

A Research on the Improvement of Applied Art Education in Special Education Schools Affiliated to the Ministry of National Education

Tuba Subaşı Adıbelli¹

Abstract: The study is limited to the applied art education in the work and skills application courses of students with intellectual disabilities who receive education in special education institutions. The purpose of the study is to examine all aspects of the methods applied in the field of art education in special education, to discuss the applicability of modern methods and to examine the contribution of the applied art education model to the development of students with special education needs. Another purpose of the study is to contribute to the enrichment of the content of this course. In the study, new approaches and methods in art education were examined and the factors affecting the development of individuals with special education needs were tried to be revealed. The content of the work and skills application course, its implementation, its contribution to student skills, behaviors and vocational acquisition were evaluated, and the opinions of expert educators of the field were taken with qualitative research methods. Since our research is a qualitative study, qualitative research methods were used. The general population of the study is special education. The accessible population of the study is the group of students with intellectual disabilities (moderate-severe) in the field of special education. The sample of the study is the art education of students taking work and skills application course. In order to increase the competence of the applied art education of this group of students, it was tried to reach the result by following a systematic method with deliberate elimination. Educators working in the field of Special Education made suggestions such as enriching the content of applied art education courses, reducing the number of students and implementing individual education programs in applied courses, diversifying and increasing art education courses in special education schools. As a result of the study, it was concluded that applied art education should be included in the curriculum at all levels of special education, that special education teachers can contribute to the quality of the course by taking art courses, and that grading should be made according to the student background.

Keywords: special education, intellectual disability, skills development, art practices, handicrafts, national education

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INTRODUCTION

Art education plays a crucial role in supporting individuals' self-expression, creativity, and social interaction skills. This is especially significant for individuals with special needs. In the education of individuals with intellectual disabilities, art education offers meaningful

¹ **Tuba Subaşı Adıbelli**, MEB., Programme In Islamic History and Arts. ORCID: 0000-0002-8052-7114. tubasubelli@hotmail.com.

opportunities to support cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor development. In this context, applied art education contributes to the acquisition of vocational skills, the development of self-confidence, and active participation in social life (Kırıřođlu, & Stokrocki, 1997). Particularly within the scope of vocational application courses, applied art education serves both educational and therapeutic functions for individuals with intellectual disabilities. However, the insufficient structuring of course content, instructional methods, and implementation strategies can limit students' developmental potential. Therefore, this study investigates the current state of art education in special education settings, evaluates the applicability of contemporary approaches, and analyzes the impact of applied art education on the development of students with intellectual disabilities.

Education is the process of positively changing an individual's behavior, while special education is an educational program structured to support the development of individuals who do not exhibit the same characteristics as their peers. The special characteristics of the individual are taken into consideration by many laws, from our Constitution to the Basic Law on National Education. In the Ministry of National Education's General Regulation on Special Education Services, children with special needs are defined as “individuals who show significant differences from their peers in terms of their individual characteristics and educational qualifications for various reasons, under the term "individuals requiring special education” (Ataman,1997). Special education is education that is offered to children with special needs who are different from the majority, that enables those with superior characteristics to maximize their capacities in line with their abilities, that prevents disability from turning into a disability, that equips the disabled individuals with the skills that will support them to become self-sufficient, to integrate into society, and to become independent and productive individuals (Ataman, 2003). According to the definition made by AAIDD (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities), “intellectual disability” is to show significant limitations in current functions. It is the condition of being below normal in these mental functions, as well as showing limitations in two or more of the adaptive skill areas (communication, self-care, home life, social skills, independent living, self-management, health and safety protection, academic skills, leisure and professional life) (Sucuođlu, 2005).

The ability of a person to shape matter using the inner skills, to dimension it, and to produce an object has influenced humanity throughout history, adding a hidden meaning to the outcome. When this unique structure of art is used to meet spiritual health-based needs and

aesthetic satisfaction of individuals, visual arts are seen as a soothing and empowering medium (Stuckey&Nobel, 2010; Davies, 1997; Goodman, 1968). The practices of Australian educator and designer Dicker-Brandeis, who laid the foundation for therapy studies focused on empathy and aesthetics, and these teachings adopted by contemporary art therapist Edith Kramer, are significant contributions to today's art education (Wix, 2009). Art education, which starts with the first encounter with the environment, seeing, perceiving, naming and organizing, later develops into producing and tasting (Kırıřođlu, 1991). This is the “very special arts education” practice used to achieve the learning objectives of students with special needs and the systematic development of the intended behavior in the student (Gearheart&Weishan,1996). Approaching and evaluating art education as a discipline by determining strategies is important for student development.

