



## **USING MUSIC AND MUSICAL ACTIVITIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: DEVELOPMENTS IN TURKEY\***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Music, as an expressive art, plays a significant role in the lives of all children and it can be used in education to improve non-musical educational objectives as well as the musical ones. Music has also positive contributions to the development of children with special needs in terms of feeling the sense of achievement, giving self confidence, and teaching academic concepts. Enriching educational programs with music would contribute to academic, social, emotional and cognitive development of these children. This paper begins with the overview of the related literature on the effects of music and musical activities in educating children with special needs. It focuses mainly on the practices and studies in Turkey, The authors are attempted to identify the developments of using music and musical activities in education of children with special needs in Turkey.

**Keywords:** children with special needs, children with mild mental disabilities, music, musical activities, music therapy.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Music places an important part in the lives of all children. As an expressive art, music contributes to the total development of all children and can be used in education to meet non-musical educational objectives, such as improving academic, social, and/or language skills as well as the musical ones.

Music is one of the most effective and significant techniques used in education supporting all children's motor, mental, and language development. The aims of music education are related to communication, awareness, creativity and emotions (Artan & Bal, 1998). By the use of music, children's responses grow and skills like hand-eye coordination and eye-contact develop. Through music, children may enhance their self esteem, feel the sense of security and success, rely on themselves more, enhance communication, and derive a sense of pleasure (Flowers, 1984).

"Music offers every child an opportunity for fun, enjoyment and enrichment" (Zinar, 1987). It may also be used for different purposes, such as education, healing, and treatment (Artan, 1993). As in average children's development, music has also positive contributions to the development of children with special needs in terms of feeling the sense of achievement, giving self confidence, learning developmental skills, enhancing self esteem, having relaxation, and teaching academic concepts. Music is also a way to reach these children and help them to learn. Enriching educational programs with music would contribute to academic, social, emotional and cognitive development of these children.

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Zinar (1978) said that “All children have the need for expression through music, but for the handicapped child, the physical, emotional, and intellectual benefits that can be derived from music make it an essential part of classroom activities” (p. 56). Artan (2001) has listed the important topics to pay attention when music activities are integrated into educational programs of children with special needs: The problems of disabled children, aim of the activities, planning of the activities, characteristics of educator, conditions of the workplace and choosing materials.

For all children, music makes a difference if you use it in other subjects, because it makes learning easier (Zinar, 1987). In that sense, integrating music into curriculum appears to be important and this is also not different for the children with special needs. Only, the activities and the materials may be adapted in some way to enable children with special needs to participate and succeed. Some special materials and activities may also need to be developed to achieve desired goals. Artan (2001) reported that “Music programs for disabled children should comprise of voice listening and recognizing, singing, rhythm, creative movement and dance and musical stories. ...musical programs designed to appropriate criteria will provide countless benefits for disabled children” (p. 43-44).

Looking at the studies that focusing on the use of music and musical activities in Turkey; although there found limited number of studies about using musical activities in educating children with special needs reported in Turkey in 1990's, a rapid increase was observed in the interest of people studying the impact of music and musical activities for children with special needs.

From 1990's to present, it has been observed that there is increased number of studies conducted contributing to the related literature mostly in the form of theses and dissertations and there are several articles and non-academic contributions to this field.

This paper begins with the overview of the related literature on the effects of music and musical activities in educating children with special needs in 1990's and in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. . It focuses mainly on the practices and studies in Turkey. The authors are attempted to identify the developments of using music and musical activities in education of children with special needs in Turkey from 1990's to present.

### **Developments in using music and musical activities in special education in Turkey**

In 1990's, there are limited number of studies reported about using music and musical activities and their effects on both average children and children with disabilities in Turkey. Few studies on using musical activities in educating children with special needs in Turkey focused on using music with autistic children (Basar, 1995), the effects of instrumental and movement activities in helping adolescents with mental disability in developing the ability to follow directions (Değirmenci, 1993), the degree of involvement of children with hearing impairment in musical practices (İzgü, 1993), the effects of music training in the development of auditory perception of children with hearing impairment (Bilir, Bal & Artan, 1992), the development of rhythm on kindergarten children with profound hearing loss (Bilir, Artan & Bal, 1995), and the effects of music enrichment program in academic and social skills of children with mild mental disabilities (Özeke, 1998).

