) involved re-administering the test to record progress.

The intervention was grounded in the didactic principles of music education for preschoolers – intuition (combining auditory and visual perception), accessibility, conscious and active learning, systematization and linking theory to practice – and in specific methods: conversation, demonstration, exercise and the musical didactic game (Cerghit, 2006). Demonstration was used as an intuitive model of musical action (singing, rhythmic beating, movement), exercise as conscious and graded repetition aimed at skill formation, and the didactic game as a means of integrating the didactic task into playful elements. Teaching aids included percussion instruments and sound-producing objects (small drum, bells, triangle, glasses), colored cards for associating intensity with color, symbols of story characters for tempo, and audio resources. Forms of organization alternated between whole-group, small-group, and individual activities. The structure of the program is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Structure of the formative program (February–April 2025)*

Week	Specific content	Examples of tasks and games	Form of implementation
9–13 Feb.	Sounds of different durations	"What is the sound like?", "Sing like me!", "Colored sounds"	Listening, song, game-exercise
16–20 Feb.	Reproduction of rhythmic patterns	"The Little Frog Goes Croak", "Can you sing like me?", "The Little Train"	Musical game, rhythmic games
23–27 Feb.	Alternating intensities	"Clap like me!", "Let's sing like little birds"	Listening, game-exercise
2–6 Mar.	Song performance (dynamics)	"Tell me what the sound is like!", "The Drummers"	Listening, song
9–13 Mar.	Body movements; song tempo	"Stop at the signal!", "Walk the way the song tells you!"	Movement games
16–20 Mar.	Song performance (tempo)	"How is the song sung?", "Beat the drum the way I tell you!"	Game-exercise, song
23–27 Mar.	Review: intensity	"Beat like me!", "How did we sing?"	Exercises
30 Mar.–3 Apr.	Review: tempo	"If You're Happy and You Know It", "The Dancing Singers"	Exercises

Source: planning of the experimental approach

An example of an activity is the game "You sing loudly, I sing softly!": after listening to a song fragment played alternately at high and low volume, the children identify the difference and then reproduce it vocally in pairs; in the performance stage, each child raises a red card (loud) or a yellow card (soft) depending on the dynamic level heard, and the task is then reversed – the children sing loudly or softly depending on the card raised by the kindergarten teacher. The activity thus integrates reception (intensity discrimination), symbolic representation (color) and expression (singing with dynamics).

In line with the integrated vision of the curriculum, some of the activities combined music education with other experiential domains. For instance, in the integrated activity "Let's cheer up the clown!", mathematical contents (the spatial positions on/under, in front of/behind) were correlated with the musical game "The Circus Drummers," in which the children, divided into

"kittens" and "puppies," reproduced in pairs a familiar melodic line on onomatopoeic syllables, following a question–answer pattern and marking slow or fast rhythm by beating the drum. The pyramid method was used to grade the tasks, and the collective performance of the song "At the Circus" was the condition for discovering the final surprise. Such sequences capitalize on playful motivation and allow rhythmic skills to be practiced in varied contexts, in accordance with the principle of linking theory to practice.

2.4. Data analysis

The data were processed using measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and of dispersion (standard deviation), by grouping into developmental levels and by calculating the percentage of attainment for each specific content (score obtained relative to the group's maximum possible score). Given the small sample size and the asymmetric distribution of scores, initial and final scores were compared using the nonparametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test for paired samples, and effect size was estimated using the coefficient $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$. The inferential analyses were performed by the author on the basis of the reported individual scores.

3. Results

Overall results

At the pretest, scores ranged from 9 to 18 points, with a mean of 14.75 points (SD = 2.62) and a median of 15 points. At the posttest stage, scores ranged from 15 to 18 points, with a mean of 17.06 (SD = 1.06) and a median of 17 points; the initial distribution was bimodal (15 and 17 points, three children each), whereas at the final assessment the mode was 18 points (seven children). The marked reduction in standard deviation indicates a homogenization of the group, with the greatest progress recorded by children with low initial scores (Table 3).

