

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS' ART EXPERIENCES AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE IMPORTANCE OF ART EDUCATION IN AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

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Abstract: The purpose of this research was to identify teachers' art experiences, as well as their attitudes towards the importance of art education, and subsequently determine the relationship between teachers' experiences and their attitudes. The research focused on teachers from the primary level of an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. A questionnaire was used to gather information about teachers' past art experiences as a student in primary, secondary school and university, as an adult and as related to family. Findings revealed that teachers value their art experiences in primary and secondary school as *somewhat positive*, while it was deemed *neutral* in university. A gradual change was also observed in the results regarding how teachers rated the importance of art education: from *somewhat positive* in primary and secondary school, to *neutral* in university. Correlation analyses further confirmed that there was indeed a significant relationship between teachers' art experiences and their attitudes towards the importance of art education, particularly as a student.

Keywords: Teachers' Experiences, Teachers' Attitudes, Art Education

Introduction

Education has always maintained that creativity is a life skill that should be utilised in teaching the different subjects of the school curriculum.

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Creativity has always been an important requirement in the teaching-learning process since it enables young students to recognise problems, reflect on a logical step and apply appropriate solutions. Several studies have proven the enormous positive attributes of teaching creativity through art education. As part of the school curriculum, art provides more opportunities for students to utilise creativity in the learning process as compared to any other subject. According to Iwai (2003) oftentimes, art is integrated in lessons since it helps maintain motivation for students to be more interested in the core subjects (English, mathematics and science).

Research has also proven that using art as a tool for learning results in high creative thinking ability scores. It develops visual-spatial abilities, encourages analytical and abstract thinking and more so, the capacity to think out-of-the-box (Amabile, 1989). It is therefore imperative for art education to be one of the focal points in developing the creative skills of the students of today to become an effective workforce of the future.

However, in complete contradiction to research-based facts and the expert opinion of academics and educators, support for art and art education is constantly being scrutinised and its funding reduced, if not eliminated by policymakers in major parts of the world, particularly in the United States, Australia and the UK (Harvey, 2016; Barneveld & Chiu, 2017; Vargas, 2017). This has affected the manner in which curricula are being implemented by school administrators who would often end up marginalising art in favour of the core subjects to deal with the budgeting constraints.

In other cases, school administrators who are faced with art funding difficulties would find themselves unable to: (1) hire the services of art specialists; (2) provide adequate art supplies, equipment and facilities; and (3) allot art class periods during curriculum time due to an increased demand for test preparations and instructional time for the core subjects (Israel, 2009). It is difficult not to reflect on how attitudes towards the importance of art education might be a factor in cultivating these situations. We hope that this study would help create a better understanding of the importance of art education and develop more positive support for the subject.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the attitudes of teachers towards the importance of art education.
2. To determine the teachers' levels of art experiences as a student in primary school, in secondary school and in university
3. To determine teachers' levels of art experiences as an adult.
4. To determine teacher' levels of art experiences related to family.
5. To determine the relationship between teachers' attitudes towards the importance of art education and their art experiences as a student, as an adult and as related to family.

Literature Review

Theory of Balance

In his theory on attitude and cognitive organisation, Heider (1946) hypothesised that the formation of attitudes is related to maintaining a balanced state between units, “where p = person; o = another person; x = entity/object; relation ‘unit’ = U” (p. 107).

Heider (1946) states that if a person (p) has positive attitudes towards another person (o), and the other person has positive attitudes towards an entity/object (x); it is possible that person (p) would also want a positive relationship (U) to the entity/object (pUx). Mittler (1974) applied Heider’s Theory of Balance by suggesting that if a pupil (p) likes the teacher (o) and the teacher values the art subject (x), the probability of the student having positive attitudes towards the art subject is high (pUx); therefore, a positive balanced state is achieved. Similarly, if the pupil likes the teacher and teacher dislikes the art subject, the probability of the student acquiring the same negative attitudes towards the art subject is high to maintain a balanced state. However, Bridges (1999) believes that even if the student likes the teacher, and the teacher likes art and the student likes art because of the teacher, the teacher may still have negative attitudes towards this situation caused by low self esteem due to self efficacy issues, insufficient preparation and inadequate expertise in the subject.

