Original Research Article

The Lived Experiences of Special Education Teachers On Art Integration in Teaching Literacy To Learners with Special Needs

.

ABSTRact

|  |
| --- |
| This study explored the lived experiences of special education teachers in implementing art integration within literacy instruction for learners with special needs. It aimed to examine their pedagogical practices, identify challenges encountered, derive meaningful insights, and propose a contextually relevant action plan to enhance literacy outcomes through art-based strategies. Conducted in a public school setting in the Philippines specifically at Queens Row Elementary School the research employed a qualitative, phenomenological design to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers’ instructional experiences. Five special education teachers with direct experience in using art-integrated approaches participated in the study. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, and were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes. Findings revealed that integrating various art forms, including visual arts, music, dance movement, and multimedia, enhanced learner engagement, phonemic awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and reading comprehension. Teachers reported that multisensory and creative activities enabled learners to express themselves more effectively and retain literacy concepts through interactive and differentiated instruction. Art integration was also found to foster inclusivity and support diverse learning styles. However, several challenges emerged, including learners’ sensory sensitivities, limited access to instructional resources, classroom disruptions, inconsistent parental support at home, and insufficient access to specialized professional development. Participants highlighted the pressing need for targeted training programs, workshops, and seminars specifically focused on literacy instruction for learners with special needs to enhance the effectiveness of art integration. The study concludes that art integration is a transformative pedagogical approach that addresses the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs of learners with special needs. It promotes academic development, learner engagement, and inclusive classroom practices. The study recommends increased institutional support, sustained professional development, and structured literacy programs using art-based strategies. It also underscores the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers, parents, school leaders, and community stakeholders to ensure cohesive and effective literacy instruction in special education settings. |

*Keywords: Art Integration, Literacy Development, Learners with Special Needs, Special Education Teachers' Lived Experiences, Multisensory Learning, Individualized Instruction, Special Needs Education, Inclusive Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Integrating the arts into education has evolved into a transformative method for enriching the learning experience, particularly for learners with special needs. Art integration is characterized by the integration of visual arts, music, dance, and multimedia into traditional classroom instruction. It offers a range of innovative methods to engage learners with diverse cognitive, emotional, and physical needs. This method has demonstrated the ability to enhance literacy skills, motivation, self-expression, and emotional regulation in learners with special needs. In contrast to traditional teaching approaches, which often rely on rote memory and verbal instruction, arts-based strategies provide multimodal and dynamic educational environments that cater to diverse learning preferences, thereby enhancing both cognitive and affective development.

Globally, the importance of the arts in inclusive education is being increasingly recognized. According to UNESCO (2021), arts integration promotes innovation, diversity, and enhanced emotional engagement inside the classroom. Anderson and Wendt (2022) emphasize that the arts enhance interactions with others, identity development, and a sense of belonging among learners with special needs. Similarly, Shouma (2020) emphasizes the significance of experiential learning through art, promoting reflective, hands-on activities that enable meaningful connections with learning content. The National Art Education Association (2021) shares the same views, asserting that arts-integrated instruction fosters both academic success and emotional well-being.

In the Philippines, national educational frameworks progressively promote the use of the arts to accommodate learners’ diversity. The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA, 2024) advocates for art-based education as a practical approach to enhance learning outcomes among diverse learners. The Department of Education's MATATAG Curriculum (DepEd, 2023) and the DepEd Memorandum No. 001, S. 2024 Catch-Up Friday program (DepEd, 2024) emphasize the integration of visual arts, music, and dance into literacy instruction to address learning gaps and promote cultural engagement. Prajapati and Kumar (2021) assert that art-integrated learning fosters cognitive, emotional, and social growth through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic engagement, making it especially beneficial in special education settings.

A growing body of studies confirms the efficacy of art integration in supporting literacy development for learners with special needs. Becker (2020) asserts that the visual arts facilitate learners' association of abstract language with concrete imagery, thereby enhancing vocabulary, comprehension, and expressive communication. Reisman and Severino (2020) demonstrate that creative strategies, including visual mapping and graphic organizers, reduce anxiety and enhance learning for students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. Gross (2020) emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary collaboration between special education and art educators to improve literacy through personalized and visual content instruction. Caballero et al. (2023) observed that art-based activities, including drawing, painting, and dramatization, enabled the internalization of vocabulary and reading concepts among Filipino learners with special needs.

The significance of integrating music and technology into special education has been recorded. Lee and Ho (2023) demonstrated the use of music technology to enhance phonemic awareness and self-regulation. Lou and Huang (2024) discovered that computer-assisted arts enhance early literacy and communication skills. Pavlou (2020) suggests that digital storytelling promotes creative expression and enhances narrative understanding. Wu and Teixeira (2024) underscored that art-based digital interventions support language development in learners with autism.

Nevertheless, multiple studies have pointed out challenges in implementation. Gerber et al. (2024) indicate that many teachers lack formal training in arts-based instruction. Mareza et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of institutional support, professional development, and adequate resources for successful art integration. In the Philippines, Caballero et al. (2023) discovered that SPED teachers recognize the benefits of art integration but are hindered by restricted access to resources and inadequate training. Saunders (2021) cautioned that inflexible, examination-oriented curricula frequently obstruct innovative pedagogies.

