

The Effects of Music Lessons on Social Skills Development for Children with Autism

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Abstract. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties in social interaction, communication, and restricted or repetitive behaviors. Children with ASD often struggle with social skills, which can significantly impact their ability to form relationships and function effectively in social settings. Recent research has increasingly highlighted music lessons as a promising intervention to improve social skills in children with ASD, as they provide a structured and engaging environment for social interaction and learning. This review synthesizes findings from existing studies published between 2010 and 2024, focusing on three key aspects: the effectiveness of various musical pedagogical approaches, the critical role of specially trained music educators in implementing these interventions, and the measurable outcomes in social skill development. The research shows that organized music education consistently leads to improvements in social communication, peer interaction, and the ability to recognize emotions in children with ASD. The results are talked about in terms of what they mean for educational practices and therapeutic interventions. Suggestions are also made for future studies that will help build more evidence for music-based interventions in autism spectrum disorders. This thorough literature review looks at the growing role of music education in helping kids with ASD learn how to get along with others.

Keywords: Music education, social skills, autism spectrum disorder, music classroom.

1. Introduction

It has been found that about 1 in 36 children in the United States have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) [1]. The CDC says that between 2009 and 2017, parents stated that about 1 in 6 (17%) of their children ages 3 to 17 were diagnosed with a developmental disability. Diagnoses of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) went up from 8.5% to 9.5%, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) went up from 1.1% to 2.5%, and intellectual disabilities (ID) went up from 0.9% to 1.2% [2].

When and how to socialize is very important for students with autism because it helps them learn how to get along with others. Social skills problems are a big part of ASD. They can show up in many ways, like not making eye contact, starting or continuing talks, or understanding and responding to social cues [3]. These problems can make the lives of kids with ASD bad, like making them feel alone, making it hard for them to make friends, and raising their risk of having mental health issues [4].

There is an urgent need for effective interventions to help children with ASD develop their social skills because they are so important for their general functioning and well-being [5]. People from all walks of life can communicate, share their feelings, and get along with others through music [6]. Music classes offer a structured and fun setting that might be perfect for kids with ASD, who usually do well with routines and knowing what to expect [7].

Neuroimaging studies on healthy controls have shown that music helps kids with ASD communicate better with others [8]. These studies also show that listening to music activates circuits that are important for processing feelings and memories.

In similar studies, music lessons have been proposed as a promising approach for addressing social skills deficits in this population, particularly through engaging the mirror neuron system [9].

The goal of this paper is to look at what has already been written about how music lessons can help kids with autism learn social skills, with a focus on the teaching methods used in these programs. Pedagogy is the study and practice of teaching. It includes the tasks, strategies, and techniques that are used to help people learn. Learning about the teaching methods used in music lessons for kids

with ASD can help people figure out what works in these programs and how to make and run new ones.

2. Evidence-Based Music Interventions for Social Skills Development in Children with ASD

Using a range of teaching methods, different studies have looked at how music lessons can help kids with ASD improve their social skills. One popular method is to have structured lessons led by a teacher that focuses on certain social skills, like waiting your turn, paying attention to someone else at the same time, and talking to other people. For example, Duffy and Fuller looked at how a music therapy program helped kids with ASD ages 5 to 10 with their social skills [10]. The program ran for 8 weeks and had 30-minute sessions every week. During those classes, people could sing, play instruments, and move to music. A music therapist led the lessons in a structured way, with each session focusing on a different social skill, like how to share attention or wait your turn. Compared to a control group, the kids who took part in the music therapy program had much better social skills, such as making more eye contact, waiting their time, and being more socially responsive.

Another study by Kern and Aldridge looked at how a music therapy program helped kids with ASD ages 3 to 5 improve their social skills [11]. Over 4 weeks, the program had daily 30-minute classes where people could sing, play instruments, and move to music. The music therapist led the sessions and used a child-centered method, going with the child's lead and interests and using music to help them make friends. The kids who took part in the music therapy program showed big changes in their social skills, such as being more involved in group activities, communicating better, and paying attention to others at the same time.

LaGasse's more recent study looked at how joining a music therapy group helped kids with ASD who were 6 to 9 years old with their social skills [12]. Over 5 weeks, the intervention included singing, playing instruments, and moving to music in 50-minute classes every week. The meetings were led by a music therapist who used both planned and unplanned methods to get the people in the group to interact with each other and become more social. The kids in the music therapy group did much better on social skills than the kids in a social skills group that didn't use music. They were better at sharing attention, eye contact, and talking to each other. For example, these studies show that using different teaching methods in music lessons can help kids with ASD improve their social skills. However, it is important to keep in mind that the exact teaching method may be different depending on the kids' wants and traits, as well as the intervention's goals. Some children with ASD may benefit from a more structured, teacher-led approach that focuses on specific social skills, while others may respond better to a more child-centered, improvisational approach that allows for greater flexibility and creativity.

