



PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES IN TEACHING FOLKLORE TO CHILDREN IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY FROM BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study analyzes data from a survey conducted among non-formal education teachers engaged in teaching folklore to children. It investigates effective practices and challenges these educators encounter in the transmission of folklore traditions to contemporary youth. Drawing on the collected data, the research proposes targeted strategies to enhance and optimize the teaching process, addressing the specific needs of both students and educators within this cultural and pedagogical context.*

KEY WORDS: *Pedagogical Challenges, Teaching Folklore, Children, Non-Formal Education, Transmission of folklore traditions, Case Study, Bulgaria.*

Cultural diversity and the transmission of knowledge related to musical and folklore heritage play a key role in the preservation of national identity. They ensure the transmission of traditions and skills between generations, while promoting the sustainable development of cultural communities. On a global scale, various measures are being implemented to preserve local traditions, with particular emphasis on the integration of folklore into education systems, as well as the promotion of non-formal educational initiatives, cultural festivals, research projects and cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations that work for preservation and promoting each nation's unique musical and folkloric traditions.

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in Bulgarian folklore and the need for its preservation and transmission to future generations. With the transition from the traditional way of life where knowledge was passed down naturally through daily activities and personal contact – „by word of mouth“ and

„from mother to daughter“ – the sustainability of this cultural heritage today relies mainly on specially trained teachers. Their role is extremely important, as they not only preserve traditional knowledge and skills, but also adapt and transmit them in a modern context, meeting the needs of modern education and the interests of children.

The process of teaching folklore includes knowledge and skills that require a high degree of professional training. Teachers involved in teaching folklore not only transmit the songs, dances and rituals, but also provide cultural contextualisation, explaining their symbolism and meaning. This requires teachers to have multidisciplinary training, including ethnography, musicology, pedagogy and psychology, in order to work effectively with children and develop their cultural sensitivity and identity.

The training of children in the field of musical folklore in Bulgaria is carried out both through formal and informal education. According to the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*¹, these two systems of learning and training, together with informal learning (*Formal, Non-formal and Informal learning*) are the main mechanisms for transmitting the intangible cultural heritage to future generations [6].

Formal education as a system of learning and training is centralized and integrates elements of folklore through standardized curricula. In contrast, informal education for learning and training, carried out in community centers, schools, clubs, centers and other local institutions, allows a creative and diverse, more in-depth and practical mastery of folklore practices.

Despite the significant scientific interest in the processes of identification, documentation, research, preservation, development, promotion and transmission of the intangible cultural heritage – measures recognized as essential for its preservation; despite studies by various researchers focusing on the relationship between children and folklore [1], [3], [5], [8], [9], [10], [11], [13], [16], [17], [19] – a fundamental study of the pedagogical practices related to the teaching of folklore to children in modern educational conditions in Bulgaria is still missing.

A partial study of the use of folklore elements and practices in the system of preschool education shows that, according to pedagogues, the state normative documents concerning the educational content create good conditions and opportunities for the presentation in a complex form of various genres and forms of the folklore heritage in the educational process such as: musical folklore, children's verbal genre forms, rhythm, movement, children's folklore games, components of traditional folklore – ritual and holiday calendar, etc. A

¹ *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paris, October 17, 2003. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> (Accessed Nov. 10, 2024).

disadvantage, according to the teachers, is that some of the learning resources proposed by the authors' collectives do not correspond to the needs of the teachers and the children in the kindergarten.

Musical folklore in pre-school education in Bulgaria is taught by music pedagogues and by general children's pedagogues who conduct music classes. According to the obtained results, there is a tendency in kindergartens for music teachers to be replaced by general teachers, who often have limited musical abilities and partial musical training, reduced to general knowledge and skills. This does not allow them to fully perform musical activities compared to music educators [2]. General pedagogues do not have specialized training for children's musical abilities – scope of the children's voice, sound extraction, voice staging, methods for overcoming intonation and metrorhythmic problems, etc.

Some of the teachers indicate that they lack knowledge in the field of folklore in university training. According to them, the included folklore components are primarily aimed at building a common culture among children. Some of them are inappropriate, which limits the potential for in-depth learning of folklore traditions by children. Teachers often fail to navigate the vast array of information to add additional learning resources suitable for childhood – songs, children's folklore games, dances. Additional teaching resources related to folklore are also needed by music educators, as not everyone has a close knowledge of folklore. Many of them are classical musicians and develop the children in the field in which they have experience.

The work of children's teachers is hampered by various deficits that affect their ability to teach various genres of folk heritage. Some of the factors are: the family environment, in which continuity between generations is broken; scant personal experience related to folklore practices: singing, playing, ritual; the media environment, in which folk music is rarely heard, etc.

The preservation of folk music heritage faces significant challenges stemming from a shift away from the time when these elements were part of the way of life. In the past, musical folklore served a spiritual and utilitarian role in connecting people and bringing communities together in everyday life and holidays, being passed down orally and through personal experience, providing a natural transmission between generations. Today however the lack of this authentic context requires a conscious effort to restore, maintain and revive folklore, which can be achieved through targeted study, teaching and promotion [12], [14].

According to research published in the field of ethnomusicology and cultural anthropology, active participation in music and dance folklore practices not only supports the acquisition of technical and artistic skills, but also strengthens cultural identity and understanding of the social value of traditions [15]. Furthermore, the practice of learning adapted to contemporary conditions

allows folklore forms to remain dynamic and sustainable, transforming and adapting to the needs of new generations.

The forms of teaching folklore to children in non-formal education in Bulgaria are diverse and include various initiatives aimed at the preservation and transmission of folklore traditions. Folklore classes in non-formal education are often conducted as extracurricular activities that are not compulsory. They are usually aimed at children with an interest in this field, for whom parents provide additional educational activities. A proposal for an innovative technology to stimulate interest in Bulgarian musical folklore in the conditions of informal education at the school level was approved by Dr. Angel Dobrev [7]. One of the main pillars of this system is the *additional folk singing and dancing schools*, which not only teach children traditional Bulgarian songs and dances, but also promote their emotional and cultural connection with the folk tradition. Teachers in these schools often work in small groups, which helps to focus on the individual development of each child, working fully to develop strengths and build skills.

Community centers (called in Bulgarian *Chitalishte*) also make an outstanding contribution to the preservation of folklore in Bulgaria. They provide a stage for children's performance and development through folklore singing and dancing schools, ensembles, ritual reenactments, theater performances, various cultural events. The community centers zealously preserve archives with song, dance, ritual folklore characteristic of the local community and other elements of Bulgarian culture. To a large extent, the preservation of continuity between generations, bearers of local folklore, is also due to the community centers. At the same time, the community centers create conditions for children to get to know different folk styles from different parts of the country. Community institutions play an important role in engaging young people with traditions and cultural heritage. This is achieved by organizing children's and youth ensembles, workshops and summer camps where traditional crafts, music and dance are taught. These activities not only preserve the cultural heritage but also build a sense of national identity in the younger generations. These institutions often organize festivals, competitions and local holidays, where they present the Bulgarian cultural heritage to the general public.

