





## IMPACTS OF ART AS A 'TRIGGER' IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: STORIES BEHIND LEARNING

Tanzida Shahnaj Mukti<sup>1</sup>  & Sree Bidhan Chakraborty<sup>2</sup> 

### RESEARCH ARTICLE



#### Author Details:

<sup>1</sup> Graduate Student,  
Government Teachers' Training  
College, Sylhet, Bangladesh;

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor in English,  
Government Teachers' Training  
College, Sylhet, Bangladesh

#### Corresponding Author:

Tanzida Shahnaj Mukti

#### DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250306020>

#### Abstract

It is proposed by Fleshman & Fryrear (1981) that, in the special education classroom art can enhance the lives of special children and increase their sense of self-esteem. In an educational context this study examined the influence of art in the special education area. The objectives were to find out the usefulness of art removing educational obstacles faced by gifted kids and how it can help them mitigate their thoughts, emotions as well as help them learn without problems. A qualitative method was used, involving one classroom observation and interviews of school head, three teachers and a child psychologist. Moreover, results from this research indicates that, students positively benefited by art intervention. It not only enhanced their probability of learning but also developed their social life. Art's therapeutic impact was also evident on children who took part in the art integrated learning sessions. Additionally, it minimized their communication difficulties, letting them express their thoughts and emotions effortlessly. There are still certain gaps in our understanding that needs to be filled. Findings from this research suggest that, art has the potential to serve as an influential tool in special education, contributing to more interactive and inclusive learning space. As comparatively less research has been done on determining the value of art integration in special education, it has become a time demanding matter to study this area to make the lives of the exceptional children of Bangladesh better. This research is an eye opener to everyone who work or wish to contribute positively for the betterment of special kids.

**Keywords:** *Special Education, Art, Learning, Special Children, Education*

#### Introduction

Art is recognized to be a powerful tool for communication, self-expression, and personal growth. In recent times, art has been broadly recognized for its ability of visualizing words for emotions and feelings that cannot be expressed through words (Malchiodi, 2011). While observing the influence of art on language teaching for kids with special needs, its necessity becomes even more apparent. Regardless of the unique challenges they face, art provides a ray of hope and opportunity in their life. It is also suggested by Gilroy (2006) that, as a long-term treatment, art therapy might be effective in dealing with autistic children individually or in groups because the process of art production enhances emotional and cognitive growth, improves connections, and reduces negative actions. It is also stated by Levick et al. (1983) that art serves as a pathway to gain distance from inappropriate thoughts and feelings. It is also proposed by Fleshman & Fryrear (1981) that, in the special education classroom art can enhance the lives of special children and increase their sense of self-esteem. Unlike any usual school settings where perfection is expected from a child, in art therapy sessions kids are encouraged to be mindful about their creation and enjoy the process of drawing. During a qualitative study of Dutch art therapists' experiences with ASD (autism spectrum disorder) children, the therapists defined their children as being able to develop skills in directing attention, improving flexibility, forming more structured behaviors, and expressing their experiences verbally as a result of art therapy (Schweizer, 2014). In an educational context, this study observed how a structured art therapy program can have a positive impact on kids with neuro-psycho-motor deficiencies. Additionally, the aim of this study is to systematically find out the significant ways with which art can enhance the learning of especially able children's. The key objectives are to illuminate the transformative role of art in empowering these individuals and fostering their overall development. This qualitative research investigated art's therapeutic, cognitive, and social benefits to understand its profound impact.

#### Rationale

Art is viewed as the appropriate medium for special children's education as it provides a learning practice by playing (Thompson, 2019). In the creation of art, without any limitations, children get to express what they perceive, remember, and experience, as

stated by Sampurno (2017). The number of special children is increasing gradually, and their well-being is being considered profoundly; hence, it has become a time-demanding matter to study this field and find out the influential ways of art therapy with which their lives can be made less complicated and more valuable. With the help of art, students may be able to convey their untold thoughts, manage their emotions, and communicate with others effortlessly.

### **Justification**

In this interesting exploration, art's literal impact for enhancing special children's lives is discussed. Moreover, the aim is to find out how art could reach special children's cognitive levels and minimize their challenges in language learning and formation. Because hardly much research has been done on art's actual impact on special children, there are still certain gaps in our knowledge that need to be filled. Additionally, by identifying exceptional children's true potential and supporting their growth, this research seeks to not only improve educational performance but also the quality of life for kids with exceptional needs. Through this research paper, there will be an extensive idea about the integration of art therapy into these children's lives and how it can be a therapeutic tool to stimulate cognitive processes such as attention, problem-solving, and memory. It will also be discussed how art can enhance communication abilities and social skills.

### **Objectives**

1. To know the effectiveness of art in overcoming special children's educational obstacles.
2. To observe how art can help special children express their feelings that are difficult for them to express. And how art can help them with anger management, anxiety reduction, and communication.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the influences of art on special children's lives?
2. Why art should be integrated into special education?

