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# INVESTIGATING AESTHETIC AWARENESS AND CREATIVE WRITING THROUGH INTEGRATING VISUAL ARTS INTO LANGUAGE LEARNING MATERIALS

## Fahimeh Habibi[1], Hossein Rahmanpanah[2*]

[1,2*]Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran

**ABSTRACT:** Housen (2002)) explores how using Visual Thinking Strategies builds creative thinking skills that carry over into other contexts and content areas beyond the initial premise of developing aesthetic awareness. Aesthetic education according to Greene (2001) is a process of empowering diverse persons to engage reflectively and with a degree of passion with particular works of art. Creative writing is one of the most personal subject in EFL context. However, applying the principles of Visual Thinking Strategies to promote the creativity in language learning materials has received little attention in EFL context. Hence, the main purpose of this study is to include components of Visual Thinking Strategies suggested by Housen (2002) along with text-driven task-based approach proposed by Tomlinson (2018) to observe the effects on promoting creative writing among Iranian EFL learners. To this aim, 30 homogeneous EFL learners were chosen and divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group benefitted from the newly developed language learning materials, while the control group was exposed to their conventional methods. The results indicated that including Visual Thinking Strategies in language learning materials fosters creativity in writing and aesthetic awareness among Iranian EFL learners. With respect to aesthetic awareness, the findings indicated that the four subscales of Utopian thinking of art, Insights into awareness, Philosophy of thinking and Aesthetic pleasantness were greater in experimental group after the completion of the instructional intervention. This research has many implications regarding integrating authentic visual arts into language learning materials to foster learners' creativity, aesthetic awareness, appreciating the value of art, and explores how using visual arts meet the call for differentiated instruction to address the needs of diverse learners.

**Keywords:** Creative Writing, Aesthetic Awareness, Visual Arts, Visual Thinking Strategy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings have created a world which is leading towards excessive consumerism. People tend to use materials rather than producing them. The origin of the blame however, can be on the educational system. In the absence of production, communication will be adumbrated. Nowadays, English is considered as a vigorous apparatus for communication as it is widely used around the world and since it plays a prominent role in education, it is the social and ethical responsibility of stakeholders to reconsider their approach, methods, and materials in order to nurture the learners' critical thinking, creativity, and productivity since today's world is the visual world. Tomlinson (2003) argues that course books should enhance learners' interests, enthusiasms and help them to make meaningful connections in their minds. Any language learning process traditionally needs print materials or non-print materials (McGrath, 2002; Reinders and White, 2010; Richards and Theodore, 2001). One ought to bear in mind that without sufficient input of any sorts, there will be the lack of sufficiency of output or the language usage. Course books not only provide structure and syllabus for a program but also prepare the initial framework, which can be adapted by teachers to suit the needs and learning styles of the learners (Cunningsworth, 1995; Tomlinson, 1990;1994). On the other hand, in the absence of goal-oriented language learning materials for a specific skill such as creative writing which current study focuses on, demanding competence from student in that area seems quite unreasonable and, in some cases, impossible. In this era, learners are already engaged with images of many sorts on different platforms; whether they are on television, theaters, or most importantly social media which is becoming more popular day by day. Most of the shared information today is "visual information", every day people are exposed to enormous amount of visual elements. Many videos, photographs, and memes become viral every day. Classrooms are not isolated nor separated from the real world; therefore, if the learners demonstrate interest in visual materials, it seems rational to use visual elements in language learning material more and most

importantly in an effective way. Brown (2001) stated that writing is a thinking process; a writer produces a final written product based on their thinking after she or he goes through the thinking process. The way one observes, feels, deduces, and presents has great impact on their writing. Some genres regarding writing are relatively straightforward such as reports, summaries, and in some cases narratives, considering learners are often provided with pre-shaped patterns, steps and rules by their teachers. Generally, an intermediate learner is able to effortlessly write a summary of a given text only by selecting the main notions without even paraphrasing or rephrasing. But once learners are given a task such as a descriptive writing which requires imagining, contemplating, and creativity; they become unconfident, hesitant, and even reluctant. This lack of confidence and hesitation reflects neglecting of observing a phenomenon and inefficiency of expressing what we actually perceive. According to Harmer (2001) writing is a form of communication to deliver thoughts or to express feelings through written form. Flat, uninteresting, and disengaging materials for writing and the role of the teacher as a passive, unmotivated, and uninterested instructor could lead to ignoring creativity. According to Tomlinson (2008), successful materials development should be envisaged as learning materials and the principles to follow need to show the central role that learners should play. When it comes to creative writing, the role of the leaners is one of the most crucial factors since creativity in nature varies among different people. As Maley (2009) stated, creative writing normally refers to the production of texts which have an aesthetic rather than a purely informative, instrumental or pragmatic purpose.

