

## THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: A REVIEW STUDY

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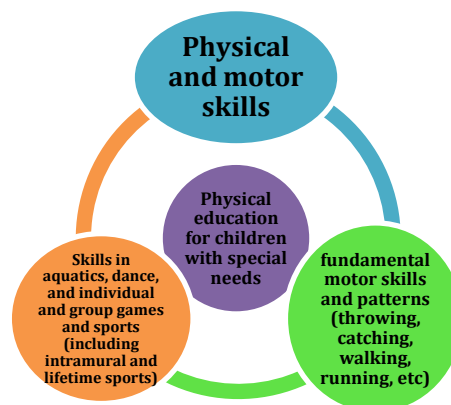
### Abstract

Sports and physical activities improve individuals' physical, physiological and psychological health and regulate social behaviors from biological, pedagogical and social dimensions. Sports practices for individuals with special needs have a great importance in their daily life activities and quality of lives. This study aims to provide a scientific and systematic review for the benefits and outcomes of physical education and sports in special education. A comprehensive and systematic literature review was carried out in order to achieve this aim. "No disability in sports" and "importance of physical education and sports for individuals with special needs" were discussed with relevant literature and recommendations for further research and practices were presented.

*Keywords:* physical education, sports, individuals with special needs

### 1. Introduction

The first practice of physical education as a course for children with special needs was carried out in United States. Essentiality of physical education in special education was regarded as an important issue and today physical education is accepted as an important part of special education practices (Adapted Physical Education National Standards, 2008; Buchanan, Miedema & Frey, 2017). Adapted physical education is physical education which has been adapted for individuals with special needs. Various rules, regulations and legislations necessitate the integration of physical education into special education and it is emphasized that physical education provided to students with special needs need to support and improve many skills and domains as shown in Figure 1. As it can be seen in Figure 1, these skills and domains include physical and motor skills, dance, individual and group games and aquatics.



**Figure 1.** Skills and Domains Supported by Physical Education for Children with Special Needs

Since physical education is an essential component and part of special education, physical education teachers are expected to provide services in order to meet the requirements of children with special needs. These services involve planning, assessment, prescription/placement, individualized education programs preparation process, teaching, counseling, coaching, evaluation, coordination of resources and consulting and advocacy (Sherrill, 1998). When physical education and sports practices for individuals with disabilities are considered, it is aimed to contribute them in terms of being a self-sufficient person, maintaining their lives independently in the society and increase their social adaptations. Physical education programs for children with special needs need to be prepared based on their requirements and individual characteristics such as diagnosis, severity of diagnosis and existing performance level (Hutzler, 2003; Block, 2007; Ozer & Sahin, 2010).

Essentiality of physical education programs were mentioned in the past in the academic literature. For instance, Gallahue (1987) mentioned that in the first stage, children with special needs require adapted physical education programs, in the second stage, they need rehabilitative physical education programs and they need constructive physical education programs in the last stage. It is known that physical activities helps children with special needs to develop self-concept and social competence, develop motor skills, physical and motor adaptation, leisure time skills, playing and creative time skills as long-term objectives. Physical activities for children with special needs are required to be competent in terms of improving psychomotor, sensory and cognitive development. If these developmental domains are achieved, these long-terms objectives will be achieved as well. Nevertheless, physical group activities promote sharing, communication and learning social behaviors among individuals with special needs (Konar & Yildiran, 2012; Ozer & Sungu, 2016).

Psychomotor domain plays an important role in social and emotional development of individuals with special needs and physical education and sports support them to acquire motor skills in the following ways. Therefore, individuals with special needs could be able to fulfill fine and gross motor skills easily.

- Enhancing the development of basic components of body structure,
- Participating in physical activities and development of physical and motor appropriateness levels,
- Gaining coordination,
- Constituting muscle endurance and strength, body balance and flexibility,
- Reinforcement of perceptual motor functions, kinesthetic and tactile perception (Pahor, Guralnik, Ambrosius, Blair, Bonds, Church & King, 2014; Koh, 2016).

In addition to psychomotor skills, individuals with special needs also gain basic objectives regarding sensory domain. These objectives are as follows:

- Coping with life problems and positive perception of self-esteem,
- Adaptation to the environment,
- Learning and achieving self-realization (Armour, 2014; Shields & Synnot, 2016).

Given the importance of physical education and sports activities in the lives of individuals with special needs, this study aims to provide a scientific and systematic review for the benefits and outcomes of physical education and sports in special education in a comprehensive manner.

