

### Research Article

## The Role and Importance of Musical Games in the Holistic Development of Children

Majlinda Hala\*

Department of Picture, University of Arts, Tirana, Albania

\* Corresponding Author: [majlindahala@gmail.com](mailto:majlindahala@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Musical play is a powerful pedagogical tool for the development of children at an early age. These activities directly affect motor, sensory, emotional, intellectual and artistic development. This article explores the ways in which games in general and musical games support the holistic development of children, including the practices of educational methods such as Orff, Dalcroze and Suzuki, supported by contemporary research in the field of music education and developmental neuroscience. Also, this article presents different models of using music games for children, focusing more on Albanian music games. In conclusion, musical games are a rich and comprehensive tool for the holistic development of children. This article provides a comparative overview of Albanian musical games and those from the broader Balkan and European regions, with particular attention to their musical and textual characteristics and their psychological and developmental impact on children. Drawing from ethnomusicological studies and developmental psychology, the paper identifies key cultural and pedagogical elements embedded in these traditions. They affect motor, sensory, emotional, intellectual and artistic aspects in a related manner. Pedagogical practices that integrate musical play, based on well-known methods such as Orff, Dalcroze and Suzuki, contribute significantly to the creation of a lively, safe and favorable environment for learning. The findings emphasize the multidimensional role of musical games in supporting children's motor, emotional, cognitive, and social development across cultures.

**Keywords:** Musical play; motor; sensory; emotional; intellectual; artistic development; early childhood.

### 1. Introduction

Music is a universal experience that plays a fundamental role in children's development. In particular, games when combined with music are among the most effective and natural ways to engage children in learning processes that help them develop multiple aspects of their personality (Gordon, 2003). Through rhythm, melody, movement and social interaction, musical games help in motor, sensory, emotional, intellectual and artistic development, integrating these areas in a natural and harmonious way (Hallam,

2010). Musical games are a cross-cultural phenomenon that blend music, movement, language, and play, offering children a holistic form of engagement that promotes learning and well-being. Across Albania, the Balkans, and the rest of Europe, these games are rooted in oral traditions and folk music practices that reflect local values, identities, and developmental needs (Merriam, 1964; Ilari, 2011). While differing in form and content, musical games in these regions share common goals: fostering group cohesion, emotional regulation, creativity, and physical coordination.

## **2. Literature Review**

Motor development includes the body's ability to move in a coordinated manner, both in terms of gross (jumping, walking) and fine (manipulating objects) motor skills. Musical games, such as those inspired by the Dalcroze method, support motor development through body movement that follows the rhythm and structure of the music (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). For example, when children walk, stop, dance, or use instruments such as tambourines or rattles to reflect different rhythms, they improve hand-eye coordination, balance, and body awareness (Valerio et al., 1998). Such activities not only build physical skills, but also promote awareness of rhythm and music in general. Sensory development is about processing information through the senses (hearing, touch, sight). Musical games provide a multisensory experience that deeply engages the child. Through hearing sounds, touching instruments, feeling movement, and observing others at play, a strong connection is made between musical sensations and perceptions (Bergeson & Trehub, 2006).

Methods such as Orff Schulwerk particularly embrace this dimension, using simple materials such as wood, metal, and leather to produce sounds that can be touched, seen, and heard. This sensory engagement helps children to structure spatial and temporal perception, as well as to develop acoustic sensitivity (Zachopoulou et al., 2003). Music is a basic form of emotional expression. Musical play provides children with a safe channel to experience and express emotions nonverbally (Pellitteri, 2000). Fast rhythms can stimulate energy and joy, while soft melodies can promote relaxation and calmness. Games that involve cooperation, such as group singing or playing instruments in a circle, strengthen the sense of belonging and social empathy (Koops, 2010). They also aid in emotional regulation through the repetition of musical structures and the creation of a predictable and safe environment (Robarts, 2006). Musical engagement through play has a direct impact on cognitive development. Involvement in rhythmic and melodic structures strengthens working memory, concentration and problem-solving skills (Schellenberg, 2004). In musical games, children learn to follow rules, observe order, evaluate connections between sounds and actions, thus developing logical thinking and planning (Degé et al., 2011). The Suzuki method, which is based on learning through imitation and active listening, demonstrates that early musical exposure has a positive effect on language development and learning in general (Bigand & Tillmann, 2005). Musical games give children room to explore and create. They are

not only teaching tools, but also forms of artistic expression. Improvising music, creating new songs, or accompanying stories with instruments are activities that develop imagination and creative thinking (Barrett, 2006). In the Orff approach, children are co-creators of musical content. They learn through experimentation and collective sharing of ideas, thus building an aesthetic approach to music that is personal and authentic.