The Community centers in Bulgaria were registered in 2017 in one of the lists of UNESCO – the Register of Good Practices for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage [4] and play a key role in maintaining traditional forms and practices inherited from the past among contemporary local communities. Community centers are unique in their structure, organization and function for society. They not only strive to preserve the authenticity of folk practices, but also promote and adapt them to modern conditions so that the younger generations perceive them as part of their cultural identity. With their activity the community centers contribute to the preservation of cultural

diversity and the uniqueness of Bulgarian traditions, while at the same time establishing Bulgaria on the cultural map of the world.

Children's folklore ensembles are another important form of non-formal education. In them, children learn not only music and dance, but also discipline, collective spirit and respect for traditions. Participating in ensembles allows children to experience stage performances and experience the joy of shared community experiences and performing folklore in front of an audience.

Centers for the support of personal development – until recently, United Children's Complexes and Centers for Work with Children, are an out-of-school unit in the system of preschool and school education, in which the state and municipal policy for the development of interests is carried out through the organization of activities in free time, the skills and abilities of children in various areas – clubs, schools, teams, tailored to the wishes, interests and free time of children and parents. In addition to well-established forms of activity, teachers in the field of non-formal education for children often use a variety of creative methods of transmitting folklore heritage that help children learn knowledge in a fun and informal way: workshops for making elements of traditional crafts (looms, carpets, ceramics, dolls, etc.); folklore evenings; creative camps.

In this way, non-formal education in Bulgaria creates conditions both for a real transmission of traditions and for an emotional connection of the young generation with Bulgarian folklore, which continues to live on through these efforts. A distinctive feature of the children who are educated in this system is that they have a personal interest, a prior desire for contact with the folklore heritage in its various forms and the support of their parents for activities and training in them outside of the regulated training in the conventional education system.

The purpose of the study is to establish the current state of teaching folklore to children in the field of non-formal education. The research **method used** is a survey conducted in the period 17.10.2023-05.06.2024 via Google Form. The total number of respondents is 123 heads of folklore formations from different areas of the country, working in the field of non-formal education.

Empirical data should record good practices and challenges faced by teachers, and propose measures to improve and optimize the folklore education process. Special attention is paid to needs of children and educators, with the aim of effectively transmitting folklore traditions to modern generations.

The indicators follow the pedagogue's professional profile, covering: age profile; town where he practices; educational profile (degree and specialty), professional experience in the specialty, as well as competences in the field of folklore: focus, attitude, specific knowledge and experience, nature and forms of training, learning resources, scope and frequency of use, evaluation of the activity.

The age profile of the surveyed persons shows a preponderance of the more experienced teachers. A significant part of the surveyed leaders (76.4%) are between the ages of 30 and 60, with the largest group of educators in the 50-60 age range (32%). This shows that more experienced pedagogues dominate the field of teaching folklore, which implies the presence of many years of professional experience. Only 9% of managers are young educators in the age range of 20-30 years. This could be an indicator of a lack of young personnel in this field, which represents a potential risk for the future transmission of folklore traditions. The share of teachers in pre-retirement age (15%) shows that a significant number of managers are approaching the end of their active career. The groups between 30-50 years are relatively evenly distributed (22% for each group), which shows stability in the average age category of educators, but also confirms the need from attracting and training young teachers to ensure continuity. The age distribution shows that there is a shortage of young teachers in the field of non-formal education, which can be a serious challenge for the long-term preservation of folklore traditions.

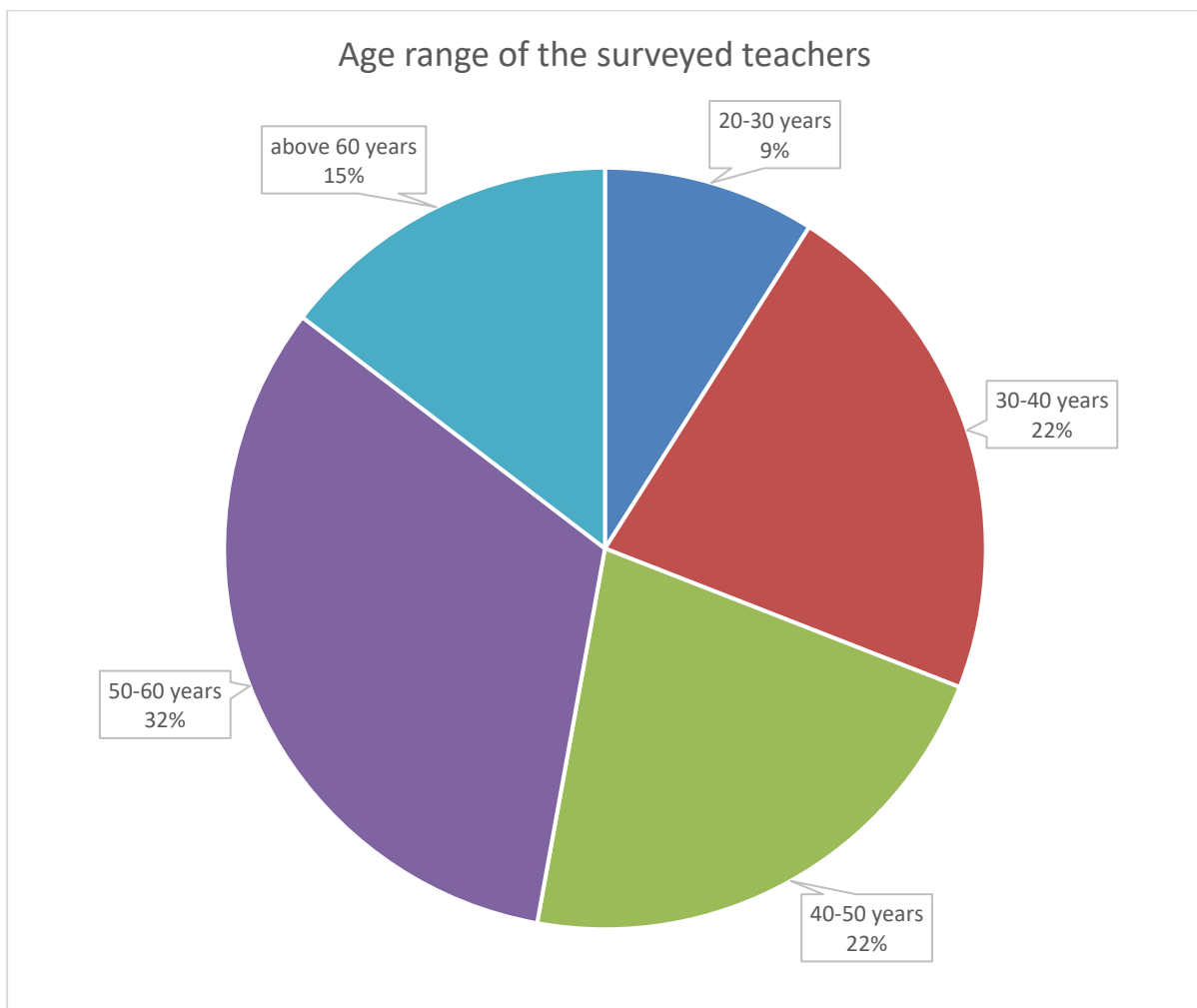


Fig. 1. Age range of the surveyed teachers

According to the **professional profile** of the surveyed persons employed in the field of non-formal education, they are divided into several groups and professional areas. Most often, the leaders of ensembles (music, dance, choir, theater and others) are also teachers in kindergarten (8%), school (23%) or professional musicians (34%). Often the respondents are librarians (5%) or community center secretaries (11%), combining administrative or organizational activities. In a significant number of cases, the respondents have parallel employment: as teachers, managers, professional musicians, administrators. This is because the rewards in non-formal education are financially unprofitable.

