Abstract. In the currently predominant online teaching environment, teachers use materials that are available on the Internet for their classes, be they paid content or otherwise. YouTube, as the most popular free video-sharing site, has been one of the sources of instructional material in the form of online videos. One very popular YouTube video, titled Vincent van Gogh’s The Starry Night: Great Art Explained was used in the teaching of Art and Language Appreciation (Apresiasi Bahasa dan Seni) class in Universitas Negeri Malang in November 2021, and its use provides insight into using free video content in online teaching. This study intends to analyze the students’ perceptions of the video’s characteristics and values that make it as a good learning material for the teaching of the Art and Language Criticism (Apresiasi Bahasa dan Seni), as seen in the positive response of the class’ students when they were asked to watch the video in class. The data of this study is the students’ responses, in the form of essays of the summary and their opinion of the video. This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze the data and relate the findings of the students’ responses to identify the good qualities of the video as instructional material. Students recognized the use of the video as a useful media as they learned new knowledge and life values. The video itself was reported to be easy enough to understand, it triggered their curiosity, and it was interesting to them.

Keywords: Online Learning · YouTube · van Gogh · Literary Teaching · Art Teaching · Literary and Art Teaching · Great Art Explained

1 Introduction

Nowadays, modern online technology has been utilized in teaching and learning activities. During the Covid-19 outbreak, when traditional direct face-to-face interactions are unfavorable, education institutions, teachers, and students seem to rely mostly on modern information technology as the backbone of the educational activities, be it in online classes, testing, and even cloud laboratories. In the last few years, the use of audio-visual
technologies, such as the YouTube platform, has been on the rise in popularity due to its practicality and positive impacts found both on educators and students.

Although YouTube, a very popular internet video sharing platform, was not initially created for education [1], a large number of its contents feature educational videos that have been adopted into classroom teaching and learning activities. In post-pandemic time, 86 percent of US citizens indicated they learned new skills using YouTube videos. Over the years, the amount of time spent watching how-to videos with the phrase “at home” in the title has increased by more than 50% (“10 eLearning Video Statistics You Should Know About in 2022,” 2022), and the videos containing the title ‘tutorial’ yields hundreds of million results [2]. According to researchers, combining YouTube with transformative pedagogy could demonstrate the Internet’s limitless potential and power for global democratization [3].

YouTube videos have been reported not only to facilitate learning but also helpful for educators in various disciplines, especially in the field of Art and Language. Nasution [4] found that YouTube provides invaluable tools for teachers in developing language competence. YouTube videos have also been found to improve students’ speaking performance, especially on pronunciation and fluency & coherence [5]. In the area of classroom psychology, Jackman [6] reported that for students, YouTube videos function as means of summarizing course content, clarifying complex concepts, concretizing abstract ideas, modeling appropriate interventions, reinforcing domain-specific jargon, exploring vicarious laboratory experimentation, and capturing first-hand musings and expositions of historical and contemporary theorists in the field of psychology. In the area of the Arts, such as music education, professional teaching videos on YouTube have the potential to improve students’ musical understanding while also removing financial and geographical constraints [3]. Indeed, YouTube videos have been proven as helpful and useful in Arts and Language classes.

