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### To cite this article:

Ozkan, Z.C., & Erdem, T. (2025). Examination of expert opinions on art skills education for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities. *International Journal on Studies in Education (IJonSE)*, 7(4), 1048-1068. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonse.5766>

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## Examination of Expert Opinions on Art Skills Education for Individuals with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

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### Article Info

#### Article History

Received:

12 April 2025

Accepted:

29 September 2025

#### Keywords

Mild intellectual disabilities

Visual arts curriculum

Artistic skills

education

Expert opinions

Curriculum adequacy (or Program

Development)

### Abstract

This study investigated the adequacy of the current visual arts curriculum for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities concerning artistic skills education, identified its deficiencies, determined the ideal state of such a program, and proposed areas for improvement. Employing a descriptive survey model, the research utilized a semi-structured interview form consisting of nine open-ended questions. This form was administered to expert academics and teachers specializing in the fields of intellectual disabilities and visual arts education to gather insights for curriculum enhancement. The research findings indicate a consensus among academic, teacher, and expert participants that the existing visual arts curriculum fails to consider the individual differences of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities. They strongly suggested that any new program should include differentiated arrangements based on the varying degrees of disability among these students. The study revealed that the current program suffers from limited activity diversity and that the learning environments (workshops) need to be suitably prepared to accommodate the specific needs of these children and the program's requirements. According to the findings, the participant experts ranked the most crucial needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities as: experiencing a 'sense of achievement,' contributing to the development of their 'psycho-motor skills,' and 'considering their individual differences.' Furthermore, the participants emphasized that any prospective new program must fundamentally 'aim to develop motor skills,' 'assist in vocational training,' 'be integrated with social and physical knowledge usable in daily life,' and demonstrate 'interdisciplinary consistency' with other subjects. Based on the results of this research, recommendations are presented for the development of a visual arts curriculum specifically tailored for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities.

### Introduction

Learning disability constitutes the most prevalent group among individuals requiring special education, a term first introduced by Samuel Kirk in 1962 (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Flanagan et al., 2011; Pesova et al., 2014). Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent and significant

difficulties an individual experiences in certain academic skills. The cognitive profiles of children diagnosed with SLD are not homogenous, showing notable variations among cognitive abilities. This variable cognitive structure can affect core domains such as speech, reading, writing, thinking, and comprehension (Korkmaz, 2000). Intellectual disability is defined by significant limitations in general mental functions (intelligence, reasoning, problem-solving, etc.) and adaptive behaviors (self-care, social skills, daily living skills). The DSM-5 uses this definition.

The most comprehensive current definition of SLD involves an individual experiencing difficulty in word reading, reading comprehension, dictation, mathematical operations, and reasoning skills. Within this definition, perceptual difficulties, minimal brain dysfunction, and language problems are considered part of SLD. However, academic failures due to visual-auditory-motor delays, environmental conditions, or intellectual impairment are excluded from the SLD diagnosis (APA, 1994). Mild Intellectual Disability (MID) generally refers to individuals with an IQ level between approximately 50-55 and 70 who require some support in terms of adaptive skills (Özkan, 2017). Their learning processes rely heavily on concrete experiences, audiovisual supports, and repetition-application. In Turkey, intellectual disability is classified as mild, moderate, and severe within the framework of the MEB Special Education Services Regulation (2018). Students with MID can usually attend mainstream schools and receive education in special education classes or within inclusive education practices. Instruction for these students is managed through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). According to the Turkish Special Education Regulation (2021), an "individual with special needs" is one who shows a significant difference from peers in terms of individual and developmental characteristics and educational competencies. The same regulation defines an individual with MID as one who needs limited special education and support services due to mild impairment in intellectual functions and conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. According to the DSM-IV criteria of the American Psychological Association, individuals with MID belong to the group with an IQ between 50 and 70. These children can generally benefit from academic instruction and learn reading, writing, and math skills. Educational programs focus on social skills, communication skills, and job skills in addition to academic ones. As adults, they can take care of themselves, live independently, and work (Dekker & Koot, 2003; Grant et al., 2005).

Individuals with SLD experience difficulty in academic skill acquisition despite having normal or above-normal intellectual development. These difficulties manifest in the areas of reading-writing, listening, speaking, and arithmetic calculation. SLD encompasses a problem related to information processing and learning skills. In this context, it includes issues like perceptual disorders, brain injury, dyslexia, and aphasia, but auditory, visual, motor impairment, intellectual disability, and cultural/environmental problems are not considered primary causes (Bowe, 2005; Graham et al., 2006; Lerner, 2000). While the exact cause of SLD is unknown, the characteristics of these individuals are well documented, often summarized as poor perceptual and motor skills, hyperactivity, coordination problems, language disorders, and attention deficits (Graham et al., 2006; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2019).

In line with the principle of inclusivity in education, access to educational opportunities and participation in learning processes for individuals with intellectual disabilities has gained significance at both international and

national levels (Islam, 2024; Pradhan & Gochhayat, 2023; Samwel et al., 2025). Although individuals with MID have certain limitations in cognitive, adaptive, and social skills, they possess capacities that can be developed in line with their potential. When appropriate support is provided in learning environments, they can show meaningful improvements in basic areas like self-care, communication, and social skills, as well as aesthetic, creative, and expressive areas like art skills (Fajrie et al., 2024; Rege, 2025).

