

## The Frequency of Music Improvisation Activities in the Fourth and Fifth Grade of Primary School

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∞ The aim of the present study was to investigate and compare the frequency of the implementation of music improvisation activities in music lessons by classroom teachers and subject teachers teaching music in the fourth and fifth grade in Slovenian primary schools. We also explored the teachers' sense of competence to implement music improvisation activities, reasons for the infrequent inclusion of such activities and solutions for more frequent inclusion. A descriptive nonexperimental method of research was used, collecting data with a questionnaire. The study found that teachers occasionally carry out music improvisation activities, most often rhythmic improvisation. The results showed no differences between the frequency of improvisation activities between classroom teachers and subject teachers. However, subject teachers do feel more competent to perform music improvisation activities than classroom teachers and there was a weak correlation between the sense of competence and the frequency of improvisation activities in music lessons. Teachers cite a lack of time, knowledge and self-confidence as the key reasons for the infrequent implementation of music improvisation activities. They see solutions for the more frequent inclusion of music improvisation activities in additional music improvisation training and changes in the music curricula, advocating for more flexible and broadly defined learning objectives. Due to the small sample size, the results are not generalisable, but they do provide an insight into the current state of the integration of music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade of primary school.

**Keywords:** classroom teachers, general music, music improvisation, primary school, subject teachers

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## Pogostost dejavnosti glasbene improvizacije v četrtem in petem razredu osnovne šole

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~ Namen te raziskave je bil preučiti in primerjati pogostost izvajanja dejavnosti glasbene improvizacije pri pouku glasbene umetnosti med učitelji razrednega pouka in učitelji predmetnega pouka, ki poučujejo predmet glasbene umetnosti v četrtem in petem razredu slovenskih osnovnih šol. Raziskali smo tudi občutek kompetentnosti učiteljev za izvajanje dejavnosti glasbene improvizacije, razloge za redko vključevanje teh dejavnosti in rešitve za pogostejše vključevanje. Uporabljena je bila deskriptivna neeksperimentalna metoda raziskovanja, pri čemer smo podatke zbrali z vprašalnikom. Raziskava je pokazala, da učitelji občasno izvajajo dejavnosti glasbene improvizacije, najpogosteje ritmično improvizacijo. Rezultati niso pokazali razlik v pogostosti improvizacijskih dejavnosti med učitelji razrednega in predmetnega pouka. Kljub temu se učitelji predmetnega pouka čutijo kompetentnejše za izvajanje dejavnosti glasbene improvizacije kot učitelji razrednega pouka, med občutkom kompetentnosti in pogostostjo izvajanja improvizacijskih dejavnosti pri pouku glasbene umetnosti pa se je pokazala šibka korelacija. Učitelji kot ključne razloge za redko izvajanje dejavnosti glasbene improvizacije navajajo pomanjkanje časa, znanja in samozavesti. Rešitve za pogostejše vključevanje dejavnosti glasbene improvizacije vidijo v dodatnem usposabljanju v glasbeni improvizaciji in spremembah učnega načrta za glasbeno umetnost v osnovni šoli, pri čemer se zavzemajo za prožnejše in širše opredeljene učne cilje. Zaradi majhnosti vzorca rezultati niso posplošljivi, vendar nudijo vpogled v aktualno stanje vključevanja dejavnosti glasbene improvizacije pri pouku glasbene umetnosti v četrtem in petem razredu osnovne šole.

**Ključne besede:** glasbena improvizacija, osnovna šola, pouk glasbe, učitelji razrednega pouka, učitelji predmetnega pouka

## Introduction

High-quality music education contributes significantly to the holistic development of the individual (Brdnik Juhart & Sicherl Kafol, 2021; Pesek, 1997; Sicherl Kafol, 2001) and is fulfilled through musical performance, musical listening and musical creative activities, which are constantly intertwined (Borota, 2013; Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport in Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo, 2011; Sicherl Kafol, 2001). In addition to musical recreation, creativity in music is roughly comprised of the two activity subfields of composition and improvisation (Nettl, 1974), which differ in the degree of planning and in the creative process itself. Hargreaves (1999) describes improvisation as the generation of new musical ideas without rearrangement, whereas composition may involve the reworking of musical material. In its strictest sense, music improvisation is defined as the spontaneous process of making music in real time (Alperson, 1984; *The Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary*) and is one of the most complex forms of creative activity (Beegle, 2010). Improvisation goes beyond the shaping of the individual's musical world and prepares them to live in a modern, complex world where 'improvisational' action and constant adaptation to change at every turn is almost an imperative (Montouri, 2003).

