

Methodology of Teaching Visual Arts in Primary Grades

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Abstract: This article analyzes the theoretical and practical foundations of the methodology of teaching visual arts in primary grades on the basis of a scholarly review approach. It highlights the impact of visual arts on the development of children of primary school age, the main problems encountered in the teaching process, ways of overcoming them, and modern methodological solutions. UNESCO’s new framework on culture and arts education interprets arts education as learning “about, with, and through” the arts, while the OECD identifies creative thinking as an important outcome of schooling. On this basis, the article substantiates the need to view visual arts in primary education not merely as teaching children how to draw, but as a means of developing observation, imagination, aesthetic taste, visual literacy, communicative competence, and creativity. The paper examines such problems as methodological one-sidedness, subjectivity in assessment, material and technical constraints, the teacher’s level of preparedness, and integration issues, and offers practical recommendations.

Keywords: Primary education, visual arts, methodology, visual literacy, creative thinking, aesthetic education, art education, integrative approach, assessment criteria, didactic problems.

Introduction: The issue of teaching visual arts in primary grades is of particular relevance in today’s educational system. It is precisely at this stage that a child’s imagination, sensory observation, ability to perceive objects and phenomena figuratively, culture of distinguishing color and shape, fine motor skills, and aesthetic taste are actively formed. UNESCO’s 2024 Culture and Arts Education Framework explains arts education as learning “about, with, and through culture and the arts” and emphasizes its holistic, transformative, and impactful character. This approach makes it possible to interpret visual arts in primary grades both as an independent subject and as an integrative developmental tool connected with other disciplines.

The scholarly essence of the problem lies in the fact that, in practice, visual arts lessons are often limited to

technical reproduction or copying samples. In such cases, the child does not become the subject of image creation, but rather remains an исполнитель of a ready-made scheme. OECD materials interpret creative thinking as the ability to generate, evaluate, and improve ideas; they also show that in many education systems the problem lies not in the absence of goals, but in the lack of effective pedagogies that can transform creativity into practical classroom activity. Therefore, the methodology of teaching visual arts in primary grades should shape not only “what to draw,” but also “how to think, how to observe, and how to express.”

The main purpose of writing this article is to identify the current problems in the methodology of teaching visual arts in primary grades and to substantiate scientific and methodological ways of overcoming them.

Developmental functions of visual arts education in primary grades

Function	Content	Expected outcome
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Cognitive	Observation, comparison, analysis of shape and color	Conscious perception of objects and phenomena
Emotional-aesthetic	Feeling beauty, expressing attitudes toward an image	Aesthetic taste and emotional sensitivity
Creative	Finding a new image, composition, and color solution	Creative thinking and imagination
Psychomotor	Drawing lines, coloring, cutting, arranging	Precision of hand movements, fine motor skills
Communicative	Explaining one's work, discussing in a group	Speech and collaboration skills

Problems in teaching visual arts in primary grades and ways to overcome them. For a primary school pupil, visual arts are, first and foremost, a means of seeing and re-expressing the world. Therefore, the methodology must be inseparably connected with age characteristics. In young children, an image is often constructed not according to the real proportions of an object, but according to its significance in the child's mind. Lessons that fail to take this natural psychological feature into account place excessive emphasis on the "incorrect drawing" and reduce the child's inner activity of creating images. Contemporary research emphasizes the need to provide strategic guidance in children's art activity while avoiding excessive control that suppresses creative freedom. Therefore, in primary methodology it is more important to guide than to correct, to offer alternatives rather than prohibit, and to value the process more than the final result.

The first major problem is methodological one-sidedness. In practice, some lessons are built only on copying drawings, coloring contours, or repeating ready-made samples. In such situations, the pupil does not gain experience in independent observation, finding compositional solutions, choosing color relationships, or expressing ideas through images. UNESCO's roadmap identifies two dimensions of arts education: on the one hand, learning the arts themselves; on the other hand, deepening other forms of knowledge through the arts.

Therefore, in the methodology of teaching visual arts, exercises should be organized in reproductive, partially exploratory, and creative stages. It is advisable to begin with observing simple shapes and colors, then move to grouping objects and building compositions, and after that proceed to open-ended creative tasks.

The second problem is the insufficient development of visual literacy. A visual arts lesson is sometimes associated only with drawing, whereas in contemporary education a child should also learn how to "read" an image. Visual literacy refers to the ability to understand the meaning of color, shape, rhythm, proportion, composition, signs, and images. If the teacher does not systematically use questions for analyzing a picture, reproduction, illustration, or the pupil's own work during the lesson, the child may create images, but the culture of understanding images remains underdeveloped. Therefore, a short stage of visual analysis should be introduced into the lesson on the basis of such questions as: "What is depicted?", "Where does the eye fall first?", "Which color creates a mood?", and "Which shape conveys movement?" This method turns the pupil not only into a drawer, but also into an observing and interpreting subject. UNESCO also views arts education as a field of research and practice, which shows that the inclusion of small analytical blocks in lessons is scientifically justified.

