



BETWEEN DIGITAL MUSIC CULTURE AND MUSICAL HERITAGE: A CRITICAL NARRATIVE REVIEW OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S MUSICAL SOCIALISATION

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Abstract:

Preschool children's musical lives are increasingly formed across interrelated family, educational, community and digital environments. Yet research has usually examined early musical development, family music-making, digital childhood and short-video platforms as separate domains. This critical narrative review investigates how digitally circulated musical content—using TikTok as an illustrative case—interacts with embodied, intergenerational and culturally situated forms of musical transmission during the preschool years. The source base was assembled purposively and iteratively around four intersecting domains: early musical socialisation; young children's digital practices and family mediation; short-form audiovisual platforms; and music, identity and intangible cultural heritage. The review does not claim exhaustive systematic coverage; rather, it compares heterogeneous conceptual, empirical and institutional sources relevant to the questions under examination. The heterogeneous evidence was analysed through thematic coding and comparative theoretical synthesis rather than statistical aggregation. Five themes were developed: changing agents of musical socialisation; the affordances and limits of short-form audiovisual music; family mediation and unequal conditions of access; embodied participation and intergenerational cultural transmission; and the emerging role of early-childhood education. The literature supports neither a deterministic account of digital harm nor an idealised opposition between technology and tradition. Direct evidence concerning preschool children's engagement with TikTok remains limited, and findings from older populations cannot be transferred uncritically to young children. Nevertheless, the synthesis indicates that musical socialisation now occurs within a hybrid ecology in which platform-circulated sounds coexist with singing, movement, play, family repertoires and community practices. The review proposes a relational and developmentally appropriate pedagogical approach: digital musical material should be selectively transformed into active listening, movement, improvisation, comparison and

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cultural inquiry, while live shared music-making remains central. Implications are offered for teacher education, family-school-community cooperation, curriculum development and future empirical research.

Keywords: preschool children; musical socialisation; digital music culture; family mediation; cultural heritage

1. Introduction

Childhood is increasingly lived across physical and digital environments that cannot be treated as separate social worlds. Smartphones, connected televisions, video-sharing services and algorithmically organised media have become ordinary features of family life, while young children's encounters with digital content are commonly mediated by parents, siblings and other carers rather than occurring through fully independent use (Holloway et al., 2013; Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2020; Scott, 2022). Music is deeply implicated in this transformation. Songs, rhythms and movement sequences circulate through homes, classrooms, community events and digital platforms, becoming resources for play, imitation, affiliation and identity.

Music is among the earliest forms of human communication and shared meaning-making. Before children participate in formal music education, they encounter musical pattern through caregiver interaction, lullabies, play songs, recorded media, celebrations, religious or community practices and spontaneous vocal and bodily exploration. Musical socialisation therefore refers not simply to the acquisition of musical skills, but to the processes through which children learn what music is, where it belongs, how one participates in it and what social or cultural meanings it carries (Campbell, 2010; Welch, 2005). These processes are relational: musical preferences and practices develop within families, peer groups, educational settings and broader structures of cultural participation.

Short-form audiovisual platforms introduce a distinctive mode of musical circulation. TikTok, Douyin, Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts combine brief musical excerpts with image, movement, repetition, imitation and recommendation systems. On TikTok in particular, sound can operate as a reusable template around which users organise gestures, dances, humour and narrative. Research on platformisation and "imitation publics" shows that participation is structured not only by individual choice but also by technical affordances that make some sounds and formats especially visible and reproducible (Kaye et al., 2021; Zulli and Zulli, 2022). These observations are important for music education, but they require careful interpretation when preschool children are concerned.

TikTok is not designed or officially intended for preschool-aged users. Young children may nevertheless encounter TikTok-originated sounds, dances and trends indirectly: through adults' or siblings' devices, reposted videos, television, advertising, schoolyard circulation or musical content transferred to other platforms. "Exposure to

TikTok" in early childhood should therefore not be equated with autonomous account ownership. It is better understood as participation in a wider platformised musical culture whose materials travel across devices and social relationships.

Existing scholarship offers relevant but fragmented knowledge. Research on early-childhood music emphasises embodied participation, caregiver-child interaction and family repertoires. Digital-childhood studies demonstrate that technology use is embedded in household routines and mediated by family values and resources. Platform studies explain how short-video services organise visibility and imitation, while heritage scholarship examines cultural continuity, collective memory and living practice. Much less attention has been given to the intersection of these fields: how platform-circulated music interacts with intergenerational transmission and culturally situated musical participation during the preschool years.

This gap is educationally significant. A moral opposition between "authentic" traditional music and "superficial" digital culture obscures both the living, changing character of tradition and the creative possibilities of digital participation. Conversely, celebrating digital access without examining commercial recommendation systems, developmental appropriateness, family mediation and inequality is equally inadequate. The issue is not whether children should inhabit either a traditional or a digital musical world. It is how adults and educational institutions can support meaningful musical participation within the hybrid conditions children already experience.

