

The Relationship Between Attitudes Towards Music Education and Academic Success

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine national and international research on the relationship between students' attitudes towards music education and their academic achievement from a holistic perspective.

The research was conducted using a review method, and selected national and international academic databases were used to access research on the relationship between music education and academic achievement. During the research process, studies published in peer-reviewed journals that directly focus on the subject were examined; the findings obtained were evaluated within a comparative and interpretive framework.

The studies examined reveal that there is generally a positive and significant relationship between attitudes towards music education and academic achievement. However, it is observed that this relationship is at a low or moderate level in most studies and varies depending on contextual variables. The findings indicate that the effect of music education on academic achievement is not directly causal, but rather indirectly manifested through cognitive and affective variables such as class participation, motivation, self-regulation, attitudes towards learning, and school commitment.

In conclusion, it can be said that music education is a complementary learning area that supports students' academic development, and its place within educational programs should be addressed in a way that strengthens the pedagogical quality of the course and student-centered practices. In this respect, the study provides a theoretical framework for research that evaluates the relationship between music education and academic success from a multidimensional perspective.

Keywords: Music education, attitudes towards music lessons, academic success

Introduction

In the educational process, art education is considered not only a field that develops an individual's aesthetic sensitivity, but also a holistic learning environment that supports cognitive, affective, and social development. Many studies emphasize that art-based learning environments positively influence students' higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and academic motivation (Eisner, 2002; Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). In this context, music education has a privileged position within formal education systems with its interdisciplinary structure and multifaceted learning outcomes.

Music education is directly related to fundamental cognitive processes such as attention, memory, language development, and problem-solving, and is considered an important educational field that supports students' learning capacities (Hallam, 2010). Neuroscience-based studies reveal that regular music education increases brain plasticity and strengthens cognitive networks involved in academic learning processes (Hyde et al., 2009). In this respect, music education is considered a learning experience that contributes not only to the outcome but also to the process dimension of academic success.

Attitudes towards music education are defined as a multidimensional construct encompassing students' feelings, thoughts, and behavioral tendencies regarding music lessons. The impact of attitude on learning is one of the fundamental variables that has long been emphasized in the educational psychology literature (Bloom, 1979). It is stated that the positive attitude students develop towards a lesson plays a decisive role in their participation in the lesson, their effort towards learning, and their academic continuity (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). It is noted that students who develop a positive attitude towards music lessons take a more active role in the learning process, and this is reflected in their overall academic performance.

Studies examining the relationship between music education and academic success in the international literature show that music education can have positive effects, especially on mathematical thinking, language skills, and general academic performance (Schellenberg, 2004; Vaughn, 2000). It is suggested that students who receive music education exhibit higher performance in abstract thinking and pattern recognition skills; and that these skills facilitate learning in academic subjects (Patel, 2011).

Research conducted in Turkey similarly reveals that attitudes towards music lessons are related to academic achievement, school commitment, and learning motivation (Kılıç & Yıldız, 2018; Özmenteş, 2013). However, the fact that music education is often perceived as a secondary subject within exam-oriented education systems can prevent its academic contributions from being sufficiently visible. This situation increases the need for research that addresses the relationship between music education and academic success from a more comprehensive and cross-variable perspective.

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between students' attitudes towards music education and their academic achievement.

Method

This study is a review aimed at a holistic evaluation of national and international research addressing the relationship between attitudes towards music education and academic achievement. The review method is considered an effective approach for systematically examining the existing knowledge in a specific field, revealing conceptual trends, and discussing research results in a comparative framework (Snyder, 2019). In this context, a literature search was conducted in the Web of Science, Scopus, Eric, Google Scholar, and Ulakbim Tr Dizin databases; the keywords “music education”, “attitude towards music lessons”, “academic achievement”, “music education attitude”, and “academic achievement” were used. Among the studies obtained as a result of the search, research published in peer-reviewed journals, accessible in full text, and directly addressing the relationship between music education and academic achievement were included in the review. The selected studies were evaluated in line with the research objective, the sample group considered, the methods used, and the main findings obtained, and common trends and differing results were analyzed with a descriptive and interpretive approach. In this study, a quantitative meta-analysis was not performed; By comparatively examining the findings in the literature, a general framework is presented regarding the relationship between attitudes towards music education and academic success.

Findings

The studies reviewed reveal a generally positive, statistically significant, and mostly low-to-moderate correlation between attitudes towards music education and academic achievement. Studies in the international literature show that students who develop positive attitudes towards music lessons tend to have higher overall academic performance, not just success in music (Schellenberg, 2004; Vaughn, 2000; Winner et al., 2013). This relationship is reported more prominently in areas such as mathematical thinking, reading comprehension, and verbal reasoning skills.

A significant portion of the studies examined emphasize that attitudes towards music education function not as a variable that directly determines academic achievement, but rather as a factor that regulates and supports the learning process. It is noted that students with positive attitudes have higher levels of class participation, exert more effort in the learning process, and exhibit more consistent performance on academic tasks (Schunk et al., 2014). This suggests that the effect of attitudes towards music education on academic achievement is indirect, mediated through motivation, self-regulation, and attitudes toward learning.

Some studies have reported a relatively limited relationship between attitudes towards music education and academic achievement. This finding suggests that music education alone is not a strong determinant of academic success; however, this relationship can be strengthened when appropriate pedagogical conditions are provided (Hallam, 2010). In particular, structural factors such as the weekly lesson hours of music classes, teaching methods, and the emphasis on practical application appear to play a decisive role in determining the direction and strength of the attitude-achievement relationship.

