



THE ROLE OF SONGBOOKS IN THE PRESERVATION OF CHILDREN'S FOLK SONGS IN KINDERGARTEN

LORENA MIHELAC

School center Novo mesto, Novo mesto, Slovenia

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR/KORESPONDENČNI AVTOR/

lorena.mihelac@sc-nm.si

Abstract/Izvleček

The paper presents an analysis of songbooks used in kindergarten. It outlines the need for renewal of the existing kindergarten curriculum from the perspective of preserving the Slovenian music tradition, and within this context, the indispensable role of children's folk songs in the preservation of Slovenian folk music. Furthermore, it tackles the following three issues: (i) the disproportionate representation of children's folk songs and author songs in songbooks; (ii) the information provided about children's folk songs in songbooks, and (iii) the representation of children's folk songs in kindergarten.

Keywords:

children's folk songs,
preschool education,
songbooks

Ključne besede:

otroške ljudske pesmi,
predšolska vzgoja,
pesmarice

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Vloga pesmaric pri ohranjanju otroških ljudskih pesmi v vrtcih

Prispevek obravnava analizo pesmaric, ki se uporabljajo v vrtcih. Izpostavlja potrebo po prenovi obstoječega Kurikuluma za vrtce z vidika ohranjanja slovenske glasbene tradicije in v tem okviru tudi o vlogi otroških ljudskih pesmi. Poleg tega obravnava vprašanja (i) o nesorazmerju otroških ljudskih pesmi in avtorskih pesmi v pesmaricah, (ii) o informacijah o otroških ljudskih pesmih podanih v pesmaricah, in (iii) o predstavljanju otroških ljudskih pesmi v pesmaricah.

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Introduction

In Slovenia, public and private kindergartens are provided for early childhood education and care, with a range of educational programs, giving parents the possibility to choose a kindergarten in accordance with their personal views. Enrolment in kindergarten is not obligatory. Parents can choose whether to enrol their child and if they decide to do so, then the child can be enrolled from the age of eleven months. Currently 82.7% of children (in total 87,708 children) from one to five years old are enrolled in 1179 public/private kindergartens (Statistični urad RS; Ministrstvo za izobraževanje, znanost in šport, 2021).

The crucial national document that governs the work and content of education in Slovenian kindergartens is the Kindergarten Curriculum (1999). Besides the goals and principles conducive to the achievement of kindergarten curriculum objectives, outlining children's characteristics and cooperation with parents, five fields of activity are defined, separately for the first age group (1- to 3-year-old children), and the second age group (3- to 6-year-old children): Movement, Language, Art, Society, Nature, and Mathematics. The suggested content and activities allow alternatives and methods for achieving the objectives (to be selected by a preschool teacher).

The role of kindergartens in Slovenia also involves preserving, encouraging, developing, and arousing love for the Slovenian folk tradition in preschool children, and the proposed activities for both age groups in the Kindergarten Curriculum show that the Slovenian folk tradition is implemented in all fields. However, recent studies have shown an imbalance of activities in the field of the preservation of Slovenian folk tradition across kindergartens in Slovenia, a disproportion in activities introducing Slovenian folk music, and a lack of literature presenting the Slovenian tradition in depth from different points of view.

Since an in-depth study about the preservation of Slovenian folk tradition across kindergartens in Slovenia, and about the disproportion in activities introducing Slovenian folk music would be beyond the scope of this paper, the current research deals only with the third issue, more specifically with *songbooks* containing children's folk songs. We examine the current trends in the field of songbooks used in kindergartens, with special emphasis on children's folk songs, i.e., their frequency of appearance in songbooks, the information provided about these songs in educational literature for kindergartens and in songbooks, and the way children's folk songs are presented by preschool teachers in kindergartens.

Background

In the past, family, and social community were the most important factors in preserving musical cultural heritage. These roles have been newly assigned to kindergarten, which has become focused on more than childcare and preparing children for school; the change appears in the continuation of the preservation of cultural heritage, providing increasingly varied activities, with the purpose of discovering the richness of heritage, revealing how heritage is transmitted, and discovering the world, and one's identity through heritage (Morrison, 1998; Vah Jevšnik, 2010).