Taking this direction, this study wants to investigate how useful a famous YouTube video can be used in the teaching of Art and Language class, as perceived by the students. YouTube videos are known to be able to present complex materials in tutorial videos, which has been seen as a possible avenue of Arts and Language teaching, namely in the development of their viewers’ artistic skills. In regard to this, Lange [2] reveals that YouTube videos can be used as useful material in an educational activity that may supplement formal, institutional learning in schools and also museums. She also mentions that in online art communities, for example, a famous or a viral art video can boost the expertise status of the video creator, implying the significance of the popularity of a YouTube art video as an indicator of its usefulness and accuracy [2]. Regarding the accuracy and usefulness of the material in the Arts and Language education, a good material should enhance students’ aesthetic perception; that is, it should elevate the understanding of artistic beauty in arts and literature to better enjoy the aesthetic pleasures of being human [7]. In order to reach this goal, it is necessary to understand the complexity of the artworks, the terminology of the art techniques, and the process by which we perceive and respond to the artwork [7]. It is interesting how such a medium as a YouTube video can be useful in communicating an accurate understanding of complex Art and Language understanding. Taking note of Lange’s idea that famous YouTube videos may be translated as ‘useful’ and ‘accurate’ to the viewers (i.e., the students), it is necessary
to put this idea to test by looking at the students’ perceptions of the YouTube material in an Arts and Language class. In this case, the famous YouTube video is chosen, which is *Vincent van Gogh’s The Starry Night: Great Art Explained*, a video with over 11 million views by June 2022, uploaded by the YouTube channel Great Art Explained, a channel with around 850 thousand subscribers. With the relatively high number of views, made by a quite large channel, with around 2000 comments - indicating a large user engagement with the video - this video is considered famous to be studied. Furthermore, the creator of the video, James Payne, is a curator, art historian, and gallerist who aims to demystify great artworks to the general public, making the video more relevant to the issue of teaching Arts. (https://www.youtube.com/c/GreatArtExplained/about; https://www.artlyst.com/about/).

Considering the aforementioned research gap that YouTube videos can be beneficial and effective in Language and Arts classroom, because they present complex content that heightens students’ aesthetic perception, this study was conducted to examine and explore whether using a famous YouTube video as a supplementary material would be of value to the students. The research question, therefore, was: how do English literature students perceive the use of YouTube videos as a source of learning in an arts and language classroom?

2 Methods

To explore students’ perspectives on the use of YouTube videos as the source of learning in the arts and literary criticism and the pedagogical aspects of the video, this qualitative study took a naturalistic approach where the use of humans as the instrument is considered suitable [8, p. 193–194]. Employing purposive sampling, this study involved all 32 students in the Art and Language Appreciation (*Apresiasi Bahasa dan Sastra*) course to provide their accounts or responses in an essay form for an assignment via Google Form online platform in November 2021.

The class was made up of freshmen from the English Literature Study Program, English Department, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang, class of 2021. These students had minimal or no prior experience or knowledge of the Arts, although some of them had some knowledge of general Literature, English Literature in particular. The course was a general course not related to the students’ core skills, but it is a Faculty-level required course that must be taken by every student in the Faculty of Letters. The aim of this course was to give introductory Arts and Literature material to students to be able to make a basic critical analysis based on a basic understanding of artworks and literary works. The course followed the goal set by Sporre [7], which is to make students understand artistic beauty in Arts and Literature in their everyday lives and situations to better enjoy the aesthetic pleasures of being human.

The course requires the students to read the main textbook, *Perceiving Arts: An Introduction to Humanities* by Sporre [7], and in the specific assignment related to this study, the students studied about analysis of paintings and were asked to watch, comment, and respond to a publicly available YouTube video: *Vincent van Gogh’s The Starry Night: Great Art Explained*, uploaded by user Great Art Explained (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wk9L1N9bRRE).
The video in question was chosen for the assignment because 1) the subject matter fits the class discussion at the time about paintings and graphic arts; 2) the particular painting Starry Night by van Gogh was already studied by the students during the introduction material given in the previous meetings; 3) the video was considered famous, detailed, and accurate enough, to fulfill the purposes of the course at the time. The video is around 15 min long, with the content mainly discussing the artwork Starry Night by van Gogh, describing its artistic value and relating it to van Gogh as a person and an artist, and with other van Gogh’s paintings as well. The students were given a short instruction to summarize and respond to the video by giving relevant comments, including interesting aspects of the video and new knowledge that they acquire from the video, in the form of a written short essay of around 500–750 words.