İzgü (1993) concluded that music education positively affected the language, emotional, social, physical and psychomotor development of children with hearing impairment. Similarly, Bilir, Bal, and Artan (1992) revealed that music training positively affected the development of auditory perception of children with hearing impairment. Correlatively, analyzing the development of rhythm in 5-7 year old children with profound hearing loss, Bilir, Artan and Bal (1995) found significant improvements on the children's performance of different rhythm tasks. In Değirmenci's study (1993) on the effects of movement and



instrumental activities in developing the ability to follow directions for adolescents with mental disability, children who participated in the movement activities were found superior to the children who participated in instrumental activities. As a general point, it was revealed that music therapy was an effective technique with children with mild mental disability in gaining the ability to follow directions. Furthermore, in Başar's (1995) study on using music with autistic children, music was found affective with respect to interactions (cited in Özeke, 1998). In Özeke's study (1998), although no significant improvements were found in experimental group after the music enrichment program with children with mild mental disabilities, according to observations from parents and teachers, the study had positive effects on children especially in social skill development. It has been observed that using music helped the researcher to establish communication with the children, the children felt comfortable with musical activities, they learned concepts and skills easier, they enjoyed the activities and materials that have been presented and this stimulated their academic and social growth. Moreover, while they have shared an activity, gaining social skills such as participating into a group activity, following instructions, leading a group was observed.

In short, regarding the related literature, in 1990's, the studies and applications related to music in special education in Turkey appears to contribute to the field but limited in number.

In the beginning of 21st century, it could be said that there is significant increase in the interest of people studying music in special education, as a result, researchers began to look for the impact of music in the special education environments.

Çadır (2008) conducted a research about social skills education for mentally disabled students. Social skills education program which is designed by the use of musical therapy method for mentally disabled students was tested with nine mentally disabled students. The program was implemented in every weekdays, during 30-35 minutes classes. The social skills analyzed in the research were inviting others to play games, bringing back the objects that was borrowed, and fulfilling the duties. The research tested whether music therapy was effective in improving these skills or not. Results showed that the social skills education program prepared through musical therapy method was found effective.

Kurt (2006), in his research aimed to investigate the effect of music for achievement on a given task. He worked with 32 children between 4-6 years old and with moderate mental retardation in an experimental-control group design. Subjects were asked to complete a task in a laboratory which was controlled by a computer. In 4 weeks period, in each 30-35 minute session, experimental group had to listen music for 5 minutes and then during 30 minutes they had to complete the given task. In a pre-posttest design, "Denver II Prescreening Developmental Questionnaire" was used. Results revealed no difference between the experimental and control groups in success of a given task and no improvement in motor skills.

Kırşehirli (2011) tested the effectiveness of teaching self-care skills by songs with the mentally retarded students. As a result, teaching self-care skills by the song was found effective with children with mental retardation.

Beside the increasing interest on research in using music in special education, Ministry of Education (2011) published a source book about musical activities for special education which aimed to guide students in vocational schools to meet the increasing needs of guidelines in the area. The resource was aimed to help students, in other words, future professionals of special education, first to choose musical activities in terms of the different needs of different exceptionalities, and second, to prepare and practice musical activities for children with special needs.



Moreover, there are also studies focusing on the opinions and the problems when utilizing music in special education. Turan (2006) conducted a study to identify the problems that teachers teaching music in the special education area. The results of the study showed that teachers' qualifications of teaching music in special education were low, materials used were insufficient, educational environment was not very appropriate for music and the curriculum for music was also not sufficient.

In Yıldırım's study (2010), to determine the opinions of teachers working at different schools for mentally retarded about the use of music in teaching concepts, a descriptive study conducted. Results revealed that teachers from the school for the severely handicapped children felt that they are competent in using musical activities for teaching concepts and they use musical activities more than the other group of teachers in the study.

Çakır-Doğan (2011) investigated the status of the elementary music program for the educable mentally retarded children. Results revealed that the number of music teachers were low and music classes were thought mostly by the special education teacher. According to the teachers, elementary music program mostly fits for the needs of educable mentally retarded children. As part of the study, Çakır-Doğan also recommended a model music program for this group of students. Similarly, Kıvrak (2003) reveals about the problem of qualified music teacher for the area of special education and emphasized the importance of special education courses in music teacher education.

There are some more resources reported on the historical process of musical therapy in Turkey (Somakçı, 2003; Karahan, 2006), hospitals used music therapy in the times of Seljuk and Ottomans (Erer & Atıcı, 2010), music therapy practices in Turkey and in the world (Uçaner & Öztürk, 2009), and music therapy and its therapeutic effects on students (Özcevik, 2007). These resources are mostly focused on the treatment effects of music. As well as those resources, a book about music therapy (Çoban, 2005) including theoretical and practical information both for psychiatric population and for children with special needs is making the significant contribution to this area.