Therefore, aesthetic awareness should be promoted while teaching creative writing. Maley (2009) illustrated that one of the chief distinguishing characteristics of creative text is a playful engagement with language. Creative writers tend to "play" with vocabulary, grammar, prepositions, etc. The researcher's personal interest in arts and teaching English encouraged her to suggest a new approach towards developing language learning materials by which learners become aesthetically more competent in order to write more creatively.

## 1.1. Creativity in Language Learning Materials

The term "creativity" is rather hard to define as it could be quite personal and specific to individuals and it manifests its ways in variety forms. Although there is a misconception which claims that creativity emerges naturally but One can teach students to think more creatively (Sternberg and Williams, 1996; Williams *et al.*, 2001). In other words, creativity can be considered as a "teachable" subject. According to Cook (2000) a playful attitude and atmosphere seems to be a key ingredient for creativity. It is rather unreasonable to expect learners use their creativity while they do not have any motivating, engaging, and mesmerizing materials at their disposal.

According to Read (2007) foundations of creativity are:

- Creativity doesn't happen in a vacuum. There is always something that stimulates and underpins the generation of children's original thinking, such as an idea, picture, text, story, object, question or problem, or some combination of these.
- Creative thinking arises from the emotional quality of children's engagement and involvement in an activity.
- Learners need a framework in which to develop creative thinking skills, and it is usually helpful to provide a model or build up an example outcome with the whole class first.
- Creativity involves the opportunity to play with ideas freely and spontaneously. At the same time, it involves disciplined thinking, curiosity, and attention to detail and effort.

## 1.2. Art and Developing Language Learning Materials

According to Jones (2009), Students and their teachers will advance in critical thinking, communication, creativity, pedagogy, and essential academia with the use of interdisciplinary techniques. Art has been undoubtedly an interesting subject in education. Most of the course books in the market include variety of illustrations, photos, etc. Eisner (2002) believed that to create or perceive with these materials requires one to think within a specific medium, the arts provide these media. The nature of art in the classrooms can assist learners to become more sensitive towards their perception and learning. While learning English is a left-brain process, being engaged with arts can improve the function of the learners' right-brain as well.

## 1.3. Creative Writing

According to Harmer (2001), creative writing is a journey of self-discovery, and self-discovery promotes effective learning. The term 'creative writing' suggests imaginative tasks such as writing poetry, stories, and plays.

Creative writing has received less attention in the field since it demands total latitude and personalization to take place and due to time constraints, strict schedules, and limitations, teachers often tend to avoid spending time on creative writing activities. Maley (2009) illustrated that one of the chief distinguishing characteristics of creative text is a playful engagement with language. This view illustrates that creative writing is defined as a form of "art" where imagination and creation take place. Therefore, it is not irrelative to consider teaching creative writing through art itself. As Maley (2009) stated, creative writing normally refers to the production of texts which has an aesthetic rather than a purely informative, instrumental or pragmatic purpose. Therefore, aesthetic awareness should be promoted while teaching creative writing.

## 1.4. Aesthetic Awareness

The term 'aesthete', comes from the Greek 'aisthetes'- a person who perceives. The extent to which the learners perceive in the classroom depends on how engaged and involved they become during the process of learning. Jones (2009) claimed that through aesthetic education, where students engage in expressive experiences where sentiment, interpretations and emotional responses are accessed. It can be thought than aesthetic awareness can be heightened and promoted. Gale (2005) illustrates the concept of aesthetic literacy in terms of outcomes, describing what we can hope to see from students who are engaging aesthetically. Jacobs (2009) claimed that aesthetic literacy may use a medium such as dance, photography or creative writing, but it has the capacity to transcend traditional discipline areas, which are often treated as separate and distinct in our current conception of curriculum. It can be concluded that by taking learners' identity and uniqueness into account, they will be more willing to engage in writing tasks and activities.

## 1.5. Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)

"Visual Thinking Strategies", on the other hand, is an inquiry-based teaching method created by cognitive psychologist Abigail House and museum educator Yenawine (2013).

VTS teaching practice include three key inquiries:

1. What's going on in this picture?
2. What makes you say that?
3. What more can we find?

The first and second inquiries seem to be more popular among the teachers and are included in language learning materials. But the third enquiry, on the other hand, is the most neglected one because of time constraints, lack of motivating and carefully developed materials. The third enquiry in fact is able to foster learners' imagination and mobbing beyond the frame since learners' are required to observe more closely, look for visual codes, textures, perspective, colors, tone, mood, etc. However, the number of studies on the effect of integrating visual arts and promoting aesthetics awareness on creative writing is scarce. Therefore, to achieve the main purposes of this study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Does integrating visual arts into materials development have significant effects on enhancing creative writing among Iranian EFL learners?
2. Does integrating visual arts into materials development have impact on promoting EFL learners' aesthetic awareness?
3. What is EFL learners' perception of integrating visual arts into language learning materials?

