

# PEDAGOGY

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## ART EDUCATION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IRAQ AND RUSSIA

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**Abstract.** This article examines the characteristics of art education for primary school students in Iraq and Russia. The study aims to identify the traditions, characteristics, content, and methods of teaching art in primary schools in the two countries. Art education in Russia has a long tradition based on pedagogical and psychological research. In Russia, there is a unified curriculum for teaching art, but in Iraq, there is no unified program for all schools, so teachers can create or choose their own curricula. The Russian art education program has a secular character. It introduces students to the art world and combines creative teaching with exposure to fine art masterpieces. A battle between secular and religious educational trends has been taking place in Iraq for years. Islamic influences are evident in many schools, where traditional art forms such as ornamentation and calligraphy are emphasized. Nevertheless, Western traditions play an important role in training visual arts teachers. Iraqi teachers and artists are reinterpreting Islamic art traditions in a contemporary framework, expanding their reach and potential.

**Keywords:** *teaching art in primary school, cultural traditions of Russia and Iraq, programs for teaching art in primary school, deficits in art education*

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### Introduction

Arts education is a universal element of modern schooling that plays a key role in developing students' creativity, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and cultural awareness [1–3]. Learning art, especially drawing, is crucial for developing children's personalities and connection to cultural values [4]. However, art education is strongly influenced by cultural traditions [5–7]. Comparison of teaching

principles and methods and cultural exchange can significantly improve art education in countries with different cultures and traditions.

Cultural traditions include beliefs, customs, practices, and artistic symbols passed down through generations [8–11]. These traditions shape the content, methods, and specific approaches of art education and influence the choice of subjects and topics taught in art classes [12]. For example, in countries with strong religious traditions, art education may include religious themes, while in regions with an ethnic heritage, the focus may be on traditional art forms and symbols. Arts education plays an important role in fostering a sense of cultural identity among students [11].

This article examines how cultural traditions shape arts education in Iraq and Russia – two countries with different backgrounds, artistic traditions, and cultural heritage. The focus is on analyzing the two countries' existing arts education programs in compulsory primary schools.

Iraq is known for its rich artistic history dating back to ancient Mesopotamia, which is often regarded as one of the cradles of civilization. The country's cultural traditions greatly influence the arts education of school children [13, 14]. An important aspect of this influence is the emphasis on Iraq's historical and cultural significance, with cultural heritage largely focused on preserving traditional art forms such as calligraphy and mosaics.

In the modern creative environment of Iraq, there is a complicated relationship between traditional and contemporary art movements [15]. While Islamic influence dominated the arts until the 20th century, the rise of professional art education led to some changes. Artists began to explore modern forms of expression and blend Western techniques with traditional art forms. However, these experiments mainly affected professional artists [16]. Islamic traditions still influence schools, with art classes focusing on geometric and abstract patterns common in Islamic art and architecture. The primary goal of art education in Iraq is to preserve the country's cultural identity and heritage by teaching traditional art forms and familiarizing students with the works of local artists.

The Russian art education system is characterized by a diverse cultural foundation and influenced by a combination of Slavic, Asian, and European art traditions [4, 7, 8]. Western art schools significantly influence children's art education, although traditional folk art is also encouraged. Russia's vast and diverse geography has led to the development of unique arts and crafts, such as clay doll making (which

differs in different regions), wooden toys, including matryoshkas, and decorative styles, such as Parekh miniature painting and Khokhloma painting. These artistic traditions are incorporated into the primary school art curriculum, which provides students with a rich and diverse approach to art education.

It is worth noting that art education in primary school in Russia is conducted in two forms: as a compulsory subject (in general education schools) and as a supplementary subject (in art schools with special specialized programs). Art education programs in Russia are based on extensive theoretical research, including psychological and pedagogical studies, which establish methodological principles for teaching art and examine specific pedagogical approaches [1, 17–20, 22].

The main principles of the Russian art education program are laid down in the Decree of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation No. 1403 of December 28, 2001, “On the Concept of Art Education in the Russian Federation.” This document contains the following provisions: the importance of an early start to art education; continuity and succession at the various levels of art education; a multicultural approach that incorporates a wide range of artistic styles and national traditions, with an emphasis on indigenous culture; the consideration of national and cultural characteristics in the development of curricula for art subjects; a comprehensive approach to teaching art disciplines that emphasizes the interaction of different art forms; the promotion of diverse educational programs tailored to the abilities and needs of each individual student; and the implementation of personalized teaching methods in art education, including individualized approaches for particularly gifted students [21].