Based on the information provided for the 123 conductors participating in the survey, the following analysis can be made: vocal ensemble leaders are the largest group, with 56 of the participants (46%) stating that they lead vocal ensembles. Some of them combine this role with additional activities such as leading orchestras, children's folk groups, groups for adults or individual singing lessons. The next largest group are the leaders of dance groups – 41 (30%). Some of them also lead vocal ensembles or ensembles for folk songs and dances. The leaders of the groups for authentic folklore, which combine various activities – vocal, dance and theatrical in recreating rites and customs – have the smallest share – 15 leaders (12%); orchestra leaders – 12 of the participants (10%). Some of them combine leading orchestras with vocal ensembles, folk song and dance ensembles or teaching individual lessons. With a close share are the leaders of folk song and dance ensembles – 11 participants (9%). Invariably, ensembles can include both vocal and dance ensembles and orchestras.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the data regarding the formation of formations by the leaders in the different age groups, as well as regarding the initiative for the creation of these formations. 63% of leaders formed their formations on personal initiative, while 37% indicated that the formation had other leaders. This means that the majority of leaders act actively and have significant input into the creation and management of their formations, rather than simply assuming leadership roles in existing groups. According to their distribution by age groups, the following specifics are outlined – in the case of the younger age group (20-30 years old) managers are less inclined to create their own formations, probably due to their less experience, confirmation of personal professional qualities in society or limited resources. Out of 12 leaders, 3 have formed their own personal formation. This represents 25% of executives in this age group.

Managers between the ages of 30 and 40 are significantly more active in forming their formations, probably due to accumulated experience and professional development. Out of 26 leaders, 17 have formed their own formation. This represents 65% of executives in this age group. In the next age group (40-50 years) there is also a high activity (54%) in the creation of

formations, but slightly lower compared to the 30-40 years group. Out of 26 managers, 14 have formed their formation.

The 50-60 age group shows high commitment and activity in creating formations (64%), similar to the 30-40 age group, which can be explained by long-term experience and stable contacts in the professional network. Out of 39 managers, 25 have formed their own personal formation.

Leaders over 60 also show high activity in creating their own formations, which can be explained by the experience gained over the years and established positions in the cultural environment. Age group over 60: out of 17 executives, 12 have formed their own personal formation. This represents 71% of executives in this age group.

Young executives in the 20-30 age group show the lowest propensity to create their own formations, possibly due to their less experience and resource constraints. The age groups 30-40, 40-50 and 50-60 show high activity in forming formations, which shows that the most productive years for executives are between 30 and 60. Leaders over 60 also show a high commitment to the creation of formations, which may be due to their established positions and experience in the cultural sphere.

These data confirm that with age and experience, the likelihood of managers being initiators of their own formations and taking more active leadership roles in the sphere of culture and self-activity increases.

The managers surveyed are representatives of different settlements – both cities (54%, 64 respondents from 118) and villages throughout the country (46%, 54 respondents from 118). This shows the wide geographical distribution of leaders and the variety of settings in which they work, engaged in the sphere of non-formal education and culture.

Education and specialization

The profile of folklore teachers in non-formal education in Bulgaria and their specialized and academic training stands out with several characteristics. It is noteworthy that 48% of the respondents have specialized training already in secondary school. The largest share is the graduates of folk arts school – 32%, followed by graduates of music school, specialized music or choreography class. This confirms the leading role of folklore arts schools as a factor in the creation of highly specialized personnel who receive intensive training in the field of folklore and orientation already in the middle course of study.

The majority of the teachers surveyed graduated from the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts „Prof. Asen Diamandiev” in the city Plovdiv (26%), which is a leading institution for training specialists in the field of folklore. This can be interpreted as an indication of the great importance of the Academy in the training of personnel teaching folklore. Other universities are: Shumen University „Bishop Konstantin Preslavski” (13%), Veliko Tarnovo

University „St. St. Cyril and Methodius” (11%), Southwest University „Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad (9%), Plovdiv University „Paisiy Hilendarski” (5%), SU „St. Kliment Ohridski” (4%), NMA „Prof. Pancho Vladigerov” (4%), VSU „Chernorizets Hrabar” (1%).

The most common specialty among the leaders is Music Pedagogy, followed by Choreography, which shows that folklore training in Bulgaria in the sphere of non-formal education is strongly related to musical training. Among the managers there are those with extensive pedagogical training such as teachers in preschool and primary school education. Additional specializations such as Cultural Management, Ethnomusicology and Choral Conducting are also indicated which broaden the profile of specialists and prepare them for a wider range of activities in the field of culture. Often this is necessary in practice, since managers can rarely support themselves from their main profession and activity.

The most common **specialization** of non-formal education teachers is folk singing, followed by folk dancing, which is also closely related to folklore practices, followed by respondents specializing in folk instruments – a key activity for the preservation, transmission and promotion of folklore heritage. In some cases, the presence of more exotic combinations of specialties such as „Tambura”, „Accordion”, „Piano” is noticed and „Bulgarian folk dances”, which shows that folklore teachers have versatile training related to various aspects of Bulgarian folk culture.

Types of folklore activities and formations

The diagram illustrates the distribution of the types of folklore activities and formations, according to the persons surveyed and the knowledge and skills that the participants in them have acquired. It is based on 120 responses and covers several main aspects of folk culture:

Song heritage (73.3%) is the most prevalent folkloric knowledge among the participants that they have acquired. This suggests that singing is central to the formations' activities. The reasons for this high percentage can be found in the traditional role of folk songs in Bulgarian culture and their perception as an accessible way to learn folklore, as well as the aforementioned fact that the most common specialization of teachers is folk singing.

The second most important category is knowledge of *local customs* (64.2%). This shows that the formations pay serious attention to the preservation and transmission of local/regional traditions, which is an important aspect for maintaining the authenticity of the customs and rites presented. The third category *Festive Calendar and Rituals* (56.7%): also emphasizes the importance of ritual knowledge.

Folk dances (53.3%) are strongly represented, with more than half of the participants having mastered knowledge and skills in this area. Dancing is a

traditional element of folklore events, but the lower percentage compared to singing may be related to the higher complexity of dance performances.