In the Slovenian Kindergarten Curriculum (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999), European policies about cultural heritage are firmly implemented (see Council of Europe, 2021), which is noticeable either in the principles conducive to the achievement of the kindergarten curriculum objectives, or within specific fields of activities for the preservation of the Slovenian folk tradition, defined separately for each field (Language, Art, Society, Movement, Science, Mathematics), and age-group (from 1 to 3 years old and from 4 to 6 years old).

In the domain of Music, the preservation of folk tradition involves the singing of children's songs, folk songs, author's songs from well-known composers, in children's learning of counting-out rhymes and teasing chants (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999, pp. 26-28). However, there is no detailed description of all the knowledge and skills the children are expected to learn from the perspective of the preservation of Slovenian folk music, and especially how to include it in cross-curricular activities.

This means, that the *understanding* of the importance of Slovenian folk music, and *why* and *how* it should (or could) be covered in various activities in a kindergarten still depends on (i) the individual preschool teacher's curriculum, (ii) their willingness to include such activities in the daily program, and (iii) personal preferences, which are (or are not) connected with the preschool teacher's abilities (e.g., whether the preschool teacher prefers to sing, dance, or to play instruments, which can depend on background knowledge, work experience, or age, for example).

Recent studies outline that musical activities involving Slovenian folk music are not equally represented in kindergartens. The most common activity is the singing of (children's) folk songs; less common are listening to these songs, playing on folk

instruments, or dancing (e.g., Denac, 2012; Geršak, 2015; Žnidaršič, 2016; Denac and Žnidaršič, 2018).

Compared to children's songs from well-known Slovenian composers, (children's) folk songs are still less favoured in these activities (Oblak, 2017). Furthermore, inadequate knowledge affects the selection of appropriate (children's) folk songs, meaning insufficient knowledge about (children's) folk songs, i.e., their origin, content, and versions varying in melody and lyrics (Žnidaršič, 2016; Denac and Žnidaršič, 2018).

According to Žgavec (2004), children's folk songs should be integrated into kindergarten activities on a daily basis, since they affect not only the development of social competences (Zalar, 2015) but the children's individual development as well (Fu, 2010). The preservation of these songs and Slovenian folk music (in general) in kindergartens must not take place only for the music's sake, but because it also tackles the question of children's identity, since cultural heritage "evokes memories of past events in a way that can be used to build or strengthen (our) identity" (Josefsson and Aronsson, 2016, p. 2095). Several studies outline the importance of music and books in preschool education (e.g., Gardner, 2011; Lukens, 2007; Smallwood and Haynes, 2008). Moreover, the use of a songbook in early childhood provides scaffolding suitable for all kinds of learners, as it allows children to reach proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), and if children's folk songs are included, an invaluable opportunity to become acquainted with a country's folk song tradition. An overview of the existing educational literature (songbooks) for children in the last 170 years, shows a considerable number of songbooks: Slomšek (1853, as cited in Terseglav, 2007), Ahacel (1883), Nedvěd (1866, 1883, 1896), Funtek (1887), Majcen (1888, 1901), Štrekelj (1895-1923), Mercina (1893), Kosi (1906), Jeraj (1921), Kumar (1924), Gerlanc (1952), Grbec (1954), Kalan (1954), Nograšek and Virant Iršič (2007), and Voglar and Nograšek (2009). Although the very first songbooks may not have been intended for kindergarteners, but for older children attending primary school, they may have been used in orphanages, childcare, or even in kindergartens, even though kindergartens, on the territory of today's Slovenia were organized from 1869 on, after the promulgation of the *Imperial Primary Education Act* ("*Reichvolksschulgesetz*") for the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian empire (Wehowski, 2019).

Two of the songbooks, *Zabavišče slovenskim otrokom* (Funtek, 1887), and *Igre in pesmi* (Mercina, 1893) are especially interesting, since these songbooks are the very first ones intended for use in kindergartens, emphasizing the role of games and music, to be learned and experienced through games in kindergartens (for more, see the foreword in Mercina, 1893).

