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Examination of activity books used in pre-school music education

Sabahat Burak*, Akdeniz University, Antalya 07070, Turkey

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Abstract

Music in pre-school education is an important field in terms of affective, cognitive and psychomotor development of children. In order to increase the quality of music education, musical activities should be appropriate to the level of children, educational and entertaining. In recent years, pre-school music education has been carried out within the framework of play, movement, dance, rhythm and improvisation, separate from the traditional approach. Teachers need supplementary books containing songs, games and activities in accordance with the required pre-school gains to be used in musical activities. There are ancillary resources mentioned in the music education literature that include these activities and are informative for teachers. However, the adequacy of the existing activity books is an important issue in terms of the better implementation of pre-school music education. This study aimed to examine the activity books that teachers use in pre-school music education. The study is a document review. Books were analysed in terms of activities and songs.

Keywords: Music education, pre-school, activity books.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Sabahat Burak, Akdeniz University, Antalya 07070, Turkey.
E-mail address: buraksabahat@gmail.com / Tel.: +90 242 310 60 82

1. Introduction

Music in pre-school education is important in terms of the affective, cognitive and psychomotor development of children (Fox, 2000; Greata, 2006; Levinowitz, 1998). Along with musical development, the development of affective characteristics such as interest, attitude and sense of competence with regard to music can be listed as important goals of pre-school music education. The musical activities performed in this period are appropriate to the level of children and are educational and entertaining, which is a proven fact that increases the quality of such music education. However, pre-school teachers who conduct music lessons should have sufficient equipment and knowledge with regard to the field in that qualified teachers are essential for effective music instruction (Burak & Atabek, 2019). Only then will effective music education in the pre-school period be not only limited to the musical development of the child but will also contribute to the development of other areas (Fox, 2000; Hallam, 2010). Consequently, the competence of the pre-school teacher in the field of music is an issue that emerges as one of importance.

Pre-school teachers believe in the importance of music education given in early childhood, but express feelings of inadequacy in this area for various reasons. Pre-school teachers think that music is important in terms of providing aesthetic equipment, social and emotional benefits, and improving the quality of human life (Kim & Kemple, 2011). On the other hand, they find themselves lacking in terms of various musical skills such as singing, and limited in terms of basic music knowledge (Kim & Kemple, 2011; Swain & Bodkin-Allen, 2014). These negative beliefs may arise from their musical education during the undergraduate period or their musical experiences in the periods preceding the undergraduate period. A sense of inadequacy in terms of music may negatively affect their motivation to perform music activities.

Another factor affecting the motivation of pre-school teachers with regard to music education and its quality is the difficulty they experience when it comes to accessing various musical resources. In recent years, pre-school music education has been carried out within the framework of play, movement, dance, rhythm and improvisation, separate from the traditional approach. Its intention is to encourage the active participation and creativity of children in music activities. There are ancillary resources mentioned in the music education literature that include these activities and are informative for teachers (Bilen, Ozevin & Canakay, 2009; Kocak & Erol, 2005). However, pre-school teachers need a range of different music education approaches, activities and songs in order to perceive themselves sufficient in terms of music teaching. Compared to traditional teaching methods, music education approaches, which also take advantage of technology, are more advantageous when it comes to supporting, diversifying and enriching learning (Atabek & Burak, 2019b). Although pre-school teachers believe in the importance and need for music, they often have difficulty in teaching music and evaluating their students. In this context, teachers need supplementary books containing songs, games and activities in accordance with the required pre-school gains to be used in musical activities. However, the adequacy of the existing activity books is an important issue in terms of the better implementation of pre-school music education. For this reason, I wish to examine the activity books that pre-school teachers use in music education.

When the related literature is examined, it is clear that studies related to pre-school music activity books are limited. Rather, the research that exists is generally aimed at examining the usefulness of books used in primary school music education. These studies provide important clues for the evaluation of pre-school music activity books. For example, Bulut (2012) has evaluated the primary school music teacher's handbook for use in the eighth grade and has stated that there are inadequacies in terms of the learning domain, the learning outcomes and the activity dimensions. In terms of the last of these, these dimensions have low functionality levels in the music education process. Arslan (2014) has concluded that, in the opinion of primary pre-service teachers, the primary school fourth-grade books mostly improve innovative thinking skills. In the same study, the primary pre-service teachers have stated that since schooling age has changed in Turkey, the books for the music course should be rearranged, and subjects such as teaching songs by ear, rhythm exercises and

forming tunes should be supported by educational and innovative play activities. Demirci and Albuz (2010) have aimed to evaluate the sixth-grade books in terms of the opinions of music teachers. Teachers think that the content of the topics is not sufficiently goal-oriented, although they think that the handbook includes an adequate amount of activities related to the topics. Music teachers have stated that the conditions arising from an inadequate physical environment in the classroom are a factor that prevents achieving the desired level when it comes to applying the activities described in the book. They emphasised that there are many other problems preventing the successful implementation of the classroom activities outlined (Demirci & Albuz, 2010).