### **Literature Review**

**Influence of art on special children's lives:** Leo Kanner is believed to be the person to recognize Autism first in 1943 as a childhood syndrome, that is regarded as "autistic aloneness," fascination with monotony, and severe interaction difficulties (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012). Special children or ASD-diagnosed individuals are people who share many similarities with other kids but deviate from social standards of normalcy. Physical, sensory, cognitive, or behavioral traits might be the cause of these variations (Richard, 2014). Moreover, autism is not recognized as a sole illness but as a condition with multiple genetic and non-genetic causes (Muhle, 2004). The major categorized abnormalities of autism are impairments in social, communicative, and imaginative skills that are generally quite severe (McGeer, 2004). In ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), sensory difficulties are not that uncommon. Lawson (2009) also added that, these issues might be linked to general sensory distress, sound and hearing, sight and seeing, touch, and taste. Furthermore, from an educational overview, art is viewed as one of the ways of achieving a stability between sensitivity and intellectuality, rationality and cause, so that humans are "human". In addition to that, art education, also being recognized as learning medium, offers an array of aesthetic experiences that have a significant positive impact on a person's soul development (Volkmar & Wiesner, 2017). As well as through art, a child's urge to think, speak, and communicate deeply is met. The motive of art therapy is to support children evading the difficulties they are enduring and find out the best strategy for their problems healing (Sampurno, Prabandari & Marianto, 2020). (Sampurno, Prabandari & Marianto, 2020) also added that, while making art, every thoughts and emotions of the child becomes lively, also the adolescent's mind gets mixed with their state of mind. Art therapy, a non-verbal form of treatment, is believed to help children with ASD, and it provides them the opportunity to express themselves that involves touching, gazing at, and sculpting art supplies (Malchiodi, 2003; Rubin, 2001; Schweizer et al., 2009). Gilroy (2006) said that, art therapy can boost the perceptual, sensory, and cognitive development of special children and help them overcome stereotype behaviors. Thus, the majority of children with autism who live a monotonous life make them live like robots devoid of creativity and imagination. Art produced in the right side of the brain steadily teaches special children to visualize and communicate in the form of art (Sampurno, Prabandari & Marianto, 2020). According to Lowenfeld (2019), art is essential in human progression. Art being a vibrant and uniting activity brings prodigious possibilities that may greatly benefit children's education. Through the intricate process of drawing, painting, or building, a child synthesizes various elements of his experience to create a purposeful whole. Additionally, providing beyond picture or sculpture, he has given us a glimpse of his thoughts, his feelings, and the way he sees. According to studies by Staumer et al. (2016) and Zwaigenbaum (2011), art can help autistic children reach their full potential. Autistic children, also known as special children, much undoubtedly possess exceptional potential, which may not be discovered yet. It is not obligatory for all of the special children to have low IQ, as up to 20% of special children possess IQ over 70. Overall, art as a mean of therapy is even additionally suitable for special educational needs folks suffering from numerous deficits and those with lacking verbal language skills. Additionally, a child's tendency to want to participate in activities and seek attention from others is increased when they perceive individuals as decent people, which helps to lessen their symptoms of autism. As children's are allowed and encouraged to be independent, they will take lead of the game when they play. Even if play is partial, it can educate social incorporation and awareness of others, particularly in group-based games (Mitteldorf et al. 2013). Moreover, according to Gaitskell & Gaitskell (1953), delay learners possess many personal difficulties. They need additional empathy and understanding, and every individual needs to be given profound attention. One must meet all the requirements in order to teach art to these youngsters with delayed

mental development. Teaching art to these special children's is similar to teaching general kids, with the exception of the fact that they need to be more motivated and the expert needs to be cautious to base his work on their interests (Rubin, 2005, p. 283). Even though art therapy does not completely reestablish special youths' condition, it enables them to be the controller of their action, gain real-world experience, and provides a safe means for the child to let go, to regress, to smear and pound and release physical strain, or to be liberate and express frightening feelings, either orally or symbolically (Rubin, 2005, p. 283). Therefore, art therapy helps special children improving their emotional as well as social aspects of life, enabling them to explore and work through emotional challenges as well as express their creative selves. This process gives their lives a great deal of existential meaning and makes it easier for them to cope with educational challenges they personally encounter (Freilich & Shechtman, 2010).

**Reason's for art to be integrated into special education:** The tendency that arose by the end of 19th century under the impact of romanticism was the intention of arts education to expand children's ability to express themselves creatively (Blocker 1979; Cuncliffe 1999). According to Soemardjo et al. (2000), art is not only a mere representation of outer world, or an escape from the real world, or a depiction of universal broad characteristics of reality that gives a simple pathway to enter the mystical domain. Art is a representation of the world of art itself. Art is one of the methods that is subjected to fun or enjoyable learning because it helps boost children's self-confidence (Adesope & Rud, 2019). Furthermore, art is considered a non-threatening and influential tool used for self-development and which helps in engaging students and children's in fun activities. Drawing is considered a pro-active exercise, that may be utilized with students who don't respond well to other kinds of learning activities. Additionally, Lowe (2016) highlighted, a sense of accomplishment and self-worth is established via art. A child who engages in art activities adopts the significant role of a creator, is capable of making suitable choices, and learns by making errors. Art spaces and art-combined curriculum provide such children an exceptional chance to develop their socio-emotional skills through practical art experiences (Lowe, 2016). Additionally, art integration accommodates kids with a variety of learning styles and essentials by reestablishing emotional regulation, confidence, and self-awareness using its therapeutic properties of emotional healing. These use of art represents a holistic teaching and learning approach that supports both physical and mental well-being (McCarthy, 2015).