## 2. METHODS
### 2.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 30 intermediate EFL learners Language Institute with the age range of 19-30. The participants were selected through convenience sampling. The participants assigned

though administering Preliminary English Test (PET) as a proficiency test to a total population of 43 learners and those participants (N=30) whose scores on test were between one SD above and one SD below the mean were selected. The researchers then assigned the participants randomly into two experimental and control groups, each including 15 participants. The subjects in this study were participating in general English language course in ITALK institute.

## 2.2. Instruments

Aesthetic Experience Questionnaire (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990) was used to measure degrees of scale of the aesthetic experience participants in this study. The questionnaire is a 5-point Likert scaling questionnaire (1=Never to 5=Always), including 32-items. Participants in both control and experimental group answered 32 question about their aesthetic experience before and after treatment period. Moreover, the researcher conducted pretest and posttest in both experimental and control groups. Experimental group benefited from treatment including 12 units of newly developed language learning materials specific to creative writing integrated with visual arts, Visual Thinking Strategies, and curriculum of text-driven task-based approach proposed by Tomlinson (2018). This phase of the study was quasi-experimental design. In order to collect data of participants' creativity in writing before and after treatment, the researcher required all the participants in both groups i.e. control and experimental, to choose one printed visual art among three preselected photos and write a short story based on that, as pretest and posttest. In order to support the quantitative data and fulfill triangulation in this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interview in experimental group to collect data on learners' perceptions towards the process of learning while using newly developed materials. In this research, four participants among experimental group were interviewed by the researcher. Compared with unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews permit the researchers to have greater flexibility to arrange the questions, so that the participants can define their own experiences (Chang, 2011; Cohen, 2007).

## 2.3. Data Collection Procedure

The main purpose of this study is to promote creative writing and aesthetic awareness through integrating visual arts into language learning materials.

For ensuring the homogeneity of participants the researcher administered the PET test to the participants. The participants were divided into two control and experimental groups.

After ensuring the homogeneity of both groups, Aesthetic Experience Questionnaire (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990) questionnaire was administered to both experimental and control groups two times, before and after the completion of the instructional intervention.

Having questionnaire administered to both groups, the experimental group benefited from the newly developed materials while the control group continued receiving instructions through their conventional materials.

The whole instructional intervention lasted for 12 sessions (90 minutes). To collect data on creative writing, the researcher required the participants of both groups to select a visual art among 3 printed paintings and write a short story as pretests and posttests. Participants' creative writings (short stories) were scored by the two raters, using Mozaffari (2013), illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Mozaffari's Analytical Creative Writing Rubric

| Criteria | 4.Excellent | 3.Good | 2.Fair | 1.Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Image | Maximum use of significant details (there is no all just one abstraction, generalisation and judgement) | Several use of significant details (they are significantly more than abstractions generalisations and judgements) | Minimal use of significant details (they are significantly less than extractions generalisations and judgements) | No use of significant details (sole use of abstractions, generalisations and judgements) |
| Characterization | Maximal use of characters physical appearance, action, thought, symbol, etc. to reveal characters (complete indirect characterization) | Several use of characters physical appearance, action, thought, symbol, etc. to reveal characters | Minimal use of the characters physical appearance, action, thought, symbol, etc. to reveal characters | No use of the characters physical appearances, action, thought, symbol, etc. to review characters (complete direct characterization) |

| Voice | Maximal use of images to make the voice appealing | Several use of images to make the voice appealing | Minimal use of images make the voice appealing | No use of images to make the voice appealing |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Story | The use of a narrative to convey purpose. | - | - | No use of narrative to convey purpose (purpose in is conveyed through formal statement) |

Participants' writings were scored from 4 (excellent) to 1 (poor). According to Table 1, 4 various criteria such as Image, Characterization, voice, and story were analyzed deeply for each participant's short story.

Maximal use of significant details, characters' physical appearance, use of image to make the voice appealing, and the body of the story illustrated in the tasks, use of were scored higher, in comparison with no use of significant details, personal judgments, use of images to make the voice appealing, or use of narrative. Moreover, to develop the materials for the experimental group, the researcher used text-driven task-based approach proposed by Tomlinson (2018). The new-developed materials also included carefully and tastefully designed questions and exercise based on visual thinking strategies (VTS) introduced by Yenawine (2013).

Newly developed materials were a carefully designed texture of text-driven task-based approach (Table 2) and visual thinking strategies proposed by Housen (2002) which are as follows:

- Accountive Stage
- Constructive stage
- Classifying stage
- Interpretive stage
- Re-creative stage

**Table 2.** Text-driven Approach (Tomlinson, 2018).

| Activity Type | Procedure | Objective |
|---|---|---|
| **Readiness activity** | Learners think about/or visualize an incident in their lives relevant to the topic of the text | To activate the learners' minds in readiness for the text |
| **Initial response activity** | Learners read or listen to the text for a particular holistic purpose | To encourage holistic responses to texts and discourage discrete, wordfixated responses |
| **Intake response activity** | Learners think about and then articulate their personal responses to the text | To encourage and reward personal expression |
| **Development activity** | Learners develop a written or spoken text which connects to the core text | To encourage and reward creative production of language |
| **Input response activities** | Learners return to the core text to make discoveries about what the writer was saying and/or how the writer used a particular linguistic or discourse feature in the text | To deepen the learners awareness of the core text and of how the language is used to achieve appropriateness and effect |
| **Development activity** | Learners return to their text and improve it using what they havediscovered in the input response activities | |

