

Exploring effectiveness of creative therapies in inclusive school setups: A Comprehensive Review

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ABSTRACT

The concept of creative therapies helps to understand an individual with or without disability holistically. It helps an individual to express themselves through their hidden talent. It will make an individual mentally and physically fit. Creative therapies are alternative of traditional therapies so it will make the learning of an individual with or without disability effective, innovative and enjoyable too. This comprehensive review aims to analyze existing literature and identify gaps in implementing creative therapies in inclusive schools and recommend some strategies that will foster inclusivity and promotes independence, self-reliance, good communication, psychological well-being. This is a narrative review approach in which articles, thesis, journals published between 2010 to 2025 were searched through databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google scholar, ResearchGate using keywords like creative therapies, art therapy, music therapy, inclusion, dance therapy. A total of 20 relevant studies were shortlisted that were based on inclusion criteria (focus on different creative therapies in an inclusive environment that promotes holistic development of child). These reviews sought from Indian and western context and highlight that there were many factors like individual, societal, environmental, socioeconomic that create barriers in inclusivity and its outcomes affect the overall well-being of an individual with disability.

Key words: Creative Therapies, socio-economic, environmental, holistic, inclusivity, individual with disability

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INTRODUCTION

In past years, education in a global context emphasise the importance of inclusion and ensures that each and every individual have right to education irrespective of race, religion, age, economic condition and disability. Inclusive education not only promotes equality or give equal access in education but also nurtures self-confidence, self-esteem, empathy, collaboration and creativity among students. If we incorporate creative therapies in inclusive school curriculum it will helps to understand the student holistically, if a student is not good in academics we can plan to involve a student in creative therapies such as dance & movement, music, yoga, drama and art therapy. These therapies are an alternative of traditional therapies and students even enjoy participating in these therapies. These therapies will make the learning of an individual with and without disabilities effective, innovative and enjoyable. "A creative arts therapist will offer you a safe, non-judgmental space to help you explore what you're feeling and how that's reflected in your creations. Through creative materials and activities, they will support you to understand yourself better, help you to process feelings and make positive changes in your

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life." (What Is Creative Therapy? n.d.-b). Despite recognition of creative therapies in education of children with and without disability in India but their effectiveness in inclusive school setups is remain untouched. If we incorporate creative therapies within inclusive setups it will work for the betterment of all students. It will use non-verbal mode of communication so if a student is having any problem in expressing themselves verbally they can use these therapies which will support both developmental and preventive functions, make them mentally and physically fit. "Guidelines of NEP 2020 suggest

alternative form of schooling that encourages alternative pedagogical styles over traditional teaching styles. These schools integrate subjects and other learning areas that were prescribed in NCFSE curriculum. By using differentiated curriculum, multi-sensory approach, UDL activities we will create an environment that incorporates equal opportunities for learning and there is provision of multiple options that is choosing subjects based on interest and competencies from middle stage onwards.” (Government of India, Ministry of Education, 2020)

Objective

This comprehensive review analyzing existing reviews on creative therapy and identify gaps in implementation of creative therapies in inclusive schools and suggest some strategies that will strengthen creativity and collaboration among inclusive school students.

Methodology

This is a comprehensive review approach in which articles, thesis, journals published between 2010 to 2025 were searched through databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google scholar, Research Gate using keywords like creative therapies, art therapy, music therapy, inclusion, dance therapy. A total of 20 relevant studies were shortlisted that were based on inclusion criteria (focus on different creative therapies in an inclusive environment that promotes holistic development of child).

Review of Related Literature

Mohite, R. A., et al. (2025). A Study on the positive effects of yogic practices on mental and social health impacts of school-aged children with hearing impairments. Children with hearing impairment often have difficulty in communication, socialization and emotion regulation which can affect their overall well-being. Yoga has many benefits and known for reducing stress, promote socialization. A total of 40 children with hearing impairment aged between 8 to 14 years participated in 12 week yoga program. Pre and Post test was done by using a standardized tool measure anxiety and social behaviour, self-esteem. Intervention include breathing techniques, relaxation asanas, basic asanas. Findings revealed significant improvement in anxiety reduction and emotional stability.

Song, C. (2025). Exploring Creative Arts Therapists Experiences with Online Therapy in South Korea during COVID-19. This study gathers experiences of South Korea’s creative arts therapists who conducted virtual therapy sessions during COVID-19 pandemic. This study raises concerns about effectiveness of online creative arts therapies and its impact on therapeutic interventions. Six females aged 30s to 40s, participated in the qualitative study. They had experiences in drama, music, or art therapy and conducted online sessions in diverse setting, including hospitals, schools and private practice. Data collected through semi- structured interviews, participant-created artworks and reflective writing. Findings revealed limitations of virtual platforms, adoption of digital tools for creative engagement, evolving strategies to maintain therapeutic presence and ethical considerations regarding privacy and accessibility.

