

## Teachers in Art Education: What Elementary School Needs to Do More with Art Appreciation

**Ardipal<sup>1</sup>**

Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

(\*)✉ (e-mail) [ardipalarly@gmail.com](mailto:ardipalarly@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The purpose of this library research is to explain the need to teaching art appreciation since art teachers in Indonesia, especially at elementary schools, have not paid much attention to this activity by establishing a relationship between the urgency of art appreciation and the current pedagogical practice in Indonesia. The researcher then draws on a set of real cases in countries or regions where students are taught to appreciate art. It was found that art appreciation has been a core strategy of teaching art at elementary level for decades that produces a lot of success in places where it is systematically implemented, proven by significant improvement on students' soft skills such as language acquisition and communication skill, which are vital for later stage of students' life. Finally, the researcher concludes by giving a number of notes about what teachers, schools, and government can do more regarding art appreciation to improve the art learning, leading to students getting the most out of the art class.

**Keywords:** teachers, art appreciation, elementary school, art education

### Introduction

The goal of this paper is to argue in favor of extensive teaching of art appreciation as an indispensable skill for students. Although familiarly known and broadly taught in other parts of the globe, art appreciation has not been seen by art teachers as an important activity in art teaching. The urgency to advocate art appreciation stems from the currently imbalance focus of art teaching in class. In the status quo, children are dominantly taught to express their art experiences by means of activities such as drawing and playing musical instruments. In other words, they solely focus on mastering composition skills or procedures to produce different forms of art. This undue emphasis on art production is problematic as it is very likely to render students bored and even drain enthusiasm at all. The emphasis also disadvantages students in that they do not learn other valuable skills beyond producing arts. The fact that art becomes less favorable than other subjects (Putra *et al*, 2014) might results from the excessive emphasis on this area of teaching.

It is therefore crucial for us to look at the roles of art appreciation. In this study, the author would put forward the concept of art appreciation, why it matters to students in addition to the current emphasis on art production, and slight procedures on how teachers can do this in class. Beyond that, it also sets some empirical studies that elaborate the valuable impacts of teaching art appreciation on students. Finally, this paper concludes with recommendations for pertaining stakeholders – government, schools, and teachers – regarding this practice.

### Method

This study presents accounts of art appreciation from a variety of literatures in internet. It starts with defining art appreciation, followed by elaboration of the current problem and why it is necessary for teachers to pay attention to art appreciation by outlining results of some studies, including the writer's own work. Recommendations are given in the final part of this paper.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Art Appreciation

Art appreciation refers to the process in which individuals make assessment over certain productions of art. The appreciation goes beyond applauding the said arts as individuals may also place value judgment on the arts – whether an art is good or bad – and even try to comprehend the nature and history of the art. We may pick a couple of examples to illustrate this activity. Going to galleries and museums to observe works of art is a form of appreciation. When a student evaluates his friend's works, the student has also done art appreciation.

In her study explaining the impact of writing as a strategy for art appreciation, Zimmerman (2012) affirms art appreciation is an activity attempted “to sensitize viewers to aesthetic elements (line, shape, color, and such) so that the viewers may place value on art and aesthetic experience.” Under this definition, appreciation is meant to scrutinize components that establish a work of art, so individuals will be aware of its value. Any small details, therefore, matter to the overall perception, and thus assessment, of the work. Adding Zimmerman's, Husen (2017) maintains that appreciation involves ‘feeling’ the works of art. Rather than merely examining what a work of art is and how it is good or bad, art appreciation, he argues, should include the process of understanding the background of art so that appreciators accumulate experience and form an opinion on the art. Individuals may also accept or reject the art on the basis of their own observation. Therefore, appreciation is much more than simply enjoying art, whose definition is to solely search for pleasure from a work of art. This close and critical examination of art, at the end, aid them grow their sensitivity in art and develop their own art style.

While it takes close inspection and logical examination in appreciating an art work, one needs not be an artist to recognize the values from such work (Irouke & Onwuekwe, 2015). As sentient beings built with the sense of beauty and orderliness, children at early ages are drawn by the attractiveness of art just like adult individuals do. Coates (1993), for instance, exemplified this idea where he observed how four-years-old children react to a number of fine arts. He discovered that children are able to identify some attributes of the arts by saying phrases like “It's smooth” after touching a pebble and “It's snowy” responding a blossom tree. The similar conclusion was also drawn by previous research as confirmed by Kraguljac (1970) and subsequent study by Duh (2004), both of which sustain the notion that all children are endowed with appreciative abilities.

