

The Effects of Using Islamic Visual Arts as Children's Teaching Materials In Kindergarten

Hazhari Ismail¹, Iylia Mohamad², Norhafizi Mohd Arof³, Mohamad Albaree Abdul⁴

Department of Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Human Development, Sultan Idris Education University¹²³⁴

hazhari@fpm.upsi.edu.my¹(corresponding author), iylia@fpm.upsi.edu.my², norhafizi.arof@fpm.upsi.edu.my³, albaree@fpm.upsi.edu.my⁴

Abstract

Involvements in Islamic visual arts activities are considered valuable because they are able to foster creativity and provide opportunities to children to explore, express ideas, and improve their developmental skills. In this study, a qualitative method was used to demonstrate the influence of Islamic visual arts education on the social development of children. Data was collected through the involvement of teachers who participated in group-focused discussions and semi-structure interviews to gain their experiences in the early childhood education environment. The data was analysed in-depth and used several existing studies and contemporary studies to look at the importance of Islamic visual arts education on the development of children's social skills. New themes were acknowledged including social competence traits such as groups, communications, support, and conflict resolution that can provide a further overview of the effectiveness of implementation using the Islamic visual arts in lessons for pre-school children.

Keywords: Early childhood education; Islamic visual arts education; social development

How to cite (in APA style):

Ismail, H., Mohamad, I., Aroh, N.M., & Abdul, M.A. (2020). The Effects of Using Islamic Visual Arts as Children's Teaching Materials in Kindergarten. *CAPEU Journal of Education*, 1(2), 44-48.

Introduction

Arts are often seen as an additional education rather than children's right to obtain an arts education. Therefore, this study provided an opportunity to consider whether basic education neglected the teaching and learning of arts as well as its importance to children (Matthews, 2003; Graves, Quptah & Simmons, 2019). Moreover, Steiner believed that learning purposes are to accept changes to children's needs regardless of physical aspects, even cognitive and emotional needs (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). Arts activities can provide opportunities for children to explore the senses through visual, touch or kinaesthetic and even rhythms can also help reduce stress and meet the emotional needs of children. According to Misailidi and Bonoti (2008), Zoghi, Mohd Nor and Abdul Hamid (2018) stated that pre-school children aged 3 to 6 years old can understand a meaning through a painting. Therefore, this study showed that

children at early age are able to understand the feelings expressed through artworks, while adults should be able to understand the feelings of children being expressed through artworks.

Islamic visual arts as teaching aids in classrooms

Hopperstad (2008) discovered that there was a link between children's drawings and peer interactions through video recordings that acted as a 'quiet observation'. During the drawing activities, the conversation topics among the children were based on academic, thus indicating that arts activities can support the development of early literacy skills. In addition, Hopperstad (2010) also stated that there were practitioners who supported visual literacy among children. His study revealed a relationship between children's drawings and peer interactions. The drawing activities were conducted by teachers with children aged 5 to 6 years in two (2) Norwegian primary schools. The research

findings revealed that there were four (4) categories of interactions observed; drawings can enhance children's interactions with peers that supported problem solving; drawings as a literacy medium including pictures and other graphic forms; and children were able to understand visual shapes and structures (Arizpe and Styles, 2003; Theodotou, 2017). Thus, literacy in schools does not only include verbal language but also visual images that can be used as texts (Anning and Ring, 2004; Kist, 2000; Kress, 2003; Yazici, 2017). Therefore, visual arts do not only help improve children's social skills but are able to help the development of communication skills.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach in data collection to explore the contributions in classrooms. Based on this study, various extra efforts were also conducted to gain a clearer understanding of the process. The beginning of this study focused on group discussions through qualitative and semi-structured interviews among teachers, strategies gained through a qualitative analysis were extended to explore problems and potential emerging themes.

Sample

This study was conducted in an urban preschool in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. There are two (2) educators volunteering themselves as respondents for the interview session conducted. In addition, the respondents have two (2) years of experience in the field. Since this study required the views of educators who had direct experience, selected respondents were categorized as potential respondents. The group discussions for this study focused on six (6) educators who have different backgrounds and involved directly with children. The selection of respondents was aimed at getting an initial idea on the study. In addition, selected groups of respondents knew each other and were interested in elements of the arts to influence the early childhood education system.

