

## Art Integration: The Missing Piece of the Puzzle

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### Abstract

*Art contributes to learning in ways that go beyond learning basic reading, writing and arithmetic, also known as the 3Rs. In fact, art is a pedagogical tool for making learning fun and accessible to children. Through this study, the researcher tried to study the perception of Delhi government teachers regarding art integration into learning. It was found that teachers are well aware of the benefits of integrating art into their classrooms. However, the level of art integration in regular classrooms is extremely poor. Teachers are unable to leverage the potential of art integration as a pedagogical tool in classrooms. The reasons behind this poor level of usage are also investigated and shared. Some corrective measures in the form of recommendations are also shared at the end of the article.*

### INTRODUCTION

Expression is a fundamental aspect of the human personality. From the very beginning of life, humans try to express their thoughts, emotions, likes and dislikes. Art is one of the mediums of expression. Learning through art has the power to improve education, and increase students' capacities and motivation to make this world more sustainable and peaceful (UNESCO & Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2024). Art integration in the regular

classroom has become a trend in this century.

Art integration may be defined as a strategy for connecting the development of concepts and skills of the art with concepts and skills of other disciplines. It is an educational approach that incorporates different art, such as music, drama, dance, etc., into core academic subjects. In simple terms, it is an innovative and constructive learning approach that is based on 'learning through the art'

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and 'learning with the art' (NCERT, 2023).

The National Education Policy 2020 acknowledges the role of art in the school curriculum and its pedagogical usage by stating, "As a part of the thrust on experiential learning, art-integrated education will be embedded in classroom transactions not only for creating joyful classrooms but also for imbibing the Indian ethos through the integration of Indian art and culture in the teaching and learning process at every level" (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). However, the demand and thrust for art integration is not new; several policy documents in India and abroad have made recommendations for its use in the classrooms.

Further, a growing body of research provides concrete evidence that shows a wide spectrum of impact of art integration on schools. The present study explores the concept of art integration among teachers in Delhi and the classroom practices used by them.

## METHODOLOGY

For the present study, 39 teachers were interviewed on the basis of a semi-structured questionnaire and a checklist. The responses of teachers were recorded and analysed. All these teachers are from the primary wing of eight schools located in the East, North-East and Shahdara districts of Delhi.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The evidence as found in the literature review compels us to understand the positive impact of art integration on schools. Art has the power to transform education by improving students' creativity and their critical thinking skills. In this regard, the teachers were interviewed with semi-structured schedules to assess their perception regarding art-integrated education. The teachers shared their opinions based on their usage of art and their previous knowledge of the topic.

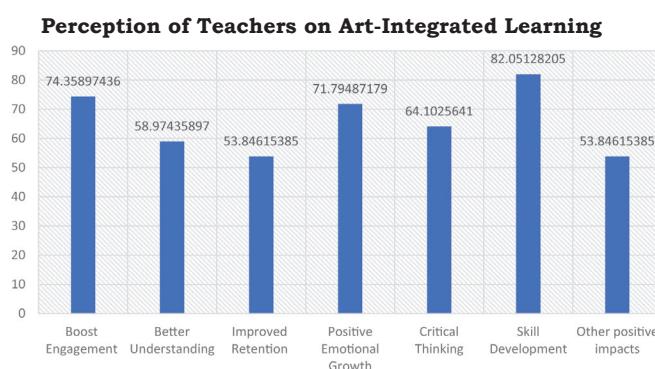


Figure 1: Bar Graph Representing Perception of Teachers on Art-Integrated Learning

The graph in Figure 1 shares the perception of teachers with respect to art integration in regular classrooms. More than 74 per cent of the teachers interviewed consider that integration of art into the lessons boosts the engagement level of children. Therefore, a majority of teachers in the schools consider art as an important means to improve the participation level of students in the learning process. A growing body of knowledge in primary education considers the engagement of children in learning as crucial in determining their learning trajectory (Bhaird et al., 2013; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). A teacher shared his experience of using art in the classroom, “It was so much fun to see my young students working on making butterflies in maths class when I was teaching symmetry... Not even a single child was absent-minded in the process of learning. I think this is the magic of art—it keeps children engaged and interested”. Art can be effectively used in classroom situations where teachers find poor participation among learners.

Art integration is transformative. By using art as a learning tool in classrooms, students explore concepts in new and stimulating ways. It makes better connections between concepts and solidifies their learning. Around 60 per cent of the teachers in the study claimed that when they used art integration in the classroom for specific lessons, they found that students understood the lessons better. A teacher explained,

“In my class, we created a comic strip to depict the variety and diversity of food in India based on geographical factors. We created a series of scripts using photographs and handmade drawings. All students were highly engaged and imbibed the content happily... It made the learning memorable”. Studies on art integration also suggest a better understanding of concepts taught through art as it makes learning deeper (Bevan et al., 2019; Halverson & Sawyer, 2022).

