

## Evaluating the Efficacy of Art Curriculum at the First Grade of Pre-Vocational Middle School and Vocational High School of Exceptional Students

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the efficacy of art curriculum at the first year of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school of exceptional students in the view their teachers in the city of Tehran. The research population consisted of all art teachers at the first year of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school of exceptional students of Tehran in the academic year of 2009-10 out of which 30 samples were chosen randomly using the random sampling method. The main research instrument was a survey and the data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire the reliability of which was calculated using Cranach's alpha coefficient (0.94). The data were analyzed using non-parametric Chi-squared test. The results showed that the objectives of art curriculum had been realized, and it had promoted the intended knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes of exceptional students at the first year of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school.

**KEYWORDS:** Curriculum, Art course, exceptional students, Pre- vocational middle school, Vocational high school

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As a social institution in the community, education covers other schools and educational institutions, playing an important role in the society. One of the most important goals of education is identifying and promoting the talents of students by fostering the skills required in different aspects of the development. To efficiently implement its tasks, this institution exploits a number of factors and elements including curriculum planning. Curriculum is one of the cornerstones of educational system so that any social change requires desirable developments and reforms in curriculum design. As such, the curriculum planners must be open-minded about changes and developments and shoulder their social responsibility [1]. Tolstoy [2] says the duty of the art is to explain anything that may appear obscure or inaccessible in logical arguments, making those concepts available to all the people. Usually, when one perceives the artistic truth, it seems as if it has already been known to them but they were unable to articulate it properly [2]. According to Read [3] art is the expression of emotions and negotiation of an accord. Art is the emotion that generates acceptable form [3]. The role of art in education and discovering the creative talents of students is crucial, as it is capable of guiding an ordinary man toward the world of innovation and creativity through a treasury of precious knowledge and culture. Artistic activities for a child are the first getaway to the wonderful world of creativity and beauty, infusing him with self-confidence and power to act as an independent and logical human being [4]. Exceptional students constitute a share of students in the world and great attention should be paid to their educational needs. Over the past two decades, there have been remarkable advances in this regard and the societies have come to appreciate the importance of providing equal educational opportunities to students with special needs, in addition to assistances required to achieve desirable and independent life, to promote the social participation of these groups in the economy. For Fowler [5], art education is one of the most basic functions of the educational system and today the groundwork of forming an educational movement with the aim of reviving arts in the educational system, particularly in the advanced industrial countries, has been done. Given the various functions of art, art education is required to help foster fully developed human beings, i.e., citizens who are capable of building a prosperous civilization [6]. The original art has its most valuable and desirable outcomes in internal and sustainable interests as well as its role in transformation, awareness raising, behavior change and growth of its audience [7] Given the importance of art education on the growth and prosperity of children's innate talent and the neglect with which it has been treated so far, the time has come to lay the ground for propelling the society and individuals toward art education and stressing the importance of this lesson in the curriculum through modification and revisiting of its goals and methods. However, considering the unfortunate marginalization of the art course in schools and the fact that it is often overshadowed by other courses so that at times it is even substituted by other courses, the effect of this

