



EduInspire -
2076

An International E-Journal

ISSN 2349-

An International Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal
Council for Teacher Education Foundation, (CTEF, Gujarat Chapter)

www.ctegujarat.org
ISSN 2349-7076

EduInspire

- An International Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal



VOL: XII

ISSUE: II

JUNE-2025

Council for Teacher Education Foundation,
(CTEF, Gujarat Chapter)

Fostering Student Engagement through Art Integrated Learning for Holistic Education

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Abstract

Students today have to face the pressure of academic performance while grappling with numerous subjects in the curriculum (Robinson, 2011; Wagner, 2008). A 'one size fits all' approach would not be able to fulfill the needs of learners who have different needs and preferences (Gardner, 2011; Tomlinson, 2017) Teachers in Indian schools have to cope with the needs of learners with differing abilities, interests and learning styles (NCERT, 2005; Sinha, 2019) along with the requirements of continuous evaluation and term-end assessment (Kumar, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2020). Art Integrated Learning (AIL) helps learners understand difficult, abstract concepts (Dewey, 1934; Goldberg, 2012) in the subjects taught in schools (Burnaford et al., 2007; Snyder, 2001) Art Integrated Learning fosters student engagement and makes the teaching learning environment interesting and joyful (Catterall et al., 2012; Ruppert, 2006). This paper explores the role of art integration in actively engaging school children in the learning process to impart holistic education for their emotional, social, academic and spiritual growth (Davis, 2008; Silverstein & Layne, 2010).

Key Words: *Art Integration, student engagement, holistic education, learning process*

Introduction

Education is defined as 'the process of acquisition of knowledge, skills and values and development of moral ideas, habits and personal development' (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970). Education enables knowledge to be transmitted to the coming generations and also support them for their future roles in society (Durkheim, 1956; Vygotsky, 1978). With the advancement of civilisation, societies started to become more complex. This led to the evolution of formal systems of education with specialised institutions called schools and specialists called teachers coming into existence to teach the young ones (Spring, 2018; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Education aims at the creation of cohesive, peaceful and prosperous societies for which children who are the future citizens have to be groomed to ensure peace, prosperity, social and economic development (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2018).

Learners today have to grapple with the challenges of expectations regarding academic performance, information overload, proliferation of digital and social media and many distractions that lead to limited student engagement in the learning process. The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) aims at holistic development of students right from the pre-primary

stage onwards, encompassing cognitive, emotional, physical and spiritual growth. But schools continue to favour pedagogies that lean towards rote learning and uniform instructional practices. (UNESCO, 2006; NCERT, 2021)

Holistic education refers to education that focuses not just on intellectual growth, but development of the mind, body and spiritual growth of learners (Forbes, 2003; Kessler, 2000). Holistic education aims at nurturing learners into well-rounded human beings who care for peace, sustainability and have concern for the welfare of the planet (Miller, 2007; Noddings, 2005).

Holistic education aims at the harmonious growth of intellectual, emotional, physical, social, humanist and spiritual aspects of the learners (Gidley, 2016; Hare, 2010). In India, the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) has the holistic vision of enabling students develop social and academic maturity, integrity and resilience, to emerge as lifelong learners who are also capable of harmonious social and environmental relationship (Government of India, 2020; NEP, 2020).

Art Integration in Education

The Cambridge dictionary defines integration as "the action or process of combining two or more things in an

effective way" (Cambridge University Press, 2023). Art integration means 'integration of arts with education' i.e. correlating and integrating arts with the teaching of different subjects in the curriculum such as languages, social studies, sciences and mathematics (Bresler, 1995; Jacobs, 1989).

Art integration is a cross-curricular pedagogical approach that utilises various aspects and forms of art and culture as the basis for learning of concepts across subjects (Brouillette, 2010; Marshall, 2014). Art pedagogy is used as a tool to make general subjects learner-friendly and create an environment of creative expression and joyful learning for students (Cornett, 2015; Snyder, 2001).

Art Integrated Learning (AIL)

Art Integrated Learning (AIL) helps in understanding difficult concepts (Eisner, 2002; Winner & Hetland, 2008). Abstract concepts can be made concrete using different art forms (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 2001). AIL helps learners increase their subject knowledge and understanding while acquiring an appreciation of arts (Catterall et al., 2012; Deasy, 2002). Art Integrated Learning encompasses learning about the arts, acquiring proficiency in different art forms such as drawing, craft, music, drama, while encouraging students

to give full rein to their imagination, critical thinking, as well as their physical and mental strength when they are involved in the creative process (Goldberg, 2012; Wright, 2003). This cultivates confidence in their abilities and builds self-esteem in students (Burton et al., 2000; Fiske, 1999). It enhances their motivation and productivity (Catterall, 2009; Ruppert, 2006).