As Table 2 illustrates, readiness activities are suitable starters for learners to warm up and the ease the way for learners to start visualizing. To provide initial response activities, the researchers asked the participants to demonstrate their immediate reaction to a quotation and an image. To accomplish Intake response activities, learners were supposed to complete 2 tasks about the details of an artwork after an in-depth observation. As a development activity, the learners were asked to accomplish the second phase of VTS where they were supposed to give a reason for the carefully selected questions in the tasks. Their reasons were supposed to be based on hidden facts and the existing features in the artwork such as colors, textures, contrasts, shadows, and brushstrokes. To provide input response activities, learners completed

the third and final phase of VTS. They went beyond the frame and only trusted their own imagination, visualization, and mental illustration, and described objects and situations which had not been illustrated or pointed directly in the artwork such as time, temperature, people's names and their relationships. Finally, with all the details, names, phrases, and vocabularies that had been extracted from previous activities, they wrote a short story about the paintings in newly developed materials.

## 3. RESULTS

To investigate the impact of integrating visual arts into materials development on learners creative writing, the researcher conducted pretest and posttest. Prior to these tests, the researcher had to make sure if the sample was homogeneous in terms of its proficiency. Accordingly, PET scores were used to test the homogeneity of the learners. The results are shown below.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics of the PET scores for the control and experimental groups

|  | Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std.Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PET | Experimental | 15 | 45.8333 | 4.55679 | .83195 |
|  | Control | 15 | 44.1000 | 3.88054 | .70849 |

The results in Table 3 shows that while the experimental group has a higher observed mean of PET scores, the reported standard deviation for this group reveals that it has a higher dispersion in terms of proficiency. In order to further trace the difference between these groups, the researcher conducted a Mann-Whitney Test since the distribution of the PET scores was not normal, as shown in Table 4.

As shown in Table 4, the distribution of the PET scores were not normal since the observed p level was less than .05. Accordingly, a non-parametric test had to be used to compare the groups in terms of their proficiency.

**Table 4.** Mann-Whitney test for comparing the control and experimental groups' PET scores

|  | PET |
|---|---|
| Mann-Whitney U | 340.500 |
| Wilcoxon W | 805.500 |
| Z | -1.629 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .103 |

According to the results demonstrated in Table 4, (U= 340, 50, p= 103), it was concluded that there was no significance difference between the groups in terms of their PET scores. This fact implied that the groups were both similar in terms of their proficiency level. Accordingly, it was argued that this study controlled the proficiency of the participants.

In order to test the first hypothesis, the researcher divided the participants of the present study into 2 groups (the experimental group and the control group). Before conducting the treatment, the participants' writing tasks were scored, then the treatment was carried out within the experimental group and by the time the treatment was done, all of the participants were asked to do another writing task. Eventually, all of the participants' writing tasks were scored in order to observe the extent to which the treatment was influential. The results of the descriptive analysis of the obtained scores are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics for writing pretest scores

|  | Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Writing Pretest | Experimental | 15 | 11.7500 | 1.25132 | .27980 |
|  | Control | 15 | 11.2500 | 1.25132 | .27980 |

As it shown in the Table above, there were 15 learners in the control group and another 15 learners in the experimental group. The observed mean for the experimental group was 11.75 and the standard deviation was 1.25. In addition, the observed mean for the control group was 11.25 and the standard deviation was 1.25.

The parallel writing test was also conducted as a posttest to both the control and experimental groups in one session under time limitations at the end of the course. The results of the descriptive analysis of the collected scores are shown in table 6.

**Table 6.** Descriptive statistics for writing posttest scores

| Group Statistics | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
| Writing Posttest | Experimental | 15 | 13.8500 | 1.08942 | .24360 |
| | Control | 15 | 11.8500 | 1.03999 | .23255 |

As is shown in Table 6, there were 15 learners in the control group and another 15 learners in the experimental group. The observed mean for the experimental group was 13.85 and the standard deviation was 1.08. In addition, the observed mean for the control group was 11.85 and the standard deviation was 1.03.

In order to have a sound inferential analysis, the normality of the distribution of the data was tested. For this purpose, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run. The results are shown below.