In important international publications, applied art education (in the context of special needs or art therapy) studies have focused on individuals struggling with depression, cancer or physical disabilities in a hospital environment or at home. For example, (Stuckey &Nobel,2021) in their research in the American Journal of Public Health, stated that creative arts activities have a positive effect on the health of sick people. Walsh, Martin, and Schmidt published their opinion in the Journal of Nursing Scholarship that cancer patients experience a decrease in stress and anxiety, and an increase in positive emotional states through visual art works. In addition, Nainis, Paice, Ratner, Wirth, Lai, and Shott stated in the Journal of Pain and Symptom Management that weekly applied art therapies reduced cancer patients' discomfort caused by pain and other symptoms. In his publication titled Creativity in Art Therapy Prime Mover or Silent Partner, Gregory pointed out that in therapeutic art works, the value given and the help provided achieve the main goal in the healing process. In his publication in The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education, Wexler emphasized that patients and individuals with disabilities should be guided to engage in visual arts activities (Stuckey&Heather & Nobel,2006;Sheila&Scott&Martin&Lesley&Schmidt,2004;Nainis&Nancy&Paice&JRatner &Wirth&Lai& Shott,2006; Gregory&Diana, 2002; Wexler& Alice, 2002).

In private education institutions, applied art education is provided under the name of work and skills application courses. This education is a systematic program that supports the multifaceted development of students receiving special education, characterized by targeted and categorically classified objectives. However, limitations in the education programs for work skills education given in schools for students with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities, the

lack of scientific publications and the problems in the integration of the course into the educational curriculum were determined during our research.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States supports individual education by identifying types of disabilities in the field of special education. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) has been developed with the support of this law. By raising awareness among special education institutions and families, students are supported and education is aimed to reach the highest level (<http://specialed.about.com/od/idea/a/Special101.htm>) In the Regulation on Special Education Services published in our country, individuals with intellectual disabilities are classified as mild, moderate, severe and very severe intellectual disabilities (Editor-in-chief, 2020). The Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Special Education Services, Board of Education has programmed the courses with the number 64 and the decision dated 18.04.2018. (orgm.meb.gov.tr) MoNE (https://orgm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2020_06/24_163215_ozel_egitim_yonetmeligi_son_hali.pdf) Within the framework of the Special Education Program published by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Türkiye, two separate curricula are implemented based on the degree of intellectual disability. One curriculum is designed for children with mild intellectual disabilities, while the other is tailored for children with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, including those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. These programs are detailed in the official annexes (Annex I-II-III-IV), and they aim to equip students with the skills and behaviors necessary for independent living and future employment. Children with mild intellectual disabilities do not take elective or compulsory work and skills application courses at the primary and lower secondary (middle school) levels. However, beginning in upper secondary education, specifically in grades 9 through 12, these students receive instruction in the "Work and Skills Application" course for eight hours per week. This course is delivered in vocational training centers and focuses on developing students' occupational orientation, fine motor skills, self-care, social adaptation, and daily living skills. Students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, including those on the autism spectrum, continue their education in specialized Work Skills Centers. Here, they also participate in the "Work and Skills Application" course for eight hours per week. The instructional content is designed in alignment with students' individual developmental levels and includes structured, practical activities aimed at fostering life skills, enhancing social integration, and preparing them for future employment opportunities. These differentiated curricula underscore the importance of individualized education in special education settings

and reflect the Ministry's commitment to inclusive, skill-based learning tailored to the unique needs of each learner. Visual arts courses contribute to individuals with intellectual disabilities gaining self-care, social skills and work-study arrangements.(Salderay, 2008) Like visual arts, work and skills application courses in the curriculum are undoubtedly important in helping individuals with special education needs gain targeted behaviors and skills and become independent.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Art is the primary factor that develops the emotions and thoughts of the individuals, guides them and forms the level of aesthetic concern. Paradigms in art education create the need for active teaching with a triggering force. In private education institutions, applied art education is provided under the name of work and skills application courses. This education is a systematic program that supports the multifaceted development of students receiving special education, characterized by targeted and categorically classified objectives. However, it was found during our research that there are limited studies conducted and disseminated regarding work and skills education provided in special education schools for mild, moderate, and severe disabilities. In this context, it was aimed to discuss the quality of the work and skills application courses in the relevant institutions and to support the course content with the data that emerged as a result of this discussion and brainstorming.

The aim of this research is to evaluate the content, methodology, and implementation of applied art education in vocational application courses offered to students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities in special education institutions. It also seeks to assess the applicability of art and vocational skills education method education approaches and determine their contributions to students' development. Additionally, the study aims to develop recommendations for enriching course content, promoting individualized instruction, and enhancing teacher competencies in the field of art education.

Our study was conducted by following national and international publications, examining the Special Education Regulation of the Ministry of National Education and obtaining the opinions of educators working in special education institutions affiliated to the Ministry. Although the work and skills application course has the highest course credit in application schools, there is a noticeable lack of scientific research in this field, which guided our study in this regard. Our study aims to fill this gap and provide a basis for further studies.

METHOD

The study, which is limited to the applied art education in work and skills application courses of students with intellectual disabilities in the field of special education, analyzes all aspects of the methods applied in the field of art education in special education, discusses the applicability of modern methods and examines the contribution of the applied art education model to the development of students with special education needs. In the study, new approaches and methods in art education were examined and the factors affecting the development of individuals with special education needs were tried to be revealed. The content of the work and skills application course, its implementation, its contribution to student skills, behaviors and vocational acquisition were evaluated, and the opinions of expert educators of the field were taken with qualitative research methods. This study was designed in accordance with the qualitative research paradigm. Data were collected through interviews with expert educators working in the field of special education. The sample group, selected using purposive sampling, consisted of students receiving art education as part of their vocational application courses. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques. Based on the findings, the significance and role of art education in special education were examined in detail, and practical suggestions were developed.