Findings

The analysis of this study was intended to explore how the effects of Islamic visual arts education in preschool on children, particularly in the aspects of social skills development. A list of proposed effects was obtained through an interview session (IS.1 2) with two (2) teachers and focused-group discussions with six teachers (FG.1 6) in the proposed preschool. The analysis indicated that there were certain themes identified from social skills attributes, particularly (a) groups, (b) communication, (c) support, and (d) solving conflicts.

a. Group

In both discussion sessions and focused-group interviews conducted, the teachers stated that there was a high chance of Islamic visual arts activities encouraged children to cooperate in groups. As a result of the observations conducted on two teachers discovered that arts learning sessions could help foster teamwork and share experiences among children, thus, supported the views of the study.

"Rather than self-isolating all the time, children have the opportunity to work in a group, where they can draw together and have the opportunity to communicate with each other. They need to discuss opinions and share ideas." (FG.2)

"They carry out many group activities. Working in partners" (FG.1).

A teacher instructed the children to work in groups to complete task with the time specified. Since Islamic visual arts involved recurring patterns, this made it easier for children to discuss further. The findings also lead to a consideration that group activities were able to form cooperation among them.

".. when we put children in a group and carry out Islamic art projects for each group such as large collages, colouring patterns and similar forms, they work together, build cooperation and working as a group to complete tasks on time." (FG.3)

However, there was a teacher who shared the experiences of conducting observations on a child who had difficulty completing tasks individually. The teacher formed a group to help the child to complete the assigned task by getting help from other friends.

The findings are in line with the researcher's view that working in a group provides an advantage in the teaching and learning process.

"A girl in my class is very difficult to listen to instructions from others. The child asked me to make a group and helped him. When they are in a group, they are able to carry out their tasks well, guide the child, understand each other and help each other." (IS.1)

b. Communication

The data collected indicated almost all opinions related to arts agreed that arts contributed to the development of communication skills in various teaching and learning activities of Islamic

arts conducted. Furthermore, communication skills are very relevant to the desire and needs of the children.

"I see arts as an opportunity for individuals to communicate with the environment. Obviously the environment is something complex for children. Like their ability to accept, the question, engagement and naturally connected." (FG.4)

"I felt it was something very important for children because it was difficult for them to express their opinions and feelings in mathematics and science. Therefore, through these geometric patterns they will help children understand the concept of numbers." (FG.1).

Other findings discovered that one of the teachers emphasized Islamic visual arts education was vital to improve children's communication skills especially for those who did not use English as the main language at home. This is evident from the opinions shared by the respondents.

"I think it's very important for children who don't use English as the main language where they use other languages when they are at home, especially when they are engaged in arts activities such as dancing, drawing and so on, they have their own ways of building confidence that is also commitment, then they can be part of group work, build confidence and become mature." (FG.5).

Thus, in order to improve communication skills, children's self-confidence should also be improved, as discussed by the researcher. Moreover, a positive classroom atmosphere can contribute to communication skills. The findings are in line with the results of interviews stated that arts helped to develop communication skills, both respondents presented evidence and shared their experiences in managing children to evaluate how Islamic visual arts helps children's development from time to time.

"Of course, this is an alternative to communicate with others and give you more confidence to speak freely. They talk about experiences such as making visits to mosques and explain more. They can communicate with friends, give opinions, and even protest against the views of others. In my opinion, that's how Islamic arts help in the aspect of communication." (IS.1).

"At the beginning of schooling, I found children had no equal self-confidence in themselves. One of my former pupils was often stuttering, it showed very difficult for him to mention something. But now, I find very significant changes through activities prepared such as arabesque drawing, colouring, and group activities. I guess it's a good improvement." (IS.2)

c. Support

An ability to be 'someone' and try to 'feel some deeply' is one of the effects of Islamic visual arts activities that can be practiced. It is one of the ways to support others. Two respondents explained how these Islamic visual arts activities can help them to understand and to appreciate views of others.