The review addresses three questions:

- 1) How does the existing literature conceptualise the influence of digital and short-form audiovisual media on preschool children's musical socialisation?
- 2) How do digitally mediated musical experiences differ from, and interact with, family-, school- and community-based forms of musical transmission?
- 3) What pedagogical implications follow for culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate early-childhood music education?

The article contributes an interdisciplinary interpretive framework centred on the concept of a hybrid ecology of musical socialisation. This term describes the relational field in which live and recorded music, local and transnational repertoires, family choices, educational practices, platform affordances and children's own playful transformations operate together. The concept does not assume that all influences are equal, beneficial or freely chosen. Rather, it directs attention to the relationships through which musical material becomes available, meaningful and actionable in children's lives.

2. Literature review

2.1 Musical socialisation as relational and cultural participation

Developmental theories provide part of the background for understanding preschool musical experience. Piaget (1962) highlighted symbolic play and imitation, while Vygotsky (1978) located learning within culturally mediated social activity. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach further directs attention to the interaction of

family, school, community and wider social systems. For the present topic, however, developmental accounts are most useful when combined with cultural and sociological perspectives that recognise children as active participants who interpret and transform the resources available to them.

Music is not only an auditory object. Singing, rhythmic movement, gesture, play and shared attention connect sound with bodies, emotions, places and relationships. Young children appropriate songs rather than merely reproduce them: they change words, combine repertoires, invent movements and use musical fragments in social play. Campbell (2010) demonstrates that children's musical worlds are formed through participation in both child-generated and adult-mediated practices. Hallam (2010) similarly documents cognitive, personal and social associations of active musical engagement, although broad developmental benefits should not be treated as automatic outcomes of every musical exposure.

Family musical life is especially important. Caregivers organise access to recordings and lessons, sing or avoid singing, transmit valued repertoires and model what counts as legitimate musical participation. Musical parenting may include intuitive vocal interaction as well as deliberate selection of songs and activities (Koops, 2020). Evidence from Brazilian families during COVID-19 social distancing indicates that disruptions to everyday routines were accompanied by reported increases in children's individual musical activity and in shared caregiver-child singing, dancing, listening and music-making. Although based on cross-sectional caregiver reports, these findings highlight the adaptability and relational resilience of family musicking under changing conditions (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Recent work on online musical-parenting programmes also shows that digital delivery can support active caregiver-infant musical interaction when technology functions as a bridge to embodied relational activity rather than as a substitute for it (Papazachariou-Christoforou, 2026).

Musical socialisation is inseparable from cultural identity. Identity is not a fixed possession transmitted unchanged from one generation to another; it is continually constructed through representation, participation and social positioning (Hall, 1996). Bourdieu's (1984) account of taste further reminds us that musical preferences are related to social conditions and unequal access to cultural resources. In early childhood, musical identity develops through multiple affiliations: family history, language, locality, migration, media culture, friendship and schooling. Educational practice should therefore avoid reducing heritage to a single national canon.

2.2 Traditional music and living heritage

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines heritage through practices, knowledge and expressions that communities recognise and continually recreate (UNESCO, 2003). This understanding is particularly relevant to music. A traditional song is not culturally meaningful simply because it is old or included in a curriculum. It becomes living heritage when people sing, move, remember, adapt and connect through it. Song transmission has correspondingly been

conceptualised as an elementary cultural practice through which older generations introduce younger members to musico-linguistic rules, culturally organised forms and affect-regulative resources. The distinction between informal transmission in intimate family settings and formal transmission in educational institutions demonstrates that children's songs carry relational, normative and cultural meanings extending beyond musical content alone (Stadler Elmer, 2021).

Intergenerational musical transmission can link children with family narratives, dialects, places, celebrations and collective memory. It can also create dialogue across generations and support the recognition of cultural plurality (Argyriou, 2021; Argyriou and Lici, 2026). Yet tradition should not be romanticised. Repertoires may embody exclusions, gendered assumptions or dominant national narratives. In culturally diverse classrooms, heritage education requires inquiry into whose music is represented, who has authority to interpret it and how different family traditions can enter the educational space.

Experiential pedagogies provide important resources for such work. Orff-Schulwerk foregrounds elemental music, speech, movement, improvisation and group creation (Orff, 1978). Kodály-inspired practice emphasises singing, inner hearing and carefully sequenced musical learning through meaningful repertoire (Choksy, 1999). Dalcroze Eurhythmics connects rhythm and musical understanding with bodily movement in space (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921). These traditions differ historically and pedagogically, but all resist reducing music to passive reception. Their contemporary relevance lies not in using them as a defensive barrier against digital culture, but in their capacity to transform any musical material, including a digital sound, into embodied, creative and social participation. World Music Pedagogy further strengthens this bridging function by approaching culturally diverse musical repertoires not as static objects of representation, but as opportunities for embodied participation, intercultural encounter, empathy and global citizenship (Argyriou, 2026).

