

Reimagining the Role of Art for Student Learning at Wenzhou-Kean University

Hanyu Wang, Wenzhou-Kean University, China
Rosalie Muertigue Palaroan, Wenzhou-Kean University, China

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Abstract

This research aimed at exploring the opinions of undergraduate students at Wenzhou-Kean University (WKU) towards the issue of reimagining the role of art for student learning. Previous research had shown that the art method was crucial for students' learning process. This study had investigated 70 students varying in different majors from College of Business & Public Management, College of Liberal Arts, and College of Science and Technology in WKU to further explain the relationship between art and students' learning process. Incorporated with quantitative and qualitative methods, this research would try to clarify the working principles behind art towards improving students' memory skills, as well as examine the efficiency of art in motivating students' further studies. Through the study, it was found that students in WKU widely applied art methods during their learning process. As revealed, there were also some constructive results that were brought up by the study which need further explanations.

Keywords: Art Method, Undergraduate Students Learning Method, Memory Skill

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Introduction

People always said that “art is the universal language of the world”. Not only does art have a variety of forms, but also it exists more in ideology, which is not restricted by a set of boundaries including languages and living areas. In today’s educational environment, it’s not hard to find that schools usually integrate different forms of art into students’ studies. Forms of art include but are not limited to stage performance, singing, drawing, and other audio support. Tafti et al. (2020)¹ did research that focused on primary education of four typical countries in different parts of the world, trying to find out the similarities and differences in the goals of art curriculums. The research implies that there is a consensus of the significant role of art playing in students’ studies, which makes art more than a subject but for individual and social development. Another example is the effectiveness of introducing audio teaching methods in class. Rossiter et al. (2009)² show some innovative audio teaching methods in the research studying student-generated audio to enhance learning. By incorporating recording methods for second language learners, students effectively learn from their mistakes in an enjoyable learning procedure. Therefore, with the fast spread of cultural communication and technological development, art plays an increasingly important role in education as a universal language, helping students to understand the content of courses better.

Learning is a lifelong career. Thus, the application of art in the educational field also ranges from the time that a baby is born to the time after his or her college graduation. During this long period, knowledge is gained step by step, and the form of art is also changing through time. Art contributes a lot with connecting new information to the old one, restructuring a new learning map. As research done by Gibson and Larson (2007)³ in Visual Arts and Academic Achievement implies that integrating art into learning promotes self-fulfillment, as well as the development of human beings. Society also benefits from the influence of art, which reflects in every aspect of daily life.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to figure out the connection between art and student success, especially for classroom teaching in the east of China. To be specific, it's going to answer the following questions:

1. Is that a significant relationship between art and student learning?
2. How does art work to improve students’ memory skills?
3. How does art motivate students’ further studies?

Objectives of the Study

This study aims:

1. To determine the significance between using the art method and student learning.

¹ Fallah Tafti, S., Jafari Harandi, R., & Tabatabaei, M. (2020, February 1). *A comparative study of primary education art curriculum goals in Brazil, Greece, Iran, and South Korea*. Iranian Journal of Comparative Education.

² Rossiter, J.A., Nortcliffe, A., Griffin, A. and Middleton, A. (2009) Using student generated audio to enhance learning. *Engineering Education Journal* 4 (2), 52–61.

³ Gibson, M. A., & Larson, M. A. (2007, December 17). *Visual Arts and academic achievement - escholarship.org*. Journal for Learning through the Arts, 3(1).

2. To define the working principle behind art towards improving students' memory skills.
3. To examine the efficiency of art motivating students' further studies.

Research Methods

Research Design

Based on the research problem, this study is a mixed-method study that focuses on the attitude of Wenzhou Kean University students about art learning and art teaching. By using the qualitative and quantitative method, the research design can be more flexible, while the researcher could also get more details and depth in respondents' answers. The attitude on art learning and art teaching would be more abstract and personalized, which would be hard for numerical statistics. Thus, this research applied Constructivist Worldview combined with Interpretivism as a philosophical foundation for a qualitative approach to better explain some subjective answers (Creswell, 2019)⁴. The multiple intelligences theory introduced by Gardner (1993)⁵ was also integrated in this research to consider the relations between art and students' learning. The applicable research design can be helpful to respond to the research questions. According to Gaille (2020)⁶, a survey method has many benefits in gathering data from multi-dimension, as well as providing opportunities for final data comparison. For better explaining the research questions, the researcher chose to apply a survey method into this study, which could reflect some opinions about art learning among modern bilingual university students.