In the work of Hardiman and others, we find signs of long-term retention of content, if taught through art and therefore, they advocated a dedicated time for art instruction in the K-12 curriculum (Hardiman et al., 2014). In tune with this, 54 per cent of the teachers affirmed that the content taught through the integration of art results in more retention. A teacher shared her experiences of teaching concepts in geometry, “My students retained their understanding of the properties of geometric figures after they built and decorated shapes in the maths class. The task of building and decorating geometric shapes made it possible for kids to explore the properties of each shape, discuss them with others, and retain them. They can even now, after the end of the academic session, talk about the properties learned that day”.

A large percentage (72 per cent) of the teachers interviewed claimed that art integration has the potential to support the emotional well-being and social skills of students. A teacher told

us that collaborative art activities have fostered teamwork, communication and empathy in his students, "I see improvement in peer relationships and emotional expression of students whenever they work on art projects in groups. Art has provided opportunities for us to work on the emotional needs of students". The literature on learning through the arts describes an art integration programme as "a programme to facilitate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in young children". Many studies have proven the positive impact of art integration on different SEL domains, such as "self awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making" (Müller et al., 2019; Mynaříková, 2012).

Among the teachers interviewed, 64 per cent claimed that art integration activities improved close observation and analysis of various phenomena. It helps in developing problem-solving and decision-making skills, which further improve critical thinking skills. A teacher shared her experience of drama integration in her language classroom, "I find it extremely fruitful to incorporate the arts in my language class. My students, through drama integration, can give multiple perspectives and opinions from different characters' viewpoints. It has made our kids better critical thinkers". Literature available on the same theme also shows the positive impact of art integration practices on the development of critical thinking

skills. The results from different studies have proven the benefits of using art integration in school-wide activities in promoting the acquisition of critical thinking skills among students (Broome et al., 2018; Şenel & Döş, 2024; Ulger, 2018).

Art integration offers a bouquet of benefits in developing various skills in primary school students (Ogunkunle & George, 2015; Essel et al., 2017; Milkova et al., 2013). A teacher told us that in many art integration projects in the classrooms, students readily collaborate with their peers. They work together, share ideas and help each other in order to achieve group goals, which improves teamwork and self-expression in children. Further, he added that activities that involve painting, drawing or working with different types of materials strengthen students' fine and gross motor skills. A high percentage (82 per cent) of the teachers interviewed also reported skill development as one of the main benefits of art integration into the primary classes.

More than half of the teachers interviewed (54 per cent) acknowledged other benefits of art integration into primary classes. According to them, integration of art enriches the learning environment of the classroom and improves the engagement level of kids by motivating them to learn more interactively and joyfully. Through various creative activities, students explore different concepts in innovative ways that improve understanding and retention of ideas.

Overall, many teachers appear to have a positive perception of Art-Integrated Learning (ALI). They recognise its potential to enrich education and foster a more engaging learning environment. Studies have also reported similar perceptions. This may imply that teachers are well aware of the benefits and potential of integrating the art into primary classes.

### **Art Integration into Classrooms: A Reality Check**

Figure 2 depicts teachers' use of art integration into classrooms. The level of art integration into classrooms was ascertained through a five-point scale encompassing: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often and Always. It was found that:

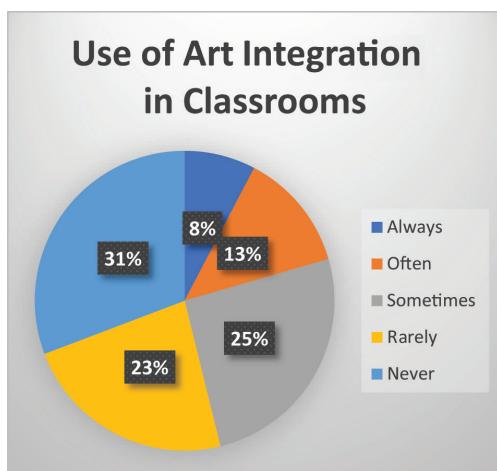
1. 31 per cent of the teachers in primary classrooms do not use art integration in their teaching at all.

2. 23 per cent of teachers use it a few times, usually for some special events or projects in school.
3. 25 per cent of them occasionally use art integration in some specific subjects and units for study.
4. 13 per cent of the teachers use it as and when they see scope for using it.
5. Only 8 per cent of the teachers use art integration as a regular part of their routine. They incorporate some form of art into every subject and every lesson.

The analysis in the previous section reveals the positive perception of teachers towards art integration. Teachers know various key benefits of using art in their classrooms and of integrating art into different subject areas. Yet, only one-fifth (21 per cent) of the teachers are using it, with 8 per cent of them using it 'Always' and 13 per cent of them using it 'Often' in their regular classrooms. These teachers shared how they created character portraits or storyboards every week to use them in language classrooms and how they organised their art activities with proper planning that helps in all school subjects.