2.3 Digital childhood and family mediation

Young children's digital practices occur within household relationships and routines. Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) show that parents negotiate digital opportunities and risks through values, aspirations and everyday constraints. Scott (2022) likewise identifies a varied repertoire of family mediation strategies in preschool homes, including supervision, joint use, instruction, restriction and the purposeful integration of media into family activity. These findings challenge a simple division between "screen time" and "real life."

Developmental appropriateness remains essential. The American Academy of Pediatrics stresses the importance of high-quality content, adult co-use and the protection of sleep, movement, play and caregiver-child interaction (Council on Communications and Media, 2016). The World Health Organization (2019) similarly situates sedentary screen time within a broader balance of physical activity and sleep. Such guidance does

not establish that every digital encounter has identical effects. It encourages attention to content, context, duration, displacement and the quality of adult mediation.

Systematic work on digital play suggests that technologies may support exploration, communication and creativity when children retain agency and when digital activity connects with material and social play (Chu et al., 2024). Music technologies can likewise offer access to sounds, recording, composition and multimodal experimentation (Lee and Chang, 2021). Interviews with educators and parents reported by Xie et al. (2025) indicate perceived benefits for engagement and resource diversity, alongside concerns about screen time, content quality, technical barriers and teacher preparedness. A qualitative case study in one Indonesian early-childhood setting further suggests that structured and adult-guided TikTok exploration can provide opportunities for young children's creative expression. Because this evidence derives from a single context, it is best understood as an illustration of pedagogical possibility rather than as evidence of a general developmental effect (Budiarti and Kurniati, 2024). Together, these studies demonstrate why "digital music" should not be treated as a single undifferentiated category. Evidence from preschool teachers' online professional development further indicates that digital tools become pedagogically meaningful when training connects them with reflective, child-centred and creative musical practice rather than technical competence alone (Kanellou and Argyriou, 2025).

2.4 Short-form video, platform affordances and evidential limits

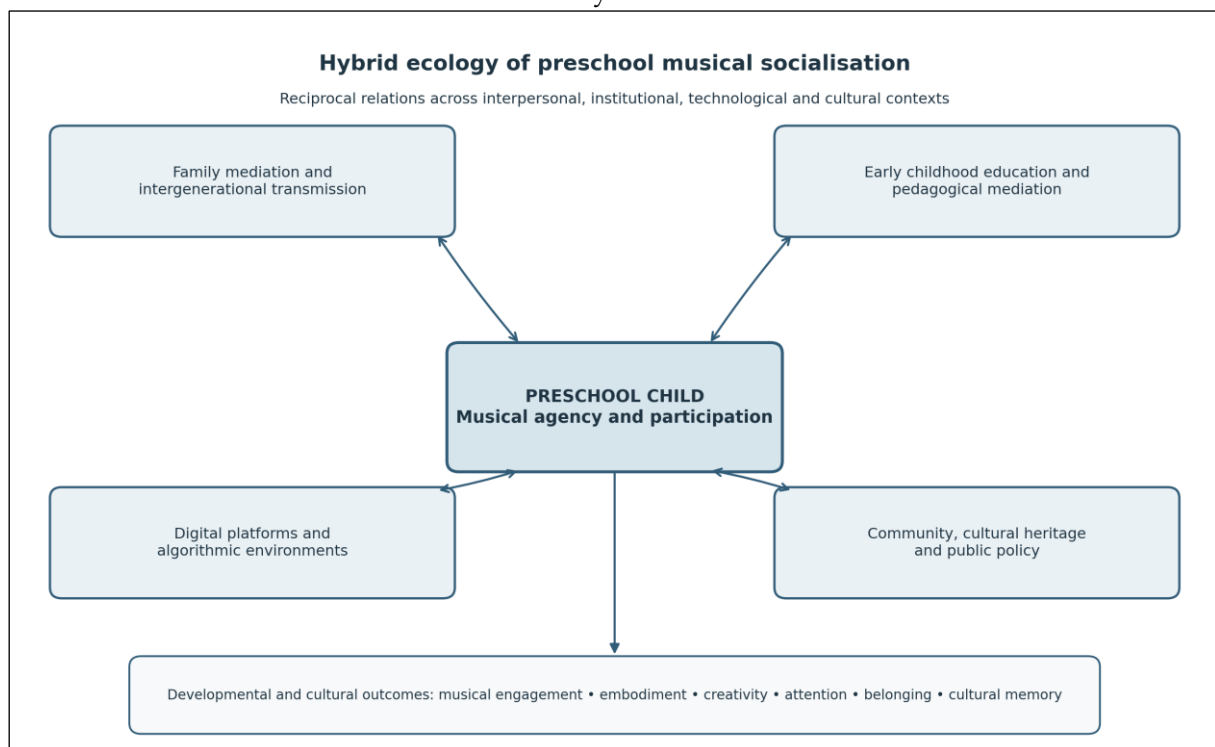
TikTok is significant not simply because it contains music, but because it reorganises the relationships among sound, image, gesture and circulation. Kaye et al. (2021) describe the platformisation of Douyin and TikTok, while Zulli and Zulli (2022) conceptualise TikTok participation through technological mimesis: users reproduce and modify recognisable formats, helping to form imitation publics. Recent scholarship has positioned TikTok and children as a distinct field of inquiry, drawing attention to the interaction of platform affordances, algorithmic visibility, participatory cultures, commercialisation and evolving forms of regulation (Lee et al., 2025). This literature primarily concerns older children and adolescents rather than preschool users, but it clarifies why TikTok cannot be treated merely as another neutral channel for audiovisual content. Montag et al. (2021) similarly emphasise the need for more differentiated evidence about motivations and effects.