Research Instrument

For the survey method, a self-made questionnaire for students in Wenzhou Kean University has been used to gather data. The questionnaire has been divided into four parts: Part I- Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents; Part II- WKU students' understanding of art learning and art teaching; Part III- WKU students' art method in learning and memory; Part IV- WKU students' view towards applying art method in leaning. This study will also be supplemented with unstructured interviews and observation to better understand the research problems.

Respondents and Sampling

The research will utilize the primary data to prevent delay and later modification. The respondents from Wenzhou Kean University will intentionally cover three colleges: College of Business & Public Management, College of Liberal Arts, and College of Science and Technology, including 30 respondents from College of Business & Public Management and College of Science, 10 respondents from College of Liberal Arts through simple random sampling, which totally means 70 respondents as a sample for the analysis. Likewise, a purposive sample of 30 users and pushers is included for a better comparison of results.

⁴ Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Inc.

⁵ Gardner, Howard. *Multiple intelligences: The theory in practice*. Basic books, 1993.

⁶ Gaille, L. (2020, January 10). *20 advantages and disadvantages of survey research*. Vittana.org.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics like ranges, frequency counts, listing your favorite art method, and describing how the art hobbies affect your school learning help provide qualified answers to measure the relationship between art and students' learning (objective 1), clarify the relevant students' memory principles about art (objective 2), examine the influence of art brings to students' future study (objective 3).

Limitation of the Study

In the whole process of the research, some limitations still exist in different aspects. The research sample may be too small to represent the whole attitude of WKU students or even the modern undergraduates in China. Besides, some students may forget some hobbies in their childhood period which could bring a significant impact on their adulthood learning. In addition, it also happens when some students are not realizing they get help from their understanding of art when they trying to figure out a problem.

Ethical considerations

In any research, ethical issues take top precedence, and this is well kept in mind throughout the course of this study. In this study, every participant will be explained clearly the purpose of the study. All responses from the surveys and interviews reported will be bound by ethical consideration. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be maintained, and their views will also be respected. Furthermore, approval from all the participants will be sought before answering the survey questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Totally, there are seventy (70) undergraduate students from Wenzhou-Kean University participating in this research study. Table 1 shows the distribution of the students. Through simple random sampling, ten (10) students from different majors were chosen. Three majors were chosen respectively from College of Business & Public Management and College of Science and Technology, while one major was chosen from College of Liberal Arts as it had less major included. The research did not include participants from the College of Architecture & Design, as all the majors in the college were related to art which would lead to weaker pertinence to the research topic.

WKU Respondents

Categorical Variables	Type		Frequency	Percent	Total
Gender	Male		32	45.71%	100%
	Female		38	54.29%	
Major	College of Business & Public Management	Finance	10	14.29%	42.89%
		Accounting	10	14.29%	
		Marketing	10	14.29%	
	College of Liberal Arts	English	10	14.29%	14.29%
		Computer Science	10	14.29%	42.89%
	College of Science and Technology	Mathematical Sciences	10	14.29%	
		Biology	10	14.29%	
Age	Freshman Year		18	25.71%	100%
	Sophomore Year		33	47.14%	
	Junior Year		14	20%	
	Senior Year		5	7.14%	

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents of the Study

Respondents' Gender, Major and Age

Referring to Table 1, all the seventy (70) respondents agreed on the consent before taking the questionnaire. In respect of gender, 32 males and 38 females were included in the study, as the number of respondents in gender was almost equal, with the number of females slightly exceeding the number of males. The respondents were from three colleges in different majors, including Finance, Accounting, Marketing, English, Computer Science, Mathematical Sciences, and Biology. Ten (10) students were equally chosen from each major mentioned above, which had an equal distribution of 14.29%. Among the three colleges, College of Business & Public Management and College of Science and Technology as big colleges had a higher percentage of respondents that is 42.89%, while College of Liberal Arts represented by English major with 14.29%. The age of the respondents was also divided into four levels. The great majority (47.14%) of the participants were in their sophomore year indicated by 33 respondents. 18 freshman students participated in the questionnaire with a percentage of 25.71%. Following by freshman, junior students owned 20% with 14

participants. The age group with the least students included was senior year, with only 5 respondents accounting for 7.14%.