**Table 7.** Results for Test of Normality

| | | Kolmogorov-Smirnova | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Group | Statistic | df | Sig. | Statistic | Df | Sig. |
| Writing Pretest | Experimental | .179 | 20 | .092 | .942 | 20 | .258 |
| | Control | .226 | 20 | .009 | .908 | 20 | .059 |
| Writing Posttest | Experimental | .205 | 20 | .028 | .849 | 20 | .005 |
| | Control | .207 | 20 | .024 | .925 | 20 | .122 |
| a. Lilliefors Significance Correction | | | | | | | |

According to the Table 7, the distribution of pretest scores for both control group (k-s= .22, p= .00) was not normal but the one for the experimental group (k-s= .17, p= .09) was normal since the observed p was above the accepted significance level, p< .05. Moreover, the distribution of posttest scores for both control group (k-s= .20, p= .02) and the experimental group (k-s= .20, p= .02) were not normal since the observed p was below the accepted significance level, p< .05. According to the observed results in the Table 7, it can be concluded that a parametric test, independent samples t-test can be used to compare the observed pretest mean scores of the two groups and non-parametric test, independent samples t-test can be used to compare the observed posttest mean scores of the two groups.

The following table shows the results of analysis for the pretest scores. An independent samples t-test was used to compare the writing pretest scores of the two groups.

**Table 8.** Comparison of writing pretest scores

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | | Lower | Upper |
| **Writing Pretest** | Equal variances assumed | .054 | .817 | 1.264 | 38 | .214 | .50000 | .39570 | | -.30105 | 1.30105 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.264 | 38.000 | .214 | .50000 | .39570 | | -.30105 | 1.30105 |

According to the Table 8, considering the results of the t-test (t= 1.26, p= .21), it can be argued that there was no significant difference between these two groups in terms of their performance on the pretest.

**Table 9.** Comparison of writing posttest scores

| Test Statistics[b] | |
|---|---|
| | Listening Posttest |
| Mann-Whitney U | 42.000 |
| Wilcoxon W | 252.000 |
| Z | -4.364 |

| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)] | .000[a] |

a. Not corrected for ties.
b. Grouping Variable: Group

The parallel form of the writing test was administered as the posttest and the results of the comparison of the two groups are shown in the Table 9. According to the observed results of the Mann-Whitney (Z= -4.89, p= .00), it can be argued that there was a statistically significant difference between these two groups in terms of their performance on the posttest. Considering the results of the test shown in the Table 9, it can be argued that the learners in the experimental group outperformed the ones in the control group in terms of their performance on the posttest. In other words, it can be argued the null hypothesis of the study was significantly rejected. Thus, it can be argued that the treatment of the present study could foster the participants' writing skill.

As mentioned earlier, each writing task was scored by two raters. In order to ensure the reliability of the scores given by the two raters, a Pearson correlation test was run to see if there was a significant correlation between the test scores. The results are below:

**Table 10.** Pearson correlation test for the scores given by the two raters

| | | OFRater1 | OFRater2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| OF Rater1 | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .717 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .004 |
| | N | 10 | 10 |

Based on the results reported in table 10, it can be argued that the Pearson correlation coefficient (.71) is significant at p < .05 level. That is, the reliability of the scores given by the two raters was at the accepted level.

It is worth mentioning that the researcher divided the mentioned questionnaire into 4 different factors germane to the criteria which were covered in it. As a result, the 4 factors were analyzed statistically in order to clearly investigate and find out the areas of difference regarding before and after the treatment. The mentioned factors include *Utopian thinking of art, Insights into awareness, Philosophy of thinking* and *Aesthetic pleasantness.* Every single factor was analyzed statistically. The first factor which is *Utopian thinking of art* investigated the extent to which the participants pay homage to applying art in everyday life. In other words, this factor measured the extent to which the participants are familiar and intimate with art as well as the extent they benefit from art and apply it in their daily lives.

The second factor which is *Insights into awareness* dealt with the extent to which the treatment could add to the participants' understanding of Aesthetic Awareness.

The third factor which is *Philosophy of thinking* dealt with the basis and essence of the participants' attitudes towards the role of Aesthetic features in EFL Writing skill.

The fourth factor dealt with the extent to which the participants were inclined towards Aesthetic Awareness. In better words, this factor measured the extent to which the participants are fascinated by art itself or how much art is appealing to them.

To test the hypothesis the researchers calculated the descriptive indices of the data collected by the questionnaire before and after the course. The results are shown below.

**Table 11.** Descriptive statistics for the questionnaire data before and after the course

| | Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aesthetic Pre | Experimental | 15 | 77.4000 | 7.14943 | 1.84597 |
| | Control | 15 | 76.2667 | 5.87326 | 1.51647 |
| Aesthetic Post | Experimental | 15 | 88.0000 | 8.09762 | 2.09080 |
| | Control | 15 | 78.0667 | 6.08824 | 1.57198 |

According to the statistics reported in Table 11, the learners in both groups were comparable in terms of their aesthetic awareness prior to the course; however, a closer look at the table shows that the learners in the experimental group were rather more aware of the aesthetic aspects of language after the course. To test the hypothesis, the researcher conducted a paired sample test to see if the course led to any improvement and then, an independent samples t-test was run to compare the groups before and after the course in terms of aesthetic awareness.