However, the common misconception often heard is that special children cannot play or participate in any enjoyable activity with others. However, this is not always or totally true. Despite their play being limited and different from general kids, they can actually participate in games (Sampurno, Prabandari & Marianto, 2020). With proper interventions, especially able children can learn to play. Hence, the implementation of art therapy-based play is extremely useful not only for special children but also for general kids (Mitteldorf, Hendricks, & Landreth, 2013). A study by Schlosberg where he mentioned that children's incentive response to the things they are being educated can be improved by playing (Scholsberg, 1947). On the other hand, everything, including necessity or demands, varies from children to children. The teachers have to understand this difference, even if it is vital to them, and come to an acceptance where they have to adjust and modify their teaching method (Wilde & Kaufman, 2019). Each and every kid has their own unique way to smarten themselves, whether it is through language, math, art, music, emotions, nature, social contact, or self-awareness (Parfitt, 2019).

### **Methodology**

**Methods and Design:** This vital part of research also known as methods and design, conveys the way a researcher should proceed systematically. To gather and analysis data qualitative methods have been used in this study. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to gather interviewees response and the questions were set in the relation to the study objectives.

A semi-structured interview consists of asking participants a sequence of open-ended questions and then following up to learn more about their responses and the topic of interest. In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews combine aspects of structured and unstructured interviews; some questions are predetermined, while others are not. A highly adaptable technique for small-scale research is semi-structured interviews (Drever, 1995).

**Qualitative instrument:** Qualitative research produces result that are believed to be authentic. This approach is facilitated by involving people and observers in the exploration procedure, and the research output is presumably to be identical as well. The results are gathered via a variety of techniques, and at least two or more approaches are often used while conducting qualitative studies.

For my research paper, qualitative seems to be the approach that works best so far. Qualitative research permits in-depth examination and detailed explanation. I used this approach because it is a valuable tool that yields accurate and meaningful data. The concept of how the external world is assumed, practiced, interpreted, or built is provided by qualitative research. It records opinions, emotions, and perceptions. In the qualitative research approach, the natural environment is examined by the researcher. Additionally, as Bryman (2004) noted, qualitative research aids teachers understanding learners through learners' perceptive, to put consideration to their bounded surroundings, emphasize more on the procedure, and develop grounded theories. Cleland (2017) also added that, for educational research, qualitative method is extremely crucial as it offers an in-depth understanding of experiences, phenomena, and context by providing answers to "how" and "why" research questions. To better comprehend human experience, qualitative research allows asking questions that are difficult to put in statistics. A complete interpretation of human nature enabled deeper comprehension and contribution of social science ideas provided by qualitative research. Qualitative research focuses on human experience, perception, and behavior to understand the social phenomena of individuals in a natural setting. According to Wu, H. L., & Volker, D. L. (2009), qualitative research methodologies are used to discover

average human experiences in all its natural surroundings as well as within all its complexity. The qualitative research method allows participants to share their thoughts and experiences without any complications. Because my study is small-scale, a qualitative research approach will enable me to gather and evaluate data effortlessly while maintaining the quality of the study. Interview and observation both fall under the measures of qualitative research. Which are certainly reliable sources of collecting data. Hence, interviews and observation are the most suitable instruments that will help me to collect resourceful authentic data and conduct my study accurately.

**Interview:** In qualitative research, an interview is considered the most effective instrument. It aids the researcher in enhanced comprehension, explanation, and exploring research subject views, behaviors, experiences, phenomena, etc. Interviews are typically open-ended to ensure that comprehensive information is achieved. Interviews are extensively used as an instrument for information acquisition in qualitative study. According to Lambert and Loiselle (2007), an interview is typically used in research as an information-collecting medium on participants' viewpoints, experiences, and beliefs regarding a particular matter or problem of interest.

In this study, an interview is used as the research instrument. We integrated interviews with some teachers and a few parents of mentally retarded children with a set of questionnaires regarding the impacts of art therapy in a special child's life to generate reliable, valid, and trustworthy data. We establish a non-threatening, pleasant environment for the interviewees throughout the interview. Interviews keep the validity and reliability of the study as the subjects are considerate and cooperative about sharing their opinions, and the queries are also reliable.

