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# An Overview of Music Education for Individuals with Special Needs

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## Abstract

Special education includes many disciplines due to its structure. One of these disciplines is music education. Music education is of great importance for children who need special education. Like children with normal development, children with special needs are also interested in music. Participates in music education to the extent of his/her ability. While the non-competitive structure of music education motivates the child with special needs, it also offers him/her a new way of communication. However, in order for music practices working with individuals with special needs to achieve both educational and social goals, it is closely related to the adequate equipment of the music teacher who will work with them. In this article, different studies and researches on the importance of music education of individuals with special needs and the role of music teacher in music education of individuals with special needs are analysed and various information about the literature is given.

**Keywords:** music education; special education; individual with special needs.

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## 1. Introduction

The Children with special needs are defined as children in need of special education. The physical characteristics and/or learning abilities of these children differ considerably from the norm. The level of differences determines that the child has special needs and therefore participates in special education services (Akçamete, 2023). In Turkey, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) describes an individual in need of special education as an individual who differs significantly from his/her peers in terms of individual and developmental characteristics and educational competences (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018). Children with special needs may not see, hear or learn as others perceive them (Eripek, 2013).

### 1.1. *The Classification of Children With Special Needs*

There are different approaches to classifying students with special needs. MoNE classifies individuals in need of special education as individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, physical disabilities, visual impairments, hearing impairments and special talents (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018).

### 1.2. *Education of Individuals with Special Needs*

Special education is education carried out in appropriate environments with education programmes developed to meet the educational and social needs of individuals with significant differences in terms of their individual and developmental characteristics and educational competencies compared to their peers, and with specially trained staff (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018). In the national and international framework, the concept of providing special education services as co-education and separate education is widespread. Co-education, in the form of mainstreaming or inclusion, involves students with special needs receiving education together with other students in the general education environment. Separate education, on the other hand, involves the education of students with special needs in the same environment with other students with similar needs (Atbaşı & Özdemir, 2020). Individualised education programmes and related services are necessary for children with special educational needs to benefit from the education offered to them and to meet their needs (Kargın, 2023).

### 1.3. *The Role of Music Education in Special Education*

The music education that is appropriately planned and suitable for the learning level, provides extremely positive effects on the cognitive, social, affective and psychomotor development of students with special education needs thanks to the multifaceted effects

of music. Music activities also support self-confidence, attention, language skills, perception, imagination, interests and abilities and communication skills (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2022). The benefits of music education for children can be listed as providing motivation; gaining experience in entertainment, creative expression and emotional reactions; expressing their feelings and thoughts; reducing their tensions; developing their self-esteem; increasing their self-worth; increasing their listening skills, auditory perception and attention span; supporting their language, motor, cognitive, self-care and social development areas; and providing effective and permanent learning (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2014).

The place of music lessons in inclusive education is also very important. Music activities in which children participate collectively contribute to the development of social interaction and social adaptation skills in the classroom Uçal (2020). The essence of music as an aesthetic expression is joyful, non-judgemental, non-competitive and predictable, and everyone can participate in music at their own level. Music activities can involve all children in meaningful ways when they are designed to offer a range of levels of participation. Music can involve all children as collaborators, participants and community members in many activities, from collective music-making to movement games (Humpal & Wolf, 2003).

It is known that some of the children with autism are very sensitive to music. However, it should not be forgotten that each child with special needs has different needs. Önal (2010) states that individual music education should be given to children with autism, who are among individuals with special needs, and a special music education programme should be prepared for each autistic child. Özorak (2019) concluded that children's songs can be a supportive practice in the education of children with autism who have speech disorders. The positive effects of music on speech and language in children with autism spectrum disorders have been discussed by many researchers. Some researchers argue that improvised music can improve communication skills, including speech and language use (Burić, 2018).

Music education for children with intellectual disabilities, who are among individuals with special needs, aims not to make them musicians, but to help them express themselves by developing their musical potential. Music can help them to cope with emotional difficulties. Behaviours such as insecurity, aggression, tension and fear are seen as important factors in coping with difficulties (Kınalı, 2003).