Children with SLD are known to struggle with abstract thinking. Consequently, individuals with special needs may find it difficult to use effective expressive skills related to concepts due to their limited conceptual thinking. Therefore, the senses are a crucial learning tool for them. Art education is a multi-functional discipline for individuals with special needs. Through art in general, and visual arts in particular, these children can engage in collaboration with other disciplines. A good visual arts education approach can help students with special needs develop their cognitive development, social development, and psychomotor development (Allan, 2014; Fox & Macpherson, 2015).

Art education is a multifaceted field that supports an individual's creativity, visual-spatial perception, fine and gross motor skills, self-perception, and social participation (Cakir et al., 2019; Caniglia-Robiolo, 2021; Ciddi, 2025; Deasy, 2021). The education of art skills for individuals with MID can positively affect their quality of life, social integration, and personal development. However, elements such as the quality, content, teaching methods, and teacher competencies of art skills education programs need careful evaluation. Studies conducted specifically in Turkey show that themes such as the contribution of visual arts education to motor skill development, increase in self-confidence, and the consideration of individual differences are prominent (Adıbelli, 2025).

The concept of artistic skill is a multidimensional competency that includes technical proficiency, expressive power, creativity, and aesthetic perception in visual art forms such as drawing, painting, sculpture, and design (Lukaka, 2023; Okonkwo, 2014). Art education is not only related to technical skill instruction but also to emotional, social, and cognitive development. For instance, art activities contribute to an individual's self-expression, self-confidence gain, and social acceptance (Darts, 2006; Farrington et al., 2023; Lukaka, 2023).

Learning and development theories propose that significant contributions can be made to the life and learning processes of individuals with intellectual disabilities through art education (Anderson, 2014; Crockett, 2018). According to Piaget's cognitive development theory, learning is based on action-experience, and skills at the concrete operational stage are of paramount importance. In this context, concrete learning materials and activities gain significance for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities in art education (Efland, 2004; Lansing, 1966). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) approach aims to identify the potential an individual can reach with assistance and then plan and execute artistic activities by providing this necessary support (Moreno et al., 2021; Vygotskaya, 1999). In behavioral and reinforcement approaches, practice, repetition, and positive reinforcers play a crucial role in developing art skills. Motivation and learning increase when a student's drawing or work is supported by positive feedback from the teacher, the group, or other individuals (Anderson et al., 2010; Kouski, 1975). The humanistic-affective approach provides opportunities for the student to express and externalize their inner world through art education. This perspective is highly important for individuals with

intellectual disabilities in terms of self-perception, emotional awareness, and sense of self-worth (Casciano et al., 2019; Passi, J., & Parker-Katz, 2021). Self-Determination Theory posits that human behaviors are autonomous and volitional, that individuals enact their behavior at the highest level of thought, and participate in events with a complete sense of choice. According to this theory, learners—especially individuals with disabilities—will work effectively and develop healthily to the extent that their needs are continuously met; conversely, to the extent that they are thwarted, individuals will show signs of negativity and non-volitional behaviors (Ryan et al., 1997; Sünbül, et al., 2003).

There is a growing awareness among art educators and special education specialists that art can be an effective instructional strategy for children with special educational needs. The integration of visual arts, such as painting, into the special education curriculum can contribute to the learning of perceptual, motor, and academic skills (Kırıçoğlu, 2002; San, 2004). A child's physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social development are interconnected parts of the same whole, constantly interacting with each other. Neglect of one area inevitably impacts the others. In this context, it is crucial that an integrative approach is consistently adopted in special education and reflected in art education practices. John (1986) specified that art activities, particularly for children with intellectual disabilities, should involve: limiting materials, using simple procedures, repeating tasks, breaking down the art production process into small, sequential units (task analysis), and designing art experiences that ensure skill acquisition and success. Environmental arrangements for art activities involving children with intellectual disabilities must be individualized, depending on the severity and type of each person's disability. To achieve this, the child's artistic skill level should first be determined, assessing their ability to use materials like clay, playdough, watercolors, and pastels, as well as their aptitude with colors and shapes.

Art educators have recommended that art education programs should focus on providing experiences with the following characteristics (Darragh et al., 2016; San, 2000; Silver, 1989):

- Children should be given extensive opportunities to examine both natural and man-made works of art intensively.
- Art activities should help children express their individual thoughts and feelings most effectively, allowing them to apply their own ideas and creative manual skills.
- Tools and materials should be used that are appropriate to the children's individual abilities and that satisfy their aesthetic senses while developing their manual dexterity.
- Environmental arrangements should be made to facilitate the understanding of concepts related to line, shape, color, and spatial relationships.
- Various art forms and crafts, such as painting, sculpture, decorative arrangements, architectural works, rug-making, and weaving, should be introduced, and practical work in these fields should be undertaken.
- Opportunities should be provided to develop aesthetic perception and skills in daily life, such as in home decoration or environmental arrangement.

