

# Family Upbringing and the Effects of Socialisation in the Light of Music Education

KRISZTINA RÉVÉSZNÉ PÁLFI – BEATRIX FARAGÓ – NÓRA TORNAY  
– JÓZSEF RÉVÉSZ

## Abstract

This study examines the developmental potential of music within the context of family upbringing. Access to the arts – and in this case, to music – has varied substantially across historical periods. In earlier centuries, active engagement with artistic practices was, among other factors, often associated with social privilege. The contemporary paradigm, according to which music education is regarded as a universally accessible good across all social strata, has emerged only gradually. The analysis highlights the importance of emotional experiences that shape children as they navigate the often challenging process of growing up. Children draw upon the emotional resources provided by their parents and music, which can profoundly and holistically affect the human psyche and can thus serve as a foundational element in the development of emotional well-being.

**Keywords:** mother–child relationship; music education; socialisation context

**Subject-Affiliation in New CEEOL:** Social Sciences – Education – School Education

**DOI:** 10.36007/eruedu.2026.1.092-107

## The Relationship Between Music Education and Emotional Intelligence

It is widely recognised that the family constitutes the primary socialisation environment for a child. The child's relationship to their surroundings and to the world, as well as the development of their emotional intelligence, is fundamentally shaped by what parents and the immediate environment provide during the early years of life. The term *emotion* derives from the Latin verb *motere*, meaning “to move,” with the prefix *e-* suggesting movement outward, implying that emotional states are closely connected with action (Goleman 1996). Developing the capacity to identify and regulate one's emotions is therefore essential in everyday life, as emotions exert a significant influence on various cognitive functions, including memory, attention, and decision-making processes (Adolphs and Damasio 2001).

Although certain emotional predispositions that shape one's temperament have genetic roots, the neural pathways associated with emotional regulation are highly

plastic. In childhood, it is primarily the family, and later various educational institutions – such as kindergarten and school – that shape these emotional pathways, either facilitating or hindering the acquisition of foundational components of emotional intelligence. Childhood and adolescence represent critical developmental phases in which emotional habits that guide behaviour throughout life become established. Our actions are often governed by feelings that emerge and shift rapidly from moment to moment (Goleman 1996).

Music has the capacity to enter the individual's inner emotional world with relative ease, often without encountering resistance. Every piece of music carries a latent, interpretation-independent emotional content which, when brought to life in performance, radiates as energy within the listener. On the most basic level of musical perception, the principle of similarity guides musical reception: the listener seeks aspects of themselves in the sounding work, magnifying those motifs with which they can most readily resonate. In this way, associative processes emerge in which emotions are expressed with considerable intensity (Margulis 2018).

When music reaches our emotional sphere, it becomes a highly effective medium for revealing and expressing feelings that may be unspoken or even unspeakable. At this point, projection and introjection alternate cyclically. As a result, our mood state shifts and becomes more manageable. This influx of energy into the psyche can support individuals in overcoming moments of crisis. For children in particular, musical experience can compensate for failures or frustrations encountered in academic or everyday performance, thereby strengthening emotional resilience. Developing resistance to failure provides a sense of safety and psychological protection – an essential life skill whose foundations are best established during childhood.

Musical experience may occur through active creation or through receptive listening. For a child, one of the most reassuring forms of musical engagement is the mother's or father's soothing, comforting singing voice. The ability of music to access deep emotional layers can be partly explained neurobiologically: auditory signals travel from the thalamus to the amygdala (one of the primary emotional processing centres) and only subsequently to the cortex. These subcortical pathways allow emotional memories to be activated even before conscious cognitive processing occurs. The amygdala, as the repository of emotional memory, assigns emotional significance; without it, personality as such cannot exist. The 'emotional brain' not only recognises but also evaluates affective stimuli. Music can thus provide access to emotion-laden neural patterns stored in the amygdala (Goleman 1996).

The emotionally attuned relationship between infant and parent, characterised by mutual responsiveness and a loving family atmosphere, forms the foundation upon which the child's emotional capacities develop.

## The Problem of ‘Musiclessness’

The arts contribute to shaping personality primarily by influencing the individual's emotional sphere, thereby bringing the person closer to an understanding of the transcendent dimension of existence; in this sense, the primacy of lived experience over knowledge is indisputable. At the same time, an essential characteristic of the arts – and of music as one of their integral forms – must not be overlooked: the aesthetic dimension. The evaluation of aesthetic quality is partly determined by socially constructed judgments (including expert discourse) and must also be considered in relation to prevailing cultural frameworks (Lothwesen 2014) since perceptual processes are shaped in the dynamic relationship between subject and object (Wallbaum 2000).

