

MUSIC EDUCATION IN CROATIA: PERSPECTIVES OF MUSIC PEDAGOGY STUDENTS ON THEIR FUTURE CAREERS

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Abstract

In the Music Pedagogy study program, students acquire and develop competencies in practical music, music theory, and pedagogical subjects. Upon graduation, they are qualified for employment in both music schools and general education schools. The aim of this research was to explore the professional aspirations of future music educators and to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in students' attitudes toward future pedagogical work based on sociodemographic variables. The research, conducted in 2025 via an anonymous survey, included 79 Music Pedagogy students in the Republic of Croatia. The results indicated that an equal number of students would like to work in general education schools and music schools. The primary reason cited for their choice was the specific student profile associated with each school type. Students believe they acquire and develop professional and pedagogical competencies to a significant extent during their studies. They also believe they will work successfully with parents, especially with students and colleagues, and anticipate high job satisfaction. A slightly lower level of agreement was determined regarding the statement that their future job would not be a source of stress. It was found that female students have a more pronounced awareness of lifelong learning, while students in higher years of study are more optimistic about future professional satisfaction. The results of this research can contribute to a better understanding of the professional expectations of future music educators and can be used to improve the study curriculum, particularly in preparing students for stressful work situations.

Keywords: *Music pedagogy students, expectations of the future profession, professional and pedagogical competencies, music teaching.*

1. Introduction

Music educators in the Republic of Croatia acquire professional-musical and pedagogical competencies during their studies, which enable them to engage in music-pedagogical work. Music educators can teach Solfeggio and Music Theory in music schools, as well as music classes in general education primary schools (Music Culture) and secondary schools/gymnasiums (Music Art). Furthermore, upon completing their studies, music educators are qualified to lead extracurricular and out-of-school music activities, including choirs, orchestras, various forms of musical creativity, music kindergartens, and various ensembles. They can also operate within professional and amateur cultural institutions, as well as cultural and artistic societies (Arts Academy in Split, 2026; Academy of Music in Pula, 2026a; Academy of Music in Pula, 2026b; Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, 2020a; Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, 2020b; Academy of Music, University of Zagreb, 2011). Research, however, indicates differences between the acquisition of musical knowledge and the pedagogical competencies required for teaching. Research results have shown that emphasis during studies is placed on fundamental musical knowledge, while methodical-didactic competencies and pedagogical practice remain insufficiently represented (Bogunović & Stanišić, 2013; Šulentić Begić & Begić, 2018). This imbalance in skill development can directly influence students' professional preferences, steering them toward work environments where they feel more competent. Furthermore, studies have observed a lack of intercultural competence and the acquisition of improvisation skills, alongside existing concerns regarding the methodical organization and delivery of lessons and the implementation of multi-genre curricula (Begić, 2014; Bennett & Chong, 2017). It has also been shown that students who perceive themselves as teachers rather than exclusively as performing musicians during their studies are more likely to actually become music teachers (Jones & Parkes, 2010; Bennett & Chong, 2017). In this context, Pellegrino (2009) emphasizes that aligning the identities of a musician and an educator is crucial for fostering positive attitudes toward the future teaching profession. Pesek & Bratina (2015) found that music pedagogy students prefer future employment in music

schools over teaching music in general education schools. Similar results were obtained by Begić, Šulentić Begić & Đurđanović (2024), who found that two-thirds of Music Pedagogy students preferred teaching in a music school, while only one-fifth preferred working in a general education school. Such preferences often reflect long-term music education. Specifically, Isbell (2008) points out that years of education in music schools create a stronger connection to that specific system, which may explain why students often favour working in music schools over general education ones. Regarding the subjects that future educators would most like to teach, these include Solfeggio, Music Theory, and Choir, while the least preferred are music classes in general education secondary schools and ensemble playing in music schools (Begić et al., 2024). Reese, Kuebel & Svec (2023), on the other hand, found that the majority of students wish to lead ensembles in the future, but also that they would like to work in the upper grades of primary school or in secondary school. Regarding gender, studies by Demirbatır and Özer (2021) and Ballantyne and Packer (2004) found that female students hold more positive attitudes toward the teaching profession than male students, in contrast to other research (Begić et al., 2024; Cüceoğlu Önder, 2014) that found no such differences. Furthermore, Cüceoğlu Önder (2014) found that the type of secondary school attended by future teachers does not affect their attitudes toward the teaching profession. However, Cüceoğlu Önder (2014) found differences in the year of study and the reasons for choosing the teaching profession. The author interpreted these findings by noting that upper-year students had direct teaching experience and pedagogical practice, which led to changes in their initial attitudes and professional aspirations. Conversely, Begić et al. (2024) did not find such differences.

