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THE ROLE OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN CROATIA IN PRESERVING TRADITIONAL MUSIC

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Izvleček/Abstract

Traditional music is a vital component of intangible cultural heritage and identity, yet it is increasingly absent from its original, spontaneous contexts. This paper examines the role of music education in preserving traditional music. An analysis of N=75 papers from HRČAK, the Portal of Croatian scientific and professional journals, shows that nearly one-third address musical heritage, traditional and folk music, interculturalism, and world music in teaching. Music education is therefore recognized as a key environment for transmitting, preserving, and developing students' cultural identity and intercultural competences.

Vloga glasbene vzgoje na Hrvaškem pri ohranjanju tradicionalne glasbe

Tradicionalna glasba je pomembna sestavina nesnovne kulturne dediščine in identitete, vendar vse bolj izginja iz svojih prvotnih, spontanih okolij. V prispevku preučujemo vlogo glasbene vzgoje pri ohranjanju tradicionalne glasbe. Analiza \(N = 75\) člankov iz portala HRČAK, portala hrvaških znanstvenih in strokovnih revij, kaže, da skoraj v tretjini člankov obravnavajo glasbeno dediščino, tradicionalno in ljudsko glasbo, medkulturnost ter svetovno glasbo (angl. world music) pri poučevanju. Glasbena vzgoja je zato prepoznana kot ključno okolje za prenašanje, ohranjanje in razvijanje kulturne identitete ter medkulturnih kompetenc učencev.

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Introduction

Music pedagogy, as both a scientific discipline and an educational practice, plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting traditional music as part of intangible cultural heritage. Traditional music is a fundamental carrier of individual and collective cultural identity because it encompasses collective memory, customs, values, aesthetic norms, and the historical experience of a particular region. In the context of globalization, technological development, and changing values, it faces decreasing visibility and interruptions in intergenerational transmission. For this reason, schools, especially music education, are essential environments for systematic introduction, understanding, and appreciation of traditional musical expression.

Starting from the theoretical foundations of music pedagogy, this paper investigates how music education can contribute to preserving traditional music in contemporary schools. It analyses Croatian and international studies on curricula, pedagogical approaches, reception, performance practice, and the development of students' intercultural competences. Music education provides a structured framework through which students encounter traditional music via listening, performance, analysis, and understanding music in its cultural and social context.

According to the Curriculum for Music Culture in Primary Schools and Music Art in Gymnasiums (Ministry of Science and Education [MSE], 2019), traditional music can be included in all three domains: listening and becoming familiar with music, musical expression and related activities, and music in context. Thus, traditional music is treated not only as a historical category, but also as a living, dynamic part of contemporary cultural practice.

The aim of this paper is to critically examine the role of music education in preserving traditional music, starting from music pedagogy as a discipline focused on transmitting and safeguarding traditional musical heritage. The paper also offers recommendations for the improvement of music education as a key factor in preserving traditional musical and cultural heritage.

Traditional Music in Early Preschool and Primary Education

Already in early childhood and preschool education, singing, playing instruments, listening, creativity, and movement create opportunities for including traditional music, which encourages children's holistic development. Denac (2010) emphasizes

that children's interest in varied musical genres and traditions develops in early childhood, highlighting the importance of early musical experiences for fostering cultural identity and a lasting interest in music. Sučić and Gergorić (2016) warn about the marginalisation of traditional music under the influence of mass media and emphasise cooperation between families and educational institutions, advocating an integrated curriculum that includes traditional songs, games, and dances. The need to strengthen the role of folk songs in preschool education is also confirmed by Mihelač (2022), while Argyriou (2025) points out that intercultural musical activities for preschool children based on traditional songs encourage aesthetic appreciation, empathy, and the development of an inclusive identity.

At the primary school level, Gergorić (2016) highlights the insufficient representation of intercultural content in textbooks and the need to evaluate traditional music more equally alongside the Western classical repertoire. Gergorić and Sučić (2018) confirm students' interest in folklore-related content, but also note its limited implementation caused by organisational obstacles and insufficient institutional support. They therefore emphasise the need for curricular changes, teacher professional development, and stronger cooperation between schools and communities to improve the integration of traditional music into teaching and extracurricular activities.

International empirical research confirms similar patterns. Cao et al. (2025) present a programme for integrating traditional Chinese folk music into secondary school music education and demonstrate that such a curriculum improves students' musical achievement, awareness of national heritage, and patriotism. Yang, Chuangprakhon, and Seekhunlio (2025) found that including Ziyang folk songs in music teaching increases engagement, cultural pride, emotional involvement, vocal skills, and understanding of musical structure, while local traditions provide a balance between technical excellence and cultural immersion.

