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**A COMPARISON BETWEEN MUSICAL UPBRINGING OF  
JEWISH AND ARAB STUDENTS IN ISRAEL**

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*Abstract*

This paper presents initial findings from partial analysis of a questionnaire that aims to identify individual and cultural differences related to the musical upbringing of Jewish and Arab Israeli students. The questionnaire was developed as part of a larger study. The participants are students who study for a music education bachelors' degree and a teaching certificate in Israel. It is hypothesized that the students' musical upbringing is related to their musical identity and their decision to choose a music education career. Data were collected from 50 Jewish and Arab Israeli students through a closed-ended questionnaire with the inclusion of four open-ended questions. The questionnaire had 36 items covering several individual aspects such as musical support and encouragement, musical background and experience, listening habits, musical knowledge, personal beliefs related to music teaching, and music career aspirations. The preliminary data indicate that there was a significant difference between Jewish and Arab students in the level of encouragement and support related to music activities that they received from parents and from music teachers. Jewish students were more encouraged to learn and play music than Arab students. The same trend was found regarding singing. Statistically significant differences were also observed concerning the age in which the students started learning a musical instrument. Jewish students began instrumental music studies at an earlier age than the Arab Students.

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**Keywords:** Music education, cultural aspects, career choice, teacher education.



## **1. Introduction**

This paper presents initial findings from a partial analysis of a questionnaire that was developed for a larger study. The questionnaire aims to identify similarities and differences related to the musical upbringing of Israeli Jewish and Arab students who study for a music education teaching certificate. It is generally acknowledged that musical upbringing is influenced by religious and cultural affiliation which impact the musical environment and learning opportunities of the child. The initial musical exposure of the child facilitates the development of ties between the child and the musical heritage of the family and the community (Cambell, 2011). Music learning opportunities include the availability of music classes in kindergarten and school, the opportunity to study music instrumental lessons either at a music conservatory or with a private music teacher, and other musical activities that are available in the community.

Musical experiences build up as the child enters kindergarten and school and participates in music making activities such as singing, playing or listening to music (Abril, 2016; Cutietta, 2002). Exposure to music may occur during music classes or as part of general school activities.

Formal music learning (e.g., private music lessons) usually starts at the relatively early ages of 6-9 years of age (Cutietta, 2017). Learning and performing music at an early age enables the child to develop musical understanding, fine technical playing skills, as well as to develop a musical identity later on as a teenager.

Some children do not have the chance to participate in any type of music activity for reasons such as the presence of religious beliefs that restrict musical activities or remote living locations where music teachers are unavailable. The musical background of each individual student has an effect on both musical skill abilities and musical theoretical knowledge. This paper investigates whether there is a difference between Jewish and Arab students in the encouragement and support they received and the age they had started to sing or play a musical instrument.

### **1.1. Exposure to music and music lessons**

In the Western society children aged three and up are usually exposed to a musical environment, which includes their family's musical heritage and musical sounds of the community (Cambell, 2011). The educational environment exposes the growing child to a wider repertoire of musical styles. Musical experiences in kindergarten and school include singing, playing musical instruments and listening to a wide variety of musical pieces (Abril, 2016). Another more individualized musical experience includes private instrumental lessons that in many cases start during elementary school years (Cutietta, 2017). More subtle music education takes place when learning to play a musical instrument either in private lessons or as part of a small group of students studying with a teacher. Studying to play with private teachers is a process that may last until high school graduation and at times may continue in adult life.

Community musical activities provide wide possibilities for participation. The varied participation of children and teenagers with music activities may promote the development of a musical identity (Moore, Burland, & Davidson, 2003).

### **1.2. Encouragement and support in the process of music learning**

Encouragement and support of parents during childhood influences the child's interest in an activity and the time the child will engage in that activity. In a study of gifted pianists Sosniak (1985) found that

parents' interest and attentive listening to their child's practice sessions helped their child form steady practice habits and motivated them to keep practicing for a longer time. As the child grows up, parents' involvement declines and internal self-motivation develops (Sloboda, Davidson, Howe, & Moore, 1996). The intrinsic motivation to practice marks the beginning stages of musical autonomy (Sloboda *et al.*, 1996). In a study on self-motivation of top musicians Ericsson (1993) found that as teenagers they had developed well organized practice sessions with efficient use of time. These practice habits had been acquired already during their childhood.