Despite these promising findings, a research gap remains. In general education, student outcomes and controlled interventions are the primary topics of most recent studies. Few qualitative studies have been conducted that document the actual experiences of teachers in special education integrating art into their lessons. In Philippine public school settings, where implementation may be influenced by contextual variables such as funding, policy constraints, and cultural relevance, this gap is more pronounced. Crispel and Kasperski (2021) highlight the lack of teacher-centered research in inclusive arts education, underscoring the importance of exploring teachers' perspectives and experiences.

This study examines the lived experiences of special education teachers at Queens Row Elementary School who use art in their literacy lessons. Drawing on the researcher's experience as a special education (SPED) teacher and illustrator of learning resources, the study aims to document the impact of creative strategies on learner engagement, literacy development, and instructional decision-making. This research, viewed through a phenomenological lens, aims to amplify the perspectives of special education teachers and provide actionable insights to inform policy, program development, and teacher training. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how arts integration can support inclusive and culturally responsive literacy instruction in public special education settings.

2. methodology

This chapter outlines the research design, setting, participants, instruments, data collection procedures, analysis, and ethical considerations employed in the study. It details how the researcher systematically explored the lived experiences of special education teachers in integrating art into literacy instruction for learners with special needs.

**2.1 Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of special education teachers in integrating art into literacy instruction for learners with special needs. A phenomenological approach was appropriate for capturing rich, in-depth narratives that reflect how special education teachers experience and interpret the process of art integration in their instructional practices. This design enabled the researcher to generate insights grounded in participants' real-world experiences within the special education setting.

**2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique**

The study utilized purposive sampling to select five SPED teachers who met the following criteria: (1) had five years or less of teaching experience in special education at Queens Row Elementary School; (2) had practical experience integrating art into literacy instruction; and (3) voluntarily agreed to participate in the study by signing informed consent forms. The researcher also participated as a co-participant, contributing personal insights from her dual role as a SPED teacher and illustrator for the learning resource development team, while maintaining critical reflection throughout the research process.

**2.3 Research Instrument**

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews guided by a three-part protocol: (1) establishing rapport and collecting basic demographic and teaching background information, (2) exploring in-depth questions related to the use of art in literacy instruction, and (3) providing space for clarification and reflection on participants’ responses. The structure allowed flexibility in probing for deeper insights, encouraging participants to share detailed narratives and spontaneous reflections. The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide specifically designed to examine teachers’ experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the outcomes of integrating art into literacy instruction. Content experts validated this guide and conducted pilot tests to ensure clarity and relevance. In addition to interview data, supplementary information was collected through field notes and audio recordings.

**2.4 Data Gathering Procedure**

The data collection involved Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and individual interviews with the five participants. Each session lasted approximately one hour and was audio-recorded with participants’ consent. The interviews were conducted in the school setting during times convenient to the teachers. The researcher created a comfortable environment to encourage open sharing. Transcriptions were completed verbatim, ensuring the authenticity of responses.

**2.5 Data Analysis Procedure**

The study used thematic analysis to process and interpret the qualitative data. The researcher followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Initial coding captured the essential ideas, which were then clustered into broader themes that reflected the collective experiences of the participants. Direct quotations and contextual interpretation supported these themes.

**2.6 Ethical Considerations**

This study adhered to established ethical standards for research. Informed consent forms clearly outlined the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the strict confidentiality of all collected data. Audio recordings were used solely for transcription and data analysis and were securely stored to ensure privacy. The research protocol was reviewed and endorsed by the appropriate school and division authorities and approved by the institutional ethics board. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained transparency, respect, and a commitment to safeguarding the rights and well-being of all involved.

3. results and discussion

Based on the findings of this study, a comprehensive teaching action plan was created to maximize the use of art-based methods in literacy instruction with learners with special needs. The study examined the lived experiences of five special education teachers at Queens Row Elementary School and found that integrating the visual arts, music, dance, and multimedia significantly improved learners' engagement with special needs, phonemic awareness, and reading comprehension. The thematic analysis captured key patterns in implementing these strategies, the benefits observed, and the challenges encountered.

**Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Art Integration in Teaching Literacy to Learners with Special Needs**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Superordinate Theme** | **Subtheme** | **Evidence (Actual Responses)** | **Translation** |
| Art Integration and Literacy | Art Activities and Techniques | "Art integration ang ginamit naming yung usually yung finger painting, collage, ahh coloring, paper cutting ganyan, collage narin. Tapos paper tearing..." | "We use art integration, usually finger painting, collage, coloring, paper cutting, and collage too, then paper tearing..." |
| "Young art integration in teaching literacy learning maganda ito para sa kanilang vocabulary through visual or picture reading." | "Art integration in teaching literacy is good because it helps them with vocabulary through visual or picture reading." |
| "Yung art integration gamit na gamit talaga namin sa activities namin so usually gumagamit kami ng art integration skills sa activities namin..." | "We use art integration a lot in our activities, usually in literacy activities." |
| "Maganda din itong art integration kasi na tatackle niya na yung iba’t ibang subjects like reading..." | "Art integration is great because it addresses various subjects like reading..." |
| “Mas na-express, nag-eenjoy ng mga bata ang gusto nilang gawin through art integration kasi mas marami pong pagpipilian. Kasi ginagamit naming po yung visual, yung music, yung dance at saka yung multimedia through TV o videos para maturuan sila ng literacy.” | “Children can express themselves better and enjoy what they want to do through art integration because it offers more options. We use visuals, music, dance, and multimedia, such as TV or videos, to teach them literacy.” |
| Engagement and Focus | Learners with Special Needs: Motivation and Involvement | "Yung mga bata excited sa arts to discover and explore more and ah to paint, yun kasi yung pinaka importante gusto nila yung kulay." | "The children are excited about the arts to discover, explore more, and paint. That is the most important for them, they like the colors." |
| "Interesado silang ginagawa, tapos may free will sila dahil hindi sila restricted na ito lang dapat." | "They are interested in what they are doing, and they have free will because they are not restricted to a specific way of doing things." |
| "Mas naalala nila ang lesson, ang sound ng letter kapag kinakanta ko kasi sinasabayan nila ito." | "They remember the lesson and the sound of the letters when I sing them because they follow along with me." |
| “Mas magandang alamin niyo yung kung ano yung favorite color nila, Kung mag iintegrate ka mas maganda kung aalamin mo yung favorite nila kasi duon mas magfofocus sila mas magiging interesado sila sa mga bagay na gusto nila. Yun talaga yung una, yun tlag yung motivation natin na kung mahilig sila sa bilog lagyan sila ng maraming bilog diyan nanduon na ang focus nila. “ | “It is better to find out what their favorite color is. If you are going to integrate something, it is best to know what they like, because they will focus more and be more interested in things they enjoy. That is the first step; that is our motivation. For example, if they like circles, give them plenty of circles to work with, and that is where their focus will be.” |
| Visual Learning and Memory | Visual Aids and Memory Retention | "Visual learners talaga ang mga bata natin sa sped." | "Our learners in SPED are really visual learners." |
| "Visual learners sila so mas na nag iimprove sila pag nakikita nila yung bagay, na uunderstand din nila yung ibig sabihin ni teacher pag nakikita nila yung picture so duon din.. na eenhance din ang kanilang memory or learning capability o yung retain of lesson sakanila." | "They are visual learners, so they improve more when they see things. They also understand what the teacher means when they see pictures. This helps enhance their memory, learning capability, and retention of the lesson." |
| "Pag guamagamit kasi tayo ng visualize nagkakaroon sila ng memory retention natatandaan nila yun tapos nadadagdagan ang kanilang vocabulary." | "When we use visuals, they develop memory retention, they remember it, and their vocabulary increases." |
| Challenges in Art Integration | Sensory Sensitivity | "Pero problem is sa music meron mga sensory issues yung mga bata so nag cocover sila, so ang intervention na ginagawa is ni lelessen ang volume..." | "The problem with music is that some kids have sensory issues, so they cover their ears. The intervention we use is to lower the volume..." |
| "Ang volume ng tv hanggang sa paunti-unti nilalakasan ko siya. Everyday kong ginagawa yun walang skip yun." | "I gradually increase the volume on the TV, and I do this every day without skipping." |
| Multilingual and Picture-based Confusion | "Dapat iintroduce mo din yung 2 na tawag sa bagay. Hindi lang tayo naka specific sa isa." | "You should also introduce both names for the object to avoid confusion." |
| "Nasanay din naman tayo na tinatagalog natin, katulad ng sit down – upo. Nasanay tayo na bilang SPED teacher, no? Na ganun nga, reading-literacy natin is Tagalog ngayong taon in preparation para sa kinder sa MTB hanggang Grade 3, kaya iniintroduce natin pag-aralan ang Tagalog. So, ang challenges lang doon is i-coconvert pa natin sa English yung word na yun para lang mas maintindihan nila. Pero at least, nasasanay naman sila at naging success din naman, katulad ng isa nating learner na English-speaking siya sa SPED pero pagdating ng kinder, Tagalog din naman siya. Na-adopt niya na rin. Siguro preparation din talaga.” | "We have gotten used to it as SPED teachers, right? That is how it is—our reading and literacy lessons are in Tagalog this year as preparation for kindergarten under the Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) curriculum, which continues up to Grade 3. That is why we introduce and encourage learning Tagalog. The challenge is that we still need to translate those words into English so they can be better understood. However, at least they get used to it, and it turns out to be successful, as seen in one of our learners who was English-speaking in SPED, but by the time they reached kindergarten, they had also learned Tagalog. They were able to adapt. I guess it is part of the preparation." |
| "Ang pictures kasi parang simula yun para matuto yung bata sa reading." | "The pictures are used as a starting point for teaching reading to the learners." |
| “Yun yung challenges pag picture talaga. Kailangan specific, huwag na iba-iba. Dapat close to reality na.” | “That is the challenge with using pictures. Must be specific and consistent, not varied. It should also be as realistic as possible. “ |
| “Yung realia diba .. applicable din yun bukod sa picture reading.. pero depende parin sa availability ng bagay, ng material. Kung applicable din ba sa lesson at sa need ng bata.” | "Realia, right? It is also applicable aside from picture reading. However, it still depends on the availability of the object or material, and whether it is suitable for the lesson and the learner’s needs." |