In terms of responses to art, one may react in one or more of three levels: emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual. Emotional reaction is usually a sudden response at emotional level when one is exposed to an art work, while aesthetic reaction occurs when there is an unconscious association individuals make upon viewing the work. Intellectual reaction requires thorough analysis ending in knowledgeable judgment (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 1996). Thus, when a child shouts “It's wonderful” directly after seeing a fine art, he shows emotional response.

Art appreciation is not an exclusive ability of those having a vested interest and skill in art. In fact, all children possess this ability, though not at the same extent, and it could be made better with proper art education (Duh, Čagran, & Huzjak, 2010). For children to grow appreciation, however, teachers need to ensure the art experience that students get is the one that is meaningful to them. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to bring art works that engage students' emotions and former aesthetic experience (Duh, Zupančič, & Čagran, 2014).

As one of focuses in art teaching, art appreciation provides what art production does not. Instead of teaching students techniques to make art works, which remains challenging for a large portion of students in class and where the focus is more on teachers than students, art appreciation invites them to actively seek values from art works. This carries two benefits to different type of students. Those with little interest in art subject would find the activity more enjoyable and meaningful as they learn why and how an art is important. Switching focus to appreciate art also reduces continuous burden to produce works that these students often feel daunting. For students who love and have talent in art, the activity would further shape their artistic sense thereby

strengthening their aesthetic ability. The class atmosphere would also be livelier as there are variations in activities that students do, not only practicing and creating art works.

## 2. The Need and Exclusion of Art Appreciation

The ability to appreciate art, unfortunately, does not automatically come up as the students are constantly taught to produce arts like the current emphasis. To put it simply, art expression does not bring about art appreciation (Zimmerman, 2012). The ability to make well-informed evaluation of art needs regular exercise. Thus, we should teach art appreciation along with art production, and to balance the two in the process of art teaching.

The need to introduce art appreciation in art classes also aligns with the core purpose of teaching art in the first place. Soehardjo (2005) maintains art education has three main purposes; 1) cultivate and develop students' personalities, 2) nurture students' aesthetic sense, and 3) enrich the students' life creatively. It is interesting that teaching students to produce art works is not the primary goal that art teachers should aim for. Instead, it is the students' personalities and aesthetic that teachers should work on. This account is supported by Putra *et al.* (2014) that art education is not meant to prepare artists or any art practitioners. Rather, it is aimed at preparing students to choose career not involved with art. Similar argument was made by Tabrani (2000) stating that the teaching of art should grow students to "think with art" (imagination) and to think with words. In this sense, art teaching is not to transfer artistic ability but to activate art within education.

Despite the clear need to teach art appreciation, it is unfortunate that most teachers haven't realized this need and thus deprioritizing this focus of learning. A couple of reasons can explain this phenomenon. Setiawan (2007) studied that teachers assumed that art lesson is all about practical matter; students only need to practice to reproduce art to be proficient in it. Setiawan also notes that teachers have little understanding of the practice of art appreciation. These two reasons logically explain why art appreciation is not prioritized or even excluded from art class.

## 3. The Impacts of Art Appreciation

There are a bunch of impacts that the activity of art appreciation make. The most prominent one is to enhance love and interest in art works. In the context of art education, appreciation acts as a "vehicle" by which students learn the merit of the works during art observations thus making the art works more appealing to them. This process of art comprehension does not occur when the students are merely tasked to express art by means of art reproductions. Consequently, they grow the feeling of admiration gradually that at the end cultivates respect and even love to art. This is an important step for students to realize the significant position of arts among other subjects.

As the students recognize the values of art works, they can also discover some aesthetic experience that might augment their artistic skill. The appreciative activity involves the process of uncovering the artist's messages through, for instance, his or her sketches in a painting. The patterns of art sketches often benefit the students in that they at times inspire ideas and designs which at the end affects their style of art expression later. This is especially valuable for students with a vested interest in art. An example of this is the work of Putra *et al* (2014) in which it was found art appreciation is better than normal art teaching in helping students learn *Seni Karawitan*.

There are also personal benefits that students get from doing art appreciation. Duh (2016) and Jolley (2016) state that continual implementation of art appreciations helps children concentrate longer in their activities. The logical reason behind this finding is that during art appreciation, students are compelled to pay full attention to art works so as to discern any small patterns or structure of the works, without which it is hardly possible to comprehend the works.