This process allows them to build their artistic identity from an early age (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2006). One of the greatest values of musical games is their potential for social inclusion. Music, especially when played in groups and through play, creates opportunities for collaboration even for children with special needs (Rickson & McFerran, 2007). Musical games can be easily adapted for children with motor, cognitive or sensory disabilities. They do not necessarily require theoretical knowledge, but rely on experience and feeling, making everyone a valuable participant in the activity (Wigram & Gold, 2006).

### **3. Findings and Discussion**

International studies highlight that musical games are an interdisciplinary tool that significantly affects children's motor, sensory, emotional and intellectual development (Barrett, 2016; Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2019). However, the way these games are conceived, structured and implemented varies significantly depending on the cultural and pedagogical context. A comparative analysis between the most popular international models and traditional Albanian practices highlights the differences as well as the possibilities for creative synthesis.

*Japanese approach – Suzuki Method.* The Suzuki Method is based on the idea that every child can learn music in the same way as they learn their native language – through listening, imitation, and daily practice (Suzuki, 1983). In this context, musical play is not spontaneous, but part of a conscious path to promote listening sensitivity, motor coordination and the parent-child relationship. This method has shown significant effects on the development of focused attention and artistic sensitivity (Kostka & Payne, 2021). This approach contrasts with Albanian practices where play is more associated with spontaneity and less involved in structured learning processes.

*French approach – Musical play as cultural formation and socialization.* In French preschool education, musical play is associated with the transmission of cultural heritage through traditional songs and organized rhythm activities (Jellison, 2015). Games help children learn the rules of social interaction and develop body awareness through group singing and role-playing. This type of organization is an integral part of the early curriculum.

*Balkan Counterparts* - similar to Albanian games, musical games in neighbouring Balkan countries such as North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia use traditional instruments (tambura, kaval, tapan) and favor compound meters (7/8, 9/8), creating dynamic rhythmic environments. For instance, Macedonian children's songs like "Ajde da se igraeme" or Serbian "Ide maca oko tebe" also incorporate structured repetition,

verbal play, and physical movement (Petrović, 2015). Lyrically, many Balkan games include moral lessons or social behavior patterns, encouraging values such as sharing, obedience, or kindness. The strong rhythmic drive in Balkan games is often more complex than in Western European counterparts, which influences children's rhythmic acuity and coordination skills from a young age (Janković & Janković, 2000; Mehmeti et al, 2024). In Albania, however, these elements are present in folkloric forms, but not institutionalized in the educational system.

*German and Swiss approach – Dalcroze Eurhythmics.* The Dalcroze method focuses on building rhythmic sensitivity and body control through rhythmic movement and musical improvisation, placing children in a deep bodily experience of music (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921/1980). It has shown high results in children's motor development and the ability to feel and experience musical time (Habron, 2014). Although Albanian culture contains similar bodily elements through traditional dances and songs, the lack of a structured pedagogical methodology prevents its sustainable application in formal education.

*Scandinavian approach – Play as social and inclusive education.* In Scandinavian countries, musical play is included in education for values such as gender equality, cooperation, understanding and cultural sensitivity. For example, in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, musical games are developed in an open, non-competitive form, with an emphasis on the process rather than the result (Lindgren & Ericsson, 2011). This creates an environment where children feel free to explore identity and emotions through their voice and body. This is different from Albanian practices, where play is still mainly functional (entertainment, preservation of tradition) and less related to the formation of values.

*The Albanian Approach – Musical Play as a Folk Heritage and a Spontaneous Educational Tool.* In Albania, traditional musical games are linked to customs, festivals and daily life. They are transmitted orally and contain rich elements of rhythm, melody and physical and social interaction. Songs such as “Rrodhe rrodhe”, “Hapa dollapa” or “Ne jemi dy shqiponja” etc., include elements of rhythmic stopping, group cooperation and bodily sensitivity, contributing to the development of children's motor and social skills. According to Albanian ethnological studies (Gjeçi, 2002), these games have a strong community and emotional function. However, the lack of their documentation and inclusion in modern educational practices constitutes a potential loss for the artistic development of children in the country. The heritage of Albanian musical games represents an essential aspect of oral folk culture, where music, rhythm, movement and community are organically intertwined. (Gjeçi 2002 & Dhoska et al, 2024) offers an in-depth analysis of folk games as natural educational tools, built through community experience and transmitted from generation to generation in a spontaneous and informal manner. In this context, musical play does not only have an entertaining function, but also contains formative, ritual and educational dimensions that help in the development of many aspects of children's personality.