Problem Statement

Students today have to contend with increasing number of subjects in the curriculum along with expectations regarding academic performance while facing innumerable distractions (Robinson, 2011; Wagner, 2008). Educators agree that a 'one size fits all' approach does not address the needs of learners with different needs and differing abilities, interests and learning styles (Tomlinson, 2017). Yet there is no consistent and practical approach to improve student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Kuh, 2009).

Teachers struggle to strike a balance between engaging the learners and meeting the requirements of the curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Eisner, 2002). Teachers in Indian schools strive to make learning interesting and fulfill the needs of learners who have different levels of achievement (NCERT, 2005; Sinha, 2019)

However, they are hampered by the demands created by continuous evaluation and term-end assessment (Kumar, 2018).

Significance of the Present Study

Art integrated education supports the growth of different aspects of intelligence (Gardner, 1993; Kornhaber et al., 2004) and enable learners to think creatively and innovatively and originally (Hetland et al., 2013; Winner et al., 2013). Art Integrated Learning stimulates cognitive development (Davis, 2008; Silverstein & Layne, 2010) and fosters necessary skills and abilities in learners (Burnaford et al., 2007).

Art integrated learning (AIL) is based on the constructivist philosophy of Piaget and Vygotsky. AIL encourages students to construct knowledge through multi-sensory experiences. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences supports learning through verbal, visual, musical, kinesthetic and interpersonal modes. AIL is in harmony with Bloom's Taxonomy, contributing to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) by enhancing self-awareness, emotional regulation and empathy.

Art Integrated Learning (AIL) is defined as "an inventive and constructivist learning pedagogy in which art becomes the medium of learning, a key to understanding concepts within any subject of the curriculum," according to the

National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 15). By facilitating art integrated learning approach that involves kinesthetic, musical and interpersonal intelligences as well as verbal and logical intelligences, educators can enable all types of learners to understand the subject matter, making learning easier for all (Gardner, 2011).

Global research affirms these benefits.

Bamford's "The Wow Factor" (2006, 2019) reported that high-quality arts education improves academic outcomes, cultural awareness, and student motivation across 60 countries. **Catterall (2023)** linked arts participation to enhanced self-efficacy and social cohesion.

Need for and Justification of the present Study

In spite of much research conducted on Art integration in education and Art Integrated Learning (AIL), empirical studies on AIL within Indian school systems remain limited, especially within the reformative framework of NEP 2020.

The present study aims to address the gap by examining how AIL contributes to holistic education in Indian CBSE schools, integrating global insights with local practices. This research takes the position that the creative processes involved in art integrated learning can make the learning

process joyful and nurture student engagement to enable holistic education.

Objectives:

- To examine how AIL supports learner engagement in modern Indian classrooms.
- To explore the contribution of AIL to holistic development of students.
- To investigate perspectives of educators regarding implementation of AIL - art integrated learning.

Research Questions:

1. How does art integration enhance student engagement in contemporary Indian classrooms?
2. In what ways does AIL contribute to holistic development of students?
3. What are the perspectives of educators regarding implementation of AIL?

Review of Related Literature

Art-Integrated Learning (AIL) refers to a pedagogical approach where art becomes both a medium and a method of instruction. It builds on the foundations of **constructivism**, emphasizing student-centered learning, where learners make meaning through interaction and exploration (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). The approach also resonates with

Gardner's (2020) assertion that education should cater to different intelligences, such as spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, and interpersonal. AIL further supports the development of **21st-century skills**, including creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication, as promoted by frameworks like the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21, 2019).

Lakhyani, S. (2024) revealed gaps in pre-service teacher education, showing misconceptions about the role of arts, thus justifying the need for research into implementation contexts and stakeholder readiness.