Russian scientists have repeatedly emphasized the importance of accessible and widespread arts education for developing mentally healthy people. A. Melik-Pashayev emphasizes this in his work: “The strictly rational character of education leads to the neglect of the emotional sphere of a growing person, to the neglect of his emotional and moral development – in essence, his spiritual life. This inevitably leads to an ‘emotional blunting,’ a lack of sensitivity towards others and nature, and a disturbing dominance of a narrow intellect that cannot distinguish between good and evil. In contrast, artistic and creative experiences foster emotional sensitivity and emotional intelligence – the ability to understand one’s own inner world and that of others” [22, p. 5].

Research shows that young children have a rich capacity for artistic creativity and a natural openness to express their experiences through

art. However, without structured and systematic training, these skills often fade by puberty and are hindered by a lack of confidence in their ability to create meaningful artistic works [20, 22].

Currently, in Russia, there is a unified curriculum for teaching art in primary schools (grades 1–4), developed under the leadership of the artist and educator B. Nemensky and his co-authors [2, 5].

The training program for primary school teachers includes courses (or modules) that focus on the methodology of teaching arts [23].

Normally, the curriculum includes one visual arts lesson per week. Design and technology are also compulsory subjects, with one weekly lesson. The visual arts textbook is designed to support creative teaching practices and encourage teachers to do more than just complete tasks from the book. The teaching process combines appreciation and discussion of professional and folklore art with creative activities. Typically, the program is taught by primary school teachers rather than visual arts specialists.

The curriculum for each grade level includes several modules covering the major areas of visual arts: Painting, Drawing, Architecture, Sculpture, Decorative and Applied Arts, Art Perception, and a module that focuses on digital artistic creativity (The ABCs of Digital Graphics) [2, 5].

The primary school program also includes tasks that involve observing the world around us – plants, animals, and people. For example, students can examine patterns on butterfly wings and then create their own butterfly designs. Children are taught to draw pictures with dots and lines and solve spatial representation tasks.

Special emphasis is placed on introducing children to famous Russian and international artworks. The textbook introduces students to paintings by Vincent van Gogh, Mikhail Vrubel, and Viktor Vasnetsov. Instead of a historical approach, the selection of artworks is organized thematically. When students learn about paints and color gradation, they study Van Gogh's Sunflowers. When exploring the concept of creating images with shapes and surfaces, they examine Evgeny Charushin's book illustrations. The textbooks also include numerous children's drawings to help students feel like a full-fledged artist. In this program, children's creativity and adult artistry are not presented as opposing concepts but coexist in a unified artistic space.

In the first grade, students are encouraged to complete small design projects, such as creating a Christmas ornament or a paper model of a house. These tasks aim to explore reality – such as observing the houses of different animals (shells, burrows, nests, cocoons) – and stimulate the

imagination by asking children to invent and represent their own unusual houses.

During training, students learn about different artistic materials and explore their expressive potential. The textbooks illustrate these topics with artworks by well-known artists, presenting different techniques and materials. The curriculum also includes lessons on color mixing and emphasizes the principles of artistic composition. Students learn the importance of making emotionally expressive images, highlighting the most striking details, and moving away from photographic realism in favor of creative interpretation.

The program also includes group projects in which different students' works are combined to create a composition. For example, an 'underwater world' project might include fish, jellyfish, and algae drawn by different children. In second grade, students learn to look closely at artwork, describe the mood and feel of paintings, and analyze the techniques used to create them. A special topic deals with the depiction of people, focusing on conveying emotions and states through various methods, both in two- and three-dimensional forms.

In the third grade, the students deal with theater. The fourth-grade program introduces children to the art of different cultures. At the beginning of the year, they learn about the artistic traditions of different Russian regions known for their folkloristic crafts. In addition, the curriculum covers the artistic heritage of Japan, Central Asia, and Ancient Greece, as well as the unique characteristics of each culture.

Primary education in Iraq lasts 6 years and is the only compulsory level of education. Some children complete their education at this level. Over time, the methods of teaching visual arts in Iraqi primary schools have evolved. Until recently, art education was often neglected, but now it is part of the curriculum in primary school [24]. The inclusion of artistic disciplines is seen as beneficial for the personal development of students.

Due to the previous neglect of arts education, Iraq has not developed a unified, recognized program for teaching the visual arts in primary schools. Several teacher manuals give general recommendations for teaching art. Methodological tools have been developed to support the teaching of art in Iraqi schools, including:

1. The 'Art Education' program includes drawing, sculpture, photography, and design instruction.
2. The 'Arts' program aims to develop students' skills in the visual arts.

3. In the 'Graphic Design' program, students learn how to create artistic projects using computer software.

4. The 'Arts and Crafts' program focuses on teaching students how to make traditional arts and crafts [14, 25].

Currently, art education programs in drawing focus on teaching students the basics of realistic drawing and proportion while encouraging their imagination through freehand drawing. Art workshops are organized in some schools (especially urban ones) where students can experiment with different artistic materials. These workshops cover a wide range of creative themes and techniques. In the craft area, students learn to work with clay, make traditional ceramic vessels, and create mosaics from small pieces of colored paper.

