

**METHODS OF WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH UNDERDEVELOPED
MUSICAL ABILITIES AND THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED**

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Annotation: *This article examines effective methods of working with students who demonstrate underdeveloped musical abilities, such as weak sense of rhythm, poor pitch perception, limited auditory memory, and low musical motivation. The study highlights common pedagogical difficulties encountered in music education and proposes practical teaching strategies aimed at improving students' musical perception, performance skills, and emotional engagement. The article emphasizes the importance of individualized instruction, differentiated tasks, and supportive psychological conditions in developing musical competencies. The findings suggest that systematic work through step-by-step exercises, interactive technologies, and creative learning environments can significantly enhance students' musical progress.*

Keywords: *musical abilities, rhythm development, pitch perception, auditory memory, music education, differentiated teaching, music pedagogy, student motivation, musical training methods, learning difficulties.*

Musical education plays an essential role in the holistic development of students. It contributes not only to artistic growth but also to cognitive, emotional, and social development. However, in educational practice, teachers frequently encounter students whose musical abilities are underdeveloped. These learners may struggle with recognizing melody, keeping rhythm, singing in tune, memorizing musical patterns, or expressing musical emotions.

Underdeveloped musical abilities can appear at different stages of education and may be influenced by genetic factors, limited exposure to music in early childhood, psychological barriers, low motivation, or insufficient instructional support. Teachers often face challenges in ensuring that such students participate equally and develop necessary musical competencies without feeling discouraged or inferior.

The purpose of this article is to explore the most effective pedagogical methods for working with students who demonstrate weak musical abilities and to identify the major difficulties that teachers face in the educational process. The study also aims to offer practical recommendations to improve music teaching outcomes in both school and extracurricular environments.

The development of musical abilities has been widely discussed in music pedagogy and psychology. Researchers such as B. Teplov emphasized that musical ability includes a complex system of skills, particularly musical hearing, rhythm perception, and emotional sensitivity to sound. According to Teplov, musicality is not limited to talent

but can be nurtured through systematic training and appropriate educational conditions.

Zoltán Kodály developed a pedagogical system emphasizing singing, solfege, and folk music as essential tools for developing musical hearing. His approach suggests that every child is capable of learning music if instruction begins gradually and consistently.

Carl Orff's method focuses on rhythm, movement, and improvisation, making music education more accessible for students with weak musical skills. Orff argued that the integration of body movement and percussion instruments strengthens musical perception and reduces anxiety.

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze developed eurhythmics, which is based on the idea that rhythm must be experienced physically. This method has been considered particularly effective for learners who struggle with rhythmic accuracy.

Modern researchers highlight that underdeveloped musical abilities are often associated with low confidence and fear of failure. Therefore, psychological support and motivational strategies are critical. Many studies also emphasize the importance of differentiated learning, where tasks are adjusted to the learner's level and gradually increased in difficulty.

Working with students who have underdeveloped musical abilities—meaning limited pitch discrimination, weak sense of rhythm, poor coordination, minimal prior exposure, or generally low musical aptitude—requires patience, structured adaptation, and a strong emphasis on building confidence rather than expecting rapid mastery. These students are not necessarily "untalented"; research and experienced educators consistently show that musical skills develop through deliberate, repeated, and enjoyable practice, even when starting from a very basic level.

Below is a detailed explanation of effective methods and the most frequently encountered problems, presented entirely in text form.

Core Principles Guiding Instruction

Before specific methods, keep these foundational ideas in mind:

- Adopt a growth mindset — emphasize effort, persistence, and small improvements over innate talent. Phrases like "Your brain is growing every time you try" help reframe struggles.
- Prioritize success-oriented experiences — choose tasks where the student can achieve something audible and satisfying quickly.
- Start with what the student can already do (even if it's only clapping a steady beat once or humming a favorite tune) and build outward.
- Use multi-sensory input — combine hearing, moving, seeing, and touching to reinforce concepts.
- Keep sessions short and frequent rather than long and infrequent; 10–15 focused minutes several times a week often yield better results than one hour once a week.

Detailed Methods for Working with These Students

Extreme Task Segmentation and Micro-Progression

- Break every skill into the smallest possible component.