Similarly, Manotas Pizarro et al. (2025) propose a sociocultural approach for preserving traditional Vallenato music in Colombian secondary schools, noting increased interest, knowledge, and heritage appreciation, improved school coexistence, and more critical thinking. In the African context, Nyamwaka (2025) shows that traditional music integrated through digital platforms and artificial intelligence can improve musical skills, cognitive abilities, and cultural awareness, while still requiring a balance between contemporary methods and cultural authenticity.

Within primary and secondary education, Li (2025) emphasises storytelling, experiential and interdisciplinary learning, as well as technology-supported resources as key strategies for connecting traditional music with cultural narratives. However, the author also warns about students' preference for popular music, limited access to instruments, insufficient teacher education, and the dominance of the Western classical repertoire.

Jumriani et al. (2024), through the example of panting music from South Kalimantan, demonstrate that performance activities related to traditional music can be successfully integrated into textbooks dealing with cultural and ethnic diversity, thereby enabling traditional music to be learned and contextualised within a broader social framework.

On a broader sociocultural level, Fan (2025) warns that globalization and orientation toward the outside world weaken young people's interest in local culture in China. Therefore, the author advocates integrating traditional music into primary school music education, which is essential for developing students' cultural identity and musical literacy and requires systematic curricular reforms, innovative teaching methods, and competent teachers.

Numerous studies consistently confirm that the systematic inclusion of traditional music in educational systems, from preschool to higher education, contributes to the development of musical competences, the strengthening of cultural identity, intercultural sensitivity, and a sense of belonging to the community. Traditional music is therefore not perceived as a static historical artefact, but rather as a living carrier of collective memory, values, and aesthetic norms, as well
as a foundation for the ethnocultural identity and mentality of different peoples.

Taken together, these studies indicate that models for integrating traditional music into early childhood and primary education are most effective when they are grounded in local traditions and their cultural meaning, include listening, performance, analysis, and contextualisation, and are supported by experiential, project-based, and sociocultural approaches. Cooperation with local musicians, heritage bearers, cultural and artistic societies, and parents further strengthens this process. At the same time, the studies emphasise the decisive role of teachers and educators, their pedagogical and intercultural competences, and the need for professional development and curricular reforms that can reduce the dominance of the Western classical repertoire and ensure meaningful preservation of traditional music.

Theoretical and Empirical Basis of the Intercultural Approach to Traditional Music

In contemporary discussions concerning the role of music education in preserving cultural diversity and developing intercultural understanding, increasing emphasis is placed on the need for theoretically grounded and methodologically elaborated approaches. Volkov (2023) discusses artistic music education as part of intangible cultural heritage within the framework of the institutionalised transmission of tradition.

On a theoretical level, Ovčhinnikova (2024) provides a key framework for understanding the role of traditional music in the development of students' intercultural competences by identifying four approaches: ethnomusicological, subject-oriented, anthropological, and person-oriented. A comparison of international and Croatian experiences demonstrates that, despite the strong presence of multicultural music education within curricular policies, there is still a lack of elaborated theoretical and methodological models for the development of such competences. Most international research remains at the level of conceptual discussions or isolated experiments without systematic synthesis. Therefore, the author advocates further development of ethnomusicological dialogue and the systematisation of international experience, so that intercultural competences can be understood from general concepts to concrete teaching methods and learning outcomes. This confirms music education as a key environment for preserving traditional heritage and developing students' intercultural competences.

Empirical research in the international context complements these theoretical foundations. Long and Yulia (2025) demonstrate that integrating traditional Chinese music into contemporary education contributes to the development of students' musical competences, cognitive abilities, and cultural awareness, while successful implementation depends on educated teachers, high-quality materials, resources, and culturally sensitive pedagogical strategies.

The authors emphasise the need to balance cultural authenticity with contemporary teaching methods and to identify obstacles such as insufficiently competent teachers and cultural barriers. Jiang (2025) and Bing et al. (2024) show that optimising music education curricula in Chinese provinces through localised curricula, experiential learning, and innovations driven by educational policy strengthens students' cultural literacy, aesthetic sensitivity, and technical skills.

In the Croatian context, Gortan-Carlin and Diković (2025) emphasise that study programmes in early childhood and preschool education play a key role in encouraging intercultural communication and preserving traditional music.