**Table 12.** Paired sample t-test for the learners aesthetic awareness

| | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Experimental Group | -1.06000 | 3.24698 | .83837 | -12.39812 | -8.80188 | -12.644 | 14 | .000 |
| Control group | -1.80000 | 3.54965 | .91652 | -3.76573 | .16573 | -1.964 | 14 | .070 |

According to Table 12, the experimental group made a significant improvement after the course (t= 12.64, p= .00) while the control group was not as successful as the experimental group (t= 1.96, p= .07). The results show that integrating visual arts into material development can significantly improve the learners' aesthetic awareness after a course. To further analyze the results, the two groups were compared using independent samples t-test.

Considering the observed improvement in aesthetic awareness in the experimental group, a further analysis was done to see what aspects of aesthetic awareness were improved after treatment.

**Table 13.** Paired sample t-test for comparing aesthetic awareness of the experimental group before and after the treatment

| | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Utopian thinking of art | -3.661 | 14 | .003 |
| Insights into awareness | -3.773 | 14 | 002 |
| Philosophy of thinking | -2.303 | 14 | .037 |
| Aesthetic pleasantness | -2.841 | 14 | .013 |

As shown in Table 13, the observed significance levels for all the components were below .05; that is, it was concluded that the instruction could improve the aesthetic awareness of the learners with regard to all the components. In addition to compare the groups before and after the course an independent samples t-test was run. The results are shown below.

**Table 14.** Independent samples t-test for aesthetic awareness

| | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Aesthetic Pre | .474 | 28 | .639 | 1.13333 | 2.38900 | -3.76030 | 6.02697 |
| Aesthetic Post | 3.797 | 28 | .001 | 9.93333 | 2.61582 | 4.57506 | 15.29161 |

According to Table 14, while the groups were similar at the inception of the course (t= .47, p= .63), the instruction could grow the experimental group's aesthetic awareness significantly so that the group can outperform the control group in terms of aesthetic awareness. Accordingly, the second null hypothesis of the study is rejected.To further analyze the data the researcher compared the aesthetic awareness of the participant pairwise before and after the instruction. The results are shown in the following tables.

**Table 15.** Descriptive Statistics for aesthetic components before the treatment

| | Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Utopian thinking of art Pre | Experimental | 15 | 18.6000 | 3.24698 | .83837 |
| | Control | 15 | 19.0667 | 1.66762 | .43058 |
| Insights into awareness Pre | Experimental | 15 | 19.2000 | 2.80815 | .72506 |
| | Control | 15 | 18.2000 | 2.67795 | .69144 |
| Philosophy of thinking Pre | Experimental | 15 | 20.3333 | 3.06283 | .79082 |
| | Control | 15 | 20.4000 | 3.11219 | .80356 |
| Aesthetic pleasantness Pre | Experimental | 15 | 19.2667 | 3.32666 | .85894 |
| | Control | 15 | 18.6000 | 3.62137 | .93503 |

As shown in Table 15, it was argued that the learners in two groups were very similar in terms of their *Utopian thinking of art, Insights into awareness, Philosophy of thinking and Aesthetic pleasantness*

aspects of their aesthetic awareness, with respect to the observed means. In addition, with regard to the observed standard deviation indices reported above, it was argued that the two groups had similar homogeneity except for intellectual awareness before the instruction. Independent samples t-test was used to compare the means.

**Table 16.** Independent samples t-test for Aesthetic Subscales Prior to Intervention

|  | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Utopian thinking of art Pre | -.495 | 28 | .624 |
| Insights into awareness Pre | .998 | 28 | .327 |
| Philosophy of thinking Pre | -.059 | 28 | .953 |
| Aesthetic pleasantness Pre | .525 | 28 | .604 |

As shown in Table 16, the differences observed in Table 16 between the mean scores of the two groups were insignificant due to the fact that the observed p levels in Table 16 were all above .05. Accordingly, it was concluded that the two groups were comparably equal before the instruction.

**Table 17.** Descriptive Statistics for Aesthetic Subscales after the Intervention

|  | Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Utopian thinking of art Post | Experimental | 15 | 21.8000 | 2.56905 | .66332 |
|  | Control | 15 | 19.2667 | 1.98086 | .51146 |
| Insights into awareness Post | Experimental | 15 | 21.6667 | 2.25726 | .58282 |
|  | Control | 15 | 20.1333 | 1.76743 | .45635 |
| Philosophy of thinking Post | Experimental | 15 | 22.0667 | 3.34806 | .86447 |
|  | Control | 15 | 19.8000 | 1.78085 | .45981 |
| Aesthetic pleasantness Post | Experimental | 15 | 22.4667 | 3.02056 | .77991 |
|  | Control | 15 | 19.8000 | 2.21037 | .57071 |

As shown in Table 17, the observed means were rather far from one another considering the fact that the observed mean scores of the experimental group were higher than those of the control group after the instruction. In addition, with regard to the observed standard deviation indices, it was concluded that the experimental group was more heterogeneous than the control group after the instruction with regard to all four components.

