

**The attitude of a parent toward art education in boys' elementary  
school In Saudi Arabia**

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**Abstract:**

Art education is not only memorizing, drawing or copying; the objectives of teaching art education in Saudi Arabia is to develop the intellectual, social, aesthetic, creative and emotional growth of the students. It is a deep artistic vision that has to be taught in a planned manner by considering important features of the subject. These features should take into consideration all the changing and developing elements of the art discipline. In addition, art education requires special materials, skilful and educated teachers.

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**Introduction:**

In Saudi Arabia, there are four government agencies involved with planning, administrating and implementing the overall governmental educational policy. The Ministry of Education was established in 1953 replacing the Directorate of Education, which was functioning under the Ministry of Interior. The Ministry of Education is presently considered the largest centralized educational agency in Saudi Arabia. Its responsibilities range from policy-making, planning, and budgetary staffing to providing physical and teaching materials and supplies to all elementary, intermediate, and secondary male schools. It is also responsible for adult education, special education and teacher training programs. The ministry undertakes research and development related to the development of curriculum and teaching methods (Al-Salloum, 1995).

The General Presidency of Girls' Education; the General Presidency of Girls' Education supervises the complete spectrum of schooling for female students. The Directorate General for General Education directs schools and programs at the elementary, intermediate and secondary levels. The Deputy General of Girls' Colleges oversees junior college, undergraduate and post-graduate levels.

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The Ministry of Higher Education provides support and services for the Kingdom's seven universities and seventy-eight colleges. It is responsible for the supervision, coordination and follow-up of post-secondary programs and the connection with national development programs in different fields and provides the various sectors with the necessary technical and administrative manpower. It also supervises scholarships of Saudi students studying abroad, coordinates international inter-university relations and oversees the 27 or so educational and cultural mission offices in different countries.

The General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training (GOTEVT) has responsibility for both technical education and vocational training, and each of these areas is administered by a Directorate General under the direct authority of the Deputy Governor. While the the Directorate General for Technical Education has separate divisions for industrial, commercial, and agricultural education with sections devoted to developing and evaluating examinations and to research and curricula; the Directorate General for Vocational Training has divisions for developing and supervising varied vocational and on-the-job training programs (Al-Salloom, 1995).

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The goals of art education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are to help children's development in the following areas: (a) emotional growth, (b) intellectual development, (c) physical development, (d) perception, (e) social development, (f) aesthetics, (g) creativity, (h) the use of the sense, (I) respect for and love of work, (j) self expression and the relieving of frustrations, (k) self confidence, (l) knowledge of tools, equipment, (m) the expansion of knowledge in general and specifically knowledge of the terminology of art, and (n) the ability to take advantage of free time in order to benefit the person and the society (Fadal, 1990).

Education in Saudi Arabia is divided into five levels: Kindergarten (2 years), Elementary (6 years), Intermediate Education (3 years), Secondary Education (3 years) and Higher Education (4 years). The second level of education in Saudi Arabia is Elementary Education. According to Al-Salloom (1995) Saudi educational policy states that elementary education should:

1. Lay the foundation for all later stages in life and provide all members of Saudi society with the fundamentals of sound ideology, learning experience, knowledge and skills;

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2. Cultivate the correct Islamic creed in children's souls and provide them with a comprehensive moral and intellectual education shaped by Islamic values;
  3. Teach students Islamic prayers, virtues and good conduct;
  4. Develop children's basic skill, especially in language, mathematics and physical education;
  5. Further children's general education in all subjects;
  6. Acquaint children with the blessings God has bestowed on them and the geographical and social environment of their nation so they can utilize these blessings in service to their community;
  7. Develop children's aesthetic sense and imaginative thinking, and strengthen their appreciation of manual and technical work of all kinds;
  8. Develop children's understanding of the rights and duties of citizenship and instill love of country and loyalty to the monarch;
  9. Cultivate a love for learning and the value of work, and train children to make constructive use of their leisure time;
  10. Prepare children for future responsibilities as part of Saudi society.

Elementary schooling is compulsory and regarded as the foundation for the development of an overall education program. Elementary education spans grades 1-6, after an optional completion of one or two years of Kindergarten.

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The children begin elementary school at six years of age and students in each grade are generally within a two-year age span (1995, p.31).