This literature clarifies platform mechanisms, but most TikTok research concerns adolescents, adults or general user populations. Evidence concerning preschool children is extremely limited. Research involving college students or autonomous social-media users cannot be used to infer developmental effects in young children. It can identify platform affordances—brevity, repetition, recommendation, reuse of sounds and audiovisual coupling—that may also shape the content reaching families. It cannot establish that these affordances cause reduced attention, passive musicality or cultural homogenisation among preschoolers.

Accordingly, this review distinguishes three evidential levels. First, there is direct evidence about family mediation and young children's digital practices. Second, there is direct evidence about platform architecture and older users' participation. Third, there are theoretical inferences about how platform-circulated music may interact with preschool musical life. Keeping these levels separate is necessary for an academically responsible discussion.

Taken together, these literatures support the hybrid ecological model presented in Figure 1. The model places the preschool child at the centre, but not as an isolated recipient of content. Musical agency develops through reciprocal relations among family mediation, early childhood education, platform infrastructures, and community and policy contexts. Digital platforms therefore constitute one part of the child's ecology rather than an autonomous causal force, while family and educational mediation can amplify, reinterpret or interrupt their influence.

Figure 1: An ecological model of preschool musical socialisation in hybrid cultural environments



Source: Author's conceptual synthesis based on the literature reviewed.

The model also clarifies the evaluative position adopted in this review. Developmental and cultural outcomes—musical engagement, embodiment, creativity, attention, belonging and cultural memory—cannot be attributed to a device or repertoire category alone. They emerge from the quality, duration and social organisation of participation. This relational premise informs both the analysis of the corpus and the recommendations advanced below.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Review design

The study employed a critical narrative review and comparative theoretical synthesis. This design was selected because the research questions cross fields that use heterogeneous concepts, populations and methods. The aim was not to estimate an intervention effect or claim exhaustive systematic coverage. It was to identify convergences, tensions and evidential gaps across early-childhood music education, digital-childhood research, platform studies and cultural-heritage scholarship.

3.2 Literature identification and source base

The source base was assembled iteratively for the purposes of a critical narrative review. Relevant scholarship was identified from the authors' existing work in early-childhood music education and cultural pedagogy, from the reference lists of key publications, and through targeted retrieval around the review's central concepts: preschool musical socialisation, family mediation, digital play, short-form audiovisual platforms, music technology, traditional music and intangible cultural heritage. Peer-reviewed research was considered alongside foundational scholarly books and authoritative institutional guidance where these contributed directly to the conceptual questions.

Selection was purposive and conceptually driven rather than exhaustive. Sources were retained when they clarified a theoretical construct, provided direct evidence concerning preschool children or family and educational mediation, explained relevant platform affordances, or illuminated cultural transmission and heritage practice. No PRISMA-style screening flow or reproducible database search log was maintained; accordingly, the review does not claim systematic coverage, a fixed database yield or a formally bounded corpus. Its contribution lies in comparative interpretation across heterogeneous literatures, with the resulting limitations stated explicitly below.

3.3 Eligibility and selection

The review prioritised peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books and chapters, research reports and authoritative institutional documents that contributed substantively to at least one of four domains: (a) preschool musical participation and socialisation; (b) young children's digital practices and family mediation; (c) the architecture or participatory culture of short-form video; and (d) music, identity and living cultural heritage. Seminal sources published before the digital-platform era were retained where they provided necessary conceptual foundations.

Commercial or promotional material, sources without identifiable scholarly or institutional provenance, social-media marketing studies without relevance to participation or music, and unsupported developmental claims were not used as evidence. Studies of adolescents and adults were considered only when they illuminated platform affordances; they were not treated as direct evidence of effects on preschool children. The purposive nature of selection, the absence of a reproducible search log, the

inclusion of English- and Greek-language material only, and the interpretive synthesis constrain comprehensiveness and reproducibility.

3.4 Analysis and synthesis

Sources were read comparatively and coded for: population and setting; form of musical participation; mode of digital access; role of family or educator mediation; account of cultural identity or heritage; opportunities attributed to technology; risks or limitations; and strength and directness of evidence for the preschool population. Initial categories were compared and consolidated into five themes:

- 1) changing agents of musical socialisation;
- 2) affordances and limits of short-form audiovisual music;
- 3) family mediation and unequal conditions of access;
- 4) embodied participation and intergenerational cultural transmission;
- 5) educational mediation within a hybrid musical ecology.