Degree of Applying Art Methods in Class

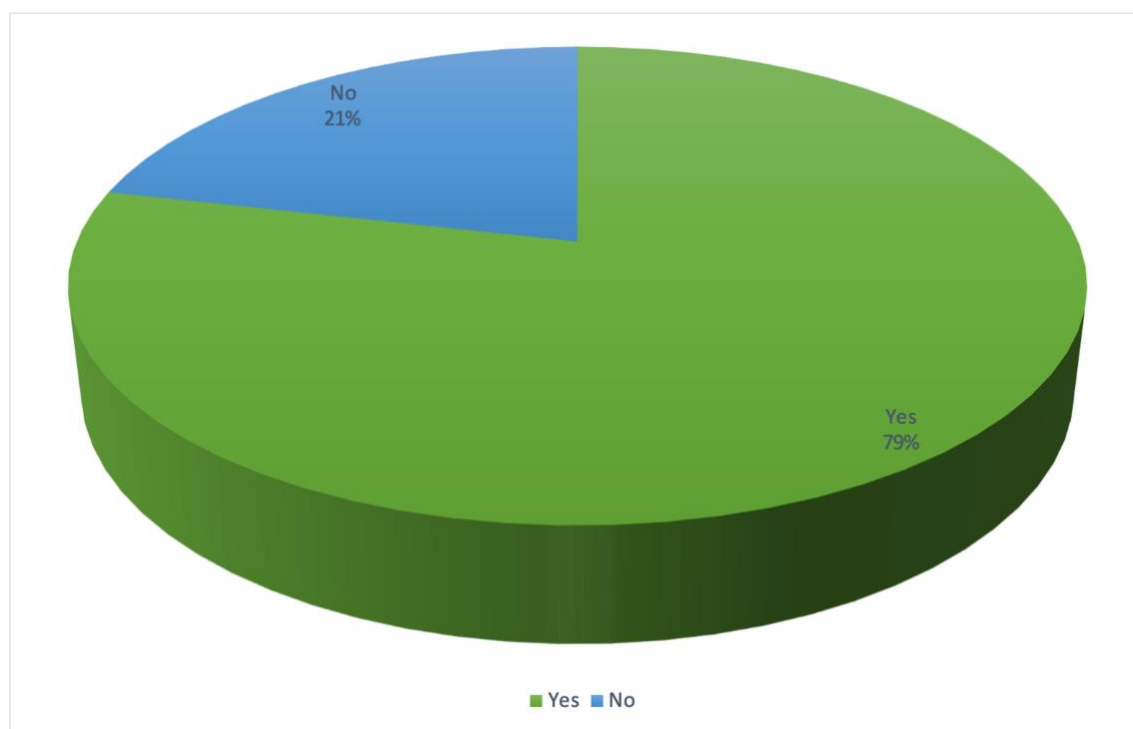


Figure 1. Incorporating Art Teaching Method in Class

In the in-class learning environment, teaching methods with art are varied a lot. According to Tirath (2017)⁷ in the research of *Innovative Teaching Method for State-of-Art Education in India*, some new emerging art teaching methods are mentioned. E-textbooks with hyperlinks can provide students with multiple resources from the Internet, creating a multimedia learning experience. Computerized grading is usually used for exams including multiple choices, which benefits from the rapid development of AI technology. Shabiralyani et al. (2015)⁸ also noted some traditional art methods in learning, for example, models, charts, maps, flashcards, and blackboards, which play important roles in encouraging students' learning. These visual aids powerfully support teachers to transfer the text to students in a vivid and active way. Interactive learning method can also be categorized as one of the art methods. According to Giorgdze and Dgebuadze (2017)⁹, the interaction is between teachers and students, while teachers are usually at the center of the lecture and the students act as the audience. The flipped classroom is another interactive method. It means teachers will provide the lecture in advance through recording lessons. The formal class time will focus more on the homework tutor rather than the content of the lecture. As Webb and Doman noted

⁷ Tirath, R. (2017). A study of innovative teaching methods for state-of-the art education in India. *Research India Publications*.

⁸ Shabiralyani1, G., Hasan, K. S., Hamad, N., & Iqbal, N. (2015, November 19). *Impact of visual aids in enhancing the learning ...* - ed. *Journal of Education and Practice*.

⁹ Giorgdze, M., & Dgebuadze, M. (2017). *Interactive teaching methods: Challenges and perspectives*. *International E-Journal of Advances in Education*.

