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**MUSIC EDUCATION OF ROMA STUDENTS IN CROATIA AS THE  
ENCOURAGEMENT OF CROATIAN STANDARD LANGUAGE  
ACQUISITION**

**Abstract**

The paper deals with the position and possibilities of music education of Roma in the formal education system and outside the system in the context of the middle Europe specifically on the example of Eastern Croatia. Roma people have been in the unfavorable position in every way. Poor knowledge of Croatian standard language conditions poorer success in the education process. A greater knowledge of Croatian would enable students, members of the Roma minority, better integration in the education system and society in general. Music, as a universal language, and music education could be a mean of faster and easier integration. The review of former experiences in Eastern Croatia and considering the actual state impose several solutions to the problem dealt with in the paper.

**Keywords:** Roma people, integration, music education

## **Introduction**

The education system of the Republic of Croatia is based on the preschool, primary, secondary and higher education. The preschool education in the Republic of Croatia conducts its programs in kindergartens, and they comprise education, medical care, diet, social care of children from six months to the school enrolment. (Preschool Education Act, Zagreb, 1997) Eight-year primary education in the Republic of Croatia is the only obligatory and free for children aged six to fifteen years old. Secondary education is not obligatory, but it enables everybody, as well as the primary education, under the same conditions and according to his/her abilities, continuing education and therefore also knowledge acquisition and workability. (Primary and Secondary School Education Act, Zagreb, 2008). The continuance of education conducts through higher education whose holders are Croatian universities, polytechnics and higher schools.

Already mentioned primary education as the only obligatory and free education offers to every child the right to education under the same conditions. These rights are regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (art. 65) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 26.) There is no need to additionally emphasize the importance of education. That is clear. But the importance of equal opportunities for everybody, and this especially refers to marginalized groups, and problems which occur in its implementation, is a topic that should be of a great importance. Education is a powerful tool thanks to which economically and socially marginalized individuals and groups can get out of the poverty and social exclusion and fully participate in the society as active citizens (Farnell, 2012, p. 17). Furthermore, Farnell writes about the vicious cycle in which children from poor families and other vulnerable groups have significantly bigger possibility of early school leaving which increases the danger of social exclusion.

## **The education of Roma students**

One of the most marginalized and socially excluded groups is Roma population whose low level of education, the way of life, customs and unconcern or long insufficient authorities care for Roma people led to social marginalization (Hrvatić, 2005). The very notion of „a marginal man“ depicts the individual who is forced to live in two societies and two cultures, not belonging to any of them. (Lapat, 2010, p. 236) Starting from the preschool education, either through the kindergarten program or through obligatory

education program of preschool, to the primary school as the most important element of the education of Roma students which conditions the further education with finishing/not finishing. Numerous analyses showed a great number of Roma students who does not finish primary education. Reasons to that are social exclusion, the way of life, low level of education in the family, and especially poor knowledge of Croatian as an official language in the Republic of Croatia should be emphasized, which interferes with the understanding of the program. Insufficient knowledge of Croatian as an official language in the Republic of Croatia represents to Roma people a big problem. Roma children who do not know well Croatian in the family before starting the school because their parents do not know it too should be emphasized. There are two kinds of preschool education facilities for Roma people, that are state kindergartens or Roma preschool facilities where homogenous groups can be found. Preschool education is important for Roma people because within it children obtain moral values and principles of a good education, such that parents often are not able or cannot provide them with, which is a consequence of very young Roma families without experience. (Jakić, 2012) The obligatory preschool program in the Republic of Croatia from school year 2015./16. is obligatory for all children, Roma children too, which is a great and important factor for easier acquisition of Croatian as an official language. The National Program for Roma people, brought by the Croatian Government, should also be emphasized because in the special part the education is mentioned. Better knowledge of Croatian would enable Roma children better school success, longer education, continuing education in secondary schools, at polytechnics and universities. Only a small number of Roma children who enroll the primary school finishes it, especially female children who are exposed to early marriage and giving birth, therefore they are almost forced to leave the school. Roma people find school difficult, especially the ones who did not have the opportunity to attend some preschool facility, and these are in majority because they did not manage to learn the language basics of the language spoken in schools. Great problems occur while entering the primary education because children mostly do not understand the language, and the reason to that is that they speak Romani čhib at home. Therefore, they are not in the same position as the rest of the children and they do not have a strong motivation to continue the education, and only a few of the persistent ones finish the school. (Jakić, 2012) Roma people are difficult to include in secondary education, and when they are enrolled, it is mostly vocational schools that last three years. The authorities try to keep Roma children in the secondary education by giving them scholarships, providing them with