A central problem is related to the lack of an adequate musical environment. This can be observed, for instance, in the dramatic reduction of music lesson lessons in formal education, as well as in our own experiences in higher education and teacher training. It is evident that some prospective teachers refrain from singing because they have previously experienced disadvantage or negative judgment regarding their vocal abilities. This phenomenon is further intertwined with a range of pedagogical, psychological, and sociological factors, alongside significant emotional suppressions such as fear, avoidance, and self-protective withdrawal.

## Presentation of the Research and Thematic Framework

The questionnaire-based study was conducted in the spring of 2024 among parents and prospective parents. A total of 361 respondents completed the questionnaire (N = 361), representing all four generational cohorts examined (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z), each with valid responses. The aim of the investigation was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how parents and prospective parents perceive the importance of music education within the family. Given that the positive influence of music education on children's emotional and cognitive development is well documented, it is essential to emphasise that this developmental support should ideally begin at home.

Furthermore, the study aimed to explore what participants consider constructive and valuable music, as well as the types of music they would choose to share with their children to support healthy emotional development. To conduct the research, a quantitative research strategy was applied, specifically the questionnaire method. In order to reach a relatively large audience and encourage wide participation, the survey was disseminated online, primarily through social media community groups. There, the participants accessed the questionnaire via a provided link. This approach is justified by recent findings (Sipos et al. 2015), which confirm that the target population is fully accessible through digital channels, in line with contemporary lifestyles shaped by digitalisation and the rapid circulation and sharing of information.

Participation in the study was entirely anonymous, and responses were recorded without personal identifiers. The questionnaire (hosted in Google Forms) consisted of 16 items, including both multiple-choice questions and open-ended response options. Responses were compiled and analysed using Excel, and visual representations (charts and diagrams) were created to illustrate the findings in a more accessible manner.

### Question 1: Gender

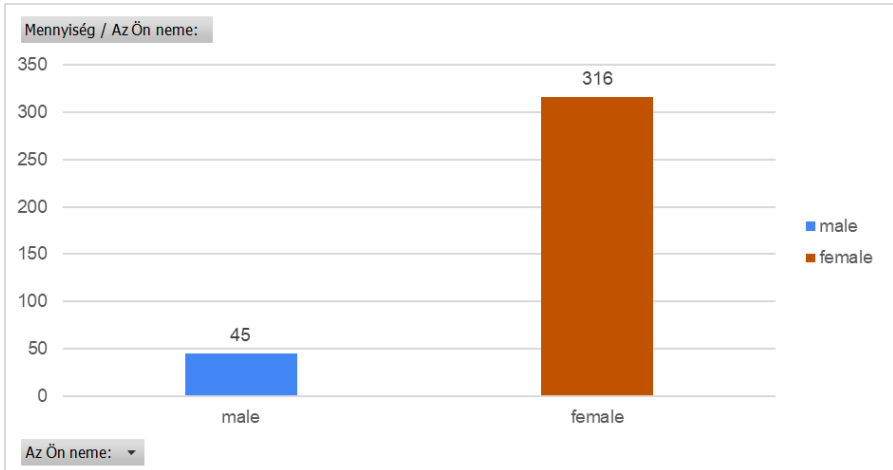


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by gender (own editing)

Among the respondents, 361 individuals (N = 361), representing 87.5%, identified as female, while 45 respondents (12.5%) identified as male. The higher proportion of female respondents may be related to the fact that mothers typically spend more continuous time with their children during the first three years of life. As a result, they are often more directly involved in activities associated with childcare, entertainment, and early developmental support, which may include selecting games, rhymes, and songs for the child.

Fathers, through their presence, playfulness, and the sense of security they provide, also contribute significantly to the child's emotional development. However, mothers often tend to engage more consciously with practices aimed at supporting early developmental processes. This does not imply that fathers are less interested in or less committed to these aspects of upbringing; rather, it reflects differences in parental roles, responsibilities, and time allocation within the family context.