In the field of music pedagogy, improvisation is a sensitive topic. Despite the growing efforts to establish its presence in children's music education (Chandler, 2018; Larsson & Georgii-Hemming, 2019) and a better understanding of its beneficial effects on the individual's cognitive (Azzara, 2002; Navarro Ramón & Chacón-López, 2021) and social development and interactions (Berkowitz, 2010; Burnard & Boyack, 2013; Diaz Abrahan et al., 2022; Sawyer, 2006), the question of whether improvisation can be learned at all remains a matter of debate at all educational levels (Van der Schyff, 2019). While some embrace the view that, especially in children, improvisation can only be encouraged and nurtured (Hickey, 2009; Lanier, 2022; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010), others propose detailed procedures for teaching improvisational skills (Azzara, 1999; Torres, 2018; Whitcomb, 2013). These refer to different types of improvisation, most notably vocal and instrumental (Koutsoupidou, 2005; Whitcomb, 2005), melodic and rhythmic (Gruenhagen & Whitcomb, 2014), and individual and group improvisation (Beegle, 2010; Koutsoupidou, 2005; Sawyer, 1999). Research shows that teachers most often perform rhythmic and melodic improvisation, mainly in a call-and-response format, immediately followed by the use of untuned and tuned instruments (Whitcomb, 2007), with vocal improvisation being less common than instrumental improvisation (Koutsoupidou, 2005). Some advocate so-called free improvisation, in which

there are no well-defined frameworks for music making and the concept of freedom holds a central position (Hickey, 2009; Higgins & Mantie, 2013; Monk, 2013; Ng, 2018) along with musical communication between individuals (Hickey, 2009; Monk, 2013). At the opposite pole on the spectrum of limitations in improvisation activities is structured improvisation. Here, the focus is on teacher guidance and music-theoretical rules (Rebne & Saetre, 2020) that promote the development of musical skills and the acquisition of musical knowledge (Brophy, 2005; Coulson & Burke, 2013; Guilbault, 2009; Whitcomb, 2013). Some authors (Beegle, 2010; Edmund & Keller, 2019) argue that it is important to keep a balance between the two when implementing music improvisation activities.

Notwithstanding the different perspectives on encouraging and/or teaching improvisation, in recent years there has been a greater understanding and appreciation of improvisation activities that focus on the process and the experience that students gain from it. Hickey (2009) argues that music improvisation is not merely a product that can be learned in a strict methodological and pedagogical sense; its quality is to foster a process that emerges in freedom and allows for self-actualisation, which is also evident in the creative process of other areas (Jurišević, 2011). Campbell (2009) argues that the music improvisation activity, more than any other musical experience, provides the learner with a holistic musical education in which music theory, aural perception and performance are richly intertwined. Improvisation is worth implementing in primary school music lessons because it provides experiences of risk and fosters spontaneity, exploration and collaboration (Higgins & Mantie, 2013).