The increased amount of practice hours top musicians accumulated led to a higher playing proficiency. In comparison to other musicians by the age of 18 these top musicians defined by Ericsson (1993) as professionals and experts had accumulated an estimated amount of 8000 practice hours as compared to 3000 practice hours of less accomplished experts and 1000 practice hours of amateurs. The encouragement and support these musicians received as children greatly affected the level of proficiency they had reached by the age of 18 years old. Moore, Burland, and Davidson (2003) revealed that musical activities of improvising music, participating in ensemble rehearsals, and playing in concerts enhanced children's interest in music and motivated them to continue with their musical development. Similar findings were found by Hargreaves & Marshal (2003) regarding teenagers who participated in bands with no adult guidance.

In this type of playing environment that has been defined as the "third environment", the band members not only played together but also learned new techniques from one another as well as maintained and supported each other's interest in music activities. These musical activities not only provide opportunities for musical performance but also social environments in which to meet with people of similar interests. Hence, the on-going engagement with music performance and development appears to be inseparably associated with both musical achievements and positive social experience.

### **1.3. Music education in Israel**

The Israeli education system provides formal education from pre-kindergarten (3-4 years old) to 12<sup>th</sup> grade (Knesset, 2015). Extra afternoon educational enrichment such as private music lessons is fully funded by the parents (Knesset, 2016). In the educational system of Israel, a child is referred to kindergarten or school according to his native speaking language – Hebrew or Arabic - and religious affiliation. The language of instruction in the Jewish kindergartens and schools is in Hebrew and in the Arab kindergartens and schools in Arabic. The kindergarten and school programs address the cultural and religious requirements of either the Jewish or Arabic population (Central bureau of statistics, 2016).

Most kindergartens have music classes although the exact percentage is unknown due to disperse institutions dealing with this age group (personal communication, supervisor of music education in Israel, 2016). It should be noted that in the Arab schools and kindergartens less music classes are offered in comparison with the Jewish schools though, more specified information was unavailable as for 2016 (personal communication, supervisor of music education in Israel, 2016).

The core curriculum in the Elementary school is mandatory and includes varied subjects among them reading, writing, math and English. A few annual hours are directed towards studies of the arts. These

classes are elective and are chosen according to each school headmaster's preference. They include three elective hours in grades 1-3, and two hours in grades 4-6 (The Knesset, 2016).

The electives include five subjects: music, arts, theatre, dance, and communication (The Knesset, 2016). Therefore the availability of music classes depends on the choice of the school. According to the Ministry of education in most elementary schools that are registered and recognized by the state (85%) music classes are part of the curriculum for at least one school year. In 10% of the secondary schools there are music programs. High school music programs are offered today in 130 schools in Israel (The Knesset, 2016). The music programs are professional and are part of the final high school exams.

#### **1.4. Religious affiliation**

The four main religions in Israel: Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and Druze. The Druze religion was founded in Cairo, Egypt, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Dana, 1998). The population in Israel in 2014 was 8.7 million people, distributed as follows: 75% (6.525 million) were Jews, 21% were Arabs. Of them: 85% (1.488 million) were Muslims, 8% (139,000) were Druze and 7.5% (134,300) were Christians (Central bureau of statistics, 2015).

The attitude towards music differs between religious and ethnic groups in Israel. Thus, in the Jewish society, music learning and performance is well accepted while in the Muslim society for reasons that originated with religious bans, music learning is partially accepted (Cahn & Rusu, 2016). Nowadays, studying music among the Arab population became more acceptable although the past bans over music learning still have an impact (Abdel-Rahman Hamza, 2014; Cahn & Rusu, 2016). These bans may be partially responsible for the shortage in Arab music teachers, as well as the lack of music learning possibilities for those persons of the Arab population that reside in rural areas.