### **3.1 Albanian folk and musical games for children**

Albanian folk and musical games for children can be divided into several categories according to their purpose and the function they perform. Some important musical games are as follows:

Games with movement interaction and rhythmic singing, such as "Roza rosina" where the group of children creates a circle and interacts through song and synchronized movements. These games develop motor coordination, bodily rhythm and social interaction.



Figure 1: Musical game "Roza Rozina"

Games in cooperation and interaction (in a group), such as "Open the closet", which encourage attention, perceptual readiness and quick reaction. These are games that work on impulse and control of emotions in a natural way.



Figure 2: "Open the closet"

Games that include acting, singing/recitative, such as “Round, round, round”, “Shi, shi lagashi”, “Po nget lepri”, “Po leh qeni”, “Ne jemi dy shqiponja”, “Dallandyshe” which include narrative and improvisational elements, helping to develop imagination and emotional expression.



Figure 3: “Round, round”

Popular games with a competitive purpose, such as “Shkurtabiqi and the giant”, “Kala dibrance” “Biz” which also include the concept of winning or losing, helping children learn the rules of social interaction and managing emotions.

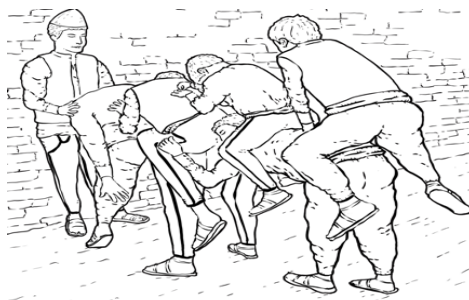


Figure 4: “Kala dibrance”

Popular game with a concentration purpose “Guraçokthi”, which is related to an object (stone) that has the purpose of hiding it and the friend finds where it is hidden. In addition to developing fine motor skills, it develops the child’s concentration.



Figure 5: “Guraçokthi Game”

International musical games have passed the stage of mere entertainment and have become a pedagogical tool for the development of the child as a whole (Flohr, 2010). Through the recognition and use of musical games for children (Hala, 2015), they:

- develop the rhythmic element and the linguistic aspect through the discourse of verses;
- become aware of the correct rhythmic accompaniment of songs, with popular rhythmic instruments (idiophones/membranophones, etc.);
- develop the emotional side by experiencing the content of the poetry that crosses children's themes through these types according to the provinces;
- develop the emotional side by experiencing the melody that permeates children's songs;
- develop concentration and attention during the accompaniment of a song or musical game with percussion instruments, body movements, by realizing the synchronicity of singing - accompaniment - movement;
- develop the sense of group interaction while accompanying or singing play songs, as a musical ensemble, the sense of the element of fun and pleasure through rhythmic, musical and aesthetic movements during the accompaniment of toy songs and musical rituals;
- develop social skills while interacting with others;
- have fun through their own creativity, but also in interaction with others.

Although Albania possesses a rich heritage, it is imperative to integrate this wealth into a well-defined didactic structure, through teacher training and curriculum design that combines modern methods with tradition. The educational functions of the Albanian musical games, being an early form of community preschool education, have helped in:

- a) Motor development: through walking in a circle, jumping, rhythmic landings and directing movement according to the song;
- b) Sensory development: through the use of voice, sound, physical contact and spatial perception;
- c) Emotional development: through role-playing, group complicity, and sharing emotions during play;
- d) Intellectual development: through understanding poetic structures, rhymes, and game rules;
- e) Artistic development: through the combination of singing, reciting, movement, and often theatrical elements of play.

Games often include folk verse forms, the use of dialects, and orally defined rules, making them a powerful tool for preserving language and identity

#### **4. Summary and Conclusion**

Musical games are a rich and comprehensive tool for the holistic development of children. They affect motor, sensory, emotional, intellectual and artistic aspects in a



interconnected way. Albanian musical games, though relatively understudied in Western scholarship, demonstrate rich cultural, musical, and developmental content that aligns with broader European practices. Their melodic simplicity, rhythmic vitality, and meaningful texts make them highly effective pedagogical tools. Compared with other Balkan and European counterparts, they balance structure and spontaneity, reinforcing motor, emotional, cognitive, and social growth.

Integrating traditional musical games into contemporary educational frameworks can promote not only developmental gains but also cultural sustainability. Further interdisciplinary research is needed to document, preserve, and pedagogically adapt these treasures of intangible cultural heritage for future generations.

Pedagogical practices that integrate musical play, based on well-known methods such as Orff, Dalcroze and Suzuki, contribute significantly to the creation of a lively, safe and favourable environment for learning.

Given the positive impact musical games have on children's development, it is important that these practices occupy a central place in preschool and primary education curricula. Also, collaboration between educators, musicians, and child development specialists should be encouraged to develop comprehensive music-based strategies.

