

Arts participation

Background

The summary below presents the research evidence on arts participation in the Arab World context.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit focuses on impact on outcomes for learners; it presents an estimate of the average impact of arts participation on learning progress, based on the synthesis of a large number of quantitative studies from around the world.

This page offers a summary and analysis of individual studies on arts participation in the Arab world. In contrast to the Toolkit it includes studies which do not estimate impact, but instead investigate the implementation of interventions and how they are perceived by school leaders, teachers and students using a range of research methods. This information is valuable for school leaders and teachers interested in finding out more about particular examples of arts participation interventions that have been delivered in the Arab world.

Summary of the research in the Arab World

Global evidence of the impact of arts participation intervention on students outcomes appears to be positive but low, particularly in English, Math, and Science. Wider benefits such as more positive attitudes to learning and increased well-being have also consistently been reported. In the Arab world, arts participation is mostly provided to students as extracurricular activities and its impact on their outcomes was rarely investigated. In Jordan, the importance of extracurricular activities, specifically music performances of a high school music group were examined to determine its impact on the education of adolescent girls about patriotism, the proper way to live their faith, and their role as young women (Adely, 2007). In this ethnographic study, data collected through interviews and observations showed that the participation of adolescent girls in music performances at national events created opportunities for young women to deliberate about these critical issues. These music performances seemed to educate female students about forms of citizenship and their role in the nation's development. Although these music performances were limited to national events, participants struggled to be committed to these lessons because they were extra-curricular activities and students involved felt the need to concentrate on their studies. Additionally, these young females struggled with the way they dressed for these events, which were not segregated by gender, and specifically with appropriate forms of covering (hair and body) during public performances.

On another note, arts participation drew researchers' interest particularly to the impact that it has towards children physical and emotional wellbeing. In a systematic review Moulā, Aithal, Karkou, and Powell (2020) looked at child-focused outcomes and assessments of arts therapies (art, music, drama or dance movement therapy) delivered in primary mainstream schools to prevent children's difficulties and facilitate personal change and growth. Parents and teachers of 60 primary male children with mild learning difficulties in Saudi Arabia reported a significant improvement on children's

physical and emotional well-being after they participated in movement therapy for three months. A total of 24 sessions were designed to allow students explore the body's action in space, build trust, develop relationships, and engage in group rhythm. Similar to their peers in USA, UK, Canada, and South Korea, children in Saudi Arabia showed significant improvements from attending arts therapies on their self-esteem, self-confidence, self-expression, mood, communication, understanding, and coordination and social skills.

Arts participation, particularly music and drama, was examined in several contexts in the Arab world in order to show evidence of their impact on students' cognitive and physical development. Music, for instance, can become an important part of any educational setting. It provides a positive atmosphere which helps children to experience reduced stress and enhanced development. In Jordan, Mattar (2013) investigated the effect of "The Mozart Effect: Music for Children" collection on the social, cognitive, and physical development of five and six-year-olds. Twenty-one of them were in an experimental group exposed to music, composed by Mozart, accompanying their daily school program for eight months. The control group, following an identical curriculum, did not experience any accompanying music. Results revealed that young children who listened to music regularly demonstrated better social, cognitive, and physical development than those who did not. Music in the classroom promoted a positive environment and created a pleasant classroom ambience. It helped students relax and focus their attention and concentration skills. Music accelerated the quality of information learned and retained which enhanced children development. It also increased their ability to listen to others and communicate more effectively leading to an enhanced in social interaction.

Additionally, using songs showed a promising evidence in improving literacy in a dual-language kindergarten in the United Arab Emirates (Dillon, Aguleh, & Al Seyabi, 2019). During a 4-week period, music was integrated

across the curriculum where children were listening to a story through music to help them develop strong literacy skills and understand sequences. Qualitative data collected showed that listening to songs in both English and Arabic and the repetitive and rhyming nature of songs helped children distinguish between different sounds and phonemes. Consequently, children were speaking in full sentences and with eagerness and confidence. Furthermore, children were speaking more in Modern Standard Arabic rather than Emirati Arabic, which is one aim of this dual-language program. Findings of this study showed promising evidence to the effect of music integration both in whole-group activities and in learning centers and recommended future researchers to explore further which types of music activities other than song singing could contribute to children's literacy development in similar Dual language and ESL settings.

In Saudi Arabia, the impact of using songs and music on English language acquisition of primary children was examined (AlAfar, 2016). Surveys collected from 20 teachers and 40 parents showed evidence that music and songs is an effective technique in teaching young children English. However, both participants believed that it is rarely used in English classroom and that it could be replaced with a better alternative. Findings of this study suggest that the curriculum was not rich enough with fun activities like songs and rhymes. Furthermore, music should be integrated in the curriculum with some changes in order to make it suitable for the Saudi culture and Islamic religion.