**Question 2: Type of place of residence**

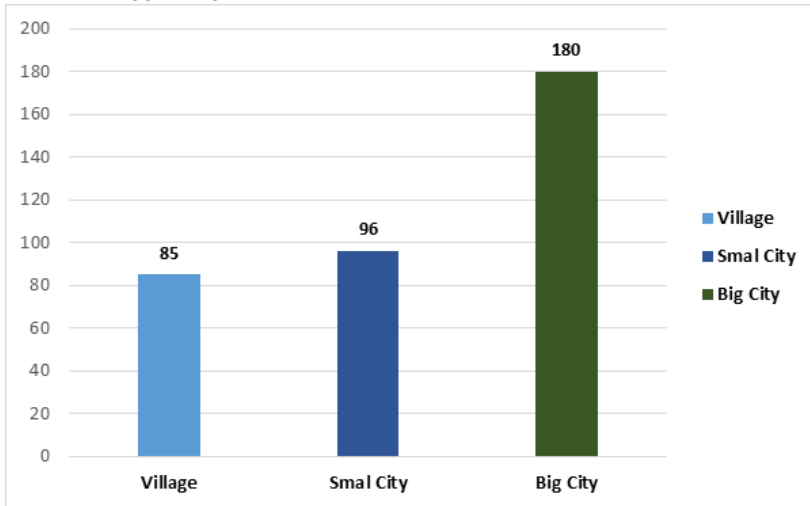


Figure 2. Type of residence (own editing)

49.9% of respondents (n = 180) reported living in a large city, 26.6% (n = 96) in a small town, and 23.5% (n = 85) in a village.

**Question 3: Which of the following generational cohorts do you belong to?**

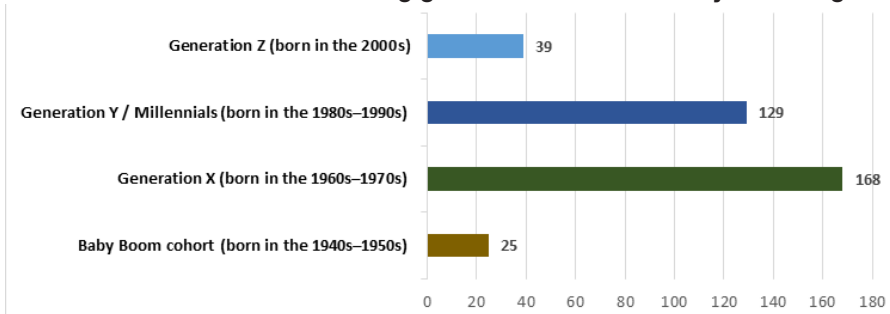


Figure 3. Distribution by generational cohorts (own editing)

The largest proportion of respondents belongs to Generation X, comprising 168 individuals, which represents 46.5% of the sample. The dissemination of the questionnaire was significantly supported by my mother, who is also a member of this generation, and therefore, her social network contributed to the relatively high representation of Generation X participants. The second largest group was Generation Y, with 129 respondents (35.7%). Members of Generation Z accounted for 39 respondents (10.8%). The smallest share of participants belong to the Baby Boom generation, represented by 25 individuals (6.9%).

**Question 4: What is your highest level of education?**

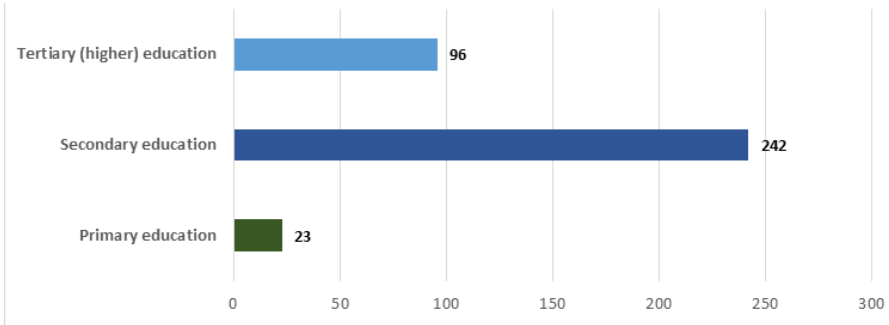


Figure 4. Highest educational attainment (own editing)

The largest share of respondents reported tertiary education (n = 242; 67.0%). Secondary education was reported by 96 respondents (26.6%), while primary education was reported by 23 respondents (6.4%).