In our study, publication ethics and copyright regulations for intellectual and artistic works were complied with, and the survey study in the research was carried out in accordance with international declarations and guidelines. The study, which was conducted with educators working in Special Education Practice schools affiliated with KonyaMoNE, was carried out digitally via Google Forms <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/16Mk8lS8OVKFj7N4C1rCbJasRZs0sSmjRsnkFT1cO1A/edit#responses>

PARTICIPANTS / POPULATION AND SAMPLE / STUDY GROUP

Since our research is a qualitative study, qualitative research methods were used. The general population of the study is special education. The accessible population of the study is the group of students with intellectual disabilities (mild-moderate-severe) in the field of special education. The sample of the study is the art education of the students taking work application courses. To increase the competence of the applied art education of this group of students, it was tried to reach the result by following a systematic method with purposive sampling. The survey study was limited to 55 specialized teachers who served between 1 and 21 years in special education schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education. While preparing the

survey study, the majority of the teachers working in special education (mild-moderate-severe intellectual disabilities and autism) schools of the Ministry of National Education, who have worked in special education schools for 7-14 years, constitute the majority. Since this research adopts a qualitative design, appropriate qualitative research methods were employed to explore and analyze the subject in depth. The study aims to understand the effectiveness and implementation of applied art education within the context of special education, particularly in relation to the Work and Skills Application Course. The general population of the research consists of the broader field of special education, encompassing all students with intellectual disabilities. The accessible population includes students diagnosed with mild, moderate, and severe intellectual disabilities, as well as those on the autism spectrum, who are enrolled in special education institutions. The sample of the study is more specifically defined as students receiving applied art education as part of their Work and Skills Application Courses. The study aims to assess and improve the competence and impact of applied art education on this target group. For this purpose, a purposive sampling method was used, allowing researchers to select participants who could provide the most relevant, informed, and experience-based insights regarding the research topic. A systematic and goal-oriented approach was followed throughout the sampling and data collection process. The primary data collection tool was a survey questionnaire designed specifically for this research. The survey was administered to a total of 55 specialized teachers, all of whom work in special education schools affiliated with the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE). These educators had professional experience ranging from 1 to 21 years in the field. While preparing the survey and selecting the participants, special attention was given to include teachers who had significant classroom experience with students with intellectual disabilities and autism. Notably, the majority of respondents had been working in special education schools for a period of 7 to 14 years, making them well-positioned to evaluate the strengths, limitations, and development needs of the applied art education programs. This sampling strategy enabled the researchers to gather rich, context-specific data that reflect the realities and challenges encountered in the field. The qualitative approach, supported by teacher perspectives, provides meaningful insights into how applied art education can be optimized within special education curricula.

Table 1. *Table of Participants.*

Variable	Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Branch	Special Education		40
	Handicrafts		40
	Visual Arts		20
Gender	Female		52
	Male		53
Professional Experience	1-7 years	18	32.7
	7-14 years	21	38.2
	14-21 years	7	12.7
	21 years and above	9	16.4
Total		55	100

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

In order to improve the quality of the work and skills application course in the curriculum of special education schools, the opinions of expert educators in the field were obtained and evaluated in tables with explanations in the relevant sections of our study. The content research was actively submitted for voting for seven working days and evaluated with methods suitable for qualitative studies. The researcher of the current study is a 21-year educator and has about 12 years of experience working with children with special needs and their families. Since the researcher is the person who collects and analyzes data in qualitative studies, the field of expertise, experience and competence of the researcher is very important. Therefore, having a master's degree in art education and pursuing a doctorate is essential for the credibility of the research and its continuity in the scientific field.

In order to determine the effectiveness of applied art education in special education schools in the behaviors and skills of students and to determine to what extent the objectives of the course are achieved, there is a need to evaluate the current program with teacher opinions. Therefore, opinions were obtained from 55 teachers working in special education schools. The questions asked are as follows:

1-Do you think that work and skills application courses contribute to the multi-skill areas of students with special education needs?

2-Do you think that the skills gained in the work and skills application courses are also useful in academic courses?

3-Do you think that work and skills application courses contribute to the socialization of students with special education needs?

4-Have you received any training in any field of art as an educator?

5-Do you think that special education course teachers should receive art education in order to increase their competence in work and skills application courses?

6-Do you find the work and skills application course programs sufficient? If your answer is no, please write your suggestion below.

7-Do you find work and skills application course hours sufficient?

8-Can the traditional handicrafts curriculum be applied in special education work and skills application courses?

9-What are your suggestions for increasing the functionality of work and skills application courses in special education?

10-What are the points you want to change in the work and skills application course curriculum?

Data Analysis

Figure 1. How many years of service do you have in a private educational institution?