- Zehra, A., et al., (2024) examined how art-integrated learning would be of relevance in meeting the needs of 21st century learners and the challenges in implementation of AIL in India. The study gives insights into the evolution and impact of AIL on pedagogy in India.
- Lakhyani, S. (2024) revealed that art is considered a fringe subject despite being given a place in the school curriculum. There is a need to promote art in teacher training schools to pave the way for art integrated teaching and learning as envisioned in National Education Policy 2020. The research findings revealed the fears, misconceptions and disinterest of

teacher trainees regarding art, the prevalent discouraging school and home environment, lack of trained art teachers and art being included in the curriculum only in theory. The analysis was followed by an art workshop in which participants created artwork, found joy in creation and improved their understanding of art. The study concluded that art is essential to teacher education to facilitate learning.

- Anupama, C. S. (2024) asserted that in the pre-primary stage, visual and performing arts help in building curiosity and enriching imagination. At the primary stage, art integration helps in developing observation, exploration and healthy self-expression. At the upper primary stage, this develops interest in the subjects taught by enabling joyful and creative learning experiences. At the Secondary stage, it encourages students to adopt artistic and aesthetic sensibility in their day to day life and promotes Indian traditional and cultural values. In higher secondary stage, the inclusion of art education in general studies enables students to gain understanding of the regional art and craft traditions.
- Surbhi, A. and Sharma, A. (2023) revealed that Art-integrated learning is an innovative and inclusive teaching method that uses various artistic mediums to teach

academic subjects, develops socio-emotional and psychomotor skills and promote holistic development. The integration of arts into the curriculum promotes holistic learning and inclusivity in the classroom. Art-integrated learning has been field-tested and found to be effective in enhancing the teaching-learning process. Students participating in art-integrated classes show greater retention and understanding of material. But the research on AIL pointed out the need for scalable teacher training models.

- Das Munshi, S., & Saha, R. (2023) revealed that permeation of technology into every aspect of modern life has made people mechanical and hampered their aesthetic sense. Art education helps the learners develop particular skills and challenges them to look for multiple ways to solve problems and create something new. Their research revealed that the new National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) invoked art-integrated learning as a cross-curricular pedagogical approach for holistic education of students at all levels of education.
- Srivastav, P. (2023) revealed that integrating arts into learning is an inventive, constructivist approach in which students explore academic concepts through various art forms. Teachers use

various art forms to make the teaching learning process more engaging and holistic. Art Integrated Learning creates an equitable learning environment for all learners through a framework of experiential learning.

- Prabhu, B., & Lourdasamy, A. (2022) asserted that integrating art into school curricula can develop artistic sensibilities in children and improve their academic performance and well-rounded development. Teaching methodologies that incorporate art and infuse artistic sensibilities in children lead to improvement in academic performance and self-esteem. Art integration supports the powers of imagination and self-expression in children. The inclusion of Art as a core subject in the curriculum from primary classes would lead to better educational outcomes.
- Thote, P., et al., (2019) asserted in their research that Art-integrated learning promotes holistic development and joyful learning for school children. Art integrated learning promotes creativity and cultural appreciation. Art education develops perseverance, critical thinking and problem-solving skills in students. Engagement in art education positively affects academic achievement and helps in

developing empathy in children development.

- Chonn Ching, V. (2017) revealed the importance of arts integration for holistic development of children and lifelong learning. There are many challenges in arts integration like need for support from administrators, constant professional development, nurturing proactive disposition for implementation of this pedagogy. The study provides research-based evidence regarding the importance of arts education in the current educational context.
- Gullatt, D. E. (2008) revealed that Arts integration improves can enhance student learning and academic achievement across disciplines in school settings. Arts are often overlooked but can be a research-based mechanism for enhancing student academic success, aligning with national and state policy goals.
- Efland, A. (2002) in "Art and Cognition: Integrating the Visual Arts in the Curriculum" discussed how integrating visual arts in the curriculum can develop the cognitive flexibility of learners. This integration would help in establishing connections across diverse human experiences.

Research Gaps in Art Integrated Learning

The review of related literature helped in making sense of the research already done in this area and identifying gaps in the research on art integration in education. There is gap in research on AIL using indigenous art forms for inclusive and culturally relevant curricula. There has been little research conducted on the role of parents and the community in supporting AIL initiative for student engagement. There is gap in research on AIL in enhancing learner engagement and improving learning outcomes in educational institutions (Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006).

Research is needed to explore the impact on student engagement when taught by teachers who are trained for 'AIL.' Given the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence in education, research is needed to explore their role and use in implementation of AIL.