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course on all-round development of students has been on decline. To promote the status of art in Iran, the educational policy makers have introduced reforms in curriculum. In this regard, in 1999, the Office for Planning and Writing Textbooks decided to formulate a new curriculum design to organize and enhance the dismal state of the art training in the primary schools. The results of scientific analyses and evaluations of experts in the planning board led to the design of art curriculum guide in primary schools [8]. When a program is designed and implemented properly in the educational system with concurrent and post hoc evaluations and the strengths and weaknesses addressed, it can be said that the planning has passed a proper procedure in that educational system [9]. In today's approach to the education, the realization of educational standards is no more dependent on the removal or marginalization of course such as arts. According to Mehr Mohammadi [6], in the new paradigm of education, maintaining high standards of training depends on putting art and the aesthetics at the core of the curriculum or the educational reform. In today's world where the rapid progress of science and technology provides extensive competition opportunities for those interested in the knowledge, children constitute an integral part. The modern life is replete with new ideas. From the perspective of many distinguished figures in the field of education and training and the external experts, art education should be an essential part of the school curriculum. Along with three basic skills (reading, writing, calculating) art should be recognized as the fourth fundamental skill in the curriculum, saving removed from traditional and historical isolation [6]. The most important aim of exceptional students' education is to prepare them for "life". To do so, their characteristics, abilities, talents, and mental and spiritual health should be taken into account and their educational needs should be in harmony with rapid changes of life conditions, allowing them to take advantage of their surrounding environment and facilities. Art education approach to students with special needs is centered at realizing the talents and abilities of these students. In this curriculum the purpose of art education is to provide conditions that strengthen the power of imagination, free thinking, decision making and liberty in the actions of students [10]. Given the importance of art education in the developing physical and social abilities of exceptional students, The Institute for Education of Exceptional Students has initiated a challenging task since 2006. Art course book, which is a unique and special book in line with the main objectives of art teaching, is one of the outcomes of this period designed for the newly established pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school by notable authors and experts in this field. In the past, the exceptional students at the end of the primary school gained access to the professional training courses (academic guide). This course not only failed to resolve their problems, but also hours and years of training compounded their challenges by adding new problems such as the inability to interact with the social and professional community. Despite the fundamental goals defined for these students, the curriculum was unable to promote skills (academic tutoring) and self-efficacy (within the limit of their ability) in them. This shortcoming came to the attention of the authorities in the Institute for Education of Exceptional Students, making them to introduce pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school courses parallel to main curriculum aimed specifically at teaching art so that graduated students gained greater self-efficacy and confidence in their skills and abilities in the job market. Given the implementation of this plan, the researcher seeks to explore the views of art teachers about the success of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school curriculum of exceptional students in achieving the predefined objectives. In other words, from the perspective of art teachers, how successful the pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school curriculum has been in realization of its goals?

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is an applied research that seeks to investigate its subject through a descriptive-survey method. Given that pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school grade has been newly introduced and there are a limited number of exceptional schools in the country (especially in Tehran), the study population consisted of all teachers of art lessons at the first grade of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school in all exceptional schools of Tehran and its provinces in the academic year 2009-10. The total population included 57 teachers working at 36 educational centers. In this study, based on the sample size of the study, simple random sampling method was used. To do so, first all members of the study population (teachers) were assigned a number on a list and then using a table of random numbers, 30 subjects were randomly selected from the list of teachers. In this study, a self-administered questionnaire was used, which included both closed and open-ended questions to evaluate teachers' suggestions on a Likert-scale. This questionnaire consists of 40 items in line with research questions to evaluate the realization of the goals of art curriculum from three domains of cognition, attitudes and skills in exceptional students at the first grade of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school. To check the reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha was used. Table 1 shows the results of reliability test.

**Table 1.** Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each field and the entire test

Cronbach's alpha	Test reliability
Cognition	0.82
Skills	0.89
Attitude	0.88
Total test	0.94

The results indicated the reasonable reliability of the questionnaire. In addition, the validity of the questionnaire was evaluated based on the judgment of experts, which confirmed the formal and content validity of the questionnaire. In this study, descriptive and inferential statistics methods were used and the results are presented in graphs. All data analyses and chi-square test were performed by SPSS Software.

### 3. RESULTS

**Table 2.** Frequency distribution of the teachers' responses to the question about the realization of the art curriculum goals with respect to the cognition domain

Values	Frequency	Percentage
Very low	20	9.52
Low	78	37.14
High	91	43.33
Very high	20	9.52
Total	210	100

According to Table 2, 43.33% and 9.53% of teachers believed that the goals of art curriculum with respect to the cognition were highly and very highly realized respectively. In contrast, 37.14% and 9.52% of teachers suggested that the realization of art curriculum goals were low and very low respectively.

As shown in Table 3, the value of chi-square with 3 degree of freedom is 20.163 which is significance at the level of  $p < 0.0001$ . It suggests that there is a significant difference between teachers' responses to questions about the realization of art curriculum objectives in the cognitive domain, with most responses falling in the category of high and very high. This indicates the relative success of the curriculum in reaching its defined goal.

As shown in Table 4, 37.6% and 9.3% of teachers believed that the goals of art curriculum in the domain of skills were respectively highly and very highly realized. On the contrary, 37.46% and 12.2% of teachers suggested that the realization of art curriculum goals in this domain were low and very low respectively.

According to Table 5, the value of chi-square with 3 degree of freedom is 223.13, which is significance at the level of  $p < 0.0001$ . It suggests that there is a significant difference between teachers' responses to question about the realization of art curriculum objectives in the skills domain, with the responses being largely consistent. This indicates the failure of the curriculum in achieving its defined goal.