As for drama, the impact of dramatic play on promoting the development of children's early writing skills was examined among kindergarten children in Jordan (Ihmeideh, 2015). The results revealed a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in the writing behaviors of children in the experimental group ($n=25$) in comparison with their peers in the control group ($n=21$). Children's early writing behaviors improved following the employment of dramatic play activities and they produced different forms of writing. The production of letter-like forms was the most common form of

writing exhibited by children in the dramatic play center, followed by writing via drawing, and writing via reproducing well-learned units or letter strings. This result could be due to the fact that children have done real writing activities in which they were asked to write freely without being blamed for their own writing mistakes. In addition, the results demonstrated that children who have been exposed to dramatic play activities developed more positive attitudes toward the process of writing mainly because children began to see writing in a different way, and to write while playing; thus, children practiced writing as a means rather than as an end.

The impact of arts participation was also investigated on students learning in science and math. In Jordan, Abed (2016) investigated the effect of drama-based science teaching on grade 7 male students' (n=87) understanding of scientific concepts and their attitudes towards science learning. Findings showed that there were statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) in students' scores in science for the experimental group who learned science through drama. Drama activities have the power to improve understanding of scientific concepts for students in all achievement levels (high, average, low) in science because of the social and physical stimulations it offered to students. Through the role play and theatrical scenes, students tried to understand the science concept and used their bodies as actors, which helped them to understand others' points of view and students' feelings towards scientific issues. In these activities they used their bodies actively to construct, transform, and express for themselves what it meant to be a molecule in a solid matter, liquid, and gas. Hence, drama changed the traditional view of learning science and provided an authentic aesthetic experience to students. Drama activities created a space for collaborative learning, reduced students' anxiety towards their ability to learn science, and increased their motivation towards science learning. As a result, students shared ideas in fear-free environment in which peers can engage in discourse, debate ideas, and share thoughts without anxiety.

In the same context and through a quasi-experimental design, Al-Khateeb (2018) showed that using drama increased Jordanian kindergarten children's acquisition of mathematical and scientific concepts. After training the teacher, children in the experimental group were acting the drama text (i.e., geometrical shapes). Each student was given a role to play and then asked to perform it to the class. Then, the teacher and students discussed and debated the lesson. The study concluded that the experimental group (n=25) outperformed control group (n=25) on the scientific/mathematical concepts test but no significant statistical differences attributed to gender of the experimental group in the acquisition of such concepts. Drama has also increased students interaction and created an active learning environment in the classroom. Hence, findings of this study recommend integration of drama-based learning for kindergarten children and preparing both novice and in-service teachers for designing and implementing this approach in their classroom.

Arts participation was also examined to see its impact on secondary students' creative thinking and motivation in Palestine (Salha & Jabr, 2016). Seventy-four grade 6 students were divided into two groups of experimental (who studied a unit designed with interdisciplinary approach in the art education curriculum) and control group (who studied in the traditional way). Results of this study revealed development of students' creative thinking skills and enhancement in their motivation. This could be because arts stimulate both sides of the brain and developed the neuro system which lead to an increase in students' outcomes, motivation and creativity. In light of this, findings of this study recommend using interdisciplinary approach in teaching arts and crafts and to train teachers to design educational arts activities.

Despite the benefits of arts participation on students overall development, Jaradat (2015) identified several problems facing art education nowadays. Questionnaires collected from male and female Jordanian art teachers reported that the main obstacles for art education are curriculum

management, activities, teaching strategies, and educational methods. Educational methods (i.e., lack of interest in training courses for art education teachers, and lack of modern books and references in the school library) and lack of budget and necessary tools allocated for educational activities had the highest means. Furthermore, arts education teachers reported that they don't participate in developing the art curriculum and that the curriculum is not adequate with student environment. If arts education is to be taken seriously in Jordan, Jaradat (2015) recommends that teachers should participate in the development of the curriculum in order to transform the art curriculum into a more interdisciplinary one.

Summary paragraph:

Evidence of arts participation in the Arab world shows a promising impact on students' physical and emotional wellbeing as well as on their academic and social development. Studies in, Jordan, UAE, and Saudi Arabia reported that teachers using music or drama led to enhanced cognitive and physical development of students. In one particular study in Palestine, arts participation improved secondary students' creative thinking and motivation.

Arts participation is an approach that teachers use to provide a positive atmosphere inside the classroom and help in reducing children's stress. Drama-based teaching, in particular, increased students' interaction and created a collaborative learning environment leading to an increase of students' outcomes. However, researchers have highlighted some potential barriers for arts education in the Arab world. Examples include lack of teacher training on designing and implementing arts educational activities, limited budget allocated and lack of necessary resources, and rigidity of the conventional curriculum.

While there have been a number of experimental studies on arts participation in the region, there are still gaps that could be resolved, especially through additional longitudinal studies and including both genders to identify similarities and differences in the outcomes. Moreover, other studies are needed to explore the effectiveness of arts participation on students' understanding and cognitive development.

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Search Terms

Art participation; art education; art class; music; drawing; drama; creative arts; studio art; art material.

Databases searched

Academic search complete

ERIC (EBSCO)

Education Source

Google scholar

ProQuest Central

ProQuest Dissertations

Web of Science