

Orientation and vocational maturity in music conservatory students

Oscar Davila-MariñoDepartamento Viento Metal. Conservatorio Profesional de Música, Vigo (España)  **María-Carmen Rico**Departamento de Didáctica, Organización Escolar y Métodos de Investigación. Universidad de Vigo (España)  <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/reciem.95904>

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ENG Abstract: Professional music conservatory students' orientation and vocational maturity have been little studied. Therefore, this work aims to analyse the available orientation and the vocational maturity students develop. This research used a quantitative (descriptive-correlational) and cross-sectional design through questionnaires. The sample comprised 252 students from the last years of the professional Music degree and teachers from the province of Pontevedra. Results and conclusions reveal deficiencies in schools' vocational orientation for higher education and the decision-making process as well as professional information. Furthermore, some shortcomings of the incorporation of orientation activities in the annual planning are highlighted. Regarding music conservatory students' vocational maturity, some music-related professions are not well known, limiting their career choices. Considering gender, there are significant differences in self-knowledge and the self-efficacy dimension of vocational maturity, with male students' average slightly higher than females'. Likewise, this work shows that the decision-making dimension is significantly higher among students whose parents have music-associated professions, and the dimension related to information about studies and professions is more extensive among students who have already chosen their future training or profession.

Keywords: vocational orientation; vocational maturity; music education; educational centre; conservatory.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Legislative approach. 3. Method. 4. Results. 5. Discussion and conclusions. 6. Limitations and future perspectives. 7. Acknowledgements and conflict of interest. 8. References.

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1. Introduction

Vocational orientation is a process of helping people in training to improve their choice, decision-making and future career development with the necessary support. It should involve professional counsellors and other related professionals, fostering students' self-knowledge and providing them with academic and professional information for the process of choice or decision-making (Álvarez González & Isús, 2011). In this line, vocational orientation aims to achieve deep personal self-knowledge, facilitate academic and professional information, and prepare action plans for decision-making (Álvarez González & Bisquerra, 2012).

As one of the objectives of vocational orientation is to help people become aware of their possibilities and limitations to facilitate academic or professional decisions in critical periods, it should be considered a formative process or part of it. In the field of music and the current context, while contemplating the traditional outlets, there is a need for training that orients towards new employment niches, such as those related to the multimedia industry or others associated with the digitalisation of music. In addition, conservatories should embrace the music-related professions that have emerged in recent years and promote projects related to other professional or artistic fields. All of this will help students to discover emerging job opportunities that respond to and anticipate the needs of society.

Scientific advances and technological applications, among other things, have led to changes in a dynamic world of work, which means that people are constantly challenged to meet today's demands (Cárdenas, 2017). For more than a decade, vocational orientation, as a participant in change, has evolved from a one-off intervention in vocational decision-making to a systematic support process for training and career development. (Álvarez González & Bisquerra, 2012). It is one more factor in the quality of education, which

should favour students' self-knowledge and personal maturity to make the best decisions for their future careers (Jiménez & Ruiz, 2019; Yalandá & Trujillo, 2021).

Professionals, students and educational centres should have the tools to adapt to the new times, and the world of music is no stranger to these changes and demands. One of the challenges facing music education is opening up a wide range of employment possibilities, including future professions that are still emerging. To achieve this, students must participate in career development programmes that enable them to interact with the world of work before they enter it (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2021). Furthermore, students' involvement in vocational orientation programmes will develop their motivation and interest in their chosen profession, improving academic performance and personal well-being through confidence in their choice (Quiroga-Garza *et al.*, 2020). The functions of active job search orientation should be implemented in the fields of education and training, focusing on self-knowledge and providing information to students in higher education and professions (Ríos de Deus *et al.*, 2020). In addition, promoting social values and awareness of equal opportunities would strengthen students' attitudinal development in a competitive labour market. Likewise, the search for collaborative synergies between the subject, education, the labour market and the social context should be promoted.