**Question 5: What characterizes your musical background?**

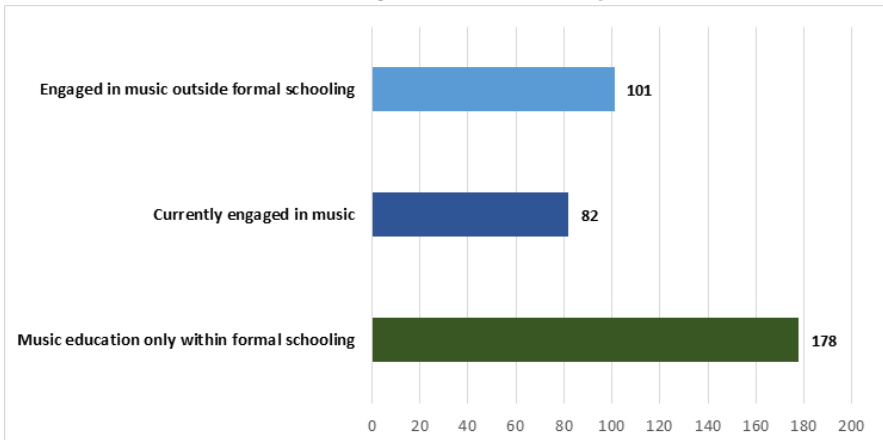


Figure 5. Musical training (own editing)

The largest share of respondents, 178 individuals (49.3%), reported participating exclusively in structured music education within formal schooling. This suggests that a high level of formal musical training is not a prerequisite for parents to recognise the developmental and relational benefits of music for children and the parent-child relationship. A total of 82 respondents (22.7%) currently engage in music, indicating that music constitutes an integral part of their everyday lives. Additionally, 101 respondents (28.0%) had opportunities outside formal education to engage in music-related activities for a period of time, but they are not presently involved to the same extent.

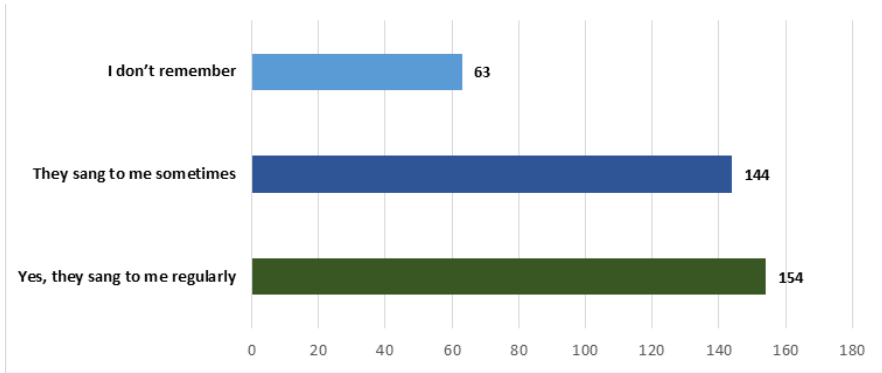
**Question 6: As a child, did your parents sing to you?**

Figure 6. Parental singing during childhood (own editing)

The sixth question aimed to determine the proportion of respondents who have memories of their parents singing to them during childhood. In this context, “regular singing” was understood as singing during daily activities, at bedtime, and during leisure time, serving to entertain or soothe the child. A total of 144 respondents (39.9%) selected the option “sometimes,” which in this study referred primarily to occasional bedtime singing without more frequent musical interaction.

A further 63 respondents (17.5%) reported having no memories of their parents singing to them, which we found noteworthy, as it indicates that a substantial proportion of individuals did not experience this form of musical and emotional interaction during childhood. The results were not disaggregated by generational cohort for this question; thus, the percentages shown represent the overall distribution across all generations.

**Question 7: Do you have clear memories from childhood of listening to music or singing together?**

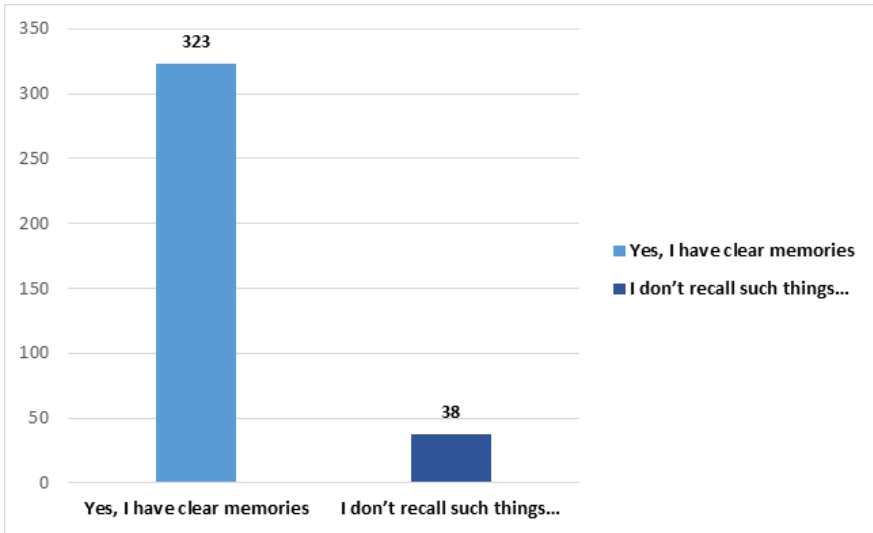


Figure 7. Memories related to listening to music (own editing)