- Example for rhythm: First master a single steady pulse by marching or tapping without any melody. Only later add simple patterns (quarter note, then quarter + two eighths).

- Example for pitch: Begin with two contrasting notes (high/low, sol-mi) sung or played on an instrument before introducing a third note.

- Repeat the tiny segment many times with slight variations (louder/softer, faster/slower, different timbre) to build automaticity without boredom.

- Why effective: Prevents cognitive overload and provides frequent "wins" that combat discouragement.

Heavy Reliance on Kinesthetic and Movement-Based Learning

- Use whole-body actions before fine motor precision: stomp/clap/sway to internalize beat and meter; walk pathways on the floor to show phrase shape; use arm gestures for high/low pitch direction (Kodály hand signs or simple up/down motions).

- Body percussion sequences (pat-clap-snap-stomp) develop rhythm sense without requiring an instrument.

- Dalcroze-inspired eurhythmics: Respond to music with free or guided movement to feel pulse, dynamics, and form physically.

- Why effective: Many students with underdeveloped abilities struggle with auditory-only processing; movement creates a stronger neural anchor.

Playful, Game-Like, and Non-Pressured Activities

- Incorporate musical games: "Copy cat" echo games for pitch/rhythm imitation; "Freeze dance" to reinforce steady beat; "Musical statues" for listening awareness.

- Use improvisation within strict limits (e.g., "Make three sounds on the drum using only your fingertips").

- Allow "silly" or exaggerated performances to reduce fear of mistakes.

- Why effective: Lowers emotional stakes, increases intrinsic motivation, and disguises skill-building as fun.

Strong Aural Before Visual Approach

- Delay staff notation for a long time—months or even years for some students.

- Rely on rote learning, call-and-response, listening to short models repeatedly, and playing/singing by ear.

- Introduce notation only after the sound and physical feeling are secure (e.g., show the symbol after the student can reliably clap the rhythm).

- Use simplified visual aids later: icons, color-coding (red = do, blue = sol), or large rhythm cards with pictures.

- Why effective: Notation can be overwhelming and counterproductive when basic sound discrimination is still developing.

Technology and Assistive Tools as Scaffolds

- Slow-down apps (e.g., Amazing Slow Downer, Transcribe!) let students hear passages at reduced tempo.

- Visual metronomes or beat-light apps show pulse visually.

- Simple recording tools allow instant playback so students hear themselves objectively.

- Pitch-matching apps or tuner displays provide real-time feedback without teacher judgment.

- Why effective: Offers private, non-judgmental repetition and feedback.

Strength-Focused Repertoire Selection

- Choose pieces based on the student's existing interests (popular songs, movie themes, culturally familiar music) even if technically simple.

- Modify parts: Simplify rhythms, reduce range, use easier keys/fingerings.

- Allow creative substitutions (e.g., play bass line on one string instead of full chords).

- Why effective: Personal relevance increases engagement and practice time.

Most Common Problems Encountered and Realistic Responses

Persistent Frustration and Negative Self-Talk

- Student says "I can't do this," "I'm tone-deaf," or gives up quickly.

- Response: Normalize struggle ("Most musicians sound rough at first"), document tiny improvements visibly (progress chart with stickers), praise specific effort ("You kept the beat steady for four whole measures—that's real growth").

Very Slow Skill Acquisition

- Weeks or months pass with seemingly little change in pitch accuracy or rhythm steadiness.

- Response: Lower expectations dramatically for a while; celebrate consistency over perfection; track progress in very small units (e.g., "Today you matched pitch direction 6/10 times instead of 3/10").

Inconsistent or Absent Home Practice

- Student arrives unprepared, forgets assignments, or practices ineffectively.

- Response: Assign ultra-short, game-like tasks ("Play this 2-measure pattern 5 times while watching a cartoon"); involve parents in short guided sessions; use phone reminders or practice apps with streaks/rewards.

Poor Internalization of Pulse/Rhythm

- Student rushes, drags, or loses beat entirely when playing alone.

- Response: Externalize the beat longer than usual (teacher claps, uses foot tap, or plays along); practice with a very slow metronome or drum loop; use conducting gestures where student leads and teacher follows to build internal timing.

