

The development and improvement of rhythmic skills in school music lessons among children aged between 6 and 8

Summary of the Ph.D. dissertation

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Musical activities, in addition to their many positive transfer effects, are also a source of joy. The development of musical skills at school takes place primarily in music lessons, which are the main stage for the foundation of general musical literacy. Therefore, school music lessons offer all children the opportunity to experience the feeling of freedom and joy by connecting rhythm and movement, acquiring musical knowledge, and refining their aesthetic sense. At the same time, based on our experience, the practice and methodology of Hungarian music education in elementary schools put more emphasis on singing musical activities, and less on rhythmic activities. School music lessons can also provide opportunities for students to like music and musical activities more, however, based on previous studies, music lessons are not one of the most popular lessons in Hungary.

In our research, we aimed to examine the development of rhythmic skills among first and second-grade students. In a longitudinal study, we examined the characteristics of the rhythmic skill development of children studying according to the traditional curriculum in the first two grades of elementary school (n=205). Our two other experimental studies concern the playful development possibilities of rhythmic skills in classroom conditions, in which we examined the possibility of effective development of rhythmic skills and the effects of regular practice of rhythmic games on the attitude towards music lessons (n₁=258, n₂=218).

Based on our *longitudinal study* results, the auditory rhythmic ability which represents rhythmic skills shows a significant, moderate development with a slowing intensity in the first two years of elementary school. We have shown also that rhythm perception and rhythm reproduction develop to a different degree in the examined grades. The developmental characteristics of the auditory rhythmic ability and the changes in its structure were revealed by factor analysis. In the first two years of elementary school, our results show a continuous reorganization of rhythmic skills and in the second year, we can conclude that the ability to perceive tempo stabilizes. The results of our *first experiment* show that the application of the first rhythmic development program did not affect the development of abilities in the experimental group (n=141) to a significantly greater extent than in the control group (n=117), but at the same time, it slightly helped the students with low development to catch up. The development program was successful in promoting a positive attitude toward music lessons, contributing to a significantly more positive attitude in the experimental group than in the control group. As a result of our *second experiment*, the application of an intensive rhythmic development program, the experimental group (n=90) achieved significantly higher development in all tested musical abilities than the control group (n=128). The students of the experimental group using the intensive rhythmic development program liked the music lessons significantly more than the students of the control group.

Our longitudinal study and two experiments conducted in first grade support the previous research results, according to which the age of 6–8 is a sensitive period for the development of rhythmic skills. In addition, we have also shown that rhythmic skills can be significantly improved in the first grade with intensive and regular development integrated into the lesson.