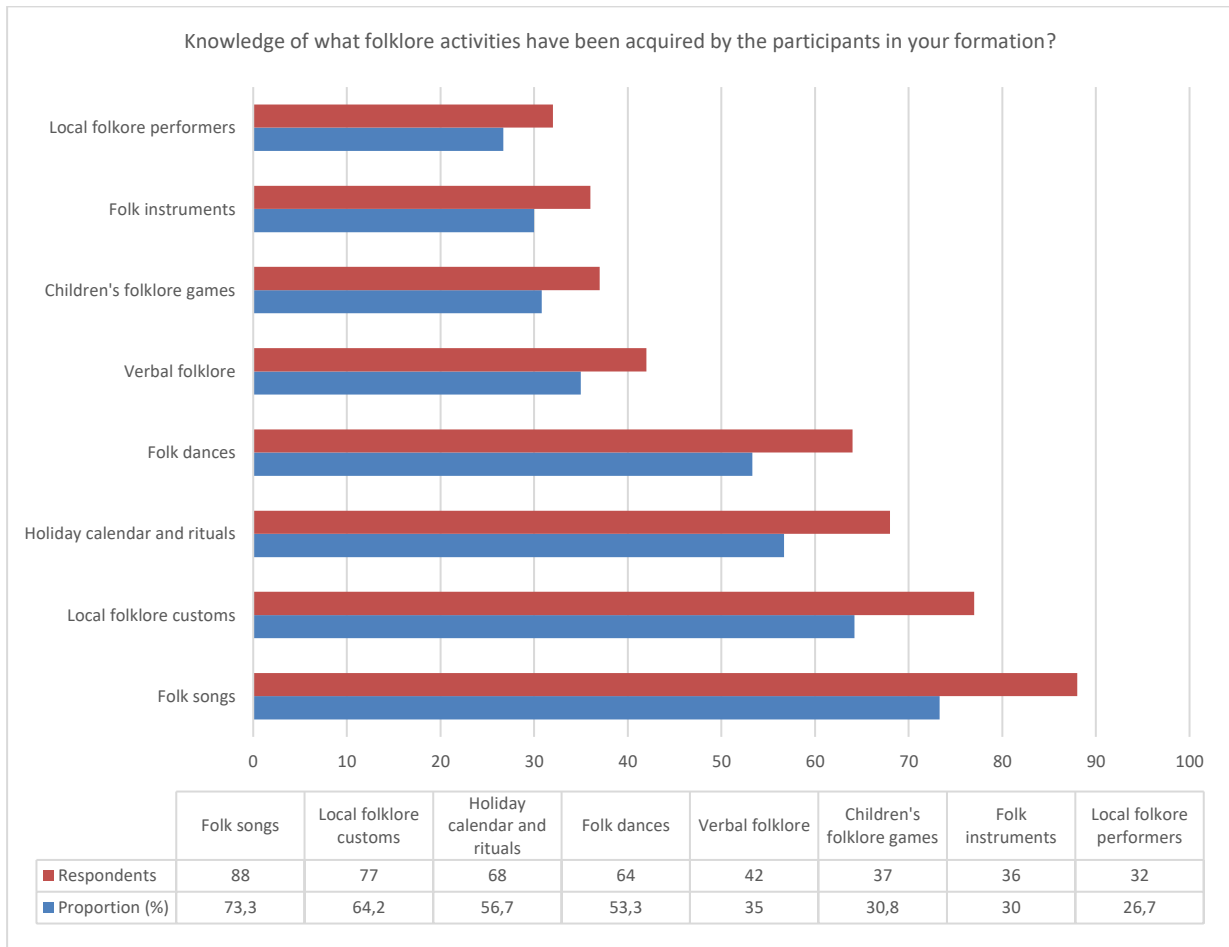


Fig. 2. Knowledge of what folklore activities have been acquired by the participants in your formation?

Knowledge of *Verbal Folklore*, including legends, tales and proverbs, received 1/3 of all learners (35%). This may be due to the more difficult access to authentic material or a weaker commitment to the verbal tradition of the formations, as well as the lack of opportunities for public performance. The share of *children's folklore games* is comparable (30.8%). The relatively low level of teaching of children's folklore games indicates that these games are taught less often or are less integrated into the programs of formations. The acquisition of skills for *playing folk instruments* is also relatively underrepresented (30%). Possible reasons could be the lack of trained teachers or difficulties in purchasing a personal instrument for self-training and rehearsals. According to the leaders of the formations, the least expressed interest is in *the local folklore performers* (26.7%), which can be explained by the fact that this information is less of a priority compared to the other folklore

categories, as well as that the interest in the personality of the folklore performer is in the field of researchers, and not of the children being taught.

The art of singing is the main activity for participants in folklore formations in the sphere of non-formal education, according to the data from the respondents. There is a **balance between recreating rites and traditions** and they are second in prevalence after singing, which shows a good balance between the different aspects of folklore education. The development of this field can be in the direction of integration of more practical knowledge for the performance of rituals. The findings show that the playing of **folk instruments and the recreation of children's folklore games** are poorly represented in formal education. Further efforts are needed in these areas. Learning folk instruments is key to a comprehensive understanding of folk traditions, and games can be used as a method to engage children from an early age. The low presence of **verbal folklore** shows that it is undervalued and opportunities should be sought to create conditions for a wider introduction of oral traditions as an important component of cultural heritage.

A possible way out of the ascertained distribution of folklore activities to create conditions for preserving the entire spectrum of continuity in terms of folklore and intangible cultural heritage can be solved through measures in the formal education system and supporting mechanisms in the field of informal education. It is important to pay attention to the teaching of folk instruments and to provide a better material base and trained teachers in this field. **The integration of children's folklore games in preschool education can** increase children's interest in folklore and improve their active participation. It is recommended to increase verbal folklore and attention to the transmission of oral traditions such as tales, legends and proverbs, which will enrich the overall cultural literacy of the participants. Interest in local customs and calendar rites can be enhanced by introducing more hands-on activities to support better understanding and preservation of these traditions.

Types of repertoire of folklore formations

The results of the survey of the leaders of folklore formations in the sphere of non-formal education provide important data on the types of repertoire that are used in these formations, as well as on the different approaches to the preparation and creation of the repertoire. The picture drawn by the results is of a well-balanced approach to the teaching of folklore, which combines the efforts to preserve the traditional cultural heritage and the aspiration for its adaptation and development in a modern context. Folklore formations in Bulgaria simultaneously preserve and adapt folklore to modern conditions.

A preponderance of the authentic repertoire is reported, according to survey data. 75.6% of leaders (93 out of 123) use an authentic repertoire, which underlines the high value they attach to the preservation of original folk

traditions. This is a significant percentage and shows that there is a strong connection with cultural heritage and traditional forms of folklore.

Almost half of the respondents (44.9%) also present a contemporary or original repertoire created by choreographers, performers and composers. This shows that there is a significant group of leaders who not only preserve the tradition but also develop it through modern interpretations. The development of folklore through new creative forms is an important element in maintaining its vitality and appeal in the modern context and is a sign of the dynamic nature of folklore culture that can adapt to modern needs.

22% of leaders continue to work with repertoire inherited from previous leaders of formations, which is a sign that there is a certain continuity and respect for previous generations in these formations. This repertoire plays an important role in preserving tradition and stability in the performance of folklore while allowing for a smooth transition between generations of leaders.