Regarding specialized High school music programs, these programs in Israeli high schools are common in the Jewish schools, while none are currently offered in the Arab high schools (personal communication, regional supervisor of music education in Israel, 2017).

In Israel, formal instruction in instrumental performance is done in music conservatories and musical centers and in private lessons. These are open to the whole population, however for those who reside in rural areas and lack transportation they are less available.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The aim of this study was to find differences and similarities in the upbringing of Israeli students, Jewish and Arabs, as related to music learning. The parents' attitude to their child's musical education is critical in the process of learning music (McPherson, 2008). The encouragement and support that a parent shows towards his child's musical activity effects the child's motivation to continue (Sosniak, 1985; Ericsson, 1993). Therefore, this study investigated who were the main supporters of the students and whether there were differences between the Jewish and Arab students in the level of encouragement and support they received. The study also investigated whether there was a difference between the Jewish and Arab students regarding the age they had started to sing or play a musical instrument.

### **3. Research Questions**

What are the differences and the similarities in upbringing of Israeli Jewish and Arab students concerning encouragement and support from their families and society? Are there differences in between Israeli Jewish and Arab students in the age they started to learn to play music? Does it affect the age they start learning to play music?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to find information regarding the musical upbringing of Israeli Jewish and Arab students who study in music education programs.

### **5. Research Methods**

#### **5.1. Development of the Attitudes toward Music Experience and Education (AMEE) questionnaire**

Based on a previous literature review (Cahn & Rusu, 2016), a questionnaire was developed with the aim of identifying individual and cultural differences related to music between Jewish and Arab Israeli students who study in a music education teaching certificate programs in Israel. The questionnaire includes adaptations of questions from previous questionnaires by Bergee *et al.* (2001), Epstein *et al.* (2015), Henry (2013), Katsir, Sagi, & Gilat (2004), McClellan (2011), and Rickels *et al.* (2013), as well as original questions.

The AMEE questionnaire includes the following categories: demographic information; musical background related to (1) playing and singing experience, (2) parental and social encouragement and support, (3) listening & playing habits, and (4) motivations for music activity during childhood; musical knowledge; current music playing activities; performance experience; individual listening habits; attitudes towards teaching music, i.e. (1) motivation to become a music teacher, (2) characteristics of a good music teacher, (3) professional ability of music teachers.

The AMEE questionnaire was content validated by four Jewish and Arab lecturers and the language was validated by native Hebrew speaking graduates and native Arabic speaking graduates. Based on their comments, the AMEE was rewritten and administered to 20 professional musicians both Jewish and Arabs as part of the pilot study. Based on their answers minor changes were made. Reliability of the AMEE instrument was assessed based on the computation of the internal consistency (Alpha Cronbach). It is important to mention that the development of AMEE is part of a larger study investigating the differences and similarities between Jewish and Arab music education students in Israel.

#### **5.2. Participants**

Participants were 50 music education students in Israel, which study either for a music education bachelors' degree or in a music education teaching certificate program. In all these programs the language used for instruction is Hebrew.

**Table 01.** Gender and ethnicity of the participants (N =50).

Gender and ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Male	15	30%
Female	35	70%
Jewish	26	52%
Arabs (Muslim, Christian, Druze)	24	48%

Participants included 26 Jewish students (52%), 18 of which were female (69.2%) and 8 male (30.8 %), and 24 Arab students (48%), which consisted of 15 Muslim students (30%), 5 Christian students (10%) and 4 Druze students (8%). Among the Arab students, 17 students were females (70%) and 7 students were males (30%). In terms of age distribution, 25 students (50%) were between the ages of 18-24, 16 students (32%) were between the ages of 25-30, 6 students (12%) were between the ages of 31-40, and 3 students (6%) were aged 41 and upwards.

### 5.3. The AMEE questionnaire

The AMEE questionnaire includes questions that require either yes-no answers, or answers on a six-point Likert scale, where a value of 6 represent high agreement with the statement and a value of 1 represents high disagreement. Four open ended questions were also included in the AMEE. These questions requested from the participants to describe the attitude of their society towards music learning and whether this attitude affected their choice to learn music. The questions also requested from the participants to express what would be considered an achievement for them once they would be working in the field. Ethical Committees consents were received before administering the questionnaire. The participants were informed about the confidentiality of the collected data.

