



ROLE OF ARTS AND CREATIVITY IN REDUCING STRESS AND IMPROVING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AMONG DISABLED SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

The present research paper focuses on the role of arts and creativity in reducing stress and improving emotional well-being among disabled school children. Disabled children often face academic pressure, communication barriers, low self-confidence, social isolation, and emotional difficulties in the school environment. Arts and creativity provide supportive and child-friendly methods through which children can express their emotions without fear or pressure. Activities such as drawing, painting, craft, music, rhythm, storytelling, role play, and drama help children communicate feelings that they may not express easily through words. These activities also support relaxation, confidence, classroom participation, social interaction, and emotional resilience. Arts-based education is especially important in inclusive classrooms because it respects different abilities, learning styles, and modes of expression. The paper highlights that creative activities should not be treated only as extra-curricular activities but as meaningful educational tools for emotional development and stress management. The study suggests that regular use of art, music, and drama in schools can create a more inclusive, joyful, and emotionally supportive learning environment for disabled school children.

Keywords

Arts, Creativity, Stress Reduction, Emotional Well-Being, Disabled School Children, Inclusive Education, Art Activities, Music Activities, Drama Activities, Emotional Expression

Introduction

Education plays an important role in the overall development of children. It is not limited to academic learning, reading, writing, and examination performance. It also includes emotional development, self-expression, confidence, communication, social participation, creativity, and problem-solving ability. For disabled school children, these areas become more important because they may face several difficulties in the school environment. These difficulties may include academic pressure, communication problems, physical limitations, social isolation, peer rejection, low confidence, and emotional stress.

Arts and creativity provide an effective way to support disabled school children emotionally and socially. Creative activities such as drawing, painting, colouring, craft work, music, singing, rhythm activities, storytelling, role play, drama, and movement give children opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings in simple and comfortable ways. These activities are especially useful for children who may find it difficult to express their emotions through words. Through art, children can use colours and images to show their feelings. Through music, they can experience calmness, joy, rhythm, and emotional connection. Through drama and role play, they can express emotions, practise communication, and build confidence.

Arts-based education supports inclusive learning because it allows every child to participate according to ability, interest, and comfort. In traditional classroom activities, disabled children may feel pressure due to comparison, marks, speed, or verbal performance. However, creative activities provide freedom from such pressure and help children feel accepted and valued. These activities also support holistic development by improving emotional expression, social interaction, imagination, attention, confidence, and resilience.



The role of arts and creativity is therefore highly significant in reducing stress and improving emotional well-being among disabled school children. A school environment that includes art, music, and drama can become more child-centred, inclusive, and emotionally supportive. Such activities can help disabled children reduce stress, express feelings, improve mood, participate with confidence, and develop emotional strength.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the role of arts and creativity in reducing stress among disabled school children.
2. To examine how art activities help disabled school children express emotions and feel relaxed.
3. To analyse the impact of music activities on emotional well-being and classroom participation among disabled school children.
4. To assess the role of drama and role play in improving confidence, communication, and emotional expression among disabled school children.

Understanding Arts and Creativity in Education

Arts and creativity have an important place in education because they support the overall development of children beyond textbook learning and examination performance. Education is not limited to reading, writing, memorisation, and academic achievement. It also includes emotional development, imagination, self-expression, confidence, social participation, communication, and the ability to respond creatively to life situations. Arts and creativity help children express their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and ideas in different forms. These forms may include drawing, painting, craft, music, rhythm, dance, storytelling, role play, drama, movement, and creative writing. In the context of disabled school children, arts and creativity become even more meaningful because they provide alternative ways of expression for children who may find verbal, academic, or social communication difficult.

UNESCO gives importance to culture and arts education because it supports creativity, critical thinking, imagination, belonging, mutual understanding, inclusion, and participation in learning. The UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education emphasizes the need to integrate culture and arts education into formal, non-formal, and informal learning settings so that education becomes more inclusive and responsive to learners' needs (UNESCO, 2024). This is relevant to the present study because disabled school children need educational experiences that are flexible, expressive, and emotionally supportive. Arts and creativity can help the school environment move from a purely academic model to a more child-centred and inclusive model.

Meaning of Arts in Education

Arts in education refers to the use of creative and expressive activities as part of the teaching-learning process. It includes visual arts, music, drama, dance, craft, storytelling, and other forms of creative expression. In school education, arts are not only used for entertainment or co-curricular activities. They also support learning, emotional expression, communication, social interaction, confidence, and personality development. Through arts, children can express their ideas and emotions in ways that may not be possible through ordinary classroom language.