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>AGES OF STUDENTS</b>
FIRST	6-8
SECOND	7-9
THIRD	8-10
FOURTH	9-11
FIFTH	10-12
SIXTH	11-14

In Elementary Education the students provide learning emphasis on classical Arabic language and the Islamic religion with secondary stress on history, geography, mathematics, science, physical education, and finally art education (refer to Table 1). Every week the students in elementary school take art education class for 2 hours in first, second, and third grade, in fourth, fifth, and sixth they take art education class for one-hour weekly.

**Table 1**

Elementary school timetable, grades and hours per week

Subjects	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth
Islamic studies	9	9	9	9	9	9
Arabic studies	9	9	9	8	8	8
Social studies	0	0	0	2	2	2
Science	2	2	2	2	3	3
Mathematics	4	4	4	5	5	5
Art education	2	2	2	1	1	1
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total Hours	28	28	28	29	30	30

Even though art education is required in elementary schools in the Saudi Arabia, the importance of this inspiring subject is underestimated because, the Ministry of Education does not focus on the curriculum planning and the teachers do not teach with any objectives. Some school officials' look upon art education as very minor subject, even the school administrations change the grades of students who excel in mathematics and sciences if their grades are low in art education because, they feel it is not equitable for them. And this underestimation has harmful consequences on the way art education is taught and studied.

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The current population of the country is estimated at twenty million, 90% of who are farmers and merchants. The remaining 10% are Bedouins who live in the desert (Al-Sallom, 1995). This fast-growing population requires more and more schools but the ministry can not cope up with this growth, they are forced to rent private homes as schools and there are no rooms for teaching art education in this rented house. This discourages the art teacher in teaching the subjects as required.

Negative image of art instructors in comparison to other disciplines; Art education, unlike other subjects in the school is not evaluated by the school that discourages the students to learn about art education. The schools' administrators also do not encourage either the teachers or the students. They see art education as wasting students' valuable time. The school supervisor encourages the school administrations to use the art education teacher for the purpose of painting the school walls, or use him for adornment of office administration and courtyard of school, for example, the schools' walls and other assignments that administrator feels they can do. They are not treated as teachers like teachers of other subjects. The students do not take this teacher like the other teachers.

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On the hand, almost of the parents in Saudi Arabia do not encourage their children to do art education. They still think that instruction in art education is carried out the way they were taught when they were in schools. The parents feel that art education is a waste of students' precious time when they would have studied other subjects that would be useful to their future career's life. These are subjects like mathematics or science. The parents also do not buy the materials necessary for use their children to take the subject seriously.

### **Statement of problem**

The study examines the present status and the past status of teaching art education in the Saudi Arabia boys' elementary schools. The study investigated the attitude and feeling of a parent from Saudi Arabian about art education in boys' elementary school in Saudi Arabia. It would encourage the ministry of education in Saudi Arabia to change the attitude toward art education for the parents to make art education develops and respect like the other subjects in elementary schools.

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### **Methodology**

Information concerning the specific questions was gathered by interviewing a selected Saudi Arabia parent who has children studying in boys' elementary school in Saudi Arabia. The field notes was collected through interviews using a tape recorder and writing of field notes.

The researcher has been involved in the teaching of art education in boys' elementary school for five years, one year in intermediate school and there after the ministry moved him to teach in a teachers' training college to train teachers of elementary and intermediate schools. The researcher is familiar with the problems affecting the teaching art education boys Elementary School. The participant was a male parent from Saudi Arabia who has studied in elementary school in Saudi Arabia and has two children in elementary school currently. Our close relationship us friends helped me to ask him to participate in this study. The interview was conducted at prearranged times and settings. This was done a room in Alden Library where there were fewer disturbances from students using the facilities of the library.

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The interview was opened ended questions lasting from 45 minutes to one hour during which he was asked to describe his own background and beliefs about art education in elementary school. Subsequently the researcher took the field notes to the parent to comment and make additions or corrections where necessary.

### **Research Question**

The following are the research questions:

1. What was your experience of art education in elementary school?
2. How often do you encourage your child to do his homework in art education like other subjects?
3. What are your fillings toward art in elementary school?
4. Do you think it is necessary to teach art education in boys' elementary school?

### **Data Collection**

Data collection was done through interview with the participating parents. The interviews were recorded, as part of data gathering and the tape-recorded conversation with the parent was transcribed. The interview was done in Arabic and translated into English during the transcription.

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### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted alongside data collection, data interpretation and data reporting writing as simultaneous process. After the data collection and organization as described above was completed the next process involved re-examining the data for answering the research questions. Once enough information was gathered to answer the research questions, the project was written.