Research shows mixed results regarding the inclusion frequency of improvisation activities in music lessons (Chandler, 2018). While music improvisation is one of the least popular musical activities (Byo, 1999) and is given very little time (Gruenhagen & Whitcomb, 2014), a study by Whitcomb (2007) found that 81% of the participating New York City teachers include improvisation in the teaching process, while improvisation is also a regular feature in the first three years of primary school according to the results of a study conducted by Orman (2002) in the eastern region of the United States. In a study on the integration of improvisation activities in music lessons in English primary schools, Koutsoupidou (2005) found that 76% of the 67 teachers who participated in the study practised improvisation on their own initiative. The main reasons teachers give for not using improvisation are a lack of experience with improvisation and a lack of knowledge of the theoretical aspects of improvisation, but the insufficient level of music improvisation activities is also due to reduced classroom discipline, as perceived by teachers, and a lack of time. The author also found that more experienced and older teachers are more likely

to include improvisation activities than inexperienced and younger teachers. Only 19% of the teachers surveyed had experienced improvisation in their own primary education, which is an illuminating statistic. It is also interesting to note that no correlation was found between teachers' competences and the type of improvisation activities they used (instrumental, vocal, movement). Furthermore, Whitcomb (2007) indicates a strong correlation between the implementation of improvisation activities and teachers' previous experience gained in workshops, conferences and studies. In a later paper (Whitcomb, 2013), the author highlights the insufficient knowledge and skills of teachers in implementing music improvisation and suggests combining improvisation activities with other musical activities to maximise the economical use of time.

Despite the general positive attitudes of classroom teachers towards music teaching, Šober (2021) found that the musical background and additional musical experience of teachers significantly influenced their choice of music activities in their music lessons. Even though student teachers acquire all of the necessary knowledge and skills for high-quality music teaching during their studies, it is evident in practice that teachers who do not have a strong musical background from the outset must seek continuous professional development (Šober, 2021). Teachers frequently avoid composing or improvising in their own music instruction when they feel uncomfortable in executing these activities (Odena, 2001). Teachers' beliefs about their own creativity have a significant impact on the degree to which creativity is encouraged in the classroom and the value they place on creativity (Rubenstein et al., 2013; Sak, 2004). Moreover, research shows that classroom teachers often feel self-conscious when teaching music (Holden & Button, 2006; King, 2018; Poulter & Cook, 2019; Seddon & Biasutti, 2008; Stunell 2010; Vitale, 2020).

Research (Bell, 2003; Brophy, 2002; Madura Ward-Steinman, 2007; Mullet et al., 2016) further suggests that most music teachers experience feelings of self-consciousness and a lack of confidence in their ability to perform improvisation activities. In addition to a lack of improvisational experience in music teaching (Bernhard & Stringham, 2016; Gruenhagen & Whitcomb, 2014), issues such as a lack of time (Russell-Bowie, 2009; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008) and the sense of chaos that comes with performing improvisation activities (Campbell, 2009) are also significant. In their research, Hickey and Schmidt (2019) studied the effect of professional development on the level of integration of improvisation and compositional activities in music teaching. They point to a lack of confidence and a lack of practical experience with improvisation as two key reasons teachers give for not sufficiently incorporating creative activities, and see the solution in better professional development of teachers, which is reflected in

teachers' better understanding of creative music activities and a higher level of implementation of such activities. In a more recent study, Nikolaou (2023) conducted 13 music improvisation workshops with primary education university students. After the workshops, about half of the students (46%) expressed that they felt confident as future classroom teachers to implement music improvisation activities in their music lessons (Nikolaou, 2023).

In her research on musical creativity in Slovenian primary schools, Črčinovič Rozman (2009) found that music lessons at the classroom level focus on creative activities alongside music (e.g., fine art creativity and movement to music) rather than music-making activities, i.e., composition or improvisation. Moreover, teachers are not fully familiar with strategies for implementing music composition and improvisation. Nevertheless, both teachers and students expressed satisfaction with the level of music-making activities in the classroom. To encourage music improvisation in the classroom, the author suggests that the topic be better addressed in university curricula and that short seminars for teachers be held on the subject. Markelj (2014) studied the integration of music-making activities in music lessons at the classroom level. The results showed that teachers with higher levels of music education are more likely to include certain types of music-making activities. The author also found that teachers from the first to the third grade of primary school include rhythmic improvisation and creative music-didactic games more often than teachers from the fourth and fifth grade. However, the study's small sample size and uneven distribution of teachers based on their musical education suggest that these findings should be interpreted with caution (Markelj, 2014).