Experiential Learning Theory

Teachers were also learners/students in the past and how they have experienced art may well be a factor in their current attitudes towards art education. Brown (2006) has documented teachers who were greatly affected by their negative past experiences and social interactions with unsupportive and patronizing art teachers; Gatt and Karppinen (2014) interviewed teachers with parents who undervalue the art subject and Ashworth (2010) cited teachers whose school supervisors’ understanding of how the art subject should be taught is a point for debate.

Dewey (1938/1959) identified these types of experiences in education based on how lessons are prepared and provided for the students’ learning experience: (1) some learning experiences may be considered miseducative since it distorted or prevented the growth and need of further experience; (2) some learning experiences promoted a slack and careless attitude focused only on enjoyment that it prevented a person from learning more out of the experience; (3) some experiences are so unfocused, disconnected and not linked together by a common goal that the learner became scatterbrained (p. 247).

The author adds that if the students undergo learning experiences similar to the ones mentioned, the teacher loses the ability to control future experiences.

Therefore, according to Dewey (1938/1959), the only frame of reference for a quality learning experience was to utilise the organic connection between education and personal experiences. Teachers should recognise the existence of students’ prior experiences, be it positive or negative, and integrate the students’ life experiences in

the curriculum (Aedo, 2002). Teachers should build on prior knowledge and create continuity accordingly as the lesson moves forward towards completion.

Lessons should also be well organised in promoting future experiences that a student would look forward to the next learning experience after undergoing the present one.

Conceptual Framework

Heider's Theory of Balance (1946) and Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory (1938/1959) were used in the conception of the framework as theoretical references to substantiate the research findings. Teachers' attitudes focused on the valuation of the teacher towards the importance of art education. For teachers' art experiences, descriptors focused on teachers' art experiences as a student, as an adult and experiences related to family.

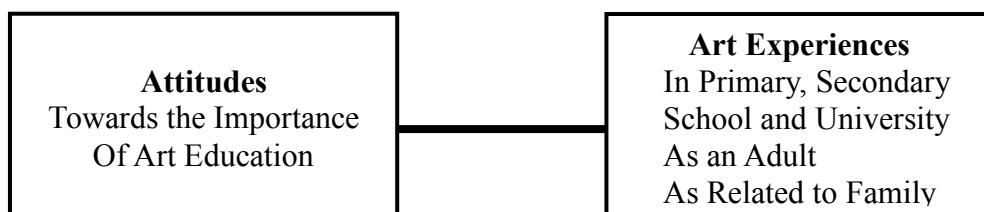


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Method / Procedure

This study used quantitative research to investigate the relationship between teachers' attitudes toward the importance of art education and their art experiences. The scope of this research was limited to the data gathered from February 5 to February 23, 2018 in the selected school. Primary teachers from level 1 to 6 were selected due to the group's high degree of interaction with the majority of the students in the school. The population of the primary level totaled 68 teachers consisting of educators teaching various subject in the curriculum. This study had a 100% response rate from all 68 teachers (n=68).

To gather empirical data, this research adopted the "Art Education Attitude Scale" by Luehrman (1999). The questionnaire had a scaled response, based on the Likert method, with each possible response assigned a numerical value (score): "Strongly Agree" = 5; "Agree" = 4; "Undecided" = 3; "Disagree" = 2; "Strongly Disagree" = 1 (Luehrman, 1999). The following were the assigned scale indicators and interpretations: 4.51-5.00 = very positive; 3.51-4.50 = somewhat positive; 2.51-3.50 neutral; 1.51-2.50 = somewhat negative; 1.00-1.50 = very negative. Scale and interpretation values were adopted from Kamaylar (2017) and Basumatari (2016) with similar quantitative objectives,

Part 1: The first page of the questionnaire included an introductory message, a request for teachers' cooperation, terms of confidentiality and a brief background of the purpose of the study. It was followed by questionnaire part 1 about the demographic details of the sample group.

Part 2-Section A: This part of the questionnaire consisted 25 items with four constructs related to art education: (1) purpose of art education and its benefits; (2) relative importance of art education in the curriculum; (3) support from the school administration through budget allocation, staff management and scheduling of art periods, and (4) art education as a tool for critical thinking.

Part Two-Section B: examined the teachers' valuing of their art experiences as a student in primary, secondary school and university based on the following constructs: (1) Value of art experiences in school as a student; (2) Art teacher showing work by famous artists; (3) Influence of classmates and peers on art experiences; (4) Participation in art related activities, such as frequency of visits to art museums, galleries, art fairs and undergoing art lessons outside of the school.

