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Art Education in Primary School: creativity and awareness from the earliest years

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ABSTRACT — Art Education in Primary School: creativity and awareness from the earliest years – This study analyzes the importance of Art Education in Mozambican primary education, an area that is often neglected in the school curriculum. Its devaluation contributes to students' loss of interest when they move on to secondary school. Art Education is essential for cognitive, emotional and cultural development, revealing students' creative potential. The research, carried out at the Pimissa School, seeks to understand the impact of valuing this subject from an early age and how its inclusion in the curriculum can foster an integral education, promoting more creative, empathetic and socially engaged citizens.
KEYWORDS
Art Education. Pupils. Mozambican Elementary school. Activities.

RESUMO — Ensino da Arte no Ensino Fundamental I: criatividade e consciência desde a primeira infância – Este estudo analisa a importância do ensino da Arte no ensino primário moçambicano, uma área muitas vezes negligenciada no currículo escolar. Sua desvalorização contribui para a perda de interesse dos alunos ao passarem para o ensino secundário. O ensino da Arte é essencial para o desenvolvimento cognitivo, emocional e cultural, revelando o potencial criativo dos alunos. A investigação, realizada na Escola Pimissa, busca compreender o impacto da valorização dessa disciplina desde a infância e como sua inclusão no currículo pode favorecer uma formação integral, promovendo cidadãos mais criativos, empáticos e socialmente engajados.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Ensino da Arte. Alunos. Ensino Primário moçambicano. Atividades.

RESUMEN — Educación artística en la escuela primaria: creatividad y conciencia desde los primeros años – Este estudio analiza la importancia de la Educación Artística en la enseñanza primaria mozambiqueña, un área a menudo descuidada en el currículo escolar. Su devaluación contribuye a la pérdida de interés de los alumnos cuando pasan a la enseñanza secundaria. La educación artística es esencial para el desarrollo cognitivo, emocional y cultural, revelando el potencial creativo de los alumnos. La investigación, llevada a cabo en el Colegio Pimissa, busca comprender el impacto de valorar esta materia desde edades tempranas y cómo su inclusión en el currículo puede favorecer una educación integral, promoviendo ciudadanos más creativos, empáticos y comprometidos socialmente.
PALABRAS CLAVE
Educación artística. Alumnos. Primaria mozambiqueña. Actividades.

The role of art in students' cognitive, emotional and social development

Art Education in Mozambican primary education continues to be a curricular component that is often neglected in comparison to other subjects that are considered central. This lack of appreciation contributes to its marginalization in school curricula, which negatively influences student engagement, especially in the transition to secondary education. This problem is addressed by Chivai (2023), who criticizes the attitude of the Ministry of Education and Culture towards the subject of Visual Education. Since 2017, Paiva (2017) has been following the efforts of Portuguese-speaking African countries, such as Cape Verde and Mozambique, to create higher education institutions dedicated to training teachers in Art Education, which has favored the presence of this area in the curricula. Despite the investments made, in mid-2025 the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEC) still faces significant challenges to effectively promote Art Education in schools. This reality is also observed in the context of Brazilian education, where, according to Barbosa (2022, p. 202), “the systematized struggle for the inclusion of art in pedagogical training began in high school courses”.

Art Education - which includes visual arts, music, dance and theater - plays a fundamental role not only in the cultural formation of students, but also in the development of cognitive and emotional skills. Marques (2023, p. 33) argues that “art should be integrated into the educational process, as it enables the development of different forms of expression, reflecting the individuality of the student”. The author also points out that art stimulates creativity, social awareness and empathy, fostering personal growth from the earliest school years. This insertion has taken place both formally and informally through structured and intentional means, such as curricular subjects, textbooks and materials displayed in classrooms, as well as through unplanned paths. An example of this is the extracurricular activities that have come to include artistic practices, such as school ceremonies, workshops and cultural clubs held outside of regular school hours. Dussel (2025, p. 9) adds that:

> This entry took place both ‘through the door’ and ‘through the window’, that is, through planned and explicit ways, such as school subjects, textbooks or pictures on the walls, but also through unplanned ways; examples of this are extracurricular activities that incorporated artistic practices - school rituals and ceremonies, workshops, cultural activity clubs outside of school hours.

The afore mentioned authors share the same perspective in arguing that art, when integrated into the educational process, should be recognized not only in informal teaching spaces but also in school subjects and teaching materials. In this way, art broadens the possibilities for expression and contributes significantly to the development of the student's individuality and identity, regardless of the way in which it is presented in the school environment.