Their analysis of 964 syllabi shows that music-related courses (N = 72) particularly motivate students to preserve traditional and intercultural culture. According to Dionyssiou's model, learning outcomes include musical events and sense of place, while the creative process is least represented, which points to the need for stronger emphasis on creativity and intercultural competences among future educators. This is consistent with Licardo and Peček (2020), who also highlight the need to strengthen intercultural competences in teacher education programmes.

A comparison of the aforementioned studies suggests that international literature is gradually shaping a common framework: curricular solutions encompassing listening, performance, analysis, and contextualisation of traditional music, combined with experiential, project-based, and sociocultural approaches, contribute positively to musical achievement, cognitive development, cultural awareness, and students' sense of pride. At the same time, authors such as Ovčinnikova (2024), Long and Yulia (2025), Li (2025), and Fan (2025) warn about structural challenges, including insufficiently developed theoretical and methodological models of intercultural music education, limited resources, insufficient teacher education, and the dominance of the Western classical repertoire.

In this context, educational systems are increasingly recognised as key environments for the development of sustainable curricular models and pedagogical strategies that integrate traditional music into regular teaching, extracurricular activities, and broader projects. Traditional music is thereby recognised as a fundamental resource for developing interculturally sensitive, musically competent, and culturally aware students.

Method

In the research section, a quantitative-qualitative content analysis was conducted of scientific papers available on HRČAK, the Portal of Croatian scientific and professional journals. The analysed papers pertain to music pedagogy, ethnomusicology, and cultural heritage and were searched up to April 2026 using the keyword *music education* with variable keywords (*musical heritage/cultural heritage*, *traditional/folk music*, *interculturalism/world music*).

First, the total number of papers identified according to the specified keywords was analysed (N=75), after which a detailed analysis was conducted on 23 papers (30.7%) directly dealing with musical/cultural heritage, traditional/folk music, and interculturalism within the context of music education.

For each paper, the following aspects were examined: thematic area, educational level (primary/secondary school, teachers, students), research objectives, pedagogical methods employed, and the main findings related to the preservation of traditional music and the role of music education in transmitting heritage.

Results and Discussion

Within the corpus of seventy-five papers, twenty-three papers (30.7%) directly address musical heritage, traditional/folk music, and interculturalism in music education, indicating that the scientific and professional community recognizes music education as a key environment for preserving and transmitting traditional music.

Since traditional music is increasingly removed from its original, spontaneous context, schools and music education become important mediators and spaces for its preservation. The number of papers by keyword group is presented in Table 1, while individual studies are descriptively synthesised according to analytical categories, with emphasis on how they conceptualise schools and music education as spaces for preserving and mediating traditional music in contemporary society.

Table 1

Number of papers and keywords used in the search

	Keywords	Number of papers
Music education (N = 75)	Musical heritage / cultural heritage	5
	Traditional music / folk music	8
	Interculturalism / world music	10
Total		23

Connection Between Music Education and Musical Heritage

An analysis of five HRČAK papers identified using the keywords music education and musical heritage demonstrates the multilayered role of music pedagogy in preserving traditional and overall musical heritage. These studies include the contributions of melographers and composers, the importance of early child involvement in music, scholarly production in music pedagogy, and school extracurricular activities, especially choirs.

Various authors in contemporary Croatian musicological and pedagogical literature

emphasise that traditional music is one of the key carriers of national identity and that its preservation depends on systematic action within education. The following section presents the contributions of individual researchers who, from different perspectives, confirm the importance of music pedagogy in preserving Croatian musical heritage.

Koprek (2018) highlights the role of Miroslav Vuk Croata in preserving Croatian sacred musical heritage both in Croatia and in the diaspora, where arrangements of folk songs simultaneously preserve music and local dialects. Gortan-Carlin and Lovrinić (2021) present the development of Istrian musical heritage and its connection with Croatian tradition, emphasising the influence of Istrian-Littoral music on composers' creativity and its promotion within music education. Sam Palmić (2009) confirms the importance of early involvement of preschool children in musical activities promoting the local music of the island of Krk, while parents expressed highly positive attitudes, highlighting the role of early education in preserving local heritage.

At the level of scholarly production, analysis by Šulentić Begić (2024) demonstrates that 24% of papers in the CROSBI database address music education as a contribution to preserving musical heritage in primary schools, secondary schools, and music schools, confirming the importance of music pedagogy and the considerable interest in this field. Music pedagogy plays a significant role in extracurricular activities: schools offer choirs, orchestras, dance, folklore, and other musical activities. Authors Mičija Palić and Jambrošić (2023) emphasise the importance of primary school choirs in preserving Croatian musical heritage through the performance of traditional works by Croatian composers at the Croatian Youth Music Festival competition in Varaždin.