It is important to note that primary school students only have two hours a week for art lessons. These lessons are often seen as secondary and scheduled at the end of the school day, negatively impacting students' willingness and enthusiasm to participate in these activities.

The methods and approaches to teaching arts are diverse and depend largely on the teacher. Some lessons focus on a common theme for all students, while in others, the teacher discusses individual students' ideas and helps them implement them. Students complete many of the traditional tasks with colored chalk. However, in more advanced stages, the children also work on mosaics and decorative paintings. During the lessons, the students are introduced to Arabic art in general and Iraqi art in particular, but contact with European art is rather unusual.

In modern Iraq, secular and religious traditions coexist in drawing classes [26, 27, 29, 30]. Fine arts, particularly in the form of figurative painting or sculpture, are generally less popular in Arab countries compared to other art forms, partly due to the Islamic prohibition on the depiction of human figures and, in some interpretations, living beings in general [31–33]. Although Iraq is a predominantly Muslim country, there are no strict restrictions on visual arts subjects in schools, apart from content that goes against public morals or violates religious symbols. For example, some teachers ask students to draw pictures depicting a family picnic, moments with friends, or other everyday scenes from their lives [6].

Art education methods in many periods of Iraqi history often served as an instrument of ideological education. For example, drawing topics most often revolved around the wars that Iraq experienced. A comparison of art education in Iraq and Russia reveals significant differences due to cultural traditions. These differences reflect the two

countries' unique historical, cultural, and social contexts and shed light on how cultural traditions shape approaches to art education.

### **1. Influence of Cultural Traditions**

Iraq greatly emphasizes preserving traditional art forms such as calligraphy and mosaics. Educational programs emphasize preserving the country's historical heritage and aim to introduce students to Iraq's rich artistic past [6].

In contrast, the Russian art education system is based on different traditions and aims to familiarize children with the culture and art of different countries, and it is not limited to the Russian heritage [5, 2].

### **2. Religious Influence**

The religious influence on art education for children is minimal, and there are no specific sections for Orthodox art in the curriculum. Training in sacred painting is provided exclusively in specialized religious institutions, such as Sunday schools.

In Iraq, Islamic art forms such as calligraphy and geometric patterns are included in the curriculum, but the emphasis is on preserving traditional art and maintaining a link to historical heritage rather than emphasizing religious context. Researchers note that there has long been a struggle between secular and religious education in Iraq. As Al-Mohammedawi notes, "Islamic art has not yet made a definitive separation between the sacred (religious) and the secular" [24].

In modern Iraq, a clear change in attitude towards depicting human figures, especially women, can be observed in the visual arts. As Khalaaf Abdulqadhim A. Khalaaf states, «The image of Iraqi women has found expression in artworks that reflect their development as equal members of society, their spiritual and social liberation, and their achievements. These works of art form a gallery of remarkable female figures». While the depiction of women in Iraqi art dates back to the 19th century, the long-standing ban on portraying women from life has gradually been relaxed. The once abstract and idealized depictions of women (e.g., 'Holy Deities' or 'Mother Earth') have evolved. Since the late 20th century, Iraqi artists have interpreted the female form in various ways – realistically, abstractly, or symbolically – moving away from earlier restrictions. Art universities now offer courses in academic figure drawing, a further departure from traditional restrictions [28].

Modern Iraqi calligraphers are redefining traditional forms by incorporating features of contemporary graphics. For example, Arabic script often combines visual elements such as portraits of women, maps,

or other figurative representations. These works often use various techniques, including oil and acrylic painting [29].

### **3. Art Education Programs in Primary Schools**

Until recently, there were several art education programs in Russia [4, 7]. However, a unified federal program for teaching art to younger students has been recommended. This program includes sections aimed at stimulating creative perception of works of art and developing skills in painting, drawing, sculpture, and design. At the same time, the curriculum serves as a basis for creative teachers and allows for adaptations that reflect regional characteristics as well as students' interests and needs.

There is no standardized program for teaching art in Iraq. Instead, various teaching guides are offered that focus on different areas of artistic creativity. Teachers have the flexibility to use these guides or develop their own curricula.

Discussions about developing artistic imagination and creative skills focus primarily on students in higher arts education institutions. Art educators are actively developing new teaching approaches for art students, integrating both national and Western methods and styles [31, 32]. However, the challenges of art education at the school level are rarely addressed in Iraqi academic literature. This creates a remarkable gap between general art education in schools and specialized art education in universities.

### **4. Theoretical and Methodological Foundations**

Russia has a rich tradition of developing psychological and pedagogical frameworks in education, which also extends to teaching fine arts. Scholars have created pedagogical frameworks based on theoretical foundations, including philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical principles of arts education [1, 2, 4, 7, 18, 19].