Main methodological problems encountered in primary grades

Problem	Manifestation	Negative consequence
Excessive reliance on copying samples	All works turn out similar	Independence and creativity decline
Absence of visual analysis	Artworks and visual elements are not discussed	Aesthetic perception develops weakly
Subjectivity in assessment	The criterion of “beautiful / not beautiful” dominates	Pupil motivation decreases
Limited resources	Few materials, insufficient visual aids	Practical experience is reduced
Low methodological preparedness of the teacher	Little lesson variety, weak integration	Lesson effectiveness declines

The third problem is the uncertainty and subjectivity of assessment criteria. In visual arts lessons, results are often evaluated with general descriptions such as “beautiful,” “neat,” or “similar.” This is especially unclear for a primary school pupil and may sometimes create psychological pressure. OECD materials indicate that, in order to foster creativity, assessment should cover not only the generation of ideas, but also their improvement, the testing of various solutions, and the ability to explain them. Therefore, in visual arts, assessment should focus not only on the final drawing, but also on the process. For primary grades, convenient criteria may include: understanding the task, being able to place the composition, selecting color appropriately, adding an independent element, and explaining one’s work in simple language. Such an approach helps form in the child the feeling of “I was able to do it.”

The fourth problem is the lack of material and technical resources. UNESCO’s 2024 background document notes that access to culture and arts education in many countries is affected by shortcomings in infrastructure, resources, and digital connectivity. At the school level, this problem manifests itself in the limited availability of paper, paint, brushes, reproductions, visual teaching materials, multimedia tools, and an appropriate learning environment. However, if the methodological approach is chosen correctly, effective lessons can still be organized even with limited resources. For example, activities such as monochrome drawing, collage,

composition using natural materials, working with shades of a single color, classroom mini-exhibitions, and observation exercises based on examples of local applied arts do not require major expenses. Thus, the problem lies not only in the scarcity of materials, but also in the methodological reorganization of existing possibilities.

The fifth problem is the teacher’s methodological preparedness and the level of interdisciplinary integration. Today, teaching art is no longer limited to developing a separate aesthetic skill; it can also be connected with reading literacy, speech development, natural science, mathematics, and technology. UNESCO’s Arts for Transformative Education guide presents the arts within a transformative education model as an active methodological tool for the teacher. The OECD also emphasizes that creativity should be developed within subject teaching and that this requires clear pedagogical guidance for teachers. Therefore, for primary school teachers, special professional development in the methodology of teaching visual arts, a bank of lesson plans, collections of integrative tasks, and the development of reflective observation skills are highly relevant.

For example, in language lessons pupils may depict fairy-tale characters, in natural science they may express the color states of the seasons, in mathematics they may create patterns from geometric shapes, and in technology lessons they may work with paper plastic

techniques. This is a practical manifestation of the integrative model. Through such an approach, knowledge is formed in the child not as fragmented pieces but as interconnected understanding. The UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education notes that the

arts can serve as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of other subjects. This means that in primary-grade methodology, visual arts should be organized not as an “additional decoration,” but as an active cognitive instrument of education.

Methodological ways of overcoming the problems

Problem	Way of overcoming it	Expected effect
Dominance of sample copying	Step-by-step sequence: observation → analysis → independent depiction → reflection	Independence increases
Weak visual analysis	A 3–5 minute image-analysis stage in every lesson	Visual literacy improves
Subjective assessment	Clear rubric-based criteria and process-oriented assessment	Fair and understandable evaluation
Resource scarcity	Low-cost materials, natural objects, local content	Continuity of lessons is ensured
Low teacher preparedness	Professional development, methodological seminars, lesson bank	Pedagogical quality improves

Another important direction is the interpretation of the pupil’s work and reflection. In primary grades, a visual arts lesson should not end only with a practical product. If a pupil can give simple answers to questions such as “What did I draw?”, “Why did I choose this color?”, and “Which part of my work is the best?”, then his or her artistic activity acquires a conscious character. This process develops the pupil’s speech, the ability to justify one’s ideas, and aesthetic self-awareness. The OECD also views creative thinking not only as generating ideas, but also as evaluating and improving them. Therefore, in primary grades, oral reflection should be regarded as a compulsory component of arts education.

Digital and visual technologies also expand methodological possibilities, but they are not an end in themselves; they are a means. Research on the possibilities of AR and digital tools in primary education shows that such technologies can increase pupil engagement and strengthen visual explanation.

However, in primary-grade visual arts they should be used only as an additional tool enriching live practical activity. For example, it is useful to view artists’ works, show short animations about colors, or analyze examples of composition on a screen; however, conducting the entire lesson in front of a screen is not appropriate for children of primary school age. The main emphasis should remain on creating by hand, sensing, experimenting, and observing.

It is also important to consider the influence of arts education on the child’s overall development. Research on narrative drawing shows that the combination of drawing and storytelling supports reading readiness and the development of expressive speech. This finding means that integrating visual arts with reading literacy and oral speech in primary grades is scientifically well grounded. Thus, exercises such as “Draw and tell a story,” “Express the mood of the season through color,” and “Create an image based on a text” connect art with the development of language and thinking.

Recommended structure of an effective visual arts lesson

Stage	Duration	Content
Motivation	3–5 minutes	Short discussion, observation of a sample or object
Visual analysis	5 minutes	Questions on color, shape, and composition
Demonstration	5–7 minutes	Showing the technique or the method of completing the task
Independent creative activity	15–20 minutes	The pupil works individually or in pairs
Reflection and mini-exhibition	5–7 minutes	Viewing the works and commenting on them in 1–2 sentences

The results of the analysis show that the methodology of teaching visual arts in primary grades should be constructed with simultaneous consideration of the child's age psychology, aesthetic development, cognitive activity, and creative freedom. Contemporary international approaches interpret arts education not merely as the acquisition of visual skills, but as an educational space that ensures the comprehensive development of personality, fosters creative thinking, and helps learners master other subjects more deeply.

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