Another range of repertoire is a combination of own work and elements of work by established authors. 26% of executives use their own repertoire with elements from established authors. This group shows creativity and flexibility in the use of folk material, combining original work with established works. On the plus side, it emphasizes the collaboration between individual innovation and reliance on the existing benchmark for adapted folklore, allowing the repertoire to be enriched with new elements but without departing from tradition. There are also managers (8.9%) who create their own repertoire entirely, which is a relatively small but important share. These leaders demonstrate the high level of creativity that can contribute to the development of new forms of folklore. In a negative aspect, there is also a danger of deviating from the dialect and the specificity of the presented folklore.

A significant proportion of managers (35%) rely on documents, compendiums and recordings to prepare their repertoire. Research activities in the field and meetings with informants - bearers of the tradition - are carried out by 47.9% of managers. This practice is of key importance for the preservation of authentic folklore, since direct communication with the original sources of the tradition provides the most accurate and reliable information, which is becoming increasingly difficult to access in the context of intensifying globalization processes.

Many of the executives interviewed, with many years of experience (20 to 30 years), had the opportunity to conduct field research in the past. Today, however, in 2024, the circle of bearers of traditional folklore has narrowed significantly, creating challenges for continuing the authentic transmission of traditional culture.

The outlined groups of repertoire are not mutually exclusive, but complement each other and meet different goals facing the leader in the different stages of his pedagogical activity.

Overall, the predominant use of authentic and traditional repertoire (75.6%) underlines the role of folklore formations as guardians of cultural heritage. However, almost half of the conductors (44.9%) also include contemporary and original repertoire, showing that folklore is not frozen in time, but evolves and adapts. In parallel with this, almost half of the leaders (47.9%) conduct field research, which emphasizes the importance of the leaders of folklore formations in the field of non-formal education as balancers between the preservation of traditions and their adaptation, which is key to the sustainable development of Bulgarian folklore.

Children's difficulties in the implementation of folklore activities

The surveyed pedagogues and managers work with children in the following age ranges: 3-6 years. (27.5%); 7-12 years (72.5%); 12-18 years (69.2%), 18+ years. (28.3%). Usually their work is not only with one age group and with one formation.

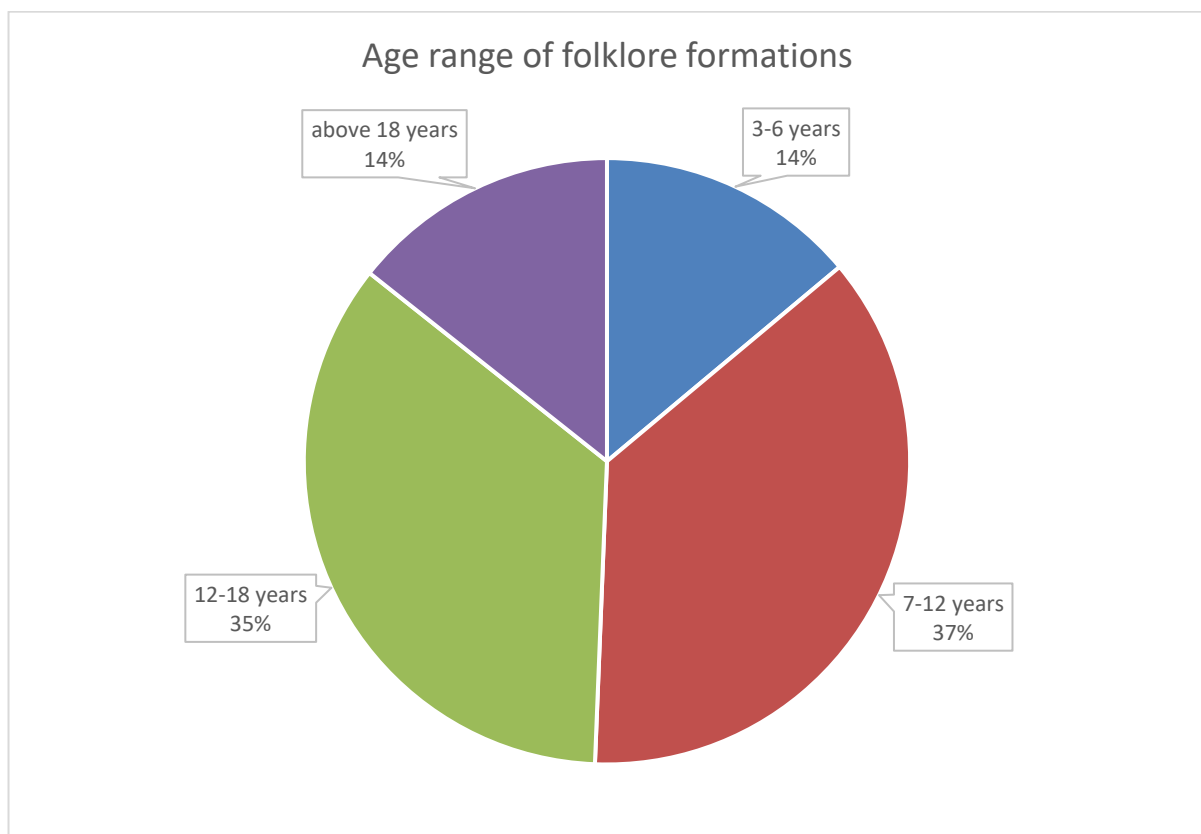


Fig. 3. Age range of folklore formations

According to the opinion of one third of the interviewed managers (33%), children experience difficulties or face certain difficulties in learning folklore samples. These difficulties can be categorized into several main areas related to different types of folklore activities.

First of all, in the field of singing activity a significant number of managers indicate dialect verbal forms (42%) as the main difficulty. Next are the problems related to mastering ornamentation in folk singing (40.9%), which requires specific vocal skills. Educators noted difficulties in mastering the characteristic style of singing, playing, dancing (30.7%) and the characteristic sonority (21.6%), as well as the correct intonation (22.7%), which are key to the authentic prototype of folk performances. A common problem for all three forms of folklore activity – singing, playing and dancing – is mastering the specific style and metrorhythm. Mastering the metrorhythm, which is fundamental to every folklore performance, represents a significant challenge for 19.3% of the children.

Along with the reported main difficulties, the leaders also point to partial deficits, such as the insufficient motor culture of the children and the insufficient learning material used in the learning process – factors that further complicate the learning of folklore samples and their specifics.

These observations show the need for a more targeted approach in pedagogical practices, which takes into account the peculiarities of the folklore tradition and offers innovative methods to overcome the mentioned difficulties.