**Table 18.** Independent samples t-test for Comparing the Component Means after the Instruction

|  | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Utopian thinking of art Post | 3.024 | 28 | .005 |
| Insights into awareness Post | 2.071 | 28 | .048 |
| Philosophy of thinking Post | 2.315 | 28 | .028 |
| Aesthetic pleasantness Post | 2.759 | 28 | .010 |

With regard to the results observed in Table 18, it was concluded that the instruction could significantly improve the learners' aesthetic awareness after the instruction with regard to all four components due to the fact that the observed significance levels were all below .05. Thus, it was argued that the instruction applied in this study was successful in terms of both improving the learners writing ability and promoting their aesthetic awareness after the instruction.

The third research question of the study was as follow:

What is EFL learners' perception of integrating visual arts into language learning materials?

As it is mentioned earlier, the interview which was guided by the following questions was conducted after the course:

1. How engaging did you find the artworks in the newly developed materials?
2. How those visual arts differ from the ones existing in your course books?
3. How fostering aesthetic awareness paved the way for your creativity in writing?
4. To what extent you were willing to complete the progressive tasks in the newly developed materials?
5. Did answering questions in materials encourage you to look for new vocabularies in order to express your feelings in your writing?
6. Has accomplishing these new creative writing materials any impacts on your perspective towards "the value of arts"?

As it was expected, that most learners perceived integrating art works to materials to be innovative and unique. Besides rising their motivation and tendency to improve overall language skills as well as enhancing learners' awareness of aesthetics, a number of learners were encouraged to raise cultural issues while focusing on art works because they believed it would help them develop their communicative and particularly their pragmatic competence.

Another reason behind supporting visual art integration in EFL classes was that some learners found it an interesting technique to motivate learners. For example, a learner said "whenever I implement visual arts even regarding some apparently unrelated topics, I come up with abundant ideas and interesting things in my mind. No matter, what topic I raise, I believe using visual arts may lead to fruitful discussions." On the other hand, a number of participants did not have a positive perspective. One reason was that they adopt such a position is that, as mentioned by a learner, "some learners may get it as if the teacher is going to consider the class activities as something like fun, unimportant since she does not directly face the activities in the class and stands in a shadow" another student claimed that "some learners may find it an unwanted extension of one activity. Accordingly, it is hard to manage classes in which students coming together with different expectations and tastes."

In addition, some students perceived it to be unnecessary due to the fact that it deviates from what they called an objective of language learning classes. A learner stated that "English classes should aim at teaching target structures and elements emphasized in the textbooks. They have to focus on how a native speaker uses these elements. We should know about their use." This view considers visual art integration as a threat to the improvement of accuracy of the learners.

Regarding the data obtained from the interview, it can be concluded that there were a number of factors affecting learners' choices of using cooperative teaching. The least important factor was the nature of the activity itself, since it was not mentioned by many of the participants in the interviews. One key factor was "manageability" as reflected in a learner's quotation. She stated that "no matter what activity you are doing in classroom, it should be manageable in terms time and place. Moreover, there is always a time pressure in language classes. Students meet twice in a week for about one hour and something. You have to consider this, otherwise, you have to skip an activity or you will find yourself behind the schedule." The second issue is "feasibility" as mentioned by a learner who states that "you are thinking of putting students in groups or introducing an innovative aspect. I found it interesting but it is not feasible in a language classes since there are several activities in a lesson that need to be covered and the students are not at a good level."

Another factor raised was the issue of "learners' tendency". One of the learners stated that "there are various activities available to us as the learners. However, learners do not tend to pick up these activities. For example, our class is hardly in the mood for talking or taking part in such added elements since they perceive learning English as mastering a lesson I believe it is not possible to promote visual art integration in all classes in the same way. If learners do not tend to take steps, teachers are subjected to failure."

Regarding learners' familiarity with visual arts, they had little to say since they believed their knowledge and awareness were limited. Moreover, they believed that they had little, if any, chance to update themselves and improve their practical skills on implementing visual arts in classes. Some of them also considered their lack of language proficiency as the other source of problem.

In sum the comments and attitudes of the participating learners in the interview could be summarized in the following table.

**Table 19.** Summary of the learners' attitudes toward using art works in their textbooks

| Codes emerged from the interview | Frequency (Percentage) |
|---|---|
| Willingness to use or elaborate in visual arts | 7 (87%) |
| Motivation and interest | 5 (62%) |
| Size of the class | 6 (75%) |
| Sufficiency of the textbook syllabus | 3 (37%) |
| Time limitation | 5 (62%) |
| Lack of students' proficiency readiness | 7 (87%) |

## 4. DISCUSSION

The results in this study indicated that the use of visual arts in language classroom can be significant not only in terms of raising the learners' writing ability but also with regard to reinforcing their aesthetic awareness. Although conventional language teaching method found to be as significant as the use of visual art in language classroom, the traditional approach to writing instruction found to be sterile in terms of encouraging the learners to develop their aesthetic awareness. In addition, with regard to the results

from the interview, it was found that despite some negative aspects of art integration in language classes, such as lack of students' readiness in terms of proficiency and time limitations, it can certainly affect the students' willingness to use language and motivation and interest in language learning.