**Observation:** Observation is considered as one of the most important research methods, used in a variety of research approaches. According to M. Ciesielka et al. (2018), the term "observation" in many respects is misleading. The researcher does more than just simply observe during an observation session. Observation is not only a logical activity but also very sensory and greatly physical. The initial thought that arises when contemplating this concept is seeing, observing, and listening (sometimes even eavesdropping), though taste, smell, and touch may also be included. Observation helps the researcher gather data by directly observing participants while being present on the spot. The researcher does not influence or take part in the process but rather observes and takes notes silently without interrupting the process. Moreover, observation can reveal the similarities and differences between what is portrayed or vocalized and the authentic exercise, providing an entrance to implicit knowledge (D'Eredita and Barreto 2006). It helps the researcher collect authentic and valid data that is dependable and trustworthy. By using direct non-participating observation, a researcher gets the opportunity to get closer to the field of study while remaining in the position of a guest or outsider (Kostera, 2007). Along with interviews, with the help of observation, we will be able to observe the effectiveness of art therapy live. The data gathered in this manner is presumed to be reliable and valuable. This study blends the themes of art and language. Hence, to connect both in a proper manner, we need observation as well as interview, which will aid my research procedures.

### **Research Context**

The interviews were conducted in an art and autistic school situated in Sylhet, which is in the northeastern part of Bangladesh. The school has a two storied building with a small courtyard in the front and there is a small sitting arrangement for the parents. On the first floor there is head teacher's office, child psychologist's chamber, restroom and two large classrooms where the classes with special children are held. Every classroom is decorated with colorful artworks, along with several small round tables and chairs for the kids. The classroom is well decorated with colorful items and play materials. There are five trained teachers, four assistants and one child psychologist. The classes are taken five days a week. Art therapy, speech therapy, PECS and other techniques are followed in teaching process as per the student requirement.

One classroom observation was conducted in order to observe the actual scenario. The observation was done without interrupting the ongoing class. The researchers didn't participate in or influence the classroom setting or environment. In total one full class was observed.

**Respondents:** To conduct the investigation for this study, school head, a child psychologist and three instructors from a special education school participated in qualitative interviews. The head teacher was a male and other teachers along with the child psychologist were female. They all had to give their valuable response as per the questionnaire, that consisted 10 questions according to the 2 research themes. Each theme contained 5 questions each. A total 20 minutes was reserved for each interviewee. Native language was used throughout the interview, as the interviewee's were more comfortable with native language. Later, all of the data gathered from the interviews were translated in English by the researchers manually. Also, the interview was audio recorded. The entire interview was conducted during each teacher's spare time, hence, their classes were not cancelled or interrupted.

One classroom observation was done with the presence of special student's. The special children were only participating in their regular classroom. No modification was done before or throughout the observation. Also the exceptional needs were not approached directly.

### **Reliability And Validity**

To guarantee the quality of a research reliability and validity concepts are used. Both measure the suitability of how an object is assessed via a process, test, or technique. Reliability is fundamentally shown by a measure's consistency, whereas research

accuracy is largely indicated by validity. Validity and reliability are important considerations while designing your study, organizing your methods, and documenting your results, especially in quantitative research.

Reliability is defined as a method that constantly measure a particular variable. While similar methods yield the same results under the same conditions, the measurement is deemed reliable. For instance, if the temperature of a fluid sample is measured several times under the same circumstances and the thermometer constantly displays the same reading, the results are considered reliable. Reliability also raises concerns regarding the influence of the observer, as there is no safeguard against the inherent subjectivity of the individual collecting the data (Babbie, 2010). Wilson (2010) notes that problems of reliability are often intertwined with subjectivity; thus, when a researcher employs a subjective methodology, the reliability of the findings must be critically evaluated.

Our questionnaire underwent verification by an expert to assess inter-rater reliability. A pilot study was conducted involving two teachers placed in comparable conditions and environments. Both teachers were interviewed using the same questionnaire under identical circumstances that had been developed for the research. The findings from this pilot study were notably consistent, indicating that the questionnaire is reliable for a robust study.

Validity refers to the degree to which a method accurately measures what it is intended to measure. When research demonstrates high validity, it produces results that align with specific properties, characteristics, and variations present in the structural or social realms. One indicator of measurement validity is high reliability; if a method lacks reliability, the findings are likely to be invalid. The validity of research can be understood as the extent to which the principles of the scientific research method have been adhered to throughout the process of obtaining research results. According to Oliver (2010), validity is an essential requirement for all types of studies. Various forms of research validity exist, with the primary types identified by Cohen et al. (2002) including content validity, construct validity, criterion-related validity, external validity, concurrent validity and face validity.

The following procedures have been implemented to ensure the validity of the research:

- a. Determining the appropriate time scale for the study;
- b. Selecting a suitable methodology that aligns with the study's characteristics;
- c. Choosing the most effective sampling method for the research;
- d. Establishing an environment that allows respondents to freely select from the available answer options.

It is crucial to recognize that while threats to research reliability and validity cannot be entirely eradicated, we have made significant efforts to mitigate these risks. Consequently, we have successfully achieved the findings we aimed for, thereby preserving the validity of the study.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

**Subject:** This study was conducted using qualitative research method. Three special children schools that are situated in the northeastern part of Bangladesh provided valuable data that were used in this study. This qualitative method mainly included interviews of six teachers. Two Male and four female teachers were interviewed from the selected schools using a semi-structured questionnaire.