The seventh question examined the extent to which respondents have clear childhood memories related to listening to music. The response options were: “Yes, I have clear memories” and “No, I do not recall such experiences.” The majority of respondents (89.5%,  $n = 323$ ) reported having such memories, while 38 respondents (10.5%) indicated that they do not recall similar experiences.

**Question 8: If you do have such memories, how would you characterize these memories?**

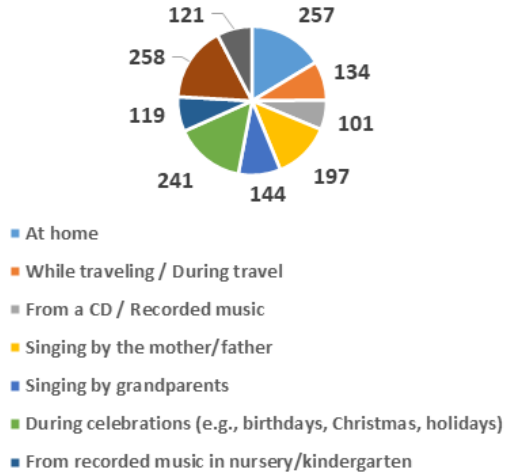


Figure 8. Characteristics of musical memories (own editing)

Respondents selected from the options that best characterised these memories/ experiences. The majority of such experiences were reported to have occurred during teacher-led activities and in the home environment. Respondents could mark multiple options from the list.

**Question 9: If you are a parent, did you sing to your unborn child during pregnancy?**

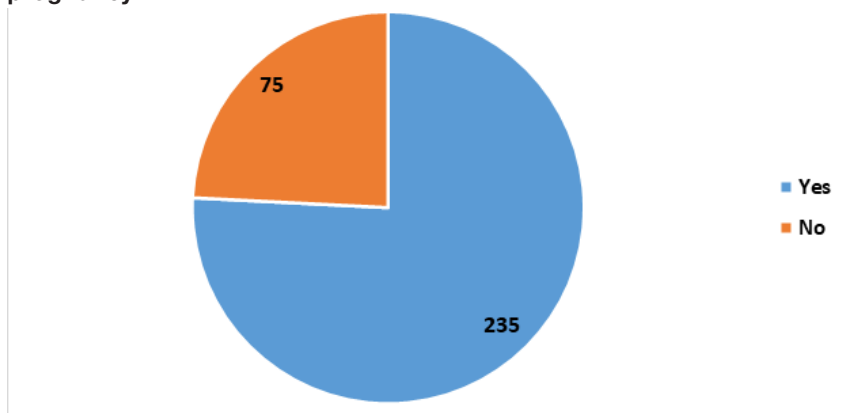


Figure 9. Parents' singing habits during pregnancy (own editing)

The questionnaire also aimed to determine the proportion of parents who sang to the fetus during pregnancy. The majority – 235 respondents (75.8%) – gave a positive answer, while 75 respondents (24.2%) stated that they did not sing. Exposure to music and to the mother’s voice in the prenatal period enriches, rather than diminishes, the developing child. Stimulation of the senses supports the formation of neural connections and promotes maturation when activities involving rhythmic speech, singing, and movement are present from the fetal stage onward.

Infants in the womb not only hear musical sounds but also respond to them in various ways. For example, calm, softly sung melodies and the mother’s gentle vocal tone are typically associated with a decrease in fetal heart rate and a state of relaxation, whereas faster music or singing with greater rhythmic variability may elicit corresponding changes in the fetus’s heart rhythm.