The synthesis used negative-case reasoning: evidence that complicated a simple technology/tradition opposition was actively retained. Claims were calibrated according to whether they were supported directly by preschool research, indirectly by adjacent research, or proposed as theoretical interpretations. An explicit evidential map makes these levels visible. No human participants or personal data were involved; therefore, institutional ethical approval and informed consent were not required.

The evidential map distinguished four types of contribution. Campbell (2010), UNESCO (2003) and Stadler Elmer (2021) provided conceptual foundations for musical socialisation, living heritage and intergenerational song transmission. Scott (2022), Chu et al. (2024), Lee and Chang (2021), Ribeiro et al. (2021), and Zendrato and Handayani (2025) supplied direct, although context-specific, evidence concerning preschool digital mediation, digital play, family musicking, technology-supported musical interaction and emerging relationships between short-song exposure and musical interests. Xie et al. (2025), Budiarti and Kurniati (2024), and Papazachariou-Christoforou (2026) contributed adult-reported or case-based evidence concerning digital music education, guided TikTok creativity and online musical parenting. Kaye et al. (2021), Zulli and Zulli (2022), and Lee et al. (2025) explained platformisation, imitative participation and children's wider TikTok cultures, but were treated as platform-level evidence rather than evidence of effects on preschool children.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Musical socialisation now involves a wider network of agents

The literature indicates that family, school and community remain central to early musical socialisation, but no longer operate as relatively bounded channels. Recorded music, connected devices and platform-circulated sounds move across these settings. A child may encounter a melody through an older sibling's video, reproduce its gesture pattern during play, hear a related version on television and later transform it in a

classroom movement activity. The meaningful unit is therefore not the platform alone, but the network of people, devices and practices through which a sound travels.

This supports an ecological rather than technologically deterministic interpretation. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework helps locate musical experience across interconnected settings, while contemporary family-mediation research shows that access is socially organised (Scott, 2022). The child is neither a passive endpoint of an algorithm nor a completely autonomous digital creator. Preschool musical agency is relational: children imitate, select, refuse, repeat and transform materials within boundaries established by adults, interfaces and available resources.

The proposed hybrid ecology of musical socialisation extends this account and is consistent with wider ecosystemic approaches to early childhood education (Argyriou and Tapsis, 2026) by including platform infrastructures. Recommendation systems participate in cultural selection by increasing the visibility and repetition of particular sounds. Yet their influence is mediated when adults choose devices, supervise content, sing along, redirect an activity or connect a digital fragment with a family story. Educational analysis should consequently examine not only what children hear but who introduces it, under what circumstances, what activity follows and what other forms of music-making it displaces or enables.

Table 1 translates this ecological argument into a comparative analytical framework. The contrast is heuristic rather than binary: traditional practices may be mediated by recordings and platforms, while digital encounters may become collective, embodied and culturally situated. The comparison identifies dominant tendencies in each mode and specifies the pedagogical work required to connect access with meaningful participation.

Table 1: Traditional and digital modes of musical
 socialisation in early childhood: an analytical comparison

Analytical dimension	Traditional and family-based practices	Digital and platform-mediated practices	Pedagogical implication
Participation	Collective, embodied and relational; embedded in routines, celebrations and play.	Individual or networked; often screen-mediated, repeatable and portable across settings.	Reconnect digital encounters with shared singing, movement and play.
Child's agency	Singer, mover, player and co-creator who varies repertoire in interaction.	Viewer, selector, imitator and potential remixer or content creator.	Move from passive exposure towards guided selection, transformation and creation.
Adult mediation	Model, co-participant, memory bearer and cultural interpreter.	Gatekeeper, curator, co-user and interpreter of platform content.	Use active and instructional mediation rather than restriction alone.
Musical form and attention	Longer songs; repetition with variation; attention sustained interpersonally.	Short excerpts, loops and trends; visibility shaped by recommendation systems.	Balance immediacy with sustained listening and

			developmentally appropriate limits.
Embodiment and creativity	Voice, movement, gesture, instruments and improvisation within shared activity.	Audiovisual imitation, choreography, remixing, recording and multimodal creation.	Use digital material as a prompt for live, bodily and inventive music-making.
Cultural transmission	Intergenerational, locally situated and connected with language, place and memory.	Translocal and globalised; rapidly circulating and platform-selected.	Connect global repertoires with local heritage and multiple cultural identities.
Potential and concern	Belonging and continuity, but also possible romanticisation or cultural closure.	Expanded access and diversity, but also commercialisation, homogenisation and overexposure.	Adopt a balanced, inclusive and critically mediated ecology of participation.

Source: Author's analytical synthesis of the reviewed literature. The categories indicate predominant tendencies and are not mutually exclusive.