| Routine Disruption | "Pag namali tayo ng tugtog o na play ng tutog mag-ca-cause ng tantrums kasi routine nga sila e." | "If we play the wrong song or tune, it causes tantrums because it disrupts their routine." |
| “Naranasan ko ito sa isang bata ko, kapag nakita lahat ng activity sheets sa harap niya ilan ang sasagutan, kukulayan, art activities, at babasahin kailangan niyang malaman ang routine, tulad ng activity 1, activity 2, activity 3, at activity 4, para alam niya kung kailan matatapos. Kapag hindi ito nasunod o hindi ipinaliwanag kung ilan ang gagawin, nagkakaroon siya ng tantrums sa kalagitnaan, lalo na kapag pakiramdam niya ay masyadong marami ang gagawin. Nawawalan siya ng focus at parang tinatamad na..” | "I experienced this with one of my learners. When he saw all the activity sheets in front of him, he needed to know what to answer, what colors to use, and what art activities to complete, as well as what to read. To understand when he would be finished, he had to familiarize himself with the routine, including Activities 1, 2, 3, and 4. If this routine was not followed or if it were not explained how many tasks he needed to complete, he would throw tantrums midway, especially if he felt there was too much to do. He would lose focus and start to feel unmotivated." |
| “Oo, so pag nagtatntrums siya sa middle ng routine ire-remind mo nananman siya o music time palang,,” | "Yes, so if they start throwing tantrums in the middle of the routine, you just remind them, 'Oh, it is music time.'" |
| “Through routine kasi sa everyday na ginagawa ng bata natutunan nila ang ginagawa nila na pagkasunod- sunod. So mahalaga din ang routine kasi papasok na duon ang behavioral na may positive effect kapag na implement mo sakanila ang rules and routine.. “ | Through routine, children learn the sequence of what they do every day. So, routine is important because it incorporates behavioral aspects that have a positive effect when you implement rules and routines with them." |
| Effective Techniques in Literacy | Visual, Music, and Dance | "Visual, music, and dance movement." | "Visual, music, and dance movement." |
| Visual, kasi nga visual learners sila na art activities to help them remember the letters at sounds and music lover din mga bata natin ..kasi pag paulit ulit naririnig diba may retention.” | “Visual, because they are visual learners, so art activities help them remember the letters and sounds. Our children are also music lovers because when they hear something repeatedly, it helps with retention." |
| ”Yes, sa visual like claveria na picture reading, then music and dance movement kasi para ma catch natin attention ng bata natin through pictures at gusto din nila nasayaw. Example pag inintroduce mo yung letters pwede na through action song napapanoodin ng bata sa tv na sasabayan ni teacher at mga bata.” | "Yes, for visual learning, like Claveria's picture reading, as well as through music and dance movements, we can capture the learners' attention with pictures since they also enjoy dancing. For example, when introducing letters, it can be done through action songs that can be watched on TV, with the teacher and learners joining in." |
| Letter Visualization and Manipulation | "Gumagamit kami ng beadwork for letter formation, tracing letters, and letter collage making." | "We use beadwork for letter formation, tracing letters, and letter collage making." |
| “Sa art activities cutting, paper tearing, clay, yarn- lacing. “ | "In art activities: cutting, paper tearing, clay modeling, and yarn lacing." |
| “Tracing ng letters through the use of color para mas Makita ng bata.. letter collage using colored papers.” | "Letter tracing using colors to make it more visible for the child, and letter collage using colored papers." |
| “Yan coloring, drawing, and cut and paste para nga ma visualize nila ang letters and things that start sa letter.” | "That is coloring, drawing, and cut-and-paste activities to help them visualize the letters and the things that start with the letter. |
| “ Mga art activities din na sinabi ko nung umpisa coloring, collage, picture cutting, paper tearing, then gumagamit din ng manipulatives for visual like letter blocks and puzzle.” | “The art activities I mentioned earlier include coloring, collage, picture cutting, and paper tearing. We also use manipulatives for visuals, like letter blocks and puzzles." |
| Teacher Adaptation and Flexibility in Art Integration | Adapting Art Forms and Media in Art Integration | “Ako naman kasi nung unang turo ko talaga di pa masyadong gamit ang tv mostly ang ginagamit natin ay tarpapel so naranasan ko mula doon sa semi technological technology ang gamit natin sa learning na hanggang sa ngayon na high- tech na na available na ang videos, available na ang mga animations .. para sa akin ah na malaki talaga ang evolvement nito din kasi marami na tayong nagagawa mga manipulative materials incorporating our lesson.” | "In my case, when I first started teaching, we did not use TVs much. We mostly used tarpaulins. I experienced the transition from using semi-technological tools in learning to the high-tech resources we have now, such as videos and animations. For me, the evolution has been significant because we can now do so much more, including incorporating manipulative materials into our lessons." |
| “Yes nagiging interactive sila duon. Yun ang kagandahan sa ngayon. Pero ako talaga di ko biniitawan ang traditional yung abakada ganun parin yung atake ko pero ginagamitan lang ng multimedia o visual through picture.” | "Yes, they become more interactive with it. That is the advantage nowadays. However, I have not completely abandoned the traditional approach, such as using the Abakada. My method is still the same, but I incorporate multimedia or visuals through pictures." |
| “Ginagamit nating yung visual. Gumagamit din tayo ng multimedia through youtube diba? So gamit na gamit siya so na rerecognize o nareretain kasi sa mga bata yung ginagawa nila. May ginagayahan sila sa tv so through sounds narerecognize ng bata or na reretain sa bata ah ganito pala yung sound ng letter.” | "We use visuals, and we also use multimedia through YouTube, right? So, it is beneficial because the children recognize and retain what they are doing. They have something to follow from the TV, and through sounds, the children recognize or retain how the letter sounds." |
| “Katulad nga po nun sir na nagkaroon po tayo ng training and workshop po nun tungkol sa learning activity sheets papasok po yung arts po duon sa visual, multimedia po sariling gawa ni teacher ang drawing ang inilalagay sa activity sheets.” | "Just like when we had training and workshops about learning activity sheets, arts were integrated into the visuals and multimedia. The teacher creates their drawings to include in the activity sheets." |

