

Visual Culture Education, Creative Cognition, and Visual Symbolization Skills in Early Children's Learning

Mohamad Helmi Ismail¹, Nurul Hidayah², Ririn Despriliani³, Serin Ellsa Tasya

{helmiismail@upi.edu¹, hurulhidayah@upi.edu², ririndespriliani@upi.edu³}

Affiliation, Indonesia University of Education, Distric Campus Cibiru^{1,2,3}

Abstract. The visual culture-based arts education (VCAE) is presumably able to build children's awareness of socio-political aspect in visual images, altering the inappropriate visual arts integration practices, symbolic thinking, and creativity. However, there is not enough evidence to claim its relevance in the Kindergarten setting. This research is conducted to study the VCAE possibility in the K-2 and its relations with the children's creative cognition and visual symbolic skills. Using the integrative literature review method, this research is synthesize various data collected by opportunistic sampling technique and analyze it thematically. The study finds that VCAE only works in elementary school and above even though it resembles the culturally relevant approach that commonly used in Kindergarten. Conceptually, VCAE are having connections with the visual symbolic thinking and the creative cognitive skills. In conclusion, VCAE is a promising concept that needs to be further explored to test its sufficiency in the K-2 setting.

Keywords: Visual Culture Arts Education, Visual symbolization skills, Creative cognition, Early Childhood Education

1 Introduction

The inappropriate visual arts integration in early children's learning might cause much more loss to the children's development than we might predict due to the complex nature of today's world. The Global digitalization that emerges in today's living is driving materialistic tendencies even further than ever before. Based on Baudrillard's theory on consumer behavior today [1] it is found that more and more people today are consuming something as an effort of interpretation and communication process to emphasize their position within certain norms or societies rather than fulfilling their actual needs. Various materialistic and consumptive behaviors take place within certain spectacles where we use or reproduce certain mass ornament that signify the rich, the beauty, and the smart based on fabricated global trends. Within various worldwide digital platforms, those occurrences revolving within tremendous speed and scale carrying various ideologies and representations along with its socioculturally constructed values under certain kinds of social stereotypes. We create our cycle of spectacle productions and consumptions with various terms of norms and values as stated by Boulding [2] "The image not only makes society, society continually remakes the image". Those images-based behaviors might lead to a sociocultural problem like that of in the research findings conducted by Leaf et., al., [3] that examine the critical response protocol teaching

practices that somehow leading to a sustaining discrimination and white supremacy in the K-12 Art Class. This research finding can be considered as an alarming circumstance for the children's future development because as stated by Supsakova [4] that children and young people can easily be affected by certain social networks which influence their perception, opinions, and attitudes to values through social interactions.

Meanwhile, on the practical aspect, we often found that most kindergarten educators repeatedly neglect the nature of visual arts resulting in an oversimplification of visual arts in children's learning. Usually, the teachers instruct the children to draw and ignore anything other than children's fine motor skills development. In that case, the teachers overlook not only visual arts and creativity but also the cognitive developments and reality that are constructed in children's minds. Based on the sociocultural cognitive view [5], visual symbolization efforts during artwork creation can facilitate a socially constructed thinking process. That process is important because it allows the children to express their thoughts and build their understanding by exchanging visual symbols representing their various cultural backgrounds. Moreover, that process aligns with Malaguzzi's conception [6] that early childhood teachers should be more attentive to the children's creative process rather than the result. However, those valuable learning activities might not occur when visual arts are not appropriately applied to the children's learning process. Moreover, the long-term consequences might not just be about children's creative and cognitive development. The inappropriate visual arts integrations into the early children's learning might hinder children's awareness of visual arts relations with its socio-political systems and the artificial understanding of their own culture that leads them to the materialistic tendencies stated earlier.

On the other hand, the visual arts in its own nature has a good potential to help various children's learning barriers and to encourage them to do further knowledge constructions in their environment. Alter [7] stated that visual art products have certain tendencies that can encourage complex thinking skills because it's metaphorical, multi-layer, and ambiguous elements. Along with the visual culture-based education (VCAE), in which Basak [8] described its study that based on certain principles like power, ideology, representation, seduction, gaze, intertextuality, and multimodality might be able to bring the children into a philosophical interaction in inquiring the visual culture representations in their surroundings. That kind of interaction can facilitate not just a method to overcome children's learning barriers, but also allow them to build their cultural understanding that might become a good foundation for their future.

While the complexity of the visual culture seems to have a good potential to add depth to the visual arts integration into children's learning, there is not enough evidence to objectively claim its relevance in the early childhood education setting. Much more effort is required in exploring the possibility of integrating visual culture education in early children's learning, and how it relates to the children's symbolic thinking and their cognitive process. In regards to what was described earlier, this article is trying to pronounce the results of the literature review asserting the possible applications of visual culture education within the kindergarten setting and its relations with the children's creative cognition and visual symbolic skills.