Vocational maturity refers to knowing an individual's career development and proposing improvement programmes to help them adjust and delimit their lives. It can be defined as the behaviours revealed when performing different career development tasks in each life stage (Álvarez González, 2011). Vocational orientation should focus on developing students' vocational maturity as a determining factor in academic performance, enabling them to make wise and autonomous choices about higher education or their future profession. Some authors maintain that vocational maturity is the degree to which students base their decisions on the information they have about different academic and professional alternatives, prior knowledge of their values, goals, interests, abilities and socio-personal reasons (Lucas & Carbonero 2002). In the decision-making process, different concepts are fundamental in determining the career path, such as self-concept (which concerns abilities, values, skills and interests) and knowledge of studies and professions (Álvarez-Justel & Ruiz-Bueno, 2021), as well as self-efficacy and confidence in academic and professional projects (Qonitatin & Ratna, 2021; Rodrigo Fernández, 2021). Self-efficacy is crucial for the orientation and development of learning and for observing the evolution of academic performance in stressful situations or when adapting to new training contexts (Chávez, 2022; Freire & Ferradás, 2020). To prevent conservatory students from choosing a musical profession mainly or solely for economic reasons, it is important to address their vocational maturity (García Celdrán, 2021). Therefore, information on career opportunities linked to music and planning for career development is essential (Ponce de León & Lago, 2012).

At present, professional music conservatories in Spain lack counselling departments and professional counsellors. There are some exceptions: in centres of the Community of Madrid that request them, and in the Community of Andalusia, although the counselling department is managed by the teaching staff. Several initiatives have emerged in response to this lack, such as creating optional subjects to raise awareness of career opportunities in the musical environment or implementing orientation programmes with activities included in the curriculum to facilitate vocational maturity (Zarzo, 2014). In recent decades, various studies have called for the incorporation of psycho-pedagogical content and advice in music education through the intervention of counselling departments with professionals mainly from the fields of psychology and pedagogy (Álvarez González, 2008; Fernández-Morante *et al.*, 2021; Tornero & Villagar, 2014; Zarzo, 2014). The availability of interdisciplinary teams, including a music teacher, may be the most appropriate option.

Considering the generalised precariousness of orientation in Spanish education, both in the professional and higher levels of music, this study aims to analyse the vocational orientation and maturity of the students of professional music conservatories from the viewpoint of the teaching staff and the students. Associated with this objective, the following hypotheses (H) were formulated:

- H1. Students and teachers have different views on the vocational orientation offered in the conservatories considered in the study.
- H2. The students' vocational maturity is related to self-knowledge/self-efficacy, information about studies and professions and their decision-making.
- H3. The self-knowledge/self-efficacy of students' vocational maturity differs according to gender.
- H4. The students of the professional conservatory whose parents have professions related to music have a higher vocational maturity.

2. Legislative approach

Firstly, the *Organic Law of Education 2/2006, of May 3* (commonly known as *LOE*), established in Article 45 the objective of providing students with quality artistic training that guarantees the preparation of future music professionals, among other arts. Subsequently, the *Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality 3/2020, of December 29* (commonly known as *LOMCE*), amended the previous law, introducing changes in the field of music. Among its new features, it regulates the new Spanish Baccalaureate in Arts for students who simultaneously study professional music education and common subjects in the Spanish Baccalaureate; it recovers the name of the Professional Degree of the corresponding education (formerly Technician's Degree); and in its ninth additional provision, it proposes including professional artistic education in the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications within two years.

Currently, in Spain, regulated studies lead to an official degree and are studied in public or private conservatories. These courses are structured in three grades: elementary (4 years), professional (6 years) and

higher (4 years). The last degree leads to the Bachelor's Degree in Higher Artistic Education in Music, which is academically equivalent to the Bachelor's Degree. The elementary and professional degrees are taught in professional music conservatories and authorised professional degree centres. In contrast, the higher degree is offered in higher music conservatories and authorised higher degree centres.

The characteristics of specialised music training from an early age and its compatibility with general education require students to make a considerable effort over time. This effort must be accompanied by quality educational orientation to help them manage its complexity. In general, non-specialised orientation in these studies is developed through the tutorial function involving the entire conservatory's teaching staff. It differs from that applied in primary and secondary education in that it does not offer professionalised orientation supported by a specific counselling department under the direction of an educational counsellor. All this shows that the particularities of musical education and centres, which are very different from those of the general system, are not sufficiently considered. Professional counsellors in these same compulsory schools suffer from an overload of demands. This could help us understand the urgency of institutionalising professional orientation in conservatories.