**Lived Experiences Of Special Education Teachers In Art Integration**

The participants discussed a variety of art-based instructional methods, including finger painting, collage, coloring, paper tearing, music, and dance movement. In addition to being successful in teaching letter sounds, word identification, and reading comprehension, these multisensory strategies significantly increased engagement among learners with special needs, especially among learners with intellectual disabilities (ID) and autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Co-participant 1 stated that music enhances phonemic awareness and memory retention, as evidenced by her comment, "They remember the sound of letters better when I sing them."

Additionally, art activities promoted letter formation and the development of fine motor skills, with tactile stimulation provided by materials such as clay and beads. For kinesthetic learners, dance and movement were particularly effective in reducing restlessness and improving concentration. Learners with special needs gained a more concrete understanding of basic literacy concepts through the use of visual aids, such as image cards and illustrated vocabulary. Furthermore, the utilization of technology, including interactive learning platforms, instructional videos, and multimedia presentations, improved learners' engagement and aided in the development of vocabulary acquisition and simple reading comprehension.

**Emerging Themes And Strategies In Art Integration**

The discussions produced several key themes, including student-centered instruction, differentiated approaches, and the importance of structure and consistency. Special education teachers emphasized the value of allowing learners with special needs to make choices in art tasks, such as selecting materials and colors, which enhanced their confidence and independence. Additionally, familiar routines such as the use of repetitive songs or organized visual cues were essential for minimizing anxiety and promoting behavioral management in learners with special needs.

Participants emphasized the relevance of contextualizing visuals. Inconsistencies between English and Filipino labels or illustrations that did not match real-world references frequently caused learners to struggle. To enhance comprehension, teachers emphasized vocabulary in both languages and carefully selected culturally relevant resources.

**Challenges In Art Integration**

Despite the numerous advantages, teachers highlighted several challenges in implementing art integration in literacy instruction for learners with special needs. Learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), in particular, often experience sensory processing challenges, such as adverse reactions to loud sounds or overly vivid visuals. To address these issues, teachers adapted by adjusting the volume, modifying the pace of activities, or incorporating visual schedules to provide consistency and structure. Language inconsistencies between English and Filipino instructional materials also created confusion among learners. Co-participants shared that these concerns were addressed by adapting instructional materials, using bilingual visuals, and ensuring cultural and contextual relevance in their resources.

Additionally, the limited availability of art materials, time constraints, and the need for more specialized training, workshops, and seminars were noted as significant concerns. However, the participants emphasized that overcoming these challenges greatly depended on the teacher’s flexibility and resourcefulness in modifying strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners. They also stressed the importance of parental involvement and consistent guidance at home, which reinforces the learning process. Furthermore, the active participation of other school stakeholders in organizing and supporting inclusive school activities was seen as a key factor in enhancing the successful integration of art into literacy instruction for learners with special needs.

**Insights and Implications**

The study underscores the significant impact of art integration in enhancing motivation, engagement, and learner independence in special education. As observed by co-participants 1 and 5, incorporating art into literacy instruction not only motivated learners with special needs but also promoted greater autonomy and active participation in classroom activities. the findings highlight the importance of understanding and meeting each student's unique learning style through flexible art-based methods, as noted by co-participants 3 and 4, which helped keep students interested and reduced behavioral problems. multimedia tools, such as videos and animations, proved particularly effective in maintaining attention, reinforcing phonemic awareness, and enhancing learning retention. these insights suggest that art integration, particularly when combined with technology and interactive methods, provides a dynamic and responsive instructional model.

the implications for practice point to the importance of equipping teachers with the skills to implement diverse, individualized, and technology-enhanced strategies in special education classrooms to accommodate varied learning needs. furthermore, the findings from this study align with existing literature that supports the effectiveness of arts integration in fostering inclusive and differentiated instruction. art-based strategies not only make learning more engaging and accessible but also provide opportunities for personal expression and emotional regulation, key components in the holistic development of learners with special needs.