Many school-age students show great potential for artistic cognition, as well as a natural interest in creativity, which indicates that Art Education can play a significant role in students' personal and social development. Paiva (2024, p. 35) points out that “Art Education unlocks a vast field of possibilities so that each person can build themselves in the uniqueness of their relationship of social belonging”. Based on this perspective, it is understood that Art Education favors self-expression, stimulates critical thinking and strengthens the collective capacity to face social challenges.

In view of this, this project seeks to answer the following question: what would be the impact of valuing Art Education from elementary school on the process of students' all-round development? The research aims to investigate how the consistent inclusion of Art Education in the curriculum can contribute to a more complete education, stimulating not only reasoning and cognitive skills, but also students' creativity, empathy and social involvement. Through a multidisciplinary approach, this study aims to highlight the importance of this area in the Mozambican educational context and suggest concrete strategies for its effective implementation in the country's elementary school.

Prehistoric Art in Mozambique: expression of spirituality and cultural identity

Prehistoric art in Mozambique reveals profound aspects of the lives, spirituality and social organization of the peoples who inhabited the territory before the arrival of the colonizers. One of the most emblematic expressions of this art is rock art, which is widely found in regions such as Manica, Niassa and other provinces of the country. These paintings and engravings on rocks depict scenes from everyday life such as hunting, dances and rituals and are symbolic records of great value, reflecting the beliefs, customs and community life of ancestral populations.

In addition to rock art, other forms of artistic expression developed in the pre-colonial period show the diversity and cultural richness of the Mozambican people. Wood and stone sculpture, notably practiced by groups such as the Makonde, performed not only an aesthetic function, but also a spiritual one, representing human figures, ancestors and symbols linked to local identity and religiosity.

Ceramics and weaving also occupied a prominent place, being used both in everyday life and in ceremonial contexts. The geometric patterns and decorative elements present on these objects carry social and aesthetic meanings specific to each community, revealing a rich and sophisticated symbolic language.

Interactions with the Indian Ocean trade routes contributed to the enrichment of these artistic practices, introducing new materials, techniques and influences that were integrated into local traditions. This fusion of knowledge broadened the communities' artistic repertoire and strengthened cultural continuity over time.

In this way, Mozambican prehistoric art not only documents ancestral ways of life, but also constitutes a fundamental pillar of national identity. It inspires contemporary artists and remains alive in current cultural practices, reinforcing the value and permanence of a unique and deeply rooted historical heritage. This influence transcends borders: several Brazilian artists, for example, have explored and represented realistic aspects of African ancestry in their works, highlighting the

cultural richness and contribution of African peoples to the identity formation of the Americas. In this vein, Santos (2019, p. 352) states that:

> We can also mention artists of black descent who produced works in other parts of Brazil at the same time, such as Jesuíno Francisco de Paula Gusmão (1764-1819) from São Paulo and José Teófilo de Jesus (1758-1847) from Bahia. Despite the predominance of themes channeled through Catholicism, we find an exception in the work of Teófilo de Jesus. We will present a proposal for approaching one of his allegories of the continents, the one referring to the African continent (Figure 1), followed by an allegory of the same continent (Figure 2), painted by the Italian Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770).

In agreement with Santos (2019), who proposes an analysis of allegorical representations of the African continent, it is possible to see that Africa, being the cradle of humanity, is also one of the fundamental origins of the arts.

Figure 1 – José Teófilo de Jesus*, Alegoria da África*



Source: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_Te%C3%B3filo_de_Jesus apud Santos (2019, p. 353).

Figure 2 – Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *Allegory of Africa: man with camel, detalhe do afresco Apollo and the Continents, na escadaria da Würzburg Residenzschloss*



Source: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_Te%C3%B3filo_de_Jesus Apud Santos (2019, p. 353).

Allegory is a symbolic way of representing something abstract or complex using images or stories that make that idea more visible or understandable.

Triangular approach in the Mozambican context

In Mozambique, a country of great cultural and historical diversity, art teaching plays a fundamental role in valuing local identities and strengthening collective memory. In this scenario, the Triangular Approach, originally developed in Brazil, has emerged as a methodology with great potential for adaptation and application in Mozambican schools, from primary education to teacher training in higher education institutions.