Exceptionally, the Autonomous Communities of Madrid and Andalusia have incorporated counselling departments in professional music conservatories. In the Autonomous Community of Madrid, the *Instructions of 18 February 2021, from the Directorate-General for Secondary Education, Vocational Training, and Special Regime Education*, established that these centres may create counselling departments with the prior authorisation of the educational administration and provide them with teachers from the secondary education teaching staff specialising in educational orientation, acting as department directors, as well as with the support of professionals from the music and performing arts teaching staff. The configuration differs in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia. The *Decree 361/2011, of 7 December, on the Organic Regulations of Elementary and Professional Music Conservatories of Andalucía* (Article 76), indicated that the Department of Orientation, Training, Evaluation and Educational Innovation should comprise several professionals appointed by the management, with one teacher as head of department and four as support, from different teaching departments. This reflects the continuing absence of specialised professional counselling. As a result, students and teachers are exposed to extended attributions of the 'tutorial function', facing problems that clearly exceed their competences.

3. Method

This research was conducted with a non-experimental quantitative (descriptive-correlational) cross-sectional design through surveys.

3.1. Instruments

The design of the questionnaires, aimed at music students and teachers in the schools described in the following section, was based on the scientific literature. Different dimensions/sections were considered in their development, and the distribution of the items was based on the following aspects:

- Vocational orientation offered by the conservatory to improve students' vocational maturity adapted three closed Likert-scale items (five options), based on Ponce de León (2009), targeting students and teachers. In the teachers' questionnaire, a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .907 was obtained in this study. In the case of students, the coefficient was .812.
- Characteristics of the vocational orientation provided by teachers in the questionnaire for teachers, also based on Ponce de León (2009), with thirteen items related to orientation planning, student self-knowledge, career information and vocational decision-making. The Cronbach's alpha score obtained in the present study was .753.
- Vocational maturity of the students, with a questionnaire based on Ponce de León and Lago (2012). Questions related to self-knowledge (abilities, values, interests and strengths), and academic and professional information associated with music and decision-making (alternatives, advantages, disadvantages and people consulted) were adapted. Several items of Lucas and Carbonero's (2002) questionnaire were adapted to assess self-efficacy, confidence in decisions about their academic and professional project, considering their social conditioning factors (self-confidence, the influence of parents and friends) and the reasons for the vocational decision about studies or professions linked to music. The final questionnaire comprised 43 Likert-type scale items (five options). For the present study, a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .861 was obtained.

Following the García-López and Cabero (2011), the questionnaires addressed to teachers and students were validated by expert judgement.

3.2. Participants, procedure and data analyses

The study involved 252 students and teachers from the nine professional music conservatories in the province of Pontevedra that offer regulated education. Specifically, the centres in the cities of Vigo and Pontevedra, which are autonomously owned and depend on the Department of Education of the Autonomous Community of Galicia, and the municipal centres from the following towns were involved: Redondela, Cangas, Vilagarcía de Arousa, Ponteareas, A Estrada, Tui and Lalín. Of these, out of a population of 260 students, 131 were involved (i.e., 50.4%). Likewise, out of a population of 227 teachers, 121 (i.e., 53.3%) collaborated in the study. This is a representative sample of the population, with a confidence level of 95% (Vallejo, 2012). The

participating students were in the final years of their professional degree (5th and 6th years), 73 males and 58 females, aged between 15 and 51, with a mean age of 19.18. This group had spent more than one year at the conservatory, which gave them insight into the existing orientation and tutoring. The participating teachers had more than one year's experience in teaching, 78 males and 42 females, aged between 20 and 65 ($M = 41.24$, $SD = 8.23$).

Data were collected, with the prior authorisation of the management teams of the Music Conservatories, through the participants' voluntary completion of the questionnaires, individually, anonymously and on paper. This research followed the ethical standards of the Helsinki Declaration. The project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Doctoral Programme in Education and Behavioural Sciences of the University of Vigo (Cod.: CE-DCEC-UVIGO-2018-04-10-0918).