Difficulty Matching Pitch (Poor Intonation/Singing Voice)

- Student sings far off-pitch or cannot tell when notes are wrong.

- Response: Use sirens/glissandos to slide between pitches; pair with visual pitch direction; start with comfortable speaking range and gradually expand; accept approximate matches at first and narrow tolerance slowly.

Comparison to Peers and Demotivation in Group Settings

- In class/ensemble, slower students feel embarrassed or withdraw.

- Response: Use heterogeneous grouping where roles vary (some play steady beat, others add simple patterns); highlight individual contributions publicly ("Great job holding the pulse, Alex—that kept everyone together"); offer private or small-group pull-outs when needed.

Teacher Fatigue and Burnout

- Constant repetition, slow pace, and emotional support demands exhaust the instructor.

- Response: Set realistic personal goals per student; celebrate your own small teaching wins; seek peer support or professional development in adaptive methods.

In summary, success with students who have underdeveloped musical abilities depends far more on consistent small-step exposure, emotional safety, joyful repetition, and teacher adaptability than on any single "magic" method. Progress is often non-linear and can suddenly accelerate after long plateaus. The ultimate goal is not virtuoso performance but sustained musical participation and personal satisfaction throughout life.

Despite the effectiveness of many pedagogical strategies, teachers face multiple challenges in working with students with underdeveloped musical abilities.

Psychological Barriers

One of the major problems is that students often feel ashamed or insecure. They may believe they are "not talented," which reduces motivation and increases anxiety. Fear of public performance can block learning progress.

Limited Lesson Time

In many schools, music lessons are limited in frequency and duration. Teachers may not have enough time to provide individualized attention, especially in large classrooms.

Lack of Supportive Environment

Some students do not receive encouragement at home. If parents do not value music education, students may lack exposure and practice opportunities outside school.

Difficulty in Maintaining Group Balance

Teachers must work with both talented and weak students simultaneously. This creates tension: advanced learners may become bored, while weaker learners may feel pressured.

Inadequate Teaching Resources

Some educational institutions lack musical instruments, audio equipment, or technological tools. This reduces the effectiveness of rhythm and pitch development activities.

Misunderstanding of Musical Ability

A frequent misconception is that musical ability is purely innate. In reality, musical skills can be developed through training. Teachers who believe otherwise may unintentionally neglect weaker students.

Overall, the discussion shows that successful music education requires not only methodological knowledge but also psychological sensitivity and supportive learning conditions.

Conclusions

Working with students who have underdeveloped musical abilities is a complex but achievable pedagogical task. Musical difficulties are not evidence of incapability but rather a signal that students need additional support, practice, and motivational guidance.

The most effective approaches include diagnostic assessment, differentiated instruction, rhythm and pitch development exercises, auditory memory training, and motivational strategies. Movement-based rhythm activities and gradual melody training are especially beneficial. The integration of multimedia and interactive technology also enhances learning outcomes and promotes independent practice.

The teacher's role is critical in building a supportive environment where students feel safe, valued, and encouraged to improve. When students experience success, even at a small level, their confidence and interest in music increases significantly.

Based on the findings and analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

Introduce diagnostic musical tests at the beginning of each term to identify students' specific weaknesses in rhythm, pitch, and memory.

Apply differentiated learning tasks, ensuring that weaker students receive simplified exercises and gradual progression.

Use movement-based rhythm teaching, including marching, clapping, and dance activities to strengthen rhythmic perception.

Encourage regular short practice sessions rather than long repetitive drills, as frequent repetition improves musical memory.

Create a supportive psychological environment where mistakes are accepted as part of learning, reducing student anxiety.

Incorporate game-based learning and group activities, which motivate students and reduce performance pressure.

Use modern technology such as ear-training and rhythm apps to increase independent learning opportunities.

Provide teacher training programs focused on working with students who have weak musical abilities, including psychological and pedagogical methods.

Engage parents in the learning process by informing them about the importance of musical development and encouraging home support.

Promote inclusive music education, ensuring that every student, regardless of ability, can experience the joy and benefits of musical participation.

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