accommodation in student dorms, extracurricular activities and the like. The secondary schools is important because it is the stepping stone for finding a job or at least a step closer to bigger job possibilities. When talking about the higher education, it is clear that considering a very small percentage of Roma children who attend secondary school, there are even less Roma children in higher schools. There are many reasons to it, from the economic situation in the family, conditions of living, Roma tradition, but also they education system. There are only 11 Roma people among 9 463 declared Roma people who are educated in the higher education, according to the last census. (Jakić, 2012.) Following all of above, a question *How to make the existing education system more interesting in terms of better acceptance of Roma children?* arises. The system needs to be more flexible and focused on the needs, problems and areas of interests of the individual and enabling the attendance of areas of interest which would have a motivational role, but also an important role in Croatian language acquisition, and therefore the integration as well, both in the education system and society in general. The national strategy for Roma integration from 2013 to 2020 lists insufficient flexibility of the education system of Roma people in the Republic of Croatia. (Mlinarević, Kurtović, Svalina, 2015) As opposed to that, every uncontrolled imposition of school could lead to the defensive behavior or ignorance. (Hrvatić, 2000, p. 270)

### **Music education of Roma students in the Republic of Croatia**

The Republic of Croatia in its education system offers also the artistic education in Music and Dance schools. These kinds of education are not obligatory, and the participants are children who have shown the interest and ability for that kind of education. Kotarac writes about such programs which inspire and encourage the creation (Kotarac, 2007), directing to the integration of Roma students in the obligatory system of music and dance primary education. Music abilities and talents that are inborn are a good motivation and a basis for the free willing education. The more flexible system offered by preschool and primary education curricula for music and dance schools in terms of richer approach to every student through the individual instrument class and the possibility of the integration through common solfeggio teaching and common playing (a choir, an orchestra, a chamber ensemble) are the premises for a better success. The language barrier in this kind of education system will not come to the fore and will disable the implementation of the curricula because the music language with its all characteristics and the lack of knowledge of those people who are

starting learning it will lead to the same position every child. Moreover, according to Perroti (Škojo, 2010, p. 347) music education significantly helps in shaping the personality, and music education as universal besides from the fact that it is a powerful tool of interculturalism, it is also a tool that helps to integrate Roma children more easily in the education system and social life in general.

Elly Bašić, a prominent music pedagogue and a creator of the Functional music pedagogy based her music pedagogy on the idea “Not some children – but every child has the right to the music culture“. Every child has the right to the music culture, if it is considered from the aspect of curricula of primary schools in the Republic of Croatia which provide every child with one music lesson per week and extracurricular activities in order to educate them musically. But what about the music education possibilities in general and what about the students who are not included in the music education for any reason. Zvonimir Kotarac writes about it “One should believe in the fact that a good school policy is the one that appreciates the right of every talented child to artistic education too and that enables it in the practice and promotes ethnicity and responsibility.“ (Kotarac, Tonovi, p. 79) Led by the idea “Not some children – but every child has the right to the music culture“ and the rights of every child to education under the same conditions, we come to the question of the music education of marginalized groups of Roma children and their integration/exclusion in the education system, problems and searches for new, better solutions and ways how to improve the same system. There are numerous possibilities of the integration of Roma children in formal and informal music education system. Except possibilities, there are also good examples that show that the implementation of such and similar models has its potentials. One of those is the Action plan “The decade for the integration of Roma people 2005 - 2015“ which had an aim to increase the number of Roma children of both genders included in the obligatory education system and in the social and public life of their communities. Three music schools in Slavonski Brod, Pitomača and Orehovica approached to the integration of Roma students in artistic programs which started in 2007./08., but at (dislocated) departments of obligatory primary schools.

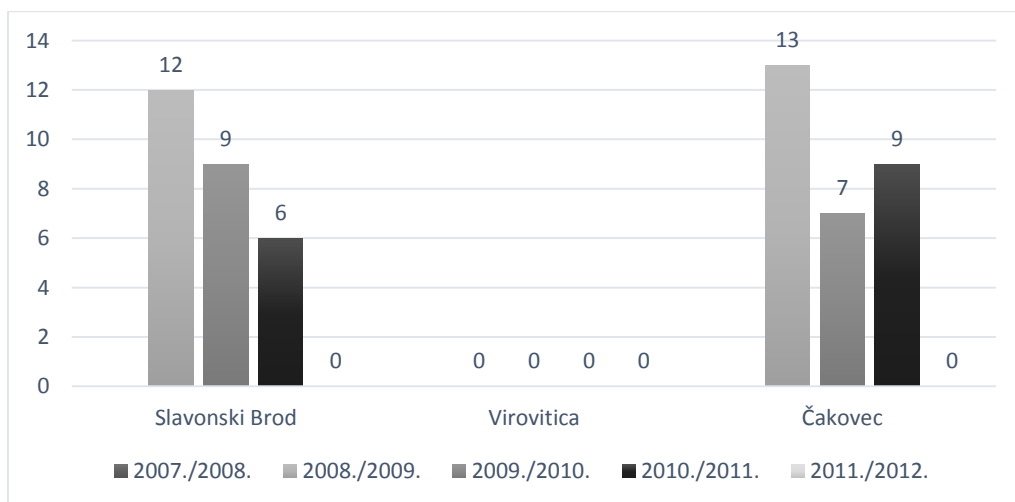
According to the reports of the Ministry of Science, education and sport the number of Roma students included in the artistic programs was following:

- school year 2007/08 – no data;
- school year 2008/09 –25 students included (Music school “Ivan Zajc“ Slavonski Brod, a dislocated department in Jelas, 12 students; Art

School Miroslav Magdalenić Čakovec, department Orehovica – 13 students, Music school “Jan Vlašimsky“, a department in Pitomača – data could not be shown because of the lack of information about the minorities)

- school year 2009/10 – 16 students included (Music School “Ivan Zajc“ Slavonski Brod, a dislocated department in Jelas, 9 students; Art School Miroslav Magdalenić Čakovec, department in Pitomača – data could not be shown because of the lack of information about the minorities)
- school year 2010/11 – 15 students included (Music school “Ivan Zajc“ Slavonski Brod, a dislocated department in Jelas, 6 students; Art School Miroslav Magdalenić Čakovec, department in Orehovica – 9 students; Music School “Jan Vlašimsky“ department in Pitomača - data could not be shown because of the lack of information about the minorities)
- school year 2011/12 – integration of Roma children in artistic programs of obligatory primary schools is not mentioned as a special measure (as it was in the reports of the previous year), but Art School Miroslav Magdalenić in Čakovec is mentioned in the list of primary schools at the beginning of 2012/13 where Roma students are included
- school year 2012/13 does not have reports
- school year 2013/14 does not have reports

Graph 1. *The number of Roma students included in artistic programs*



By analyzing the data from MZOŠ it is visible that there was the interest for this kind of education among Roma students. A decreased number of students is also visible in every next year, which does not necessarily mean weaker student interest for programs, but it can be a result of the inertia of the very system of the school included in deepening and advancement of the implementation of this kind of a class model and one author of the paper can witness it because she was an active participant in the process in one art school included in the Action plan of the decade.

The author in her article “Group playing as a mean of the integration of Roma students“ (Nuhanović, 2015) describes the beginning of the implementation of the project about the integration of students in the system of music education, problems which occur and possibilities offered. She also states that in 2008/09 in the Music School “Ivan Zajc“ a teaching model was created which showed very successful in the educational sense and it should have been moderated and improved in order to be implemented and comprise a greater number of Roma students. The foundation of success is according to the author the establishment of the Accordion ensemble whose participants were Roma and non-Roma students of the first, the second and the third grade of the music school. Unique for their composition and age (a group playing starts at the earliest in the third grade of music education) they showed how they can learn and create together, tolerance and mutual respect are developed, as well as the feeling of the same value and positive climate which contributes to the feeling of safety.



Picture 1. Accordion ensemble of the Music School Slavonski Brod, Show on the 1. symposium on Roma language, Zagreb, 2009, conductor: Sanja Nuhanović

The informal music education should not be neglected in music schools, together with the formal education. The integration of Roma children in extracurricular music activities and areas of interest are a good basis for creating a “multicultural bridge“ which would decrease misunderstanding and prejudices and it would encourage tolerance and respecting the differences. The integration could be mutual (meeting and participating in the culture of another nation enrich all participants, therefore non-Roma too). But how to win Roma children, and especially their parents, to participate in such activities? Often, talking to those who are in any way involved in not only education, but Roma and their life in general, we hear complaints relating to indifference, insufficient engagement and willful aloofness Roma population about caring for education up to the worries of being integrated into society in general. As long as we have only one track mind, not realizing that maybe we need to make changes ourselves and as long as we do not take the initiative to provide hands that will lead us through the "multi-cultural bridge" to sensitize the dominant and the majority of the population, in terms of education we will not do much.

Therefore, one should act, give a hand, insist, motivate, encourage, join. An important role in these activities could have associations of cultural-artistic amateurism (folklore, choir, orchestra, dance groups) which could with its primary and existing activities add new ones and adjust them to new members if necessary. It is about the associations that deal with pedagogic work and have the leader who is ready to learn, upgrade the knowledge and abilities, not just professional ones, that are cultural-artistic associations which are the holders (or should be) of the cultural life of the place they are working in. If they are socially conscious, these associations should tend to involve the marginalized groups, therefore Roma population, in their work and activities.