The SPSS software (version 20) was used for the statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics and correlations between different variables were analysed. In the respective analyses, the value (n) varied slightly depending on the number of missing cases in the items used and the number of teachers providing orientation to students. A statistical significance level of $p < .05$ was considered for the tests

4. Results

Considering the general objective of this study, the results obtained are presented in two sub-sections.

4.1. Descriptive analyses: orientation and vocational maturity

The descriptive analyses revealed some deficiencies in the vocational orientation offered by the professional conservatories to the students. The shortcomings are linked, to a large extent (on a scale of ranks) and by both groups, to the information provided in the conservatories about music-related studies and professions, as well as to information to support students' decision-making (in terms of professional future) (Table 1).

Table 1. Support and information provided for vocational orientation

Items	Teachers	Students	Total
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
1. Support provided by the conservatory to improve pupils' self-knowledge.	2.92 (1.19)	3.30 (1.11)	3.11 (1.15)
2. Information provided by the conservatory about higher studies and professions related to music.	3.18 (1.12)	2.79 (1.09)	2.98 (1.10)
3. Information provided by the conservatory to make decisions about the academic and professional future.	2.92 (1.11)	2.83 (1.06)	2.87 (1.08)

Legend: M = Mean; SD : Standard Deviation

As reflected in Table 2, the results of the dimension of the characteristics of the vocational orientation provided by teachers also revealed some shortcomings, such as the incorporation of the planning of orientation activities in the Annual Teaching Plan ($M = 2.02$); and, in general, the systematisation of these activities ($M = 2.73$). More positive results were obtained in the items related to promoting students' self-knowledge in terms of their abilities, strengths and weaknesses ($M = 4.51$), as well as information concerning studies and professions associated with music, such as how to approach higher education institutions and their teaching staff ($M = 4.01$). Results regarding support for students' vocational decision-making about their academic and professional future ($M = 3.98$) were also positive. In addition, the positive view ($M = 3.83$) of the role played by parents in professional orientation is also noteworthy.

Table 2. Characteristics of vocational orientation provided by teachers

Items	M (SD)
1. Teachers instruct pupils to better understand their abilities, strengths and weaknesses.	4.51 (0.63)
2. When deciding their academic and professional future, teachers inform and make pupils evaluate the different alternatives, their consequences, advantages and disadvantages.	4.36 (0.83)
3. Teachers teach to assess and know what studies are necessary to exercise the different professions related to their subject.	4.34 (0.85)
4. Teachers teach students to better understand their values and interests in terms of their professional priorities.	4.25 (0.81)
5. Teachers make known and provide information about higher education institutions and their teaching staff.	4.01 (0.94)
6. Teachers make known and provide information about professions related to their subject.	4.04 (0.94)
7. The teaching staff teaches students how to make decisions related to their academic and professional future.	3.98 (0.96)
8. Parents and legal guardians play a fundamental role in vocational orientation.	3.83 (1.10)

9. The teaching staff teaches them to value and know the necessary studies to be able to exercise the different professions not related to their subject (different itineraries and specialities).	3.58 (1.13)
10. Teachers make known and provide information about professions not related to their subject.	3.12 (1.09)
11. Orientation is only for students who request it or who show interest in the professional world and higher studies in music.	2.92 (1.38)
12. Vocational orientation activities are planned actions, not improvised or intuitive.	2.73 (1.35)
13. The planning of orientation activities is included in the Annual Teaching Plan.	2.02 (1.19)

Legend: M = Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

In general, the results on vocational maturity (Table 3) in terms of students' self-knowledge and self-efficacy were acceptable ($M = 3.74$). The overall result of students' information about studies and professions was also acceptable, although somewhat lower than the former ($M = 3.17$). The degree of knowledge about music-related professions showed that aspects related to performance, teaching and composition were the best known; for example, being a member of an orchestra ($M = 4.33$), a conservatory or music school teacher ($M = 4.18$) or a composer ($M = 3.31$). Aspects less well-known by students included those linked to medicine or therapy, such as a music therapist ($M = 2.00$) or a therapist specialising in the problems of music professionals ($M = 1.96$), as well as those associated with music management, such as a music producer ($M = 2.31$), an artistic representative ($M = 2.05$) or an orchestra manager ($M = 1.83$).