**Instrumentation:** Interview is the main instrument of this study. The interview was conducted using one set of Questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted ten questions based on two research themes. Each theme consisted five questions related to the study emphasis. The six teachers were interviewed in an informal setting within their school premises. They all had to answer ten questions and justify their claim. Every person got twenty minutes to share their thoughts. An audio recorder was used to record the interview with the permission of interviewees. Along with the interview, the researchers observed live classrooms carried out by teachers to comprehend how they are using art to conduct language classes with special children, and what problems the teachers encountered in language teaching. The researchers observed one class in total.

**Data Analysis:** Six teacher interviews were used in this qualitative study, which concentrated on three schools that use art to help special education students learn languages. A validated semi-structured questionnaire was used to ensure inter-rater reliability. A semi-structured questionnaire with ten questions—five for each of the study's thematic areas was validated by an expert. The sampling method employed was purposive. A thematic analysis was carried out after the data was gathered. The interviews were held in native language. Researchers translated those acquired data manually to maintain quality of interpretation and translation. Data coding was carried out by hand to guarantee authenticity.

The approach utilized in this research was qualitative. Data collection was carried out through interviews with 3 educators and 1 child psychologist from the school under investigation. An expert validated a semi-structured questionnaire comprising 10 questions, divided into five questions for each thematic area of the study, ensuring inter-rater reliability. The sampling method employed was purposive. Following the data collection, a thematic analysis was conducted. The research design of the study is outlined as follows.

## Questionnaire

### Interview Schedule: 20 minutes

<b>Theme 1: What are the influences of art on special children's lives?</b>
1. Do you think art therapy is beneficial for children with special needs? If yes please elaborate.
2. Does art therapy help in reducing special children's anxiety and depression and help in taming them?
3. Does art therapy help in communication?
4. Do you think art therapy works for special children? If/ if not please describe.
5. Can special children express themselves freely with the help of art therapy?
<b>Theme 2: Why art should be integrated into special education?</b>
1. Do you think art therapy helps in learning? And does it enhance the quality of learners? If yes / if not please explain.
2. Why should educators use art therapy as a teaching tool for special children's education?
3. Why integrating art therapy is important in the classroom? Please explain.
4. Do you think art therapy is a positive approach toward special child language teaching? If yes/ if not please explain?
5. What is your experience applying art therapy for language teaching?

## Findings & Discussion

### Findings

The goal of this section is to provide a description of the interviews conducted to investigate the impact of art on special children's lives and the necessity of incorporating art into special education.

One child psychologist (R2) and three teachers (R1, R3, and R4) of a reputed art and autistic school were directly interviewed to find out the importance of art in exceptional children lives with ten relevant questions. They were all liberated to give their valuable views.

### Influences of Art on Special Children's Lives

The first person interviewed was the head teacher (R1) who runs a special education school in a divisional city of Bangladesh. He identified- *Art therapy is not just for special children, it's for all children. We have a lot of thing that we can't say or express, so we express it through art therapy. It is very easy to communicate through art therapy.*

He further added- *It's not that they draws very well but they gets peace by doing art.*

R3 likewise added- *This psychological way of treatment makes children very calm. Sometimes special children have hyperactivity. When we give them art therapy, the child's attention centers in one direction, this makes his brain gradually calm down. And the other thing is that we can't teach these kids a lot together. Learning becomes easier when I give the child a subject such as: a picture that he can visualize.*

In reply to a question: Does art therapy help in communication? R1 shared his experience saying- *Art therapy helps 100%. For my children here who has speech delay we give them language therapy to communicate with us. And language therapy is conducted with the help of drawn pictures. So when they want to communicate, they can use some cards that they have drawn or we have drawn. Suppose, he doesn't like vegetables, he likes chicken. Now from the cards, he will present a card that will show that he does not want to eat vegetables today, he wants to eat chicken. This is why art therapy is essential for communication skills. This therapy or method of communicating through this card is called PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System).* He continued- *Art therapy is in the APA method of our special child. Through art therapy, one does not need to know anything extra.* He again noted, *"Since children love color and drawing, teachers can use art therapy to enhance learning and make the class enjoyable and less boring.*

R2 also shared her thoughts regarding influence of art therapy. She remarked- *Art therapy surely works for children with exceptional needs. Art therapy is necessary because when we do art therapy they become stable and calm steadily.* She further mentioned- *Art therapy can relieve their depression and calm them down. Children can express their feelings. She emphasized- They can express anything through painting. When you look at their picture, you can see what's going on in their mind.*

### Integration of Art in Special Education

R3 remarked- *The human brain is affected by art therapy. Because via drawing, everything you are thinking about takes shape on paper or canvas."* She mentioned- *"Art brings children closer to teachers. With the help of art, a child's thoughts and thinking's are understood by teacher. Their thoughts are reflected in their art.*

R2 further added how vital art is- *Art therapy helps to get rid of anxiety and depression. All their emotions can be expressed through art therapy. It also helps in learning.* She again remarked- *The special children we work with have less stability, less*

*sociality. They don't want to sit in the class at first. But art therapy is a way to help him sit and settle down." She insisted, "Art therapy made it easier to communicate.*

*Similarly, R1 also added- There are many children who are 8 years old or over, but they can't talk. Now in this case the organs of the child become hard and he is less likely to talk. So how will he do his communication? Many of us do not understand sign language, to communicate using sign language his family also needs to learn this language. And through art therapy with the help of PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), if something can be shown by drawing, it becomes easily understandable for the child. In this manner, his life changes completely and becomes easier.*