Visual art activities such as drawing, painting, colouring, clay modelling, collage-making, and craft work help children express inner thoughts and emotions. These activities allow children to use colour, shape, line, texture, and imagination to communicate their feelings. For disabled school children, visual arts can become a powerful method of expression because some children may have difficulty explaining their emotions verbally. A child who cannot easily say "I am sad" or "I am afraid" may express these feelings through colours, drawings, or creative forms. Bosgraaf et al. (2020) found that art therapy for children and adolescents uses different materials and forms of expression to address psychosocial problems and support emotional communication.

Music is another important form of arts in education. It includes singing, listening to songs, rhythm activities,



clapping, use of simple instruments, movement with sound, and group musical participation. Music can create calmness, joy, emotional connection, and social engagement. It can also help children improve attention, memory, listening ability, and coordination. For disabled children, music may be especially useful because rhythm and sound can support communication even when verbal expression is limited. Geretsegger et al. (2022) reported that music therapy may support autistic people in areas related to communication, interaction, and social-emotional development.

Drama is also a meaningful art form in education. It includes role play, storytelling, acting, facial expression, movement, dialogue, and group performance. Drama helps children understand different roles, situations, emotions, and social behaviours. It provides a safe space where children can express feelings indirectly through characters and stories. For disabled school children, drama activities can reduce hesitation, improve communication, and increase social confidence. Bololia et al. (2022) found that dramatherapy can support children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder by developing behavioural, expressive, social, and emotional skills.

Thus, arts in education means much more than drawing or singing for enjoyment. It is a broad educational approach that supports emotional, social, cognitive, and creative development. In inclusive education, arts can help children feel accepted, valued, and capable.

Meaning of Creativity in Education

Creativity in education refers to the ability of children to think, imagine, express, explore, and create something in their own way. It involves originality, curiosity, problem-solving, flexibility, emotional expression, and new ways of understanding experiences. Creativity does not mean that every child must become an artist, singer, actor, or performer. Rather, it means that every child should get opportunities to use imagination, make choices, express personal ideas, and participate actively in learning.

In the classroom, creativity develops when children are encouraged to ask questions, explore materials, express feelings, solve problems, and present ideas without fear of failure. A creative classroom allows children to think beyond fixed answers. It respects individual differences and gives space for multiple forms of expression. This is very important for disabled school children because they may not always perform well in conventional academic tasks, but they may show strong abilities in drawing, music, movement, craft, storytelling, or dramatic expression.

Creativity also supports emotional development. When children create something, they experience ownership, achievement, and satisfaction. A drawing, song, role play, or craft item becomes a personal expression of the child's inner world. This process helps the child release tension and gain confidence. Fancourt and Finn (2019) reviewed evidence on the role of arts in health and well-being and reported that arts engagement can contribute to health promotion, prevention, and management of different emotional and social needs. This indicates that creativity is not only an educational activity but also a supportive process for emotional well-being.

For disabled school children, creativity gives freedom from comparison. In many academic activities, children may be judged by marks, speed, handwriting, reading level, or memory. However, creative activities allow each child to participate according to ability, interest, and comfort. One child may express through colours, another through rhythm, another through body movement, and another through role play. This flexibility makes creativity highly suitable for inclusive classrooms.

Creativity also supports problem-solving. When children use art materials, music patterns, drama situations, or storytelling, they learn to make decisions. They decide which colour to use, which sound to create, how to act, how to complete a craft, or how to express a feeling. These small creative decisions strengthen independent thinking. Therefore, creativity in education is closely connected with confidence, expression, flexibility, imagination, and resilience.



Major Forms of Arts Used in School Education

Different forms of arts can be used in school education to support children's learning and emotional growth. The most common forms include visual arts, music, drama, dance, storytelling, craft, and movement-based activities. Each form has its own value, and each can be adapted according to the needs of disabled school children.

Visual arts include drawing, painting, colouring, clay work, paper craft, collage, poster-making, and model-making. These activities are useful because they allow children to express thoughts through non-verbal means. Children with speech difficulties, emotional stress, autism spectrum conditions, intellectual disability, or learning difficulties may benefit from visual arts because they can communicate through images and symbols. Bosgraaf et al. (2020) explain that art-based interventions use creative materials and expression to support children and adolescents with psychosocial problems. This is important in the present study because stress reduction often requires safe emotional expression.