The dimension of decision-making showed the importance of considering different alternatives when choosing the academic or professional future ($M = 4.51$). In addition, parents were the people that students consulted the most when deciding on their vocational choice ($M = 4.26$), and those least consulted were the teaching staff ($M = 2.97$).

Table 3. Self-awareness/efficacy, information about studies/professions and student decision-making

Dimensions	Items	M (SD)
Self-awareness/efficacy	1. Are you aware of the subjects in which you have shown the greatest ability at the conservatory?	4.15 (0.98)
	2. Have you defined your professional priorities, including the values and interests you would like to achieve by pursuing a profession in the future?	4.03 (0.95)
	3. Do you consider that you know yourself well, including your strengths and weaknesses?	3.94 (0.87)
	4. Do you consider that you have a good understanding of the topics that interest you most, both within and outside the academic environment?	4.12 (0.91)
	5. When making decisions as important as your future studies or profession: 5.1. I trust myself to succeed.	3.78 (1.12)
	5.2. My parents do not impose their opinions on me.	4.29 (1.03)
	5.3. I have sufficient self-confidence.	3.60 (1.26)
	5.4. I have confidence, even if I do not receive support from my parents or friends.	3.45 (1.03)
	5.5. I am clear about what I can, should, and want to do.	2.57 (1.43)
	5.6. I do not delay the decision, even though it may be uncomfortable for me.	3.55 (1.31)
Overall		3.74 (1.09)

Dimensions	Items	M (SD)
Information about studies/professions	6. Degree of knowledge of professions related to music:	
	6.1. Member of an orchestra, choir, or chamber ensemble.	4.33 (0.92)
	6.2. Conservatory or music school teacher.	4.18 (0.86)
	6.3. Solo performer.	4.15 (1.00)
	6.4. Music teacher in a primary or secondary school.	3.98 (1.05)
	6.5. Private tutor.	3.91 (1.09)
	6.6. Choir, orchestra, or band conductor.	3.35 (1.18)
	6.7. Composer.	3.31 (1.12)
	6.8. Musicologist / Researcher / Music historian.	2.76 (1.14)
	6.9. Arranger.	2.56 (1.20)
	6.10. Music critic.	2.51 (1.08)
	6.11. Sound technician.	2.49 (1.23)
	6.12. Tuner / Instrument builder / Instrument repairer.	2.47 (1.13)
	6.13. Presenter of music programmes.	2.47 (1.15)
	6.14. Music producer.	2.31 (1.16)
	6.15. Artistic director of an opera house or orchestra.	2.28 (1.17)
	6.16. Music librarian / Archivist / Documentalist.	2.26 (1.15)
	6.17. Editor.	2.22 (1.14)
	6.18. Disc jockey (DJ).	2.17 (1.26)
	6.19. Disc jockey.	2.05 (1.06)
	6.20. Music therapist.	2.00 (1.10)
	6.21. Therapist specialising in musician-related issues.	1.96 (1.11)
	6.22. Scriptwriter and presenter of educational concerts.	1.86 (0.96)
	6.23. Orchestra manager.	1.83 (0.97)
	7. Are you familiar with the necessary studies to pursue various professions in the music industry?	3.57 (1.10)
	8. Do you know where and how to obtain information related to music professions and education?	3.53 (1.22)
	9. Do you have information about what is required and how to access higher education, as well as the characteristics of the different specialisations available?	3.27 (1.50)
	10. Are you aware of the characteristics (tasks and responsibilities) of the various music-related professions and the advantages and disadvantages they might present for you?	3.37 (1.11)
	11. Do you know which profession or studies you wish to pursue after completing your professional degree?	4.02 (1.18)
	Overall	3.17 (0.71)
Decision-making	12. When making a decision, such as one related to your academic and professional future, do you consider it important to take into account the possible alternatives, as well as their advantages and disadvantages?	4.51 (0.75)
	13. When dealing with such an important issue as the choice of your academic or professional future in music, I usually discuss it with:	
	13.1. Parents.	4.26 (1.07)
	13.2. Teachers.	2.97 (1.14)
	13.3. Higher education students.	3.16 (1.25)
	13.4. Professionals working in the field I am interested in.	3.71 (1.15)
	Overall	3.72 (1.07)

Legend: M = Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

4.2. Contrast analyses: orientation and vocational maturity

In the correlation analyses, the T-test showed that the vocational orientation offered by the conservatories does not differ according to gender in any of the items (on a 5-option scale) of this dimension (Table 4).