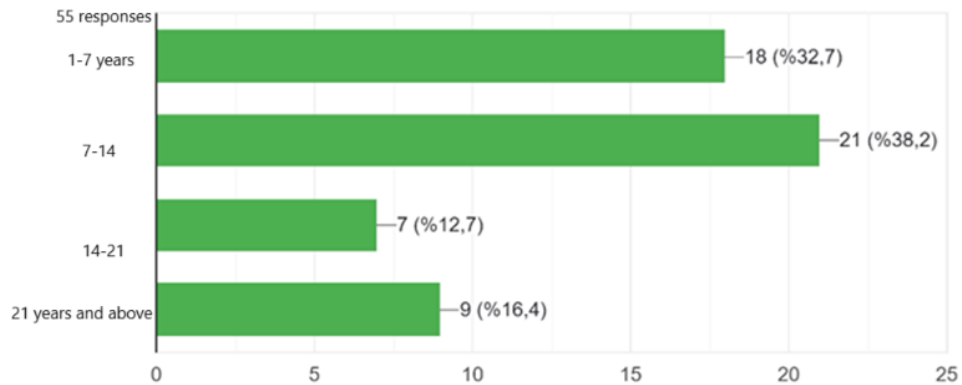
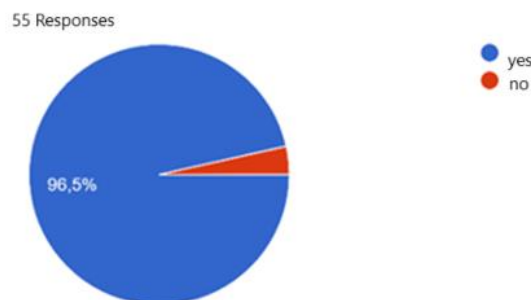


Figure 2. Do you think that work and skills application courses contribute to the development of students with special education needs?



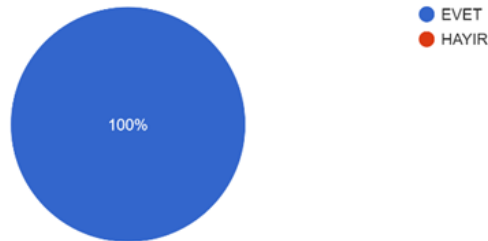
Expert teachers in the field found the work and skills application course, taught for eight hours per week in vocational schools providing education to students with mild intellectual disabilities and in work and skills application schools providing services to moderate-severe autistic students, to be beneficial for the development of the students.

Figure 3. Do you think that the skills gained in the work and skills application courses are also useful in academic courses?



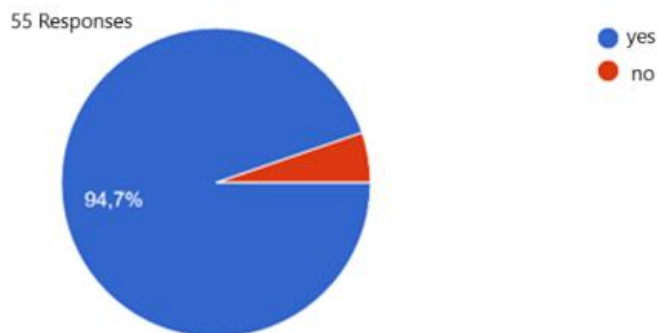
The number of educators who think that the work and skills application course is useful in academic academic courses is 96.5%. The fact that studies targeting the development of hand-eye coordination are frequently carried out in skill courses shows a systematic progress in other courses.

Figure 4. Do you think that work and skills application courses contribute to the socialization of students with special education needs?



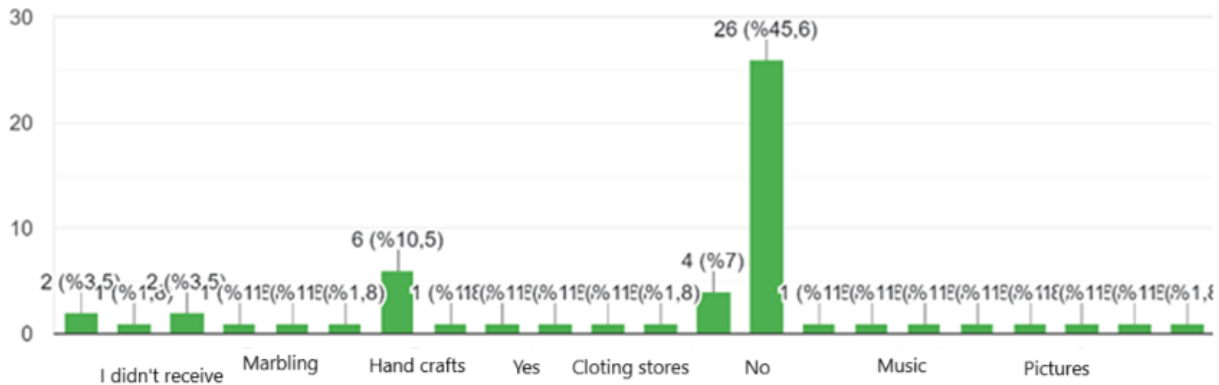
The prevailing view is that skill-focused courses are directly related to the socialization of students. Art plays an active role as a means of socialization. It is possible to say that this is done through group education classes, exhibitions, workshops and fundraising events. In addition, the student, who learns by doing-experiencing, is rewarded for his/her efforts by obtaining a concrete object and being appreciated at the end of his/her work.

