



USING ART THERAPY METHODS IN TEACHING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS THROUGH INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article scientifically analyzes the issues of using art therapy methods in teaching children with special needs based on inclusive education in the primary education process. The research is organized according to the IMRAD model (Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion), in which the pedagogical and psychological effectiveness of art therapy methods in the context of inclusive education is studied. The article highlights the impact of art therapy methods such as drawing therapy, music therapy, sand therapy, and drama and role-playing games on the emotional state, social adaptation, interest in lessons, and self-confidence of primary school students. During the research process, pedagogical observation and qualitative analysis methods were used. The results of the study demonstrate that art therapy methods are an effective pedagogical tool for facilitating the adaptation of children with special needs in the educational process within an inclusive education environment, ensuring their emotional stability and enhancing their social engagement. The results of this article hold practical significance for improving the inclusive approach in primary education practices and widely implementing art therapy methods.

Keywords: Inclusive education, children with special needs, art therapy, primary education, IMRAD model.

Introduction

In the context of current globalization and the rapid development of the education system, ensuring that every child has the right to quality education is an important social-pedagogical task. Especially, the issue of teaching children with special needs in general education institutions, without segregating them from society, is currently of pressing importance. From this perspective, the concept of inclusive education is developing as a significant component of the education system.(1-picture)



Inclusive education is a pedagogical approach that ensures children with various limitations in their physical, cognitive, psychological, or emotional development receive education in the general educational environment alongside their healthy peers.[1] This approach involves organizing the educational process while taking into account the

individual needs of the children. The main goal of inclusive education is to fully reveal each child's potential and enhance their adaptation to society and social activity.

The primary education stage plays a crucial role in shaping a child as a personality, their attitude toward learning, and the development of their social behavior.[2] It is during this period that important qualities such as self-confidence, independent thinking, engaging in communication, and emotional stability are formed. For children with special needs, this process is even more complex, as they often face difficulties in expressing their emotions, communicating with peers, and adapting to the learning process.

For this reason, alongside traditional teaching methods in inclusive classrooms, it is necessary to use innovative pedagogical approaches that support children's psychological well-being and help them express their inner experiences freely. One such effective approach is art therapy methods.[3]

Art therapy (2-picture) is a method aimed at ensuring the emotional, social, and psychological development of children through artistic means, including drawing, music[4], drama[5], colors,



(2-picture)



sand, and other forms of creative activity. In the process of art therapy, children have the opportunity to express their feelings nonverbally, freely, and naturally. This is particularly important for children with special needs who face difficulties in speech, communication, or emotional states.

Using art therapy methods in an inclusive educational environment increases students' interest in lessons, reduces stress and anxiety, and creates a positive psychological atmosphere in the classroom. Furthermore, art therapy develops children's creative thinking, strengthens their self-confidence, and eases the process of social adaptation.

In this regard, scientifically investigating the application of art therapy methods in effectively organizing inclusive education in primary education holds significant importance. This research is dedicated precisely to this issue, aiming to analyze the pedagogical and psychological potential of art therapy methods in the inclusive education process.

Methodology

This research aims to determine the pedagogical and psychological effectiveness of applying art therapy methods to elementary school students in an inclusive education setting. The research process utilized methods such as qualitative pedagogical observation, analysis, and practical activities.

Participants

The research involved students with various special needs enrolled in an elementary class at a general education school. The following categories of students were included in the research group:

- children with emotional-behavioral difficulties;
- students with speech development issues;
- children experiencing difficulties in social adaptation;
- students facing problems with attention focus.

During the research process, the individual capabilities, psychological state, and developmental needs of each child were taken into account.

Research Design

The research was conducted in three stages:

Diagnostic stage	Practical stage	Monitoring and analysis stage
the initial emotional state of the students, their social activity, and their adaptation level to the lesson process were clarified;	art therapy sessions were organized in an inclusive classroom setting;	the changes observed in the students were analyzed through pedagogical observation.

Methods of art therapy used



(3-rasm)

1. Drawing therapy (3-picture) This method aims to identify and express students' inner experiences, emotional states, and psychological conditions. During the sessions, children were encouraged to draw freely on any topic, express their moods through colors, and carry out artistic work on the theme "my feelings." As a result, the children were able to express their feelings non-verbally, which contributed to their emotional relief.

2. Music therapy (4-picture) Music therapy sessions focused on improving concentration, fostering inner calmness, and ensuring emotional stability. Calm background music, nature sounds, and rhythmic exercises were used in the sessions. In some activities, children performed actions to music, expressing their feelings through physical movement.



(4-picture)



(5-picture)

2. Sand therapy (5-picture) The use of sand therapy has contributed to the development of children's fine motor skills and enhanced imagination and creativity. The students created various shapes and narrative compositions using sand. This process increased relaxation in children, reduced internal tension, and strengthened their self-confidence.

4. Drama and role-playing games (6-picture) Within the framework of drama therapy, role-playing games were organized, allowing children to enact various social situations. This method helped students develop their communication skills, work in teams, express their thoughts, and establish positive relationships with peers. Positive changes were particularly observed in children who faced challenges in speech and socialization.



(6-rasm)

Organizing Activities

Art therapy sessions were held 2–3 times a week, each lasting 30–40 minutes. The sessions were organized either as an integrated part of the lesson process or as separate developmental activities. At the end of each session, a brief reflection was conducted to note the children's emotional state and level of engagement.