The data, in the form of students’ responses in the form of essays, were analyzed based on Miles et al.’s [9] interactive model of data analysis that starts off with data collection, followed by data condensation and data display before conclusion-drawing was reached. Afterward, the collected data were coded by two coders after creating a provisional coding scheme [10, p. 58] which was revised into a more comprehensive, specific, and interpretative. The initial set of codes was based on the principles of material developments by Tomlinson [11] and arts and language appreciation by Sporre [7]. The data gathered were then compressed into codes, put into themes, and finally categorized. It is also important to organize the frequency of codes to gain some insight into the most important themes being discussed by the students and to capture their feeling and attitude toward the YouTube material and their possible analyses and criticisms. The codes produced by both codes were then verified and triangulated, and it was found that although some codes were slightly different in labels, they were inherently in the same vein, and this was where the consensus was reached.

3 Findings and Discussion

The research was intended to gain some insight into students’ perception of the YouTube video as a supplementary source of learning in the arts and language appreciation. The results are organized based on students’ perception of the YouTube video as a learning source, especially in relation to English language teaching, and secondly as a learning source of the Arts and Language analysis and appreciation.

3.1 Learning New Knowledge

Students viewed the material as an important source of information. The knowledge can be related to the style of van Gogh’s paintings, their details, the source of his influence, and even life story. Most of the codes derived from the analysis indicated that they learned new knowledge. They reported:

*From all of the things that has been explained in the video. I do learn a lot of things. First, I learned how to create emotions not just a copy.* (APZ8)

*To be honest, I don’t familiar with Vincent van Gogh, I don’t know him and about his painting. After watching this video I can know more about him. He was really an amazing artist.* (DER6)
From the explanation I realize that every detail of painting has its own meaning. From the explanation, I just know if van Gogh influenced by Japanese style too. I don’t really know about art and I just look if my perspective tells it is good and I say good. Evidently every painting has meaning and has its own plot twist. (AA8 - 8).

After I watch the video, I know more about Vincent while in the mental asylum. But before I watched the video I didn’t know about Vincent’s mental health. And, after watching the video, I felt a little bit surprised and didn’t expect that. (AFP, 10–13).

New information or knowledge is one of the important requirements in a good learning resource. This is evident, especially in the development of thematic units of ESL materials [12]. This information is also important since activating content knowledge is beneficial for learners’ understanding and retention of text information. Strong background knowledge can also address language problems [11].

In gaining the new knowledge, the video’s way of telling the artistic value and meaning of the van Gogh’s paintings is also important, firstly in that the video relates the artistic process with van Gogh’s life, and secondly, in that the video explains in an easy to understand way.

In relating the artistic evaluation of van Gogh’s painting to van Gogh’s life events, the video makes the knowledge more relatable to the students. This also makes the explanation easier to follow and understand. One student wrote:

This video tells how big the role of art in human life. The artist vincent van gogh has proved it. From this video I understand that art really plays a big role in a person’s life. (WCW, 24)

Here the student relates her understanding of art knowledge with the artist’s life. Another student wrote:

Like Japanese paintings that have a low level of shadow, van Gogh’s work looks different from paintings at that time. In terms of extrinsic, the video maker explained that van Gogh’s artwork was based on Nature, which he saw at the time. In starry night paintings it is also seen that he describes what he saw while in asylum. (APZ, 2, my emphasis)

Here the student can relate the extrinsic elements of aesthetic evaluation of the painting, which is van Gogh’s life at the time of the painting, in making her own understanding of the style and the subject matter of the painting. In general, all students commented on van Gogh’s life, and all but two students relate van Gogh’s life story to the analysis of the paintings. It seems that the video is able to make a good blend between van Gogh’s life story and criticism or analysis of his paintings. The video can weave together events in a chronological story of an artist’s life events, so that the students can effectively relate and learn complex skills of art analysis and criticism. All students mention and discuss the artist’s interesting life story and are then able to connect the story to the knowledge of the Arts, and to the analysis and criticism of the artwork’s value.
Another of the video’s strength is its clear and easy to understand explanation. The most prominent is in the video’s explanation on the particular painting style and technique that van Gogh applies to his paintings. Usually, in Art and Language Appreciation course, the explanation of artistic techniques is generally considered difficult, and as such, this topic is given only as introductory material. This is because the students are not Art students, and they are not expected to produce artworks or to give an analysis focusing on the artistic techniques necessary in the production of artworks. Therefore, the discussion of artistic techniques is intentionally limited and made easy for the students of this course. However, this video can successfully teach students about the particular technique that van Gogh used: a brush technique called Impasto (Fig. 1).