2 Methodology

This literature review is using the Integrative literature review method to synthesize the relevance of visual culture education within the Kindergarten setting and its relations with the children's creative cognition and visual symbolic skills. Various literature is gathered using the opportunistic sampling technique due to the scarcity of resources that are mainly collected online from the researchgate and other sources found on Google. Those literatures then classified as primary and secondary data that later on being evaluated its validity under certain criteria. The thematic analysis was applied to analyze various literature to gain insight by studying the pattern from study findings in articles, books, or organizational policy articles.

3 Result And Discussion

3.1 Results

The conducted study collected 30 works of literature that consist of various books, book chapters, articles in journals, and conference proceedings that have been selected regarding its validity. All those literatures were analyzed to identify the possible application of Visual Culture Education within the Kindergarten setting and its relations with the early children's creative cognitive and visual symbolization skills.

Table 1. Collected Literature

Themes	Works	Books	Gov. publication	Indexed journals	Indexed conferences	Other articles
VCAE & CR studies	5	1	1	2	1	
Possible applications	VCAE 5			5		
Successfully applied VCAE	3			3		
VCAE failure	2			2		
Sociocultural & Creative Cognition	4	2				2
Empiric/Application	3			2	1	
Sociocultural & Creative Cognition						
VCAE, sociocultural cognition, Symbolic thinking	1	1				
Empiric/applications	4	1		3		

Of the 15 articles studied, related to the implementations of the Visual Culture Education. It was generally found that Visual Culture Education could not be fully implemented properly. Much of this is due to teachers' lack of familiarity with Visual Culture study which, according to Duncum [8], should include studies of power, ideology, representation, seduction, gaze, intertextuality, and multimodality in it. Although it is said to be able to help improve some children's competencies, this mostly occurs at the elementary school age level and above. Nevertheless, the study found that the Visual culture arts education has close characteristics with culturally relevant approaches family and it is commonly applied in the K-2 class.

Regarding the relations between VCAE the children's creativity, 8 articles found the closeness of the characteristics of the two. With regard to children's creative cognition, Efland's view of

sociocultural cognition provides a clear picture of the relationship between VCAE and the creative cognition approach. Cognitive sociocultural aspects prioritize aspects of the process of cultural exchange beyond the definition of truth reflecting a variety of cognitive activities such as what is contained in the concept of creative cognition which focuses on cognitive processes in the process of creation. The concept of learning that focuses on the process is problem-solving oriented and open-ended as mentioned by Malaguzzi [6] represents cognitive sociocultural tendencies in Efland's concept of art and cognition. Apart from the conceptual review of the literature, the field data that emerged from the three research articles collected showed the same trend.

The research collected five works of literature consisting of books, research articles, & book chapters. From this collection of literature, two main themes are described which examine aspects of the conception of sociocultural cognitive relations, symbolization skills, and VC as the first theme. While the second theme relates to a collection of studies that examine empirical data or applicable studies on the same theme. The collection of articles studied shows a strong connection between the concept of art and cognition from Efland [5] which is based on cognitive sociocultural studies and the nature of VC, which cannot be separated from socio-cultural struggles and their various capitalizations. Visual narratives and their various complexities are fundamental things that enable the social exchange of cognition, and objectification of thoughts, and underlie the process of cultural exchange

3.2 Discussions

3.2.1 Visual Culture Education in the Early Childhood Education Setting

VCAE (Visual culture arts education) has close characteristics with culturally relevant family approaches and it is a common thing in the Kindergarten. Nonetheless, the successful implementation of VCAE was found only in the elementary age level and above. Research by Güler [9] using the Action Research method states that the application of VCAE which involves elementary & junior high school-aged children can improve children's competence in terms of critical thinking, awareness of the relation of everyday social issues to art, better ways of expression, and better inquiry skills. The same results were also mentioned by Robb, Jindal-Snape, Levy [10], where VCAE application in elementary school can encourage children to filter cultural capital control from adults and can express themselves based on their own views. While research conducted by Ozosy [11], the application of VCAE is said to be able to increase teacher visual literacy as a result of the training he has conducted. Meanwhile, within the scope of Kindergarten, the application of VCAE tend to experience the shallowness of learning material at the Kindergarten level if it is associated with the opinion of Duncum [8] who suggests that visual culture studies should apply certain principles in studying them such as power, ideology, representation, seduction, gaze, intertextuality, and multimodality. This can be seen from the results of a literature review from Alam, Sumaryanto, Jazuli, [12] that applying various modern devices to children's learning is not enough because the visual culture should be understood as a rhizomatic structure that a visual object always containing various issues that emerge from the contextual relations of our daily living [13].