Part Two-Section C: focused on the teachers' valuing of their art experiences as an adult based on the following constructs: (1) Participation in art-related activities, such as frequency of visits to art museums, galleries, art fairs and undergoing art lessons outside of the school as an adult; (2) Influence of art-teaching colleagues on attitude towards art education; (3) Knowledge about art or art history; (4) Skills in making art; (5) Importance of art education in primary, secondary school and university.

Part Two-Section D: explored the teachers' level of exposure to art that they have experienced with their family and the influential implications it may have had on their attitudes towards art. The questions were based on: (1) Parental encouragement to participate in art activities and (2) Influence of parents on teachers' attitudes towards art.

Findings / Results

Research Objective One

Research objective one was to determine the attitudes of teachers towards the importance of art education. Means and Standards Deviation technique was utilised to interpret the responses of teachers. Teachers' attitudes towards the importance of art education were determined to be *neutral*, with a total mean value of 3.06. The item that stated "Art is an important subject with specific content worth knowing" received the highest mean score of 4.21, while the item that declared "Art is not an important part of the curriculum" received the lowest mean score of 1.68.

Research Objective Two

Research objective two was to determine the teachers' levels of art experiences as a student in primary and secondary school and university. Means and Standards

Deviation technique was used to learn more about teachers' art experiences as a student. The study revealed the following results:

Teachers' level of art experiences in primary school was determined to be *somewhat positive*, with a total mean value of 3.69. The item that rated "the importance of art education in primary school" as *somewhat positive* received the highest mean score of 4.47, while the item that focused on "how often the art teacher show work by famous artists" received the lowest score of 2.76 (*neutral*).

Teachers' level of art experiences in secondary school was determined to be *somewhat positive*, with a total mean value of 3.67. The item that rated "the importance of art education in secondary school" as *somewhat positive* received the highest mean score of 4.21, while the item that focused on "how often the art teacher show work by famous artists" received the lowest mean score of 3.44 (*neutral*).

Teachers' level of art experiences in university was determined to be *neutral*, with a total mean value of 3.01. The item that stated "what kind of effect did your classmates and peers have on you art experiences" had the highest mean score of 3.38, while the item that focused on "how often the art teacher show work by famous artists" received the lowest mean score of 2.31 (*somewhat negative*).

Overall results indicate that the teachers' level of art experiences as a student in primary school, secondary school and university indicated a *neutral* level, with a total mean value of 3.46. The teachers' art experiences in primary school ranked the highest with a 3.69 mean score, while their art experiences in university ranked the lowest with a mean score of 3.01. Details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of teachers' art experiences as a student ($n = 68$).

Constructs	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Art Experiences in primary school	3.69	0.51	Somewhat Positive
Art Experiences in secondary school	3.67	1.02	Somewhat Positive
Art Experiences in university	3.01	0.96	Neutral
Total (Teachers' Art Experiences as a Student)	3.46	0.61	Neutral

Research Objective Three

Research objective three was to determine teachers' levels of art experiences as an adult. Means and Standards Deviation technique was used to analyse the data. The teachers' level of art experiences as an adult was determined to be *neutral*, with a

total mean value of 2.76.

The item that stated “what kind of influence have art teachers who were your colleagues had on your attitudes toward art education” had the highest score of 4.22, while the item that focused on the number of times the teacher “had art lessons outside of school” received the lowest mean score of 1.43. Findings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers’ art experiences as an adult (n = 68).

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
As a teacher / administrator, what kind of influence has art teachers who were your colleagues had on your attitude toward art education?	4.22	0.73	Somewhat Positive
- Visited a gallery / art fair	2.87	1.16	Neutral
Circle the answer that most closely fits the number of times you participated in these art-related activities as an adult (since university): - Visited an art museum	2.84	1.38	Neutral
How would you rate your skills for making art?	2.65	1.10	Neutral
How would you rate your own knowledge about art or art history?	2.59	1.14	Neutral
- Had art lessons outside of school.	1.43	0.83	Very Negative
Total (Art Experiences as an Adult)	2.76	0.70	Neutral

Research Objective Four

Research objective four was to determine teacher’ levels of art experiences related to family. Means and Standards Deviation technique was utilised to find out the teachers’ level of art experiences with their family. The teachers’ level of art experiences related to family was determined to be *neutral*, with a total mean value of 3.03. The item that stated “how would you characterise the influence of your parents on your attitudes toward art” had the highest mean score of 3.49, while the item that stated “did your parents encourage you to participate in art activities” received the lowest mean score of 2.57.