### **Results**

#### **Participant Profile**

The participating parent is a graduate in education from Saudi Arabia. He graduated from Ummul-Qura University with Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction in 1997. The participating parent would be referred to as Mr. Ali to keep his identity confidential. Mr. Ali is a professor in Imam University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Mr. Ali has two boys in elementary school. The older boy is in the sixth grade while the younger one in the fourth grade. Mr. Ali is currently in the United States on sabbatical leave for one year studying English language. His children are with him and attend public school. Mr. Ali was asked the following questions during the interview:

1. What was your experience of art education in elementary school?
2. What were your sons' experiences of art education in elementary school?

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3. Are there any members of your family who do art?
  4. Do you encourage your children to do their homework in art like other subjects?
  5. How useful is art for your children?
  6. What are your feelings toward art in elementary school?
  7. How useful do you believe art education will be in the future of your children?
  8. Why is necessary to teach art education in boys' elementary school?

The interview was conducted with Mr. Ali in the library and the interview took 30-45 minutes in which the questions were put to Mr. Ali concerning his experiences with art education in boys' elementary school in Saudi Arabia.

What was your experience of art education in elementary school?

When this question was put to Mr. Ali, he claimed that the art class was very enjoyable for him and other students in the class. The teacher had no pre-planned objectives in while teaching the subject. Art was always put the last lesson of the day in the class timetable. This class was free time for every body to discuss or shout or chat with friends. The class was always used to do assignment of other subjects. Mr. Ali asserted that the lesson was often used to have "fun".

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I asked him a follow up question, why the art lesson was used for fun unlike other subjects? Mr. Ali said that probably he thought the teacher had no curriculum to follow. The teacher also did make an attempt to reinforce the students by making the subject interesting so that they would take seriously like other subjects. Secondly, he said that there was no grade awarded so that students did not put any effort to study it.

What were your son's experiences of art education in elementary school?

He said that his children like the subject because it is not hard and they don't need to put a lot of effort like other subjects. It has no hard homework to keep busy and occupied for along period. "...I usually buy for them crayons...(Mr.Ali). I asked a further question how do you respond to their request? He said that it is not "a big deal I just buy them..." (Mr. Ali). I asked whether the experience with his sons with same as his? Mr. Ali response was that nothing has changed in the teaching of art education form the time he was in schools to this period when his sons go to elementary school.

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Are there any members of your family who do art?

He claimed that his sister's hobby is art and she used to draw flowers when she was young but today, she does embroidery in a colorful manner, the interest in art has helped her to do embroidery successfully today. She also collects pictures of flowers to this day and put them frames and hung on her walls. She enjoys the beauty of flowers.

Do you encourage your children to do their homework in art like other subjects?

He doesn't encourage his sons to do art because it not a good career in Saudi Arabia. "...I will rather have them do math than art..." (Mr. Ali). He said that art education would be a waste of time for them. "I expect them to work hard in other subjects..." (Mr. Ali). He further claimed that he could allow them to do artwork during the weekend after they finish their homework.

How useful is art for your children?

Mr. Ali claimed that art would help the students to relax form the serious subject like math to a more playful and relaxing subject like art. This is the only use for art in the school. It makes the students to be creative and imaginative during the art lessons. He said that it can also help them to distinguish color and helps them understand different modes of color.

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How useful do you believe art education will be in the future of your children?

To the above question Mr. Ali asserted that art education has no future because of the cultural beliefs of the Saudi society where an artist is not taken seriously unlike one who studied maths, or biology or chemistry. I will prefer my sons and daughters to study other subjects rather than art education. But if an art teacher who has planned guides them in the elementary school with a well thought curriculum and they may learn some aspects of ceramic and other artwork it may help them if they became architects later in their life.

Why is it necessary to teach art education in boys' elementary school?

For this question Mr. Ali answered that it necessary for beginners in the elementary school. They can expose their imaginations in drawing or making other objects for them to enjoy. He further said that art is not necessary for higher classes. They can make decision in higher level what type of subjects they want to study.

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I asked a follow up question; how could you improve art education? He answered if the school has the material and other stuff for instruction including the syllabus for all levels and by grading the students work will encourage the students to take artwork very seriously. He also said that if modern technology is used as teaching aid, then the students will be motivated to learn and take the subjects as useful as other subjects.