3.2.2 Visual Culture Education Relation with the Children's Creative Cognition

A person's creative expression is usually influenced by a variety of behavior patterns found in their environment. This is commonly referred to as the influence of culture on one's thinking. The sociocultural cognitive view based on the Efland's opinion [5] besides being related to

cultural influence also emphasizes that the creative process as an attempt to concretize the subjectivity of thought into material objectivity. This view can be brought closer to the concept of creative cognition, which focuses on behavioral tendencies in the creative process. Within the scope of Kindergarten, this is relevant because children's creativity still cannot be assessed based on a product approach. Efforts to focus on the process of creation and socially constructed reality in a sociocultural cognitive view can encourage children's subjective activity in learning through artistic expression or appreciation activities. In the Creative Cognition approach, the creation process can be part of the process of constructing reality. This idea is actually supported by Mizuno & Xu [14], where in their research found that the local cultural norm and language are having strong influence to how creativity is constituted, discerned, and conceptualize in students' mind. Creativity that appears in a cognitive process, according to Rogaten & Moneta [15] is a natural behavior that arises because of a person's creative thinking process. Creative Cognition is related to a variety of thinking styles, which generally consist of divergent and convergent thinking, metaphorical and analogical thinking, perspective-taking, imagery, and incubation. However, within the scope of early childhood education, the various occurrences of creative cognition behavior need to be aligned with the nature of the children themselves. It is important for the K-2 teacher to emphasize children's nature because the technique and media sometimes can't encourage the children to be more active in their creative process [16].

3.2.3 Visual Culture Education Relation with the Children's Visual Symbolic Skills

In the conception aspect, Efland's [5] view of art and cognition is considered relevant in bridging the relationship between sociocultural cognitive concepts, Visual Culture, and visual symbolization skills. Efland considers metaphor as a reflection of high cognitive performance, essential part of imagination, cognitive processes and its structure, altering the reality that had been known and beyond like that of in brunner's concept. Environmental influences that are commonly studied in a sociocultural cognitive viewpoint are confirmed by Sugiarto's research [17] which states that the variety of images made by children is influenced by attitudes, behavior, and values in the children's coastal environment. Mamur [18] also mentioned the same thing where children's artworks are greatly affected by the digital images display that are usually seen on TV or similar devices rather than printed images as it widely known that various digital media are closer to the children's today's living than printed images. From those descriptions, it can be concluded that the concept of sociocultural cognition, both scientifically and empirically, seems to be related to the concept of Visual Culture and children's symbolic thinking activity. Furthermore, according to Cortes & Cobos [19], children are closer to visual metaphors than language metaphors.

Based on several collected literature, the link between visual culture, sociocultural cognition, creative cognition, and visual symbolization skills is obviously reasonable. However, in some cases, practical application in kindergarten may still require some further studies due to the complexity of the learning material that must be applied within the scope of visual culture. Despite the lack of evidence of VCAE applications in early childhood learning, the close proximity of Visual Culture Arts Education studies to a culturally relevant approach indicates good potential for its application in kindergarten. This perception come out from Chin [20] various recommended approach in implementing the visual culture education in the classroom through certain method of critical pedagogy that encourage the student to excavate a deeper meaning of visual culture artifact. By and large this notion is similar to one of the principle of

culturally relevant approach that invites children to decode the cultural message of a visual object as described in CCSESA [21]. Moreover, it is also confirmed by Mitchell et al. [22] who reviewed several studies and other reports, stating that culturally diverse learning, which is based on the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, greatly supports the success of teachers in introducing specific content related to existing regional values. This approach is considered successful in changing existing learning patterns to a more children-centered learning that facilitates their various cultural backgrounds. Not just in New Zealand, Durden et. al., [23] also reporting the same good result about the cultural relevant approach within their ethnographic study in America.

This literature review generally found the conceptual connections between visual culture arts education, creative cognition, visual symbolic skills, and its relations with the culturally relevant approach that is useful as the baseline theory construction for future studies in developing the visual culture-based learning model in the K-2 setting. However, the conducted study still has many shortcomings due to the limited literature resources, especially those that specifically examine the application of visual culture arts education within the scope of Kindergarten. In regard to these matters, the practical application of visual culture-based learning for early children remains unclear. More exploration of the application of VCAE in the scope of Kindergarten still needs to be done because of the complexity of the principles of visual culture studies, which may be difficult for young children to understand.

4 Conclusion

Although relatively difficult, the application of VCAE in kindergarten learning can be facilitated by a culturally relevant approach that invites children to decode the cultural message of an object. Efland's views on sociocultural cognition provide a clear picture of the relationship between VCAE and the foundation of a cognitive approach to creativity represented by creative cognition. The link between visual culture and visual symbolization skills is also profoundly clear. However, in some cases, practical application in kindergarten may still require further study due to the complexity of the learning material that should be applied within the scope of Visual Culture Arts Education.

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