

Efficacy of Music for Improving Language in Children with Special Needs

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Abstract : The efficacy of music for improving speech and language has been shown across ages and diagnoses. Across the world, the wide range of therapy settings and increasing number of children diagnosed with special needs demand more cost and time effective service delivery. However, research exploring co-treatment models on children other than those with Autism Spectrum Disorder remains sparse. The aim of this research was to determine the efficacy of music for improving language in children with special needs, and generalizability of therapy effects. 25 children (7 to 12 years) were split into three groups – A, B and control. A cross-over design with direct therapy (storytelling) with or without music, and indirect therapy was applied with two therapy phases lasting 6 sessions each. Therapy targeted three prepositions in each phase. Baseline language abilities were assessed, with re-assessment after each phase. The introduction of music in therapy led to significantly greater improvement ($p=.046$, $r=.53$) in associated language abilities, with case studies showing greater effectiveness in developmentally appropriate target prepositions. However, improvements were not maintained once direct therapy ceased. As such, the incorporation of music could lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness of language therapy in children with special needs, but sustainability and generalizability of therapy effects both require further exploration.

Keywords : music, language therapy, children, special needs

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