**Question 10: If you have a child, do/did you sing to him/her in the evenings at bedtime or during other activities?**

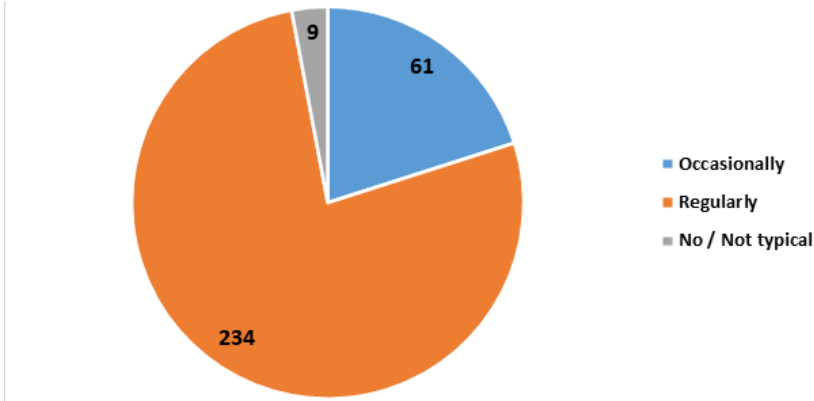


Figure 10. Regular bedtime singing (own editing)

The majority of respondents indicated a definite “yes”: 234 individuals (77%) reported regularly singing to their child at bedtime. A further 61 respondents (20.1%) selected the option of singing occasionally, but not as a consistent practice. The smallest group, 9 respondents (3%), reported lack of singing during bedtime routines.

**Question 11: As a parent/prospective parent, how important do you consider singing to your child? (5 = extremely important, 1 = not at all important)**

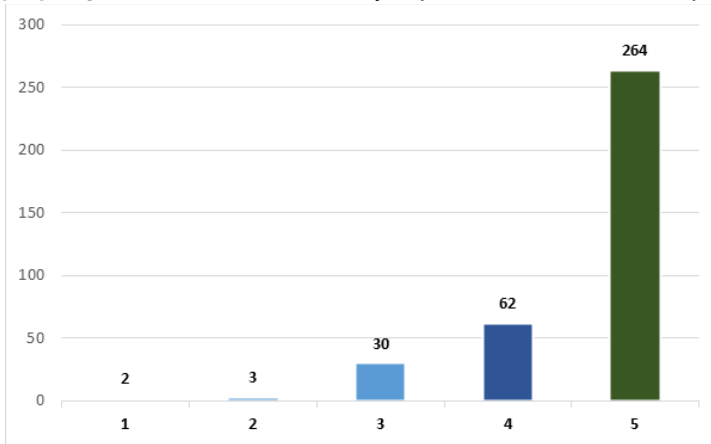


Figure 11. Opinions on the importance of singing (own editing)

The eleventh question applied to both parents and prospective parents. It asked respondents to indicate, on a 1-5 Likert scale, how important they consider singing to their child. Responses were recorded across all scale points. The majority selected the value 5 (“I consider it extremely important”), representing 264 respondents (73.1%). A further 62 respondents (17.2%) selected 4, and 30 respondents (8.3%) chose 3. Three respondents (0.8%) selected the value 2, and only two respondents (0.6%) indicated that they do not consider singing important at all (value 1).

**Question 12: Is there anything that holds you back from singing to your child?**

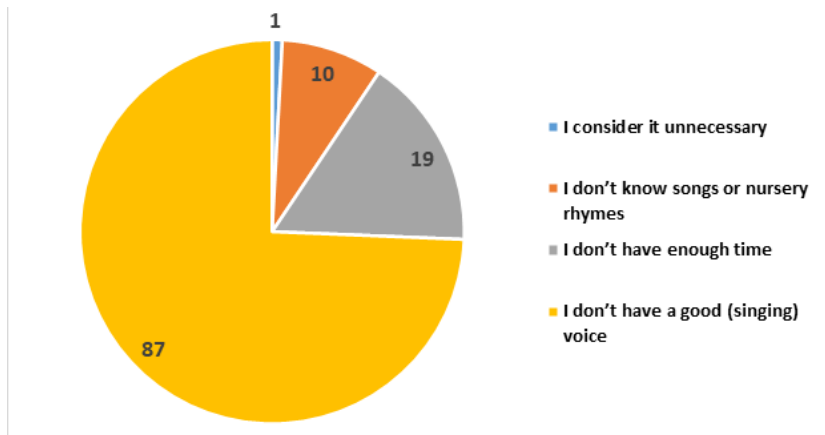


Figure 12. Factors that deter parents from singing (own editing)

The twelfth question was optional and was intended only for respondents who identified some factor that inhibits their singing to their child. A total of 87 respondents (74.4%) reported that they refrain from singing because they feel they “do not have a good voice.” The second most frequent response was “I do not have enough time,” selected by 19 respondents (16.2%). Ten respondents (8.5%) indicated that they “do not know songs or nursery rhymes,” while one respondent (0.9%) selected the option “I consider it unnecessary.”