Current instructional practices in Turkey for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities (MID) often fall short, particularly in the domain of art education. Art classes are frequently perceived as merely a "supplementary" component of the curriculum, resulting in limited availability of materials and methods specifically adapted for

students with disabilities. This scenario hinders students from fully actualizing their potential in aesthetic, psychomotor, and social developmental areas. However, studies conducted in Turkey consistently demonstrate that visual arts education offers significant contributions to areas such as self-confidence (Işık, 2023), motor skills (Aksu, 2011), individualized education program (Avcıoğlu, 2011; Öztürk & Eratay, 2010), music education (Doğan, 2011; Tecimer & Doğan, 2017) and art teaching (Çağlayan, 2018; Özkan, 2017) in students with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, existing research provides strong evidence regarding the positive effects of art education on the learning gains and overall development of these individuals. Erim (2011) indicated that visual arts positively contribute to the development of motor skills, specifically gross and fine motor skills like hand-eye coordination. Keskinova & Ramo Akgün (2022) found that the quality of drawing skills is closely linked to developmental skills, particularly perceptual and motor skills. Işık's (2023) thesis, "The Contribution of Visual Arts Education to Self-Confidence Development," further affirmed the positive impact of art education on self-confidence.

In this context, an examination of art skills education for individuals with MID is essential, not only for generating academic knowledge but also for proposing practical solutions to the implementation challenges faced in the field. In recent years, the integration of art education with special education has become increasingly widespread globally. The growing recognition of art education's importance clearly demonstrates the effect of its activities on individuals' physical and mental development. According to Salderay (2001), the role of artistic activities as an instrumental means to achieve educational goals highlights their humanistic and active dimensions in other learning domains. Despite this, it is evident that artistic skills education for individuals with intellectual disabilities remains partially neglected, and the body of research addressing this specific area is limited. A review of the literature reveals various findings regarding the contributions of arts education to therapeutic, cognitive, and psychomotor development in individuals with intellectual disabilities (Malley & Silverstein, 2014; Öztürk & Yılmaz, 2019). However, it is noteworthy that research systematically examining the opinions of teachers, academics, and special education specialists on how to develop artistic skills in individuals with mild intellectual disabilities, how to plan the teaching process, and how to structure assessment approaches is limited. This deficiency poses a significant obstacle both to adapting arts education programs to the field of special education and to making individualized education plans more functional.

Therefore, this research aims to reveal the current status, needs, and practical challenges of teaching art skills to individuals with mild intellectual disabilities, based on expert opinions. In this respect, the study fills a theoretical and practical gap in the literature and offers data-based recommendations to improve the quality of art education in the field of special education. Furthermore, the research findings are expected to guide policymakers, teacher training programs, and special education practitioners. Consequently, this research aims to understand the experiences and expectations of participants by determining how art skills education can be structured for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities and by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of current applications. The concept of "artistic skill" will be analyzed in terms of the instructional environment, teaching processes, and student characteristics. The primary objective of this study is to determine the views of subject matter experts, academics, and teachers regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing visual arts curriculum for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

In line with this primary objective, the following research question is posed: What are the opinions of subject matter experts and academics regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing visual arts curriculum for individuals with intellectual disabilities?

## **Method**

The primary aim of this study was to determine the opinions of subject matter experts and academics regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing visual arts curriculum for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities. Fundamentally, the study examined the following aspects of the current visual arts curriculum concerning artistic skills education: its sufficiency, its current deficiencies, its ideal structure, and specific areas for improvement. Within this general scope, the research focused on the artistic skill adequacy of the existing visual arts course curriculum, its desired state, and necessary improvement efforts.

## **Research Design**

The research was conducted using a qualitative research design. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2006), qualitative research generally utilizes data collection techniques such as observation, interview, and document analysis, and follows a process aimed at determining perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic manner in their natural setting. The study employed a descriptive survey method and was designed as a case study, a qualitative research method (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). A case study, one of the important techniques used in qualitative research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006), is a research design in which researchers analyze a situation, event, action, program, or process in depth (Yin, 2012). A case study provides rich and important perspectives on events and behaviors (Brown, 2008). Cases can be limited in time and action. A case study allows researchers to collect and analyze comprehensive data on the research topic and helps to better understand a situation.

This study examined the current visual arts curriculum for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities and examined it based on expert opinions. In this context, comprehensive data was collected regarding the adequacy, effectiveness, and relevance of the current visual arts curriculum for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities, based on the opinions of subject matter experts and academics. To answer the central research question, "What are the opinions of subject matter experts and academics regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing visual arts curriculum for individuals with intellectual disabilities?", a semi-structured interview form was utilized.