## 2. Method

In order to achieve the aim of the study, different international academic databases were searched and publications regarding physical education for individuals with special needs were included and examined in the study. The literature search was carried out with keywords involving “physical education”, “sports” “special education” and “disability”.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. No Disability in Sports

Physical education, recreation, and sports activities primarily have the purpose of helping individuals with special needs to be happy and self-sufficient person, have life motivational and social adaptation. It is aimed to acquire sports habits and a society with individuals with special needs making sports (Kinali, 2003; Auxter, Pyfer & Huettig, 2005). Sports bring all people together and therefore contributes to social integration and participation of individuals with special needs. In other words, sports do not recognize any disability (Hodge & Jansma, 1999). When examined, it is seen that handicapped players show many important achievements in Paralympic games (Taskin, 2014). Especially, players with physical, visual and hearing disabilities have important gains in many sport branches.

In this context, physical education, game and sports activities for individuals with special needs requires important competence (Barton, 2017). Accordingly, European countries established educational institutions in order to train professional groups who can meet these requirements. For example, Germany Koln Sports Academy (Sporthochschule) Department of Sports and Rehabilitation train physical education teachers specialized for teaching individuals with special needs. It is also emphasized that physical education and activity needs of individuals with special needs must be carried out based on collaboration family, physical education teacher, physiotherapist and special education professionals.

The scope of sports concept comprises all different gender, age, performance groups, disease, type and severity of disability and social and economic conditions. Dimension of sports in the society necessitates physical education and sports activities for individuals with special needs as well. Increasing quality of lives and achieving integration and rehabilitation of individuals with special needs requires providing specific sportive conditions and opportunities for every disability group and human power who has this knowledge and skills are needed as well. Understanding of “No Disability in Sports” has become more prevalent in the recent years and more participation of individuals with special needs would increase their social integration and life adaptation (Bloemen, Backx, Takken, Wittink, Benner, Mollema & De Groot, 2015).

### 3.2. Importance of Physical Education and Sports for Individuals with Special Needs

It is widely known that physical education and sports play a crucial role in the lives of individuals with special needs having different type and severity of disabilities. According to Ergun (2003), sports make individuals with special needs to improve their physical and emotional structure, discipline, competition, friendship and social roles. Universal language of these social roles is physical education and sports. Sports develop understanding, carrying responsibilities and collaboration and increase social cohesion in the group.

Physical education and sports activities also help individuals with special needs to control aggressive and impulsive behaviors (Morris & Schulz, 1989). Since sports leads individuals to participate in social environments as a social activity, it has an important role in socialization

of individuals as well. In modern societies, sports is considered as a collective activity and people establish social relationships through sportive activities. From this perspective, it can be indicated that individuals with special needs can communicate with others and participate into the society (Yetim, 2005).

Taliaferro, Hammond and Wyant (2015) found that physical education and sports practices carried out in the university campus increased the self-efficacy levels of preservice teachers about inclusion of individuals with special needs. According to the literature, it is emphasized that preservice teachers who received physical education and sports for individuals with special needs have more positive attitudes and expectations towards individuals with special needs. In addition, providing environments for students beginning from early childhood to higher education in which students will increase their knowledge, acceptance and interaction with individuals with special needs is really important.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is really important in special education to increase quality of life, participation in daily life activities, socialize and prepare programs based on individual characteristics plays a great role in the lives of individuals with special needs. Therefore, individuals with special needs would be able to cope with obstacles, communicate, socialize, have fun and higher levels of motivation and develop positive personality characteristics. Physical education and sports are important parts of individuals with special needs and therefore more studies need to be carried out in this field in order to improve educational policies and practices. The present study aimed to provide a systematic and comprehensive literature review in order to reveal the importance of physical education and sports activities for individuals with special needs through content analysis. In conclusion, the results of the study showed that physical education and sports activities play an important role in the lives of individuals with special needs and these practices need to be provided by qualified professionals. In line with these results, the following recommendations for further research and practices are provided as well:

- Physical and motor developments of individuals with special needs should be periodically monitored.
- There should be a physical education teacher who is competent in teaching individuals with special needs in every special education and rehabilitation institution and/or inclusive education.
- Open and closed environments should be organized for physical education of individuals with special needs.
- Essential materials for movement, coordination and other physical education practices should be supplied in every special education and rehabilitation institution and/or inclusive education.
- According to the evaluations and observations, duration of physical education of individuals with special needs might be increased and developmental level could be followed.
- Inservice trainings for special education professionals and physical education teachers might be organized in order to increase their knowledge, skills and competencies about the importance of physical education, current trends and applications in physical education for individuals with special needs and how to integrate physical education into special education practices.
- There should be more courses related with physical education during special education teacher training programs at the universities.

- Families of children with special needs should become more aware about the necessity of physical education for their children.

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