

## Is perception influenced by educational background: A comparative Study of Pre-Service teachers' Perceptions on Art Education

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### Abstract:

*Gaining an insight into primary pre-service teachers' perceptions is vital for teacher educators especially in the field of primary art education. This study was a comparative study which explored if the educational background of participants influenced their perceptions on art education. Located in a Fijian urban university, this study, using a questionnaire designed by the investigator, provided an insight into primary pre-service teachers' perception of art education. A cohort of 45 participants was selected through convenient sampling for the purpose of this study. Findings reflect the narrow perception of art education held by participants, which was solely based on defining art education as merely drawing ability. This study will have implications for tertiary and primary art education and other related study.*

**Key words:** Art education, pre-service teachers, perception, teacher education, teacher educators

### INTRODUCTION

Perception is a way of regarding, understanding or interpreting something: a mental impression. Perception is inseparable from

an individual. Everyone has their own unique perceptions, shaped from their personal experiences and values. It is obvious that the pre service teachers would differ from each other in emotional make up, economic background, intellectual capacity, creative potential, and life experiences. These play a vital role in the creation of individual perception of artists and art education. These pre-existing viewpoints shape how an individual reacts to an event, interacts with other people, and perceives the world around them. Perception of an individual determines how they see and appreciate art which in turn impacts on the teaching and learning of art education.

Art education is the area of learning which is based upon the visual, tangible arts—drawing, painting, sculpture and design, pottery making, weaving, fabrics. This study is a comparative study, which proposes wider theoretical implications for the re- conceptualization of pre-service teacher training in the area of art education, especially in Fiji. The Fijian art curriculum focuses on development of art ideas, skills and process, arts appreciation, arts in society and culture. The Fijian Ministry of Education clearly outlines its art curriculum and therefore expects teachers to teach art from kindergarten to form 7 or higher education where applicable. The Fijian primary art education curriculum has adopted art education as an essential subject for children to study in primary levels. In Fiji's case, majority primary schools have the classroom teacher as the overall general practitioner (Richardson: 1992). The primary teacher is the person responsible for the whole range of instruction, which includes art education, too. This situation often results in dilemma for the primary teacher if the teacher has not been adequately prepared during teacher training.

Subramani (2000), in the Fiji Education Commission Report, highlights that, primary art education curriculum should suggest ways in which students may explore their own lives and experiences, and find ways of expressing what they feel, see and imagine. With the help of their instructors, they

should assess the creative potential in their own environment (colors, shapes, sounds, movements, images, space, personalities, history, humor and artistic traditions) as the local environment offers great opportunities for investigating moods, atmosphere, feelings, and memories; working with a wide range of symbols, images, mythologies and cultivating skills of selecting, ordering, manipulating, simplifying, balancing and unifying.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perception of pre-service teachers on art education and compare if the educational background influences their perception of art education.

By understanding personal perceptions of teachers, in this case, pre service teachers, it becomes possible to engage more deeply with the ideas represented in the creation and development of artwork and artistic abilities. Therefore, investigating pre service teachers' perception of art education and artist would enlighten teacher educators to develop appropriate activities and implement the artistic techniques accordingly for optimum benefit.

It is of great importance to investigate this area of art education, since such knowledge can influence teacher pedagogy in primary art. This study also would bring a new point for primary art education. In addition to that, it will help art teacher educators to better promote and teach appropriate techniques and skills to pre- service teachers, making explicit their importance in art education overall. The results of this study will greatly influence teacher educators' decisions in planning art education. This research will throw light on how art education has been perceived and how this perception hinders the learning and development of artistic abilities in pre service teachers. This will help teacher educators to tailor the teaching of the art education courses to develop interest and creativity in the pre-service teachers. Finally, the findings will

have the potential to influence changes at tertiary levels in the area of art education, especially in the case of Fiji.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Art education and teacher perception**

Frost (2010) agrees that by offering art education in the school system, all children get a chance to stimulate their imaginations, as well as their cognitive and problem-solving skills. Therefore there is a need for people to realize the importance of art education in schools as it is not only beneficial to the person itself, but contributes to the wellbeing of the community as Duncan (2010) in his speech at the Arts Education Partnership National Forum remarks,

Through the arts, students can learn teamwork and practice collaborative learning with their peers. They develop skills and judgment they didn't know they had. It gives the child an opportunity to demonstrate creativity. It helps students to become well-rounded and expression of one-self becomes easier also. In addition to that art helps build student's self-esteem. Therefore the emphasis on the arts in schools is not about learning a specific skill, but about attaining an education that nurtures the whole child. It is not about leading to a better career but about leading to a better life.

