

ARTICLE

Guitar in primary music school: Students' attitudes toward guitar lessons

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Abstract

Music schools in the Republic of Croatia are rooted in a long tradition of individual instrument instruction and a curriculum focused on classical art music. Students' attitudes toward instrument lessons play an important role in their motivation, musical development and long-term music engagement. This study, conducted with a sample of 103 guitar students, aims to examine primary music school students' attitudes toward guitar lessons and to determine whether these attitudes differ by gender and age. An attitude scale was used, comprising three dimensions: satisfaction with the subject, self-confidence, and perceived usefulness of playing the guitar. The results show a high level of students' satisfaction with guitar lessons, with challenges observed in self-confidence and the perception of the usefulness of playing in everyday life. A high, positive, and statistically significant correlation was found among all examined attitude dimensions, especially between self-confidence and the perception of the usefulness of playing the guitar. Statistically significant differences were found for age, but not for gender. Younger students showed greater interest and satisfaction, indicating a decline in motivation with increasing age and suggesting the need for greater flexibility in approach and repertoire in higher grades. It is recommended that teachers devote greater attention to adapting the repertoire to students' interests within the existing curriculum. Such an approach may help older students connect more deeply with their music-making, highlighting a promising avenue for future research to investigate how personal values and self-confidence relate to long-term engagement in music education.

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1. Introduction

Croatia shares a similar history of music education with countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Serbia. These countries have retained the system of so-called state primary music schools, in which the curriculum is predominantly based on classical art music. Students attend a general education and music school in parallel, where, in addition to their main subject (instrument), they take Solfeggio classes and participate in group music activities through a choir or orchestra. Enrollment usually requires passing an entrance exam that tests the child's musical abilities.¹ This type of education is traditionally almost free, allowing access to the most talented students

regardless of the family's financial situation. Today, in Croatia, in addition to the state music schools, there are also private music schools and various courses organized by associations or individuals.

In contrast, in the West, there are generally no state primary music schools in this form; they are often funded by local communities and tend to be less strict in their curricula and programs. Parents also finance music learning through private lessons. For older students, playing music is organized within secondary music schools as an extracurricular activity (school bands), mainly at an amateur level.² The program plays popular music, i.e., it is not strictly prescribed classical art music, which allows students to engage with music that is more relatable and enjoyable to them, fostering greater interest in musical participation.

There are also differences in the conceptions of instrumental teaching across Eastern and Western countries, as illustrated by comparing the Polish and Norwegian systems.³ National documents strictly regulate Polish music schools, potentially resulting in a high level of technical and musical playing skills. Music schools prepare students for professional music practice and do not primarily serve as leisure activities. The Norwegian system, on the other hand, is more flexible, without a prescribed national curricular framework, and promotes broader educational goals and the personal development of the individual. It can be concluded that in Poland, music school is understood almost exclusively as a professional path, whereas in Norway it primarily serves as creative leisure time and cultural education for children.

In music schools in Croatia, which are financed by the ministry, the teaching of an instrument as the main subject is carried out individually, while group music is realized through chamber music and orchestra. In primary school music education, individual instrument lessons take place twice a week, enabling students to develop musical abilities, acquire musical knowledge and skills, and prepare for secondary school. These specialized public schools offer a standardized multi-year curriculum (typically spanning six years for children aged 7/8 to 13/14) that runs parallel to general primary education. Operating under the authority and regulation of the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports, these institutions provide structured instrumental instruction, music theory, and ensemble training, serving as the foundational tier of the national music education system.¹ After graduating from secondary school, students can continue their studies at music academies or build a professional musical career.⁴ The teaching content is determined by a list of recommended compositions for each grade during the school year.^{1,4}