When considering the group (teachers and students), significant differences were found concerning the help provided by the conservatory to improve the students' self-knowledge ($p = 0.01$). A similar result was observed between these two groups concerning the information offered by the centres about higher studies and professions related to music ($p = .01$).

There were no significant group differences in the information provided by the conservatories for decision-making about the academic and professional future (teachers and students).

Table 4. Gender and group-based vocational orientation

Items	M	F	t	df	p	Teac	Stud	t	df	p
	M	M				M	M			
1. Support provided by the conservatory to improve pupils' self-knowledge.	3.1	3.1	-.05	240	.95	2.9	3.3	-.256	241	.01
2. Information provided by the conservatory about higher studies and professions related to music.	2.9	2.9	-.04	238	.97	3.2	2.8	2.72	239	.01
3. Information provided by the conservatory to make decisions about the academic and professional future.	2.9	2.9	-.23	239	.81	2.9	2.8	.69	240	.49

Legend: M = Mean; t= Statistical value; df = degrees of freedom; p= Bilateral significance

The students' vocational maturity according to gender showed similar values, except for the dimension of self-knowledge/self-efficacy (Table 5). This significant difference ($p = 0.03$) results from males' slightly higher mean than female's (M = 3.88; F = 3.62).

In terms of age, the vocational maturity of students aged 18 to 20 was higher than that of younger students (15 to 17 years), except for the decision-making dimension. However, in neither case were the differences significant. Consistent with the above, depending on the school grade, vocational maturity was higher among students in the 6th grade of the vocational degree, except for the decision-making dimension, which showed slightly higher scores in 5th-year students than in 6th-year students (M 5th = 3.77; M 6th = 3.65), although the differences were nonsignificant.

Table 5. Contrast between dimensions and gender, age and grade variables

Dimensions	M	F	t	df	p	15-17	18-20	t	df	p	5 th	6 th	t	df	p
	M	M				M	M				M	M			
	1. Self-knowledge/self-efficacy.	3.88	3.62	2.22	105	.03	3.68	3.70	-.24	87	.82	3.70	3.81	-.95	105
2. Information on studies and professions.	3.16	3.15	.73	123	.94	3.13	3.19	-.50	99	.61	3.09	3.23	-.41	123	.16
3. Decision-making.	3.70	3.73	-.30	120	.76	3.77	3.60	1.51	98	.13	3.77	3.65	1.13	120	.25

Legend: M = Mean; t= Statistical value; df = degrees of freedom; p = Bilateral significance

Considering another group of variables (Table 6), students whose parents had music-related professions showed greater vocational maturity in self-knowledge/self-efficacy and decision-making. However, significant differences were only found in the latter ($p = 0.04$). In the dimension concerning providing students with information about studies and professions, the mean was slightly higher--albeit nonsignificant-- when the parents were not music professionals (M = 3.18). Greater vocational maturity was detected in students who had already chosen studies or a future profession, with significant differences ($p = .03$) in the dimension of information on studies and professions (M yes = 3.24; M no = 3.00).

Table 6. Vocational maturity, with attention to parents who are music professionals and pupils who have already chosen higher education or profession

Dimensions	Parents		t	df	p	Choice made		t	df	p
	Yes	No				Yes	No			
	M	M				M	M			
	1. Self-knowledge/self-efficacy.	3.83	3.73	.59	105	.55	3.86	3.65	1.60	96
2. Information on studies and professions.	3.01	3.18	-.16	123	.24	3.24	3.00	2.17	114	.03
3. Decision-making.	3.95	3.67	1.98	120	.04	3.77	3.65	1.15	111	.25

Legend: M = Mean; t= Statistical value; df = degrees of freedom; p = Bilateral significance

Significant positive correlations were found in vocational maturity (Table 7) between the dimensions of self-knowledge/self-efficacy and information about studies and professions (.434, $p < .05$). There was also a significant positive correlation (.203, $p < .01$) between the dimensions of decision-making and information about studies and professions. Although the correlation between self-knowledge/self-efficacy and decision-making was positive, it did not reach significance (.190, $p = .051$).