In contrast, Iraq remains predominantly influenced by Islamic pedagogy and its basic principles [16, 21, 33].

An analysis of art education in Iraqi primary schools reveals several problems, primarily due to a lack of resources to provide students with the necessary artistic materials and tools. Teachers often point out the lack of methodological resources for teaching art, which has a negative impact on students' educational outcomes. In addition, some schools lack well-trained art professionals, which further impairs the effectiveness of these programs.



Overall, this leads to a decline in students' interest. Iraqi primary school students perceive Artistic disciplines as secondary and unimportant, undermining these programs' intended goals.

The analysis has led to the following conclusions: Cultural traditions play a crucial role in shaping the arts education of school children in Iraq and Russia. These traditions are deeply rooted in each region's history, religion, and artistic heritage and significantly influence arts education's content, methods, and objectives in both countries.

This study examined the most important aspects of primary school art education in Iraq and Russia and identified similarities and differences. In Iraq, the main goal of art education is to cultivate students' artistic thinking and creativity while using drawing and arts and crafts as a means of ideological education. In Russia, the emphasis is on fostering creative thinking, learning about art culture in a broader context, and integrating art education into the general educational framework.

However, both countries face the challenge of improving the methods of teaching art. Artistic disciplines are often seen as unimportant and secondary and receive less attention in the educational process.

Table 1

*Comparison of Traditions in Primary Art Education in Iraq and Russia*

Category	Russia	Iraq
Influence of Cultural Traditions	Focus on global art traditions with an emphasis on national heritage	Emphasis on national cultural traditions
Religious Influence	Secular approach to arts education in primary school.	A strong influence of Islam on pedagogy
Programs for Aart Education in Primary School	There is a unified program: «Fine Arts and Artistic Labor» (authors: B.M. Nemensky et al.)	There is no unified program
Theoretical and Methodological Basis	Extensive experience in the development of psychological and pedagogical approaches; a large number of textbooks	Teachers report a lack of teaching materials and guidelines
Problems in Teaching Fine Arts in Primary School	Fine Arts in Primary School – Art is often seen as a secondary subject.  Fine arts are taught by general primary school teachers and not by specialized art teachers	Lack of resources to provide students with art materials.  An insufficient number of well-trained art teachers.  Lack of methodological resources for teaching.  Art is often perceived as a secondary subject

In Iraq, there is an urgent need for a more flexible and diverse approach to the selection of topics and techniques to broaden students' intellectual and creative development. Some primary schools in Iraq face challenges related to the lack of financial and material resources. Professional art in Iraq combines secular and religious trends with the search for modern means of expression, which inevitably affects teaching art to school children. However, modern and foreign influences must be reconciled with Iraqi cultural traditions when designing art education programs.

In Russia, we have identified a challenge for primary school art education: it is often taught by general primary school teachers, not art specialists. We believe that examining teaching practices in the arts subjects in both Iraq and Russia can contribute to pedagogy in both countries. In Russia, it is crucial to emphasize the preservation of national art forms and folk crafts. At the same time, it is important to familiarize Iraqi educators with Russian specialists' methodological and psychological-pedagogical expertise and to adapt these approaches for use in Iraqi primary schools while respecting national and cultural traditions.

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# ПЕДАГОГИКА

## ТРАДИЦИИ И МЕТОДЫ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ ИЗОБРАЗИТЕЛЬНОГО ИСКУССТВА В НАЧАЛЬНЫХ ШКОЛАХ ИРАКА И РОССИИ

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**Аннотация.** В статье исследуются особенности художественного образования младших школьников в Ираке и России. Цель данной статьи – выявить особенности, традиции, содержание и методы начального художественного образования в двух странах. Обучение художественным дисциплинам в России имеет давнюю традицию и опирается на педагогические и психологические разработки. В России принята единая программа по изобразительному искусству, в то время как в Ираке нет общей для всех школ программы, учителя имеют свободу в выборе программ или создании собственных. Программа художественного образования в России носит светский характер, направлена на знакомство с мировой художественной культурой, совмещает уроки творчества и знакомства с произведениями изобразительного искусства. В Ираке долгое время борются тенденции светского и религиозного образования, влияние Ислама на обучение изобразительному искусству прослеживается во многих школах, где отдается предпочтение традиционным видам искусства, таким как орнаменты и каллиграфия. Однако в сфере подготовки учителей изобразительного искусства сильны западные традиции, учителя и художники переосмысливают традиции исламского искусства с позиций современного мира, расширяя его границы и возможности.

**Ключевые слова:** *преподавание изобразительного искусства, традиции художественного образования России и Ирака, методы начального художественного образования, дефициты преподавания изобразительного искусства*

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