As already mentioned, guitar lessons, like other instrument lessons, in Croatian state music schools are taught individually. Although such a model has its advantages and disadvantages, it is considered an irreplaceable form of education for future musicians. The positive aspects of individual lessons include easier attention retention, the possibility of student self-assessment, realistic assessment of one's own progress, and the ability to adapt the program to the student's individual affinities. On the other hand, potential weaknesses include the student's dependence on the teacher and the high costs financed by the ministry.⁵ Although lessons are individual, teachers sometimes fail to adapt their approach to each student. When a teacher aligns the requirements with the student's abilities and interests, they lay the foundation for realistic goals that result in greater motivation and satisfaction for both parties.⁶ Music teachers should consider how they can equip students with the necessary abilities and traits to address problems that may arise.⁷ The way a teacher approaches a student has a crucial impact on the student's self-image and their relationship with others.⁸

Teachers should be models, especially for the youngest students⁶, because their role is not only to transfer knowledge but also to shape relationships and create a positive teaching atmosphere.⁸ Effective teaching of an instrument requires a motivated, professional teacher who lays the foundations for motivation with supportive comments while maintaining a flexible approach grounded in enthusiasm, energy, and a positive atmosphere.⁵ Modern teaching requires the teacher to play the role of a mentor, collaborator, and organizer⁹ while establishing a relationship of trust, a kind of partnership in which the student and teacher jointly select the teaching repertoire.⁵ If the student is not provided the opportunity to participate in shaping the teaching or express their own musical ideas, their creativity may remain suppressed.¹⁰ In contrast, when teaching is innovative and creative and when the student actively participates in the process, it is easier for them to remember and adopt the teaching content.¹¹

Effective communication and cooperation with parents contribute to improving the quality of teaching. Parents often lack understanding because they are not experts in classical music or playing a classical instrument. They often perceive guitar lessons in music schools as a course where students will quickly learn to play every song with chords for home parties. Therefore, parents should be informed about the importance of listening to classical music, about the specifics of the concert guitar (such as playing with nails), and the importance of investing in a quality instrument. Parents should also be involved in monitoring the student's progress, and to improve teaching, they should

also be instructed in monitoring students' practice at home.¹² Effective instrument teaching should be based on fulfilling three basic needs of students: a sense of autonomy in learning, a sense of competence with the instrument, and a strong connection with the teacher and the musical environment.¹³ When these conditions are met, the student stops experiencing practice as an obligation and begins to accept it as a natural part of their personality and everyday life. Such an approach develops technical skills and ensures that practicing music contributes to the student's personal growth and long-term satisfaction.

To better understand the factors that shape students' motivation and persistence in playing an instrument, the following is a review of relevant scientific research. Previous work clearly shows that musical progress is not solely the result of technical practice but rather a complex interaction between a student's perception of their abilities, environmental influences, and emotional relationship to playing.

A 10-year longitudinal study¹⁴ showed that a student's early vision of themselves as future musicians and intensive practice in the first three years are key predictors of future success. Students who planned to become musicians before starting their studies achieved significantly better results and dropped out less often compared to those who did not have such a vision. The authors concluded that while practice is important, a stable musical identity and a clear perception of future goals are critical to retaining motivation and achieving top results on the instrument. Given the importance of identity, research on a young clarinetist demonstrates that freedom of choice in repertoire significantly enhances higher-level cognitive functioning and greater perseverance in overcoming technical difficulties.¹⁵ When practicing a self-selected piece, the student spontaneously used advanced strategies, such as singing and mental exercises, whereas with teacher-imposed tasks, the student did not. The results of the study suggest that greater student independence directly increases the quality of practice and concentration. Similarly, a study of 686 young musicians to determine what most influences their exam performance¹⁶ showed that self-efficacy, i.e., a student's belief in their ability, is a key factor in achievement, more important than even the amount of practice. Personal experiences of success are the strongest source of self-confidence for young instrumentalists, i.e., if students succeed once, they believe they can do it again.¹⁷ The research emphasizes the importance of successful performances, with successfully playing a difficult part being the strongest source of self-confidence. Furthermore, watching peers of similar ability play successfully is more motivating than watching

professionals. Verbal encouragement from teachers and parents helps, but only if it is specific and realistic, as this type of feedback can reinforce students' belief in their abilities and counteract feelings of inadequacy. Students often interpret nervousness or sweaty palms as a sign of incompetence, so they need to be taught that such behavior is normal excitement, not incompetence.