Overall, Croatian musical heritage lives through the work of melographers and composers, scientific research, early music education, music teaching, and rich extracurricular activities. The findings indicate the need for further strengthening of music pedagogy and the systematic inclusion of traditional music at all levels of education, from preschool to higher education, to ensure the continuous transmission and development of national musical heritage.

Traditional Music in Curricula, Textbooks, Teachers' Attitudes, and Identity

Using the keywords *music education* and *traditional music/folk music* on HRČAK, the Portal of Croatian scientific and professional journals, eight papers were identified that examine the role of traditional music in the educational system from various

perspectives. Their common focus is traditional music as an important carrier of cultural and musical identity, but also as a potential means for developing students' intercultural competences.

In the Croatian context, particularly through the example of Istrian traditional music, research clearly points to the complex relationship between curricular guidelines, teaching practice, and the potential of music education in shaping students' intercultural competences and identities. Sam Palmić (2010) observes the Istrian scale within Disoteo's strategy of intercultural music education, in which traditional music becomes a paradigm of Croatian regional music and a key factor in shaping both individual and collective identity.

In an analysis of primary school curricula from 1946 to 2006, Sam Palmić (2013) concludes that programmes insufficiently acknowledge regional and multicultural diversity and do not fully use the potential of traditional music for developing intercultural competences. In an analysis of Music Culture textbooks, Sam Palmić (2015) examines whether they reflect musical diversity, include minority music, and enable students' emotional connection with their own and other traditions. The author also questions whether traditional examples have only a decorative function or a deeper identity-forming role.

At the level of classroom implementation, Močinić and Crnčić Brajković (2018) found that the realisation of traditional content in Music Culture classes strongly depends on teachers' personal attitudes. Teachers perceive traditional music as deeply connected with community life and emphasise the invaluable role of the contemporary school system, regular teaching, and extracurricular activities in preserving musical heritage.

The increasingly prominent role of schools as a link between institutional education and local musical practice is highlighted by Debeljuh Giudici (2021), who describes the state of traditional vocal music in Istria through its rich and ethnically diverse repertoire, as well as the transition from spontaneous everyday singing to organised performances.

Furthermore, Drandić (2010) confirms that the majority of the 123 surveyed teachers in Pula hold positive attitudes toward including Istrian traditional music in teaching. Several factors were identified: skill development, encouragement of knowledge, acquisition of competences, and lack of knowledge, with skill development emerging as the strongest factor. This supports the inclusion of Istrian traditional music in the curriculum for the purpose of developing intercultural competences.

Škojo, Sesar, and Tatai (2025) emphasise that the Music Culture curriculum enables a comprehensive approach to traditional music through three domains (listening, expression, music in context) and provides teachers with considerable freedom in selecting content. Nevertheless, students generally do not express a strong interest in traditional content; greater openness was observed among younger students, especially girls, and when diverse and creative teaching methods were employed.
The authors stress the need for creative, project-based, and interdisciplinary approaches, cultural and artistic programmes, and the key role of teachers in developing competences and sensitivity toward national musical and cultural identity.
Goldin and Šuran (2025) present the example of the elective subject Traditional Music of Istria at the Ivan Matetić Ronjgov Music School in Pula as part of the Regional Teaching project. Teaching was conducted through listening, analysis, and practical music-making involving traditional and contemporary hybrid songs, with an emphasis on creativity and critical reflection on tradition.
Traditional music is understood as a dynamic process whose survival depends on performers who know traditional patterns but enrich them through improvisation and personal expression. Students created lyrics and musical works by connecting traditional elements with their own experiences and contemporary surroundings, thereby developing creativity, self-expression, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of cultural context.
The analysed studies confirm that traditional music plays multiple roles in music education: it simultaneously serves as a carrier of regional and national identity, a means of intercultural learning, and a valuable resource for developing students' musical, emotional, and social competences.
Overall, the reviewed studies clearly demonstrate that music education, together with extracurricular and project-based activities, can play a key role in the preservation and transmission of traditional music, provided that curricular frameworks, textbook content, and teachers' professional competences are systematically strengthened, while contemporary and interculturally oriented pedagogical approaches are encouraged.

Traditional Music within the Intercultural Approach to Music Education and World Music

Traditional music occupies a prominent place within the intercultural approach to music education and world music, especially in contemporary multicultural societies.