Del Río Diéguez, et al.(2024). Art therapy as a therapeutic resource integrated into mental health programmes: Components, effects and integration pathways. A study has been conducted in two mental health hospital in the community of Madrid with the primary objective of analysing which factors makes an art therapy an effective therapeutic intervention. Data is collected through semi structured interview from 10 professionals, 5 from each hospital questions including about key factors, therapeutic contributors and suggested improvements. The responses were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. The study concludes that art therapy is an effective and helpful treatment. It is an interdisciplinary approach that fits into each patient’s plan.

Yotenka, R., & Yovita, Z. (2024). Evaluating Creative Therapy Effectiveness on Children with Special Needs through Robust Clustering Techniques. The study examine whether creative therapies are effective for the progress of children with special needs. Sample of the study is 56 children with special needs and primary data was collected using observation of children over eight sessions of therapy using Robust Clustering Using Links clustering algorithm to evaluate children’s fine motor skills, social interaction and behavior development and cognitive capabilities. The study highlighted targeted interventions and modern treatments that regularly elevate children to 5 or very good developmental category during 6 to 10 years. Findings call for inclusion in therapies and educational policies to cater the needs of diverse children.

[Dobesh, S., et al.\(2023\)](#). Moving Towards an Accessible Approach to Music Therapy for Autistic People: A Systematic Review. This main aim of the study is to show how music therapy beneficial for people with autism spectrum disorder and improving their attention, prosocial behaviour and motor synchrony. This is a systemetic literature review and show relationship between music therapy and autism spectrum and use current music therapy practices to give recommendations on technology designed for persons with autism. The framework guide therapists to incorporate technology in therapeutic setting. This review indicates that much of the current research focuses on medical treatment of autism. This research generally supports the effectiveness of music therapy for persons with autism.

[Lindetorp, H., et al.\(2023\)](#). Collaborative music-making: special educational needs school assistants as facilitators in performances with accessible digital musical instruments. The study designed a novel system built into previously tested accessible digital musical instruments and aim at involving students with profound and multiple learning disabilities, assistant, and a professional musician in playing music together. Quantitative as well as qualitative methods were used in the study and the results described in terms of how we perceive drivers and barriers to reach towards a goal and a joint concert that brings school of students with special needs and music school together with a specific focus on traditional orchestral instruments.

[Poon, T. \(2023\)](#). Dance/Movement Therapy's influence on student's social-emotional learning and academic success. The study explores dance movement therapy integration with socio- emotional learning in English language for an after school class. The researcher used correlation method and shows correlation between socio-emotional learning and academic success. Findings revealed that students have better emotional awareness and willing to engage in creating writing tasks by using non-judgemental approach like circle games and non-verbal movement activities.

[Stefanescu, C. \(2023\)](#). Art: a tool for social inclusion. This is an artistic mediation project carried out with adolescents with functional diversity using service-learning methodology. This work addresses social inclusion from an artistic perspective. A series of artistic workshop has been carried out with the selected group and how art therapy develop social and communication skills, expression of their feeling and emotions and after the workshop artistic work was performed in collaboration with the students to make

realistic social inclusion. Implementation of art therapy was done on seven adolescents with special educational needs.

[Shukla, A., Choudhari, et al.\(2022\)](#). Role of art therapy in the promotion of mental health: a critical review. The review is based on the idea that how people can feel better and recover via artistic expression and how their active participation in art improves their mental health. Reviews were collected from databases of PubMed, Google, Google scholar, WHO's mental health database. These researches were done on art therapy and advantages of mental health rehabilitation and focuses on art therapy. Findings revealed that art therapy improved mental health in patients.

[Tao, D., Gao, et al.\(2022\)](#). The physiological and psychological benefits of dance and its effects on children and adolescents: a systematic review. The aim of this review was to examine physiological and psychological benefits of dance and its effects on children. Past 20 years studies were searched through databases of PubMed, Web of Science, Psyc ARTICLES, Medline and Social Science. All searched publications were searched in English and peer reviewed paper. Findings indicate that dance provides physiological and psychological benefits to healthy and medically compromised populations. Findings suggest implications of dance therapy in health policy, change, reconfiguration and implementation.

[Amonkar, N., et al. \(2021\)](#). Effects of creative movement therapies on social communication, behavioral-affective, sensorimotor, cognitive and functional participation skills of individuals with autism spectrum disorder. This is a longitudinal study and quasi-experimental design and reviewed 72 studies across participants aged between 3 to 65 years with autism spectrum disorder. The high quality studies highlights that there was small to large sized improvements in social communication skills undergoing music and martial art therapies and medium to large improvements in motor and cognitive skills undergoing yoga and martial arts training.

