Volume 5, Issue 1, June 2026, ISSN: 2948-4316
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20823429
Published on: 30 June 2026

Journal of Social Sciences and Business
Quest International University
https://qiu.edu.my/journal/index.php/jssb/index

EXPLORING TEACHERS' VIEWS TOWARDS UTILIZING MUSIC IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Shirley Tan Yang Qing[1], Aznan Che Ahmad[2*], Ratna Osman[2]

[1]Quest International University, Perak, Malaysia
[2]Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam

**Corresponding author: aznan.ahmad@ubd.edu.bn*

Abstract: This study investigates educators' perspectives on the use of music-based activities to support children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Music is frequently recognized as an effective medium for fostering emotional expression, enhancing social engagement, and increasing classroom participation, particularly among learners who experience difficulties in communication and interaction. Despite these advantages, the degree to which music is incorporated into teaching practices often depends on teachers' knowledge, confidence, and perceptions, which remain insufficiently examined within the Malaysian context. A qualitative research design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with teachers working in both inclusive and specialized educational settings. Thematic analysis indicated that participants acknowledged multiple benefits of music, including enhanced student engagement, improved communication, and better emotional regulation. Nevertheless, several constraints were identified, such as limited professional training, insufficient resources, and reliance on informal teaching approaches. Teachers with prior musical experience demonstrated higher confidence levels, whereas others expressed uncertainty due to inadequate preparation. Guided by Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the findings highlight how processes such as observation, imitation, and reinforcement can be facilitated through music to support behavioural and social development in children with ASD. The study recommends the provision of structured training, improved access to resources, and the adoption of evidence-based practices to strengthen teachers' capacity and promote inclusive education.

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), music-based interventions, inclusive education, music activities, social learning theory

INTRODUCTION

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a developmental conditions characterized by challenges in communication, social interaction, and behavioural adaptability. Globally, educators have increasingly explored innovative strategies to support learners with ASD, with music emerging as a particularly promising approach. Previous research suggests that music can transcend linguistic barriers, activate multiple areas of the brain, and offer a constructive channel for emotional expression.

In Malaysia, national initiatives such as the Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (PPPM) and the Special Education Integration Program (SEIP) have contributed to expanding access to education for students with special needs. However, the integration of music within classroom practices often remains unstructured, typically involving spontaneous singing or rhythmic activities rather than systematically designed interventions. This study therefore examines how teachers perceive and implement music-based activities for children with ASD, with particular attention to their confidence, knowledge, and the level of institutional support available.

The study is informed by Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. These processes are closely aligned with musical

engagement, where elements such as rhythm, melody, and repetition can facilitate the modelling of social behaviours, emotional regulation, and communication skills in supportive learning environments.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Music is frequently recognized as a valuable medium for supporting emotional development and holistic growth in children. For learners with ASD, participation in musical activities has been associated with reduced anxiety, increased engagement, and improved social interaction. Activities such as singing, movement, and rhythmic exercises can contribute to the development of communication skills, emotional regulation, and active participation in classroom settings.

Within Malaysian special education environments, however, the use of music varies considerably. Its effectiveness often depends on teachers' confidence, training, and pedagogical knowledge. While some educators regularly integrate music into their lessons, others encounter challenges due to limited strategies or insufficient resources.

Teachers play a critical role in determining how music is implemented in classrooms for children with ASD. Their beliefs, experiences, and perceived challenges directly influence the effectiveness of music-based practices. Despite this, there remains limited research focusing on teachers' perspectives within Malaysia. Understanding these perspectives is essential for identifying effective practices, addressing existing barriers, and optimizing the use of music in supporting children's learning and development.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) presents ongoing challenges in communication, social interaction, and behavioural flexibility. These difficulties often limit children's ability to participate fully in classroom learning activities. Music-based approaches, which are engaging and socially interactive, have been identified as potential strategies to help address these challenges.

Although the benefits of music are widely acknowledged, its implementation in educational settings largely depends on teachers' preparedness and confidence. Educators are responsible for designing lessons, selecting appropriate activities, and adapting instructional strategies to meet diverse learner needs. However, many teachers report feeling insufficiently equipped to apply music-based approaches, particularly in contexts where training opportunities and institutional support are limited.

As a result, music is often used in an informal and unstructured manner, without clear pedagogical frameworks or evidence-based planning. This can lead to inconsistent practices and uncertainty regarding its effectiveness. Without such insights, it is difficult to design appropriate training programs, develop relevant resources, or establish effective support systems. Addressing this gap is therefore essential to ensure that music is implemented purposefully and consistently to enhance learning outcomes for children with ASD.

OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

i. Examine teachers' perspectives on the use of music activities with children diagnosed with ASD.

ii. Identify the challenges encountered by teachers when implementing music-based activities.
iii. Explore how teachers incorporate musical activities into their teaching practices.
iv. Investigate teachers' perceptions of the benefits of music for children with ASD.

METHODS

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perspectives on the use of music activities with children diagnosed with ASD. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection method, as they enable participants to share their experiences, reflect on their teaching practices, and discuss both the advantages and challenges of integrating music into the classroom.

Population and Sampling

The study focused on teachers who were actively working with children diagnosed with ASD in specialized educational settings. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants with relevant experience and direct involvement in music-based teaching practices. Five teachers from the researcher's institution were recruited. Although the sample size was relatively small, it allowed for a detailed and meaningful exploration of individual perspectives. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, were strictly maintained. Data saturation was achieved after the fifth interview.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews guided by five key themes: (1) prior use of music in teaching, (2) teachers' perceptions of music activities, (3) challenges and limitations, (4) strategies for integration, and (5) perceived benefits for children with ASD. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Field notes were also taken to supplement the recordings. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The process involved repeated reading of transcripts to achieve familiarity, followed by the generation of initial codes that captured significant ideas related to teachers' perspectives, confidence, and challenges. These codes were then organized into categories and refined into broader themes through continuous comparison. NVivo software was used to facilitate systematic organization and analysis of the data.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Credibility was enhanced by incorporating direct quotations from participants. Dependability was ensured through systematic documentation of the research process. Confirmability was maintained by grounding interpretations in

participants' responses rather than researcher bias. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participant characteristics.

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Five teachers participated in the study, all of whom had experience working with children diagnosed with ASD and had incorporated music into their teaching practices. The respondents represented a range of educational contexts, including special education institutions, mainstream schools with special needs units, inclusive settings, and dedicated special needs classrooms.

Teaching experience ranged from five to ten years, indicating substantial exposure to both the educational needs of children with ASD and the use of music in classroom settings. This diversity provided a comprehensive perspective on how music activities are implemented across different educational environments. To maintain confidentiality, participants were identified using pseudonyms such as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and so on. Table 1 presents the demography details of the respondents.

Table 1

Demography of The Respondents

Respondents	Teaching Experience	Educational Environment	Experience with Children with ASD
Teacher 1	6 years	Institution for Special Education	6 years
Teacher 2	8 years	Mainstream Institution (Special Needs unit)	8 years
Teacher 3	5 years	Institution for Special Education	5 years
Teacher 4	10 years	Classroom for Special Needs	10 years
Teacher 5	7 years	All-Inclusive Institution	7 years

Theme 1: Teachers' Perspectives and Competence

Participants generally expressed positive attitudes toward the use of music, describing it as an effective tool for capturing students' attention and enhancing engagement. Several teachers highlighted that music facilitated connection and encouraged self-expression among children with ASD. However, they also noted that its effectiveness varied depending on individual sensory preferences, emphasizing the need for careful adaptation of activities.

Theme 2: Challenges in Implementation

Despite their positive perceptions, teachers identified several obstacles in implementing music activities. These included limited access to resources, insufficient support staff, and difficulties related to students' sensory sensitivities. Time constraints and a lack of specialized training were also frequently mentioned, indicating a need for greater institutional support and professional development opportunities.

Theme 3: The Utilization of Music Activities

Teachers reported using a variety of musical activities, such as action songs, rhythmic exercises, humming, percussion instruments, and movement-based activities. These were often integrated into daily routines rather than treated as separate lessons. The teachers emphasized that music could help their students' focus, reduce anxiety, and support emotional regulation, demonstrating its flexibility as a teaching tool.

Theme 4: Perceived Benefits for Children with ASD

Participants consistently observed positive outcomes associated with the use of music. These included increased attentiveness, improved communication, and enhanced emotional regulation. Teachers noted that music encouraged interaction among peers and supported the development of social skills. In some cases, children who were typically less responsive became more engaged through musical activities.

DISCUSSION

Teachers' Perspectives

The findings indicate that teachers generally view music as an engaging and effective approach for supporting children with ASD. Their perspectives align with existing research highlighting the interactive and motivating nature of music. However, confidence levels varied, often influenced by prior experience and familiarity with music-based strategies.