Regardless of their diverse compilation of songs, the list of songs in these songbooks, shows that from the very first songbooks for children, until the latest literature, the emphasis has been on authors songs and that children's folk songs are significantly less represented, unless the songbooks are not explicitly presenting (children's) folk songs alone (e.g., Komavec and Šivic, 2004, Pesek, 1994-2000).

Problems and purpose of the research

There is yet no research about songbooks used in kindergartens and how children's folk songs are represented in these books. Since children's folk songs have an indispensable role in the preservation of cultural heritage, research about these songs, from the perspective of their frequency of appearance, which of these songs appear in literature, and how they are represented in preschool educational literature and within musical activities in kindergarten, would therefore highlight the actual situation, and give valuable guidelines for additional preschool educational literature about children's folk songs.

The purpose of this study was three-fold:

- To collect data about the songbooks used in Slovenian kindergartens, with special emphasis on children's folk songs,
- To examine the frequency of children's folk songs being included in musical activities,
- To examine which relevant information about children's folk songs is passed from preschool teachers to children in kindergarten.

Methodology

Based on the general findings, research results from other studies, and the purpose of this paper, the following research questions have been designed:

1. Which songbooks are used in kindergartens?
2. Which of the proposed songbooks containing children's folk songs are mostly used in kindergartens by preschool teachers

3. What is the frequency of children's folk songs being included in songbooks for kindergarten?
4. Which children's folk songs are used in music activities in kindergarten?
5. What are the shortcomings of the existing songbooks in the opinion of preschool teachers?

The descriptive and causal non-experimental method was used in the research, and R-studio for the statistical analysis.

Participants

The current study involved 70 preschool teachers from 38 kindergartens in ten Slovenian regions (Goriška, Gorenjska, Obalno-kraška, Notranjsko-kraška, Osrednje-slovenska, Savinjska, Zasavje, Jugovzhodna, Podravska, and Pomurska). From seventy preschool teachers with an average work experience of 15.3 years, 67 were female (95.71%) and only 3 male (4.29%). To all the preschool teachers, questionnaires were sent online, and a special editable document for collecting the children's folk songs which are most often sung in these kindergartens.

Results and discussion

The results show that not all preschool teachers are using in their music activities the same literature that was used during their own schooling.

Table 1: Same literature used during schooling and at work

Responses	f	f%
yes	31	44.29
no	2	2.86
partly	37	52.86
total	70	100.00

Two major songbooks are used in Slovenian kindergartens (Table 2): *Majbna sem bila* (Voglar and Nograšek, 2009) and *Piške sem pasla* (Nograšek and Virant Iršič, 2007). Both songbooks are used regardless of the work experience, and the fact that these two books are not compulsory songbooks for use in kindergartens, since there exists currently no list of compulsory songbooks for kindergartens. It seems that these books constitute a sort of "heritage" from previous schooling, during which this educational literature was used as the most suitable one, and then later continued to be used at work in kindergartens.

The songbook *Majhna sem bila* is used by all preschool teachers (100%), even by those with work experience of more than 30 years ($N = 9$, 12.86%), which can be explained by the fact that the first edition of this book appeared in 1982. The second songbook *Piške sem pasla* is also frequently used (87.14%), presumably from its first appearance in 2005.

Table 2: Songbooks used in kindergartens

Literature used in kindergartens	No. of teachers	in %
<i>Majhna sem bila</i>	70	100.00
<i>Piške sem pasla</i>	61	87.14
Other	50	71.43

The additional literature (“other”) used by preschool teachers (71.43%) is diverse and covers sources from the Internet, songs from songbooks for choirs, songs included in textbooks for piano, guitar or soprano records, personal compilations (booklets), or collections of handwritten children’s folk songs that the preschool teachers used to sing in their childhood or schooling, or are (still) singing in their family. The selection of literature (songbooks) indicates that it is not chosen from an organized database (or a pool) with a collection of songbooks or literature.

To examine the preschool teachers’ familiarity with different songbooks containing children’s folk songs, and to analyze the frequency of their use in musical activities, five songbooks were proposed, among them three songbooks containing only (children’s) folk songs: *Pesmi in šege moje dežele* (Kunaver et al., 1987), *Slovenske ljudske pesmi za otroke 1-4* (Pesek, 1994-2000), and *Otroška pesmarica (Slovenske ljudske pesmi) 1-2* (Šivic et al., 2004, 2006).