Above mentioned studies are only couple of examples coming out from the thesis and articles identify the developments of using music and musical activities in education of children with special needs in Turkey. Besides these literature, there are several private contributions to the field of music therapy. There are several private special education and rehabilitation centers that using music therapy methods for developing several skills and changing problematic behaviors of different groups of special children (<http://www.e-psikiyatri.com/psikiyatri-haberleri/MUZIKLE-ENGELLERI-ASIYORLAR/2093/>).

There are also some personal initiatives for practicing music therapy. Their work consists of wide variety of people changing from psychiatric patients to special children. For example, Çoban (2006) wrote about several subjects on music therapy practices on a website of a neuropsychiatry center, such as forming musical development objectives for children with speech problems (<http://www.e-psikiyatri.com/cocuk-psikiyatrisi/kekemelik-ve-diger-konusma-bozukluklari/Muzikle-Tedavide-Hedeflerin-Gelisimsel-Sirasi/21031/>), therapeutic effect of sound (<http://www.e-psikiyatri.com/eriskin-psikiyatri/muzikterapi-muzikle-tedavi/Sesin-Tedavi-Edici-Yonu/21798/>), and musical development processes (<http://www.e-psikiyatri.com/psikiyatri-haberleri/MUZIKAL-GELISIM-SURECLERI/68/>). Çoban (2000) also mentioned about music therapy in educational environments (<http://www.e-psikiyatri.com/psikiyatri-haberleri/EGITIM-ORTAMLARINDA-MUZIKLE-TEDAVI/43/>), planning in music therapy (<http://www.e-psikiyatri.com/psikiyatri-haberleri/MUZIKLE-TEDAVI-PLANI/275/>), and developmental therapy in treatment with music (<http://www.e-psikiyatri.com/psikiyatri-haberleri/MUZIKLE-TEDAVIDE-GELISIMSEL-TERAPI/301/>). As well as wrote about those subjects, giving concerts with children with special needs is mentioned as part of his work in sharing the knowledge



(<http://www.adnancoban.com.tr/muzikterapi.html>). Moreover, Sezgin's significant contribution in this area is published in the platform called "music therapy" (<http://www.muzikterapi.net/t/03/index.jsp>), includes information about using musical activities with different groups and examples of practices; where he is also mentioning about the project called "music without barriers", which includes musical group activities with the children with special needs for about 12 months.

There are some more people work especially with the group of autistics, such as Eracar, an academician and one of the founders of psychotherapy center, shares her articles on music therapy and autism at this center (<http://www.aurapsikoterapi.com>). Working with professionals of special education about art therapies, including music, is another contribution of her for the area.

In summary, information above shows that in the beginning of the 21st century there are significant developments in Turkey reported in the area of special education using music and musical activities with children with special needs.

### CONCLUSION

All children need education. Children with mental disabilities need educational interventions differing from their normal peers. Music plays an important part in the lives of all children, especially for children with special needs. Using some music activities in education of children with special needs opens these children new windows to life, providing new stimulation for them. With music, they may have fun, gain pleasure, and develop their various skills. Therefore, this study aimed to identify and report the developments of using musical activities in education of children with special needs in Turkey.

Looking at the studies in 90's and beginning of the 21st century, although there is a slight increase in number of studies in using musical activities in special education and in music therapy, there seems an improvement in awareness and recognition of music therapy services in special education. Limited studies done in the field of special education on using music and musical activities were mostly focused on the outcomes of skill development, social skills, achievement, and teaching concepts. Moreover, music therapy practices seemed to be widening with the efforts of personal initiatives. More books, studies and tested practical work is needed to talk about an fully improvement in using music in special education.

Looking at the studies, it can be concluded that although most of resources have been written by the researchers mainly working in the area of special education, there is an increasing interest of music educators in this area. Musicians and music educators seems to show an interest but it is still limited. However, special education teachers or preschool teachers may not feel competent in using music activities with children with disability. Early childhood education specialists interested in the area contribute to the literature as well but it seems these efforts are also limited. Music specialist's contribution to use of music in working with children with special needs, either in form of music therapy or in form of musical activities is needed. Moreover, music teachers after graduating from the music departments can either work at the regular schools or special schools. For working in special schools they need special education courses, to understand and meet the needs of special students better and to feel more competent in the area. Music specialists' contribution can be achieved through sharing their knowledge with the special education professionals and through guidance. Therefore, it can be concluded that collaboration among different area of professions is strongly needed to reach the same goal of improving practices in special education. Moreover, contribution of the scientific knowledge in the area through books, studies and practices, and sharing those knowledge are also needed area of work.

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