



The Relationship Between Music Education and Children's Social-emotional Development: A Literature Review

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Abstract

The purpose of this review is to examine the impact of music education on children's socio-emotional development. More specifically, this paper will critically review the literature on the impact of music education on children's emotional control, empathy, and social skills. Through the review of the literature, it is evident that research shows that music education, especially group musical activities, has a positive impact on children's socio-emotional development. Music education helps children to control their emotions and to know themselves better. It also helps children to develop their ability of empathy, to know the emotions of others better. In addition, music education can help children to develop their confidence and collaboration ability, which contribute to the improvement of their social skills and relationships with others in groups. The studies have some methodological limitations. First, all the studies have sample bias. Second, the design of these studies is mostly cross-sectional. Third, the validity of the data, especially the self-report data, needs to be improved. However, the findings of these studies show that music education has an important role in developing children's socio-emotional competencies. Future studies should overcome the methodological limitations of the current studies by using a longitudinal design and a more representative sample to explore the long-term impact of music education on socio-emotional and social skills development.

Keywords

Music Education; Emotional Regulation; Empathy; Social Skills; Child Development

1. Introduction

Social-emotional development is the most important area in child development because it is the first step towards socialization. It is challenging for educators and researchers since social-emotional development helps children recognize and control their emotions, be empathetic, feel self-aware and community aware, and develop and maintain healthy social relationships. It even shapes the future development of children by helping them make responsible decisions according to moral standards, safety rules, social rules, respect for others, and the consequences of their actions, thus preparing them for their future work and life success (Varadi, 2022). However, music education offers a new perspective on the social-emotional learning and development of children. It creates an interesting point of contact between musical and non-musical functions, which is of great importance in educational research. Music education, which is a combination of creative expression and structured learning, provides a powerful opportunity for children to develop these important skills.

In recent years, the issue of how music education affects children's social-emotional development has been examined from various perspectives using different methods, age groups, and types of music education. It is even found that it could increase children's IQ (Rose et al., 2019). Singing is the most important aspect of music that helps children develop their physical skills, social skills, emotional skills, and intellectual skills. All of these findings have proven that music education plays an undeniable role in the psychological development of children. Despite the large volume of studies, there is a clear lack of research on the relationship between music education and children's social-emotional development.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between music education and children's social-emotional development from three aspects with important educational and practical value: empathy, social abilities, and emotional regulation. The goal is to explore how music education can promote the social-emotional development of children and provide empirical evidence to help educators, researchers, and practitioners better understand the achievements and limitations in this area. By reviewing the existing literature, this paper attempts to provide some insights for exploring the exploration of music education in the social-emotional development of children, providing future research directions and teaching ideas.

2. Methodology

This literature review includes academic journals and books from 2010 to 2023. At the initial stage of literature review, the authors searched online databases such as Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar for literature related to "music education," "children's social-emotional development," "empathy," "social skills," and "emotional regulation," and their cross-combination. The search range was restricted in the past thirty years. Manual searching of key classic literature and highly cited literature from related fields was also conducted for these journals: International Journal of Music Education, Music Education Research, and Psychology of Music, in addition to database results. To ensure the quality and relevance of the studies included, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established:

Inclusion Criteria

- (1) Studies focusing on children as the primary subjects;
- (2) Research examining the impact of music education on social-emotional development, particularly in empathy, social abilities, and emotional regulation;
- (3) Studies employing quantitative or qualitative methods, or mixed-method research;
- (4) Publications in peer-reviewed academic journals or books published by renowned academic institutions.

Exclusion Criteria

- (1) Studies not focused on children or lacking separate data for children;
- (2) Studies that do not specifically address the relationship between music education and social-emotional development;
- (3) Publications from non-peer-reviewed sources or non-academic articles (e.g., news articles, blogs).

A total of 223 studies were reviewed, but only 20 were directly related to the topic of this review (i.e., the relationship between music education and children's social-emotional development). The collected literature was divided into three categories: 1) The impact of music education on children's emotional regulation; 2) The impact of music education on the development of children's empathy; 3) The enhancement of children's social skills through music education.

3. Main Findings

3.1 The Impact of Music Education on Children's Emotional Regulation

For children, the success of their emotional regulation affects their mental health and social behaviour. Literature review on the benefits of music education beyond academics: In the literature review on the benefits of music education beyond academics, it is shown that music learning can help students improve their social and emotional well-being.

In particular, children who engage in musical activities are found to have stronger emotional management and self-regulation, as these are closely related to the social support that they receive in group settings. Broh's research also indicated that activities beyond academics, in addition to helping in academic achievement, also help in emotional

regulation and social adaptation. With this enhanced ability, children are then able to respond calmly and effectively to emotional experiences. For example, when children learn to play an instrument, they are not only required to focus their attention and control their movements, but also regulate their emotions.