Table 3: Teachers' art experiences related to family (n = 68).

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
How would you characterise the influence they've had on your attitude toward art?	3.49	0.87	Neutral
Did your parents encourage you to participate in art activities?	2.57	1.11	Neutral
Total (Art Experiences Related to Family)	3.03	0.90	Neutral

Research Objective Five

Research objective five was to determine the relationship between teachers' attitudes towards the importance of art education and their art experiences as a student, as an adult and as related to family. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to calculate and compare the data gathered about the relationship between teachers' attitudes towards art education and their art experiences. The study revealed the following findings:

A significant relationship was found between teachers' attitudes towards art education and their art experiences as a student. Data analysis revealed a significant correlation with $r = .272$, $p = .025$. Correlation was significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

No significant relationship was found between teachers' attitudes towards art education and their art experiences as an adult. Data analysis indicated a non-significant correlation, $r = .187$, $p = .127$ ($p = n.s.$).

No significant relationship was also found between teachers' attitudes towards art education and their art experiences as related to family. Data analysis showed a non-significant correlation, $r = -.034$, $p = .782$ ($p = n.s.$).

Discussion

The attitudes of teachers towards the importance of art education

Descriptive analysis of data reveals that teachers in the selected international school in Bangkok, Thailand have *neutral* attitudes towards the importance of art education. However, even though the sample group's attitudes towards art education is ambivalent, it is important to note that data also indicates a *somewhat positive* response to the opinion that *Art is an important subject with specific content worth knowing*. And similarly, the sample group gives a *somewhat negative* response on the suggestion that *Art is not an important part of the school curriculum*. The findings suggest in general that the sample group somewhat agrees that art is an important subject with specific content worth knowing and an important part of the school curriculum. Thus, it is quite unexpected that the mean average result of the responses

is in the neutral scale.

According to Jones and Harris (1967), results that are similar to the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph are expected in some opinion-based studies since a neutral response is unavoidable. The authors observed that often when a person expresses an opinion, he may or may not have an underlying attitude towards that opinion. Green (1953) agreed that an underlying attitude is a latent variable and not immediately observable. Therefore, a neutral response is still a suggestion of the existence of an attitude towards art education, albeit a latent one. However, if we consider the fact that a high value of agreement is given to the item that *Art is an important subject with specific content worth knowing* and a strong disagreement to the notion that *Art is not an important part of the school curriculum*; this definitely suggests a positive attitude towards art education. The items relating to the teachers' support for art may be what Green (1953) refers to as the evidence of the underlying positive attitude that is not immediately observable (latent) but exists under the observable appearance of a neutral response.

The teachers' levels of art experiences as a student in primary and secondary school and university

Statistical analysis of the data shows that the sample group has *somewhat positive* art experiences as students in primary and secondary school. In addition, teachers have indicated a *somewhat positive* response on the importance of art in primary school and in secondary school. However, the teachers have expressed a *neutral* response when asked how often did their art teacher in primary and secondary school show work by famous artists, which suggests that a somewhat equal number of teachers may have and may have not experienced being shown work by famous artists during art lessons.

A previous study on Missouri school principals' attitudes towards art education indicates similar results. According to Luehrman (1999), a high 70% of the school principals who participated in his research have responded that their most memorable positive experiences in the art class occurred in the elementary (primary) level. The school principals also reflected that the more their art teacher showed works by famous artists, the more valuable their experiences became. Based on Zajonc (1965) the frequency or repeated exposure of an individual to a stimulus object (e.g. works of famous artists), enhances the positive attitude towards it. Therefore, if an art teacher values the art subject enough to incorporate famous works of art in his lessons, the higher the possibility that his students would develop positive attitudes towards famous works of art or any artwork for that matter. This reinforces the important role of a teacher in developing positive or negative attitudes towards the importance of art education. Based on the analysis of data from the selected school, the teachers' art experiences as students in university are *neutral*. Findings