**Table 3.** 1<sup>st</sup> item: results of chi-square test analysis, the views of art teachers at pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school of exceptional students about the cognition domain

1 <sup>st</sup> item	Cognition
Chi square	20.163
Degree of freedom (df)	3
Significance level	.000

**Table 4.** Frequency distribution of the teachers' responses to the question about the realization of the art curriculum goals with respect to the skills domain

Values	Frequency	Percentage
Very low	92	12.2
Low	281	37.46
High	282	17.6
Very high	70	9.3
Total	750	100

**Table 5.** 2<sup>nd</sup> item- results of chi-square test analysis, the views of art teachers at the first-grade of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school of exceptional students about the skills domain

2 <sup>nd</sup> item	Skills
Chi square	223.13
Degree of freedom (df)	3
Significance level	.000

**Table 6.** Frequency distribution of the teachers' responses to the question about the realization of the art curriculum goals in the field of attitude

Values	Frequency	Percentage
Very low	23	9.5
Low	92	38.3
High	90	37.5
Very high	28	11.66
Total	240	100

As shown in the Table 6, 37.65% and 11.66% (49.16% in total) of teachers believed that the goals of art curriculum in attitudes domain were respectively highly and very highly realized. On the contrary, 38.3% and 9.5% of teachers suggested that the fulfillment of art curriculum goals in this domain were low and very low respectively.

**Table 7.** Vocational high school of exceptional students about the attitudes domain

Third question	Attitudes
Chi square	73.9
Degree of freedom (df)	3
Significance level	.000

According to Table 7, the value of chi-square with 3 degree of freedom is 73.9, which is significance at the level of  $p < 0.0001$ . It suggests that there is a significant difference between teachers' responses to question about the realization of art curriculum objectives in the attitudes domain, with most responses being categorizing as high and very high. This indicates the success of the curriculum in achieving its defined goal.

**Table 8.** Frequency distribution of the teachers' responses to the question about the realization of the art curriculum objectives

Values	Frequency	Percentage
Very low	125	10.41
Low	441	36.75
High	475	39.58
Very high	126	10.5
Total	1200	100

The results of Table 8 suggest that 39.58% and 10.5% (50.08% in total) of teachers believed that the goals of art curriculum in the first grade of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school were highly and very highly realized respectively. On the contrary, 36.75% and 10.41% of teachers suggested that the realization of art curriculum goals in this domain were low and very low respectively.

**Table 9.** Results of chi-square test, the views of art teachers at the first-grade of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school of exceptional students about the realization of curriculum goals

Fourth question	Curriculum objectives
Chi square	380.92
Degree of freedom (df)	3
Significance level	.000

According to Table 9, the value of chi-square with 3 degree of freedom is 380.92, which is significance at the level of  $p < 0.000$ . It suggests that there is a significant difference between teachers' responses to question about the realization of art curriculum objectives, with most responses falling in the category of high and very high. This indicates the success of the curriculum in obtaining its defined goal.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the present study indicates that the objectives of first-grade art curriculum in all three fields of cognition, skills and attitudes had been realized up to 50.08%. Therefore, the art curriculum has been successful in raising awareness about the beauty of nature, the artistic materials and cultural heritage of the country to the students. It has also succeeded in developing verbal and social skills along with five senses of students, thus reinforcing their intellectual capabilities, which is evident in the significant improvement in their academic progress and motivation. The art course, in addition to fostering a sense of aesthetics and beauty, has encouraged the desire for exploring and preserving works of art and cultural heritage in students, coupled with a predilection toward expression of emotions and thoughts and communication with other students. The results suggest that there has been a paucity of studies on realization of the goals of art curriculum in the first grade of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school of exceptional students. However, the few domestic and foreign researches in this field indicate the importance and the urgency of addressing the art course and art education activities in raising the awareness of the students. The study of Willmart [11] about the role of integrated art lessons on promoting students' learning stresses the positive impact of this lesson on artistic education of students and the necessity of incorporating artistic activities in curricula of schools as well as its application in all academic subjects. This study also demonstrates the important role of the arts and its elements in different courses and its effect on improving the learning of intended concepts. The findings of this study are consistent with the goals of the curriculum planning in normal students. The results of the study about the main research question are compatible with the following research. In his study on the status of art in the education system with an emphasis on developing the role of arts in education and the effective role of creative thinking in artistic creations, Khala [12] posits that the fundamental objectives of art are fostering free, independent, active and creative human beings. As can be seen, the findings of this research confirms the impact of art on all-round development of human being, suggesting that the realization of art curriculum goals can help nurture active and creative a human beings. The results of study indicated that in the cognitive domain, the objectives of art curriculum in the first grade of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school of exceptional students had been realized by 52.85%. As suggested by the results, the art curriculum has been successful in familiarizing students with harmony and beauty of the nature. Also, this course has helped students incorporate nature in their