Table 3 shows that the preschool teachers are most familiar with the two songbooks *Majhna sem bila* and *Piške sem pasla*, and that the other songbooks are rarely used, with *Pesmi in šege moje dežele* being the least popular. Slovenian folk music is frequently included in music activities by preschool teachers ($M = 3.41$; $SD = 1.31$), mostly once a week (44.29%), and even semi-weekly (18.57%). In some kindergartens, activities including Slovenian folk music occur three times per month (12.86%), twice a month (8.57), and once a month (15.71%), regardless of work experience.

It is interesting that 48.57% of the participants neither agree nor disagree that the knowledge obtained during their schooling has helped them in the presentation of Slovenian folk music, especially in presenting children’s folk songs.

Table 3: Proposed songbooks for preschool education

Songbooks		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total	Mean (SD)
Majhna sem bila	f	0	57	10	2	1	70	3.76
	f %	0.00	81.42	14.29	2.86	1.43	100%	(0.58)
Piške sem pasla	f	0	31	20	12	7	70	3.07
	f %	0.00	44.29	28.57	17.14	10.00	100%	(1.01)
Šege in navade	f	0	1	10	11	48	70	1.49
	f %	0.00	1.43	14.29	15.71	68.57	100%	(0.79)
Pesek Songbooks	f	0	6	12	21	31	70	1.90
	f %	0.00	8.57	17.14	30.00	44.29	100%	(0.98)
Šivic1	f	0	6	11	22	31	70	1.89
	f %	0.00	8.57	15.71	31.43	44.29	100%	(0.97)
Šivic2	f	0	4	7	23	36	70	1.70
	f %	0.00	5.71	10.00	32.86	51.43	100%	(0.87)

Table 4 presents the musical activities. The Kruskal-Wallis test shows statistically significant differences between the musical activities $H(3) = 83.64, p < .001$. The most frequent activity is “singing of children’s folk songs,” and the least frequent, “playing of folk instruments”. The results accord with findings from other studies (Denac, 2012; Geršak, 2015; Žnidaršič, 2016; Denac and Žnidaršič, 2018), which also outline the disproportion in activities when presenting Slovenian folk music.

Table 4: Musical activities in kindergarten including Slovenian folk music

Activities		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total	Mean (SD)
Singing	f	33	29	7	1	0	63	4.34
	f %	47.14	41.43	10.00	1.43	0.00	100%	(0.72)
Folk dance	f	3	22	34	10	1	63	3.23
	f %	4.29	31.43	48.56	14.29	1.43	100%	(0.80)
Folk Instrum.	f	4	11	26	27	2	63	2.83
	f %	5.71	15.71	37.15	38.57	2.86	100%	(0.93)
Listening	f	10	28	19	11	2	63	3.47
	f %	14.29	40.00	27.14	15.71	2.86	100%	(1.02)

A plausible explanation for the preference for singing (children’s) folk songs (regardless of the length of work experience) can be understood as reflecting that these songs are usually short, simple in lyrics, melody, and musical structure (Denac and Žnidaršič, 2018; Mihelač et al., 2021).

Furthermore, no (additional) musical instruments are required, nor a spacious room (which would be the case if learning folk dances), and even the youngest children can be included in this activity.

Although the emphasis is on the singing of children's folk songs in kindergarten, scant information about these songs is provided by preschool teachers to kindergarteners (Table 5), and similar findings emerged in studies by Žnidaršič (2016) and Denac and Žnidaršič (2018). Explanation mostly concerns *how to sing* children's folk songs and the *authorship* of these songs. Less is explained about the circumstances *why* and *how* some songs were created ('Story about CFS'), if there are any *variant versions* of a particular song, or if a particular song can be found in another country ('Roaming CFS').