In another study, Bulut (2013) concluded that the topics included in music handbooks have been generally provided with general names, which do not really identify and coincide with the contents. She states that (1) each topic is handled independently and the connections between topics are rarely established; (2) the topics are not successive and complementary; (3) the topics are covered superficially; (4) the content does not provide a complete learning program and (5) similar topics are repeated in exactly the same way under different names in different classes. Bulut (2014), in another study, stated that the topics in the music books are handled independently, without an order of priority and without a preparative–complementary relationship. She stated that (1) the topics are not ordered in a successive manner; (2) the topic name–learning domain relationship is weak; (3) the topic name–learning outcome relationship is not completely provided; (4) the topic names do not reflect the content; (5) the learning domain–learning outcome relationship is not completely provided; (6) the learning domain–content relationship is weak, and the learning outcome–content relationship is not provided; (7) the topic name–learning domain–learning outcome–content relationship is weak, and these dimensions do not completely coincide and (8) finally, it has been emphasised that the topic name–learning domain, topic name–learning outcome, learning domain–learning outcome, learning domain–content, learning outcome–content relationships are mostly weak (Bulut, 2011, 2015). Atabek & Burak (2019a) have evaluated teachers’ handbooks from a pre-service teachers’ perspective. They found that activities in the music books tended to be inappropriate for different age groups and learning outcomes, insufficient for facilitating learning, requiring hard-to-obtain materials, and that there are difficulties in terms of applications. All of these were raised as major concerns for both activities and songs in the books considered. Additionally, activities in the books were repetitive and lacking in entertainment while songs were criticised in terms of their rhythm, melody, lyrics, quality and practicability in the classroom.

2. Method

This research is a document review. Such a review involves the analysis of written materials containing information about the case or cases targeted for investigation (Yildirim & Simsek, 2008). In the research, I examined nine activity books used in pre-school music education. The examination of these books involved the following stages: accessing documents, checking their authenticity, understanding the documents and analysing data (Yildirim & Simsek, 2008). With regard to the analysis of the data, I carried out the following procedures. Firstly, I selected a sample from the activity books used in pre-school music education. Secondly, I determined the necessary steps for the analysis. The criteria that should be included in a music education book were determined by Atabek & Burak (2019a) in the form of categories. These criteria divided the books into activities and songs. I then determined the unit of analysis. These units can vary and can include such aspects as words, themes, characters or people (Yildirim & Simsek, 2008). In this context, I determined the units of analysis as the chapters of each book. I applied a random sample selection method when it came to the selection of sections for analysis. The criteria for analysis for the activity category were suitability for learning, material, difficulty and entertainment. In terms of the songs category, the quality of the song, rhythm, melody, lyrics and material was determined as units for analysis (Atabek & Burak, 2019a). The criteria specified in the analysis of the units examined are given as ‘2’ if present, ‘1’ if partly present or ‘0’ if not present.

Table 1. Sections examined

No.	Writer	Section	Pages
1	Kocak & Erol (2005)	Autumn	61–69
2	Bilen et al. (2009)	Ant with Crickets	68–73
3	Erol (2012)	Stone	39–44
4	Modiri (2012)	Let's Sing Together	81–83
5	Erol (2015)	Nasreddin Hodja	38–45
6	Kilic (2012)	Nursery Rhymes and Physical Movement	89–92
7	Morgul (2006)	Now there's a bird.	139–142
8	Frazeer and Kreuter (1987)	Beginning at the beginning	53–84
9	Connors (2004)	Activities using rhythm sticks	13–34

3. Findings

Pre-school music education books are examined in two parts as activities and songs. Activities were examined in the dimensions of suitability for learning, material, difficulty and entertainment. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The contents of the activity books used in pre-school music education

Activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Suitability for learning										
Age suitability	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	14
Compliance with acquisitions	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Applicability in the classroom	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	16
Learning										
To gain rhythm skills	2	2	2	1	2	1	0	1	2	13
Ensuring student development	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	15
Being remarkable	2	1	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	15
Motivation	2	2	2	2	2	1	0	2	2	15
Material										
Require material	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	15
Clarity of explanation	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	17
Require technology	2	1	2	2	1	0	0	1	1	10
Difficulty										
Difficult for teacher in practice	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Difficult for student in practice	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	7
Entertainment										
Fun	2	2	2	1	2	1	0	1	2	13
Boring	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	5

Note: Yes (2), Partly (1), No (0).

The activities in the books were appropriate for the age of the children as they were based on play, movement, improvisation and rhythm. In terms of suitability for learning, the books did not include the acquisitions of the child's pre-school program. In addition, there is no link between activities and acquisitions. It is possible to conclude that books prepared in this way will not help teachers sufficiently when it comes to implementing the curriculum. Activities were also examined in terms of classroom applicability. It was observed that most of the activities in the books included child behaviour, such as sitting, jumping, running and lying down. In this respect, the activities were suitable for pre-school classes. The activities in the books aim to provide students with rhythm skills. However, not every activity has such a target. In terms of student development, many activities were not only to ensure the musical development of the children but also to contribute to their social, affective and cognitive development. In terms of being remarkable and motivating, it was observed that the

activities in some books were more stagnant than those in others and showed similarities to the activities engaged in by children in different fields. On the other hand, a significant portion of the songs was original and encouraging students.

