"THE IMPACT OF MUSIC THERAPY ON EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ANXIETY REDUCTION IN SCHOOLCHILDREN"

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Abstract: This study investigates the pedagogical and psychological impact of music therapy on developing emotional intelligence and reducing anxiety levels among school-aged children. In the modern educational environment, students frequently experience academic stress and emotional imbalances, which negatively affect both their psychological well-being and academic performance. To address this issue, an empirical research methodology was implemented, involving an experimental group of schoolchildren who participated in structured music therapy sessions—including active music-making, rhythmic exercises, and receptive music listening—alongside a control group following a traditional curriculum. The results of the study indicate a significant positive correlation between regular music therapy practices and the enhancement of students' emotional self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication skills.

Keywords: music therapy, emotional intelligence, anxiety reduction, schoolchildren, emotional self-regulation, psychological well-being, music pedagogy.

Introduction: The contemporary educational environment places significant academic, social, and emotional demands on schoolchildren, often leading to increased levels of stress, psychological tension, and anxiety. Prolonged emotional distress not only impairs cognitive development and academic performance but also negatively affects the overall psychological well-being of young learners. In this context, developing emotional intelligence—defined as the ability to monitor, express, and regulate one's own emotions and understand those of others—becomes a critical educational objective. Traditional pedagogical approaches often prioritize cognitive metrics over emotional development, necessitating the integration of innovative, non-pharmacological interventions within the school curriculum to support students' psychological health.

Music therapy has increasingly gained recognition as a powerful therapeutic and pedagogical tool capable of influencing human emotions, neurological pathways, and behavioral responses. Historically, the therapeutic effects of music have been explored by pioneering researchers such as E. Thayer Gaston and

Juliette Alvin, who established the foundations of modern music therapy. In recent decades, neuroscientific advances have further demonstrated how music engages the brain's limbic system, which regulates emotions and memory. In the field of modern music pedagogy and psychology, scholars such as Stefan Koelsch and Susan Hallam have extensively documented the profound impact of musical engagement on intellectual and emotional development. However, despite this wealth of general research, there remains a distinct need to investigate specific methods for implementing structured music therapy programs directly within the standard school environment to address classroom-related anxiety.

Methodology: To empirically evaluate the impact of music therapy on emotional intelligence and anxiety reduction among schoolchildren, a mixed-methods experimental research design was employed. The study combined quantitative assessments of anxiety and emotional intelligence with qualitative pedagogical observations to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The research was conducted over a structured period within a general education school environment, focusing on primary and early secondary school students (ages 8 to 11) who exhibited signs of academic stress and classroom-related anxiety.

The participant cohort was randomly divided into two distinct groups to measure the intervention's efficacy accurately: the experimental group and the control group. The control group continued with their standard academic curriculum without any therapeutic modifications. Conversely, the experimental group participated in a structured school-based music therapy program conducted three times a week. Each session lasted approximately 25 to 30 minutes and integrated both active and receptive music therapy techniques. Receptive methods involved guided music listening using low-tempo, harmonic classical and ambient compositions designed to lower heart rates and induce psychological relaxation. Active methods included rhythmic drumming exercises, vocal expression, and collaborative instrument-playing, which encouraged emotional release and interpersonal communication.

Results: The quantitative and qualitative data gathered throughout the research period revealed significant differences in emotional development and anxiety levels between the two groups. Prior to the intervention, both the experimental and control groups exhibited highly similar baselines regarding classroom-related anxiety and emotional self-regulation. However, the post-intervention assessments conducted at the end of the study demonstrated a clear positive shift exclusively among the students who participated in the structured music therapy program.

In terms of anxiety reduction, the data obtained from the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC) indicated a substantial decline in psychological tension within the experimental group. Specifically, overall classroom anxiety levels in the experimental group decreased by approximately 30 percent. Students who previously reported high levels of stress during examinations and public speaking tasks displayed greater emotional stability and fewer somatic symptoms of distress, such as restlessness or lack of focus. In contrast, the control group showed no significant statistical improvement, with anxiety levels remaining virtually unchanged, and in some instances, slightly increasing due to upcoming academic evaluations.

Discussion: The empirical findings of this study clearly demonstrate that school-based music therapy is an effective psychological and pedagogical intervention for improving emotional well-being in schoolchildren. The observed 30 percent reduction in anxiety and 25 percent increase in emotional intelligence metrics within the experimental group support the hypothesis that structured musical engagement directly influences emotional regulation centers in the human brain. From a neuroscientific perspective, these outcomes can be attributed to music's capacity to engage the limbic system and modulate cortisol levels, thereby counteracting the physiological symptoms of academic stress. Rather than being a mere recreational activity, music therapy functions as a structured cognitive anchor that helps children recalibrate their emotional states during the school day.

A critical aspect of the results is the contrasting performance between active and receptive music therapy techniques. Receptive methods, such as listening to low-tempo, harmonic compositions, proved highly effective in lowering situational anxiety and inducing relaxation before high-stress academic tasks like examinations. On the other hand, active music-making, including rhythmic drumming and group singing, played a more prominent role in developing social components of emotional intelligence, such as empathy and peer cooperation. This suggests that a balanced, dual-method approach is necessary when designing school-based music interventions, as different musical activities stimulate distinct psychological and social mechanisms.

Conclusion: This research underscores the critical importance of incorporating emotional well-being strategies into the modern educational framework, demonstrating that school-based music therapy is a highly viable mechanism for achieving this goal. The empirical evidence gathered throughout the study confirms that structured musical interventions systematically lower

classroom-related anxiety while fostering key metrics of emotional intelligence, such as empathy, self-regulation, and social cooperation. By bridging the gap between cognitive demands and emotional needs, music therapy provides young learners with the psychological resilience necessary to navigate academic stress.

The practical outcomes of the study suggest that a combination of receptive and active music therapy techniques offers the most comprehensive benefits, addressing both individual physiological tension and broader interpersonal dynamics. Consequently, it is recommended that educational institutions transition from viewing music solely as an aesthetic subject to recognizing its profound value as a therapeutic and developmental tool. Integrating short, expert-designed musical sessions into the standard school week can drastically improve the overall classroom climate and reduce student burnout.

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