It can be concluded that attitudes toward future work may be influenced by gender and year of study, whereas in some research, prior attendance at a secondary music school is considered less significant. All these findings highlight the importance of continuously monitoring students' attitudes to adapt study programs to their needs. Given the conflicting results of earlier studies on the influence of gender and year of study, this research seeks to provide up-to-date insight into the attitudes of future music educators.

2. Research

2.1. Research aim, research question, and research hypotheses

The aim of this research was to explore the professional aspirations of future music educators and to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in students' attitudes toward future pedagogical work based on sociodemographic variables. The research was guided by the following research question and hypotheses:

RQ1: Which subjects and in which institutions would future music educators like to teach?

H1: There is a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes toward future pedagogical work with respect to gender.

H2: There is a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes toward future pedagogical work with respect to previous musical education.

H3: There is a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes toward future pedagogical work with respect to the year of study.

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Sample and Data Collection Procedure. The research was conducted in 2025 and included 79 students (43 female and 36 male) from the Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, Republic of Croatia, who are being educated as future music educators. The data were collected via a survey. Regarding the year of study, 14 students were in their first year, 14 in their second year, 19 in their third year, 16 in their fourth year, and 16 in their first year of graduate study. Of the total participants, 66 students reported having completed secondary music school.

2.2.2. Instrument and Statistical Procedure. The research utilized an anonymous survey questionnaire developed by Begić et al. (2024), comprising 15 items. Students' attitudes toward their future pedagogical work were examined using an instrument comprising 9 items on a five-point Likert scale. The instrument's reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.775. Given the violation of data distribution normality, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used to test the hypotheses and determine whether sociodemographic variables were associated with statistically significant differences in students' attitudes. Quantitative data were processed using SPSS.

2.3. Results and discussion

The research participants were asked to indicate which institution they would most like to work at. The highest number of participants (N=29) preferred teaching in a primary music school, followed by

general education primary schools (N=18) and general education secondary schools (N=14), while the fewest participants preferred working at an academy (N=5). These results confirm previous research (Begić et al., 2024; Pesek & Bratina, 2015) on the preference for working in music schools, which Isbell (2008) attributes to a strong connection to that system resulting from years of prior education in music schools.

As the reason for their preference for a specific type of employment institution, nearly two-thirds of the participants (N=49) stated that it was because of the students they would like to work with, while 34 noted that the subjects taught at that institution were a good fit for them. Furthermore, 22 participants cited their existing competencies as a reason for their choice, while only one in nine students (N=9) indicated that their chosen institution was the most pleasant or rewarding place to work.

Regarding the subjects they would like to teach, approximately half of the students cited Solfeggio and Choir, while 41.8% chose Music Art (high school music appreciation). The result regarding the preference for teaching music in secondary schools is consistent with the findings of Reese et al. (2023) and Pesek & Bratina (2015), who found that music pedagogy students prefer future employment in music schools, with Solfeggio being a core subject in that system. About one-third of the students want to teach Music Culture, Music Theory, and Ensemble Playing.

At the end of the first part of the questionnaire, students expressed their opinions regarding employment opportunities after graduation. Only one in five students believes that they will find employment in their desired institution quickly and easily. An equal number of participants hold the opposite opinion, while more than half are unable to estimate the likelihood or the speed of their future employment.

In the second part of the questionnaire, students presented their attitudes toward their future pedagogical work (Table 1).

Table 1. Students' Attitudes Toward Future Pedagogical Work.