Eisner (2004) also agrees that art education teaches us to frame the world from an aesthetic perspective. Developing discerning aesthetic awareness can lead to the understanding of relationships. Art education is not only limited to itself. Art enables students to learn and understand other subjects as Cohen (2010) highlights;

Art is related to many different subjects and it can help to reinforce the knowledge of all those disciplines. Art is experimental like science and it requires exact mixtures of compounds like oil, wax, pigment, and silica. Art reinforces mathematics when it requires the accurate representation of

objects in two and three dimensional space. Mathematical concepts like linear perspective, symmetry, and spatial relationship are used in art. Art has connections to foreign languages as many of its terms come from German, Italian, French, and Latin. Many historical periods have been greatly influenced by the art created during that time. Art also connects to language arts, physical education, and technology

Educators just need to realize the importance of art education. Richard (n.d) emphasizes that art makes children see the beauty that exists in the world. Today, children are so bombarded with technology and plugged in almost constantly. Many of them don't even know what a real painting looks like. Pictures have been replaced with flat screen televisions or home theater systems. Their parents fail to teach them the importance of creativity, doing something with your hands.

The ideas that pre service teachers bring to class have an impact on learning outcomes. Therefore it is important as art educators to investigate the perceptions pre service teachers bring with them in regards to art education. These perceptions would help teacher educators to gauge the interest level of pre service students towards art educators. What teachers believe about their teaching capabilities can have a strong influence on their teaching (Hamilton; 2008). Art teaching opportunities can lead to increased confidence and competence for pre-service teachers, along with enhancing student outcomes (Garvis; 2008).

Therefore, this study investigates the perceptions pre-service teachers have about art education and an artist. The findings of the study will guide the art teacher educators to design the art education workshop activities to suit the interest of the pre service teachers. For, interest in art will capture and retain attention which in turn will give pre-service teachers more exposure to the field of art education. Teachers that value creativity lead the way in cultivating the well informed and active citizens our future demands: where individuals are able

to generate fresh ideas, communicate effectively, take calculated risks and imaginative leaps, adapt easily to change and work cooperatively. Ausubel (1968) stated, the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. It is true that teachers tend to teach as they were taught, modeling themselves after their own teachers. It's vital for art teacher educators to research on pre service teachers' perception so they are able to gauge the exact mindset of pre-service teachers bring to learn art education. Thus studying the perception of pre service teachers would enable teacher educators to design appropriate content and technical skills which would help communicate ideas, feelings and imagination through creative expression.

## **METHOD**

For the purpose of this study, quantitative and qualitative research was combined with aesthetic concerns, reflecting aspects of practice based research and a/r/tography. Practice based research depicts the researcher / practitioner as central to the inquiry as is the context in which the research is taking place. A/r/tography encourages the combined creative freedom and risk-taking of the artist with the theory, rigor and responsibility of the academic researcher, along with the ethics and compassion of the educator. (Bickel; 2008).

The main focus of the study was divided between two components, and the research instrument utilized was a designed questionnaire to investigate perceptions of art education according to art education background. The first component investigated the art education background of the participants; either primary level or secondary level of art was done. The second component of the research investigated pre-service teachers' perception of art education. The questions elicited the respondents view on his or her perception of art education.

## Sample

The cohort of participants included 45 primary pre-service year one teachers at a Fijian university in Fiji. A convenient sampling was done to aid the researcher in administration and distribution of questionnaire

## RESULTS

### Art education background

The sample comprised of 39% of students who had done art education up till primary level only, while 61% stated that they had done art education up till secondary level.

### Perception of art education of participants with primary art education background

The prominent factor in describing art education by pre-service teachers, with primary art education background, was the notion of drawing. 63% of respondents perceive art education as drawing only. For these respondents, *“art education means expressing your views and feelings through drawing”*, *“It’s a creative nature of drawing and expressing yourself”*, *“art education refers to how you learn to draw for creative and expressive art with different drawing methods or “ it is a way you express your feelings by drawings”*

Percentage	Perception
63%	drawing
37%	creative subject which deals with artistic expression

**Table 1: primary art education background**

### Perception of art education of participants with secondary art education background

In comparison, 38% of respondents with SAEB, still perceive art education as *“Art education is about drawing, designing and very creative in everything we do”*, *“art education is educating students to use their skills of drawing to express their emotions”*,

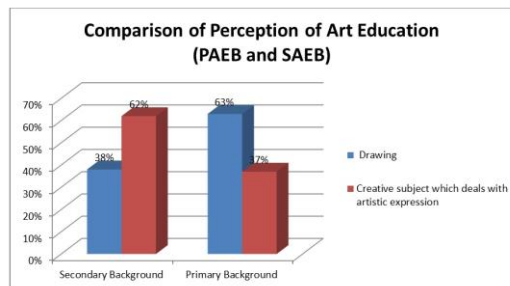
*“Art education means study of arts or deals with drawing and making sketches” “Means anything regarding to drawing, “Art education is to learn how to draw neatly and color or paint” , “Art education means expressing your views and feelings through drawing”, or “Presenting your emotions, thoughts and ideas in drawing, creations and creativity.”*