The comparison reveals that the central issue is not the replacement of a “good” traditional form by a “bad” digital one. The two modes organise musical experience differently: they distribute agency, attention, embodiment, adult authority and cultural visibility through different relations. Traditional participation derives much of its developmental significance from interpersonal synchronisation and contextual continuity, whereas platform-mediated participation expands access and multimodal experimentation but is more strongly shaped by commercial design and algorithmic selection. The pedagogical priority is therefore to create passages between the two—turning a circulating sound into singing, movement, instrumental exploration, storytelling or dialogue about cultural origin, and enabling inherited repertoire to be recreated rather than merely preserved. In this sense, mediation is the mechanism through which exposure becomes participation and through which cultural continuity remains open to plurality and change.

4.2 Short-form audiovisual music offers distinctive affordances, not a separate musical world

Platform scholarship identifies brevity, audiovisual coupling, repeatability, sound reuse and imitative participation as characteristic affordances of short-video culture (Kaye et al., 2021; Zulli and Zulli, 2022). These affordances can make musical fragments memorable and invite bodily response. For young children, a short, repeated pattern may become material for vocalisation, movement or pretend play. Repetition itself is not educationally deficient; it is fundamental to early learning and to many traditional musical practices.

The pedagogical issue is the form and purpose of repetition. In a shared song, recurrence can be socially negotiated through eye contact, turn-taking, variation and collective timing. On a platform, recurrence may be technically generated and embedded

in rapid sequences of unrelated content. The distinction is not between repetition and non-repetition, but between different structures of attention, agency and relationship.

Digital music also expands access. Families and educators can encounter repertoires beyond their immediate locality, document community performances, communicate across distance and create new combinations of sound, image and movement. Music technologies can support recording, listening, composition and multimodal expression when integrated into active pedagogy (Lee and Chang, 2021; Xie et al., 2025). A digital excerpt can become the beginning of musical inquiry rather than the end of it.

At the same time, platform content is commercially organised. Visibility is not identical to cultural value, diversity or developmental suitability. Recommendation systems may repeatedly privilege already popular formats. These structural concerns justify critical mediation, but the available evidence does not permit a causal claim that TikTok exposure diminishes preschool attention or musical creativity. Such questions require direct, age-appropriate empirical investigation.

One small-scale quantitative study involving 25 children aged four to six reported a statistically significant relationship between parent- and teacher-reported exposure to short TikTok songs and children's interest in traditional songs. Given its purposive sample, indirect measurement and cross-sectional design, the study should be interpreted as preliminary evidence that platform-mediated exposure may be related to musical preference formation, rather than as proof that TikTok reduces children's interest in traditional repertoire (Zendrato and Handayani, 2025).

4.3 Family mediation shapes opportunities, meanings and inequalities

Families remain decisive because preschool children's digital encounters are typically shared, supervised or indirectly observed. Parents and carers select devices, subscriptions and content; older siblings act as informal cultural intermediaries; and household routines determine whether music accompanies play, meals, travel, celebration or solitary viewing. Scott (2022) demonstrates that mediation is more diverse than restriction alone. It can include "extending" children's media interests into new activities and "relating" digital experiences to other aspects of family and non-digital life. Co-use, explanation, instruction and purposeful integration can therefore change the meaning of the same digital material.

Musical mediation may involve asking where a song comes from, singing the full version of a fragment, comparing languages, inventing movements or recording a grandparent's repertoire. In these cases, technology supports relational activity. By contrast, prolonged unaccompanied viewing may displace conversation, movement, outdoor play or shared music-making. The relevant evaluative questions therefore concern quality, context and displacement, not only minutes of exposure (Council on Communications and Media, 2016; World Health Organization, 2019).

This family focus also reveals inequality. Digital participation depends on connectivity, devices, adult time, confidence, language and platform literacy. Heritage

participation likewise depends on access to family or community knowledge and on whether a family's musical culture is recognised by educational institutions. Bourdieu's (1984) analysis cautions against treating taste and opportunity as individual preferences detached from social conditions. A culturally responsive approach must avoid judging families through an assumed opposition between "enriched traditional homes" and "screen-dependent homes."

4.4 Living heritage depends on participation, not preservation alone

Traditional songs and dances can connect children with language, place, family memory and community. Their educational significance lies in enactment: singing together, moving, narrating, adapting and asking about context. UNESCO's (2003) concept of intangible heritage as continually recreated practice is therefore more productive than a preservation model in which children simply reproduce authorised repertoire.

Digital media can both complicate and support this process. A short fragment may detach music from its history, language or social function. It may also stimulate curiosity, enable dispersed family members to share performances or give minority traditions new visibility. The outcome depends on mediation and power: who names the music, whose interpretation is heard, whether cultural context is explored and whether digital circulation benefits or appropriates the communities concerned.

For multicultural early-childhood settings, this finding has two implications. First, local and national traditions should be presented as plural and changing rather than culturally homogeneous. Second, families should be invited as knowledge holders without being required to represent an entire culture. Children can compare lullabies, work songs, celebrations, rhythms or movement practices while learning that cultural forms travel, mix and acquire new meanings.