"During Islamic arts activities, they try to learn how to appreciate others, listen and work with them... together. They have learned to listen to others instead of playing... or focusing on stories told from others." (FG.3)

"Gives you the opportunity to show empathy, put yourself in the feelings of others. That way, you can understand and experience what other people feel by the way they express themselves, the words they use and certainly how they feel when completing a given activity." (IS.2)

A teacher talked about understanding others in a group or not, in other words widely. As a result, this led to actions such as inquiries to provide opinions or assistance.

"I like to see my son in the group because he can get a lot of different views and sometimes it is better than making it alone ... because maybe he does not know or understand about something or may forget .. so he can always ask friends or group members who have information about Islamic arts." (FG.2)

d. Conflict Resolution

In this regard, a teacher talked about the ability of arts activities to improve and help the development of children's skills in groups collaboratively. Working with each group members who have different views provided positive experiences and impacts. As such, these children learned how to accept and convey their views to others as well as knew how to deal with debate situations in the event of a conflict between them.

"... There was a case of conflict where they faced a debate with their friends about colours in Islamic drawing, and a boy shouted from his arts place and another friend said "you should use another colour" and they started arguing about it. It is an interesting thing because they can think about it... and the debate that takes place is on their knowledge .. "(IS.1)

Furthermore, teachers can explain to children can learn how to work with people they do not like when doing Islamic art drawing activities.

"The most interesting part is when arts provide opportunities to work with different people. I remember my son telling me during his class activities about "he does not like his friends" because they have different perspectives on Islamic calligraphy drawing, but he should continue his work until it is finished. I mean, arts teach them to persevere and also respect others even if that person we do not like... "(FG.6)

Therefore, considering all the above findings, the four main keys that appear consistently through the findings are:

- Extensive data collection indicated that Islamic visual arts education in schools environment can improve children's social skills and various other elements of social skills can also be detected even in a small number of children
- Findings from one school provided a strong level on the effectiveness of arts education, suggesting that it is possible to be held in the current curriculum, with little improvement, to offer high quality arts education at the beginning of children's education.
- In general, all types of arts activities show a positive effect on children's development even in other forms of art such as Islamic visual drawings and sketches.

Discussion and implications

Islamic visual arts, in general, appeared to enhance children's social skills as suggested by Hall (2009), Ismail et. al (2019) that drawings and arts should be considered as important elements in communication skills in the curriculum. Differences in Islamic visual arts activities such as drawing can be proven as a result of research findings that showed there were features and elements in children's social skills.

Drawing can also enhance cooperation and communication in children; giving a sense of

belonging in group activities, leadership, ability to follow, and a sense of awareness of others. Through observations during drawing activities, children gained support from each other by encouraging and inspiring the group. They took their turns to draw and follow instructions. Drawing activities show an increased awareness of valuing others as they can help children respect their personal and social spaces, and both are important for effective social interaction. This view is supported by Lobo and Winsler (2006; Yazici, Yaman & Pinarçik, 2016) which stated that drawing improves children's social and behavioural competencies. Other studies also showed that children who participated in drawing programs show a significant improvement in their social skills and their behavioural problems decreased throughout the program compared to those who were not involved. This study evidently revealed that Islamic visual drawings provided benefits and improved children's skills and social behaviour. Thus, arts activities had significant impacts on children's social competencies and behaviours, emerged as an important element in children's readiness to go to school.

The feedback from the interviews showed that teachers should build a positive relationship between teachers and children by having good communication during Islamic visual arts activities. These skills are important because arts are considered a practical subject, which gives children a valuable opportunity to be creative. For an example, the findings explain how the teachers at the beginning of the activity can show correctly and explain clearly to the children how the tasks given were related to Islamic values. Giving confidence to children at the beginning of the activity is so valuable that they can complete a given arts assignment. In addition, children need interaction with adults who like to spend time with them (Ismail et al. 2019) while asking valuable open-ended questions. In addition, by playing the role of an adult, teachers can provide opinions and guidance but they must let the children make their own final decisions. Samuelsson et al. (2009) in his study stated that communication and interaction between children and adults through the use of tools can lead and instruct children. They discovered that by engaging children in this way, it made children more confident to participate in the activity.