*Moreover, R4 identified- Art therapy should be used to increase the communication with teachers. In the case of special children, they tend to less believe almost everyone. With the help of art, we gain the trust of theirs. She continued- Integrating art therapy is really important in the classroom. In the case of special children, it is often seen that there is some problem in the fine motor of their hands, children cannot write, but children have a fascination for color or color pencil. They like to see color, so if they are given a color pencil in their hand, they take it very sincerely.*

*She further noted- As for language art therapy helps tremendously. As it helps in communication we can work on their language and speech therapy as well.*

### **Discussion**

The study's conclusions share a lot of parallels with the enduring works on the influence of art therapy on learning. We will systematically analyze the similarities between our study and pre-existing works done by many researchers around the globe.

#### **Influences of Art in Special Children's Lives**

Based on the study's finding of theme one, educators expressed their experience by stating, Art therapy helps stimulate peace through art. This treatment helps children to calm down. Children suffering from hyperactivity benefit greatly from this therapy. Additionally, art therapy makes learning easier by helping children visualize. We found similar statements from other researchers. According to Sampurno, Prabandari & Marianto (2020) mentioned that, through art, a child's urge to think, speak and communicate deeply is met. The goal of art therapy is to assist children in escaping the difficulties they are enduring and find out the best strategy for their problems healing. By observing the similarities, we can say that art therapy surely has many positive effects, such as healing and taming children with exceptional needs. By analyzing theme one, it is apparent that all of the respondents mentioned how art therapy holds importance in communication, sharing feelings, and harmoniously making the learning process enjoyable and prosperous. A study conducted by Sampurno, Prabandari, & Marianto (2020) specified that art produced on the right side of the brain steadily teaches special children to visualize and communicate in the form of art. The study conducted by Freilich & Shechtman (2010) mentioned that this process gives their lives a great deal of existential meaning and makes it easier for them to deal with the academic challenges they encounter on their own. By analyzing the findings of the study, we also observed that every respondent indicated the fact that art aids in teaching special children more effectively and makes learning additionally fruitful. It is evident from theme one that art therapy positively enhances learning by helping teachers to better cope with special children. According to R2, art therapy helps children relieve depression by allowing them to express their feelings through drawing, allowing them to express anger, love, and emotions about family, allowing for a deeper understanding of their thoughts. An extensive study carried out by Lowe in 2016 revealed that a sense of accomplishment and self-worth is established via art. Volkmar & Wiesner (2017) also added that art education that is also recognized as a learning medium, offers a range of artistic experiences that holds a significant positive influence on a person's soul development. Art certainly helps gifted children to get better at handling their emotions and expressing their thoughts and reactions in an improved manner.

#### **Integration of Art in Special Education**

Among teachers, art is regarded as very crucial not only in special education but also in general education, as it shapes thoughts and emotions, brings children closer to teachers, and helps relieve depression and anxiety and improve sociality. It facilitates communication, fosters trust, and can be integrated into classrooms for children with fine motor skills or language difficulties. Overall, art therapy is a valuable tool for improving communication, language, and speech therapy. Findings from this study are supported by many other researchers' discoveries. As Lowe (2016) mentioned, a child who engages in art activities assumes the significant role of a creator, who is capable of making useful decisions and learns by making mistakes. Art spaces and art-integrated curriculum provide such children a unique opportunity to develop their socio-emotional skills through practical art experiences. According to Adesope & Rud (2019), we found the similar benefits of assessment. As they said, art is one of the methods that is subjected to fun or enjoyable learning where it helps boost children's self-confidence. As teachers mentioned, art brings children closer to teachers. It also helps the teacher understand children's thinking. It is remarked by teachers that children's thoughts are readable and understandable with the help of art. Art therapy helps in getting rid of anxiety and depression and additionally helps in expression. Art therapy aids in increasing stability and makes them sit in the classroom and settle down, eventually encouraging them to learn.

### **Triangulation**

Well-known researcher Rubin (2001) stated that art therapy is assumed to be used to assist people in finding ways to learn about themselves and the world, as well as to build relationships between the two.

From this exploration we found that art therapy or art related activities helps exceptional children, including hyperactive kids to achieve peace and calmness. It also makes visual learning easier, shapes thought and emotion, bringing children closer to teachers, relieves depression and anxiety, and improves sociality. We found a similar report from Ballou (1995). As she said, art therapy is an approach that centers around art, it is a place where individuals can have both verbal and nonverbal outlets, be creative, resolve emotional conflicts, as well as promote self-awareness and personal growth. In addition, teachers from this study also agreed on art's effectiveness in conveying emotions, promoting communication, and improving learning effectiveness and enjoyment. Enabling teachers to work with special need pupils more skillfully, and lets them express their emotions via painting. It facilitates communication, and promotes trust, and can be integrated into classrooms for children with learning disabilities, fine motor troubles or language difficulties.