**Table 2. Action Plan for Integrating Art into Literacy Instruction for Learners with Special Needs**

**(Queens Row Elementary School – Philippine Public School Setting)**

**Table 2. Action Plan for Integrating Art into Literacy Instruction for Learners with Special Needs**

**(Queens Row Elementary School – Philippine Public School Setting)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Research Gap** | **Objectives** | **Key Strategies/**  **Intervention** | **Activities** | **Resources** | **Timeline** | **Evaluation and Monitoring** |
| 1. Lack of systematic approaches to integrating art into literacy instruction for learners with special needs. | -Identify specific effective strategies and methods for integrating art into the literacy curriculum.  -Investigate the role of individualized art-based activities in supporting diverse learning needs. To help learners with special needs:  a. Enhance phonemic awareness  b.Improve vocabulary and word recognition  c.Develop reading fluency using multisensory techniques  d. Foster memory retention and comprehension  e. Build fine motor skills alongside literacy  f. Strengthen focus and engagement through routine  g. Address sensory sensitivities while enhancing literacy  h. Promote holistic literacy through multimedia | Develop customized, art-based literacy interventions for learners with special needs.  Create a flexible curriculum framework that incorporates art–based strategies.  -Design lesson plans integrating hands-on activities in  visuals, music, dance movement, and multimedia.  Use themes in activities based on learners' interests, such as their favorite color or cartoon character, or make them contextualized and localized to be relevant to the literacy lesson. | - Develop and implement a pilot art-integrated literacy program, "Art Thursdays," to reinforce literacy skills.  a. Letter Art Activities:  -Letter Collage  -Letter Formation  -Letter Hunt  b. Picture and Word Association: Use visual art cards to match pictures with corresponding words in both Tagalog and English.    c. Song and Action Integration: Introduce songs with letter sounds paired with hand movements or dances.  d. Story Visualizations: Learners draw key events or characters from a story after listening to or reading it  e. Tracing, Cutting, and Pasting Activities: Learners trace letters, Cut and form an animal or thing that starts with the letter, or cut out images related to lesson words.  f. Spinning Wheel Activities: Create a spinning wheel with questions or tasks related to letters, sounds, or vocabulary.  g.Calming Art Activities: tactile activities depending on the learner's  preference.  h. Video  Lesson and Digital Storytelling  Using this approach makes learning more enjoyable and accessible by combining pictures, sounds, and activities that learners with special needs can understand and enjoy. | -Materials can be modified depending on the topic and their availability.  a. Crayons, clay, beads, colored paper, glue, tracing sheets  b. Flashcards, visual aids, trapapel, printed real pictures  c. Simple action songs about literacy- reading lessons from YouTube or teacher-made videos  d. Simple picture-based storybooks with  specific clipart or real pictures and drawing materials, tracing sheets, pencil, eraser /laminated tracing pad, whiteboard marker, board eraser  e. Scissors, glue, crayons, and printed pictures (simple and specific illustrations/ or real pictures)  f.DIY spinning wheel, flashcards, printed pictures  g. Clay, colored papers, cotton balls, feathers, etc.  h.YouTube or Teacher-Made Video-Assisted Lesson | 1. Short-term (3-6 months): Pilot study with art literacy interventions.  2. Medium-term (6-12 months): Teacher trainings/workshops and evaluation of learners' progress. | 1. Assess the impact of art on literacy growth and engagement.  2. Collect data through assessments of learners’ literacy, reading performance, and engagement during art activities.  3. Monitor learner participation and adjust strategies based on feedback.  . |
| 2. Lack of special education teacher preparedness and inadequate resources for integrating art activities and adaptive technology in special education settings. | - Assess the current preparedness of special education teachers to utilize adaptive technology in the classroom.  Equip special education teachers with the skills to integrate art and technology into literacy instruction effectively.  -Identify specific resource gaps in using assistive technologies for learners with special needs. | - Conduct professional development trainings/ workshops on art integration and adaptive tools.  -Provide mentoring and peer-learning workshops.  -Offer accessible resources and tools to enable effective technology-based learning for diverse learners. | -Conduct practical training and workshops that demonstrate techniques such as visual scaffolding and adaptive multimedia.  Facilitate small group discussions to share best practices and address challenges.  Provide direct classroom support to guide special education teachers in adapting technology-based tools to meet the diverse needs of learners. | -Training/  Workshop venues are equipped with the necessary materials and supplies.  -Printed and digital materials, including guides and online resources.  -Adaptive technology tools (speech-to-text software, assistive devices:  Interactive Whiteboards/ Projectors or Smart TVs.  Laptops, desktops, tablets, and microphones.  -Localized/Contextualized Learning Materials:  Teacher-made or DepEd-provided learning activity sheets, visual aids, flashcards, and interactive materials tailored to learners with special needs. | 1. Short-term (2-3 months): Initial training on assistive technology tools and classroom implementation.  2. Medium-term (6 months): Evaluate technology adoption and expand teacher training. | 1. Measure teacher and learner feedback on the effectiveness of the adaptive tool.  2. Pre- and post-training/ Workshop assessments of special education teachers' proficiency.  2. Collect data on the frequency and ease of use of adaptive technology in the classroom. |
| 3. Insufficient collaboration between parents, teachers, and specialists in designing and implementing individualized instruction for learners with special needs. | -Strengthen parent-teacher communication and collaboration in special education by religiously and conscientiously reminding parents about take-home literacy art activities.  -Create a model for multidisciplinary collaboration to enhance individualized education plans (IEPs).  -Examine how ongoing collaboration affects the success of individualized learning plans. | -Establish regular parent-teacher meetings to schedule conferences and collaborative planning sessions.  -Strengthen the home-school connection by collaborating with parents during 'Art Thursdays,' engaging in creative literacy activities alongside their children to reinforce learning.  -Facilitate workshops or meetings to develop shared goals for learners’ learning experiences. | -Organize regular meetings between parents, teachers, and specialists to discuss and review updates on the IEP progress and resource suggestions.  -Provide take-home literacy art activities.  Promoting cooperation, including strategies for aligning goals and interventions. | - In-Person/Online Platforms Communication: Venue, Schedule, and Logs. (chats, Google, Zoom meeting)  Templates for shared goal setting and progress tracking. | 1. Short-term (1-2 months): Initial meetings to discuss goals and develop the IEP.  2. Medium-term (4-6 months): Ongoing collaboration and feedback sessions. | 1. Assess IEP effectiveness and family satisfaction.  2. Conduct surveys to gather feedback from all stakeholders about the collaborative process. |