(2020)¹⁰, flipped classrooms aimed to offer students more personalized instruction, and this mode needs teachers to prepare a lot of plans and activities in advance.

In my research among all the 70 respondents, the majority (79%) of them had applied art teaching methods like visual aids, group work, performing, or other kinds of art methods during their class time. Nevertheless, there was still a small amount (21%) of students with no art method incorporated in the class. Besides, according to the results of the questionnaire, most of the participants regarded the art teaching method as helpful to their learning progress, whereas only a small fraction of the students thought the art method did no good in their studies. On the other hand, about sixty-six (94.29%) respondents were willing to incorporate more art methods into their future studies, while the other four (5.71%) students still provided the negative answer. The results clearly showed the significant relationship between art methods and students' learning, as most students regarded themselves with making identified progress during art learning and were eager to acquire more art learning methods in their further studies. The results also proved that art methods were a strong motivation for students learning.

Respondents' Degree of Fondness in In-class Art Methods Applying

Question No. 6	Mean	Interpretation
Do you like incorporating the art teaching method in class? Measure your Likert scale.	3.77	Agree

Table 2. The Fondness Degree of Incorporating Art Teaching Method in Class

Through the Likert-type questions, it could be found that the average of the participants was fond of incorporating art teaching methods in the class. More than half (64.29%) of the respondents expressed their interest in learning art, while eighteen of them chose to stay neutral (25.71%). Only a small proportion (10%) of the students gave negative feedback, which indicated that the art method was welcomed during the students' learning process.

¹⁰ Webb, M., & Doman, E. (2020). Impacts of flipped classrooms on learner attitudes towards technology-enhanced language learning. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 33(3), 240–274. doi:10.1080/09588221.2018.1557692