Variable	M	SD
I believe that the professional competencies I am acquiring during my studies will significantly assist me in my future pedagogical work.	4.32	.79
I believe that the pedagogical competencies I am acquiring during my studies will significantly assist me in my future pedagogical work.	4.59	.59
I am aware that after completing my studies, I will need to engage in continuous lifelong learning .	4.73	.53
I believe that I will successfully collaborate with colleagues in my future pedagogical work.	4.57	.57
I believe that I will successfully collaborate with students in my future pedagogical work.	4.63	.58
I believe that I will successfully collaborate with parents in my future pedagogical work.	4.18	.75
I believe that my future pedagogical work will not be a source of stress for me.	3.41	.97
I think that I will successfully cope with the challenges that await me in my future pedagogical work.	4.34	.70
I believe I will be very satisfied with my future pedagogical vocation.	4.52	.64

As shown in Table 1, the lowest level of agreement was determined for the statement that their work will not be a source of stress (M=3.41). This data indicates that students realistically perceive their future vocation as emotionally demanding, which aligns with their need for preparation for stressful situations. Students agree to a significant extent with the importance of the competencies acquired during their studies for their future vocation, as well as with the statement regarding the necessity of lifelong learning (M=4.32–4.73). Furthermore, they show significant agreement in their assessments of the likelihood of successful future collaboration with colleagues, students, and parents (M=4.18–4.63). Regarding the expected stress associated with their future vocation, they had a neutral average opinion. Finally, students are generally optimistic about future professional challenges and are generally satisfied with the pedagogical profession.

The results were also compared with respect to sociodemographic variables—specifically, participants' gender, year of study, and prior musical education. Due to violations of normality in the data distribution, the Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in students' attitudes.

The Mann-Whitney U test revealed that students' attitudes differ by gender regarding awareness of the need for lifelong learning (p=0.006) and expected satisfaction with their future vocation (p=0.040). Specifically, female students had a significantly higher level of agreement with these statements. This result supports the research by Demirbatır and Özer (2021) regarding the more positive attitudes of female students toward the teaching profession. Based on the obtained results, hypothesis H1, which stated: "There

is a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes toward future pedagogical work with respect to gender," is partially accepted.

The Mann-Whitney U test showed no statistically significant differences in students' attitudes based on prior musical education. These results align with the study by Cüceoğlu Önder (2014), which found that the type of previously completed school does not influence attitudes toward the teaching profession. Consequently, hypothesis H2, which stated, "*There is a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes toward future pedagogical work with respect to previous musical education,*" is rejected.

Finally, students' attitudes were compared by year of study. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed statistically significant differences in the expectations of future music educators across four of the examined items. A significant difference was found in the assessment that professional competencies acquired during studies would significantly assist them in their future work ($p=0.025$), as well as in the perceived importance of acquired pedagogical competencies ($p=0.021$). Furthermore, differences across years of study were observed in perceptions of future pedagogical work as a source of stress ($p=0.039$). The most pronounced statistical significance was established regarding the statement on expected satisfaction with the future pedagogical vocation ($p=0.002$). In general, students in higher years of study, particularly those in the 3rd and 4th years of undergraduate studies, achieve higher mean ranks. It should be noted here that students attend internships at the school in the 4th year of undergraduate studies and in graduate study. These results confirm Cüceoğlu Önder's (2014) reflections that pedagogical practice during studies strengthens professional identity and transforms initial attitudes. Therefore, hypothesis H3, which stated: "*There is a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes toward future pedagogical work with respect to the year of study,*" is also partially accepted.

3. Conclusion

Based on the research, it can be concluded that Music Pedagogy students hold high professional expectations for their future vocation while also maintaining a clear awareness of the challenges they will face in a real-world work environment. The results confirmed that sociodemographic variables, such as gender and year of study, significantly influence professional attitudes. A particularly notable finding is that confidence in one's own competencies increases statistically significantly in the later years of study, reinforcing the importance of pedagogical practice and direct teaching experience. The limitation of this study is the use of a convenience sample from a single institution, which limits the generalizability of the results to the entire population. Additionally, the research relied on students' subjective self-assessments via a survey questionnaire. Given these findings, future research should adopt a longitudinal design to track the same group of students from their first to their final year, enabling a more precise assessment of attitudinal changes. Furthermore, combining quantitative methods with qualitative approaches, such as semi-structured interviews, would provide deeper insight into why students perceive certain aspects of the job—such as collaboration with parents—as more stressful. Regarding educational practice, this study suggests the need to introduce specific workshops and courses focused on communication skills, stress management, and conflict resolution with parents. Strengthening these aspects of the curriculum, alongside existing high-level professional and pedagogical competencies, would ensure a more confident transition from university to the classroom for future music educators and lead to greater long-term career satisfaction.

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