also reveal that their classmates and peers in university have had an effect on their art experiences. And most notably, there is a *somewhat negative* response on the frequency of their encounters with works of famous artists. It is important to note that among the primary, secondary and university levels, the lowest mean scores have appeared in items related to art experiences in university. Furthermore, the negative response from the sample group regarding their exposure to works of famous artists is a strong indication on why the trend on the importance of art education for the sample group is on a decline, from *neutral* in primary and in secondary school, to *somewhat negative* in university. The findings suggest that as individuals go higher in their educational level, the number of art experiences in schools become lower. According to Eisner (1966) less than one-half of secondary schools require the learning of art for graduation and an even lesser number offer any major in art. It is also important to note the how classmates and peers appear to have a high effect the art experiences of students in university. Most of the time, according to Jones & Harris (1967), a particular group gives the individual a sense of identity and serves as an important source of attitude change. Thus, it is highly probable that art experiences in university are defined not by the amount or quality of art lessons being experienced by the individual, but by the changing attitudes of classmates and peers towards the learning of art. Jaworowski (2011) cited this stage as the “graveyard of artistic activity” (p. 3). Since secondary school and university level is a phase for self-discovery for young students, this is where they decide whether they will continue learning art or not. This is often where pressure from different social groups is in its highest, when students feel the need to belong to a group and make decisions based on the preferences of the group they want to be identified with. Cohen (1964) cited that for some individuals, being part of a group is a necessity and that these individuals will have strong desires to maintain their social relationships for prestige and privileges associated with being a member of the group.

The teachers' levels of art experiences as an adult

Findings reveal that the selected teachers rate their art experiences as adults as *neutral*. The sample group also gives a *somewhat positive* rating for the influence of art teaching-colleagues in their attitudes towards art education. However, the selected teachers have given a *very negative* rating for the question regarding the opportunity to participate in art lessons outside of school after reaching adulthood. Findings also show the resurgence of art teachers having a significant impact on teachers' attitudes towards art education in the form of art-teaching colleagues. The sample group indicates that their art experiences and attitudes towards art education in primary school are influenced mostly by art teachers. But in university, the influence comes mostly from classmates and peers. It is then unexpected that a *somewhat positive* score would result for the item related to the influence of art teaching-colleagues on

art experiences as adults. Note that this result is similar with the primary school level. This finding suggests that although the art lessons may have declined during secondary and university level, its impact increased once again during adulthood, particularly for teachers. Being exposed to art and art lessons seems to be an unavoidable part of being in the teaching profession. Based on Eisner (1966) and Mittler (1974) a majority of schools assign the teaching of art lessons not to art specialists, but to classroom teachers who have majored in general elementary education. These classroom teachers would often teach art under the guidance of an art specialist who manage the school's art-integrated programme. This explains the *somewhat positive* response with regards to an art teacher-colleagues influence on the teachers' attitude towards art education since their collaboration would expectedly be more frequent and inclusive.

The teachers' levels of art experiences related to family

Descriptive analysis of data reveals that the sample group considers their art experiences related to family as *neutral*. They also have indicated *neutral* responses to questions that inquire about parental encouragement to participate in art activities and the kind of influence their parents have on their attitudes towards art in their youth. These neutral findings about art experiences with the family are quite unexpected. In fact, most studies about attitude formation towards art have definite opinions regarding the very important role parents play in either encouraging or discouraging participation art-related activities (Luehrman, 1999; Miraglia, 2008; Russell-Bowie, Yeung & McInerney, 1999). However, neutral responses are sometimes unavoidable since it is possible that the sample group might not have strong opinions about the topic (Jones & Harris, 1967). Or in some cases, when respondents are given a neutral option in a survey question, they are more likely to select this option, since it can mask their favourable or unfavourable opinions (Bishop, 1987). Magsamen (2009) believes that parents generally has little understanding about art, that is why it is imperative that experts in the field provide them with relevant information about art to fill in the information gap. Oskala, Keaney, Chan and Bunting (2009) reported that parental encouragement towards art shows a consistent trend that suggests younger children are "more likely to have been taken to arts events and encouraged to participate in arts activities when growing up, as compared with older age groups" (p. 10). Luehrman (1999) also confirms that a significant number of responses from his sample group recall that their family art experiences are influential during youth and helped create strong positive attitudes towards art education. It is therefore well established that parents' participation in artistic activities help create a positive attitude and motivation for students to be involved in art-related activities (Jaworowski, 2011).

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