Drawing on cave walls is as old as art for healing, and it is a natural human inclination, similar to speaking and tool making; our species might be defined using this action (Rubin, 2001). To include, the foundation of art therapy is the belief that creating art is a therapeutic and life-improving activity that serves as a means of nonverbal expression of emotions and ideas. It is utilized in a broad range of contexts with children, adults, families, and groups in order to promote personal development, enhance self-awareness, and aid in emotional repair, just like other types of psychotherapy and counseling (Malchiodi, 2007). We found similarities from teachers participating in this study. They all agreed that art helps children understand their thoughts, relieves anxiety and depression, and increases stability, encouraging them to sit in the classroom and learn. Teachers agree to the fact that, not only in special education, art therapy is a crucial tool in general education as well.

Art therapy promotes the idea that everyone has the ability to express themselves and that the therapeutic process itself is more significant than the final result (Malchiodi, 2003). From both aspects, researchers and this study conclusion agree on art therapy's power and effectiveness. According to previous research works and this study outcomes, it can be assumed that art therapy is a great initiative to enhance the learning of gifted children. It has many potential, and if art therapy can be implemented into the education of special children, I believe it will bring influential changes into their lives in a positive way. Furthermore, art therapy's influence is detectable in helping children to cope with depression by improving their understanding, providing a forum for them to express their emotions, helping them lead life like an average child, and trying to make life as easy and lively as possible. Overall, this study has found a promising and positive attitude toward art therapy that helps not only in their personal lives but also in social, emotional, and educational criteria. This is immensely crucial in the long run.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Conclusion**

According to Silver (1989), when children have handicaps that interrupt with learning, we are repeatedly so engrossed by their difficulties that we lose the sight of their strength. Children with additional requirements are unique. They have obstacles but still have the possibility to be developed. And this potential can be harnessed through art therapy. Many researchers and educators have noted its effectiveness in developing the lives of special children and assisting with their limitations. Thompson (2019) has mentioned in his study that art is an appropriate medium for gifted kids because it offers learning via play. There are numerous ways of art therapy for working with children with special requirements, for example, drawing with sand, lentils, rice, seeds watercolor on paper, etc. Art therapy uses art medium as the prime way of communication and associates numerous creative ways with art. Art assists learning through actions that encourage and facilitate educational and social growth. According to many professional researchers, this therapy is especially useful for children with special needs. According to Lowe (2016), a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence is facilitated by art. With the assistance of art therapy, the child articulates his emotions, thinking, and internal conflicts through a visual representation, illustration, or some other kind of art.

In this study, emphasis is given to understand the effectiveness of art as a medium of learning for specially challenged children. Findings from the study suggest that the especially able students participating in art related learning programs showed suggestively lower level of anxiety and a considerably higher level of empathy and pro-social behavior by the end of this exploration.

With art integration, gifted children were able to maintain their focus for longer time, developed interest in new things and confidently tried out new stuffs. Art has also made improvement in patience, increased motivation, and it has been shown to optimize the child's development significantly. The qualitative analysis also suggest that art may contribute to more flexible and relaxed attitude, improve communication and learning skills in special kids. Overall, art might be able to contribute positively to the problem areas of special educational need's.

### **Recommendations**

As special children are prone to vulnerability, we must ensure the participation and collaboration of special children to change this planet positively. Also, providing opportunities and reducing negligence can enhance their chance to flourish and shine. Art therapy has the potential to give them a second chance in life. Art can have great breakthroughs in educating these special beings and shaping special children's education systems if used appropriately. Not only gifted kids but also regular youngsters' can be immensely benefitted by the use of art therapy. Hence, opportunities should be provided as well, and art therapy should be considered more in developing the lives of special and regular children.

To implement art therapy for the betterment of special children's, we should familiarize ourselves with eye-opening activities and action research to exchange knowledge and expertise through collaboration and synchronization. This research was

conducted despite many boundaries. However, it may serve as an enlightening starter for other researchers, educators, and policymakers.

**Acknowledgment:** No

**Author's Contribution:** *Tanzida Shahnaj Mukti:* Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing; *Sree Bidhan Chakraborty:* Methodology, Analysis