Furthermore, Duh also (2016) notes that the development of communication skill can be achieved by art appreciation. Children hone their communication skill when assigned to verbalize their opinion of paintings that teachers brought into class. The ability is acquired as children study collaboratively with one another, listening to their peers explaining descriptions of art works after

some observations. Duh notices that students' vocabulary was enriched by mutual listening. The results above support some studies found in some Californian districts where art appreciation, commonly referred to as Visual Thinking Strategies, is systematically taught in class. The approach, designed in the midst of 1990s for K-12 students, has been integrated into curriculum for years and has now seen fruitful findings. Studies on the method suggest that students taught with visual thinking strategies performed better in math and reading, understood visual images better, and exhibited better development in their social-emotional aspects (Frey, 2015). The proven impacts are the reason for the continuous implementation of this activity, as a result of which teachers there are blessed with plenty teaching resources (Watabe, 2015).

All of the findings suggest there are new perspectives of teaching art appreciation than what is currently believed. Besides being in line with the goal of art education, that is, to sensitivize students to art, art appreciation equips students with abilities necessary to help them learn better since it coerces them to think rigorously and communicate their thoughts. It is therefore a clear underestimate to sideline art appreciation in art teaching.

#### 4. Teaching Art Appreciation

With regard to the previous findings of the impacts that art appreciation could have on students', there are several things teachers need to remember in teaching art appreciation. Firstly, the activity should engage students in a way that maximizes their participation. They should be encouraged to ask, question, and communicate their views with their friends and their teacher, with the former interaction taking larger portion of time. Husen (2017) supports this by arguing that appreciation should involve observation by asking and showing interesting elements of an art work. Active participation in class is also a key demand of the Curriculum 13 (K13) in Indonesia.

It is insufficient for the students to solely observe works as research (Bertscheit, 2001) suggests that doing so will lead students to feel bored. Interesting methods involving attractive pattern of communication between teachers and students should be carried out in class. Therefore, teachers' role in this case is indispensable (Duh & Kljajic, 2013). Moreover, appreciative activity should not be restricted only to an individual program in class. Instead, teachers should be creative in leading students to do this by, for example, taking students to museums or art galleries.

Besides active interaction among students, teachers still need to maintain necessary level of communication in form of discussion with students about the art works observed. In doing the conversation, teachers can do it by following what Barner (2012) calls as four steps of teaching art appreciation: description, analysis, interpretation, and Judgement. Ardipal (2019) presents some useful questions that teachers can pose to students for each step.

Table 1. Questions for Art Appreciation Activities

<b>Description</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What did you see/hear?</li> <li>2. How many the colors are used?</li> <li>3. How are the colors used by the artist?</li> <li>4. How does the artist use paint?</li> </ol>
<b>Analysis</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is there any element standing out from the composition?</li> <li>2. Is the composition balanced?</li> <li>3. Are you interested in a specific part of the work? Why?</li> </ol>
<b>Interpretation</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What mood do you feel from the work?</li> <li>2. If you were the object in the work, how would you feel?</li> <li>3. Why did the artist choose this specific object to be drawn?</li> </ol>
<b>Judgment</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Find out an interesting work. Why is that interesting to you?</li> <li>2. What do you like and dislike from the work?</li> </ol>

## Recommendations

### 1. Teachers

Art teachers in school should allocate more time and space for students to exercise their aesthetic sense by assigning students to appreciate art besides teaching composition skills. This can be simply done, for example, by bringing art works to class that the students can observe and assess. Furthermore, while art appreciation takes more portion of time in class, teachers also need to upgrade their ability in delivering the art appreciation materials, regardless of their former academic background. One example of skill that teachers can work on is effective communication to ignite student's curiosity of art and to mingle students with one another to collaboratively appreciate art. This is necessary to make sure that art class' atmosphere is live and encouraging. Important is that teachers always bring variation of activities in class.

### 2. Schools

Schools as the supporter of art education ought to stand as the accommodating body that provides access for students to enhance their artistic ability and to raise awareness and interest of art. Adding art as an extracurricular activity after school can be helpful in that it provides opportunity for those interested in art to channel their interest, which is important for their self-actualization, considering that the time for art class in school is very limited. Moreover, conducting regular art exhibitions in school will be the platform to attract students having less concern with art.

### 3. Government

Government is responsible to facilitate the implementation of art education that it can run well to meet the demand of curriculum and the goal of art education. As teachers' competency is the main concern, government's major job remains to assist teacher in becoming better teacher by organizing training for teachers, especially those without art background, with the hope that they can be a decent substitute while the government is waiting for more students with art degree to teach in primary school. This need of training fits teachers' lack of training as confirmed by studies such as that of Wahira (2012). In addition, it is vital for government to offer art resources such as guidance books on art and local art instruments that can maximize the implementation of art education in school.