In addition, the subjective assessment of the task also plays a key role. Students only practice when they expect success; otherwise, when they think they cannot learn a difficult piece, their motivation drops.¹⁸ Also, even if a student can play a piece, they will not practice it if it is not valuable to them. The authors distinguish four components of value: interest (enjoyment of playing), utility (enables enrollment in schools or playing in a band), importance for identity (it is important for the student to be seen by others as a successful musician), and sacrifice (giving up free time). According to them, the greatest drop in motivation occurs when the sacrifice (practicing boring scales) outweighs the interest, i.e., students know they can but do not want to. Social factors also play a significant role in shaping students' motivation, alongside psychological factors. Regarding gender, research¹⁹ indicates that a student's evaluation of an instrument depends directly on social stereotypes and perceived "gender appropriateness." Instruments perceived as gender-neutral and socially visible (such as the guitar) make it easier for a student to identify with the learning process and foster a stronger belief in the importance of playing. Another study did not identify significant disparities in weekly practice time between genders.²⁰ However, differences in strategies were noted: girls more frequently employ systematic strategies and promptly rectify errors, whereas boys are more likely to evaluate their concentration level during practice as superior. The results of a study¹⁸, applied to the musical context, suggest that expectations of success and the subjective assessment of the task are crucial for both genders. Another study²¹ confirms that feelings of competence and satisfaction later develop similarly across all students, regardless of gender. Similar results were also obtained by other research²², which found that female students initially show lower self-efficacy than male students, but that the differences decrease over time. Namely, although girls initially have less self-confidence, with a positive atmosphere and effort, they end up just as satisfied and competent as boys.

When it comes to age, understanding the factors that shape persistence becomes crucial during this critical period. A research²³ investigated motivational patterns in adolescent students, highlighting that this phase is when perceptions of musical instruction change. The results suggest that self-efficacy and environmental support

determine whether students perceive practicing as a meaningful activity. The authors suggest that the decline in motivation during adolescence can be mitigated if students recognize the personal value and broader applicability of the skills they have acquired, such as improved self-discipline and enhanced creativity, which can benefit them in various aspects of their lives. Optimism declines in adolescence: younger children (preschoolers and early primary school children) tend to have extremely high, often unrealistic expectations of success and highly value most tasks, whereas as they enter adolescence, these beliefs about abilities and the value of tasks become more negative and skeptical.¹⁸ As students get older, their assessments of their abilities become more accurate. In adolescents, the components of value (interest, importance, usefulness, and sacrifice/effort) are more clearly distinguished, whereas younger students more often see these elements as a single undifferentiated whole (e.g., “I like” and “it is important” are the same to them). In adolescents, the subjective value of a task, i.e., how useful or intriguing something is to them, becomes the main reason for making important decisions, such as future occupation, while younger students are less likely to make such thoughtful decisions based on these beliefs.

The theoretical review has highlighted the key roles of self-efficacy, independence, and environmental support in the development of a young instrumental musician. Although these elements are common to all young musicians, the specific context of Croatian music education, with its traditional curriculum and focus on classical art music, raises the question of how these relationships and influences manifest themselves in Croatian students. Therefore, the aim of this research is to examine students' attitudes toward guitar lessons, with particular emphasis on the influence of teaching on motivation for long-term musical engagement.

2. Methods

2.1. Description of the research process and sample description

The research was conducted during the second semester of the 2024/2025 school year on a convenience sample of 103 guitar students from the first to sixth grade of eight primary music schools in Croatia. The data were collected using an anonymous questionnaire. In accordance with the research code of ethics²⁴, written consent from parents was requested and obtained. The sample of participants is presented in more detail in [Tables 1 and 2](#).

Table 1. Description of the sample by gender

Gender	<i>n</i>	%
Male	53	51.5
Female	50	48.5
Total	103	100

As shown in [Table 1](#), 103 students participated in the study, with approximately equal numbers of boys and girls.