Table 3. *Individual scores at pretest and posttest (max. 18 points)*

Code	Initial	Final	Difference	Code	Pretest	Posttest	Difference
C1	18	18	0	C9	18	18	0
C2	16	17	+1	C10	12	15	+3
C3	12	16	+4	C11	17	18	+1
C4	16	18	+2	C12	15	17	+2
C5	14	17	+3	C13	17	18	+1
C6	14	17	+3	C14	11	18	+7
C7	15	18	+3	C15	15	16	+1
C8	17	17	0	C16	9	15	+6

Source: author's own research data.

Of the 16 children, 13 obtained higher scores at the final assessment, while three children who were already at or near the maximum level (C1, C8, C9) maintained their scores; no child showed regression. The mean increase was 2.31 points (SD = 2.06). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two assessments ($W = 0$, $Z = -3.20$, $p = .001$), with a large effect size ($r = .80$). The result holds even when the alternative value of 13 points is used for C16 ($p = .001$).

Distribution by developmental level

At the pretest, seven children (43.75%) were at the high level and seven (43.75%) at the very high level, while two children (12.5%) were at the medium level. At the posttest, no child remained at the medium level; 14 children (87.5%) reached the very high level and two children (12.5%) the high level (Table 4).

Table 4. *Distribution of preschoolers by developmental level*

Developmental level	Pretest – n	Posttest – %	Final – n	Final – %

Very low (1–3 pts)	0	0.0	0	0.0
Low (4–7 pts)	0	0.0	0	0.0
Medium (8–11 pts)	2	12.5	0	0.0
High (12–15 pts)	7	43.75	2	12.5
Very high (16–18 pts)	7	43.75	14	87.5
Total	16	100.0	16	100.0

Source: author's own research data

Results by specific content

The item analysis (Table 5, Figure 1) shows that, at the pretest, the elementary reception contents – identifying sound sources, recognizing vocal timbre, breathing, and identifying environmental sounds – were already well mastered (above 85%). The lowest levels were recorded for tasks requiring controlled musical expression: performing songs with different dynamics (50.0%) and at different tempi (56.3%), as well as for discriminating sound duration (59.4%) and tempo (62.5%).

Table 5. *Percentage of attainment by specific content at the initial and final assessment*

Specific content	Pretest (points / %)	Posttest (points / %)	Difference (pp)
Breathing	28/32 (87.5)	29/32 (90.6)	+3.1
Environmental sounds	28/32 (87.5)	31/32 (96.9)	+9.4
Sound sources	32/32 (100.0)	32/32 (100.0)	0.0
Direction of propagation	13/16 (81.3)	16/16 (100.0)	+18.7
Sounds of different durations	19/32 (59.4)	29/32 (90.6)	+31.2
Rhythmic patterns	11/16 (68.8)	14/16 (87.5)	+18.7
Alternating intensities	13/16 (81.3)	16/16 (100.0)	+18.7
Performance – dynamics	8/16 (50.0)	14/16 (87.5)	+37.5
Vocal timbre	15/16 (93.8)	16/16 (100.0)	+6.2
Instrumental timbre	13/16 (81.3)	16/16 (100.0)	+18.7
Sounds produced by sounding objects	25/32 (78.1)	16/16 (100.0)	+21.9
Body movements	12/16 (75.0)	14/16 (87.5)	+12.5
Song tempo	10/16 (62.5)	16/16 (100.0)	+37.5
Performance – tempo	9/16 (56.3)	14/16 (87.5)	+31.2

Source: author's own research data; percentages were recalculated from raw scores.

Note. The item "Sounds produced by sounding objects" was scored with a maximum of 2 points per child at the initial assessment (32 points for the group) and 1 point per child at the final assessment (16 points for the group); the percentages are therefore calculated relative to the maximum of each assessment. Consequently, the maximum possible total score was 19 points at the initial assessment and 18 points at the final assessment.

