



## A Discussion on Interdisciplinary Approach of Visual Art Syllabus in Malaysian Higher Education

Mohamad Faizuan Mat<sup>1\*</sup>, Sarah Naemah Aman Leong<sup>1</sup>, & Nourah Nasser Al-Nahari<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

<sup>2</sup>Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University

\*Email: mmfaizuan@unimas.my

**Abstract.** This article contributes to the discussion on the need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach in the visual art syllabus, specifically in higher education in Malaysia. Over the last two decades, the academic world has faced rapidly advancing technology and the rise of Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0). Because of the increased level of high-tech software and hardware competency among students, universities are in dire need to improve and innovate their current syllabi. Hence, this study was carried out to discuss the need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to improve current visual art syllabi in Malaysia. The topics that are explored in this paper include the definition of an interdisciplinary approach in visual art syllabi, the current status of visual art syllabi in Malaysia, factors that are important for the integration of art with other fields, and how an interdisciplinary approach can be implemented. The data used in this research were obtained from a seminar, in-depth interviews, and a literature review, and were analyzed using a qualitative method. The findings indicate that visual art education duly needs a new program or needs to be revamped into a future-ready curriculum. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach, or the integration of two bodies of knowledge in one program, could be one of the solutions to this issue.

**Keywords:** *art syllabus; higher education in Malaysia; interdisciplinary; visual art curriculum integration.*

### 1 Introduction

Considering the rapid development of technology these days, we need to start questioning the way art education is implemented in formal institutions. Jiggins [1] raised an issue pertaining to traditional classroom education, where the teacher stands in front of the classroom to teach while the students sit behind their desks to learn, expecting them to take over the workforce eventually. A practice that has remained unchanged for a long time is trying to stay relevant while hanging by a thread with one foot deeply rooted in the industrial revolution that started in the 1800s. Furthermore, despite interdisciplinary methods having been discussed for the last twenty years, the curricula in universities today are still structured based on a disciplinary approach [2]. Today's art education

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Received February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Accepted for publication July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

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DOI: 10.5614/j.vad.2023.15.1.5

increasingly demands the involvement of art in other areas. Art can find a way in and merge with other fields through interdisciplinarity. An interdisciplinary approach in art education is not just a matter of what art can do in other areas but also subject to what kind of art can be produced by using other areas of knowledge. However, in order to propose such a method we first need to investigate the factors and elements that are important in an interdisciplinary approach in art education. It should start early at school or university level. Hence, the art education syllabus needs to be reviewed and to an extent may require a revamp. With the rise of Industrial Revolution 4.0, it is high time for art to integrate with other areas due to the rapid development of technology and the cyber world. The western world has long been discussing interdisciplinarity in art and the importance of art being in line with other critical areas has been recognized.

In 2002, the National Art Education Association strongly suggested interdisciplinary teaching and learning through the arts. According to Lynn [3] art educators agreed that interdisciplinary work lets students solve problems and make meaningful connections, while an interdisciplinary syllabus gives students the chance to establish new perspectives and discover relationships between ideas. In Malaysia, we have yet to find any fine art syllabus that fully applies an interdisciplinary approach; it may have been done but only within some courses rather than the overall curriculum. Interdisciplinarity is not new and has already been explored and adopted by many artists. For example, science and art; Leonardo Da Vinci; the great pyramids, the golden ratio; art, architecture, and math; M.C. Escher and mathematical tessellations (Eisenhower Clearing House, <http://www.enc.org>, 2006), which beautifully explore the natural connections between works of art, science, and math. Additionally, in 2015, 2016, and 2017, art exhibitions such as *NYAWA: Nature's Yield and Wonders of Art*, pioneered by the University Putra Malaysia under the Faculty of Design and Architecture, realized a collaboration between art and science that explores therapeutic aspects, forestry, medicine and health sciences, bioscience, etc. While these exhibitions have proven to have great potential for interdisciplinarity in art education, a thorough exploration of this potential is needed so that it can be made into a syllabus for art schools or a proposal to integrate art with other fields. However, to do so, Lynn [3] has stated that academicians need to have a profound knowledge base for teaching the subject and excellent classroom management skills to address the learning needs of the students and critical pedagogy.

## **2 Arts Education in Malaysia**

According to Mat [4], in the visual arts, we are still looking for a suitable system to educate students in line with the rapid development of technology today. He added that the institutions concerned, whether public or private, need to