Table 2. Description of the sample by grade

Grade	<i>n</i>	%
1st	20	19.4
2nd	25	24.3
3rd	13	12.6
4th	13	12.6
5th	19	18.4
6th	13	12.6
Total	103	100

Of the 103 students who participated in the study, almost a quarter were second-grade students, while the smallest share was third-, fourth-, and sixth-grade students (13 participants each; [Table 2](#)). It should be noted that, as a rule, children aged 9 enter the first grade of the primary music school (guitar major) and finish sixth grade at an average age of 14. For statistical analysis, the students were grouped into two groups: younger and older. The first group consisted of students from first to third grade ($n = 58$), and the second group consisted of students from fourth to sixth grade ($n = 45$).

2.2. Research objective, research question, and hypotheses

The aim of this research is to examine primary music school students' attitudes toward guitar lessons and to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in these attitudes across sociodemographic variables.

The research question was: What are the students' attitudes toward guitar lessons? The following hypotheses were formulated:

- (i) H1: There is no statistically significant difference in students' attitudes by gender.
- (ii) H2: There is a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes by age.

(iii) H3: There is a statistically significant correlation between satisfaction with the subject, self-confidence, and attitudes toward the usefulness of guitar lessons.

The above hypotheses were based on previous theoretical insights. Although O'Neill¹⁹ indicates the influence of social stereotypes on instrument choice, previous results on motivational patterns among students already involved in the learning process often do not show significant differences in satisfaction with teaching by gender. This result is also supported by other research^{20,22}, which suggest that once formal education begins, individual factors and the quality of the pedagogical process become more important than gender, with both boys and girls showing similar levels of engagement and enjoyment in practice. Building on this, the influence of gender stereotypes can be reduced over time by the positive musical identity that students develop within the musical environment itself.²¹

On the other hand, the age hypothesis arose from the need to verify, in the Croatian context, the findings of other researchers^{18,23} who emphasize that adolescence brings significant changes in the perception of musical practice. According to their models, maturation leads to greater criticality and more realistic self-assessment, potentially manifested in differences in satisfaction, self-efficacy, and perceptions of the usefulness of instrumental teaching between younger and older students.

2.3. Instrument and statistical procedure

The anonymous survey questionnaire completed by the students included questions and statements designed to elicit their attitudes toward guitar lessons. The questionnaire was based on an existing questionnaire²⁵ and adapted for this study, containing 20 statements.

The instrument that measured students' satisfaction with the guitar lessons consisted of eight statements in the form of a Likert scale (e.g., "On a scale of 1 to 5, indicate the extent to which you agree with the statement that you like guitar lessons, where 1 means that you disagree with the stated statement, 2 that you somewhat disagree, 3 that you neither agree nor disagree, 4 that you somewhat agree, and 5 that you agree with the statement"). A Cronbach's alpha of 0.781 confirmed the instrument's reliability. The instrument measuring students' self-confidence in guitar lessons consisted of five statements on a Likert scale (e.g., "I can always play what the teacher wants"). A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.709 confirmed the instrument's reliability. Finally, the instrument measuring students' attitudes toward the usefulness of guitar lessons included seven statements on a Likert scale (e.g., "Guitar lessons are useful because when I grow up, it can be a hobby for me"). The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.793 confirmed the instrument's

reliability. The questionnaire's internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. For the entire attitude scale, the coefficient was 0.882, indicating high instrument reliability and enabling further statistical analysis of the data.

The normality of the data distribution was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, both of which indicated a statistically significant deviation from normality ($p < 0.05$). However, the skewness and kurtosis values were within the acceptable range (-2 to $+2$), and the histogram and Q-Q plot indicate an approximately normal distribution (Figure 1).