## Conclusions

There is a reason for the the exclusion of art appreciation and the overemphasis in production in art classes, besides the prevailing misconception that art learning should only be about reproduction. With this in mind, art teachers should rearrange their teaching focus to include, and give more space to, art appreciation, allowing students to learn more and expand their soft skills beyond expressing their current artistic ability. Art teachers, regardless of their background, also need to work on themselves to upgrade their teaching competency, and schools, coordinating with government, should be able to lead and monitor this development by proper teacher training and quality supervision of art teaching in class.

## References

- Ardipal. (2019). *Model Pengembangan Pembelajaran Seni Budaya di SD*, Padang: CV. Berkah Prima.
- Bertscheit, R. (2001): *Bilder werden Erlebise. Mitreissenden methoden zur aktiven Bildbetrachtung in Schule und Museum [Pictures become experiences. Exciting methods for active image viewing in school and museum]*, Mülheim an der Ruhr: Verlag an der Ruhr.

- Duh, M. (2004). *Vrednotenje kot didaktični problem pri likovni vzgoji*. [Evaluation as a didactic problem in art education]. Maribor: Pedagoška fakulteta.
- Duh, M., Čagran, B., & Huzjak, M. (2010). Quality and quantity of teaching art appreciation. *Croatian journal of Education*, 14(3), 625-655
- Duh, M., & Kljajič, A. (2013). The level of art appreciation abilities of students in lower primary school grades. *Školski vjesnik*, 62(2-3), 191-207.
- Duh, M., Zupančič, T., & Čagran, B. (2014). Development of Art Appreciation in 11–14 year-old Students. *The International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 33(2), 208-222.
- Duh, M. (2016). Art Appreciation for Developing Communication Skills among Preschool Children. *CEPS Journal*, 6(1), 71-94.
- Frey, S. (2015). *Art appreciation helps young children learn to think and express ideas*. Retrieved from: <https://edsources.org/2015/art-appreciation-helps-young-children-learn-to-think-and-express-ideas/77734>
- Husen, WR. (2017). Pengembangan Apresiasi Seni Rupa Siswa Sekolah Dasar Melalui Pendekatan Kritik Seni Pedagogik. *Naturalistic: Jurnal Kajian Penelitian Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 2(1), 54-61
- Irouke, MV & Onwuekwe, CO. (2015). The Need for Art Appreciation in The Study of Architecture. *Environmental Review*, 5(1), 88-97
- Jolley. (2016). in Punzalan, JF. (2018). The Impact of Visual Arts in Students' Academic Performance. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 6(7), 121-130.
- Kraguljac, M., & Karlavaris, B. (1970). *Estetsko procenjivanje u osnovnoj školi*. [Aesthetic Assessment in Elementary School]. Beograd: Umjetnička akademija u Beogradu.
- Putra, INJ, Dantes, N, & Candiasa, IM. (2014). Pengaruh Aktivitas Pembelajaran Apresiasi Seni terhadap Pemahaman Siswa Mengenai Seni Karawitan ditinjau dari Kemampuan Artistik Siswa di SMAN 1 Semarang. *E-Journal Pascasarjana Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha*, Vol. 4.
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (1996). *Arts Education: A Bibliography for the Secondary Level*. Regina: Curriculum Unit Saskatchewan Ministry of Education
- Setiawan, DH. (2007). *Pembelajaran Apresiasi Seni Rupa di Sekolah Dasar Negeri II Mojorebo Wirosari Grobogan* [Thesis, Universitas Negeri Semarang, 2007]. Retrieved from: <https://lib.unnes.ac.id/1022/>
- Suhardjo, AJ. (2005). *Pendidikan Seni Dari Konsep Sampai Program*, Malang: Balai Kajian Seni dan Disain Universitas Malang
- Tabrani, P. (2000). *Proses kreasi, apresiasi, belajar*. Bandung: ITB Press.
- Wahira. (2012). Kebutuhan Pelatihan Apresiasi Seni Tari Nusantara Daerah Setempat Pada Guru Sekolah Dasar Di Makassar. *Jurnal Publikasi Pendidikan*, 2(2), 146-152
- Watabe, A. (2015). *The Importance of Art Appreciation in Childhood : An Analysis of American Educational Materials on Art Appreciation*. *The Journal for the Association of Art Education*. Vol. 36, 461-473
- Zimmerman, P. (2012). Writing for Art Appreciation. In A.R. Gere, *Roots in the Sawdust: Writing to Learn Across Disciplines* (pp. 31-45). Retrieved from: <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/sawdust/chapter2.pdf>