Music activities include listening to calming music, singing, rhythm games, clapping patterns, musical instruments, group songs, and movement with music. Music can create a peaceful classroom environment and improve emotional regulation. It can also support social participation because music activities are often done in groups. For disabled children who feel shy or isolated, group music can help them feel connected with classmates. Geretsegger et al. (2022) reviewed music therapy for autistic people and found that music therapy may support social interaction, communication, and quality of life outcomes.

Drama activities include role play, storytelling, puppet play, expression games, mime, dialogue practice, and small classroom performances. Drama helps children practise social situations, understand emotions, and build confidence. A disabled child who feels afraid to speak in class may become more comfortable when speaking as a character in a role play. Drama allows children to express emotions indirectly, which can reduce fear and hesitation. Bololia et al. (2022) reported that dramatherapy may support expressive and social skills among children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder.

Dance and movement activities are also useful in education. They help children use body movement for expression, coordination, and relaxation. However, for disabled children, movement activities must be adapted according to physical ability and comfort. Some children may participate through hand movement, facial expression, seated movement, rhythm response, or guided gestures. The aim is not perfect performance but participation, expression, and enjoyment.

Storytelling is another creative method. It allows children to listen, imagine, respond, and express feelings. Teachers can use stories to discuss emotions, friendship, courage, difference, kindness, and coping with difficulty. Disabled children may relate to characters who overcome challenges. Storytelling can also be combined with drawing, music, or role play to make learning more interactive.

Craft activities such as paper folding, clay modelling, bead work, simple decoration, and handmade objects develop fine motor skills, patience, concentration, and creativity. When children complete a craft activity, they gain a sense of achievement. For disabled school children, this feeling of completion can be emotionally meaningful because it strengthens confidence and self-worth.

Thus, the major forms of arts used in education provide different pathways for learning and expression. They allow children to participate through seeing, hearing, touching, moving, imagining, speaking, and creating. This multi-sensory nature of arts makes them highly useful for disabled school children.

Arts and Creativity as Tools for Holistic Development



Holistic development means the complete development of a child's physical, emotional, social, intellectual, creative, and moral abilities. Arts and creativity support holistic development because they involve the mind, body, emotions, imagination, and social interaction. Unlike purely academic tasks, arts-based activities allow children to learn through experience, participation, and expression.

Emotionally, arts help children express feelings such as happiness, fear, sadness, anger, confusion, and hope. A child may not always be able to discuss stress directly, but creative activities can give emotional release. Drawing, music, and drama create safe channels for emotional communication. Fancourt and Finn (2019) reported that arts engagement has an important role in improving health and well-being through prevention, promotion, and management-related pathways. This supports the idea that arts can contribute to emotional well-being in educational settings.

Socially, arts encourage cooperation, sharing, turn-taking, listening, and group participation. In music, children may sing together. In drama, they may perform roles together. In art activities, they may share materials and appreciate each other's work. These activities can reduce isolation and improve peer relationships. For disabled children, such social experiences are very important because they may often feel separated from classmates.

Cognitively, arts improve attention, memory, observation, imagination, sequencing, and problem-solving. For example, when a child creates a drawing, the child observes shapes and colours. When a child participates in rhythm, the child follows patterns. When a child performs drama, the child remembers sequence, expression, and dialogue. These processes support learning in indirect but meaningful ways.

Physically, art and craft may improve fine motor coordination, while movement, rhythm, and drama may support body awareness and gross motor coordination. Disabled children may require adapted activities, but even small physical participation can support confidence and engagement. The focus should remain on ability, comfort, and participation rather than perfect performance.

Creatively, arts help children think independently. They learn that there can be many ways to express one idea. This reduces fear of wrong answers and encourages exploration. In academic tasks, children may feel pressure to give a correct answer, but in creative activities, they can express personal meanings. This helps in reducing stress and building self-confidence.

Mareza et al. (2025) explain that arts education for students with disabilities is connected with self-expression, communication, social-emotional development, and access to learning through specialised support. This is directly related to holistic development because arts help children grow emotionally, socially, cognitively, and creatively.

Importance of Arts and Creativity for Disabled School Children

Arts and creativity are especially important for disabled school children because they provide alternative ways of learning and expression. Disabled children may face barriers in reading, writing, speaking, listening, moving, social interaction, or emotional regulation. If education depends only on conventional classroom methods, many disabled children may feel excluded or unsuccessful. Arts-based activities reduce this pressure by allowing children to participate according to their own strengths.