Music is an important tool that stimulates the creativity of children with intellectual disabilities. Music strengthens the ability of these children to express themselves and contributes to their development. Music education provides an environment where children with mild intellectual disabilities can both enjoy and experience an intense sense of achievement by offering different experiences. Musical activities help these children to feel freer and improve their self-confidence (Yılma Şakalar, 2022). The sense

of success achieved through music education motivates the child and improves self-confidence. This reinforces children's desire to be successful in other areas (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2014).

Bayless and Ramsey (1982) list the effects of music on students with special needs as follows: a) real pleasure and happiness, b) opportunity for self-expression and individual identity, c) potential for language development and speech intelligibility, d) developing attentive listening, e) opportunity for increased emotional stability, decreased problem behaviour, f) increased attention span, g) reduced distraction and hyperactivity, h) improvement of muscle coordination and rhythmic movement, i) reducing tensions, anxieties and immutability j) modification of unusual behaviour, k) possibility to cooperate with other people, opportunity for success (as cited in Harris, 1991).

#### *1.4. The Role of Music Education in Special Education*

Music education enables children with special needs to have different experiences, contributes to their social, physical and mental development and supports their success in other areas by increasing their self-confidence (Turan, 2006). However, many difficulties can be encountered when working with individuals with special needs. Music teachers should have sufficient equipment when working with individuals with special needs. Salmon (2000) states that the teacher's ability to observe and respond to children's immediate responses through voice, instrument or movement is as important as the teacher's ability to ensure that the tasks given during the lesson are repeated, expanded and different variations are added to them.

Music education aims to develop the musical skills of the individual to reach the highest level. This approach is also relevant in special education classes. Teachers should make plans in accordance with the individual differences and developmental levels of students and set flexible goals. In addition, music educators should offer appropriate experiences to students with learning difficulties, taking into account musical and non-musical achievements (Öner, 2014).

Adamek and Furman (2012) state that some students with autism are very good at music education and need very little adaptation to be successful in an inclusive music class, but some students with autism may need significant individualised adaptations due to severe social, communication or behavioural difficulties, i.e. each student with special needs has different characteristics, so it is extremely important for teachers to recognise the individual needs of the student.

The role of the teacher in music education to be given to individuals with special needs who are interested in music is very important. The teacher should be aware of the characteristics and needs of individuals with special needs and should be able to provide the appropriate educational environment (Varış and Hekim, 2017).

Children with special needs may have difficulty in self-confidence, eye contact, social skills, language and communication skills, following instructions, coordination skills, completing the given task individually, and waiting for a while. When planning music activities, all areas of development should be taken into consideration, and the goals should be set according to the children's developmental levels. When music is used as an effective educational tool, it supports children's language, motor, cognitive, self-care, and social development (Artan, 2001).

According to Lee (2016):

- Singing improves children's language, cognitive and social skills. While songs strengthen communication skills, they also support their ability to question-answer, interact and establish cause-effect relationships. Catchy melodies facilitate learning and motivation.
- Playing instruments develops children's gross and fine motor skills. It also helps the development of social skills through participation and co-operation.
- Movement activities benefit gross motor skills.
- Moving in music with contrasting elements helps the child to better understand these concepts by experiencing them through music.
- Listening to music can be an effective tool for developing communication skills, expressing feelings and developing a sense of rhythm.
- Musical storytelling is effective for increasing attention span.

Music teachers do not only have to focus on singing and playing instruments when working with children with special needs; dance and movement activities can also be used. These activities can be taught at all levels and with various types of music. Creativity should be encouraged in children with physical disabilities. Methods and approaches such as Dalcroze eurhythmics, Orff-Schulwerk and Kodaly can also be useful in this process (Weintraub, 1993).

## **2. Literature Review**

The effectiveness of music education on individuals with special needs is seen in the literature with different purposes of use. These can be expressed as researches in which music education is targeted and music is considered as a tool.