Therefore, the parametric *t*-test for independent samples was used, and the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the correlation between the variables. Quantitative data were processed with SPSS 25 (IBM, United States of America). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

3.1. Students' attitudes toward guitar lessons and differences by gender and age

3.1.1. Satisfaction, self-confidence, and attitudes toward the usefulness of guitar lessons

Students expressed their attitudes toward guitar lessons using a Likert scale. Their satisfaction with the subject was measured using an instrument comprising eight statements. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Satisfaction with guitar lessons

Statements	N	Mean	SD
I love guitar lessons.	103	4.53	0.64
I love playing guitar.	103	4.52	0.68
Guitar lessons go by quickly.	103	4.07	0.95
I love guitar lessons because I can choose the compositions.	103	4.09	1.01
Guitar lessons are enjoyable because I can choose how to play something.	103	3.95	1.05
I consider guitar lessons interesting.	103	4.50	0.68
Playing guitar is relaxing for me.	103	4.25	0.86
I love playing guitar at school.	103	4.20	1.07

As shown in Table 3, students on average completely agreed with the statements that they love guitar lessons, love playing guitar, and find the lessons interesting. On average, they mostly agreed that the lesson goes by quickly and that they love it because they can choose how to play.

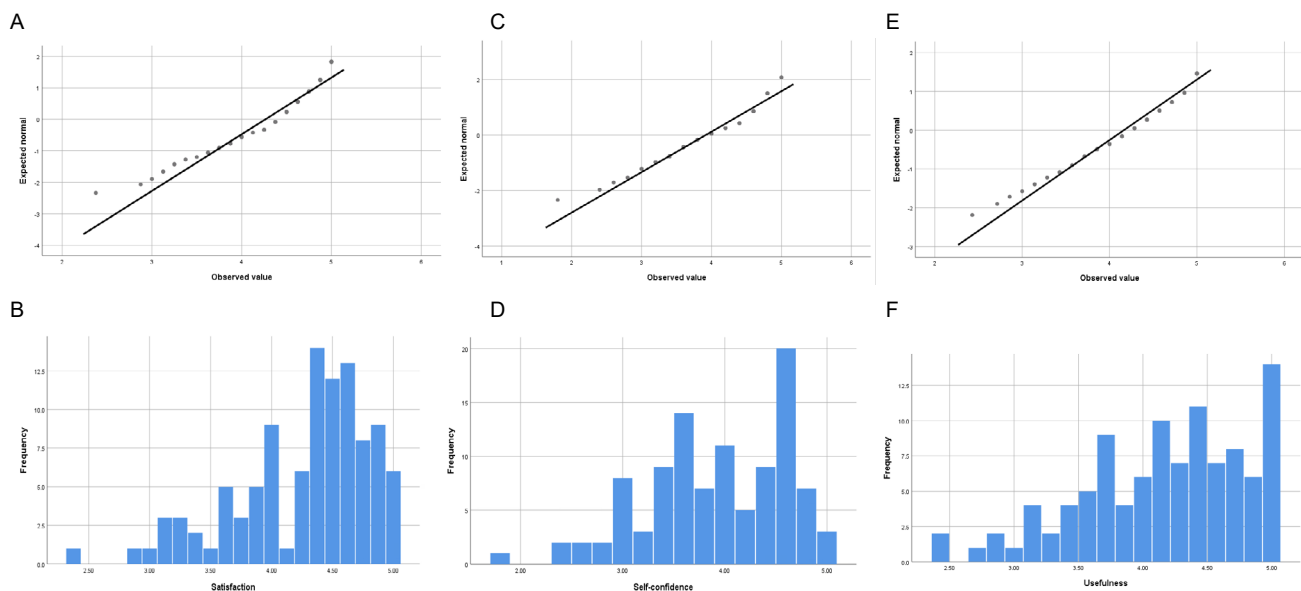


Figure 1. Distribution plots for the primary continuous variables. (A, C, E) Normal Q-Q plots and (B, D, F) histograms with normal curves for (A–B) satisfaction, (C–D) self-confidence, and (E–F) usefulness.

Also, on average, they mostly agreed with the statements that playing relaxes them and that they love playing guitar at school. These results indicate that guitar lessons are of high quality not only from a pedagogical perspective, but also from an emotional perspective, since students expressed high satisfaction with the lessons.