The action plan presented in Table 2 outlines a comprehensive and structured approach for integrating art into literacy instruction for learners with special needs in a Philippine public school context, specifically at Queens Row Elementary School. Developed from the lived experiences of special education teachers, this learner-centered framework is designed to enhance phonemic awareness, vocabulary acquisition, letter recognition, and reading fluency through the strategic use of visual arts, music, dance movement, and multimedia tools and instructions.

The action plan promotes the use of multisensory art-based strategies, including phonics songs paired with musical instruments, visual aids for word-picture association, tactile tasks such as clay modeling and paper cutting, and kinesthetic activities like dance-based letter formation. These methods cater to diverse learning preferences, including visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile, thereby fostering inclusivity and deeper learner engagement. Recognizing the cultural and material context of public schools, the plan also encourages the use of locally available materials and realia to enhance relevance and sustainability.

A key feature of the action plan is the introduction of “Art Thursday,” a dedicated day each week where literacy lessons are delivered through integrated art activities. This weekly routine provides consistent, enjoyable, and creative learning opportunities, allowing learners to explore and express themselves while reinforcing foundational literacy skills.

The plan also underscores the importance of collaboration among teachers, parents, school administrators, and other stakeholders. Regular communication and participation in inclusive school activities are recommended to strengthen the support system around the learners. Additionally, the plan calls for ongoing teacher training and professional development, particularly in adaptive technologies and differentiated instruction, to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of art integration in literacy education.

To monitor learner progress and inform instructional decisions, evaluation metrics include learner participation, task completion, performance-based assessments, observation checklists, and parent-teacher communication logs. These tools enable teachers to make timely instructional adjustments and celebrate small yet meaningful learning gains.

In summary, the action plan serves as a practical, adaptable guide that supports the holistic development of learners with special needs through inclusive, creative, and developmentally appropriate literacy instruction. By embedding arts-based practices into regular classroom routines, such as through “Art Thursday,” educators can foster motivation, improve retention, and create a more engaging and supportive learning environment for all.

4. Conclusion

The study concludes that art integration significantly enhances literacy learning among learners with special needs by fostering motivation, focus, and memory retention. Through the use of multisensory strategies, including visual arts, music, dance, movement, and multimedia, learners become more engaged and are better able to understand and retain literacy concepts. These approaches also promote self-expression, emotional regulation, and learner autonomy. However, the study emphasizes the importance of adapting the learning environment and balancing instructional aids to prevent over-reliance on visuals, particularly for learners with diverse sensory and language needs.

Art-based instruction is most effective when tailored to accommodate learners' individual preferences and cognitive profiles. Teachers should provide flexible, differentiated activities that reflect learners' sensory sensitivities and language skills. This includes using bilingual materials, adjusting music volume, and simplifying visual content to maintain engagement and minimize behavioral challenges. The integration of technology, such as videos, animations, and interactive tools, further enriches the literacy learning experience by supporting both academic and emotional development.

Despite the promising outcomes, the study identifies persistent gaps in practice, such as the lack of structured programs, limited access to adaptive technologies, and insufficient training for teachers. Moreover, the findings emphasize the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, including parents, teachers, school administrators, and specialists, to enhance the implementation of art integration in literacy instruction. Schools are encouraged to adopt the action plan developed from the lived experiences of the co-participants and to launch pilot programs that incorporate diverse, individualized, and inclusive art-based strategies. Continuous professional development and regular evaluation are crucial to ensuring that these practices are sustainable and effective in enhancing literacy outcomes for learners with special needs.

Definition of terms

The following terms are defined operationally for a clearer understanding of this study.

**Art Integration:** A method of teaching and learning that uses a variety of classroom engagement strategies to link the development of artistic abilities and concepts with skills and ideas from other subject areas.

**Visual Arts:** include painting, drawing, sculpture, and other visual media that use imagery to communicate ideas. Visualizing characters, settings, and story elements helps learners enhance comprehension and engagement.

**Music:** Involves the use of sound, rhythm, melody, and instruments. It supports literacy by improving memory retention, rhythm in language, and phonological awareness through songs, rhymes, and chants.

**Dance/Movement:** The use of physical movement to express emotions or concepts. Dance and movement can help learners with kinesthetic processing, improve concentration, and make abstract literacy concepts (such as action words).