Around 80 per cent of the teachers 'Rarely' used art integration in their classes. The reasons behind this are shared in Figure 3.

While art integration into primary classes has various benefits, teachers are not using it smartly. We find several reasons why teachers are reluctant to use art integration in regular



*Figure 2: Pie Representing the Use of Art Integration in Classroom*

## REASONS BEHIND NOT INTEGRATING ART

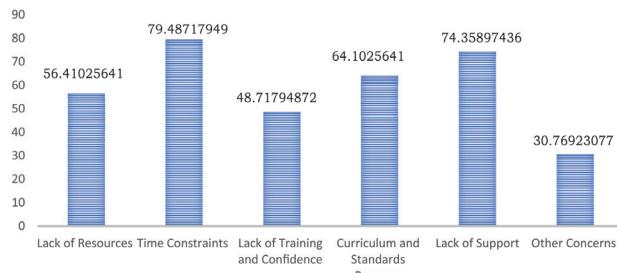


Figure 3: Bar Graph Representing Reasons Behind Not Integrating Art

classrooms despite understanding its numerous benefits. Teachers reported different reasons for this:

1. Around 56 per cent of the teachers reported that they do not have access to sufficient resources, such as supplies, materials or space for conducting art-related activities. Without the availability of these basic resources for art integration, it is very challenging for them to effectively integrate art into the classrooms.
2. A large percentage (79 per cent) of the teachers say that the pressure of covering a wide range of subjects often leaves little space for incorporating art projects into the lessons. Teachers prioritise core subjects and standardise activities over art and their integration.
3. Almost half (48 per cent) of the teachers feel that they did not receive adequate training in integrating art during their capacity-building programmes, and thus, they feel a lack of confidence and some

unpreparedness with regards to integrating art effectively.

4. More than half (64 per cent) of the teachers feel that when preparing students in accordance with standardised scores and tests as determined by their department, it is difficult to incorporate art integration. Instead, they focus on direct instruction and traditional teaching methods that align with standardised testing requirements.
5. A large percentage (74 per cent) of teachers find it difficult to use art integration, as they do not get strong support and encouragement from the school administration. School administration always discourages teachers from spending time on art-related activities, as these are not part of the evaluation at the board level.
6. 30 per cent of teachers shared various other reasons. Teachers worry that art integration could create chaos in the classroom, and it would be difficult to manage large

classes while using art integration. The need to control noise levels in classrooms discourages teachers from using art integration. Further, in trying to integrate art into classrooms, teachers find it difficult to assess students' work consistently and fairly.

Art integration significantly benefits students in learning. However, the barriers described above hinder its wide usage in classrooms, making teachers reluctant to use art integration in class.

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Educators can effectively integrate art into their classes to improve the engagement level, creativity, and understanding of learners. The following are the specific recommendations that may be useful for all teachers in integrating art into their classrooms:

1. Integrating art can be fun. We can start with decorating the classroom with students' artwork and art-related aids. These can be utilised at any time in the delivery of lessons. But if these works are not displayed, infusing art into the classroom environment can be daunting.
2. It would be useful for teachers to plan each unit thematically. When teachers begin to see links across concepts, only then can they plan manageable art activities suitable for their content.
3. The fun of art integration lies in the process, not the result. The primary goal of art integration is always creativity and exploration. Teachers could plan art activities in such a way that these become fun for students, rather than be seen as something they 'have to do'. Learning should be a by-product, not a forced outcome.
4. Teachers can always start small and build consistency. Aim for at least one art-related activity per week. Look for a wider extension of this activity to incorporate its elements into learning of different subjects. For example, a simple art activity of drawing/creating a butterfly to explore the concept of symmetry can be extended to learning about insects in science class.
5. Making cross-curricular connections can beat the constraints of time and space.
6. Use a variety of activities and include open-ended activities with clear objectives, because that is what art stands for.
7. A resource pool can be created with proper planning, which could benefit all the teachers.
8. Teacher's Manuals on art integration should be developed and distributed.
9. As a starting point, a dedicated art integration corner can be created in the classroom. The designated space can spark curiosity in children and give them encouragement the whole day. Basic art supplies can be collected with the help of children, using both new and recycled materials.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen how art integration can work as a powerful tool in improving learning. Art has the potential to be incorporated as a pedagogical tool for learning various subjects in primary classes. This study explores the concept and use of art integration in the schools operating under Delhi Government. It shows that teachers consider art integration important as

it improves the students' engagement level, understanding of content, critical thinking skills, and other cognitive and psychomotor skills. Teachers were found to be unable to use art integration in their classrooms because of time constraints, resource unavailability and lack of support. To counter this and to encourage teachers to begin art integration, some concrete suggestions are incorporated in the article.

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