Percentage	Perception
38%	drawing
62%	creative subject which deals with artistic expression

**Table 2: secondary art education background**

### Comparison of Perception of Art Education According To Educational Background

Pre-service teachers with both primary and secondary level of art education have perceived art education with the description of drawing; however, some responses from respondents with secondary art education background have highlighted art education as a creative entity where *“we as students come and learn the different concepts and skills of arts and how it can be best taught”* (SAEB)



**Fig 1: Comparison of Perception of Art Education According To Educational Background**

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Teacher perceptions are vital in any teaching situation. Our personal perceptions lead us to believe and do things in ways



which are a direct effect of the perceptions we hold. Teacher perceptions in art will have a direct impact on the way they disseminate the given art curriculum to the students. Perception often limits pre-service teachers in actually fully exploring art education courses and their own personal creative and artistic talents as their perception hinders their creative growth in art and art education as a whole. Pre-service teacher's perceptions play a vital role in the **correct dissemination** of the art education syllabi, **development** of multiple ways of perceiving and communicating, **imaginative thinking** with **empathy** about the self and the world. Bhattacharyya et al., (2009) further emphasizes on this stating, that teachers don't teach what they don't know. Teachers may lack confidence if they have had limited or no formal education on teaching art (Duncum; 1999). Other teachers may be unsure of how to use their artistic abilities and skills to assist student learning (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara; 2009).

Teachers need to learn the appropriate skills and techniques to be able to teach accordingly. Educators just need to realize the importance of art education. Art education is a language on its own and as with any language-it has a diversity of communication discourse, thus teachers must learn them before they can teach the language (Richardson; 1992). Therefore, the same reflects for art education. As Grumet (1988) suggests, curriculum is our attempt to claim and realize self-determination by constructing worlds for our children that repudiate the constraints that we understand to have limited us. The results of this study reflect on the perception pre-service teachers have on art education. This perception could reflect on the learning and teaching of art education at tertiary levels which would impact on primary levels through these pre-service teachers in later years.

According to the findings of the study, the perception of art education reflects the narrow framework of drawing only, whereas art education is a wide field of creative and artistic

techniques and skills which is not only limited to drawing only. The respondents with **secondary art education background** had **greater awareness** and **perception** of art education. **Both** the respondents with primary or secondary Art Education background, did **define** Art Education with the notion of **drawing**, however, the respondents with **secondary Art Education background** had a more **in-depth perception** of Art Education. The perception of respondents with secondary art education background reflects the true nature of art education. For these respondents, art education is *“something that comes from within yourself, your own thoughts, imagination and approaches to every thinking”*, *“It’s creativity we use in class, use of colors, recycle materials, “Art education is a department which guide and mold people who are interested in art”, “Art education is about creativity that enable students to explore about their art work” and “Art education is basically where we as students come and learn the different concepts and skills of arts and how it can be best taught”*

Therefore it becomes important to note and reflect on the issue of art education background. Art education background enables a better perception of art education as students are appropriately exposed to the process, skills and relevant techniques of art which leads then to construct an in-depth perception of art. Thus construction of perception of art education is important for pre-service teachers as they would then in turn help to create this in the students they teach. An appropriate perception of art education is important as perception hinders learning. Thus it should be vital for students in primary and high school levels to undergo art education as a compulsory subject especially if their future career aspirations concern being a teacher.

## CONCLUSION

Teacher education, especially in art education, is an area which requires active research especially in the context of Fiji. This study revealed the perception of pre-service year one teachers of art education. In order for the art curriculum to be effectively disseminated to primary students, the teachers need to be appropriately educated in this area. The findings reflected that respondents with primary art education background and secondary art education background had differing perceptions of art education. Both the respondents with primary or secondary art education background, did define art education with the notion of drawing, however, the respondents with secondary art education background had a more in-depth perception of art education. Inculcating the appropriate perception of art education is necessary in order to **avoid misconceptions** that pre-service teachers may bring with them. This study has revealed a **major misconception** pre-service teachers with primary art background hold about what **art education actually entails**. Art education is **not limited to drawing** only; it has four major sub-strands in the case of Fiji, interrelated and interconnected content learning outcomes and scope of activities. Therefore, it becomes important for teacher educators of art education to understand the perceptions of pre-service teachers to fully grasp the status of art education which the pre-service teachers hold within. Then only, it would be possible to design art activities to develop appropriate techniques and skills in the pre-service teachers which would have a direct impact on art education at primary school levels.

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