The balance between the musical activity domains of performing, listening and creating is central to the holistic musical development of a young person. It is therefore important to integrate music-making activities into the music curriculum. Improvisation is worth encouraging in primary school music lessons, as it nurtures and encourages risk-taking, spontaneity, exploration, collaboration and play (Higgins & Mantie, 2013). As there is a lack of research in Slovenia on the frequency of music improvisation activities in music education – with the exception of one master's thesis (Markelj, 2014) and the contribution of Črčinovič Rozman (2009), which covers the whole field of music creativity at the primary school classroom level – the present research aimed to gain an insight into the frequency of music improvisation activities in the fourth and fifth grade of primary school. The Slovenian Primary School Act (*Zakon o osnovni šoli*, 1996, Art. 38) states that, in the first period of primary school (grades 1–3), the compulsory curriculum, including the subject of music, is taught by the classroom teacher. In the third period of primary school

(grades 7–9), all subjects are taught by subject teachers.<sup>3</sup> In exceptional cases, a classroom teacher may also teach in grade 6. Music lessons in the second period (grades 4–6) may be taught by both a classroom teacher and a subject teacher. Accordingly, we also wanted to examine differences in the frequency of music improvisation activities between classroom and subject teachers. Some research suggests that classroom teachers tend to feel uncomfortable teaching music (Holden & Button, 2006; Poulter & Cook, 2019), and we were interested to see whether this is also reflected in the frequency and structure of music improvisation activities in music lessons.

The main objectives of the research are to determine (1) the frequency of different types of music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade, (2) teachers' sense of competence to implement music improvisation activities, and (3) reasons for the infrequent implementation of music improvisation activities and possible solutions for their more frequent implementation.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were posed in the study:

- RQ 1.1: How often do teachers implement music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade of primary school?
- RQ 1.2: Are there differences in the frequency of music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade between classroom and subject teachers?
- RQ 1.3: Which types of music improvisation activities do teachers most frequently implement in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade?
- RQ 2.1: What proportion of teachers feel fully competent to execute music improvisation activities?
- RQ 2.2: Are there differences in the sense of competence to execute music improvisation activities between classroom and subject teachers?
- RQ 2.3: Is there a correlation between the frequency of music improvisation activities in music lessons and teachers' sense of competence to execute music improvisation activities?
- RQ 3.1: What reasons do teachers give for the infrequent implementation of music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade?

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3 Teachers carry out educational work in the school (*Zakon o osnovni šoli*, 1996). Classroom teachers have completed a bachelor's degree programme in Primary Education, while subject teachers have completed a bachelor's degree programme in a specific subject. In our case, subject music teachers have completed a bachelor's degree programme in Music Education (*Pravilnik o izobrazbi učiteljev in drugih strokovnih delavcev v izobraževalnem programu osnovne šole*, 2011).

RQ 3.2: What solutions do teachers suggest for the more frequent inclusion of music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade?

## **Method**

This study utilises a descriptive non-experimental method of educational research.

## **Sample**

The study was based on a random sample of classroom teachers ( $n = 46$ ) and subject teachers ( $n = 20$ ) who teach music lessons in the fourth and/or fifth grade of primary school. There were nine subject teachers who teach in both the fourth and fifth grade. Primary school teachers from different regions of Slovenia were randomly invited to participate in the survey.

## **Instruments**

For the purpose of the survey, an online questionnaire (1KA) was designed with a combination of closed and open-ended questions and a six-point Likert-type rating scale. The questionnaire includes general demographic questions (gender, age group, teaching specialisation, years of work experience, statistical region in which the teachers teach), two Likert-type rating scales where the teachers indicated their perception of the frequency with which music improvisation activities (and specific types of activities) are included in their music lessons, two closed-ended multiple-choice questions on the teachers' own assessment of their sense of competence to execute music improvisation activities and reasons for rarely carrying out music improvisation activities, and an open-ended question on suggested solutions for the more frequent inclusion of music improvisation activities.