Here, the video narrator is explaining the technique at a slow, careful pace, with common words and not technical jargon. Also, perhaps most importantly, the video zooms in on the painting and clearly show the visual effect and characteristics of the Impasto technique without using too many words. The whole sequence of the video describing the technique is about 20 s, from 09:43 to 10:05, yet the video’s description is effective, and most students can understand what the Impasto technique is. An example is a student who was having problems with her writing, but she can successfully demonstrate a complex understanding of the technique from the video:

*I also like the technique that is use to paint the sky in “The Starry Night” is painted with Vincent’s signature short brush strokes of thick IMPASTO. I also feel the same with the speaker of this video, that We can see how he applies the impasto technique, painting so thickly, sometimes straight from the tube, spreading paint like butter with a palette knife. It is these paint heavy, stabbing brush strokes, that distinguishes Vincent from the other post-impressionists. (IK, 2)*

Another student wrote:

*Maybe the Starry Night is an amalgamation of night-time and dawn views from his window. The sky is painted with Vincent’s signature short brush strokes of thick IMPASTO. Painting so thickly, sometimes straight from the tube, spreading paint like butter with a palette knife. (AA, 2)*
Here we can see that these students may have copied straight from the video, but the video’s description was clear and memorable enough that the students took note of this explanation in their short 500-word essay. It can be said, therefore, that the video is successful in delivering a relatively complex topic to students who have minimal or no knowledge of painting techniques.

3.2 Interest in Video Content

The content of the video seems to be relevant to the context of the teaching and learning of Arts and Language appreciation. Students expressed their interest in the video since it is closely related to the artwork although the topic is in the visual arts area. Some of the codes show students were interested in the Gogh paintings, the narration of the video, the presentation of the video, and the life value of Vincent van Gogh.

*From the video, I like and interested in the results of Vincent van Gogh’s paintings. Starting from Self-Portrait with Gray Felt Hat (EAA, Pos. 9)*

*This video is great and splendid. (ARG5 - 5)*

*I really like the part where the speaker say “He created these images despite his illness, not because of it”. (MS7 - 7)*

Interesting and engaging materials are very important in a teaching and learning program. The use of video materials has made teaching and learning activities more interesting and meaningful [13]. This also reinforced the effectiveness of learning; therefore, it is important to incorporate students’ opinions and choices, which are relevant and interesting to the students [14].

3.3 Life Values

Students took some lessons from the life of Vincent van Gogh as narrated in the video. They connected the values with their life experiences, such as their current study, childhood, and even future life directions. This indicates that the contents of the material are closely related to the students’ life.

*I myself have something that I can not live without. While Vincent survived his life because of art, I am alive for books and words. (LA8 - 8)*

*whenever I feel something isn’t right about me, I can call right away to get some help. The other thing is, I don’t need to expect anything big. Because, becoming to what I wanted needs a whole process and can’t be done Instantly. (APZ8 - 8)*

*I think what we can take from this is that despite having a disease, it should not stop us to be prolific and that having supportive companions is important for one’s mental health. (MS7 - 7)*

*I used to think that becoming a professional self-taught artist was nearly impossible, especially at that time, but van Gogh proved that I am wrong. (ZDK. 8)*
Although this material is not intended as a teaching-learning material, the results of the research indicate it was still relevant to the context of teaching. The use of such authentic materials can motivate students to explore the topic further and facilitate autonomous learning. The term “authentic” itself refers to language that is utilized in real situations and is not meant for academic purposes [15, p. 177]. According to Tomlinson [16], the term “genuine materials” or “authentic texts” refers to any “written or spoken texts” that are not often used in language instruction. In other words, the term “authentic materials” refers to spoken or written language that has been produced during genuine communication and has not been created intentionally for language training [17].