## **Study Group**

The study group is representative of academics, subject matter experts, special education teachers, and visual arts teachers working in Faculties of Education that provide special education training and in schools designated for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities across Turkey. The research sample was determined using a convenience sampling approach to ensure ease of access and relevance to the research objectives. The study was conducted with the participation of a total of 60 individuals. In line with this, interviews were conducted with: 40 Academics working in Special Education Teaching departments at various universities across Turkey. 10 Special

Education Teachers employed at formal and private institutions providing special education services. 10 Visual Arts Teachers employed at similar institutions. Participants were initially contacted via phone and email, briefly informed about the study's topic, and appointments were requested for interviews. Out of 100 individuals initially contacted, only 60 provided a positive response and accepted the interview request.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

To gather the opinions of subject matter experts and academics regarding the existing visual arts curriculum, a specialized Needs Analysis Form—Interview Form was prepared. The process began with an extensive literature review targeting the research topic. This review encompassed national and international libraries, the Council of Higher Education Documentation Center archives, the Ministry of National Education Special Education and Guidance Services archives, and relevant domestic and foreign web searches. Foreign resources obtained during this phase were translated into Turkish. Additionally, consultations were held with subject matter experts, academics, and special education teachers. The questions for the Needs Analysis Form were then formulated based on the information derived from the literature review and the feedback from these experts.

The initial version of the interview form contained 2 questions on the effectiveness of the current program, 3 for describing the current situation, 3 regarding the desired situation, and 5 related to identified needs. In the subsequent phase, the questions were presented to six experts for feedback: one from curriculum development, one from special education, one from visual arts education, one from developmental psychology, one from child development, and one experienced special education teacher. Based on their feedback, the questions were reclassified and refined. A pilot study was then conducted with 10 visual arts teachers working in special education schools to establish the interview form's validity and reliability. Finally, the revised form was reviewed by a Turkish Language specialist to ensure correct grammar and spelling. Following all expert consultations, the decision was made to use the finalized form, which consists of 9 open-ended questions tailored to the research objective of needs analysis.

### **Data Collection**

Subject matter experts, academics, and teachers from schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, who were planned for the application of the interview form, were determined using convenience sampling. The research utilized a semi-structured interview technique. The researcher prepared an interview protocol containing pre-planned core questions. However, the researcher retained the flexibility to ask various follow-up or probing questions to deepen the discussion based on the flow of the interview. If a participant answered certain questions within the context of other responses, those specific questions were omitted by the researcher. Academics and teachers were visited in their respective offices at their institutions, informed about the topic, and then the interview form application commenced. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes on average. Out of the 60 interview forms collected, 10 were eliminated due to containing blank responses. In total, 50 complete and reliable interview forms were used for the analysis.

## Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed by examining each interview form administered to academics, subject matter experts, and teachers. The analysis focused on identifying key statements and important phrases within the responses to each of the nine open-ended questions in the interview form. In the second stage, these key statements were systematically presented using frequency analysis and percentages.

## Findings

Based on the frequency and percentage calculations regarding the first question, 17 (34%) of the academicians, subject area experts and teachers to whom the interview form was applied express that they do not think that the current visual arts course curriculum provides artistic skills to students with intellectual disabilities (see Table 1). 13 (26%) of them express the opinion that the current visual arts course curriculum is inadequate for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 7 (14%) of them express the opinion that the necessary artistic education is given in visual arts and music classes and that sufficient activities are carried out. 4 (8%) of them state that the current visual arts course curriculum is organized according to the level and needs of students with intellectual disabilities.

Table 1. Analysis of Expert Opinions Regarding the Current State of "Artistic Skill" Education for Individuals with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

| <b>Question 1.</b> What is the current state of "artistic skill" education for individuals with Mild Intellectual Disabilities? | <b>Frequency<br/>(f)</b> | <b>Percentage<br/>(%)</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| I do not believe the current curriculum imparts artistic skills to students with intellectual disabilities.                     | 17                       | 34                        |
| The current curriculum is insufficient for individuals with intellectual disabilities.                                          | 13                       | 26                        |
| I believe that adequate artistic education and sufficient activities are provided in Visual Arts and Music lessons.             | 7                        | 14                        |
| I believe the current curriculum is too demanding (or "heavy") for students with intellectual disabilities.                     | 5                        | 10                        |
| I do not believe the current curriculum is designed for students with intellectual disabilities.                                | 4                        | 8                         |
| I do not believe the current curriculum is tailored to the levels and needs of students with intellectual disabilities.         | 4                        | 8                         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                                                    | <b>50</b>                | <b>100</b>                |

The frequency and percentage calculations for the second question, which asked academics, subject matter experts, and teachers about the effectiveness of the current visual arts curriculum, revealed a strong consensus regarding its inadequacy (see Table 2). A substantial majority of respondents, 31 individuals (62%), stated that they do not believe the current visual arts curriculum is effective. Additionally, 11 participants (22%) agreed that the program is effective but requires improvement. Only a small fraction of the participants found the program to

be adequate: 5 respondents (10%) considered the curriculum to be partially effective, and a mere 3 respondents (6%) felt the program was fully effective.