The next instrument measured students' self-confidence in guitar lessons. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Self-confidence in guitar lessons

Statements	N	Mean	SD
I can always play what the teacher wants.	103	3.91	0.98
I am good at playing carefully and in detail in guitar lessons.	103	3.84	0.92
I am usually satisfied with my playing.	103	3.83	0.99
I can express my thoughts and feelings through playing.	103	3.96	1.08
Guitar lessons are not difficult.	103	4.05	1.07

On average, students mostly agreed with the statements listed in Table 4, but to a somewhat lesser extent than with those related to satisfaction. This result shows that, although students are satisfied with lessons, they experience certain insecurities, a common occurrence in music education.

The last instrument measured students' attitudes toward the usefulness of guitar lessons (Table 5).

Table 5. Attitudes toward the usefulness of guitar lessons

Statements	N	Mean	SD
Guitar lessons are useful because I learn to play different types of compositions.	103	4.65	0.57
Guitar lessons are useful because when I grow up, it can be a hobby for me.	103	4.50	0.80
What I learn in guitar lessons is useful in my daily life.	103	3.93	1.06
Playing guitar will be of great use to me when I grow up.	103	3.78	1.13
Knowing how to play the guitar is important.	103	3.46	1.24
Playing guitar is not a waste of time.	103	4.63	0.67
Playing guitar is useful because I can use my imagination.	103	4.19	1.05

As shown in Table 5, students on average entirely agreed with the statements that guitar lessons are useful because they learn to play different compositions and that playing can be a hobby for them later in life. They expressed the same level of agreement with the statement that playing guitar is not a waste of time. On average, students mostly agreed with the statements that the skills they learn in guitar lessons are useful in life, that playing the guitar will be beneficial to them in the future, and that it allows them

to use their imagination. They expressed the lowest level of agreement (mean = 3.46) with the statement that knowing how to play the guitar is important. These results indicate that students recognized the value of playing the guitar as a hobby, for acquiring skills, and for developing creativity, but considered guitar lessons more of a leisure activity and less important for future life.

3.1.2. Differences in students' attitudes by gender and age

To answer the research question (what are the students' attitudes toward guitar lessons?), it can be concluded that students' attitudes toward guitar lessons are positive, and they perceive them as enjoyable, although some students lack self-confidence. They also perceive guitar lessons more as a free activity and less as an important part of education that will benefit them later in life. The results were compared to test H1 (there is no statistically significant difference in students' attitudes by gender) (Table 6).

Table 6. Differences in students' attitudes by gender, as measured by a *t*-test

Variable	Gender (female, <i>n</i> = 50; male, <i>n</i> = 53)	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>
I love guitar lessons.	Female	4.62	0.53	1.33
	Male	4.45	0.72	
I love playing guitar.	Female	4.62	0.60	1.39
	Male	4.43	0.75	
Guitar lessons are useful because I learn to play different types of compositions.	Female	4.76	0.52	1.91
	Male	4.55	0.61	
Guitar lessons go by quickly.	Female	4.24	0.77	1.80
	Male	3.91	1.08	
Guitar lessons are useful because when I grow up, it can be a hobby for me.	Female	4.54	0.79	0.43
	Male	4.47	0.82	
I can always play what the teacher wants.	Female	3.96	0.97	0.47
	Male	3.87	1.00	
I love guitar lessons because I can choose the compositions.	Female	4.16	1.02	0.71
	Male	4.02	1.01	
What I learn in guitar lessons is useful in my daily life.	Female	3.96	1.09	0.26
	Male	3.91	1.04	
Guitar lessons are enjoyable because I can choose how to play something.	Female	3.96	1.05	0.80
	Male	3.94	1.06	

(Cont'd...)

Table 6. (Continued)