Koelsch (2010) discussed in detail the neural correlates involved in the processing of emotion evoked by music. He argued that music is able to evoke strong emotional reactions and consistently modulates emotional states (Koelsch, 2012-14). Hence, it is evident that music education does affect the brain's processing of emotions and, in turn, helps children to regulate their emotions better. Through music activities, children are able to express and regulate their emotions in a healthy way. Research has demonstrated that being involved in music education (e.g., singing, playing an instrument) can, in the long term, make children more resilient to emotional challenges. As a result, these children were better able to use music as a tool to bounce back from challenging emotions and view emotions in a positive way. Research has demonstrated that being involved in music activities can make children better at self-regulation in terms of emotional regulation.

3.2 The Impact of Music Education on Children's Empathy Development

Empathy is one of the most basic elements of social-emotional learning, and music education, through its unique methods, may serve to enhance this essential trait. Namely, by placing children in musical situations, they not only recognize and understand the emotions of others, but also develop a more meaningful type of empathy that goes beyond understanding others' feelings, thoughts, and emotions. Importantly, research has shown that music education can greatly increase children's cognitive empathy (Rabinovitch & Meltzoff, 2017). Cognitive empathy involves an understanding of, and ability to predict, others' emotions and behaviors in order to function effectively in social settings.

This emotional connection with their classmates encourages children to feel sympathy and prompts them to think about others' feelings and needs. Music education builds self-awareness. Learning in any musical context gives children more opportunities to develop cognitive capacities like self-awareness and empathy. When a child is expressing an emotion in a musical setting, he or she must empathize with (resonate with) the emotions of another. This new self-awareness helped them to better understand their peers, thus fostering their overall empathic capacity. Hallam (2010) argues that music has a significant effect on children and adolescents' overall intellectual, social, and personal development, a process that is probably mediated by music education, which consists of emotional reflections on an extensive range of expressions and experiences trans-culturally. In this way, such activities provide opportunities for expression and sharing of emotions, and they also help children to understand the emotions of others. Through music education, children become more aware of the emotional states of others and therefore become more empathic. Welch et al. (2014) have conducted extensive research into how singing has an impact on children's social and psychological development. They argue that participation in a choir forces the children to listen to and support each other, and thus creates a group that is characterized by empathy, in which all participants experience shared emotional states and thereby a stronger sense of belonging and group identity. The children receive emotional and social acceptance, and at the same time, emotional closeness through corresponding neural networks.

3.3 The Enhancement of Children's Social Skills through Music Education

The ability to interact with others productively in a school setting and in society at large is greatly dependent on the development of social skills in children. And music offers many opportunities for children to develop these important skills. When we engage in music, we create a social situation and thus an environment in which children can practice their social skills in a positive and fun setting. Choir or orchestra requires that children meet certain musical demands, but they also require that children engage with others and work toward coordinated performance (Hanna-Pladdy & Mackay, 2011). Children learn how to work with others, how to listen to others, and how to function as a team as they engage in music. As children engage in music, they have the opportunity to engage in cooperation, communication, and interaction with others, and therefore, they can develop their social skills. In addition, children's social skills improve because music education builds their self-confidence. When children are successful in their musical performances, their self-esteem increases.

4. Discussion

A detailed analysis of the above literature revealed that music education positively affects three dimensions of

children's social-emotional development: emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills. Both researchers adopt different perspectives and use different methods. In addition, most of the literature adopted cross-sectional designs, making it difficult to support any causal claims (Schellenberg, 2004). Also, since most longitudinal studies did not have control groups, it is difficult to attribute changes in children's IQ to music education. Furthermore, most of the studies adopted sampling biases, meaning that the studies focused on particular age groups or cultural groups, which limits the generalization of the findings (Rabinovitch & Meltzoff, 2017). The findings from qualitative data may also limit the precision and generalization of the findings of the studies. For example, Campayo-Muñoz & Cabedo-Mas (2017) pointed out that the role of emotional skills within music education may limit the precision of the findings from qualitative data. The content and duration of the music education were different among the studies, which limited the comparability of the studies. Additionally, it inadequately tracked the long-term impact of music education on social skills, meaning that the social skills were not durable. At the same time, there were also problems with the reliability and scientific validity of the outcome measures.

5. Conclusion

Abstract: This review supports the claim that music education has a positive effect on children's social-emotional development, especially on their emotional control, empathy, and social interaction. Musical performances, especially in choir and band, enable children to experience emotional resonance, increase cooperation, and interact better with each other. Music education also increases children's self-confidence, thereby enhancing their social interaction. Previous studies have limitations in sample representation and research design, which affect their results. However, the overall picture shows that previous studies have found music education to have a positive effect on children's social-emotional development. Future studies should use more representative and longitudinal designs to more accurately examine music education's long-term effects.

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