**Literacy:** The ability to read and write to understand or express ideas in a specific context.

**Phonemic Awareness:** The ability to recognize and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. This is foundational for decoding written text.

**Vocabulary:** The understanding and use of a wide range of words and their meanings.

**Reading Fluency**: The ability to read text accurately, quickly, and with appropriate expression.

**Comprehension:** The ability to understand and interpret the meaning of a text. This includes identifying key ideas, making inferences, and connecting information from the text to prior knowledge.

**Lived Experiences:** Qualitative research involves researchers gaining an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, perspectives, and decisions and how those elements shape an individual's construction of knowledge and reality.

**Special Education Teacher:** A teacher who caters to the individual needs of learners with special needs.

**Learners with Special Needs:** A child has been identified and diagnosed as having a special educational need if they struggle to learn more than other children of their age due to a learning difficulty or impairment. They might struggle with behavior, communication, and schoolwork.

Consent (where ever applicable)

The author declares that ‘written informed consent was obtained from the patient (or other approved parties) for publication of this case report and accompanying images. A copy of the written consent is available for review by the Editorial office/Chief Editor/and Editorial Board members of this journal."

Ethical approval (where ever applicable)

The author hereby declare that all experiments have been examined and approved by the appropriate ethics committee and have therefore been performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.”

References

1) Anderson, A., & Wendt, K. (2022). Arts as emancipatory pedagogy of the futures of education. Global Citizenship Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.globalcitizenshipfoundation.org/article/arts-as-emancipatory-pedagogy-of-the-futures-of-education

2) Becker, P. A. (2020). Teaching language and literacy through the visual arts: An interdisciplinary, literature-based approach. Teaching exceptional children, 52(3), 166-179. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059919894736

3) Caballero, B., Catubay, A., Semilla, H., Pinili, L., Ancheta, J., Manalastas, R., Capuno, R., Manguilimotan, R., Etcuban, J., Padillo, G., & Espina, R. (2023). Teachers’ use of the arts on children with special needs: Its prevalence and importance. International Journal of Science and Management Studies (IJSMS), 191-203. https://doi.org/10.51386/25815946/ijsms-v6i5p112

4) DepEd Memorandum No. 001, S. 2024 (2024) Implementation of Catch-Up Fridays. https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/DM\_s2024\_001.pdf

5) Department of Education (DepEd). (2023). MATATAG Music and Arts Curriculum Guide. Republic of the Philippines, Department of Education.

6) Crispel, O., & Kasperski, R. (2021). The impact of teacher training in special education on the implementation of inclusion in mainstream classrooms. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 25(9), 1079-1090. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1600590

7) Gerber, B. L., Guay, D. M., & Burnette, J. (Eds.). (2024). Reaching and teaching students with special needs through art. Taylor & Francis. https://tinyurl.com/2024GerberGuayBurnette

8) Gross, K. M. (2020). Visual arts content literacy: A partnership between art educators and special educators. Teaching Exceptional Children, 52(3), 157-165. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059919894269

9) Lee, L., & Ho, H.-J. (2023). Engagement with music technology in special educational settings for children with disabilities. Engineering Proceedings, 55(1), 27. https://doi.org/10.3390/engproc2023055027

10) Lou, X., & Huang, J. (2024). The application of computer-aided music and art in preschool education of disability and health integration. Journal of Computational Methods in Sciences and Engineering, 24(6), 3878-3891. https://doi.org/10.1177/14727978241299635

11) Mareza, L., Mustadi, A., & Dewi, D. S. E. (2024). Arts education for children with disabilities: A systematic literature review. Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal. https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1667

12) National Art Education Association (NAEA). (2021). Position Statement on Arts Integration. Retrieved from http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/how-to/arts-integration-beta/what-is-arts-integration-beta.aspx

13) National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) (2024). The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), Philippines. Global Platform for Cultural Networks. https://gpdnet.org/cultural-hub/exhibitions/the-national-commission-for-culture-and-the-arts-ncca-philippines/

14) Pavlou, V. (2020). Art technology integration: digital storytelling as a transformative pedagogy in primary education. International Journal of Art & Design Education, 39(1), 195-210. https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12254

15) Prajapati, S., & Kuma, N. (2024). Art-Integrated Learning (AIL): An Effective Learning Approach for 21st-Century Learners. SPAST Reports, 1(1). https://doi.org/10.69848/sreports.v1i1.4774

16) Reisman, F., & Severino, L. (2020). Using creativity to address dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia: Assessments and techniques. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003038313

17) Saunders, J.N. (2021) The power of the arts in learning and the curriculum: a review of research literature. Curric Perspect 41, 93–100). https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-021-00138-4

18) Shouma, M. (2020). The impact of arts integration on the learning and social abilities of students with disabilities: an approach to an inclusive classroom (Doctoral dissertation, The British University in Dubai). https://bspace.buid.ac.ae/buid\_server/api/core/bitstreams/65dd89b5-56dd-44ac-9875-867e77d1c0c9/content

19) UNESCO. (2021). A framework for culture and arts education. UNESCO. Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377481

20) WU, H. H., & Teixeira, V. S. (2024). Case Study on Art-Based Intervention with Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Macau. https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-4408241/v1