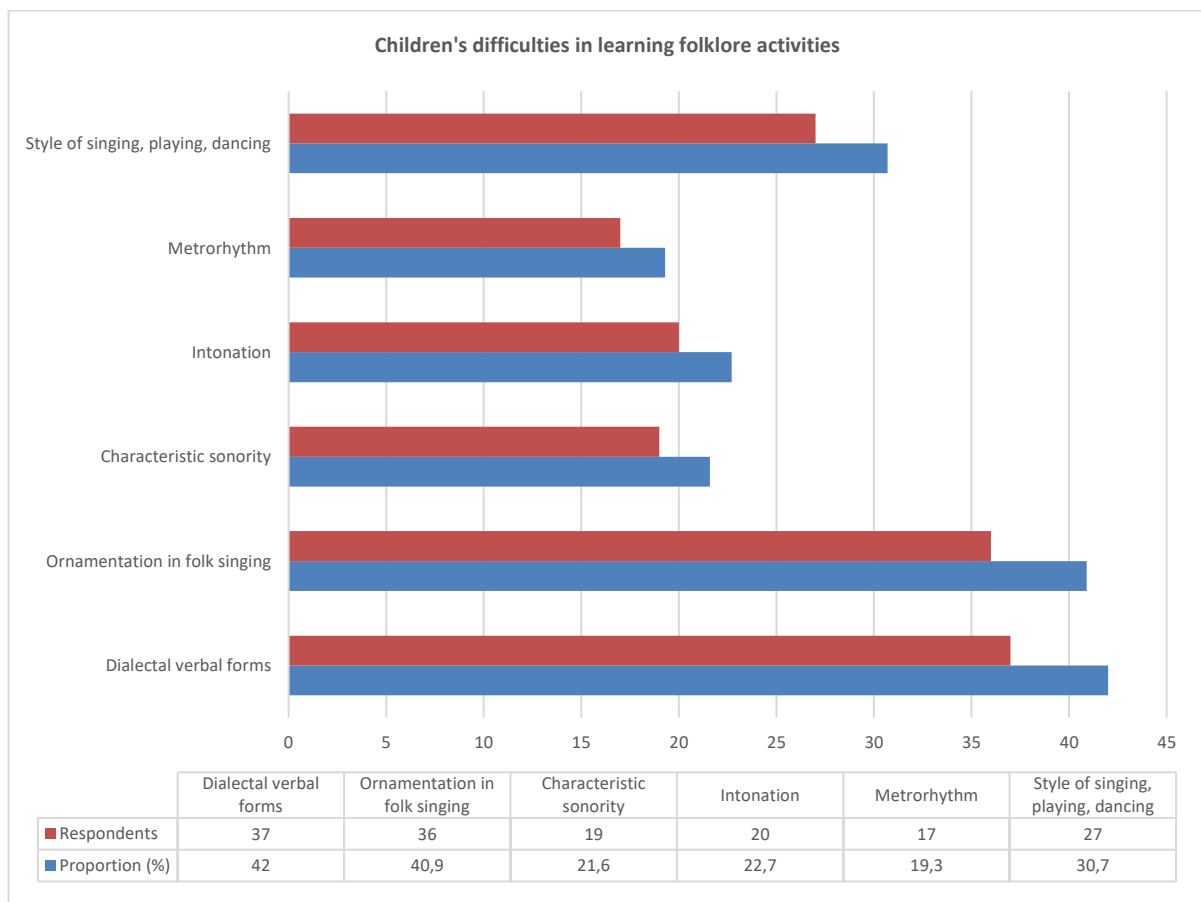


Fig. 4. Children's difficulties in learning folklore activities

In the context of the established difficulties on the part of the learners, the leaders of folklore formations also identify a number of obstacles that prevent the successful conduct of folklore training.

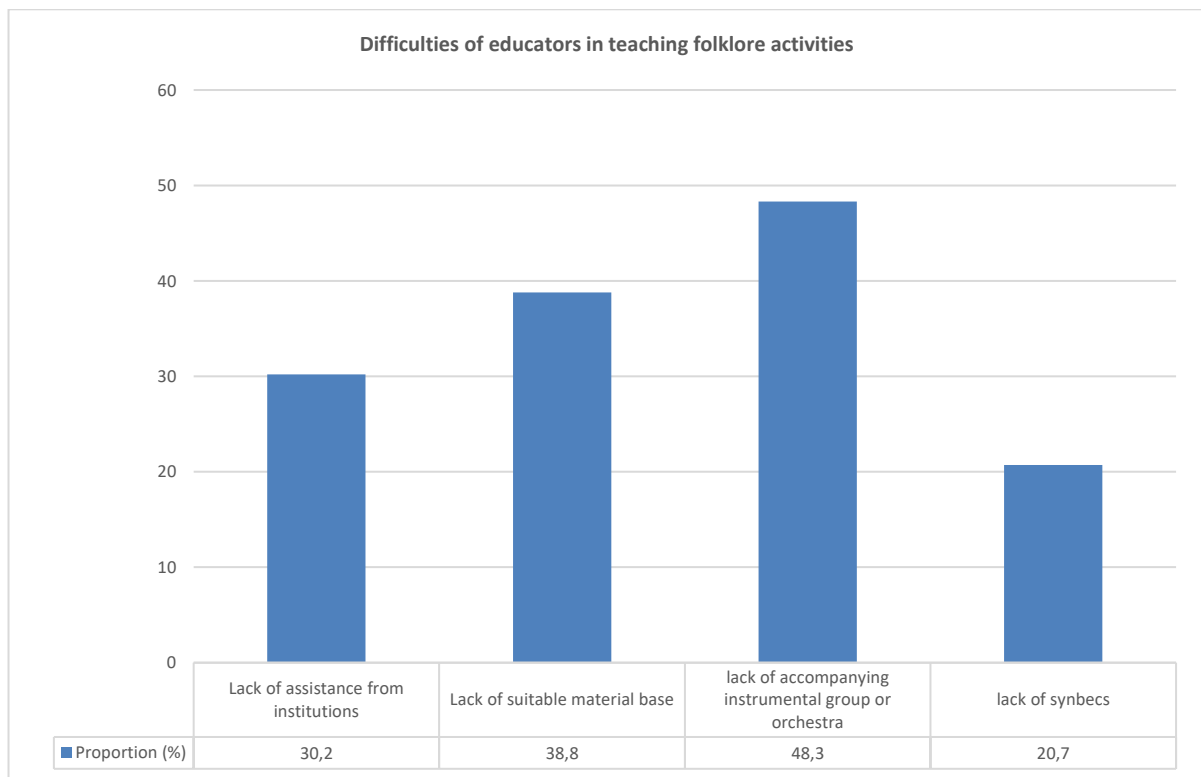


Fig. 5. Difficulties of educators in teaching folklore activities

The main groups of difficulties outlined by leaders of folklore formations are related to a lack of assistance from institutions (30.2%); lack of appropriate material base, including traditional costumes, decorations, attributes (38.8%); lack of accompanying instrumental group or orchestra (48.3%); lack of instrumentals synbecs (20.7%).

These data indicate that non-formal education is often undervalued and does not receive enough institutional support and funding. This negatively affects the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of organization and learning of folklore activities by children. For example, the lack of instrumental accompaniment is crucial for the singing and dancing activities, which are the main activities mentioned by the researched persons in the formations they lead. The reason for this lack is often associated with insufficient support for professional musicians and orchestra players, who find it difficult to find fulfillment in the field of folklore. One of the main reasons for the withdrawal of musicians from folklore formations is the lack of adequate pay. Many of them retrain and choose professions that offer better financial security. In order to overcome this problem, it is necessary to create a long-term policy to encourage

young people to play folk instruments and to guarantee a better professional realization of musicians in this field.