**Question 13: Please select from the list below the musical pieces that you have heard or are certain you are familiar with.**

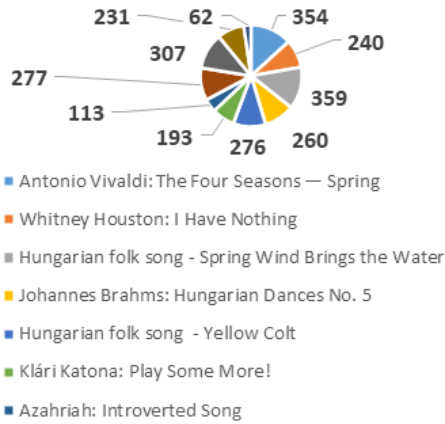


Figure 13. Known musical pieces (own editing)

This question examined respondents’ familiarity with selected musical works. The most widely recognized piece was the folk song “*Tavaszi szél vizet áraszt*”, marked by 359 respondents. This result is not surprising, as the song is commonly taught during the school years in formal education. The second most frequently selected piece was “*Spring*” from *Antonio Vivaldi’s The Four Seasons*, which is likewise widely known. Both works can be considered enduring, culturally embedded compositions that have stood the test of time.

**Question 14: Which of the following music genres do you enjoy listening to?**

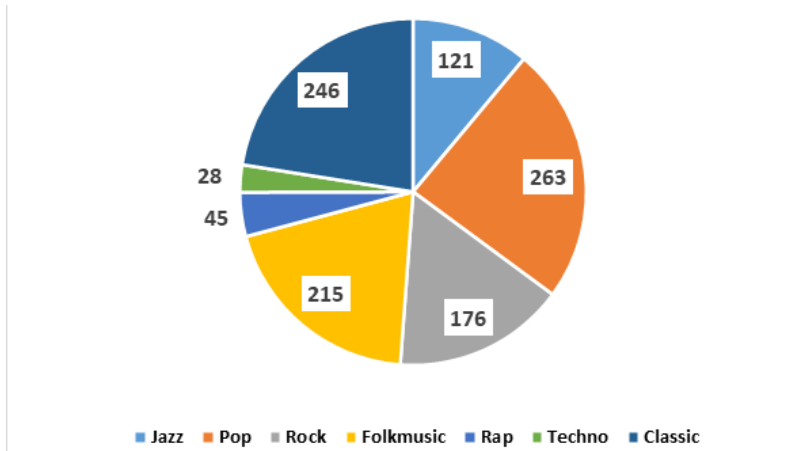


Figure 14. Examination of musical taste (own editing)

Multiple responses were permitted. The most frequently preferred genre was pop, while the least preferred – consistent with its polarising nature – was techno. The second most favoured categories were classical and folk music.

**Question 15: What do you think? Does music have any effect on a child’s emotional and cognitive development?**

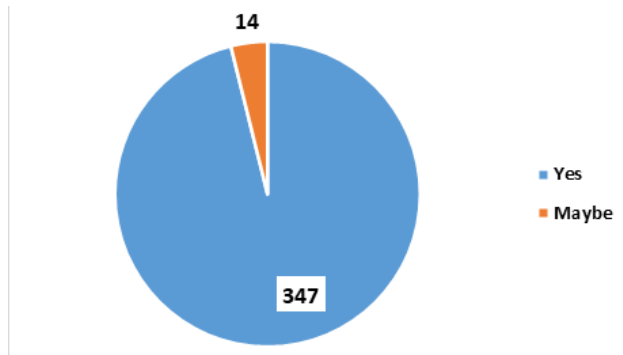


Figure 15. The impact of music on children’s emotional-cognitive development (own editing)

Respondents could choose from three options: “Yes, definitely,” “Perhaps,” and “No.” The vast majority selected “Yes, definitely” (n = 347; 96.1%). Fourteen respondents (3.9%) chose “Perhaps,” and no responses were recorded for “No.”