### 5.4. Data collection

Questionnaires were submitted either by email or handed out in printed version during January to February 2017.

## 6. Findings

The results revealed several differences between Jewish and Arab music education students. The first of these was related to the amount of encouragement and support they received from within the family and other social circles when participating in music activities. The second was related to the age in which the students started to play music during childhood. Other cultural and social aspects regarding the similarities and differences between the Jewish and Arab music education students are currently being analysed (results are not presented here).

### **6.1. Encouragement to play or sing**

Data indicate that the participants' main source of encouragement to play music came mostly from their parents, fathers or mothers, and from their music teachers. In both ethnic groups, parental encouragement for learning music was indicated as the highest influence, although the degree of encouragement differed between groups. Parental encouragement and support was marked as positive if at least one of the parents encouraged and supported musical studies of the participant as a child or as an adult. A significant difference was found between the groups both in the overall parental encouragement as well as in the encouragement of fathers and mothers. Jewish students were significantly more encouraged by their parents (88.5%, 23 participants) to study music as compared to the Arab students (45.8%, 11 participants),  $\chi^2 (df = 1, N = 50) = 10.422, p < .001$ . Jewish students were also significantly more encouraged by their fathers (69.2%, 18 participants) to study music as compared to the Arab students (41.7%, 10 participants),  $\chi^2 (df = 1, N = 50) = 3.848, p < .05$ . A significant difference was also found regarding encouragement received from mothers. The Jewish students were significantly more encouraged by their mothers (76.9%, 20 participants) to study music as compared with the Arab students (29.2%, 7 participants),  $\chi^2 (df = 1, N = 50) = 11.456, p < .001$ .

Significant differences were also observed in the encouragement received from the music teachers. The Jewish students reported that they were significantly more encouraged by their music teachers (42.3%, 11 participants) to study music as compared with the Arab students (16.7%, 4),  $\chi^2 (df = 1, N = 50) = 3.907, p < .05$ . Other encouragers and supporters such as relatives, friends, and school teachers were not found to significantly differ between the Jewish and Arab students and all reported having received low to moderate levels of encouragement from them.

### **6.2. The starting age of playing an instrument and singing during childhood**

Regarding playing a musical instrument, there was a significant difference between the students regarding the age in which they started learning to play a musical instrument or in which they started singing. Jewish students started instrumental learning earlier than the Arab students  $\chi^2 (df = 1, N = 41) = 10.602, p < .001$ . Jewish students began to learn playing a musical instrument between ages 3-9 years, while most Arab students started after the age of 10, eight of whom started after the age of 15. Jewish students also started to sing with guidance earlier than Arab students  $\chi^2 (df = 1, N = 40) = 4.569, p < .05$ . The results indicated that Jewish students started their musical training earlier than Arab students.

## **7. Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to find differences and similarities in the upbringing of Israeli students, Jewish and Arabs, as related to cultural and individual aspects. The participants were 50 music education students, Jewish and Arabs. Partial findings reveal several differences and similarities between the musical upbringing of Israeli Jewish and Arab music education students that participated in the study.

The parents' attitude to their child's learning activities is critical in all educational fields, and especially in music (McPherson, 2008). The encouragement and support (that may be seen as interest and involvement in their child's practice sessions, musical lessons, or musical performances) that a parent shows towards his or her child's musical activity effects the child's motivation to continue with the musical activity.

Sosniak (1985) and McPherson (2008) investigated children who had continued playing and had reached a good playing ability. They found that the parents' interest and involvement with their children's practice sessions had helped them to overcome difficulties and had motivated them to continue with their musical activities. Thus, the level of parental encouragement and support affect the amount of motivation children have in music playing during childhood (Sosniak, 1985; Ericsson, 1993). In the current study differences regarding the amount of encouragement and support in terms of musical activities reveal that the parents appear to be the prominent encouraging and supporting people in both groups. However between the two groups Jewish students received significantly more encouragement and support from their parents than Arab students.