Art Methods for Memorizing

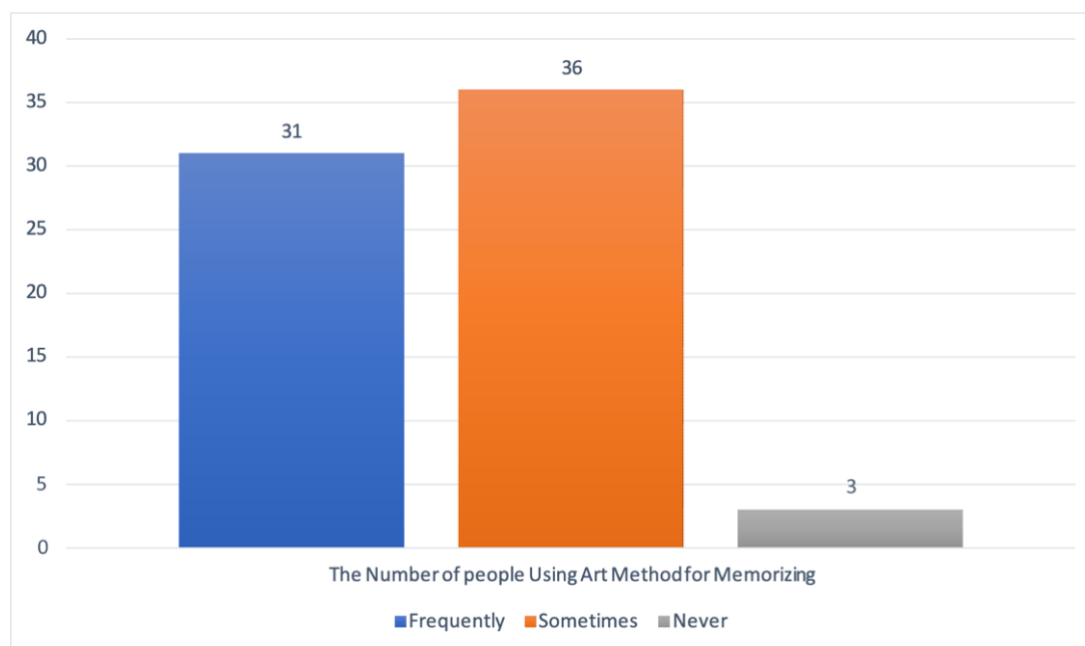


Figure 2. Frequency of Using Art Method to Memorize

As the results are shown in Figure 2, sixty-seven (95.71%) students have applied art methods for memorizing, while only three (4.29%) students showed they never memorized content in art methods. For students who expressed they had utilized art methods, more than half (51.43%) of the respondents had a middle frequency in incorporating art method, while the other thirty-one students highly applied art methods during memorizing process. According to the survey, some popular art methods were given, including performing drama, mind map, vivid graphs, and music. Drama performing was noted significantly mainly be English major students. Drama playing needs students to take command of multiple skills including writing, speaking, and performing. Only students fully understand the text the drama will successfully be performed. As Gullatt (2008)¹¹ mentioned in the research of *Enhancing Student Learning through Arts Integration*, drama gives students an opportunity to get into the deeper content of the learning materials. The drama activity is also a platform for students to learn multidisciplinary, as well as triggering critical thinking (Gullatt, 2008). The great number of respondents applying the art method indicated that the vivid visualized and audio techniques could prompt students' memorizing ability.

¹¹ Gullatt, D. E. (2008). Enhancing Student Learning through Arts Integration: Implications for the Profession. *The High School Journal*, 91(4), 12–25.

Effectiveness of Using Art Methods in Memorizing

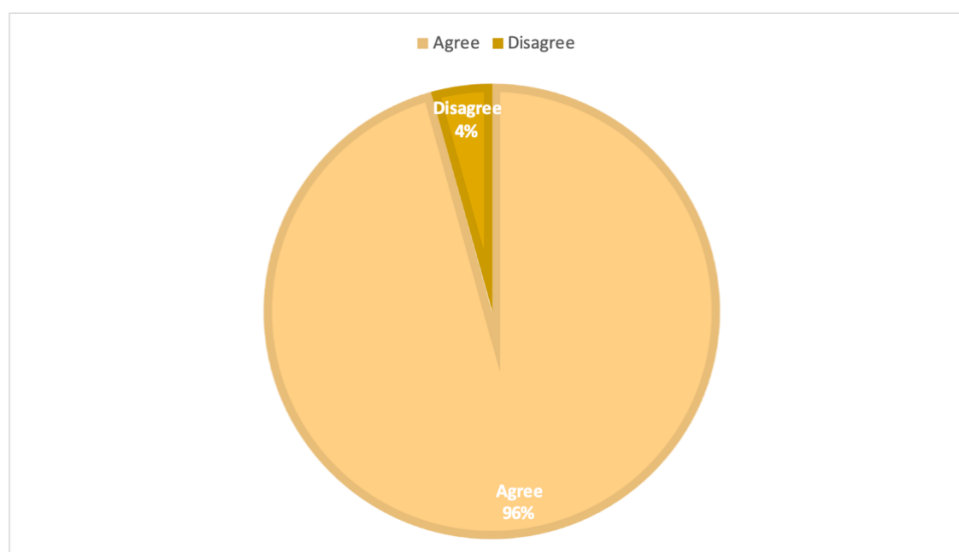


Figure 3. Agreement on Using Art Method to Improve the Memory Level

According to the results shown in Figure 3, most (96%) students gave positive feedback on the issue of using art methods to improve their memory level, which could be inferred as the majority of the respondents regard the various art methods as helpful and efficient for their learning process. Only 4% of the students still offered a negative feeling for applying the art method into their memorizing process.

Importance Between Using Art Methods and Students' Motivation

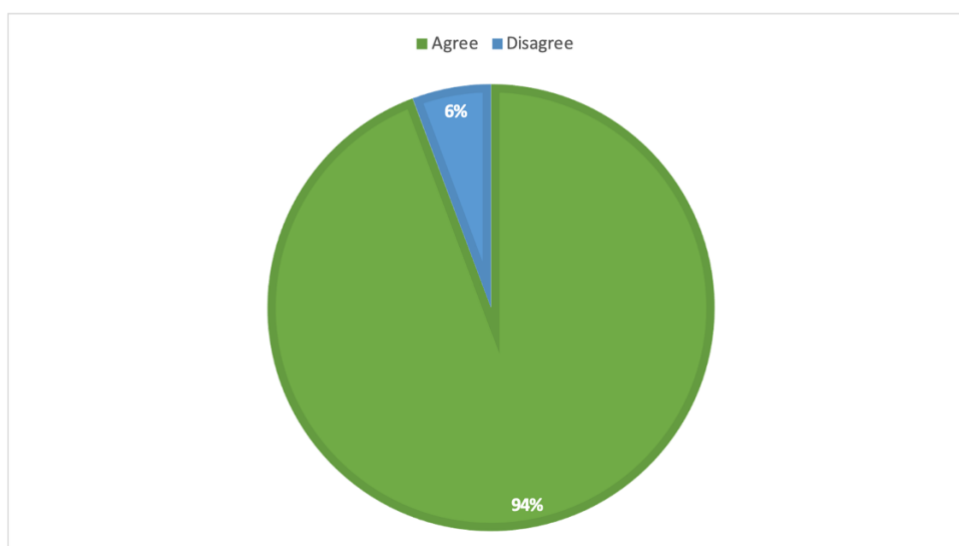


Figure 4. Agreement on Using Art Method in Studies Can Make Studies More Interesting or Easier