Table 2. Analysis of Expert Opinions on the Effectiveness of the Current Visual Arts Curriculum

| <b>Question 2. To what extent is the current curriculum effective?</b>   | <b>Frequency<br/>(f)</b> | <b>Percentage<br/>(%)</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| I do not believe the current curriculum is effective.                    | 31                       | 62                        |
| I believe the current curriculum is effective, but it needs improvement. | 11                       | 22                        |
| I believe the current curriculum is partially (or "somewhat") effective. | 5                        | 10                        |
| I believe the current curriculum is effective.                           | 3                        | 6                         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                             | <b>50</b>                | <b>100</b>                |

Based on the frequency and percentage calculations for the third question, the following expert opinions were gathered from the academics, subject matter experts, and teachers regarding subject area-related needs: A majority of 21 respondents (31%) stated that the materials used in the visual arts course lack diversity and must be increased/diversified. 20 respondents (30%) emphasized that the learning environments (workshops) must be prepared to suit the needs of students with intellectual disabilities (see Table 3). 11 respondents (16%) indicated that current visual arts teachers should be subjected to in-service training. 9 respondents (14%) shared the opinion that the existing visual arts curriculum must be revised/adapted for students with intellectual disabilities.

Table 3. Analysis of Expert Opinions on Subject Area-Related Needs in the Curriculum for Individuals with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

| <b>Question 3. What are the subject area-related needs?</b>                                          | <b>Frequency<br/>(f)</b> | <b>Percentage<br/>(%)</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| The materials used in the Visual Arts course lack diversity; they must be increased/diversified.     | 21                       | 31                        |
| The learning environments (workshops) must be suitably prepared.                                     | 20                       | 30                        |
| Teachers must be subjected to in-service training.                                                   | 11                       | 16                        |
| The curriculum must be revised (or "corrected/adapted") for students with intellectual disabilities. | 9                        | 14                        |
| It must support social and psychomotor development.                                                  | 6                        | 9                         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                         | <b>67</b>                | <b>100</b>                |

Based on the frequency and percentage calculations for the fourth question, which addressed the needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities, the following findings emerged from the academics, subject matter experts, and teachers: 16 respondents (19%) stated that the need for individuals with intellectual disabilities to experience a sense of achievement is higher compared to their other needs (see Table 4). 14 participants (17%) indicated that the development of their psycho-motor (hand) skills is among the key needs of these individuals. 13 respondents (16%) viewed the acquisition of skills/competencies as a critical need. 10 respondents (12%) shared the view that these individuals should be supported artistically. 10 respondents (12%) also stated that

gaining new and diverse knowledge is one of the needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities. 10 respondents (12%) suggested that recognizing and taking into account the individual differences of these individuals is among their essential needs. Finally, 10 respondents (12%) specified that experiencing a sense of self-confidence is a need for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Table 4. Analysis of Expert Opinions on Individual Needs in the Curriculum for Individuals with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

| <b>Question 4. What are the needs of individuals?</b> | <b>Frequency<br/>(f)</b> | <b>Percentage<br/>(%)</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| To experience a sense of accomplishment               | 16                       | 19                        |
| To develop psychomotor (hand) skills                  | 14                       | 17                        |
| To acquire skills                                     | 13                       | 16                        |
| To be supported artistically                          | 10                       | 12                        |
| To gain new and different knowledge                   | 10                       | 12                        |
| To consider individual differences                    | 10                       | 12                        |
| To experience a sense of self-confidence              | 10                       | 12                        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                          | <b>83</b>                | <b>100</b>                |

Based on the frequency and percentage calculations for the fifth question, which asked experts whether the current visual arts curriculum should be implemented and improved or replaced with a new one, the majority opinion was for a complete overhaul: A significant majority of 36 respondents (72%) stated that the current visual arts curriculum is not adequate for students with intellectual disabilities and that a new program must be developed. The remaining 14 respondents (28%) suggested that the existing visual arts curriculum could be reviewed, and its deficient or weak aspects could be improved (developed) (see Table 5).

Table 5. Analysis of Expert Opinions on the Implementation and Development of the Current Program for People with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

| <b>Question 5. Is it appropriate to implement and develop the existing program? Or should a new program be prepared?</b> | <b>Frequency<br/>(f)</b> | <b>Percentage<br/>(%)</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| The current curriculum is not adequate for students with intellectual disabilities; a new program must be prepared.      | 36                       | 72                        |
| The deficient and weak aspects of the current curriculum can be improved (or developed).                                 | 14                       | 28                        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                                             | <b>50</b>                | <b>100</b>                |

Based on the frequency and percentage calculations for the sixth question, the following expert opinions were gathered from academics, subject matter experts, and teachers regarding the deficiencies of the current visual arts curriculum: 20 respondents (32%) stated that the existing visual arts curriculum is not appropriate for the developmental levels of students with intellectual disabilities. 13 respondents (20%) indicated that the activity variety in the current curriculum is low. 12 respondents (19%) expressed the view that the existing program does

not foster skill acquisition. 10 respondents (16%) noted that the topics are consistently the same, with low subject diversity (see Table 6). Finally, 8 respondents (13%) maintained that the current program fails to consider individual differences.