In the literature, among the studies examining the effectiveness of music education for individuals with special needs independent of musical goals; examples of research with effective results in developing social skills (Pektaş, 2019; Sakarkaya, Eğilmez, Engür 2018; Sağırkaya, 2014; Yılmaz, 2010), preventing problem behaviours (Berrakçay, 2008),

acquiring daily life skills (Ertekin, 2015), concept teaching (Eren, Deniz, & Düzkanar, 2013; Karşıyakalı, Deniz, & Düzkanar, 2014) can be listed.

Karşıyakalı Doğan (2020) found that social story interventions presented together with the Orff approach were effective in the ability of three children with special needs to play rhythm patterns, to play and sing a song composed of rhythm patterns they learned, and to play the rhythm patterns they learned in their own body. Öziskender Flinn (2020) found that movement and game-based music education was effective in the application of musical dynamics, body playing and singing skills of a student affected by moderate intellectual disability. Taluy (2020) states in his research that solfege, piano and basic voice training lessons given to individuals diagnosed with autism are effective in improving their musical hearing and that one-to-one, individual-specific, regular and continuous music education with children with autism will make great contributions to the socio-cultural development of these individuals. Kılıç (2019) found that the use of simultaneous prompting teaching method, one of the errorless teaching methods, together with the Orff approach was effective in teaching singing and rhythm skills using musical instruments on three students with special needs. Kaleci (2017) concluded that the musical skills of three children with special needs improved by teaching Orff instruments and providing rhythm training with these instruments. Filianou and Stamatopoulou (2013) aimed to introduce a heterogeneous group of children aged 7-10 with special needs to their bodies and how to relate to their bodies in time and space. In the results of their studies, they reported that children managed to form a group by acting in cooperation, increased the time they could wait for their turn, and decreased the behavioural problems of the teacher. They stated that music and movement education helped them to discover their bodies and at the same time offered a fun experience, they learnt different parts of their bodies and used this information in movement games with songs and music.

### **3. Results**

In order for music education to benefit individuals with special needs, it is important that music teachers working in the field should have sufficient equipment. Although the Council of Higher Education in Turkey (YÖK) has conducted studies on music education in special education in the music teaching undergraduate curriculum (YÖK, 2006, 2018), it is seen that students with special needs and therefore, for example, students who are involved in inclusion practices cannot get enough benefit from the music course (Güven, 2011). It is seen that the participants who took special education course in their undergraduate education think that this course is effective in terms of getting to know the student, classroom management and effective communication, but it is not functional in terms of creating Individual Education Programme (IEP) that should be prepared for

students with special needs, applying different methods and techniques, gaining musical behaviour and material design (Düzbastılar & Eyüboğlu, 2019).

Music lessons enable students with special needs to experience a sense of achievement and gain new identities. For example, they can be part of a group as a ‘musician’. For this reason, it is important for music teachers to receive training in special education and inclusion environments (Güven & Tufan, 2010). Türkmen (2019) states that even if teachers have difficulties from time to time, the existence of students with special needs and normally developing students together in music education is a necessary condition

#### **4. Discussion**

As seen in the literature, music education is a discipline that is effective for individuals with special needs in many aspects. The way to achieve this effectiveness is in parallel with the adequate equipment of music teachers working in the field. Bevans (1969) when working with children with special needs, it is important not to lose sight of the goals that apply to all musical steps. The degree to which these goals are achieved depends on the teacher's interaction with the child. If the teacher establishes a healthy balance between expectations and acceptance without having great expectations, it can lead to many musical ideas and creativity in the child.

In the literature, it has been observed for many years that music teachers working with inclusive students have various difficulties in their lessons (Akay, 2023; Atterbury, 1998; Gfeller, Darrow & Hedden, 1990,; Frisque, Niebur, & Humphreys, 1994; Güven,2011; Sönmez,2017; Kutlu, 2018).

For this, the task of music teacher training institutions is very important. It is obvious that the development of a comprehensive programme that includes both theoretical and practical applications related to music education for individuals with special needs is an essential need for music teachers working in this field.

#### **5. Conclusions**

Developing a comprehensive curriculum that includes both theoretical and practical applications related to music education for individuals with special needs,

A research study based on material development for teachers who will make music lessons with individuals with special needs,

In order to raise awareness of music teachers in the field, it may be recommended to work on new and original projects.

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