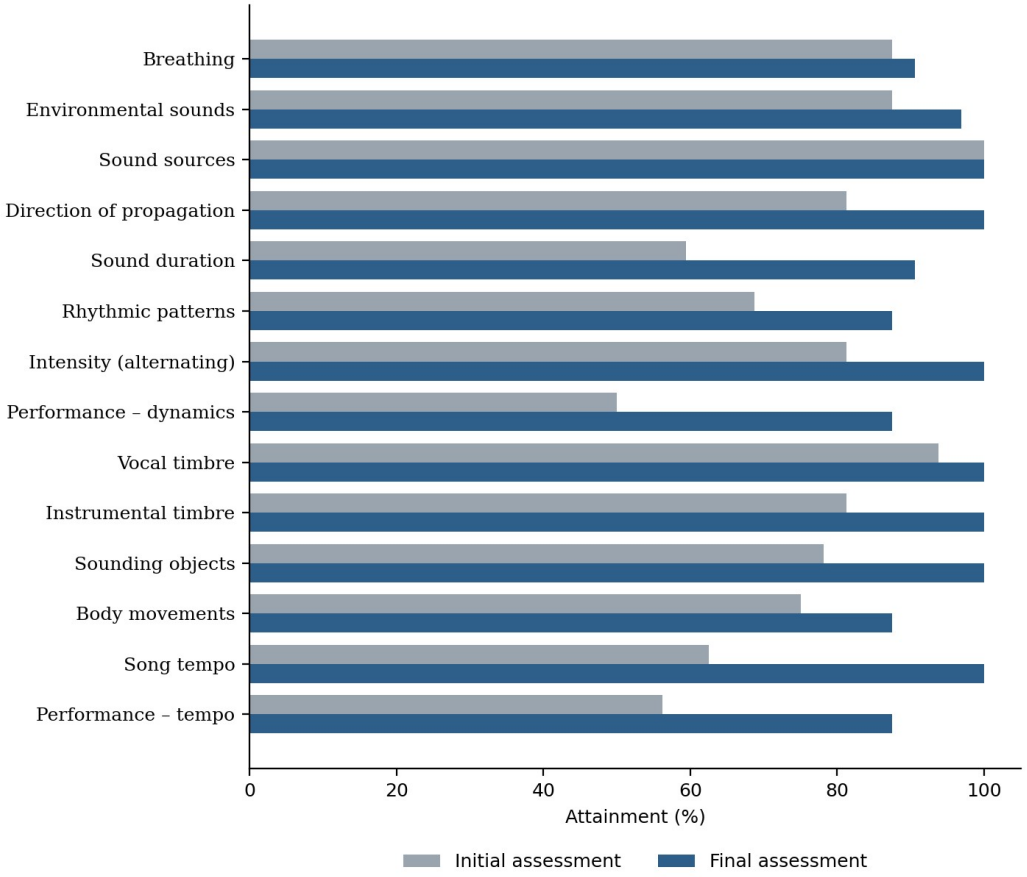


Figure 1. *Percentage of attainment by specific content pretest and posttest*

At the posttest, seven of the 14 contents were fully achieved by all children (100%), while the others ranged between 87.5% and 96.9%. The largest gains were recorded for performing songs with different dynamics and for associating movement with song tempo (+37.5 percentage points each), followed by discriminating sound duration and performing at different tempi (+31.2 pp). The smallest gains were recorded for breathing (+3.1 pp) and for contents that were already close to the ceiling at the pretest.

4. Discussion

Within the limits of the design used, the results confirm the hypothesis that a didactic approach structured around specific contents is associated with progress in musical reception and expression abilities among preschoolers in the younger group. The increase in the mean score, the disappearance of the medium level from the distribution, and the reduction in dispersion suggest that the intervention was particularly beneficial for children who started from a lower level. This "catch-up" effect is consistent with the recommendation that whole-group activities be combined with differentiated work to identify both precocious aptitudes and the difficulties experienced by some children (Nicola & Farcaș, 1991).

The profile of results by content provides relevant didactic information. Elementary reception tasks (identifying sound sources, vocal timbre and environmental sounds) were already well mastered when the children entered kindergarten, which is consistent with the observation that preschoolers display constant sensory curiosity and that contrasting sounds at wide intervals are the easiest to perceive (Dolgoșev & Marinescu, 1977). Initial difficulties were concentrated in tasks requiring voluntary control of one's own voice – singing loudly/softly or slowly/quickly.