**Question 16: In your opinion, how is the parent-child attachment influenced when parents regularly sing to and cradle their children?**

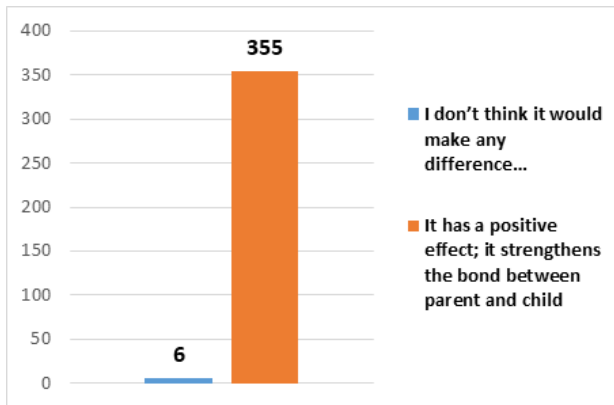


Figure 16. Relationship between parent-child attachment and regular singing (own editing)

The sixteenth question examined respondents' views on the effect of music and singing on the attachment between parent and child. Respondents could select one of two options. The overwhelming majority indicated that regular singing strengthens attachment and has a positive impact on the parent-child relationship. Six respondents (1.7%) stated that they do not believe singing has any influence in this regard.

## Research Findings in Relation to the Hypotheses

*H1: Respondents belonging to the Baby Boom and Generation X cohorts would have fewer childhood memories of their parents singing to them than members of the later Y and Z generations.*

T1: This hypothesis was confirmed. Among the Baby Boom respondents, 44% reported having clear memories of being sung to in childhood, and this proportion was 32.14% among Generation X. In contrast, the later generations (Y and Z) reported such memories at considerably higher rates (47.3% and 71.8%, respectively). These results support the earlier mentioned observation that parents belonging to the Baby Boom and X generations – and, plausibly, their own parents as well – were less likely to be held, comforted, and sung to during infancy. During the decades of socialism, many children entered nursery care at an early age, which reduced the likelihood of developing such intimate musical bonding experiences at home. This may explain why Baby Boom and Generation X individuals approached singing with their own children differently – placing greater emphasis on it – compared to younger generations.

*H2: Members of Generations Y and Z attribute greater importance to singing to their children (or future children).*

T2: This hypothesis was not supported by the data. While both Y and Z re-

spondents rated the importance of singing with a score of 5 (“extremely important”) in 64% of cases, the earlier Baby Boom and Generation X cohorts assigned this rating at even higher rates (84% and 80%, respectively). Only about 5% of respondents in either generational grouping selected a score lower than 3. This result is noteworthy because, although Baby Boom and Generation X parents reported placing stronger emphasis on singing with their children, individuals from the younger generations who experienced this practice themselves do not appear to attribute equally strong importance to it as adults.

H3: *Respondents with stronger musical training would attribute greater importance to supporting children’s emotional and developmental growth through music.*

T3: This hypothesis was partially confirmed. Musical training was categorized based on three response options:

- (1) *Music education only within formal schooling*
- (2) *Participation in music-related activities outside formal schooling*
- (3) *Currently engaged in music*

Respondents who currently engage in music did not rate the importance of singing lower than 3; none within this group selected values of low importance. Two respondents gave a score of 1, and three respondents a score of 2 overall, but these responses did not come from those currently involved in music. Among those who rated the importance as 4, 53% had only school-based music education, while 47% had additional musical involvement. Among those who selected 5, 53% belonged to the musically trained group, while 47% had only school-based musical experience.

The differences, however, are not sufficiently pronounced to conclude that musical training alone determines the perceived importance of singing to children. Still, the results also do not suggest that musical background is irrelevant. Rather, the findings indicate that a high level of musical training is not a prerequisite for parents to sing to their children. In this context, singing to a child does not require a trained voice or instrumental proficiency, but rather an emotionally receptive and empathetic attitude toward musical interaction.

## Concluding Reflections

The findings of the study suggest that there are generational differences in how early family-based musical experiences are perceived. In our interpretation, the diminished emphasis on early musical interaction among younger generations may be related to a declining tendency to express emotions in this intimate, embodied form. Contemporary life is characterised by haste and a certain emotional superficiality. This makes it all the more important to pause and acknowledge our internal emotional states – to feel gratitude, peace, joy, sadness, vulnerability, and disappointment – not as someone drifting helplessly on a sea of emotions, but as a captain confidently steering the course of their own life.

The results show that younger generations are less likely to attribute strong im-

portance to singing and musical bonding in early childhood. This, in itself, is not necessarily problematic. A person does not become “less” for lacking such experiences; yet a person who *does* live with music can become *more*. A soul receptive to the beauty and diversity of music perceives the world in richer, more nuanced colours. This is certain.

Ultimately, what matters most is the quality of the inner life we cultivate: the emotional dispositions with which we move through the world, and the ways we cope with difficulties –whether we experience them as burdens and obstacles, or as invitations for growth. In this sense, the place of music in family life may serve as a subtle but profoundly meaningful resource for emotional resilience, presence, and connection.

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