Variable	Gender (female, <i>n</i> = 50; male, <i>n</i> = 53)	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>
Playing guitar will be of great use to me when I grow up.	Female	3.94	1.13	1.43
	Male	3.62	1.11	
I consider guitar lessons interesting.	Female	4.54	0.71	0.64
	Male	4.45	0.67	
I am good at playing carefully and in detail in guitar lessons.	Female	3.74	0.88	-1.13
	Male	3.94	0.95	
Playing guitar is relaxing for me.	Female	4.32	0.82	0.77
	Male	4.19	0.90	
I am usually satisfied with my playing.	Female	3.82	0.96	-0.15
	Male	3.85	1.03	
Knowing how to play the guitar is important.	Female	3.60	1.13	1.14
	Male	3.32	1.34	
Playing guitar is not a waste of time.	Female	4.70	0.61	1.01
	Male	4.57	0.72	
Playing guitar is useful because I can use my imagination.	Female	4.30	0.91	1.00
	Male	4.09	1.17	
I can express my thoughts and feelings through playing.	Female	4.12	0.98	1.45
	Male	3.81	1.16	
I love playing guitar at school.	Female	4.40	0.81	1.83
	Male	4.02	1.25	
Guitar lessons are not difficult.	Female	4.18	0.96	1.21
	Male	3.92	1.16	

Although girls showed higher agreement with all statements (Table 6), the independent-samples *t*-test did not reveal a statistically significant difference in any variable; therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

The independent-samples *t*-test also tested H2 (there is a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes by age) (Table 7). The younger group consisted of students from first to third grade (*n* = 58), and the older group consisted of students from fourth to sixth grade (*n* = 45).

The study found a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes regarding the grade they attend for 11 of the 20 variables examined (Table 7). Younger students expressed, on average, greater agreement across all 11 statements than older students. It is noticeable that, over time, students' passion for guitar lessons decreases; they become less interested in playing at school and in general, are less satisfied with their playing, and perceive guitar

lessons as increasingly difficult. Younger students are also more likely to think they are good and attentive during lessons, to express their feelings more easily while playing, and to believe that playing the guitar is useful. This result indicates a possible decline in motivation with increasing age.

Table 7. Differences in students' attitudes by age, as measured by a *t*-test

Variable	Age (younger, <i>n</i> = 58; older, <i>n</i> = 45)	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>
I love guitar lessons.	Younger	4.66	0.52	2.13*
	Older	4.38	0.75	
I love playing guitar.	Younger	4.69	0.47	2.69*
	Older	4.31	0.85	
Guitar lessons are useful because I learn to play different types of compositions.	Younger	4.74	0.52	1.91
	Older	4.53	0.63	
Guitar lessons go by quickly.	Younger	4.17	1.01	1.80
	Older	3.93	0.86	
Guitar lessons are useful because when I grow up, it can be a hobby for me.	Younger	4.53	0.73	0.43
	Older	4.47	0.89	
I can always play what the teacher wants.	Younger	4.02	1.05	0.47
	Older	3.78	0.88	
I love guitar lessons because I can choose the compositions.	Younger	4.17	0.98	0.71
	Older	3.98	1.06	
What I learn in guitar lessons is useful in my daily life.	Younger	4.17	0.96	2.69*
	Older	3.62	1.11	
Guitar lessons are enjoyable because I can choose how to play something.	Younger	4.10	1.04	0.80
	Older	3.76	1.05	
Playing guitar will be of great use to me when I grow up.	Younger	4.02	1.10	2.52*
	Older	3.47	1.10	
I consider guitar lessons interesting.	Younger	4.57	0.65	0.64
	Older	4.40	0.72	
I am good at playing carefully and in detail in guitar lessons.	Younger	4.03	0.88	2.45*
	Older	3.60	0.92	
Playing guitar is relaxing for me.	Younger	4.40	0.84	0.77
	Older	4.07	0.86	
I am usually satisfied with my playing.	Younger	4.12	0.92	3.50**
	Older	3.47	0.97	

(Cont'd...)

Table 7. (Continued)

Variable	Age (younger, <i>n</i> = 58; older, <i>n</i> = 45)	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>
Knowing how to play the guitar is important.	Younger	3.71	1.24	2.38*
	Older	3.13	1.18	
Playing guitar is not a waste of time.	Younger	4.71	0.62	1.01
	Older	4.53	0.73	
Playing guitar is useful because I can use my imagination.	Younger	4.52	0.80	3.60**
	Older	3.78	1.19	
I can express my thoughts and feelings through playing.	Younger	4.26	0.93	3.31**
	Older	3.58	1.16	
I love playing guitar at school.	Younger	4.43	0.88	2.51*
	Older	3.91	1.22	

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.005$.