This approach proposes the integration of three interconnected pedagogical actions: artistic creation (making art), the appreciation and critical reading of images and works (seeing and reading), and the contextualization of artistic expressions in their historical, social, cultural and subjective spheres (Barbosa, 2022). By putting these three dimensions into dialog, the Triangular Approach promotes meaningful and integral learning of art, developing perceptive, cognitive and creative skills in students.

In the Mozambican context, this methodology can be particularly fruitful, as it aligns with the cultural and community values of the various regions of the country. Mozambique has a rich artistic heritage that is expressed in multiple forms: in the wood carvings of the Makonde peoples, in the graffiti and wall paintings found in traditional houses, in the capulanas used as a means of visual communication, in traditional dances such as the mapiko and nyau, in ceramics, in choral singing, as well as in contemporary expressions of urban art such as graffiti and digital art.

Mozambique's rich artistic heritage reveals a multiplicity of cultural expressions, from Makonde sculpture to contemporary urban art, which constitute a vast symbolic, visual and historical repertoire. These manifestations not only reflect the identity of the Mozambican people. It is in this scenario that the Triangular Approach, proposed by Ana Mãe Barbosa, takes on relevance as a transdisciplinary paradigm between Art and Education. This approach proposes the integration of three fundamental axes: fruition (reading images), contextualization (cultural and historical understanding) and production (artistic creation). By relating these axes to the teaching materials used in the two teaching modalities, it can be seen that the Triangular Approach offers an effective methodological structure for bringing students closer to artistic making and critical thinking, regardless of the teaching format.

Thus, the Triangular Approach allows both traditional and contemporary Mozambican art to be mobilized in educational practices that value diversity, promote critical thinking and stimulate creative production. By integrating these elements, this approach strengthens an aesthetic and culturally situated education that connects local knowledge to transdisciplinary pedagogical possibilities. In this sense, Rizzi (2017, p. 229) states that "we can understand the Triangular Approach as a paradigm/theory of the trans-area of Art/Education, because the Triangular Approach, in its potential, indicates actions, reflections and activities that are transdisciplinary in nature. The Triangular Approach is not pluri, multi or inter, it is

transdisciplinary, so it understands the Art/Education interrelationship as transdisciplinary as well".

Applying the Triangular Approach to art education in Mozambique means, for example, encouraging students to produce works inspired by their local experiences, to critically observe the visual expressions present in their neighborhoods and communities, and to understand these expressions based on their origins, meanings and transformations over time.

This also includes reflecting on the role of art in the resistance to colonization, in the construction of national identity, in the transmission of traditional knowledge and in the dialogue between cultures.

In higher education, especially in teacher training, this approach contributes to the development of pedagogical practices that respect Mozambican cultural diversity and promote the teaching of art as a cross-cutting area of knowledge, capable of dialoguing with History, Language, Philosophy, Moral and Civic Education, among other subjects.

Therefore, the Triangular Approach not only enriches art teaching, but also strengthens the links between school, community and culture, promoting an aesthetic, critical education rooted in the realities of Mozambique.

Artistic Activities

Artistic activities, especially in the field of fine arts, offer valuable opportunities for students to experiment and create using different materials and visual techniques, such as painting, sculpture, drawing, engraving and installation. More than aesthetics, these activities enable the expression of emotions, ideas and experiences, reflecting the cultural and social context of each student. By taking part in these practices, students are encouraged to observe carefully, concentrate on tasks, develop aesthetic sensitivity and exercise creativity. Following this line of reasoning, Dussel (2025, p. 8) argues that:

> The schooling of art should not be interpreted as an impoverishment of the aesthetic experience, at least not always and in all cases, but rather as a translation and recontextualization of aesthetic practices and knowledge according to other strategies and functions that are no less important: contributing to a more democratic sharing of the sensible, promoting a discipline of intellectual work and repertoires, languages and knowledge that enrich the sensible experience of each and every one, proposing certain forms of attention to the world and raising questions about languages and forms of experience that are not available everywhere.

According to Dussel (2025) Fine arts activities also open up space for experimentation and innovation, allowing each student to develop their own visual language. In the school environment, these practices play an essential formative role, favoring not only technical development, but also the construction of a broader cultural and social awareness. In this context, De Eça (2014, p. 22) points out that "the development of emotions and cognitive abilities are integral dimensions of art education", and also reinforces the importance of other dimensions such as the preservation of culture, knowledge of heritage and the ability to respond critically and creatively to the information received. Thus, artistic activities in the classroom go beyond manual work; they contribute to the holistic development of students, forming subjects who are more aware, sensitive and capable of interpreting the world with their own creative vision.