Table 6. Analysis of Expert Opinions on the Topic of "Correcting the Deficiencies in the Current Program" for People with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

| <b>Question 6.</b> Which deficient aspects of the current curriculum should be corrected/improved?   | <b>Frequency<br/>(f)</b> | <b>Percentage<br/>(%)</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| The current curriculum is not appropriate for the levels of students with intellectual disabilities. | 20                       | 32                        |
| The activity variety in the current curriculum is low.                                               | 13                       | 20                        |
| The current curriculum does not develop skills.                                                      | 12                       | 19                        |
| The topics in the current curriculum are always the same, variety is low.                            | 10                       | 16                        |
| The current curriculum does not consider individual differences.                                     | 8                        | 13                        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                         | <b>63</b>                | <b>100</b>                |

Based on the frequency and percentage calculations for the seventh question, the experts' opinions on the objectives of artistic skills training for students with mild intellectual disabilities were as follows: A plurality of 18 respondents (26%) stated that the primary objective should be to develop motor skills. 17 respondents (24%) emphasized that artistic skills training should be vocational (job-oriented). 14 respondents (20%) suggested the goal should be to simply provide general skills/competencies. 11 respondents (16%) argued that the goals should be adaptable to daily life, encompassing both social and physical applications. 10 respondents (14%) believed the program should be interdisciplinary, meaning its objectives must be contiguous and overlapping with those of other academic courses (see Table 7).

Table 7. Analysis of Expert Opinions on the 'Purposes of Artistic Skills Education' for the Mildly Mentally Disabled

| <b>Question 7.</b> What should be the aims of the artistic skills education given to these students? | <b>Frequency<br/>(f)</b> | <b>Percentage<br/>(%)</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Motor skills should be developed.                                                                    | 18                       | 26                        |
| It should be vocationally oriented.                                                                  | 17                       | 24                        |
| It should provide skills.                                                                            | 14                       | 20                        |
| It should have purposes that can be used in daily life (social and physical).                        | 11                       | 16                        |
| It should be interdisciplinary.                                                                      | 10                       | 14                        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                         | <b>70</b>                | <b>100</b>                |

Based on the results for the eighth question, expert opinions on the desired characteristics of future artistic skills training were gathered from academics, subject matter experts, and teachers: 14 respondents (27%) emphasized that the artistic skills training provided must ensure skill development. 12 respondents (23%) stressed the necessity

for the curriculum to include more and different materials than those currently used in visual arts lessons, advocating for non-traditional materials. 9 respondents (17%) stated that the training should consider individual differences. Another 9 respondents (17%) indicated that the training must be appropriate for the developmental levels of these individuals (see Table 8). Finally, 8 respondents (16%) believed that the artistic skills education provided should incorporate skills oriented toward vocational training (job acquisition).

Table 8. Analysis of Expert Opinions on the Quality of Artistic Skills Education for the Mildly Mentally Disabled

| <b>Question 8.</b> In your opinion, what kind of artistic skills education should these students receive? | <b>Frequency<br/>(f)</b> | <b>Percentage<br/>(%)</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| It should ensure skill development.                                                                       | 14                       | 27                        |
| It should include more and different materials.                                                           | 12                       | 23                        |
| It should consider individual differences.                                                                | 9                        | 17                        |
| It should be appropriate for the developmental levels of students with intellectual disabilities.         | 9                        | 17                        |
| It should be oriented toward vocational training (or job acquisition).                                    | 8                        | 16                        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                              | <b>52</b>                | <b>100</b>                |

The frequency and percentage calculations for the ninth question, which addressed the necessary measurement and evaluation practices for students with mild intellectual disabilities, yielded the following expert opinions: 25 respondents (45%) strongly suggested the necessity of employing a process-oriented measurement and evaluation method. 10 respondents (18%) indicated that a staged (or task-analyzed) evaluation process should be implemented. 8 respondents stated that performance assessment techniques should be utilized, emphasizing that practical application would be more suitable. 7 respondents (13%) specifically noted that product (outcome)-focused evaluation should be avoided. 5 respondents (9%) expressed the view that students should be rewarded (reinforcement should be provided) (see Table 9).

Table 9. Analysis of Expert Opinions on the 'Measurement and Evaluation Application of the Curriculum' for the Mildly Mentally Disabled

| <b>Question 9.</b> In your opinion, what kind of measurement and evaluation should be carried out for students with mild intellectual disabilities? | <b>Frequency<br/>(f)</b> | <b>Percentage<br/>(%)</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Process-oriented measurement and evaluation should be implemented.                                                                                  | 25                       | 45                        |
| The measurement and evaluation process should be staged (or sequential/task-analyzed).                                                              | 10                       | 18                        |
| Application (Performance Assessment) should be included/utilized.                                                                                   | 8                        | 15                        |
| Product (Outcome)-focused measurement and evaluation should not be implemented.                                                                     | 7                        | 13                        |
| Students should be rewarded (Reinforcement should be provided).                                                                                     | 5                        | 9                         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                                                                        | <b>55</b>                | <b>100</b>                |

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This research investigated expert opinions regarding art skills education for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities (MID). The research findings indicate a consensus among academics, teachers, and expert participants that the existing visual arts curriculum fails to consider the individual differences of individuals with MID. Furthermore, responses to the second interview question similarly showed that the current program is insufficient in terms of achieving visual arts course outcomes. These findings underscore that individual differences are largely ignored in the art education process for individuals with MID, necessitating a program that is sensitive to and adapted for these variations. Art education is a critical tool for supporting not only aesthetic and creative development but also cognitive, affective, and social skills in individuals with special needs (Eisner, 2002). However, most standard art education curricula are designed with the needs of typically developing students in mind, proving inadequate for addressing the unique learning differences of individuals with intellectual disabilities (Blandy & Hoffman, 1993; Sünbül, 2000).