Critical Gaps and Contribution:

There are few empirical studies on the impact of AIL on student engagement and holistic development in CBSE schools in India. This study fills that gap by capturing the voices of Indian educators under NEP 2020, offering new perspectives on implementation, effectiveness, and future potential of AIL in promoting holistic education.

Methodology

Research Design

For the present research, qualitative phenomenological study method was adopted.

Participants: 86 educators comprising Principals, Headmasters and Headmistresses, Academic Coordinators and Teachers from seven CBSE schools located in the districts of Vadodara, Kheda and Bharuch in Gujarat and Gurugram in Haryana participated in the study.

Sampling: Purposive sampling method was used in the present study. The seven selected schools were identified through referrals indicating use of AIL.

Data Collection

Data collection was done through:

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** 86 educators participated in individual semi-structured interviews that were of 40 to 50 minutes duration each. The consent of the educators was obtained for participation in the study. Their convenience was taken into consideration with the in-person interviews being conducted in the school premises, in the classrooms and school offices. Open ended questions focusing on the experiences of the educators with Art Integrated Learning were asked in the interviews. Interview

questions were open-ended and focused on the experiences of the educators with AIL implementation, student engagement and observed outcomes.

- **Non-Participant Observations:**

Classroom activities, school exhibitions, and co-curricular events were observed using a structured observation protocol developed for this study. Observations focused on the use of visual, performing, and reflective arts during instruction and student participation in AIL. Detailed field notes were maintained.

- **Artefacts Review:** Supplementary data were gathered through student-created artefacts such as journals, artwork, performance scripts and model-based projects. These provided contextual depth to interview and observational data.

Data Analysis:

Interview transcripts, observation notes, and artefacts were analyzed using **Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework:**

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Generation of initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes

6. Producing the report

Coding was conducted manually by a team of three researchers who independently coded a sample of transcripts to develop an initial coding scheme. This scheme was refined through consensus meetings to ensure inter-coder reliability. Themes were finalized based on saturation and cross-validation across different data sources comprising interviews, observations and artefacts, achieving methodological triangulation.

Ensuring Credibility and

Trustworthiness: To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, several qualitative validation strategies were employed:

- **Triangulation:** Data triangulation was conducted by comparing and integrating insights from interviews, observations, and artefacts. For example, if educators reported enhanced student engagement through AIL, observational data corroborated these claims by documenting high levels of student participation and enthusiasm during integrated activities.

- **Investigator Triangulation:**

Multiple researchers were involved in the coding process, and

intercoder agreement was established through collaborative discussions, reducing potential bias.

- **Member Checking:** Although resource constraints did not permit formal member-checking sessions, preliminary findings were shared informally with a subset of participants. Their feedback confirmed the relevance and accuracy of the interpreted themes.
- **Peer Debriefing and Audit Trail:** Ongoing peer review sessions and detailed documentation of coding decisions and analytic memos provided an audit trail, enhancing transparency and rigor.

Ethical Considerations: Institutional ethical clearance was obtained prior to the study. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout data handling and reporting.

Discussion

This study reinforces that AIL addresses multiple learner needs and fulfills the vision of NEP 2020 for experiential, inclusive, and culturally-rooted education. The integration of arts promotes cognitive development (Paivio's dual coding theory), emotional resilience (Goleman's

emotional intelligence), and socio-cultural understanding (UNESCO, 2006; 2010).

Connecting Findings to Educational Theory:

- **Theme 1: Visual Arts Enhance Conceptual Understanding** – The findings align with **dual coding theory** (Paivio, 1986), which posits that combining visual and verbal inputs improves learning. The multimodal experiences created through drawing, modeling, and diagramming resonate with **constructivist theory** (Piaget, Vygotsky), where learners actively construct meaning by engaging with varied stimuli. A teacher noted, *"When my students drew the water cycle and labeled each part, they could recall and explain it far better than when taught from a textbook."* This supports findings by Surbhi & Sharma (2023) on visual reinforcement improving understanding.
- **Theme 2: Cultural Heritage through Art Integration** – This reflects **holistic education frameworks** (Miller, 2007) and aligns with UNESCO's emphasis on cultural preservation as a core educational goal. The use of

traditional and heritage art deepens students' understanding of their identity and promotes intercultural competence. One principal shared, *"When students recreated tribal wall art while learning about communities, it gave them a strong sense of connection to Indian heritage."*