## **Research Design**

The data for the study were collected through an online survey questionnaire from January to April 2022. A total of 126 teachers commenced filling in the questionnaire, but only 82 of them fully or partially completed it. All of the partially completed questionnaires were excluded from further analysis. Thus, 66 fully completed questionnaires were obtained for the final analysis.

The data obtained from the closed-ended questions and Likert scales were quantitatively analysed using IBM SPSS version 27.0 for statistical data processing using descriptive, correlational and inferential statistics. Frequency distributions of variables ( $f$ ,  $f\%$ ) and basic descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used. Due to the small sample size and the uneven distribution of the data, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare independent samples and the Friedman test was used to compare dependent samples (with post-hoc Wilcoxon signed ranks test). The Spearman correlation coefficient was also calculated. Responses to the open-ended question were qualitatively analysed by coding.

## Results and discussion

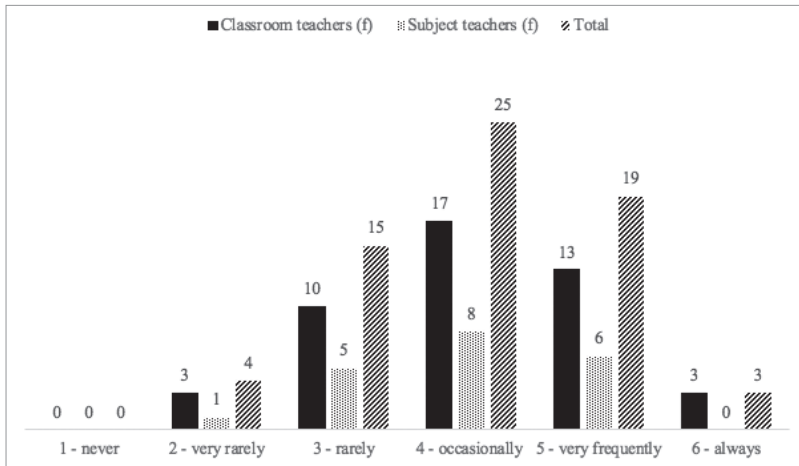
The results of the survey will be presented according to the sequence of the research questions.

### *RQ 1.1: How often do teachers implement music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade of primary school?*

The classroom and subject teachers indicated the frequency of music improvisation activities (1 – never, 2 – very rarely or once per marking period, 3 – rarely or 2–3 times per marking period, 4 – occasionally or once per month, 5 – very frequently or 2–3 times per month, 6 – always or every lesson). The marking period in Slovenian primary school lasts five months and there are two marking periods in one school year. On average, both the classroom and the subject teachers implement music improvisation activities in music lessons occasionally (once per month) ( $f\% = 37.9\%$ ;  $Me = 4$ ;  $SD = 0.98$ ) (Figure 1). Based on previous research indicating the unpopularity of music improvisation activities among teachers (Byo, 1999; Gruenhagen & Whitcomb, 2014), but nevertheless revealing a sufficient level of engagement with such activities (Orman, 2002; Whitcomb, 2007), we inferred that teachers do occasionally perform music improvisation activities. None of the respondents indicated that they do not include music improvisation activities in their teaching process, which is an encouraging finding.

**Figure 1**

*Frequency of music improvisation activities in music lessons*



**RQ 1.2:** *Are there differences in the frequency of music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade between classroom and subject teachers?*

No studies were found in the literature examining differences in the frequency of music improvisation activities between classroom teachers and subject teachers, although some research suggests that classroom teachers feel uncomfortable teaching music (King, 2018; Seddon & Biasutti, 2008; Stunell 2010; Vitale, 2020). Related to this, we were interested in whether classroom teachers are therefore also less likely to engage in music improvisation activities than subject teachers. However, no statistical differences were found between classroom and subject teachers in the frequency of implementing improvisation activities in music lessons ( $U = 432.5$ ;  $p = .688$ ;  $p > .05$ ). It is assumed that the results are a reflection of the small sample size, but they may indicate a broader problem of the absence of music improvisation activities in music lessons, independent of the teaching specialisation or educational background.