One important benefit of arts and creativity is emotional expression. Disabled school children may experience stress due to academic pressure, peer rejection, bullying, communication difficulties, or low confidence. They may not always be able to express these feelings clearly. Art, music, and drama can help them communicate emotions without direct verbal explanation. Bosgraaf et al. (2020) found that art therapy interventions for children and adolescents can support expression and psychosocial functioning through creative materials and therapeutic processes.



Another benefit is confidence building. When disabled children complete a painting, sing a song, participate in rhythm, act in a role play, or make a craft item, they experience success. This success may be different from academic success but equally important for self-esteem. A child who struggles in reading may still perform well in drawing or music. This helps the child feel capable and valued.

Arts and creativity also support communication. For children with speech or language difficulties, visual art, music, gestures, rhythm, and drama can become communication tools. In drama activities, children learn to use facial expressions, body movement, and simple dialogue. In music activities, children may respond through sound or rhythm. In art activities, children can show feelings through images. These modes of communication are very useful in inclusive education.

Social inclusion is another important benefit. Arts-based activities are often group-based and enjoyable. When disabled and non-disabled children participate together in drawing, music, drama, or storytelling, they may develop friendship and understanding. Such activities reduce separation and encourage acceptance. UNESCO states that inclusive education works to identify and remove barriers across curricula, pedagogy, and teaching so that every learner can participate meaningfully (UNESCO, n.d.). Arts and creativity can support this goal because they make classroom participation more flexible.

Arts and creativity also help reduce stress. Music can create calmness, drawing can release emotions, drama can reduce hesitation, and craft can improve concentration. These activities give children a break from academic pressure and provide a relaxing learning experience. For disabled children who may experience repeated stress in school, creative activities can become a healthy coping method.

Therefore, arts and creativity are not optional or extra activities for disabled school children. They are important educational tools that support emotional well-being, communication, confidence, participation, and resilience.

Arts-Based Education as an Inclusive and Supportive Approach

Arts-based education is an inclusive approach because it respects different abilities, learning styles, and modes of expression. It allows children to learn through visual, auditory, physical, emotional, and social experiences. This is highly useful for disabled school children because they may not all learn in the same way. Some children learn better through pictures, some through sound, some through movement, and some through practical activities. Arts-based education provides these multiple pathways.

In inclusive education, the aim is not only to place disabled children in regular classrooms but also to ensure meaningful participation. A child may be physically present in the classroom but emotionally excluded if the teaching method does not match the child's needs. Arts-based education can reduce this gap by giving all children opportunities to participate. For example, a child who cannot write long answers may contribute through drawing. A child who cannot speak fluently may participate through rhythm. A child who feels shy may express through role play. In this way, arts create space for every child.

UNESCO's Framework for Culture and Arts Education emphasizes the importance of integrating arts and culture into education policies, curricula, teacher training, and learning programmes to support creativity, inclusion, and lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2024). This supports the argument that arts should not be treated only as occasional school activities. They should be included meaningfully in the curriculum, especially for children who need emotional and expressive support.

Arts-based education also helps teachers understand children better. A child's drawing, song choice, behaviour in drama, or response to music may show emotional needs that are not visible in regular academic work. Teachers can observe whether a child is anxious, withdrawn, confident, cooperative, or expressive. This can help teachers provide



better emotional support.

Arts also support classroom atmosphere. A classroom that includes drawing, music, storytelling, and drama becomes more joyful and less stressful. Disabled children may feel more comfortable in such an environment. They may become more willing to attend school, participate in activities, interact with peers, and express feelings. This makes arts-based education useful for stress reduction and emotional well-being.

However, arts-based education should be planned carefully. Teachers need sensitivity, patience, and basic training to adapt creative activities for disabled children. Activities should not create competition, embarrassment, or pressure. The aim should be expression, relaxation, participation, and emotional growth. For example, a drawing activity should not be judged only by neatness. A music activity should not require perfect singing. A drama activity should not force a child to perform beyond comfort. When arts are used in a supportive manner, they can become a powerful tool for inclusion.

Conclusion

The study concludes that arts and creativity play an important role in reducing stress and improving emotional well-being among disabled school children. Creative activities such as drawing, painting, music, singing, storytelling, role play, and drama provide children with safe and enjoyable ways to express their emotions. These activities help children feel relaxed, confident, socially connected, and emotionally supported. Arts-based education is also useful because it respects different abilities and provides flexible ways for disabled children to participate in classroom activities. The study highlights that art, music, and drama should be included as regular parts of school programmes, especially in inclusive education settings. When creative activities are planned carefully and used in a supportive environment, they can help disabled school children manage stress, improve self-confidence, express feelings, and develop emotional resilience.

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