This finding of a lower amount of encouragement and support by Arab parents towards the musical activities of their children as reported by the Arab participants may have its origins in the Muslim religious bans towards music studies that still influence the Arab society (Abdel-Rahman Hamza, 2014; Cahn & Rusu, 2016). As of today, there is slightly more openness in the Arab society towards music studies (Abdel-Rahman Hamza, 2014). Therefore although Arab parents show more encouragement and support towards their children's activities in music than in the past, it is still less as compared to the Jewish students.

Regarding encouragement and support of music teachers Jewish students reported a significantly higher level of encouragement than the Arab students ( $p < .05$ ). A possible explanation for this lack of encouragement and support may relate to the lack of music programs, particularly in Arab high schools (personal communication, regional supervisor of music education in Israel, 2017).

A study by McPherson (2005) related to playing skill development during initial stages of children instrumental learning focuses on beginners aged 7-9. Cutietta (2017) in an article directed towards parents recommend to start private instrumental learning is between ages 6-9 years old. This age range of 6-9 for beginning instrumental learning was found in the current study among the Jewish students. However this was not true for the Arab students where most students started after the age of 10, eight of whom started after the age of 15. A comparison between the two groups showed that the Jewish students had started musical activities at a significantly earlier age than the Arab students ( $p < .001$ ).

Studies regarding acquiring expertise in a domain and especially in music point to the many years of required learning and practice. Ericsson (1993) stated that expertise in a domain starts at an early age and requires long practice hours: *"In most domains of expertise, individuals begin in their childhood a regimen of effortful activities (deliberate practice) designed to optimize improvement..... intense practice extended for a minimum of 10 years"*.

Hallam (2011) reported that in order to reach a high level of Western classical music style instrumental expertise a musician needs 16 years of learning and practicing. Sosniak (1985) referring to the young age at which classical music instrumental study begins states that the individual starts at a very young age while the amount of practice hours increases up to 50 hours per week as a teenager. The fact that many of the Arab students start learning at a later age reduces the amount of years dedicated to musical development as a child and teenager. This reduced time may affect the level of their instrumental ability.

Instrumental technique and musical abilities improve during learning and practicing and within time, enables the teenager to participate in ensembles. Successful participation in ensemble playing as well as the social aspects involved, contribute to an ongoing interest with music activities (Hargreaves & Marshal,



2003; Moore, *et al.*, 2003). The continuous process of playing during childhood and during the teenage years may develop a musical identity (Moore *et al.*, 2003). This prolonged musical engagement may enhance opting for a music teaching career (Rickels *et al.*, 2013) The musical background of each student affects types of musical exposure and experiences, while both can have a great influence on the motivation to study music education and music performance, as well as on musical knowledge and ability. These studies emphasize the importance of an early start with instrumental playing, encouragement and support from parents and teachers, which may motivate a continued interest in music that may lead to choosing a musical career as an adult. From the results of this study, one can see that most of the Jewish students began studying music at an early age and were encouraged by both parents and music teachers, therefore it is not surprising that they chose to study music education. However, many of the Arab students started to play at a later age, and they were less encouraged and supported by their parents and music teachers. These results raise the question as to what were the reasons that lead them to choose a music education career? Possible reasons apart from their apparent love for music may be connected to personal ideals such as exposing the young generation to music or becoming mediators of social change. Other reasons may be more related to the status of the teaching position in the Arab sector that also enables social mobility. These topics, which are part of a larger study based on the AMEE questionnaire, are still under analysis. Some responses to the open questions of the AMEE give a glance on their inner motivation to undergo a musical education, i.e. their personal passion for music. Hence, in referring to their motivation to study music some participants wrote:

Participant A: "I chose to study music because I feel that it is the most important thing in my life and the thing I mostly want in my life"

Participant B: "*In my opinion, music is life we cannot imagine life without music*"

Participant C: "*(Society) did not affect my decision (to study music). It is a traditional society*"

Further analysis of the data will reveal other aspects of motivations and attitudes towards music education career in Israel.

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