A search of the HRČAK portal using the keywords *music education* and *interculturalism/world music* identified ten papers. In Croatian research, traditional music and world music are recognised as key resources for intercultural education, identity development, and prejudice reduction, while also revealing a gap between the normative aims of intercultural education and the predominantly Eurocentric orientation of music teaching practice.

This issue is further addressed in studies that analyse in greater detail the presence and role of intercultural content within music education. Šulentić Begić and Begić (2017), as well as Begić (2016) and Begić, A., and Šulentić Begić, J. (2019), proceed from the multicultural nature of music and perceive traditional music as a living component of contemporary culture and a key factor in developing sensitivity toward differences and awareness of identity.

Analyses of secondary-school programmes and the Croatian primary school curriculum reveal insufficient or absent intercultural content, especially regarding non-European and less represented European traditions. Empirical research among teachers confirms the dominance of Western European art music and the limited representation of world music (Begić and Šulentić Begić, 2018a). Analyses of teaching materials further confirm the need for interculturalisation.

Within higher education for future teachers, intercultural topics are rare, while students simultaneously recognise their own lack of intercultural competences and express strong interest in developing them (Begić and Šulentić Begić, 2018b). This indicates the necessity for curricular transformation and the introduction of direct intercultural experiences.

Dobrota and Kovačević (2007) critically point to the Eurocentric orientation of Croatian music education and the marginalisation of other traditions, advocating a pluralistic approach that acknowledges various aesthetic and cultural paradigms.

In the works of Dobrota and colleagues (Dobrota and Blašković, 2014; Dobrota, 2016; Dobrota and Vukić, 2021; Dobrota, 2021), interculturalism is defined as a dynamic encounter between cultures in which music functions as a medium of dialogue and prejudice reduction. Research confirms students' positive attitudes toward world music, the connection between intercultural effectiveness, musical knowledge, and preferences for world music, and the need for continuous intercultural education from preschool to higher education. The integration of aesthetic and sociocultural approaches is emphasised as a prerequisite for the development of comprehensive intercultural competences.

Overall, traditional music and world music are recognised as key resources for intercultural education and the preservation of cultural identity. Their effective implementation requires the interculturalisation of curricula and teaching materials, systematic professional development for teachers, and pedagogical strategies that move beyond the dominance of Western art music and respond to the globalised, multicultural society.

Conclusion

Within the analysed corpus of papers from HRČAK, the Portal of Croatian scientific and professional journals, music education is consistently recognised as an important field for the preservation and transmission of traditional music. Of the 75 papers identified using music education-related keywords, nearly one-third (30.7%, N=23) directly address musical/cultural heritage, traditional/folk music, and interculturalism/world music within the context of music education.

Such representation demonstrates that music education is viewed not only as a space for aesthetic education, but also as a key mechanism for transmitting traditional music as part of musical heritage in contemporary educational contexts.

The distribution of papers by groups (five papers concerning musical/cultural heritage, eight concerning traditional/folk music, and ten concerning interculturalism/world music) indicates that the preservation of traditional music is considered within the broader frameworks of cultural heritage and intercultural education.

At the same time, the structure of the papers reflects researchers' awareness that traditional music is increasingly removed from its spontaneous and original contextual practices, while schools, through classroom teaching and extracurricular musical activities, assume the role of mediators between heritage and new generations.

The findings emphasise that preserving traditional and musical heritage relies on high-quality music pedagogy, motivational extracurricular activities, and cooperation between schools and heritage institutions.

Particular emphasis is placed on interactive, emotionally engaging, and creative forms of work as pathways toward strengthening students' identities and interest in heritage. In this context, music education becomes a space in which traditional music is transmitted, transformed, interpreted, and brought into dialogue with other musical traditions.

Author Contribution Statement

Conceptualization and methodology: A. G.; data collection and analysis: A. G. and I. P. G. C.; writing – original draft preparation: A. G.; writing – review and editing: A. G. and I. P. G. C. Both authors contributed to the research, read and approved the final version of the manuscript, and accept responsibility for its content.

Data Availability Statement

The article is based on the analysis of scientific and professional papers from the Croatian scientific portal HRČAK, which are cited in the list of references and literature.

Statement on the Use of Generative AI Tools

During the preparation of this manuscript, generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to improve the language and style of certain sections of the text. The tools were used exclusively for formatting and linguistic editing purposes. The authors reviewed, verified, and edited the suggestions and accept full responsibility for the content, scientific validity, and final version of the manuscript.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was not required, as the study is based on the analysis of publicly available scientific and professional papers from the Croatian scientific portal HRČAK and does not involve the direct participation of human subjects.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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