production of works of art, know their environment better and pay greater attention to the characteristics of their surroundings. Given the cognitive objectives of art curriculum, students have mastered the basics of artistic instruments and materials, which have influenced their artistic taste through reflection and emotion. They have had the opportunity to learn about the artistic and historical works of literature and customs of their country in the form of art and cultural heritage. Eisner [13], in his study about the creativity and art models in university science courses, explored the educational role of art and its application in acquiring greater insights and fostering collaborative learning and creativity. The findings of this study are consistent with our results. Masterman, (1995)[14] offers cognitive model for art curriculum proving that the use of cognitive models in art education can directly promote knowledge, thinking and creativity [15]. Amini [16], in his study on designing an optimal model of art curriculum in elementary schools and its comparison with the current models, posits that despite the role of art education in nurturing students' abilities and talents with the aim of developing educational goals, in practice, its situation is far from desirable. Moreover, the art curriculum in the elementary should cover both integrative and non-integrative dimensions. In this regard, art education can help improve the students' knowledge and awareness. The results of the study about skills domain indicates, the objectives of art curriculum in the first grade of pre-vocational middle school and vocational high school of exceptional students had been relatively realized by 49.73%. Accordingly, the art curriculum has not been able to develop the sensory skills of students efficiently through promoting five senses and increasing their accuracy and curiosity about the environment or nurturing the spirit of research and exploration. This curriculum should help develop verbal skills and the use of the words, facial expressions and body language in communication. Also, their social skills are fostered in the exchange of feelings and emotions. The art curriculum has not been successful in developing motor skills and coordination between the senses, the ability to express thoughts and emotions in a work of art and intellectual capacities in expressing emotions and feelings in a nonverbal manner. Apparently, since art course book in pre-vocational middle school has been designed as a follow-up to elementary course books and the design of this course book dates back to years ago, the failure to achieve the objectives of the current syllabus can be partly attributed to this issue. This is in line with the findings of Armbruster and Anderson, [17] about subject-oriented art education and formulation of a curriculum to develop intellectual capacities of learners. His findings suggest that art education play an important role in the success of students in all course through a transfer of perceptual skills [15]. In the same line of research, Chessin and Zander [7], in his study on the role of arts in education and mental health of children, explores the impact of art and emotional exchanges on various personality dimensions and prevention and treatment of mental disorders. Art is of significant importance in terms of promoting mental and emotional values and confidence, self-expression, gaining deeper insight about one's feelings and revealing true motivations[7]. Edwards et al. [18], in a study on encouraging creativity in preschool classes, contends that one way to express opinions, emotions and thoughts in children is the use of symbols, arguing that artistic creation creates an internal link between learning of students [15]. The objectives of art curriculum in attitudes domain was realized by 49.16%, indicating the relative success of art curriculum with respect to the attitude. Accordingly, art curriculum has been relatively unsuccessful in developing the sense of beauty and aesthetics in the students and encouraging their desire to express their thoughts and feelings. Overall, the art curriculum has been relatively successful in inspiring a sense of exploration and artistic experimentalism in students and heightening their fascination with the works of art and cultural heritage.

It seems that continuity and persistent practice and teaching of art in primary school can help achieve this goal. Given the fact that the art course book designed for exceptional students has been recently published, selecting exceptional students as the main yardstick of the study together with the paucity of similar studies in this field can be considered as one of the limitations of this study. Lack of access to all teachers around the country, the reluctance of teachers to complete the questionnaire and failure to evaluate students through questionnaire and academic achievement test were other limitations of this research. Accordingly, based on the analysis of open-ended questions, it is recommended that the weekly hours of art lessons in school curriculum be increased to enhance the learning of skills necessary in students. To improve the skills of art teachers, experienced instructors and artists can be invited to teach at in-service courses.

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