Table 7. Correlations between dimensions of vocational maturity

Dimensions	1. Self-knowledge/self-efficacy.	2. Information on studies and professions.	3. Decision-making.
1. Self-knowledge/self-efficacy.	1		
2. Information on studies and professions.	.434**	1	
3. Decision-making.	.190	.203*	1

Legend: * $p < .01$; ** $p < .05$

5. Discussion and conclusions

There is room for improvement in the vocational orientation offered by professional music conservatories. Specifically, shortcomings were detected in the information provided by conservatories on higher studies and professions, as well as in students' information for decision-making, whereas only the teachers help the students to get to know themselves better. Similar results have been presented by Ponce de León and Lago (2012), although they differ in the teachers' evaluations of the information provided by the centre on studies and professions, reflecting shortcomings.

Based on the results, Hypothesis 1, predicting differences between teachers and students on the vocational orientation offered by the conservatory, is partially accepted. In this sense, significant differences were found in the help provided by the conservatory to improve students' self-knowledge, and the information offered by the conservatory about higher studies and professions related to music. However, no significant differences were found in the information provided by the conservatory for making decisions about academic and professional future. Ponce de León and Lago (2012) and, subsequently, Bellver (2017) found deficiencies in the vocational orientation offered by the conservatories. In fact, Bellver acknowledged that although the incorporation of counselling departments in the Community of Madrid is a step forward, its regulations are controversial and have not obtained the expected results. Therefore, in more than a decade, no progress seems to have been made in this respect. Along the same lines, Pereira González *et al.* (2019) concluded that it is important to address career opportunities and improve students' self-knowledge so they can make appropriate vocational choices. It is difficult to understand why the educational administration has neglected vocational orientation in conservatories. It is reasonable to expect future initiatives and modifications to proceed from this body to incorporate new measures that guarantee the professionalisation of educational orientation in music conservatories.

In view of this study, the teaching staff should at least incorporate tutorial activities and orientational functions to promote students' better self-knowledge (strengths and weaknesses, professional priorities, skills and interests inside and outside the world of music), providing them with more information on higher education (centres, requirements for access or itineraries), and a wide range of music-related professions, beyond teaching and performance (Belver, 2017; Querol, 2017). Teachers should incorporate strategies to awaken students' creativity and promote the development of critical and reflective thinking that will help them solve problems to secure their future (Capistrán, 2021). For the improvement of orientation, the creation of a subject aimed at 'job shadowing' to connect with students' vocational orientation is worth highlighting, as it would promote their motivation during the training process (Ponce de León, 2021).

Regarding the characteristics of the orientation provided, the teachers showed a more optimistic view in aspects related to vocational maturity. However, they also revealed shortcomings in the planning of orientation activities in the Annual Teaching Plan and the implementation of the planning of their practices, showing some degree of improvisation. This situation shows the need to rethink and better structure the planning of actions associated with orientation.

Concerning vocational maturity, it is clear that some professions linked to music are little known by students. Logically, this will limit the vocational choice of students in the final years of the professional degree (i.e., on the threshold of higher education or before entering the world of work). We note that the Professional Music Degree, among other options, allows access to teaching in music schools and to the post of non-commissioned officer in the army. As indicated in the introduction, the professions most familiar to pupils are related to musical performance, teaching and composition, and the teaching staff's influence is evident. These professions are familiar to students because they are linked to several subjects studied at the conservatory (orchestra, instrument, analysis, etc.). The less familiar professions are related to medicine or therapy (music therapist) and music management (music producer, artistic representative and orchestra manager), which are not associated with the curriculum of professional music studies. In addition, there is a clear need for curricular and pedagogical renewal that integrates programmes on the development of employability within the curricula (López-Iñiguez & Bennett, 2021).