Although not everything about a particular children's folk song can be provided during music activity in kindergartens, some facts could be interesting for children. For example, in the presenting the Slovenian children's folk song *Ringa raja*, the existence of different lyrics can be shown e.g., those in the collection of songs no. IV from Štrekelj (1895-1923, p. 434), in Komavec and Šivic (2004, p. 68), and in Voglar and Nograšek (2009, p. 141). Alternate melodies can also be introduced, for example, the varied versions found in Komavec and Šivic (2004, p. 68), and Voglar and Nograšek (2009, p. 141).

Table 5: Information about children's folk songs in kindergartens

Inform. CFS		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total	Mean (SD)
Varied versions	f	3	14	25	18	10	63	2.74
	f %	4.29	20.00	35.71	25.71	14.29	100%	(1.1)
Origin of CFS	f	6	14	22	20	8	63	2.86
	f %	8.57	20.00	31.43	28.57	11.43	100%	(1.1)
Author of CFS	f	13	14	20	11	12	63	3.07
	f %	18.58	20.00	28.57	15.71	17.14	100%	(1.3)
How to sing CFS	f	19	17	21	10	3	63	3.56
	f %	27.14	24.29	30.00	14.29	4.28	100%	(1.2)
Story about CFS	f	5	13	21	23	8	63	2.77
	f %	7.14	18.57	30.00	32.86	11.43	100%	(1.1)
Roaming CFS	f	2	9	17	29	13	63	2.40
	f %	2.86	12.86	24.43	41.41	18.57	100%	(1.0)

Furthermore, this song could be additionally interesting because two versions are sung in Great Britain (*Ring a Ring O'Roses*) and in Germany (*Ringel Reibe*), indicating that there is a common pre-version of this song, spread across regions and countries over a period time.

Of further interest are the varying folkdances that accompany the singing of this song, since these differ in Germany, Great Britain and Slovenia for the same song. Showing the children varied versions of the same children's folk song, means showing the "never-ending story" about a children's folk song, which can differ within or even between countries, depending on where and when the song emerged and how it has changed over time.

The selection of children's folk songs used in music activities and provided by preschool teachers shows that from the 91 suggested songs, 57 (62.64%) are children's folk songs and 34 (37.36%) author songs. Furthermore, only some of the children's folk songs are selected from the two songbooks used in the kindergartens (*Majhna sem bila, Piške sem pasla*), and most of the children's folk songs are selected from other sources. A considerable number of children's folk songs are author's songs, to be found in the two songbooks used in kindergartens (*Majhna sem bila, Piške sem pasla*) and some of them selected from other sources (Table 6).

Table 6: Selection of children's folk songs from songbooks

Literature		Children's folk songs	Author songs
Majhna sem bila/Piške sem pasla	f	15	22
	f%	26.32	64.71
Other songbooks	f	42	12
	f%	73.68	35.29

The preschool teachers outline some specific problems they encounter when preparing activities in which children's folk songs are included. According to their responses, the description for activities covering children's folk songs in the Kindergarten Curriculum is sparse (35.71%), and there is a lack of additional seminars/workshops about children's folk songs for preschool teachers (37.14%). Also mentioned are the lack of children's folk songs in existing songbooks (20.00%), and of more detailed description about children's folk songs (14.29 %). Some preschool teachers have problems finding literature about children's folk songs (8.57%). The main problem faced by preschool teachers is that author's songs in the songbooks used in kindergartens are given more emphasis than children's folk songs (67.14%).

In-depth analysis of the most frequently used songbooks in kindergarten, *Majhna sem bila* and *Piške sem pasla* shows that both songbooks contain songs with content close to the children's world, covering a pitch range suitable for preschool children, with smaller, descending intervals.

Furthermore, the songs are syllabic, with frequently repeated motifs, with duple and quadruple meter prevailing over triple, and with binary rhythms prevailing over ternary.

However, from 171 songs collected in *Majhna sem bila*, only 14 songs (8.19%) are defined as "folk songs", and 7 songs (7%) out of 100 as "folk songs" in *Piške sem pasla*. The remaining songs are author songs by well-known Slovenian composers for children (e.g., Janez Bitenc, Mira Voglar, Tomaž Habe, Janez Kuhar, and Pavle Kala). For all the songs (including folk songs), descriptions about the content, suggestions about how to present the songs to the children, and (cross)curricular music activities are provided.