**RQ 1.3:** *Which types of music improvisation activities do teachers most frequently implement in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade?*

The literature review revealed different results on the popularity of different types of improvisation. While Whitcomb (2007) cites the most frequent

use of rhythmic and melodic call-and-response activities, Koutsoupidou (2005) points out that teachers most frequently perform improvisation activities on instruments, while vocal improvisation is the least frequent. It was therefore assumed that rhythmic and instrumental improvisation are the more frequently performed types of improvisation compared to melodic and vocal improvisation. The teachers surveyed ( $N = 66$ ) rated the frequency of each type of music improvisation activity on a six-point rating scale (1 – never, 2 – very rarely or once per marking period, 3 – rarely or 2–3 times per marking period, 4 – occasionally or once per month, 5 – very frequently or 2–3 times per month, 6 – always or every lesson). The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that, on average, both the classroom and the subject teachers occasionally implement various types of music improvisation activities: instrumental ( $Me = 4.00$ ;  $SD = 0.93$ ), vocal ( $Me = 4.00$ ;  $SD = 1.10$ ), rhythmic ( $Me = 4.00$ ;  $SD = 1.07$ ) and melodic ( $Me = 4.00$ ;  $SD = 1.08$ ). Based on the arithmetic mean, it is evident that rhythmic improvisation is nevertheless the most frequent type of music improvisation activity ( $M = 4.21$ ;  $SD = 1.07$ ) compared to the others. This result is consistent with previous scientific findings, but suggests that only rhythmic improvisation is more popular.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics on the frequency of performing types of music improvisation activities*

	instrumental improvisation	vocal improvisation	rhythmic improvisation	melodic improvisation
<i>M</i>	3.70	3.76	<b>4.21</b>	3.71
<i>Me</i>	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Mo</i>	4	4	4	4
<i>SD</i>	0.93	1.10	1.07	1.08

Given the results, we were interested to see whether there were statistically significant differences in the frequency with which each type of music improvisation was included. Due to the small sample size and the non-normal distribution of the data, we used the non-parametric Friedman test, which showed statistically significant differences in the frequency of inclusion of each type of music improvisation ( $\chi^2(3) = 18.308$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The Friedman test mean ranks are presented in Table 2. Further analysis by performing the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test showed that the teachers include rhythmic improvisation statistically significantly more often than melodic, instrumental and vocal improvisation (see Table 3).

**Table 2***Friedman test mean ranks*

Types of music improvisation activity	Mean rank
Instrumental improvisation	2.26
Vocal improvisation	2.46
Rhythmic improvisation	<b>2.96</b>
Melodic improvisation	2.32

**Table 3***Wilcoxon Signed Rank test – pairwise comparisons of types of music improvisation activities*

Type of music improvisation - pairs	Z	p
Vocal/instrumental	-.729	.466
Melodic/rhythmic	-3.729	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Rhythmic/instrumental	-3.892	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Melodic/vocal	-2.190	.827
Melodic/instrumental	-.119	.905
Rhythmic/vocal	-3.163	<b>.002</b>

**RQ 2.1: What proportion of teachers feel fully competent to execute music improvisation activities?**

Based on previous studies highlighting the importance of improvisation experiences in education and professional development (Koutsoupidou, 2005; Schmidt, 2019; Whitcomb, 2007), it was foreseen that at least half of the teachers would feel fully competent to execute music improvisation activities. The results of the present study showed that 51.5% ( $f = 34$ ) of the surveyed teachers ( $N = 66$ ) feel fully competent and 25.8% ( $f = 17$ ) feel sufficiently competent to execute music improvisation activities when following someone else's precise instructions, while 15 of the teachers ( $f \% = 22.7$ ) do not feel sufficiently competent to execute music improvisation activities.