The three dimensions of vocational maturity studied (self-knowledge/self-efficacy, information on studies and professions and decision-making) show positive correlations. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is also confirmed. Thus, the dimension of studies and professional information had a significant correlation with the dimensions of self-knowledge/self-efficacy and decision-making, indicating that students with more study and career information will have more self-knowledge/self-efficacy and better decision-making ability. In this line, Geovani *et al.* (2021) stated that self-knowledge is significantly related to decision-making about the

professional future. Furthermore, they considered that career planning requires information about the world of work to cope with the choice of studies or professions. Decision-making is a process that is part of career and life-long development, which is related to self-knowledge.

In terms of gender, vocational maturity associated with information about higher education and professions or decision-making showed practically no gender differences. Concerning the component related to students' self-knowledge/self-efficacy, significant differences were found slightly in favour of male students. Hence, Hypothesis 3 is accepted. The existence of similarities and discrepancies with other studies of Secondary Education (with students of similar ages) is noteworthy. For example, López-Fernández (2017) stated that females show significantly more vocational maturity than males, whereas Guerra *et al.* (2023) found significant differences in vocational choice, with males reflecting higher autonomy than females. Indanti and Sinaga (2018) and Santana *et al.* (2013) did not observe significant differences in this respect. Rosa (2015) obtained higher values in the male students' vocational maturity, although no significant differences were detected. However, it has been concluded that gender does influence the decision-making process about future studies or careers. In any case, it should be noted that there are no differences in this respect, as both genders have the same rights of access to labour market positions; so there are no objective reasons (at least, in the music professions) to argue differences.

Regarding students' vocational maturity, no significant differences were found in this study as a function of age. However, different authors have presented controversies in their conclusions. For example, Blanco-Novoa *et al.* (2019) argued that students' vocational maturity in music does not increase with age. Considering another educational context (with a similar age), within formal education (Secondary Education), Rosa (2015) stated that the higher the level of studies, the greater the vocational maturity of the student body. In the context of the music conservatory, this research concludes similarly, as students in the 6th grade of the professional degree had greater self-knowledge/self-efficacy and information about higher studies and professions than those in the 5th grade, although the differences were nonsignificant.

The role or influence of parents is present in their children's decision-making, as it was shown that they are the most consulted group when students choose their studies and future profession. Parental influence on vocational choice and vocational maturity has also been confirmed in previous studies (Abdinoor & Ibrahim, 2019; Zafar, 2019; Suryadi *et al.*, 2020). This study shows that when parents have music-related professions, students show greater vocational maturity in self-knowledge/self-efficacy and decision-making about future studies and professions. However, significant differences were only found in the latter, partially confirming Hypothesis 4. This research shows that students who have chosen studies or their future profession have greater vocational maturity, especially regarding the information obtained, as significant differences were found.

6. Limitations and future perspective

The study has some limitations, such as the scarcity of specific bibliography on this subject, and the impossibility of including authorised private professional music schools. Also, incorporating a larger territorial sample would have reinforced the study's conclusions.

As a future perspective, we propose developing lines of research that include other Autonomous Communities. This would allow defining the needs and strengths in terms of orientation in professional music conservatories, particularly in the conservatories of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia and Madrid, which have integrated the counselling department into their organisational structure. Likewise, it is necessary to promote studies to determine whether the professions of students graduating from professional and higher conservatories have met the expectations they had when they were studying, and to investigate their level of labour market insertion. This could facilitate the compilation of a census to provide information on employability in the different specialities in the field of music.

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Óscar Davila Mariño. He has a Doctorate in Educational and Behavioral Sciences (2022) from the University of Vigo. He is a professor of horn (brass instrument) at the Vigo Professional Music Conservatory (Pontevedra). He was Director of the Vigo Municipal School of Music from 1997 to 2010. He was also a horn professor with the Vigo 430 Symphony Orchestra and the Vigo Classical Orchestra. He has participated in studies related to music education

María-Carmen Rico. She has a Doctorate in Educational Sciences (2001) from the UNED. She is an Associate Professor at the Universidade de Vigo in the Department of Didactics, School Organization, and Research Methods. She has participated in numerous projects and studies related to ICT in education, innovative methodologies, and resources, which have been published in indexed journals