4.5 The educational task is transformation from exposure into participation

The strongest implication of the synthesis is that early-childhood education should not attempt either to exclude children's digital musical references or to reproduce platform consumption in the classroom. Its distinctive contribution is pedagogical transformation. A brief digital sound can be slowed down, sung, played on instruments, represented graphically, moved to, compared with another repertoire or used as material for collective improvisation.

Experiential music pedagogies offer concrete means for this transformation. Orff-inspired work can turn a loop into layered speech, body percussion and instrumental ostinati. Dalcroze-inspired activity can explore pulse, phrase, space and interruption through movement. Kodály-informed practice can reconnect a fragment with sustained singing, pitch relationships and musical memory. These applications should remain flexible and culturally responsive rather than treating any method as universally neutral. The teacher's role is thus both musical and media-critical. Teachers need to evaluate the provenance and suitability of content, recognise platform-mediated references children bring to class, and design transitions from viewing to doing. They also need confidence

in discussing copyright, representation, stereotypes, commercial influence and privacy at a developmentally appropriate level. Xie et al. (2025) identify professional preparedness and content quality as central concerns in digital music integration.

4.6 Evidential boundaries and limitations

The review identifies a substantial research gap rather than a settled account of TikTok's effects on preschool music socialisation. Direct observational or longitudinal studies are scarce. Much of the platform literature concerns older autonomous users, whereas preschool exposure is often indirect. Broader research involving 560 preschool children has reported associations between longer media exposure and behavioural difficulties (Zoromba et al., 2023). These findings do not concern musical content specifically and cannot establish causality, but they reinforce the importance of examining duration, context, displacement of caregiver-child interaction and the quality of adult mediation. The reviewed sources vary widely in methods and cultural contexts, preventing statistical synthesis or causal inference.

The narrative design entails further limitations. Although searches covered several major databases and were updated to August 2026, the review was restricted to English- and Greek-language sources and was not designed as an exhaustive systematic review. Interpretive thematic synthesis involves researcher judgement. Rapid changes in platforms, recommendation systems and family practices may also limit the future applicability of specific observations.

These limitations do not invalidate the hybrid-ecology framework, but they establish its status: it is an interpretive model to guide inquiry and pedagogy, not a tested causal model. Future studies should examine children's actual musical actions around digital content rather than relying only on adult reports or measures of generic screen exposure.

5. Recommendations

Early-childhood settings should retain live, embodied and collective music-making as the centre of provision. Singing, movement, instrumental exploration, improvisation and musical play offer forms of reciprocal attention and social coordination that a stream of content cannot provide. This priority does not require digital abstinence. It requires that technology serve musical and relational purposes.

Educators can use a simple sequence when digital musical material enters the classroom: identify, contextualise, transform, create and reflect. First, identify the sound and how children encountered it. Second, investigate its source, language, cultural context and suitability. Third, transform it through voice, movement, instruments or visual representation. Fourth, create a collective variation or response. Finally, reflect through age-appropriate questions about similarities, feelings, choices and the people connected with the music.

Teacher-education programmes should integrate early-childhood music pedagogy with digital and cultural mediation. Required competences include evaluating audiovisual content, understanding the basic operation of recommendation systems, designing active multimodal tasks, safeguarding privacy, recognising commercial influence and engaging respectfully with living heritage. Training should move beyond technical competence toward pedagogical judgement.

Family-school-community cooperation should be strengthened. Families can contribute songs, stories, recordings and knowledge of musical occasions. Schools can provide non-judgemental guidance on co-use and on turning familiar digital sounds into singing, movement and conversation. Community musicians and heritage practitioners can help children encounter music as lived practice, while digital recording can support documentation when consent and cultural ownership are respected.

Curricula should address digital musical culture explicitly rather than referring only to generic technology use. Guidance should emphasise developmentally appropriate duration, high-quality and culturally inclusive content, adult mediation and continuity with physical play. It should also protect children's right to encounter multiple repertoires rather than only those made highly visible by commercial platforms.

Future empirical research should:

- 1) observe how preschool children reproduce and transform platform-circulated sounds at home and in educational settings;
- 2) distinguish indirect exposure from independent platform use;
- 3) examine how content, context, co-use and displacement influence musical participation;
- 4) compare family mediation across socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural contexts;
- 5) investigate classroom interventions that connect short-form digital music with sustained singing, movement and creation;
- 6) use longitudinal and participatory methods capable of representing children's own actions and meanings.

Research ethics requires particular care because the topic involves young children and commercial platforms. Studies should minimise the collection of identifiable digital traces, secure meaningful parental consent and child assent, and avoid reproducing harmful or copyrighted platform content unnecessarily.