In addition to the pedagogical approach, other factors may also influence the effectiveness of music lessons for social skills development in children with ASD. For instance, the frequency and duration of the lessons may play a role, with some studies suggesting that more frequent and intensive interventions may be more effective [13]. The setting of the lessons may also be important, with some studies indicating that group interventions may be more effective than individual lessons for promoting social interaction and engagement.

There is a lot of research that shows that music lessons can help kids with ASD learn social skills. Different teaching methods can be used successfully. However, more study is needed to find the exact parts and qualities of music lessons that work best for this group of people, as well as the best time, place, and frequency for these interventions.

3. Music Education Approaches to Enhance Social Skills Development in Children with ASD

The studies show that music lessons can help improve many social skills, such as working together to pay attention, talking to others, being involved in group activities, and being attentive to others.

These results support the idea that music can be a powerful way to help kids learn and connect with others, especially autistic toddlers who may have trouble with traditional social skills programs [14].

For students with autism, learning music and social skills at the same time is seen as important because it can help these students grow. There is a clear link between sound and creativity in music education, which is a useful way to help autistic students learn. All of these methods showed promise in improving social skills, but it may be necessary to change the method to fit the individual needs and traits of the children as well as the intervention's goals.

For example, children with ASD who have significant language and communication deficits may benefit from a more structured approach that focuses on specific social skills, such as turn-taking and joint attention [15]. On the other hand, children with ASD who have higher cognitive and language abilities may respond better to a more child-centered approach that allows for greater flexibility and creativity. This approach may provide opportunities for the child to initiate and lead social interactions, which can promote a sense of agency and empowerment.

4. The Role of Music Educators in Promoting Social Skills Development for Children with ASD

In addition to the pedagogical approach, the frequency, duration, and setting of music lessons may also play a role in their effectiveness for social skills development [16]. The studies reviewed in this paper used a range of intervention intensities, from daily sessions over several weeks to weekly sessions over several months. While more intensive interventions may be more effective in the short term, it is important to consider the feasibility and sustainability of these interventions over the long term. Group interventions may also be better than one-on-one lessons at encouraging social contact and engagement because they give kids with ASD a chance to practice social skills with their peers in a safe and structured setting.

Music has been widely acknowledged as a potent instrument for fostering social skills and facilitating contact. Indeed, music often provides solace and delight for several youngsters diagnosed with autism. Their musical aptitude enables them to surmount challenges and communicate well in social settings. Not long ago, researchers looked at how teaching music affected the social skills and speaking abilities of autistic children. The findings indicated that children who had music therapy showed notable enhancements in their social communication abilities in contrast to those who underwent conventional treatment. Given that both language and music are acquired abilities, these findings might potentially lead to the creation of efficient methods for enhancing the communication abilities of children with autism. The researchers argue that this phenomenon may arise because music education offers a more instinctive and pleasurable learning milieu for these youngsters, enabling them to participate in activities that are simultaneously engaging and gratifying [17].

It also suggests that there is an urgent need for music educators to focus on children's social skill development. Music educators play a crucial role in shaping the learning experiences of their students and have the potential to make a significant impact on their social development [18]. By using specific teaching methods and strategies that improve social skills, music teachers can make the classroom a welcoming and supportive space where students with ASD can connect and communicate healthily. If so, music teachers may need to change the way they teach to meet the specific needs and challenges of this group of students. For example, they might use visual aids, give clear and concise instructions, and set up times for structured social interactions within the context of musical activities. Also, music teachers should work together with other professionals, like special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and physical therapists, to make sure that social skills development is done in a complete and well-coordinated way. By prioritizing social skills as a key component of music education for children with ASD, music educators can contribute to the overall goal of improving social functioning and quality of life for this population.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the current research provides promising evidence for the use of music lessons to promote social skills development in children with ASD. Music lessons can provide a structured and engaging environment for social interaction and learning and have been shown to improve a range of social skills, including joint attention, communication, social engagement, and social responsiveness. The pedagogical approach used in music lessons may play a key role in their effectiveness, with both structured and improvisational approaches showing promise for different subgroups of children with ASD.

By providing a structured and engaging environment for social interaction and learning, music lessons have the potential to enhance the social skills and overall well-being of children with ASD. With further research and refinement, music lessons may become an increasingly important and effective intervention for promoting social skills development in this population.

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