The results showed that participating in Islamic visual arts drawing and drawing activities-built relationships among children through sharing of views and the possibility of developing communication and cooperation skills among them. In terms of arts, Ozyurek, Begde and Yavuz (2014) argued that the combination of painting, drawing, and storytelling among children was a spontaneous way of their expressions to overcome limited

drawing opportunities orally. Therefore, all forms of arts should be considered as important elements in communication skills in the curriculum to improve children's social skills as suggested by Hall (2009).

Policy implications

Clearly, teachers believe that Islamic visual arts are important in education but rarely use them because teachers have no professional development and are responsible for teaching the core curriculum. Early childhood education faces quite critical difficulties when they lack understanding of the basics of learning arts. Therefore, schools or the government should provide programs for early childhood education teachers in the preparation of materials for Islamic visual arts activities as one of the elements of learning. Another important benefit of this program is adult responses to art activities, namely how teachers support self-expression and learning, especially for arts teachers and not general subject teachers. Therefore, for regular teacher training courses, they should get more arts trainings that emphasize the importance of teaching Islamic visual arts in children's development.

Conclusion

Providing different help and supports to each child individually or in groups is a valuable teaching strategy to facilitate the learning of Islamic visual arts among children, especially if it can be achieved without letting them feel neglected. Future arts trainings among teachers should be welcomed, especially in forms of workshops or courses that provide skills acquisition and teaching and learning sessions that require direct participation. This situation presents a challenge for policy makers, teaching institutions, and schools to improve the field of arts education. The main issue in this study is that learning arts in the early stages of childhood has been neglected. The focus is more on other areas of learning and not on Islamic visual arts education and experiences. As a result, when the findings were analysed, Islamic visual arts emerged as an important field for the earliest year in education and teachers could not ignore it. Teachers should be trained and should recognize that arts education is important. Overall, this study successfully discovered examples of effective art-based learning in the early years.

References

- Colette Gray and MacBlain (2015), *Learning Theories in Early Childhood*, 2nd edition, SAGE, London.
- Graves, J. A., Quotah, E., & Simmons, A. (2019). Islamic calligraphy: Writing toward the light. *Art Education*, 72(2), 14-19
- Hall, E. (2009) *Mixed messages: the role and value of drawing in early education*, International Journal of Early Years Education, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 179-190.
- Hopperstad, M.H. (2008) *Relationships between children's drawing and accompanying peer interaction in teacher-initiated drawing sessions*. International Journal of Early Years Education, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 133-150.
- Hopperstad, M.H. (2010) *Studying in Children's drawing*, Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 430-452.
- Ismail, H., Abdul, M. A., & Mohamad, I. (2019). The effect of Islamic visual art education on social development of preschool children. *Jurnal Pendidikan Awal Kanak-Kanak Kebangsaan*, 8, 1-7.
- Ozyurek, A., Begde, Z., & Yavuz, N. F. (2014). The relation between the social skills of preschool education children and the adult interactions around. *Social Sciences Journal*, 16(2), 115-134.
- Yazici, E. (2017). The impact of art education program on the social skills of preschool children. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 5(5), 17-26.
- Yazici, E., Yaman, B. I., & Pinarçik, O. (2016). A study into the views of preschool teachers over art. *E-Journal of International Education Researches*, 7(3), 74-88. doi: 10.19160/e-ijer.80596
- Samuelsson, I.P., Carlsson, M.A., Olsson, B., Pramling, N. and Wallerstedt, C. (2009) *The art of teaching children in the arts: music, dance and poetry with children aged 2-8 years old*, International Journal of Early Years Education, Vol.17, no. 2, pp.119-135.
- Theodotou E. (2017). Supporting personal and social development through child-led art projects in the early years settings. *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(11), 1889- 1900.
- Zoghi, N., Mohd Nor, M., & Abdul Hamid, F. (2018). Islamic patterns in Persian's Herat School of Painting: A study on Baysonghori Shahnameh. *Islamic Studies*, 5 (3), 65-74.