[Dmitriev, A. et al. \(2020\)](#). The development of creative competence of primary school students under the condition of inclusive education. This research highlights the importance of creativity formation and development at primary school students and this was recognised by psychology and pedagogy specialist. The subject of the study are the children that demonstrates creative imagination and integrate some activities that develop creative thinking abilities and

helps primary school students to solve tasks to perform creative competence, improve self-regulation and self-expression through use of creative activities and introduce children to works of art and culture in inclusive education setup. Results of the study revealed that creative imagination as part of creative competence of primary school students could be stimulated and improved with pedagogical-psychological integrated with lessons of the aesthetic course.

Martin, K. (2020). Inclusive Musical Theatre in Music Therapy Clinical Practice: A Conceptual Framework. The main aim of the study is to create a conceptual framework for promoting inclusive music. There were total 8 music therapist, 2 drama therapist, 1 performing arts manager and 1 community theatre programme director. Data gathered through surveys, examination of materials and semi structured interview was used to design a six phase conceptual framework. Results revealed similarity between participants composition and facilitation processes of inclusive music. Findings suggested that while composing music for an inclusive musical theatre it is important to emphasise on melody, form and style.

Menezes DeJesus, B., & Teixeira- Machado, L. (2020). Role of dance in the functioning and socialization of people with cerebral palsy. This was a pilot clinical trial and was conducted on seven patients with cerebral palsy. It was a pre-test, post-test experimental research design. Pre- test was done and then a one hour dance program session applied to group for one year and then post-test was done and findings revealed that dance is an entertaining and encouraging option for socialization and making a person independent as it develops self-confidence, self- esteem, emotional well-being and quality of life.

Hannigan, S. et al. (2019). Drawing on creative arts therapy approaches to enhance inclusive school cultures and student wellbeing. This paper provides an insight that creative therapies enriches inclusivity. Integration of creative therapies in curriculum promotes well-being, addresses mental health issues and incorporates inclusion that benefits individuals and communities. A philosophy aims to make a bond between students and teachers and effectively identifies strength and needs of diverse learners through art expressions.

Thergaonkar, N., & Daniel, D. (2019). Effect of arts based therapy on functionality of children with intellectual disability. The main aim of the study is to explore the effect of arts based therapy on basic skill

level and behaviour patterns Six children (4 males and 2 females) aged 5 to 13 years with mild- moderate intellectual disability participated in the study and intervention of 9 months. BASIC-MR and ABT were administered quarterly till end of the study. Median scores of BASIC-MR and ABT indicate steady improvement in skill scores.

Byers, J. G. (2015). Expressive arts in play therapy. This chapter focuses on creative therapies and play interventions within play therapy sessions and explain various techniques of creative arts used in play therapy sessions. Inculcate expressive arts in traditional play therapy gives a deeper understanding about client's dynamics.

Javan, A. T., et al. (2014). Effectiveness of rhythmic play on the attention and memory functioning in children with mild intellectual disabilities. Children in this study assessed by using Raven Colored Progressive Matrixes for Children, Canners neuropsychological test and Vineland adaptive behavior scale questionnaire. A total of 20 children with mild intellectual disability between 9-16 years selected for the study using random sampling. Total participants were divided into experimental and control group. After receiving parental consent, a 45 minutes session of rhythmic movements applied to experimental group twice a week for three months. Results of this research revealed that rhythmic movements affect attention problems (focus on sustained attention, shifting attention, focus of attention, dividing attention and attention capacity) and memory (short term, long term and working).

Carr, C., et al.(2013). A systematic review of music therapy practice and outcomes with acute adult psychiatric in-patients. This is a systematic review collected from music therapy, social and psychological databases. 98 papers were identified out of which 35 papers report findings. Results revealed open group work and active music making for non-verbal expression alongside verbal reflection. Aims of the review were communication, socialization, engagement and focus on inclusion, individualized session, high session frequency, set realistic goals and flexible use of musical activities. Study concludes that there is no single music therapy model exist for adults in acute psychiatric in patient setting and described models were not conclusive.

Neufeld, D. J. (2012). Integrated drama groups: Promoting symbolic play, empathy, and social engagement with peers in children with autism. The

main aim of the study is to benefit children with autism spectrum disorder. The goal of integrated drama group is to allow children with autism to increase socialization and competence in a fun and supportive environment and building dramatic skills. Three groups participated in the research each group has one child with autism and three are typically developing peers. Data was collected by using mixed method design using multiple baseline study and qualitative examination of field notes and interview with caregivers of primary and Reading the Mind in the Eye Test was used to determine whether participants showed improvement in reading. Findings revealed that drama based intervention is helpful in improving play skills in children with autism.

Conclusion

These reviews highlight that there were many factors that create a gap in implementation of creative therapies in inclusive school setups such as non-availability of trained professionals, resources, infrastructure, awareness and multi-disciplinary team.

Suggestion

Trained professionals should be hired in inclusive schools, schools have dedicated material, space required for creative therapies, infrastructure should be accessible, a multidisciplinary team will be there that ensures that creative therapies should be aligned with education, organize sensitization programme for parents and students that will make them aware about creative therapies.

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