Given the results, H2 is partially accepted because differences exist in a significant number of variables, though not in all.

3.2. Correlation between satisfaction, self-confidence, and attitudes toward the usefulness of the subject

To test H3 (there is a statistically significant correlation between satisfaction with the subject, self-confidence, and attitudes toward the usefulness of guitar lessons), the Pearson correlation coefficient was used, indicating a high, positive, and statistically significant correlation among all examined attitude dimensions ($p < 0.01$). Of particular note is the correlation between self-confidence and the perception of the usefulness of playing the guitar ($r = 0.705$), suggesting that the subjective feeling of competence plays a key role in how much students value music education as useful for their lives. Consequently, hypothesis H3 was confirmed.

4. Discussion

The results show that students have positive attitudes, which align with other findings⁵ that emphasize the importance of a positive climate and enthusiasm in teaching the instrument. However, the lower level of agreement with the statements about influence in repertoire selection

suggests that, in practice, students' participatory rights are still not sufficiently respected, indicating a need for teachers to actively involve students in choosing the music pieces.¹⁰ Teachers could make a step forward by involving students in the design of teaching content within the existing curriculum, which would strengthen the sense of decision-making autonomy, i.e., one of the three basic students' needs for motivation, which is important.¹³

No statistically significant differences were found by gender, consistent with research treating the guitar as a gender-neutral instrument.¹⁹ However, age differences indicate a decline in motivation and satisfaction among older students (grades 4–6, i.e., students aged 12–14), confirming similar findings²³ that warn that at this age, practice can feel burdensome if the student does not see the broader meaning and the usefulness of playing. While these cross-sectional findings do not allow for causal claims, they point to the potential value of individualized approaches and a more flexible repertoire for sustaining motivation, a direction warranting further empirical investigation.

The analysis of the correlations between the variables examined reveals a key mechanism in student motivation: a high positive correlation between self-confidence and the perception of the usefulness of the subject. This suggests that students who feel competent at playing the guitar recognize the instrument's greater life and aesthetic value. In contrast, a decline in self-confidence in older age threatens the student's vision of playing the guitar as a long-term useful skill. Therefore, strengthening self-confidence in higher grades represents an important pedagogical consideration for supporting student motivation. In addition, the questionnaire's high reliability coefficient confirms that satisfaction, self-confidence, and usefulness are intertwined dimensions of a broader attitude toward music education. As the results showed significantly higher values among younger students across items, teachers working with older grades might consider balancing technical instruction with strategies that help sustain students' emotional connection with the instrument. This can be achieved, for example, by selecting a program that includes shorter, more engaging pieces for students who do not require long-term technical preparation, thereby directly affecting adolescents' self-confidence.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, music education should be innovative and creative¹¹, especially in the upper grades of primary music schools. Deepening intrinsic motivation by encouraging creativity and independent decision-making is a key factor in ensuring students' long-term musical development.

Although this research provides valuable insights into the attitudes of guitar students, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, while the sample size ($N = 103$) is substantial and relevant to the specific context of guitar education in Croatia, the study relies on a convenience sample, underscoring the need for future research that encompasses a broader population across different regions and instruments. Second, while the present study focused primarily on general attitudes and demographic differences, future studies should explicitly investigate internal instructional factors, such as specific teaching methods, student learning strategies, musical challenges, and participation in ensemble playing. Based on the results, it is recommended that teachers devote greater attention to adapting the repertoire to students' interests within the existing curriculum. Such an approach may help older students connect more deeply with their music-making, highlighting a promising avenue for future research to investigate how personal values and self-confidence relate to long-term engagement in music education.

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Conflict of interest

Both Amir Begić and Jasna Šulentić Begić serve as Editorial Board Members of this journal, but they were not in any way involved in the editorial and peer-review process conducted for this paper, directly or indirectly. The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose. The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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Ethics approval and consent to participate

The authors confirm that formal approval from an Ethical Review Board was not sought for the research because the home institution does not have an ethical committee.

This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent for participation was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Consent for publication

Informed consent for publication was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Availability of data

The data presented in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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