Methodologies

This case study was conducted using a qualitative approach, focused on analyzing how Art Education influences the sensitivity and creative development of school-age students. The qualitative methodology was chosen because it allows for a deeper appreciation of the object of study and enables the interpretation of the meanings attributed to lived experiences. According to Coutinho et al. (2009), this type of approach makes it possible to describe and organize a wide variety of data, offering the researcher the opportunity to explore multiple dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation.

The research was carried out at Pimissa Primary School, located in southern Mozambique, a suitable environment for observing the role of the arts in the educational process. Six pupils aged between 7 and 8 took part in the study, which allowed for a diverse analysis of perceptions and experiences related to artistic practices.

For data collection, systematic observation techniques were used to understand the students' interactions with the proposed art activities. Structured interviews were also carried out with the students, with the aim of deepening the analysis of how they perceive art education and how this experience impacts on their emotional, social and creative development.

Data collection was divided into stages over five months. During this period, all observations were duly recorded, including the use of photographs, which contributed to a more complete analysis of the dynamics experienced by the students in the art activities. This methodological approach made it possible not only to identify aspects of the students' artistic sensitivity, but also to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of Art Education in the Mozambican school context. The qualitative analysis of the data obtained helped to answer the research questions and offer practical recommendations to strengthen the role of the arts in the curriculum. The activities carried out with the students included: handicrafts with recycled materials, painting on canvas and handicrafts with recycled materials in the following sequence:

Recycling

For In this activity, the students were instructed to recycle various materials, such as cans, eggshells, paper and glitter tape. Using these materials, they collaged and assembled a human figure, promoting creativity and raising awareness of the reuse of waste (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Human figure built with recyclable materials by the students



Source: https://www.facebook.com/share/v/15fEcbQusX/.

Figure 3 shows an artistic creation made by the students as part of a recycling and creative expression activity. It is a human figure made entirely from recyclable materials, which stands out for its originality and the conscious reuse of waste. The head is represented by an eggshell, carefully positioned and adorned with a hat made of paper. The body was constructed from a tin can, symbolizing the figure's torso. In the neck area, there is a small decorative bow, nicknamed a “kitten”, which adds a touch of charm and detail to the whole. The arms were finished with shiny ribbons, creatively applied to give the sculpture movement and liveliness. This composition reflects the students' involvement and the development of skills linked to sustainability, creativity and manual labor.

Painting on Paper with Collage

In the paper painting activity, the students had the opportunity to explore their creativity by choosing vibrant colors to compose and harmonize their works. The egg carton collage technique was used to create relief effects, enriching the texture of the works. In addition, each student was free to choose the format of the collage, using strips of fabric printed with the skin of a jaguar, which gave the compositions a personalized African artistic touch (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Painting on cardboard canvases



Source: https://www.facebook.com/share/v/16e7zKYBR9/.

Figure 4 shows an artistic production made by the students during the paper painting activity. It shows the use of bright colors, freely chosen to compose the image in a harmonious way. Highlighted are relief elements obtained by gluing together parts of egg cartons, creating texture and depth to the work. In addition, strips of fabric with a print similar to the skin of a jaguar were applied in different formats, according to the creativity of each student, giving originality and dynamism to the visual composition.

Water Bottle Car Building Activity

In the activity of building carts with recyclable materials, the students used water bottles as the main structure. First, with the teacher's help, bottle tops were drilled to serve as wheels. The activity stimulated creativity, motor coordination and awareness of the reuse of materials in the learning process (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Trolley made from recycled water bottles, with wheels made from lids and space for the driver



Source: https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1FDGvRXHd4/.

Figure 5 shows a handmade trolley built from recyclable materials as part of an educational activity focused on creativity and sustainability. The main structure of the trolley is made from a reused water bottle. The wheels were made with caps from the same bottle, previously drilled with the help of the teacher. The students threaded wires through the caps, attaching them to the base of the bottle, which allowed the wheels to turn freely. A space representing the driver's seat was adapted to the top of the bottle. The result is a functional and original creation that highlights the students' involvement and the conscious use of solid waste.