Figure 5. Do you think that special education course teachers should receive art education to increase their competence in work and skills application courses?



94.7% of educators who participated in art education to guide students believe that receiving art education would be beneficial.

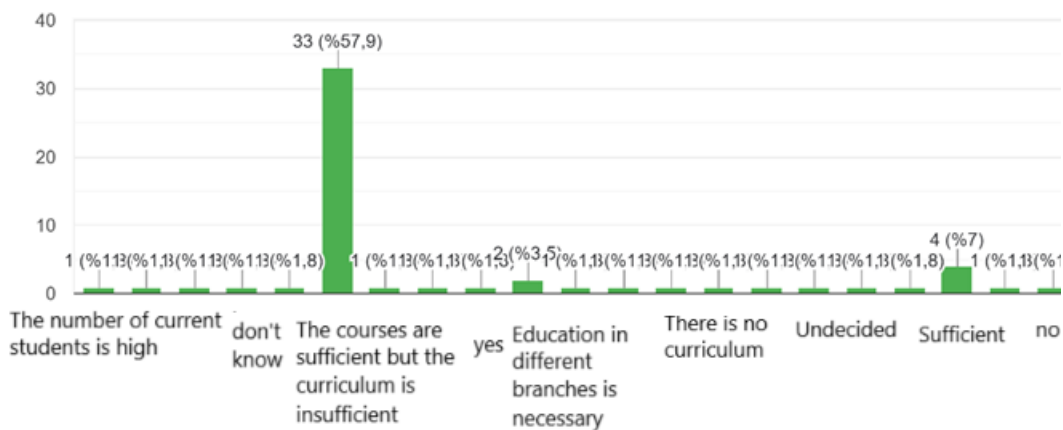
Figure 6. As an educator, have you received training in any art branch?



In skill-focused workshop courses, one special education teacher in vocational schools and two special education teachers in work practice schools attend the courses with the branch teachers. For this reason, 94.7% of the participants stated that it is necessary for special education specialists to receive skills training. The rate of educators who do not have training is high. The educators who received training stated that they received training in music, painting, tile, handicrafts, clothing, and marbling art.

Participants indicated that 12.5% did not receive any art education, 3.5% received education in water marbling, 1.8% in general handicrafts, 1.8% in clothing technologies, 1.8% in music, 1.8% in painting, and 1.8% in general art.

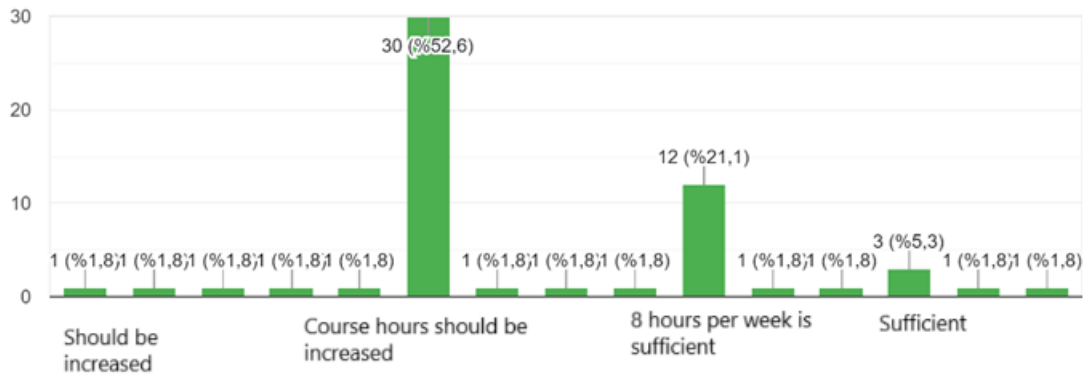
Figure 7. Do you find the work and skills application course programs sufficient? If your answer is no, please write your suggestion below.



In addition to the opinion that the work and skills application course programs are sufficient, there were also opinions that the class sizes negatively affect the teaching of this course, that the course content should be diversified with different art fields, and that the student levels in the class are incompatible.

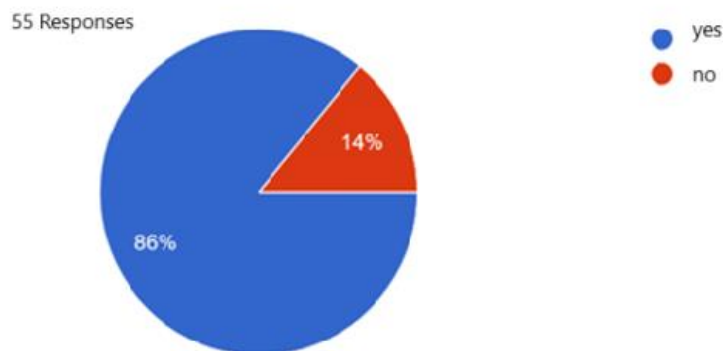
The numerical values of the participants' opinions on these questions are as follows: 1.13% indicated that the number of students in the classes is too high for the curriculum to be effectively implemented, 7% believed that the course programs are sufficient, while 57% voted that the course programs need to be diversified. Other participants suggested that a program that is diversified according to levels should be applied and that the curriculum content should be enriched.