**RQ 2.2: Are there differences in the sense of competence to execute music improvisation activities between classroom and subject teachers?**

No studies were found in the literature comparing the sense of competence to perform music improvisation activities between classroom teachers

and subject teachers. Given the scientific findings showing that classroom teachers feel uncomfortable teaching music, mainly due to insufficient musical experiences during their education (King, 2018; Stunell, 2010; Vitale, 2020), it was hypothesised that classroom teachers feel less competent to perform music improvisation activities than subject teachers. When the difference in sense of competence between classroom and subject teachers was examined, it was found that more than a third of the classroom teachers surveyed ( $f\% = 41.3\%$ ) and three-quarters of the subject teachers ( $f\% = 75.0\%$ ) feel fully competent to carry out music improvisation activities (see Table 4). After conducting a Mann-Whitney U test, it was found that there are statistically significant differences between the classroom and subject teachers in their sense of competence to execute music improvisation activities ( $U = 315.5$ ;  $p = .027$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The results indicate that subject teachers feel fully competent to carry out music improvisation activities to a greater extent than classroom teachers.

**Table 4**

*Percentage of the teachers' sense of competence to execute music improvisation activities – comparison between classroom and subject teachers*

Teaching specialisation	Do you feel competent enough to execute music improvisation activities?	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %
Classroom teacher	Yes, completely.	<b>19</b>	<b>41.3</b>
	Yes, if I am following someone else's precise instructions.	15	32.6
	No.	12	26.1
	Total	46	100.0
Subject teacher	Yes, completely.	<b>15</b>	<b>75.0</b>
	Yes, if I am following someone else's precise instructions.	2	10.0
	No.	3	15.0
	Total	20	100.0

**RQ 2.3:** *Is there a correlation between the frequency of music improvisation activities in music lessons and teachers' sense of competence to execute music improvisation activities?*

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the relationship between the frequency of music improvisation activities and the teachers' sense of competence to execute such activities in the classroom. The value of the coefficient ( $\rho = 0.33$ ) indicates a statistically significant weak correlation between the two variables ( $p = .003$ ). The results show that teachers who

feel competent to execute music improvisation activities are also more likely to implement such activities in their music lessons. The literature suggests that a sense of competence contributes significantly to the frequency of music improvisation activities in music lessons (Odena, 2001; Rubenstein et al., 2013; Sak, 2004).

*RQ 3.1: What reasons do teachers give for the infrequent implementation of music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade?*

The teachers who indicated in the questionnaire that they rarely or never execute music improvisation activities ( $n = 19$ ) gave reasons for this. Of these teachers, 57.9% indicated that the reason for not including music improvisation activities often is a lack of time, followed by a lack of knowledge to undertake such activities ( $f\% = 52.6\%$ ) and a lack of self-confidence ( $f\% = 42.1\%$ ). None of the respondents indicated a lack of motivation to do so, or that they consider such activities irrelevant for the musical development of their students. Just under a quarter of the teachers ( $f\% = 21.1\%$ ) indicated that the reason for executing an insufficient quantity of music improvisation activities was a lack of student interest, while one respondent also mentioned behavioural problems and student restlessness. The literature also suggests that a lack of improvisation experience (Bernhard & Stringham, 2016; Gruenhagen & Whitcomb, 2014) and a lack of time are key factors for the lack of implementation of music improvisation activities in music lessons (Russell-Bowie, 2009; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008).

*RQ 3.2: What solutions do teachers suggest for the more frequent inclusion of music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade?*

Both the classroom and the subject teachers surveyed identify solutions for the more frequent inclusion of music improvisation activities in additional teacher training in this area, with a focus on an increased offer of quality seminars and Slovenian literature, as well as changes in lesson planning. They believe that the curriculum for the subject of music should be looser, with more broadly formulated learning objectives that allow greater scope for the introduction of improvisational content. They also cite cross-curricular connections as a way of encouraging such activities. Some propose increasing the number of weekly music lessons. Difficulties with problematic student behaviour are also