Among the 70 participants, most (94%) of them thought that using the art method in the study could make their learning process more interesting and easier. Only a small fraction (6%) of the participants regarded incorporating art methods as not enough for them to pick up their motivation. The result indicated that there was a significant relationship between art and

student learning. While using various art methods, students were more willing to continue their studies, as well as put more effort into it.

Art Related Hobbies

Through the discovery, most students had some art-related hobbies that to some extent could help their learning. Listening to music, drawing, and watching movies were the three most popular hobbies among all the participants. Nevertheless, students got help from the three art-related hobbies from different perspectives. Some used music to gain motivation for learning, while some fully utilized the lyrics in the music to recite the article. Others even took advantage of English songs to learn native expressions and pronunciation. Watching movies mainly had benefits in students memorizing, helping students learn native expressions, as well as broadening students' horizons and enabling them to notice the art expressions in the movies. Other hobbies like watching talk shows, playing various instruments, or dancing were also boosted students learning spirit. As a result, some of the art-related hobbies may help us to learn stuff outside school learning while building connections with school learning content subconsciously. According to the research, Tyson (2019)¹² found that students get better scores in exams and graduation rates when they have art teaching methods applied in their courses. Students gain more happiness during the participation and interaction in class. The main reason is that art provides students with a more positive way to express themselves, as well as create new things. What's more, Tyson strongly believes that the use of art during learning could have a further positive influence on students' later careers. Hence, art-related hobbies provided students with more passion and motivation for their school learning, and students were also apt at encouraging themselves by incorporating hard learning content with their art-related hobbies. Tyson's study also matches with the results of this study in WKU.

Conclusion

The study was conducted primarily to: (1) describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents; (2) determine the respondents' attitudes of the role of art in students' learning; (3) identify the significant relationship between art and students learning; (4) examine the efficiency of art motivating students' further studies; and (5) speculate students' art related hobbies also contribute to their school learning.

Results revealed that the mean age of the respondents was 20 years old with 19 years old as the youngest and 23 years old as the oldest. The majority of them were female and in sophomore year. Most of the respondents were willing to incorporate art learning methods in their studies and regarded art methods as an interesting and easier way for the learning process.

The respondents' commented that they heard about art methods in-class learning, and they also applied the art methods in their daily studies. It was also found out that the respondents felt optimistic about art methods for their future learning.

The foremost problem encountered in the implementation of the using of art method was the lack of incorporating art method in class while most students considered art learning was helpful and could boost their memorized ability. In the light of the findings of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn. The respondents regardless of age, gender, major, are

¹² Tyson, J. (2019, April 1). *The impact of Arts Education on student success*. Maryland Shared Open Access Repository Home.

aware of the significance of incorporating art into their learning process but still need to improve in the in-class learning. However, as the respondents noted, their art-related hobbies like watching movies, listening to music, or drawing, helped them a lot during their self-studies, which provided significant views on the further implementation of art method learning.

Based on the conclusion, the following are recommended:

1. Teachers in the school should consider more about incorporating the related art methods in the class. Some surveys and adjustments could also be done to fit in different students' characteristics
2. After understanding students' hobbies that they applied in their daily life for learning, using music for memorizing and learning was impressed, as visualized learning method was usually considered by most people. Thus, the further researcher can be done in the direction of audio learning. It may be better if students combined audio learning methods more into their studies.
3. After the observation of my little sister's learning progress, I suspected that music learning may have a significant effect on child language learning. As my other sister who was one year younger than me often played piano and singing along at home, my little sister imitated and started to do the same by herself at the age of two. She is three years old now and has a better fluency and vocabulary in language than her peers. Further studies could be done in the aspect of instrument and music playing effect towards infant learning.
4. More various art classes should be promoted at school learning system.
5. There should be some flexible courses at school for students to do some creative art learning sharing.

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Contact email: wahanyu@kean.edu