- **Theme 3: Performing Arts Foster Communication and Empathy** – Role-play and dramatization connect with Vygotsky's social development theory, where language learning and socialization occur through interaction and shared experiences. They also echo the **drama-in-education pedagogy**, fostering linguistic fluency, empathy, and moral reasoning. An English teacher reflected, *"Enacting a play based on Mahabharata helped my students understand the ethical dilemmas in the story while enhancing their vocabulary and confidence in public speaking."*
- **Theme 4: Reflective Arts Promote Emotional Intelligence** – The use of poetry, journaling, and introspective storytelling supports Goleman's emotional intelligence

model and corresponds with **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** frameworks. A participant said, *"Through their poetry, children shared thoughts they wouldn't express otherwise - this helped me connect with them better as a teacher."* While these outcomes align with prior SEL literature, they also underscore the subjective nature of emotional growth.

- **Theme 5: Creativity in STEM through Artistic Design** – These findings support the global movement toward **STEAM education**, which integrates Arts into STEM to foster innovation, systems thinking, and aesthetic sensitivity. Countries like the US, Finland, and Australia have formally recognized STEAM as essential for future-ready learners. One observation noted, *"Students who struggled with formulas understood symmetry better when we used 'rangoli' patterns to teach geometry."* This reinforces Bamford's (2006) conclusion that arts enhance conceptual clarity and creativity.
- **Themes 6 & 7: Life Skills and Eco-Art for Holistic Growth** –

Practical and environmental arts align with **Montessori** and **Steiner education philosophies**, emphasizing craftsmanship, autonomy, and ecological awareness. These themes also reinforce the **WHO's life skills framework** and **21st Century Skills** including collaboration, citizenship, and creativity. An example included a group project where students built vertical gardens from recycled bottles, which enhanced both teamwork and environmental responsibility.

International Contextualization: The outcome of the present study resonates with global research. The findings of the present study reveal that there is enhanced student engagement when AIL is implemented in schools. This is in sync with findings of other researchers related to AIL from India and abroad. The Report of UNESCO (**UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education, 2006**) and **Seoul Agenda (2010)** affirm that AIL enables good quality education. The NEP 2020 of India, the National Curriculum of United Kingdom, STEAM initiatives of United States of America, Arts Education Framework of Singapore all are based on

the approach that AIL fosters student engagement for holistic education.

Cultural Specificity and Global Relevance: The findings of the study reveal that AIL fosters cultural awareness and appreciation, empathy, collaboration and environmental responsibility and connect traditional values with modern pedagogies for holistic education.

The present study has some limitations. The participating schools are reputed for their efforts towards co-scholastic enrichment with educators favourably inclined towards AIL. Other schools may face resource constraints and might be more inclined towards traditional approaches to education. There is not much scope for generalisation of the findings due to the scope of the study being limited to Gujarat and Haryana. The perceptions of the respondents and anecdotal evidence were used to gauge emotional and social development of students. So these are considered interpretive conclusions only.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could focus on implementation strategies in state boards and low-resource settings to ensure equity in access to holistic learning. Comparative studies between AIL and non-AIL classrooms, research into pre-service and

in-service teacher training for AIL, and international cross-cultural comparisons would expand understanding and applicability of findings. The study thus contributes both localized insight and

international relevance, reaffirming that arts integration is not peripheral but central to meaningful, holistic education in the 21st century.

Appendix 1

List of Participating Schools in the Present Research

Sr. No.	Name of School	District	State	Country
1.	Delhi Public School, Vadodara	Vadodara	Gujarat	India
2.	Delhi Public School, Harni	Vadodara	Gujarat	India
3.	Avalon World School, Waghodia	Vadodara	Gujarat	India
4.	Avalon World School, Dabhoi	Vadodara	Gujarat	India
5.	Delhi Public School, Anand	Kheda	Gujarat	India
6.	Delhi Public School, Bharuch	Bharuch	Gujarat	India
7.	Delhi Public School, Gurugram	Gurugram	Haryana	India

Appendix 2

List of Educator Participants from Schools

Name of School	No. of Educator Participants
Delhi Public School, Gurugram	06
Delhi Public School, Harni	24
Delhi Public School, Bharuch	09
Delhi Public School, Anand	08
Delhi Public School, Vadodara	23
Avalon World School, Waghodia	08
Avalon World School, Dabhoi	08
Total strength	86

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