Figure 8. Do you find work and skills application course hours sufficient?



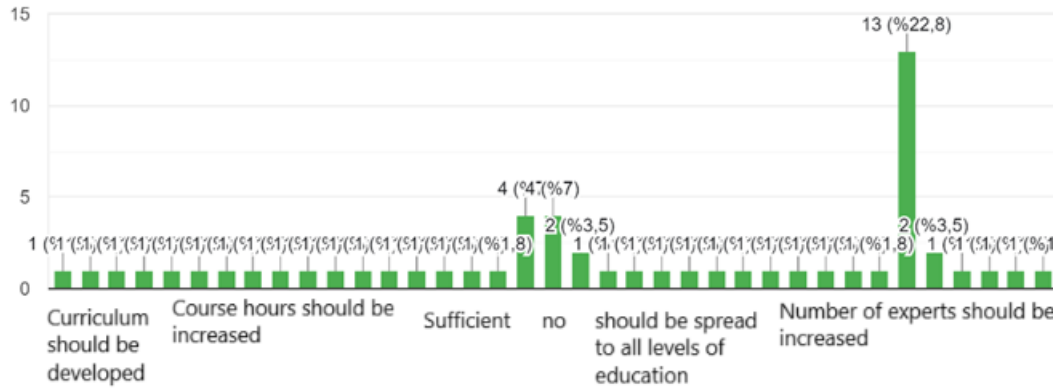
To the question “Do you find the work and skills application course hours sufficient?” 33% responded yes. 67% of the participants suggested that the course content should be enriched, the number of students should be reduced and an individual education program should be implemented in practical lessons, and art education courses should be diversified and increased in special education schools. 98.2% stated that the work and skills application course hours should be increased.

Figure 9. Can the traditional handicrafts curriculum be applied in special education work and skills application courses?



Positive opinions were received about the application of traditional handicrafts subjects in work and skills application courses. 86% of the participants had a positive opinion about the application of traditional handicrafts subjects in work and skills application courses.

Figure 10. What are the points you want to change in the work and skills application course curriculum? If yes, what are they? Please state briefly.



Special education expert teachers provided important insights into the effectiveness, structure, and implementation of the "Work and Skills Application" course. A significant portion of participants emphasized that the current program requires enhancement in terms of both instructional time and human resources. One of the most frequently mentioned recommendations was the need to increase the number of art education course hours and to assign more qualified, expert educators to teach these courses. In particular, 22.8% of the expert teachers explicitly stated that the number of specialized educators delivering applied skills courses should be increased in order to ensure that students receive more focused and high-quality instruction. Participants also stressed that the Work and Skills Application course should not be limited to upper secondary levels but should be integrated into the curriculum across all levels of education, including primary and lower secondary education, especially in special education schools. According to the teachers, early exposure to structured applied skills activities supports the development of fine motor skills, creativity, and self-confidence in students with intellectual disabilities. In addition, many educators highlighted the importance of student-centered approaches and the implementation of individualized training methods within these courses. They reported that tailoring the course content to the individual needs, interests, and skill levels of each student enhances engagement, motivation, and overall learning outcomes. This approach aligns with the principles of differentiated instruction and the Individualized Education Program (IEP), which are essential components of effective special

education practice. Several teachers also noted that the quality and diversity of materials and resources used in applied courses should be improved, and that school environments should be equipped with specialized classrooms and materials that support hands-on learning. It was underlined that when students are provided with opportunities to express themselves through artistic and vocational activities, they demonstrate notable improvements not only in their psychomotor development but also in their social behavior and communication skills. In conclusion, the opinions of expert teachers highlight a clear need for policy adjustments to expand the scope of the Work and Skills Application course. This includes increasing course hours, hiring more specialized educators, implementing individualized and student-centered instruction, and integrating the course into earlier stages of education for students with special needs.

FINDINGS

The expert teachers of the field found the work and skills application course, which is taught for eight hours per week in vocational schools that provide education to students with mild intellectual disabilities and in work and skills application schools that provide service to moderate-severe-autistic students, to be beneficial for the development of the students. They also believe that this course is necessary for their socialization. It was stated that the frequent implementation of studies aimed at the development of hand-eye coordination in skill courses shows systematic progress in other courses. Art plays an active role as a means of socialization. It is possible to say that this is achieved through group education classes, exhibitions, workshops and fundraising events. In addition, the student, who learns by doing and experiencing, is rewarded for his/her efforts by obtaining a concrete object and being appreciated at the end of his/her work. In skill-oriented workshop courses, one special education teacher in vocational schools and two special education teachers in work and skills application schools attend the courses with a branch teacher. For this reason, 94.7% of the participants stated that it is necessary for the experts in special education to receive skill training. It was suggested that the content of applied art education courses should be enriched, the number of students should be reduced and an individual education program should be implemented in applied courses, and art education courses should be diversified and increased in special education schools. The answers given by the educators whose suggestions we received for increasing the functionality of work and skills courses in special education are as follows:

Organizing special workshops for work and skills application courses was deemed necessary for these courses to be conducted more actively. It was stated that it would be useful to increase the course hours, to have expert educators make their programming student-centered and to implement technology-supported education. Families should be informed about the purposes of the studies in work and skills application courses, and family support for the course should be ensured, and programs should be created considering the individual characteristics of the students. Stations should be prepared according to abilities in the workshop layout. While classifying the activities from simple to difficult, the levels of moderate-severe and autistic students and the number of classes should be taken into consideration. The rate of student placement in businesses by vocational training centers should be increased. It was stated that it would be beneficial to activate the work and skills application course in coordination with daily life skills. Work and skills application courses are taught only at the third level in special education. It was suggested that these courses should be actively implemented at all levels in special education schools. It was stated that student-centered and individualized trainings would be useful in these courses.

Based on expert opinions gathered from special education teachers working in vocational and applied skills schools, several key themes emerged regarding the effectiveness, implementation, and future development of the Work and Skills Application Course. The following analysis categorizes the findings into five main themes:

1. Contribution to Student Development and Socialization

- Expert teachers overwhelmingly agreed that the Work and Skills Application Course, taught for 8 hours weekly, is beneficial for the developmental needs of students with mild, moderate, and severe intellectual disabilities, as well as those with autism.
- Beyond academic or vocational outcomes, the course plays a crucial role in enhancing students' socialization skills. Students engage in collaborative tasks, group education sessions, exhibitions, workshops, and fundraising events — all of which encourage peer interaction, communication, and social inclusion.
- Activities that target hand-eye coordination not only strengthen fine motor skills but are also associated with systematic improvement in other academic subjects, highlighting the interconnectedness of psychomotor and cognitive development.

- The structure of the course, which encourages learning through doing and experiencing, leads to higher student motivation. The creation of a tangible product and receiving positive reinforcement at the end of the process enhances self-worth and a sense of achievement.

2. The Role of Educators and the Need for Specialized Training

- In vocational schools, one special education teacher supports the course alongside a branch (vocational) teacher, whereas in work and skills application schools, two special education teachers are present.
- A significant 94.7% of participating educators emphasized the necessity for special education teachers to receive dedicated training in applied skill instruction, particularly in the context of art education.
- The presence of trained experts contributes to a more structured, responsive, and meaningful learning environment, tailored to the unique needs of each student.

3. Curriculum and Instructional Design

- There is a strong consensus on the need to enrich the content of applied art education courses and ensure that it reflects students' interests, developmental levels, and learning profiles.
- Educators suggested that the number of students per class should be reduced to facilitate more personalized, individual education programs (IEPs) during applied courses.
- It was also proposed that art education fields be diversified including ceramics, painting, crafts, design, etc. and expanded across more grade levels, not just limited to upper secondary education.
- Importantly, the course should not only prepare students for vocational outcomes but also integrate daily life skills, contributing to functional independence.

4. Infrastructure and Learning Environment

- Recommendations included restructuring workshops into stations based on student abilities, allowing for differentiated instruction and progression from simple to complex tasks.
- Class groupings and activity levels should be carefully aligned with the cognitive and developmental levels of students, particularly those with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities and autism.

- The need for technology integration was highlighted, suggesting the use of digital tools to enhance instruction, assessment, and creativity within applied arts education.

5. Policy, Implementation, and Stakeholder Engagement

- Currently, the course is offered only at the third education level (upper secondary). Experts strongly recommended its implementation across all educational stages within special education schools to support early intervention and consistent skill development.
- There is a need for greater alignment between school-based learning and external opportunities, such as placing students in real business environments through vocational training centers.
- The importance of family involvement was underscored; parents should be informed about course objectives and engaged in supporting the learning process at home.
- Finally, the assessment of student performance should move away from product-based outcomes. Instead, evaluation should be based on the individual progress made, taking into account the goals set in the IEP and student-specific benchmarks.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned in the book *Verbal Behavior Approaches*, “the sooner you understand your child’s disability, the sooner you will be able to help him/her, and never lose hope that your child will lead a happy, productive life.” (Barbera, 2017) The talents, interests and aspirations of a student with special education needs can be maximized by the educational environment provided to him/her and the quality of education in this environment. In this way, the individual with special education needs does not see his/her disabilities as a disadvantage and can develop. The person who develops and sees that his/her development is approved can lead a happy and productive life. If education, which is the first condition for this, is provided through art, the person's aesthetic tastes will increase. This study was conducted to develop applied art education carried out in special education schools to increase student skills in a more efficient and active way. In the study, national and international literature was reviewed. The opinions of the educators working in special education schools of the Ministry of National Education were consulted in order to evaluate the content of the course, its implementation and its contribution to student skills, behavior and vocational acquisition, and the following conclusions were reached:

Special education teachers should receive special skills training in order to increase their ideas and skills regarding the applied art education courses they attended. There are positive developments in the academic courses of the students who took work and skills application courses. The courses positively affect the cognitive, social and psychomotor development of the students. The number of students in art education courses should be reduced or these courses should be applied individually, art fields should be expanded and students should take courses in these fields according to their interests, and the number of expert teachers in the field of art should be increased. Applied art education should be a compulsory course at younger ages and guidance should be provided by expert trainers. Technology-based education programs should be integrated into work and skills application courses. Course curricula should be rearranged according to the needs of the day and students and this should be done through comprehensive workshops to be held throughout the country. Individual education programs called IEP should be carried out in coordination with daily life skills while creating applied art education courses. A more careful and systematic way should be followed in classifying the levels of students with special education needs and directing them to workshop courses. In applied art education, application should be able to be done in different areas other than the workshop. For example, the intangible cultural heritage of cities should be introduced through student mobility. Student performance criteria should not be based on a product at the end of the activity, but should be made by taking into account the point reached by the follow-up instructions and the objectives targeted for each student. The students' interaction and communication with each other increases with the group work in applied art courses.

The potential, talents, interests, and aspirations of students with special education needs (SEN) can be fully developed through the quality and inclusivity of the educational environment they are placed in. When such environments are carefully structured, the disability is no longer perceived solely as a limitation, but rather as one component of a diverse learner profile. Students who are supported to discover their strengths and whose progress is acknowledged are more likely to achieve emotional well-being, personal satisfaction, and social productivity. It is thought that providing education with art-based experiences will improve the individual's aesthetic awareness, self-expression ability and cultural identity, as well as cognitive and motor development.

This study was conducted with the primary aim of improving applied art education in special education schools in order to foster student development in a more efficient, inclusive,

and engaging manner. In doing so, national and international literature in the fields of art education, special education, and vocational training was reviewed. Furthermore, qualitative data were gathered through consultations with special education teachers employed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), with a particular focus on evaluating course content, implementation strategies, and the observed impact on students' skill acquisition, behavioral improvements, and vocational readiness.

Based on the findings, the following key conclusions and recommendations have emerged:

1. ProfessionalDevelopmentofTeachers:

Special education teachers should receive targeted training in applied art education in order to enrich their instructional strategies and develop practical skills for guiding students with diverse learning needs. Such training would enhance both the educational outcomes and the creative potential of students.

2. PositiveImpactonAcademicCourses:

Educators reported observable academic improvements among students who participated in work and skills application courses. The structured and hands-on nature of these lessons appears to support learning in other subject areas as well.

3. MultidimensionalStudentDevelopment:

Applied art courses contribute significantly to the cognitive, psychomotor, and social development of students. Beyond academic skills, these courses foster emotional regulation, peer interaction, and confidence building.

4. ClassSizeandCoursePersonalization:

It is recommended that student numbers in applied art classes be reduced to ensure more individualized attention. Alternatively, one-on-one instruction should be considered where feasible. Additionally, course content should be diversified to include various artistic fields (e.g., visual arts, ceramics, textile, performing arts), and students should be guided to select courses based on their individual interests and abilities.

5. EarlyandMandatoryImplementation:

Applied art education should be introduced as a compulsory subject from earlier grade levels to support early intervention and holistic growth. Courses should be led by experienced and certified art educators who are well-versed in the developmental needs of SEN students.

6. Integration of Technology:

Technology-based tools and digital platforms should be integrated into work and skills application courses to enhance accessibility, engagement, and creativity. Interactive media, digital portfolios, and assistive technologies can provide additional learning pathways for students with different needs.

7. Curriculum Reform through National Collaboration:

Course curricula should be revised and updated periodically to reflect contemporary needs and the evolving profile of students. This process should be supported by nationwide workshops involving educators, academic experts, and policymakers to ensure consistency and innovation.

8. Coordination with IEPs and Daily Life Skills:

Applied art activities should be embedded within each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and be directly aligned with daily life skills. This ensures relevance, continuity, and long-term functional gains.

9. Accurate Student Placement:

More systematic and evidence-based methods should be used to assess student ability levels and appropriately assign them to workshops or activity stations. Grouping should consider both cognitive levels and social-emotional readiness.

10. Extension Beyond the Classroom:

Applied art education should not be restricted to the workshop setting. Instead, opportunities for real-world application should be pursued. For instance, introducing students to the intangible cultural heritage of their city or region through community art projects or mobility-based learning initiatives can reinforce local identity and civic engagement.

11. Holistic Assessment Methods:

Student evaluation should be process-oriented rather than product-based. Performance should be assessed according to each student's progress toward individualized goals, the level of participation, and personal development throughout the activity, rather than the quality or completeness of the final product.

12. Peer Interaction and Communication:

Group-based applied art activities significantly enhance peer communication, cooperation, and mutual support among students. This social dimension of learning is particularly beneficial for students with limited verbal abilities or social anxieties.

This study affirms that applied art education is not only a creative outlet but also a transformative educational tool in special education. With systematic support, curriculum development, teacher training, and policy integration, such programs can significantly enrich the educational experiences and life trajectories of students with special needs.

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