The financial difficulties are also related to the need to maintain the authentic vision of the folklore ensembles, which requires high-quality and well-preserved costumes. In many of the community centers and ensembles, the costumes are more than 50 to 80 years old. In some cases, they manage to cope with this problem by participating in projects for additional funding.

As a good example of overcoming some of the difficulties, one of the leaders interviewed shared that my colleagues and I took care to issue appropriate sheet music to support the methodical preparation of leaders and ensembles.

Needs of the heads of folklore formations for the improvement of the activity

The diagram shows the needs of 110 respondents surveyed about their needs for the improvement and development of folklore formations. Respondents expressed their preferences on several main aspects related to improving the quality of training and the availability of resources.

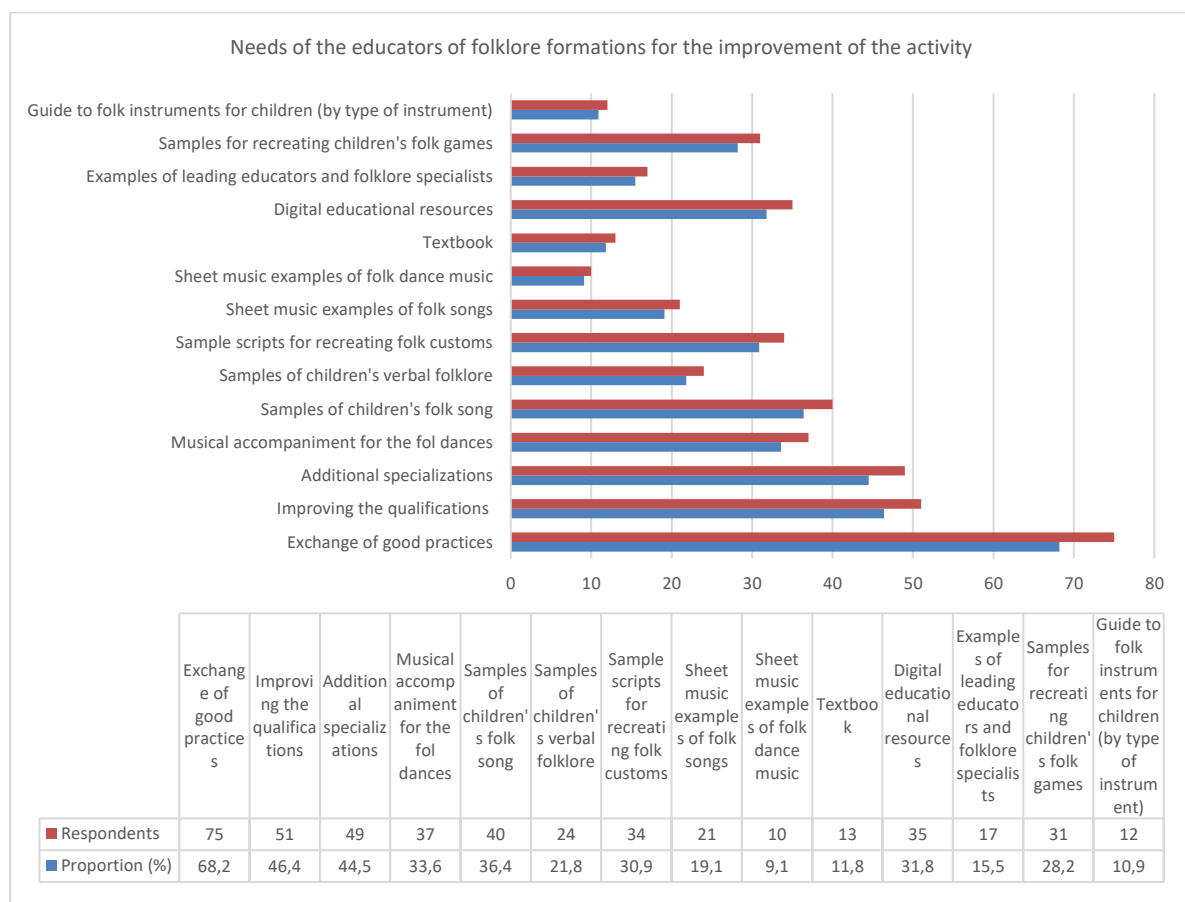


Fig. 6. Needs of the educators of folklore formations for the improvement of the activity

The largest part of the respondents noted the need to *exchange good practices* (68.2%). This highlights the collective desire to share knowledge and experience between trainers and formations. The exchange of practices can lead to more effective teaching methods and new ideas for the development of folklore programs. Almost half of the managers express the need for additional training and *upgrading of qualifications* (46.4%). This shows that although leaders have basic knowledge, there is a need to increase their expertise in order to *improve the quality of training*. 44.5% of respondents requested *additional specialization*, which suggests a desire to upgrade skills in specific areas of folklore traditions. This may include specializations in folklore such as singing, dancing, traditional instruments or ritual practices.

In terms of learning resources, trainers state the need for *musical accompaniment of folk dances* (33.6%) and suggestions for *song repertoire* for children (36.4%). A significant number of respondents emphasized the need for musical accompaniment for both folk dances and children's folk activities. This is probably related to the fact that music is essential for the practice and performance of these activities. The provision of appropriate musical material is important for the successful acquisition of folklore. A significant part of the respondents emphasized the need for *samples for recreating customs and holidays* (30.9%) and *samples for recreating children's folklore games* (28.2%). In relation to the decreasing number of children's formations that present and represent authentic examples of customs and holidays, the provision of approved models for scenarios is a key element in the preservation and correct representation of traditions, especially when it comes to training younger participants.

The educational resources that the respondents as leaders of folklore formations wish to be provided to improve their activities and to overcome deficits are teaching aids, sheet music examples for song repertoire and music for dances, as well as a guide to folk instruments (by types of instruments). In addition to books, some of the respondents indicated digital resources as well.

A significant number of respondents need to support their activities from specialists *digital educational resources* (31.8%). About a third of the respondents expressed a need for digital resources, which shows the growing importance of technology in the learning process and in non-formal education. The digitization of learning materials and the availability of online platforms can facilitate access to information and increase the quality of learning. A relatively small percentage of respondents noted the need for *teaching aids* (11.8%) and *developments by leading trainers and folklorists* (15.5%), which may suggest that such resources already exist but are insufficiently accessible or unused wide. Although sheet music examples for songs and music in general were not among respondents' top priorities, sheet music examples for songs and dance music (19.1% and 9.1%), as well as *a guide to folk instruments for children* (by

type of instrument) (10.9%) are among the desired resources for some of the trainers.