For folk songs, no information is provided about their origin, e.g., about additional variant versions, or about the story behind the creation of these songs. This means that preschool teachers, if interested, must search for additional literature about these songs. Literature about the content of children's folk songs, about their origin (village, region), variant versions, date of recording etc., do exist (e.g., in the collection from Štrekelj, 1895-1923: IV, the collection of Slovenian folk songs I-IV). The question is *whether* preschool teachers are prepared to acquire additional information about the children's folk songs that they intend to include in their activities, and moreover if they know *where* and *how* to look, and *what* exactly they should search for. Most teachers would like to have additional literature with a selection of children's folk songs (Figure 1), which would lighten their work and enrich their music activities when presenting Slovenian children's folk songs.

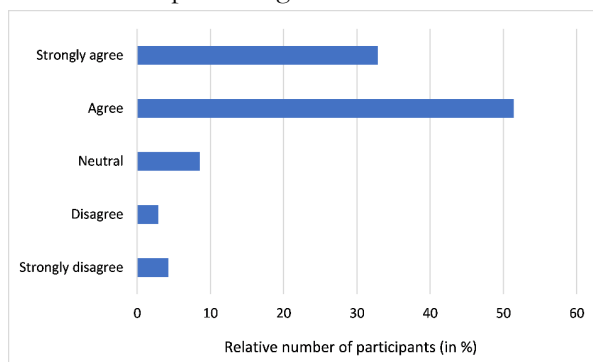


Figure 1: The need for additional literature concerning children's folk songs

Most preschool teachers, 49 out of 70 (70%) are prepared to attend additional educational seminars (workshops) about children's folk songs, 20 out of 70 are not sure (28.57%), and only 1 preschool teacher is not prepared to attend an additional seminar (workshop).

Conclusions

Our way of living is constantly changing, and nowadays, musical taste among preschool children is more than ever influenced by the media, kindergarten, cultural institutions, the social environment, and family. In seeking to preserve the folk music tradition, one of the key success factors is certainly the preschool teacher, whose role is to arouse children's joy and form a positive attitude towards Slovenian folk music in children from the earliest stage of life. This requires not only general musical knowledge, but also comprehensive knowledge about Slovenian folk music, which could be extended in preschool teachers with additional seminars, workshops, symposiums, congresses, and similar events. Support from various institutions could also be a workable solution in the sense of providing know-how: where and how to find additional literature about Slovenian folk music, which literature, and how to present folk music. The Slovenian Kindergarten Curriculum (currently being renewed in 2021), is a valuable and crucial guideline in the preservation of Slovenian cultural heritage; however, as established, it covers the description of principles, predominantly outlines for what should be achieved in all fields of the Kindergarten Curriculum, and *suggests* the activities in each field *in general*, not *in detail*. Therefore, a *supplement* to the Kindergarten Curriculum, including additional activities, and further explanations about the already provided activities in each field would offer added value and be of immense help for preschool teachers. In considering the Slovenian children's folk songs included in songbooks, we have found that two of them, *Majbna sem bila* and *Piške sem pasla* are most commonly used. Although both songbooks are an important contribution to the preschool music literature, the emphasis is on author's songs, and children's folk songs in these books are rarely included.

Additional literature about children's folk songs (e.g., about their origin, about the best-known variant versions, about the circumstances behind a particular song's creation, and if a similar song can be found outside Slovenia) could contribute to a better understanding of these songs, and their indispensability in preserving Slovenian folk music.

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Author:

Dr. Lorena Mihelač

coordinator of international projects / head of the department for Creative music expression/
teacher of vocational subjects, School center Novo mesto, SGLVŠ, Šegova ulica 12, 8000 Novo
mesto, Slovenia, e-mail: lorena.mihelac@sc-nm.si

koordinator internacionalnih projektov / vodja oddelka za Ustvarjalno izražanje/ prof. strokovnih
predmetov , Šolski center Novo mesto, SGLVŠ, Šegova ulica 12, 8000 Novo mesto, Slovenija, e-
pošta: lorena.mihelac@sc-nm.si