This can be explained by the characteristics of the phonatory apparatus in the younger group (Glava et al., 2014) and by the fact that singing is a conscious, cortically directed activity requiring voluntary effort (Dolgoșev & Marinescu, 1977). It was precisely for these contents that the greatest progress was recorded, which suggests that graded exercise, the teacher's demonstration, and visual support (colored cards, character symbols) facilitated the transition from auditory discrimination to controlled vocal reproduction.

The substantial progress in associating movement with song tempo supports the idea of interdependence between the sense of rhythm and motor coordination (Dolgoșev & Marinescu, 1977) and is in line with the trend, noted in the international literature, of valuing active musical participation over passive exposure. The study by Gerry et al. (2012) shows that active participation, involving singing and movement, yields greater benefits than passive listening even in the first year of life; in the same spirit, the present approach privileged the children's bodily and vocal engagement. At the same time, the pair and small-group organization present in many of the games used provides a basis for the socio-emotional effects of shared music-making (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010), although these were not measured in the present study and the available evidence is not unanimous (Baier et al., 2021).

The small increase in the breathing item (from 87.5% to 90.6%) deserves particular attention. Training costal-diaphragmatic breathing and curbing the clavicular breathing typical of preschoolers (Dolgoșev & Marinescu, 1977) are long-term processes that depend on the maturation of the respiratory musculature. The result suggests the need to integrate breathing exercises ("Let's blow up the balloon," "Let's blow on the dandelion," "Let's smell the flowers") systematically into the daily routine, not only into music activities.

At the applied level, the study contributes an operationalization of the specific contents of music education in the form of a practical test with playful items that kindergarten teachers can easily administer, as well as a planning model that links each content to concrete tasks, games, and forms of implementation. This operationalization responds to the call, formulated in international syntheses, for a rigorous description of music interventions and assessment instruments (Dumont et al., 2017).

Limitations

The results should be interpreted with caution. First, the absence of a control group does not allow the progress to be attributed exclusively to the intervention: at the age of 3, maturation and the general kindergarten experience may contribute substantially to the development of auditory perception and vocal control, especially since the final assessment took place approximately two months after the end of the formative stage. Second, the sample is small and convenience-based, with an unbalanced gender distribution, which limits generalization. Third, the test was developed by the researcher without reliability and validity indicators, and the assessment was carried out by the same person who conducted the intervention, which may introduce rater bias. Fourth, high initial scores produced a ceiling effect on several items. Future research could employ a parallel-group design, independent raters, a test validated on a larger sample, and measures of the maintenance of effects over time.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study showed that the development of musical reception and expression abilities can be pursued systematically from the younger group onward, starting from listening to and identifying environmental sounds and progressing to performing songs at different tempi and with different dynamics. Following an eight-week formative program based on specific content, active methods, and musical games, the preschoolers recorded a statistically significant improvement in the overall score, and the distribution shifted toward the very high level. The most important gains concerned the components of musical expression that require voluntary control – singing with appropriate dynamics and tempo – as well as the discrimination of duration and tempo.

However, the conclusions remain provisional, given the absence of a control group and of psychometric indicators for the test.

Based on the results, the following recommendations can be formulated. Kindergarten teachers should design music activities as a graded progression, from contrasting sounds to fine distinctions and from reception to expression, avoiding the reduction of songs to mere transition routines. Tasks involving controlled vocal expression (dynamics, tempo) should be supported through demonstration, visual and symbolic aids (colors, characters), and associated body movement. Breathing exercises should be integrated daily, and the choice of repertoire should respect the characteristics of the child's voice: narrow vocal range, short phrases, moderate tempo (Glava et al., 2014). Assessment should rely on practical tests with playful items, administered in stages, with attention to the children's pace of adaptation. Formal activities should be complemented by non-formal activities (festivals, school celebrations, recitals), which offer children additional opportunities for musical expression. Continuing professional development for teachers should include modules on the didactics of early music education, with an emphasis on active methods and authentic assessment.

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