As the findings suggest, the program's failure to account for individual differences restricts both students' learning processes and their motivation for participation. Indeed, international literature emphasizes that differentiated instruction and adapted materials are critical for effective art education (Tomlinson, 2014). Specifically for individuals with intellectual disabilities, activities structured according to individual differences have been shown to increase students' self-efficacy and learning motivation (Gerber, 2011). Moreover, art education approaches developed for individuals with special needs must incorporate flexibility, multi-sensory learning opportunities, and integration with life skills (MacGregor, 2015). Consequently, the research findings strongly support the expert consensus that the current curriculum must be restructured. Reviewing international best practices shows that art education programs for special needs students are often structured within the framework of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Smith, 2009). This approach allows the instructional process to be tailored by considering individuals' developmental levels, strengths, and disability-related limitations. The discussion of these findings therefore highlights not only the critique of the existing program but also the need to integrate the principles of adaptation, differentiation, and individualization found in international literature into art education curricula.

Another significant finding of the study is that a large majority of expert participants believe the current program suffers from a lack of activity variety and that the materials used in visual arts lessons lack diversity. Participants also stated that the learning environments (workshops) must be suitably prepared to accommodate the specific characteristics of these children and the program's requirements. This finding highlights the issue of inadequate art education environments and the scarcity of activity and material diversity, which is crucial for the learning process of individuals with MID. For art education to be effective, not only the curriculum content but also the instructional environment, material variety, and pedagogical approaches are determining factors (Eisner, 2002). In the context of intellectual disability, learning is emphasized as occurring primarily through concrete experiences, multi-sensory stimuli, and various activity types (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2019). The participants' assertion of insufficient activity and material variety conflicts with the core principles of art education. International literature deems the use of diverse art techniques (e.g., drawing, sculpture, collage, digital art) and materials (e.g., paint, clay, recycled objects, natural materials) vital for special needs students to express

their creativity and advance their cognitive-affective development (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987).

Furthermore, as highlighted in the findings, the proper arrangement of learning environments (workshops) boosts learning motivation and supports students' active participation in the learning process (Blandy, 1991). Specifically for individuals with intellectual disabilities, art workshops should be equipped with ergonomic arrangements, safety measures, visual cues, and flexible space utilization (Barton, 2003). In the context of art education, activity diversity is also linked to equity of participation. UNESCO's inclusive education approach stresses the need to enrich learning environments to accommodate individual differences (UNESCO, 2009). Therefore, the current curriculum's weakness in terms of materials and activities is incompatible with inclusivity goals. In conclusion, this finding reveals that art education practices must be supported by more diversified activities, varied material use, and appropriately arranged workshop environments. This approach will contribute to developing the creativity, strengthening the social-emotional skills, and enhancing the active participation of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities in the learning process.

In other findings of the research, expert opinions were examined regarding the needs of individuals with MID concerning visual arts and how a newly developed curriculum should be structured. Participant experts ranked the most crucial needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities as: experiencing a 'sense of achievement,' contributing to the development of their 'psycho-motor skills,' and 'considering their individual differences.' Furthermore, participants emphasized that any prospective new program must fundamentally 'aim to develop motor skills,' 'assist in vocational training,' 'be integrated with social and physical knowledge usable in daily life,' and demonstrate 'interdisciplinary consistency' with other subjects. This finding indicates that art education for individuals with MID serves a significant function beyond the aesthetic realm, encompassing the sense of success, psycho-motor skills, individualized learning, vocational development, and interdisciplinary consistency.

One of the most vital contributions of art education is fostering self-confidence and a sense of achievement by providing individuals with opportunities to express their creativity. Individuals with intellectual disabilities may frequently experience failure in academic areas; art activities, conversely, offer opportunities to create tangible products and experience success (Eisner, 2002), thereby reinforcing their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The contribution of art education to psycho-motor development is as important as its cognitive dimensions. Activities like using a paintbrush, cutting with scissors, and kneading clay support the fine motor skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). Research indicates that art-based activities are instrumental in developing hand-eye coordination and motor skills (Gerber, 2011).