According to the respondents, arts can be a stimulus, refresher, guider and facilitator. They believed that learning English through the arts can boost their interests and motivate them to learn EFL. These results are consistent with previous research. In addition, they believed that arts made the learning environment relaxed, as a result they are more willing to share their ideas with their classmates. Those opinions also confirm previous research. Arts serve as a stimulus and can stimulate language learners to share their ideas with others when their minds have been activated. Arts can increase language learners' comprehension and can enhance their motivation for learning languages and engagement in the class. This confirms research by Hoyt (1992) and by Gullatt (2008). The findings of this study are also in line with those of Randle (2010) in which he strongly advocated the application of visual arts in educational settings to foster creative writing and advance academic accomplishment. Moreover, the findings of the present study are in agreement with Trainin *et al.* (2006). Based on the findings of their study, there was overwhelming support for the incorporation of visual arts into writing programs to nurture their imagination, self-expression skills, and problem-solving prowess.

Moreover, the findings are in line with those of Carger (2004) and Bussert-Webb (2001) who reported that students benefited from visual arts integration in the classroom by inspiring imagination in their writings. They also found that the students were more fascinated in incorporating visual arts because they were able to manipulate the writing process more effectively. In addition, the findings of this study were also congruent with those of Olshansky (2006) who concluded that visual arts integration in teaching writing skill made students feel interested and helped them find the writing class easier and more enjoyable. Also, based on Randle (2010) there is overwhelming support for the use of visual arts in the classroom to encourage creative writing and improve academic achievement.

According to the results of the study, learning through the aesthetics might occur in a number of ways. Students might learn about cultural difference, community, the history of the country, or a number of other not essentially aesthetic topics through the aesthetic experience of engaging with every single skill or sub-skill of English.  Considering the improvements made in the quality of the participants' writings and considering the attitudinal issues discovered in this study, it is worth mentioning that this study sheds light on the processes that goes behind the improvements made as a result of making learners familiar with Aesthetic subjects through which they can improve their writing skill. According to the results of the present study, one can conclude that it has become usual for teachers not to like the creative EFL learner who is also aesthetically literate since he or she normally bends the rules to suit themselves. It is rather the sweet conforming learner who is considered the better one by the teacher and hence rewards them to the drawback of the creative noncompliant child. This attitude must be eschewed in order to enhance creativity and aesthetic awareness in EFL learners.

The teacher must create an atmosphere that encourages creativity as well as aesthetic development in the classroom. That is, the teacher must prepare conditions or settings that enhance creative and aesthetic development. An EFL learner must be allowed to deviate from group activity if the need arises. Denying the desire to make such diversion by treating the child as disruptive and taking disciplinary action can be frustrating to the child and might even make him withdraw from participating in class activities thereby affecting learning output.

According to the results of the present study, no one can impose aesthetic knowledge; it must come from the learner. However, acquiring this knowledge needs reinforcement. It is through identifying with the learner, with his or her needs and interests.

# 5. CONCLUSION

This quantitative-qualitative study has explored how does the use of visual arts influence EFL learners' writing performance and aesthetic awareness, and what EFL learners' perceptions were when they learned English through the integration of visual arts. Guided by the research questions, it was found that arts can be a stimulus, refresher, facilitator and guider. Arts can be a facilitator and guider to help language learners make understanding process easy and visual. In addition, arts can also be a refresher making the learning environment relaxed, thus improving learners' learning satisfaction. Moreover, arts can also establish the rapport among students even between instructor and students, which can enhance students' attainment of learning. Through the multiple sources of data, EFL learners in the study showed their high engagement, and communicated that they are in favor of the practice of integrating the arts into the English language learning. The findings of the study best reflect the reasons for using art in EFL

classes stated by Keddie (2010), (1) Art uplifts: students learn better when they are uplifted and one way of doing so is by aesthetically enhancing the learning environment by means of decoration. (2) Art is an accessible resource: it is all around us and it affects us all. (3) Art offers variety which is necessary in teaching to give a brisk pace to the class. (4) Art is a springboard to learning: it arouses curiosity, facilitates access to any subject or issue, leads to an unlimited new world and helps develop critical thinking skills. (5) Art seeds creativity: it sparks imagination and emotion and it may unlock creative thoughts. (6) Art is authentic: we can create a learning environment that comes to resemble the real world. (7) Art is communication: it considers personal responses that art evokes in us. Art may be loaded with symbolism which requires interpretation. Sometimes the best way to do this is to take a look at it and then share thoughts, which contributes greatly to developing communication in the classroom. The findings of this study lend weight to the application of visual arts in educational settings as an efficient vehicle to expedite the development of learners' imaginative writing skills (Lok, 2014).

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