6. Conclusion

This critical narrative review examined preschool musical socialisation at the intersection of digital culture, family life, educational practice and living musical heritage. Its central conclusion is that these domains can no longer be understood as separate environments. Preschool children encounter music within a hybrid ecology in which platform-circulated sounds move through households, peer and sibling relationships, classrooms and community settings, while songs associated with family and cultural heritage may themselves be recorded, shared, adapted and recirculated digitally. The educational issue

is therefore not whether tradition or technology should prevail, but how different modes of musical participation are selected, mediated and transformed in children's everyday lives.

In answer to the first research question, the literature conceptualises the influence of digital and short-form audiovisual media primarily through their affordances and conditions of circulation rather than through demonstrated causal effects on preschool development. Short-form platforms intensify brevity, repetition, audiovisual coupling, imitation, sound reuse and algorithmically organised visibility. These characteristics can make musical fragments memorable and invite movement, vocalisation or creative imitation; they can also encourage rapid shifts of attention, commercially patterned repetition and the repeated visibility of already dominant repertoires. However, direct preschool-specific evidence remains limited. The available scholarship does not justify treating TikTok as intrinsically beneficial or harmful, nor does it establish that exposure by itself diminishes attention, creativity or interest in traditional song. Its influence is contingent upon content, duration, context, displacement of other activity and, above all, the quality of adult and educational mediation.

Regarding the second research question, digitally mediated musical experiences differ from family-, school- and community-based transmission in the organisation of agency, embodiment, attention and cultural authority. Traditional and intergenerational practices are commonly sustained through co-presence, shared timing, bodily coordination, narrative context and repetition with interpersonal variation. Platform-mediated practices make music portable, rapidly reproducible and open to audiovisual imitation, remixing and translocal circulation, while recommendation systems assume part of the selective role formerly exercised mainly by families, educators and communities. These modes nevertheless interact rather than simply compete. A digital excerpt can enter singing, movement, instrumental exploration or pretend play; a family song can acquire new meanings through recording, comparison or creative digital representation. The decisive distinction is therefore not between "real" and "digital" music, but between passive, decontextualised exposure and participation that becomes relational, embodied, culturally situated and creatively appropriated.

In response to the third research question, culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate music education should operate as an active mediating environment. Educators need neither exclude children's contemporary digital references nor allow platform logics to determine the curriculum. They can select age-appropriate material, invite children to reproduce and transform sounds through voice, movement, instruments, drawing and storytelling, compare platform-circulated versions with family and community repertoires, and ask whose music is represented, repeated or absent. Live and collective music-making should remain central because it provides reciprocal attention, synchronisation, turn-taking and shared meaning that cannot be assumed from screen exposure alone. At the same time, collaboration with families can connect classroom practice with children's varied cultural histories and support forms of mediation based on co-use, dialogue and creation rather than restriction alone. Such work

also requires teacher education that joins digital competence with musical, developmental, intercultural and critical pedagogical judgement.

The review's principal theoretical contribution is the proposed concept of a hybrid ecology of musical socialisation. The model resists both technological determinism and the romanticisation of heritage. It treats children as active but relational agents whose possibilities are structured by adults, institutions, devices, commercial infrastructures and unequal access to cultural resources. It also redefines safeguarding: living musical heritage is not preserved by insulating it from contemporary culture, but by enabling children and communities to sing, remember, question, adapt and recreate it. Conversely, digital musical culture becomes educationally valuable not through novelty or access alone, but when it is redirected towards sustained attention, bodily participation, creative agency, cultural dialogue and belonging.

These conclusions must remain proportionate to the evidence. The review was purposive and interpretive rather than systematic, did not maintain a reproducible database search log, and brought together studies with different populations, methods and evidential strength. Research on TikTok frequently concerns adolescents or adults, while the small body of preschool-related work is often cross-sectional, adult-reported or context-specific. Future studies should therefore examine preschool children's actual encounters with platform-circulated music through developmentally appropriate observation, family diaries, interviews, digital ethnography and participatory or classroom-based designs. Longitudinal and cross-cultural research is particularly needed to explore how duration and mode of exposure, adult co-participation, socioeconomic conditions, platform recommendation and links with embodied music-making influence attention, creativity, musical preference, cultural memory and participation over time.

Ultimately, the future of early-childhood musical socialisation should not be framed as a choice between inherited songs and emerging platforms. The more constructive task is to build educational and family environments in which digital access does not displace relationship, movement, play or cultural memory, and in which musical heritage remains open to plurality, reinterpretation and children's own creative voices. Within such environments, early-childhood music education can serve as a bridge between continuity and change, supporting children not merely as consumers of circulating sounds but as embodied participants, cultural interpreters and makers of musical meaning.

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Ioanna Niti contributed to the initial conceptualisation, literature identification and preparation of the first draft. Maria Argyriou contributed to the conceptual framework, methodological design, critical synthesis, supervision and substantive revision. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Ethics Statement

This study analysed published literature and did not involve human participants, personal data or intervention procedures. Institutional ethical approval and informed consent were therefore not required.

Data Availability Statement

No new empirical data were generated. All sources included in the synthesis are identified in the reference list.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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