### **Conflict of interests**

The author would like to confirm that there is no conflict of interests associated with this publication and there is no financial fund for this work that can affect the research outcomes.

### **References**

- Barrett, M. S. (2006). Inventing songs, inventing worlds: The “genesis” of creative thought and activity in young children’s lives. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 14(3), 201–220.
- Barrett, M. S. (2016). *Constructing a narrative understanding of music teaching and learning: An autoethnographic inquiry*. Springer.
- Bergeson, T. R., & Trehub, S. E. (2006). Infants’ perception of rhythmic patterns. *Music Perception*, 23(4), 345–360.
- Bigand, E., & Tillmann, B. (2005). Does music foster enhanced cognitive functioning? *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1060(1), 273–282.
- Campbell, P. S., & Scott-Kassner, C. (2006). *Music in childhood: From preschool through the elementary grades*. Cengage Learning.
- Campbell, P. S., & Scott-Kassner, C. (2019). *Music in childhood: From preschool through the elementary grades* (5th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Degé, F., Kubicek, C., & Schwarzer, G. (2011). Music lessons and intelligence: A relation mediated by executive functions. *Music Perception*, 29(2), 195–201.



Dhoska A., Adami E. (2024) Understanding Albania's Musical Landscape: An Overview of Current Trends and Influences, *Journal of Arts and Humanities Science*. 1(1); 01-06.

Flohr, J. W. (2010). *Best practices for young children's music education: Guidance from brain research*. *General Music Today*, 23(2), 13–19.

Gjeçi, A. (2002). *Lojërat popullore shqiptare dhe funksioni i tyre edukativ*. Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave.

Gordon, E. E. (2003). *A music learning theory for newborn and young children*. GIA Publications.

Habron, J. (2014). Through the eyes of a teacher: Teacher education through Dalcroze Eurhythmics. *Music Education Research*, 16(3), 282–298.

Hala, M. (2015). *Krijimtaria folklorike për fëmijë, këngët lodra dhe ritualet*". IAKSA, Tirana, Albania.

Hallam, S. (2010). The power of music: Its impact on the intellectual, social and personal development of children and young people. *International Journal of Music Education*, 28(3), 269–289.

Jaques-Dalcroze, E. (1921/1980). *Rhythm, music and education*. Dalcroze Society.

Jellison, J. A. (2015). *Including everyone: Creating music classrooms where all children learn*. Oxford University Press.

Juntunen, M. L., & Hyvönen, L. (2004). Embodiment in musical knowing: How body movement facilitates learning within Dalcroze Eurhythmics. *British Journal of Music Education*, 21(2), 199–214.

Koops, L. H. (2010). "We sing our songs and we play our drums": Music learning and teaching in a Zambian preschool. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 32(1), 39–55.

Kostka, M., & Payne, D. (2021). *Suzuki method and early childhood music education: Comparative perspectives*. *Journal of Music Education Research*, 23(1), 55–68.

Lindgren, M., & Ericsson, C. (2011). The role of music in preschool: A comparative study in Sweden and Norway. *Music Education Research*, 13(1), 59–74.

Mehmeti E., Dhoska A. (2024) The Education System in Music High Schools: Albania and Other Western Balkan Countries, *Journal of Arts and Humanities Science*. 1(1), 13-20.

Pellitteri, J. (2000). Music therapy in the special education setting. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 11(3-4), 379–391.

Rickson, D. J., & McFerran, K. (2007). Music therapy in special education: Do we need a better rationale? *British Journal of Music Education*, 24(2), 153–167.

Robarts, J. (2006). Music therapy with children who have been traumatized by war. In S. Hadley (Ed.), *Music therapy and trauma* (pp. 67–82). Jessica Kingsley.

Schellenberg, E. G. (2004). Music lessons enhance IQ. *Psychological Science*, 15(8), 511–514.

Suzuki, S. (1983). *Nurtured by love: The classic approach to talent education*. Alfred Music.

Valerio, W. H., Reynolds, A. M., Bolton, B. M., Taggart, C. C., & Gordon, E. E. (1998). *Music play: The early childhood music curriculum*. GIA Publications.

Wigram, T., & Gold, C. (2006). Music therapy in the assessment and treatment of autistic spectrum disorder: Clinical application and research evidence. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 32(5), 535–542.

Zachopoulou, E., Tsapakidou, A., & Derri, V. (2003). The effects of a developmentally appropriate music and movement program on motor performance. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 19(4), 631–642.

**Cite this article as:** Hala M. The Role and Importance of Musical Games in the Holistic Development of Children, *Journal of Arts and Humanities Science*. 2024; 2(1); 28-37.