The activities in the books reviewed generally require different materials. These include costumes, rhythm instruments and different items such as stone, scarf, paper, painting and a wooden spoon. These materials are easily available on the part of pre-school teachers. Such teachers can use these materials to attract children's attention and motivate them to engage in the lessons. The explanations in the books are clear and the language used is simple. Although it is useful to use educational technologies to implement the activities in the books, it is not essential. Moreover, the activities were not difficult for pre-school teachers and students to practice. The activities in the books were generally fun, although some activities were more boring than others.

Table 3. Songs in the activity books used in pre-school music education

Songs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Quality of Song										
Acceptability by children	2	2	2	2	2	1	0	1	2	14
Attention capture	2	2	2	2	2	1	0	2	2	15
Age suitability	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	14
Ensuring student development	2	2	2	1	2	1	0	2	2	14
Retention	1	1	2	2	1	2	0	1	2	12
Melody, rhythm and harmony of lyrics	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	16
Rhythm										
Attention capture	1	2	2	2	2	1	0	2	2	14
Age suitability	2	0	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	13
Ensuring student development	2	1	2	1	2	1	0	1	2	12
Retention	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	15
Melody										
Attention capture	2	2	2	1	2	1	0	1	2	13
Age suitability	0	0	2	1	1	2	0	1	2	9
Ensuring student development	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	10
Retention	1	0	2	2	2	2	0	1	2	12
Lyrics										
Attention capture	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	2	2	15
Age suitability	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	16
Ensuring student development	2	2	1	1	2	2	0	2	2	14
Retention	2	1	2	2	1	2	0	1	2	13
Material										
Ease of Internet access	2	0	2	2	2	2	0	0	2	12
Requires the use of different materials	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	14

Note: Yes (2), Partly (1), No (0).

The songs contained in the books are found to be remarkable and suitable for the age group concerned. Melody, rhythm and lyrics were evaluated to be in harmony with each other. The rhythmical uniformity of some of the songs was memorable but not sufficient to ensure student development. The melody of some songs was difficult in terms of the age of the children. The lyrics of the songs were found to be age-appropriate and remarkable, and it was observed that some of the songs were difficult to remember because of the length of the lyrics.

4. Discussion, conclusion and suggestions

The books examined in the research generally are created using the Orff approach. For this reason, in the books, play, movement and nursery rhymes were of importance, and the development of

children's rhythmic skills was emphasised. Nearly half of the books have CD recordings, enabling teachers to use the recordings to teach the songs to children. Thus, it is convenient for teachers who do not have sufficient music reading skills or do not trust these skills to teach songs easily in music lessons. In this context, teachers' use of books with CD recordings will facilitate their teaching. Teachers believe in the importance of integrating technology into their courses. However, they do not have enough information on how to integrate the appropriate technology (Atabek, 2019). For this reason, in order for teachers to use pre-school music activity books effectively, suitable applications (apps) should be made during their undergraduate education.

According to the results of the study, a large proportion of the activities included in pre-school music activity books was not prepared in accordance with the acquisitions. In addition, the acquisitions are not mentioned in the books. This result is similar to the results of the research by Bulut (2013) and Demirci and Albuz (2010) which states that the subjects in the primary school music lesson books are not sufficiently targeted. In addition, the physical conditions of pre-school education institutions were found suitable for the implementation of the activities in the books. However, Demirci and Albuz (2010) found that classroom conditions were not suitable for the implementation of activities in primary school music books. This finding is not similar to those of the present study. Bulut (2014) has stated that the topics in primary school music books are handled independently without any prioritisation, and without a preparative–complementary relationship. This finding of my study is in line with the available research findings. It was understood that most of the books examined in the research did not offer a systematic way to ensure the musical development of children. A significant proportion of the songs examined in the study was found to be appropriate in terms of rhythm, melody and lyrics. This finding contradicts Atabek & Burak's (2019a) research findings. Atabek & Burak (2019a) stated that according to the opinions of prospective primary school teachers, there were significant deficiencies in the songs in the books used in primary school music education in terms of rhythm, melody and lyrics.

This research was limited to pre-school music education activity books. Considering the limitations of the research, the following research activities are recommended:

- In order to examine the degree of compatibility of pre-school music books with the Orff approach, the appropriateness of music activity books based on the Orff approach should be revealed.
- Teachers' opinions should be sought in order to reveal the functionality of pre-school music activity books with and without CD recordings.
- The extent to which pre-school music activity books meet teachers' needs and expectations should be revealed.
- The degree of success of the application program with regard to the content of pre-school music activity books should be determined.
- The extent to which the pre-school music activity books encourage the social, cognitive and affective development of students should be revealed. Teachers' opinions should be sought in this respect.
- Teachers' opinions should be sought with regard to the content of pre-school music activity books in terms of activities and songs.
- Primary school music activity books should be compared with pre-school music activity books.

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