Mask Making Activity

In the activity dedicated to creating masks, the students reused damaged pots as the basis for their artistic productions. First, they painted the outside of the pots with a uniform background color. Next, they marked out and painted the details of the masks, exploring features that refer to the identity and aesthetics of African cultures. The activity allowed them not only to develop their creativity and aesthetic sense, but also to appreciate African cultural roots through art and the reuse of materials.

Figure 6 – Mask created from a recycled pot, with painting inspired by African identity



Source: https://www.facebook.com/share/v/16w9QttfP8/.

Figure 6 illustrates an artistic mask created by the students by reusing a crate. The outside of the crate was completely painted with a uniform base color, serving as a background for the decorative elements. Then, striking features that recall African identity were added, such as geometric patterns, symmetrical lines

and stylized eye, mouth and nose shapes. The colors chosen are strong and contrasting, reflecting the visual and symbolic richness of African culture. The creation reveals aesthetic sensitivity, creativity and awareness of the value of recyclable materials and cultural roots.

The methodology adopted for the different activities was based on active, creative and participatory learning, centered on reusing recyclable materials and encouraging artistic expression. The activities were planned in such a way as to integrate educational objectives with sustainable and cultural practices.

Each proposal was developed with guidance from the teachers and practical implementation by the students, valuing autonomy, experimentation and manual work.

The techniques used included:

- Cutting out, gluing and assembling recyclable materials (cans, bottles, lids, paper, egg boxes);
- Painting with a focus on the free choice of colors and visual harmony;
- Modeling shapes and figures with reliefs and symbolic elements from African culture;
- Adapting everyday objects, such as pots and bottles, for artistic and playful purposes.

Throughout the activities, the students were led to reflect on themes such as recycling, cultural identity, creativity and group work, promoting meaningful learning that is integrated with environmental and social issues.

Results

The activities developed with recyclable materials provided highly positive results in the teaching and learning process. The students showed great creativity and artistic expression when they created human figures, masks, relief paintings and

carts, using materials such as cans, bottles, egg boxes, lids, paper and pans. This creative freedom allowed each student to imprint their identity and imagination on their work. Dussel (2025, p. 15) states that she is “convinced that art teaching, with its history and disciplinary framework, can contribute to raising questions about the present and future of the sensitive in these broader artistic experiences (...)”. Agreeing with the author, the value of art in education highlights the positive results of free creativity and the use of recyclable materials in students' artistic development, and also points to the need to contextualize these practices within a more structured art education, capable of broadening students' critical sense, cultural repertoire and sensitivity. Thus, art teaching appears as a means of deepening and enhancing artistic experiences that are already rich in their own right.

In addition, the use of solid waste contributed significantly to the development of environmental awareness, encouraging sustainable attitudes and valuing the reuse of materials in everyday life. The productions that incorporated symbolic elements linked to African culture reinforced the students' knowledge of their cultural roots, promoting respect and appreciation of local identity.

The activities also improved motor and technical skills, through practices such as cutting, painting, gluing and assembling, requiring attention, precision and coordination. Working in groups encouraged cooperation, the sharing of ideas and mutual respect, strengthening school interaction and a collaborative spirit. In view of this, Barbosa (2022) emphasizes that artistic education is not limited to creative expression, but also develops essential cognitive and social skills, such as reading images, motor coordination, cooperation and respect. It stresses the practical and social benefits of artistic activities, and the second reinforces the need for structured visual training, indicating that experience with images should be worked on from an early age to avoid gaps in aesthetic and symbolic understanding. They conclude that art education should be broad, involving both the practice and critical reading of art.

In general, there was an increase in the students' interest and participation in the classes, thanks to the playful and interactive nature of the proposals. The

enthusiasm shown during the activities confirmed the effectiveness of the methodology adopted, which integrated art, sustainability, culture and learning in a creative and meaningful way. Finally, art is education, art is the transformation of the self (Chaves, 2018).

Conclusions

The activities developed showed that the use of recyclable materials in the educational context is an effective strategy for promoting meaningful learning, creativity and environmental awareness among students. Through art and the reuse of everyday objects, it was possible to stimulate individual expression, group work and the recognition of African cultural identity.

The experiences not only contributed to the development of technical and motor skills, but also aroused the students' interest and enthusiasm for school activities. The practical and participatory approach proved valuable in integrating knowledge, values and attitudes that are fundamental to the student's comprehensive education.

We therefore conclude that methodologies based on recycling and artistic production can and should be incorporated more frequently into teaching practices, due to their educational, social and environmental potential.

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