As an example of a good practice the initiative of the Faculty of Education, Slavonski Brod department and Brod Accordion Orchestra “Bela pl. Panthy“ from Slavonski Brod and their project “With togetherness to tolerance“ should be mentioned. The aim of the project was to mark the International Roma Day in Slavonski Brod. With the support of Croatian school museum from Zagreb, Roma association “Ludari“ of Romanian origin from Slavonski Brod, Theatre and concert hall “Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić“ and the City of Slavonski Brod several programs were realized through the project and the target group were Roma and non-Roma children, the third and the fourth grade students of primary schools in Slavonski Brod.

Around eighty of them enriched their free time through four-day workshops and they showed that with work and persistence and through music and



creativity one can develop multiculturalism in these areas. All children participated in three workshops – music, language-creativity and dance.



*Picture 2. The show of the workshop participants “With togetherness to tolerance“ to mark the International Roma Day on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2015 in the Theatre and concert hall “Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić“ in Slavonki Brod together with the Brod Accordion Orchestra “Bela pl. Panthy“.*  
*Conductor: Sanja Nuhanović*

The workshop participants presented their work in the show and the exhibition at the concert which marked the International Roma Day held on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2015 in the Theatre and concert hall “Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić“, lots of Brod associations from the cultural-artistic amateurism field also participated: Brod tamburitza orchestra, Brod accordion orchestra “Bela pl. Panthy“, City brass band “Railwayman“, Folk dance ensemble Brod, Roma cultural and artistic association “Ludari“ and Sport-dance club “Astra“.

Led by the story about the togetherness, around two hundred program participants and a full Theatre and concert hall “Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić“, which has 605 seats, showed at the music-dance program that they are ready to co-life, tolerance and respect of other and different ones, and still equal. It is a good example upon which a further path of overcoming “the zone of distance“ should be built (Lapat, 2010, p. 238) which contributes to interculturalism and multiculturalism development in these areas.



*Picture 3. The show of Roma cultural and artistic society “Ludari“*

## **Conclusion**

Roma people have always been exposed to discrimination and social rejection. Roma children have never been entirely accepted in Croatian schools, although the society in general has tried to provide the Strategy, the National program and other important documents which should have made their position safer and stronger. Roma people are exceptionally musically talented, the dance and the song, as well as other music activities are close to them. The aim was to show a different approach to Roma children through activities which would be close to them and which they are successful in and therefore we chose the music expression as the motivation for Croatian language acquisition as a key tool and ability for acquiring other subjects and topics. Years of work in primary and secondary schools, as well as in the higher education institutions have showed that if you create a safe and self-confident child, you can make big improvements in his/her intellectual development. The same approach was used on Roma children and we got very favorable results of stronger integration, better success and the feeling of personal satisfaction. The example of music workshops can be a waymark to other forms of creative expressions and arts, as well as science. If we can keep more Roma children in the school education system, we will make a stronger society and stronger individuals, less Roma women will early enter the marriage and give birth to children at the age of 14 or 15. The education of Roma is the first and the most important step towards their integration into

society. Projects of integration of Roma people in the society are always welcome and desirable. Their purpose should be breaking prejudices of non-Roma people towards Roma people. Roma should be stopped being marginalized and discriminated and should be accepted as a very interesting people with the rich culture and tradition, and Roma children as clever and talented children with equal opportunities of intellectual growth and development.

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## **Sažetak**

### **GLAZBENI ODGOJ I OBRAZOVANJE PRIPADNIKA ROMSKE NACIONALNE MANJINE U REPUBLICI HRVATSKOJ KAO POTICAJ USVAJANJU HRVATSKOGA STANDARDNOGA JEZIKA**

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U radu se razmatra položaj i mogućnosti glazbenog obrazovanja Roma u sustavu i izvan sustava formalnoga obrazovanja u kontekstu srednje Europe specifično na primjeru istočne Hrvatske. Romi su kroz noviju povijest bili u vrlo nepovoljnom položaju sa svih gledišta. Slabo poznavanje hrvatskoga standardnoga jezika uvjetuje slabiju uspješnost u odgojnoobrazovnom procesu. Bolje poznavanje hrvatskoga jezika omogućilo bi učenicima, pripadnicima romske manjine, bolju integraciju u odgojno-obrazovni sustav i društvo u cjelini. Glazba, kao univerzalni jezik, i glazbeno obrazovanje mogli bi poslužiti kao sredstvo brže i lakše integracije. Pregledom dosadašnjih iskustava u istočnoj Hrvatskoj i razmatranjem trenutnoga stanja nameće se nekoliko rješenja ovoga problema koja su prikazana u ovom radu.

**Ključne riječi:** Romi, integracija, glazbeno obrazovanje