Some studies in the literature show that the effects of music education on cognitive processes are supported by neuroscientific findings. It is stated that regular music education promotes development in brain regions

associated with attention, working memory, and executive functions; and that these cognitive gains are reflected in academic learning processes (Hyde et al., 2009; Patel, 2011). These studies reveal that a positive attitude towards music education is important not only for affective gains but also for the sustainability of cognitive gains.

Research conducted in the context of Turkey reveals significant relationships between attitudes towards music lessons and academic achievement; however, this relationship often remains moderate (Kılıç & Yıldız, 2018; Özmenteş, 2013; Şen & Koca, 2020). Some studies have reported that attitudes towards music education show stronger correlations with variables such as school commitment, class attendance, and learning motivation, rather than general academic achievement. This suggests that music education functions more as a complementary element that strengthens the learning environment rather than a tool that directly increases academic achievement.

Another notable finding in the literature is that attitudes towards music education are more easily formed at an early age, and this attitude influences students' overall approaches to learning in later educational stages. It is stated that students who develop positive attitudes towards music lessons at the primary and secondary school levels exhibit more positive attitudes towards academic tasks and demonstrate a more open profile to learning (Hargreaves, Marshall, & North, 2003). Conversely, positioning music education as a secondary subject within exam-oriented education systems can negatively affect students' attitude levels and weaken the strength of this relationship.

Overall, the findings indicate that attitudes towards music education should not be evaluated in a one-way and causal relationship with academic success, but rather as an important affective and cognitive variable that supports the learning process. The vast majority of studies examined show a common trend that music education makes a significant contribution to students' academic lives.

Discussion

The findings of the studies examined in this work reveal a generally positive and significant relationship between attitudes towards music education and academic achievement. However, the fact that this relationship is reported at a low or moderate level in most studies indicates that music education should not be considered as a sole determining variable for academic achievement. The results suggest that the contribution of music education to academic achievement occurs more indirectly and through a function that supports the learning process.

Studies in the literature that address the impact of music education on cognitive processes emphasize that music education strengthens fundamental components of academic learning such as attention, working memory, and executive functions (Hallam, 2010; Hyde et al., 2009). In this context, it can be said that a positive attitude towards music education allows students to sustainably develop these cognitive gains. This moderating role of attitude on learning also aligns with Bloom's (1979) affective domain taxonomy; it shows that the value and interest students attribute to a subject can be decisive in determining learning outcomes.

The studies examined within the scope of this work reveal that students who develop a positive attitude towards music lessons participate more actively in the learning process and exhibit more consistent performance in academic tasks. When evaluated within the framework of self-determination theory, this situation can be associated with an increase in students' intrinsic motivation levels (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Music education, as a space where students can express themselves, experience a sense of accomplishment, and strengthen their perception of autonomy in learning, can indirectly support academic motivation.

On the other hand, findings in some studies indicating a limited relationship between attitudes towards music education and academic achievement suggest that this relationship is influenced by contextual variables. Factors such as school type, weekly duration of music lessons, teaching methods, and teacher pedagogical competencies appear to significantly affect students' attitudes and how these attitudes are reflected in academic achievement (Hargreaves et al., 2003). It has been reported that in environments where music lessons are primarily theoretical and exam-oriented, students' attitudes towards the subject weaken, and this has only a limited impact on academic achievement.

In the Turkish context, the fact that music lessons are often positioned as a secondary subject within centralized examination systems can negatively affect students' attitudes towards this subject. Indeed, some studies in the national literature show that attitudes towards music lessons are more strongly correlated with school commitment, attendance, and general attitudes toward learning than with academic achievement (Özmenteş, 2013; Şen & Koca, 2020). This finding suggests that music education, rather than being a tool that directly increases academic achievement, plays a role in strengthening the learning environment and supporting students' positive perception of school.

The literature also emphasizes that the effects of music education on academic achievement can vary depending on age. It is noted that students who develop a positive attitude towards music education at an early age exhibit a more positive approach to learning in later educational stages (Winner et al., 2013). This suggests

that the long-term effects of music education should be evaluated based on general learning trends rather than short-term academic achievement indicators.

Overall, the study's findings indicate that addressing the relationship between attitudes towards music education and academic success within a simple causal framework is insufficient. Music education, with its cognitive, affective, and social dimensions, holistically influences the student's learning process, and its contribution to academic success largely depends on indirect and contextual variables. Therefore, the place and quality of music education in educational programs should be evaluated not only through class hours but also within the framework of pedagogical approaches that strengthen students' attitudes towards the subject.

Conclusion

In this study, national and international research addressing the relationship between attitudes towards music education and academic achievement was examined from a holistic perspective. Findings from the literature show that a positive attitude towards music education is generally in a positive and significant relationship with academic achievement, but this relationship is indirect and dependent on contextual variables in most studies. It is understood that the effect of music education on academic achievement occurs through cognitive and affective mechanisms that support the learning process, rather than through direct causality.

The studies examined reveal that attitudes towards music education are closely related to variables such as student participation, motivation, and school commitment. This suggests that music education should be considered not as an independent factor increasing academic achievement, but rather as a complementary field that strengthens students' overall learning tendencies. In particular, positive attitudes developed at an early age are seen to be reflected in students' learning behaviors in later educational stages.

In this context, the place and quality of music lessons in educational programs should be re-evaluated; it is important that the lessons are conducted with pedagogical approaches that strengthen students' attitudes towards the lesson and increase participation and interaction. Future research that examines the relationship between attitudes towards music education and academic achievement in the context of different age groups, school types, and teaching approaches will provide more comprehensive and in-depth contributions to the field.

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