### 3.4 Curiosity

The video contents have also sparked some curiosity and stimulated them to explore the theme. It was mostly related to the curiosity about Vincent van Gogh’s journey as an artist and his philosophy of life.

> Overall I really admire him and I wanna know much more about him (ARG. 6)

> This is such an important message for me. The next is, I need to go far and beyond to learn more things. (APZ. 8)

Curiosity was not mentioned as an objective of the course, but it is possible that it was one of the positive impacts of the video. According to Tomlinson [11] impact can be achieved when learners experience a number of noticeable effects, especially the existence of curiosity, interest, and attention.

Students’ curiosity has also been proven to be one of the important components of successful learning. According to self-determination theory if students are provided opportunity to take action based on his curiosity, enjoyment and desire, students will be very likely to succeed [18].

### 3.5 Art and Literature

The knowledge of art and literature is perhaps one of the most important indicators of the success of the YouTube video as learning material. In general, the YouTube video *Vincent van Gogh’s The Starry Night: Great Art Explained* was used as part of an assignment to teach students the knowledge on how to analyze, criticize and evaluate (*mengapresiasi*) the value of art, specifically paintings and pictorial arts. As the basis of this knowledge, the students are assigned to read chapter 2: Pictures in the textbook *Perceiving the Arts: An Introduction to Humanities*, 11th Edition, by Sporre [7]. One of the objectives of the assignment related to the YouTube video was for students to see a practice in art criticism and evaluation as described in Sporre’s book [7], done in a YouTube video.

The assigned Chapter 2 of Sporre’s textbook [7] does specify several critical analysis points or aspects that can be used by students to apply a successful criticism and evaluation (i.e., art analysis) of a pictorial artwork. Overall, these aspects are: Subject Matter, Composition, Color, Focal Areas, Balance Deep Space and Perspective. The YouTube video addresses the aspects of Subject Matter, Composition, Color, Medium, Focal Areas, but it only touches on Balance Deep Space and Perspective. It is the authors’
understanding that the aspect of Balance Deep Space and Perspective is underemphasized, may be because of two possible reasons. The first reason is that this video is not created as college-level course material; hence it does not need to address the more complex aspect of Balance Deep Space and Perspective. The second is that van Gogh’s paintings generally treat the aspect of Balance Deep Space and Perspective in a simplistic way, as is described in the description of van Gogh’s style in the video, in the ‘flat’ manner similar to Hokusai’s Japanese painting. Therefore, there is less urgency to go very detailed on an aspect that van Gogh’s paintings themselves treat in a relatively simplistic manner.

Since the students were expected to understand and use these critical analysis aspects: Subject Matter, Composition, Color, Focal Areas, Balance Deep Space and Perspective, this study uses the students’ understanding of these aspects presented in the YouTube video to understand how much knowledge of the graphic art (paintings) that the students gained from the video.

Overall, all of the students can identify, understand, and retell the aspects of the Subject Matter and Color of van Gogh’s paintings described in the YouTube video. The aspect of the Subject Matter, which is about what the painting is generally about, may be considered as relatively easy to understand by students. However, the concept of Color, which is about what kind of color dominates a painting and what kind of effect the color choices create, can be considered to require more complex understanding. Here is an example of the student’s retelling of these aspects:

Vincent was influenced by Japanese prints: blocks of pure color, dark outlines, no shadow, unusual cropping and distorted perspective. He admired Hokusai’s The Great Wave, and it is possible to draw parallels not just between the composition and the stormy skies of Starry Night, but also between the rich blue tones of Hokusai’s violent waters and those of Starry Night. (SA. 1)