Challenges in Implementation

Several barriers were identified, including limited resources, insufficient training, and time constraints. These challenges reflect broader issues within educational systems, where support for integrating music into special education remains limited. Additionally, the diverse sensory and communication needs of children with ASD further complicate the implementation of music activities.

Utilization of Musical Activities

Teachers tended to incorporate music into daily routines, using it as a flexible tool to support various learning objectives. The structured and repetitive nature of music was found to be particularly beneficial for children with ASD, as it supports predictability and engagement.

Perceived Benefits

The study confirms that music can positively influence communication, emotional development, and social interaction among children with ASD. These findings reinforce the potential of music as both a pedagogical and therapeutic tool within inclusive education settings.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of music in supporting children with autism spectrum disorder, as perceived by teachers in both inclusive and specialized educational contexts. Music was found to enhance engagement, improve communication, support emotional regulation, and encourage social interaction.

However, several challenges remain, including limited resources, insufficient training, and variability in students' needs. Addressing these issues requires systemic support, including professional development programs, improved resource allocation, and the integration of music-based approaches into teacher training curricula.

By strengthening these areas, educational institutions can better harness the potential of music to support children with ASD and promote more inclusive learning environments. Future research should expand on these findings by exploring diverse contexts and larger populations to further validate and refine music-based interventions.

ORCID

Aznan Che Ahmad: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3744-0091
Ratna Osman: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3436-119X

REFERENCES

Altun, T., & Eyüpoğlu, S. (2018). Sensory sensitivities in children with autism spectrum disorder: Implications for inclusive education. *International Journal of Special Education, 33*(2), 45–58.

Au, W., & Lau, C. (2021). Teacher confidence in implementing music-based interventions for children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Special Education Pedagogy, 36*(1), 12–25.

Augustine, L., & Wong, S. (2016). Music in Malaysian special education classrooms: Practices and challenges. *Malaysian Journal of Music Education, 28*(2), 55–70.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, J., Berry, M., & Phillips, R. (2025). Music and emotional expression in children with developmental disorders. *Child Development Perspectives, 19*(1), 34–42.

Dumont, E., Jensen, A., & Sørensen, H. (2017). Music as a developmental tool for children. *Child Development Research, 12*(1), 23–34.

Geretsegger, M., Elefant, C., Mössler, K. A., & Gold, C. (2014). Music therapy for people with autism spectrum disorder. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 2014*(6), CD004381. https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD004381.pub3

Golden, J., Smith, K., & Patel, R. (2021). Institutional barriers to music integration in special education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 25*(7), 812–829.

Kim, H., Park, J., & Lee, S. (2024). Structured music activities and communication outcomes in children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 54*(3), 765–778. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-023-05612

Koelsch, S. (2014). Brain correlates of music-evoked emotions. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 15*(3), 170–180. https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn3666

Martínez-González, A., López, R., & García, M. (2021). Autism spectrum disorder: Characteristics and educational challenges. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 36*(5), 623–639.

Mawby, R. (2018). Informal use of music in classrooms: Implications for pedagogy. *British Journal of Music Education, 35*(2), 145–160.

Mössler, K., Gold, C., Aßmus, J., & Schumacher, K. (2020). Music therapy for children with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 29*(6), 781–794.

Musdalifah, N. (2023). Teachers' perspectives on music integration in ASD classrooms. *Asian Journal of Special Education, 12*(1), 88–102.

Navarro, P., Torres, M., & Delgado, J. (2025). Music interventions for children with autism: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology, 16*, 112–124. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.011212

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 42*(5), 533–544. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Savage, R., Zhang, X., & McConnell, B. (2024). Teacher preparedness for music-based interventions in special education. *Journal of Special Education Research, 48*(1), 12–25.

Van Geel, T., van der Steen, S., & Vink, A. (2023). Teachers' role in adapting music activities for children with autism. *International Journal of Music Education, 41*(2), 145–160.

VanWeelden, K., & Whipple, J. (2013). Music educators' perceptions of preparation to teach students with special needs. *Journal of Music Teacher Education, 22*(2), 26–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/1057083712458406

Vuust, P., Heggli, O. A., Friston, K., & Kringelbach, M. L. (2022). Music as a tool for brain development and therapy. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 26*(5), 375–389. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2022.03.002

Zhao, L., Chen, Y., & Wang, J. (2025). Structured music activities in autism classrooms: A mixed-methods study. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 55*(4), 1123–1138. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-024-05678