According to the stated needs of the leaders of folklore formations to improve their activities, it can be assumed that the main emphasis is on the exchange of good practices, which emphasizes the collective awareness that joint learning and sharing of experience and approved practices can improve the quality of teaching. A great potential for improving expertise in different folklore areas is found in the registered need for additional training and specialization among leaders, as further training and specializations can be directed to specific folklore genres such as music, dances, customs, children's folk games, verbal forms. The significant need for musical accompaniment for folklore activities, especially for dances and children's vocal schools, shows that training should be enriched with more musical materials. The growing need for teaching aids and digital resources shows that the future development of folklore education can be supported by the introduction of digital platforms and online materials and contribute to better education in specific areas of folklore. Such resources can facilitate access to folklore information and stimulate the interest of younger generations. The desire for more samples to recreate customs and children's folklore games can ensure the correct representation of traditions and adherence to authenticity in the stage interpretation.

Conclusion

The teaching of folklore in the field of non-formal education is an important factor in preserving national cultural identity, as folklore unites traditional musical, dance and ritual practices that are unique to Bulgaria. Non-formal education includes activities conducted outside the formal education system and expands the scope of cultural education. One of the main functions of folklore formations in the sphere of non-formal education is the preservation and transmission of the inherited folklore culture to future generations, and to children who have an affinity and orientation towards it. The obtained data and the analysis of the results based on the number of interviewed 123 leaders of folklore formations from all over the country, working in the field of non-formal education, give reason to assume that the results are reliable, have representativeness and credibility. The managers are representatives of settlements of different scales (from regional centers to small villages), with different professions, different professional experience and experience in the specialty.

According to the respondents, children educated in the conditions of non-formal education in Bulgaria encounter various difficulties in learning traditional authentic folklore. These challenges are related to both cognitive and social factors. In many families, traditional folklore values are not transmitted, which leads to a lack of basic knowledge and interest in children. They often

lack personal experience or contact with folklore, making it difficult for them to relate to the culture. The lack of cultural continuity in the family environment is also exacerbated by a limited understanding of traditional symbolism and content of traditional folklore. It often contains specific symbolism, myths and stories that are not always easy to understand by modern children who are involved in a social context abounding in modern forms of entertainment and culture (popular music, digital games, the Internet). Traditional folklore seems 'outdated', 'out of date', 'incomprehensible' compared to modern entertainment.

The findings of the study indicate that some of the children are experiencing difficulties in the adoption of traditional music and dance forms. Metrorhythm, melodies and dance steps, mastering the complex folklore elements such as ornamentation, intonation characteristic of traditional folklore, stylistics of the dialect, require time and effort. These difficulties require systematic measures and support to make the teaching of folklore more effective and in line with modern realities in non-formal education.

The role of educators who work in the field of non-formal education in Bulgaria as leaders of folklore formations for individual and group training, for the preservation and popularization of Bulgarian traditions, is **a pillar for the preservation, transmission and development of folklore and traditional practices inherited from the past**. By engaging children with folklore activities and knowledge, a connection is created with the roots of the national culture, which is important for the formation of values and identity.

The main recommendations after the identified negatives in non-formal education is to have institutional support and a constructive policy regarding the processes regarding the preservation, transmission and development of folklore and traditional practices inherited from the past through training of children in formal and non-formal education. **The strategy for the development of the culture of Bulgaria for the period 2019-2029**. [18] outlines the priorities and goals in the cultural policy of the country. One of the important highlights is the presence of the so-called amateur art as an essential part of the general cultural process, considered in close connection with people's free time, with non-formal education, with the concept of lifelong learning. The strategy emphasizes the need to sustain this activity through targeted funding and support from the state and local authorities. It is necessary to develop *a Strategy for the protection of musical-folklore heritage through formal and informal education in Bulgaria*, through the efforts of institutions and professional communities, stimulated through the state financial mechanism for education in the field of cultural heritage. Such a strategy can provide a comprehensive vision for the future development of this direction and a system of actions such as: analysis of the environment; defining needs; setting priorities; strategic activities and objectives; monitoring and evaluation. A similar step could be the development

of a program of measures by an expert council, which would bring together qualified staff from various fields of science, culture and education.

Several possible solutions in the field of public policy can be proposed to support teachers who teach folklore in the field of non-formal education such as:

1. Improving the qualifications of teachers

- **Specialized training and qualification programs:** organizing courses, seminars, conferences and online forums for leaders in various aspects of folklore – music, dance, children's folklore games, rituals and verbal folklore.
- **University training:** renewal of training programs for future teachers, emphasizing the integration of folklore in the learning process, including the study of authentic traditions and practices. Such a measure may be desirable, but not mandatory.

2. Access to quality learning materials and resources

- **Development of teaching materials:** creation of modern and adapted teaching aids, videos and interactive platforms to support folklore education. Creation of audiovisual libraries with musical accompaniments for folk dances and songs that can be used in the learning process.
- The development of online learning resource platforms and digital archives of folklore materials will provide teachers with easy access to the country's rich cultural heritage. Priority should be given to methodical support through teaching and educational resources (methodical aids, sheet music and digital), including collections with authentic music, as well as the financial support of professional musicians and composers to prepare specialized resources for teaching children.
- **Digitization of folklore materials:** introduction of digital platforms to collect and distribute learning resources, musical examples and customs.

3. Creation of a national network for the exchange of good practices

- **Platforms for teachers:** creating networks and platforms where teachers from different regions can share experiences and good practices in teaching folklore, which will stimulate cooperation between different regions and cultural communities; to encourage professional staff to participate in this process as trainers.
- **Exchanges and partnerships:** creating exchange programs between schools and cultural institutions to allow teachers to gain experience from different educational and cultural organizations.

4. Financial support for schools and schools: subsidies or grants can be introduced for non-formal educational institutions that teach folklore in order to ease financial burdens and improve the material base. This can include funding for musical instruments, costumes and teaching resources. Currently, the state provides opportunities to renew the wardrobes of

community centers and formations through projects and financing from municipal and national funds and programs, as well as funds for financing cultural events.

5. Popularization of folklore through media and events

- **Media support:** promotion of media initiatives and programs to promote Bulgarian folklore, such as shows for children, educational series and music formats related to traditional culture.
- **Organization of folklore festivals and events:** increasing the number of festivals aimed at children, where they can actively participate in music and dance competitions, as well as learn about traditional customs and holidays.

6. Public recognition and awards: the creation of national awards and recognitions for teachers and schools that make an outstanding contribution to the preservation and teaching of folklore, in order to motivate teaching staff and increase the prestige of the profession.

7. International exchange programs and festivals

- **Participation in international folklore festivals:** involving children in international festivals and exchange programs where they can see how their peers in other countries study and promote their own traditions.
- **Cooperation with international organizations:** promoting the exchange of ideas and methods of teaching folklore with organizations from other countries, which can lead to the borrowing of approaches in teaching folklore to children.

The proposed measures can contribute to increasing the quality of folklore education in non-formal education and contribute to the preservation and development of Bulgarian folklore traditions in the modern cultural context.

The research carried out is significant for non-formal education, as it illuminates key aspects of teaching folklore to children – an area that plays an important role in the preservation of national cultural identity. By analyzing the good practices and challenges faced by educators, valuable guidelines for improving educational methods and approaches are provided. This research contributes to the preservation and transmission of folklore traditions to the next generations, while offering modern solutions for better interaction with children in the sphere of non-formal education and possible institutional solutions to identified problems.

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