**Funding:** No

**Declaration:** All the authors have given consent for the publication.

**Competing Interest:** No

## References

1. Ballou, M. (1995). Psychological interventions.
2. Babbie, E. R. (2020). *The practice of social research*. Cengage Au.
3. Bryman, A. (2004). Qualitative research on leadership: A critical but appreciative review. *The leadership quarterly*, 15(6), 729-769.
4. Cuncliffe, L. (1999). Learning how to learn, art education and the 'background'. *Journal of Art & Design Education*, 18(1), 115-121.
5. Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2002). *Research methods in education*. routledge.
6. Ciesielska, M., Boström, K. W., & Öhlander, M. (2017). Observation methods. In *Qualitative methodologies in organization studies: Volume II: Methods and possibilities* (pp. 33-52). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
7. Cleland, J. A. (2017). The qualitative orientation in medical education research. *Korean journal of medical education*, 29(2), 61.
8. Drever, E. (1995). *Using Semi-Structured Interviews in Small-Scale Research. A Teacher's Guide*.
9. D'Eredita, M. A., & Barreto, C. (2006). How does tacit knowledge proliferate? An episode-based perspective. *Organization Studies*, 27(12), 1821-1841.
10. Parfitt, E., Parfitt, & Christie. (2019). *Young people, learning and storytelling*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
11. Fleshman, B., & Fryrear, J. L. (1981). The arts in therapy. (*No Title*).
12. Freilich, R., & Shechtman, Z. (2010). The contribution of art therapy to the social, emotional, and academic adjustment of children with learning disabilities. *The Arts in psychotherapy*, 37(2), 97-105.
13. Volkmar, F. R., & Wiesner, L. A. (Eds.). (2017). Essential clinical guide to understanding and treating autism. John Wiley & Sons.
14. Gilroy, A. (2006). Art therapy, research and evidence-based practice.
15. Gaitskell, C. D., & Gaitskell, M. R. (1953). *Art education for slow learners*. Bennett.
16. Jaarsma, P., & Welin, S. (2012). Autism as a natural human variation: Reflections on the claims of the neurodiversity movement. *Health care analysis*, 20(1), 20-30.
17. Sumardjo, J. (2000). Filsafat Seni, Bandung: Penerbit ITB. *Tengku Luckman Sinar, (1993). Motif Dan Ornament Melayu, Medan: Lembaga Pembinaan Dan Pengembangan Seni Budaya Melayu*.
18. Kostera, M., & Harding, N. (Eds.). (2021). *Organizational ethnography*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
19. Lambert, S. D., & Loiselle, C. G. (2007). Health information—seeking behavior. *Qualitative health research*, 17(8), 1006-1019.
20. Lawson, W. (2009). *Learning styles: Single attention and associated cognition in autism (SAACA)* (Doctoral dissertation, Deakin University).
21. Levick, M. F., Fink, P. J., & Piotrowski, Z. A. (1983). They could not talk and so they drew: Children's styles of coping and thinking. (*No Title*).
22. Lowe, E. (2016). Engaging Exceptional Students through Art Activities. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, 8(1), 14-18.
23. Lowenfeld, V. (1957). Creative and mental growth.
24. Malchiodi, C. A. (2003). Expressive arts therapy and multimodal approaches. *Handbook of art therapy*, 6, 106-119.
25. Malchiodi, C. A. (2007). The art therapy sourcebook. (*No Title*).
26. Malchiodi, C. A. (Ed.). (2011). *Handbook of art therapy*. Guilford Press.
27. McCarthy, M. (2015). Harnessing the power of art for children with special needs.
28. Mittedorf, W., Hendricks, S., & Landreth, G. L. (2013). Play therapy with autistic children. In *Innovations in play therapy* (pp. 257-269). Routledge.
29. Muhle, R., Trentacoste, S. V., & Rapin, I. (2004). The genetics of autism. *Pediatrics*, 113(5), e472-e486.
30. McGeer, V. (2004). Autistic self-awareness. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 11(3), 235-251.
31. Sampurno, M. B. T. (2017). Learning through children's paintings. In *Proceeding of International Conference on Art, Language, and Culture* (pp. 405-413).
32. Oliver, V. (2010). *301 smart answers to tough business etiquette questions*. Skyhorse Publishing Inc.
33. Adesope, O. O., Rud, A. G., Adesope, O. O., & Rud, A. G. (2019). *Contemporary Technologies in Education* (pp. 1-15). Palgrave, Macmillan.
34. Rubin, J. A. E. (2001). Approaches to art therapy: Theory and technique.
35. Rubin, J. A. (2005). Child art therapy: 25th anniversary edition.
36. Schweizer, C., Knorth, E. J., & Spreen, M. (2014). Art therapy with children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A review of clinical case descriptions on 'what works'. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 41(5), 577-593.
37. Sampurno, M. B. T., Prabandari, Y. S., & Marianto, M. D. (2020). Theoretical Exploration of Art Therapy and Education for Autistic Children. *IJIET (International Journal of Indonesian Education and Teaching)*, 4(2), 260-276.

38. Schweizer, C., de Bruyn, J., Haeyen, S., Henskens, B., Rutten-Saris, M., & Visser, H. (2009). *Handboek beeldende therapie: Uit de verf*. Houten, the Netherlands: Bohn Stafleu van Loghum.
39. Schlosberg, H. (1947). The concept of play. *Psychological Review*, 54(4), 229.
40. Silver, R. A. (1989). *Developing Cognitive and Creative Skills through Art: Programs for Children with Communication Disorders or Learning Disabilities. Revised.*
41. Thompson, H. (2019). *The PDA paradox: The highs and lows of my life on a little-known part of the autism spectrum*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
42. Wu, H. L., & Volker, D. L. (2009). The use of theory in qualitative approaches to research: application in end-of-life studies. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 65(12), 2719-2732.
43. Wilson, J. (2010). *Essentials of business research: A guide to doing your research project*. Sage publications.
44. Zwaigenbaum, L. (2011). Assessment and diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders. *BMJ*, 343.

**Publisher's Note**

*The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal* remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published data, map and institutional affiliations.

**©The Author(s) 2025. Open Access.**

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>