### **Discussion**

From the answers of the parent, I deduced that the ministry of education did not coordinate the teaching of art education by not providing curriculum for teachers of art education. This lack of syllabi for art education demeaned the subject in the eyes of the parents, the students, and the school administrators. If the policy makers in the ministry was not concerned with the subject and do not encourage schools and school administrators in the teaching of the subject like other school subjects then that is why students had a chance to play about during art lessons. This lack of syllabi also made the subject none examinable and both the students' parents saw the subject unnecessary and ask their children not to engage in the time-wasting exercises of art education.

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The response to the question whether any member of his family has art as a hobby has to do with enjoyment of an individual in adult life. His sister found beauty and value in art is a choice in adult life and she took this as a hobby but it is not the influence and motivation of art education in school that may have influenced her. This also shows that although students may not be motivated in school for the subject, they may develop interest later on their own through the enjoyment and appreciation of the value of art in the world around them. This is also talent that may not found with all students who attend art education lessons but through encouragement and motivation this attitude can be inculcated in the students from early childhood.

The parent appreciates what art education can offer to his children when he explains that it would help students understand the nature of beauty and other skills of being able to paint and distinguish colors. He also agrees that art education makes the individual relax and free from the stress and release the imagination during activities, which ends up in making the individual creative. This creativity is needed to be brought into the classroom to help students understand the nature of art of work.

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On the questions of whether art is useful to the future of the students, the negative attitude comes up again because the parents prefer their children in specializing in other profession other than art education because of the notion that it has no future. The attitude of the parents and the culture that has been built around art education becomes familiar here again because the parent expects his children to work harder in other subject rather than doing activities in art. This negative attitude towards art education is seen both in the home and the school and the subject will always suffer as an inferior subject to other school subjects. It a subject that has not been encouraged by the policy makers and right from the elementary level the child realizes that it has no future so how ever talented he/she may be both the parents and the school discourage. The child ends up in choosing other subjects just because it is the trend of the system to work harder in the sciences rather than thinking of a career in art education. The interest of the ministry is just to enable students to learn drawing that may be of advantage in another subject. Art education is therefore acting as a service subject for the other subjects. The parent also referred to way the ministry has neglected the subject by not developing the modern methods of teaching the subject so that it can be appealing to the students.

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Another issue pointed in this interview is the provision of basic teaching material for art education teachers. Both the ministry and the school administrators do not provide the required materials for the teaching of art education. It is only when ministerial policy is made that the teaching and learning of art education can change from its present-day mere drawing subject to a subject that is worth learning and teaching. A subject that provides students more than drawing and enables both learners and teachers to appreciate and get motivated about it.

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

In conclusion, I feel that the Ministry of Education has to start getting educated about the art education as a discipline so that it can educate others about the subject. The ministry has to make a well-planned syllabus for the subject that encourages evaluation and advice school administrators of their role in providing the necessary materials for the subject just like any other subject in the curriculum. The ministry can also employ supervisor to coordinates activities of the subject in the schools to guide teachers in the teaching and learning of this subject. The teachers of art education need to be re-trained or in-serviced so that they can change their methods of teaching to enhance students' interest in the subject.

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The current colleges of teaching should also emphasize the importance of the aesthetics and culture of the arts to not only the community but to the country as a whole. A university or college of art education needs to be established to encourage in the participation of artistic contest, which is hoped, would create awareness of the subject. The department of art education in the ministry of education should develop television programs, exhibitions, and projects to raise the awareness of art and its importance to the society. Courses on Arabic calligraphy, Islamic art, weaving, glass stain, fiber arts, and silkscreen should be added to the art education curriculum.

Ministry should be aware of the changes and innovation in art education taking place all over the world and adopt these changes to enhance the interest of both the students and the parents in these new changes. The department of education should create inter-school competition in art education and reward outstanding students so that the parents are encouraged to attend these meetings once every year. The schools' administrators should organize excursions to museum for students to motivate their interest in art education. The ministry of education should also carry out frequent evaluation of art education programs taught in schools.

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If the general attitude of the teaching and learning of art education changes from the ministry to the classroom teachers then both parents and students will begin to consider art education as a subject which is important like the other subjects.

Finally, the researcher recommends that future research should be done in the following areas:

1. The role of the art teacher in the elementary school level.
2. Modifying art to fit into the cultural beliefs of the Saudi society.
3. Art education and its application in applied education and technology.
4. Preserving the Saudi culture through artistic expression.

It my hope that this study will help bring about change in the present-day attitude of the ministry of education and the parents in Saudi Arabia.

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