Analyzing Data

The students' behavior, participation in class, social interactions, and emotional states were assessed through systematic pedagogical observation. The collected data were analyzed comparatively to clarify the effectiveness of art therapy methods in inclusive education.

Results

During the research process, significant positive changes were observed in primary school students with special needs as a result of the systematic application of art therapy methods in an inclusive education setting. The obtained results were analyzed based on pedagogical observations, the students' engagement during sessions, and the changes in their social-emotional states.

Increased Interest and Engagement in Lessons

It was observed that the students' interest in the lesson process significantly increased during activities that utilized art therapy methods. Students who previously participated passively, were easily distracted, or prone to withdrawing from activities began to actively engage in drawing, working with sand, and musical activities. Creative activity heightened the students' internal motivation, transforming them into active subjects of the learning process.

Stabilization of Emotional State

The research results indicated that art therapy methods play a significant role in stabilizing the children's emotional state. During the sessions, the levels of anxiety, fear, and internal tension in the students decreased. Particularly, music therapy and drawing activities evoked a sense of calm in the children and reduced stress. Some students exhibited a decrease in crying, restlessness, and aggressive behaviors during the lessons.

Improvement in Social Interaction and Adaptation to the Group

Art therapy methods, especially drama and role-playing games, had a positive effect on developing students' social interaction skills. During the sessions, children learned to collaborate with one another, wait for their turn, exchange ideas, and provide mutual support. As a result, students who previously avoided interaction with their peers or were passive began to engage more actively with their class community.

Increased Self-Confidence

Throughout the study, it was determined that the self-confidence of children with special needs significantly increased. In art therapy sessions, children experienced a sense of success through their creative work. The encouragement



and positive feedback regarding their work fostered confidence in their own abilities. This situation subsequently had a positive impact on their engagement in other subjects as well.

Particular Effectiveness of Drawing and Sand

Therapy The research results demonstrated that drawing and sand therapy methods were especially effective. Through these activities, children had the opportunity to express their feelings non-verbally, freely, and naturally. This was particularly significant for students who had difficulties with verbal expression or emotional articulation. The process of working with sand helped increase the children's calmness and reduce internal tension.

Discussion

The results obtained during the research further confirm that art therapy methods are an effective pedagogical tool in the inclusive education process. Observations indicated that art therapy methods allow for the organization of the educational process while taking into account the individual psychological, emotional, and social characteristics of children with special needs. This aligns perfectly with one of the main principles of inclusive education, which is the idea of creating an "educational environment suitable for each child."

Traditional teaching methods mainly require students to listen, memorize, and reenact. This approach often poses difficulties for children with special needs, as most have issues related to attention concentration, verbal expression, or social communication. Art therapy, on the other hand, eliminates these limitations, allowing children to express their feelings in a non-verbal, creative, and free manner.

Based on the research results, it can be stated that art therapy methods have a significant positive impact not only on students' academic development but also on their social and emotional well-being. Specifically, drawing and sand therapy helped reduce internal tension and foster emotional stability in children. Music therapy contributed to balancing students' mental states and created a calm environment during the teaching process.

Activities organized through drama and role-playing games proved to be particularly significant in developing students' social communication skills. With this method, children had the opportunity to test various social situations, put



themselves in others' shoes, and collaborate with peers. As a result, students who were previously disengaged or passive began to gradually adapt to the classroom community.

Furthermore, the research process revealed that the effective application of art therapy methods is dependent on several conditions. First and foremost, it is crucial for teachers to have adequate knowledge and skills in the basics of art therapy. If the teacher cannot correctly understand the emotional state of the children or organizes creative activities improperly, the expected results of art therapy may decrease.

In addition, creating a comfortable psychological environment in the classroom is considered an important factor for the successful implementation of art therapy methods. Children only actively engage in art therapy activities when they feel free, safe, and supported. Therefore, collaboration among teachers, psychologists, and parents in inclusive classrooms holds significant importance.

Overall, the discussion results indicate that systematically introducing art therapy methods into the inclusive education process is an effective pedagogical solution for enhancing the quality of education for children with special needs, aiding their integration into society, and supporting their development as individuals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results of this research confirm that art therapy methods hold significant pedagogical and psychological importance in the effective organization of inclusive education within the primary education system. Art therapy methods facilitate the adaptation of children with special needs to the educational process, serving as an effective tool for stabilizing their emotional state and ensuring their social development.

The methods applied during the research, such as drawing, music, sand, and drama therapy, increased students' interest in lessons and transformed them into active participants in the learning process. Especially for students who face difficulties in speech, communication, or emotional states, art therapy provided an opportunity for self-expression. This situation enhanced the children's self-confidence and had a positive impact on their development as individuals.

Moreover, art therapy methods contributed to the development of positive relationships between healthy peers and children with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Through collaborative creative activities, children acquired skills for



cooperation, understanding, and supporting one another. This laid the groundwork for ensuring social integration, which is the primary goal of inclusive education.

The research findings indicate that the systematic and targeted implementation of art therapy methods into the primary education process not only improves the quality of education but also enhances children's psychological well-being. However, the effectiveness of these methods is directly related to the professional training of teachers, the psychological environment created in the classroom, and the collaboration among educators, psychologists, and parents in the educational process.

In this regard, it is advisable to widely implement art therapy methods into educational practices for the purpose of developing inclusive education, to provide special training for teachers on these methods, and to develop methodological guidelines. Additionally, continuing scientific research aimed at studying the long-term effects of art therapy methods will further improve the inclusive education system.

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