As emerged during the interviews, the visual arts curriculum for individuals with special needs is often a rigid program that relies on outdated topics and techniques, neglects modern teaching methods, and features commonplace materials. However, a core principle of effective programs for individuals with special needs is individualized instruction. As highlighted by the participants, the program must consider individual differences. Tomlinson (2014) notes that the differentiated instruction approach increases learning motivation, especially among individuals with special needs. Furthermore, the integration of visual arts with other subjects (e.g., symmetry in math, nature drawings in science, visual storytelling in language arts) both deepens learning and

enables students to transfer what they have learned into different contexts (Marshall, 2005), making learning more meaningful for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The content of artistic skills education, whether applied in state schools or private rehabilitation centers for individuals with MID in Turkey, is inconsistent with daily life. Due to these negative characteristics, the existing visual arts program is unsuitable for the students' levels in terms of content selection. Linking art education with daily living skills enhances the functionality of learning. Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen (2019) emphasize that applications connected to life skills in art education support individuals' independent living. The suggestion for the new program to integrate social and physical knowledge thus aligns with international literature. Moreover, art education is not solely for aesthetic development or as a hobby; it also contributes to individuals acquiring functional skills. Vocational skills acquisition through art is a strategy that supports participation in the workforce for individuals with intellectual disabilities (McLean, 2008). Skills acquired in areas like ceramics, textiles, or handicrafts, for example, can increase their employability.

These findings demonstrate that art education is a multi-dimensional tool supporting psycho-motor, social-emotional, cognitive, and vocational development, not merely an aesthetic field. Supported by the literature, the experts' recommendations to integrate individualization, interdisciplinary consistency, vocational orientation, and daily living skills into the new program are critical necessities for enhancing the education, artistic engagement, and quality of life for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The final finding of the research concerns the 'measurement and evaluation practice of the curriculum' for individuals with MID. The majority of expert participants believe that process-oriented assessment and evaluation should be utilized in visual arts lessons for students with MID. Participants also stated that the assessment process should be staged (task-analyzed) and should incorporate rewards and reinforcements. This finding indicates that assessment and evaluation in visual arts for students with MID must be structured to be process-based, participatory, flexible, staged, and motivation-enhancing. The literature supports these findings, suggesting that methods focusing on the process and development should be adopted in place of traditional product-oriented evaluation. The necessity of adopting a suitable assessment framework for MID students in visual arts aligns closely with both international literature and special education research (Edwards et al., 2020; Haanstra & Schönau, 2007; Kelly & Orsini, 2021; Kraft, 2017).

Assessment for individuals with special needs should consider the learning process, not just the product (e.g., the finished artwork). Art education is inherently process-based, requiring the observation of an individual's effort, participation, progress, and creativity (Eisner, 2002). Process-based assessment provides a more holistic view of the student's developmental journey (Barrett, 2007). Furthermore, assessment procedures for students with intellectual disabilities are typically structured via small steps (task analysis) (Browder et al., 2003). Staged assessment involves breaking down a complex task into smaller parts and monitoring the successful completion of each step. This approach allows for the separate evaluation of sequential stages in visual arts, such as "preparing materials – experimenting with painting techniques – producing the final work." Within the framework of behavioral learning theory, rewards and reinforcement are critical in special education for increasing motivation

and cementing learning behaviors (Skinner, 1953). Research indicates that supporting students' efforts in art education with positive feedback and rewards enhances participation and creativity (Hetland et al., 2007). However, it is important that rewards are structured to support intrinsic motivation rather than merely extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The majority of educators participating in the research believe that verbal motivation within the natural process should be used as a motivational strategy. Skinner (1966), in his theory of operant conditioning, states that organisms learn by producing changes in their environment, and that reinforcers as stimuli that increase the likelihood of a correct response are important in the learning process. According to Stokes and Baer (1977), naturally occurring reinforcers should be emphasized in special instruction. UNESCO (2009), within the inclusive education framework, stresses that assessment practices must consider individuals' different learning paces and styles. In this context, the process-oriented, staged, and reinforcement-based assessment suggestions proposed by the expert participants align with international standards.

## **Recommendations**

The results of this research will enhance the quality of art education in practice and provide a comprehensive roadmap for future research. In particular, the development of art programs that are interdisciplinary, individualized, and focused on vocational skills will yield high academic and societal contributions.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are presented:

- Visual arts education should be implemented through flexible and individualized curricula that take into account the varied interests, abilities, and learning paces of individuals with MID.
- Learning environments should be arranged to be safe, accessible, and multi-sensory; various materials such as clay, natural materials, and digital tools should be utilized.
- Visual arts should be integrated with other subjects, such as Mathematics (e.g., symmetry), Science (e.g., nature observations), and Turkish/Language Arts (e.g., visual storytelling).
- Programs should be designed to impart functional vocational skills in areas like simple handicrafts, ceramics, and textiles, not just aesthetic development.
- Assessment methods should be process-focused, staged, and reinforcement-based, rather than solely concentrating on the students' final product.
- Art educators should be supported with in-service training on special education pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and alternative assessment methods.

Additionally, the following areas are recommended for future research:

- Conducting experimental studies to examine the impact of newly developed art education programs on motor skill development, self-confidence, social adjustment, and vocational skills.
- Carrying out studies that investigate the long-term effects of art education on individuals with intellectual disabilities (e.g., employment participation, quality of life).
- Researching the impact of new methods and digital tools (e.g., tablet drawing applications, augmented reality) on the accessibility and motivation within art education.

## Notes

This article is produced from the first author's dissertation study under the supervision of the second author.

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