mentioned, and teachers cite the establishment of better discipline, the development of student etiquette and more independent work by students as solutions. One of the solutions highlighted is to have an adequately sized classroom and a sufficient number and range of instruments, as this makes it easier to carry out improvisation activities. Some of the teachers state that this is simply the teacher's decision, thus highlighting the teacher's own initiative. Based on the results obtained, we can summarise that much of the responsibility for the frequency of the implementation of improvisation activities rests with the teachers themselves and their own desire. An adequate classroom size and a sufficiently large range of instruments is undoubtedly a facilitating factor, as is a certain amount of flexibility in the planning of music lessons, but it is up to the teachers themselves to understand and perceive the value of implementing music improvisation activities for the benefit of the students. Particularly in the Slovenian context, insufficient training is available on implementing music improvisation activities; therefore, more professional training and literature on the topic might be considered.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the frequency of music improvisation activities in the fourth and fifth grade of primary school by comparing classroom teachers and subject teachers. It was found that both groups of teachers implement music improvisation activities occasionally in their music lessons. It would be interesting to study the frequency of music improvisation activities using a more qualitative research approach, as this would provide an insight into the structure of improvisation activities and the definition of such activities from the teachers' perspective, which would provide a holistic picture of the implementation of music improvisation in music lessons. No differences were found between classroom teachers and subject teachers in the frequency of improvisation activities. It is assumed that different results would have been obtained if the sample had been larger and more balanced according to the teachers' teaching specialisation. It would be beneficial to conduct research on the implementation of music improvisation by music teachers at every grade level in primary school, comparing the practices of classroom teachers and subject teachers. This would provide a broader perspective on the implementation of improvisation in primary school. It would also be worth examining differences in the frequency of music improvisation activities according to the three primary school periods (grades 1–3, 4–6 and 7–9, respectively). According to the teachers surveyed in the present research, the most popular type

of improvisation is rhythmic improvisation. To elaborate these results, an in-depth survey should be carried out asking teachers about the specific improvisation activities (e.g., call-and-response, continuation of a musical motif, etc.) that they execute in the music classroom. Only about half of the teachers surveyed feel fully competent to carry out music improvisation activities, which points to possible improvements in the content of university education and in the provision of professional development. It was found that subject teachers feel more competent to carry out music improvisation activities than classroom teachers, which can be linked to the different structure of university education of the two groups: many classroom teaching students have not acquired any musical experience by the time they start their studies, whereas an entrance test for musical aptitude is compulsory for entry to the music education programme and requires a basic mastery of singing and playing an instrument as well as fundamental music-theoretical concepts. The sense of competence in performing improvisation activities is thus likely to reflect the overall structure of teachers' musical skills and knowledge, which may vary considerably between classroom and subject teachers. The results of the study also show that a greater sense of competence is associated with a higher level of implementation of improvisation activities in music lessons. Interestingly, although a higher percentage of subject teachers felt competent to execute music improvisation activities, they did not implement these activities to a greater extent in their music lessons than classroom teachers. We believe that a larger sample would have yielded different results. In addition to insufficient time, teachers cited a lack of knowledge about improvisation and a lack of confidence as reasons for the infrequent inclusion of improvisation activities. An increased emphasis on music improvisation activities during studies and, in particular, a greater offer of professional training and literature in Slovenian on the subject could significantly change the perception of music improvisation and consequently encourage teachers to implement improvisation more frequently in their music lessons. Teachers themselves also cite the need for additional training, along with changes in planning music lessons.

The study was limited to a small sample size, so the findings cannot be generalised to the entire Slovenian population of classroom and subject teachers who teach music in the fourth and fifth grade. Moreover, when interpreting the results, it should be borne in mind that the answers are an expression of teachers' subjective assessment and opinion, which is not necessarily a representation of the real situation. Given the number of teachers who failed to adequately complete the questionnaire, it is evident that only those who were enthusiastic and willing to participate did so.

The present research provides a current insight into the frequency of the implementation of music improvisation activities in music lessons in the fourth and fifth grade of primary school, but the results are not generalisable due to the small sample size. As more than ten years have passed since the last major research on the state of musical creativity in music lessons at the classroom level of primary education in Slovenia (Črčinovič Rozman, 2009), there is a need for up-to-date research that includes both quantitative and qualitative research approaches and addresses the implementation of music improvisation across the whole primary education vertical.

## Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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