Next, most students, 22 out of 25 students, can understand, identify, and retell the aspects of Composition (how the elements in the painting are composed), Medium (the technical process of creating a painting), and Focal Area (the main focus of the painting) of van Gogh’s paintings as discussed in the YouTube video. The concepts of Composition, Medium, and Focal Area are perhaps the more complex aspects of the art critical analysis, yet it is interesting that most students, who are not Art majors and have a relatively low understanding of Art analysis, can easily understand and retell the Composition and Focal Area analysis of van Gogh’s paintings. An example of a student’s writing below reflects this:

The appreciator from the video making a judgement for Starry Night said Vincent brings the tree much closer than the picture plane. It reminds us of the tight cropping we see in Japanese prints. He also said The Cypress tree was a newly discovered motif for Vincent and seen as a symbol of death in Mediterranean culture. The tree from Starry Night shoots up into the sky, linking heaven and earth. (DAD, 2)

Another student wrote:
Before this video I just knew his art “The Starry Night”, but now I know more about Vincent from this video... This painting of “The starry night” uses the impasto technique in its manufacture which uses very thick paint, sometimes applied from the tube directly to the surface of the canvas, smeared in the direction we want using a palette knife. The creator of the video took a good step in editing his video when explaining this section. (SNZ, 1 and 2)

Finally, as perhaps expected, there is little understanding of the aspect of Balance Deep Space and Perspective on the part of the students. The video only touches on this aspect by generally discussing how van Gogh took inspiration from a Japanese painter, Hokusai, and applied a distorted perspective and sense of space. All students did write about van Gogh’s similarity to Hokusai in their writings, but they do not explicitly relate this to the aspect of Balance Deep Space and Perspective.

Regarding the students’ analysis themselves, although the students can identify, understand and retell the art critical analysis provided in the video, the students did not add or expand on the analysis. All students understand and recognize only what the video discusses by retelling the descriptions given in the video, and they mostly did not add, expand, or question what was given in the video. It can be concluded that the students’ critical art analysis through this assignment can be considered to be rather minimal since they are only retelling the analysis from the video. However, this is acceptable and expected for the needs of the assignment and the course at that moment. This is because, firstly, this video-related assignment was meant as introductory material to the critical art analysis. Secondly, in the assignment, the students were asked only to summarize and comment, and not to explore deeper, to analyze, or to question the material. The need at the time was to provide introductory material to students who are expected to have no knowledge of critical art analysis. The course itself is also an Introduction to Art and Literary Appreciation. Hence, when the assignment was given, the students were not expected to produce their own analyses; indeed, they were never expected to produce a deep analysis during the course. This is not to say that the students’ writings do not show a deep understanding of the video material, however. There are students who related the video material with the deeper philosophical understandings relating to their real-life or practices, although these understanding are not related to the critical art analysis, such as:

I love Vincent’s words he wrote to Theodore at the end of the video: I dream of painting and then I paint my dream. It reminds me of how everyone has their own way of living this world. I myself have something that I cannot live without. While Vincent survived his life because of art, I am alive for books and words. (LA, 2)

In this case, the student relates the material on the video to her love of literature. While this literary comment is still related to the Language and Art Course in general, and it can be seen as a deeper understanding of the video material, this is not directly related to the material at hand about critical art understanding.
4 Conclusion

This study intends to analyze this video’s characteristics that make it a good learning material for the teaching of Art and Language Criticism. While there is always the possibility that the results of this study may not conclusively provide enough evidence to satisfy the objective, the findings of this study can sufficiently suggest that students recognize the values of using the YouTube video entitled Vincent van Gogh’s The Starry Night: Great Art Explained as they learned new knowledge and life values, and the video triggered their curiosity and was interesting to them. Overall, the students’ understanding of the video explanations is averagely high. At important highlights of the video, such as the explanation of van Gogh’s style related to his life and van Gogh’s techniques, the narration was slow, with appropriate visuals that make the content easy enough to understand. It is true that meaningful pictures and van Gogh’s life stories generally make complex explanations about the analysis of the paintings to be more relatable and understandable to the students.

These perceived values could be used to support the implementation of using authentic materials on online video services to enrich students’ learning experience, specifically in the arts and language appreciation classrooms.

References


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