

# More than Teachers: Ways to Improve the Specialization and Professionalism of Art Education Teachers

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**Abstract:** Recent developments in art education have heightened the need for preparing art education teachers so that they will be specialized and professional enough to develop their students effectively. However, some art researchers still question the skill levels of art education teachers who have graduated from art education institutions rather than fine art institutes. In this paper, the researcher attempts to defend the view that art education teachers are sufficiently specialized and professional and that their role in the field is not limited to teaching in schools.

**Keywords:** art education teachers, professional.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of recent global developments, the need to produce professional and specialized graduates has become a central issue for educational institutions, including art education schools in Oman. Questions have been asked about whether these institutions should produce study plans in order to develop the teaching process by meeting contemporary requirements. An investigation of the new study plan for the art education programme at Sultan Qaboos University has revealed that courses on specialization and professionalism in art were negatively affected when the number of courses on offer decreased as a result of being replaced by psychological, curricula courses. The fact that decreasing the number of pure art courses has led to a reduction in the number of hours students spend in the studio and in the workshop cannot be ignored. Rather than focusing on being primary information providers, our graduates (teachers) should dedicate more time to teaching professional artistic skills and techniques to pupils in schools.

## 2. SPECIALIZATION AND PROFESSIONALISM IN ART

Most of the studies that have explored specialization in the arts have been carried out within archaeological, prehistoric contexts and have focused on civilization and art history. Studies of *professionalism* in the creative industries in general, and the arts in particular, are widely available today, because professionalism in these sectors is a concept that is used as an alternative to the concepts of training, education and skills (Yarri Kamara, 2003).

Some art researchers have questioned the skills of Omani art education teachers who have graduated from art education institutions and not fine art colleges. In Oman there are only a few colleges of art, and only two of these colleges specialize in art education. Therefore, many people think that Oman is not in a good position to support the arts sectors by providing skilled and professional graduates.

This is also an international issue. For example, in his article 'The State of the Arts', Anderson (2010) asserted that in Australia the number of professional artists has declined from 5,500 in the 1990s to 3,800 in 2010 (Anderson, 2010). In addition, in their economic study on professional artists in Australia entitled 'Do You Really Expect To Get Paid?', Throsby and Zednik stated that the decline in the number of professional visual artists is one of the most recognizable

issues among all art communities in the country, where the number of professional artists has 'fallen slightly from 45,000 in 2001 to 44,100 in 2009' (2010, p.8). Perhaps the biggest disadvantage of these reports is that they provide only descriptive data, rather than investigating the issues of professionalism and specialization in the arts sector.

The issue of professionalism and specialization has been investigated intensively in many studies, such as Ermine, Boughazala and Tournkara's (2006) study entitled 'Critical Knowledge Map as a Decision Tool for Knowledge Transfer Actions', Smith's (2001) work 'The Role of Tacit and Explicit Knowledge in the Workplace' and Evans' (1978) research on 'Early Craft Specialization'. These academic works have contributed to investigating the issues of training, 'exchanging Arts intangible knowledge which is associated with Arts traditional objects, between Artists' and the 'quality of hand-skills requested in traditional Arts more than Arts making field'. Therefore, the content of these studies is valuable in a discussion of professionalism and specialization in Omani art education.

### 3. EVALUATING SPECIALIZATION AND PROFESSIONALISM IN ART EDUCATION

Most of the academic studies exploring specialization in the arts have been carried out within archaeological, prehistoric contexts and have mainly focused on civilizations arts history (e.g. Aroled, 1987; Thomas et al., 1991; Hagstrum and Melissa, 1995; Chide and Bernard, 1996). In brief, field observations have led to several main opinions on specialization and professionalism.

First, the process of transferring arts that used to be tacit between teaching generations in art education schools in Oman now lacks a clear strategy. This is because teaching methods and course descriptions are frequently changed. Second, in the context of professionalism in the process of teaching art, the delivery of some courses, such as ceramics, sculpture and painting, shows that art education departments are not paying attention to 'intensity' in their related course workshops; sometimes there is little account of 'time and effort' in comparison with the 'quality and quantity of the final production. Third, data emphasises that graduates from, for example, the Department of Art at Sultan Qaboos University, have less interest in working in the pure arts sectors; instead, they prefer to become school teachers, as this is a permanent government job with guaranteed hours and pay. Finally, after completing their degrees, whether in Oman or overseas, art education graduates face the challenge of the huge difference between the study environment at university (art education programmes and the related practice courses) and the reality of their field of work. These differences relate to equipment, time of work, types of products to be created, applicable laws, technical support, and artistic supervision from the Ministry of Education.

The transfer of art knowledge from one generation to the next needs to be addressed theoretically, similar to the transfer of knowledge in all other industries. The first suggested point regarding this process is what Ermine, Boughazala and Tournkara (2006) asserted when they stated that 'identifying valuable knowledge is the beginning of the solution' (p.129). In 'practising fields' like arts and pottery, knowledge must be transferred into 'actions', which means that the stage of selecting 'valuable knowledge' is vital. This leads to placing the issues of specialization and the traditional exchange of knowledge within strategies for intangible cultural heritage and its relevant cultural contributions, as suggested by UNESCO in its Convention 2003. In Article 2 of the Convention, 'the goal of safeguarding, as with other forms of intangible cultural heritage, is to ensure that the knowledge and skills associated with art making process are passed on to future generations so that arts can continue to be produced within their communities' (UNESCO, 2009, p.4).

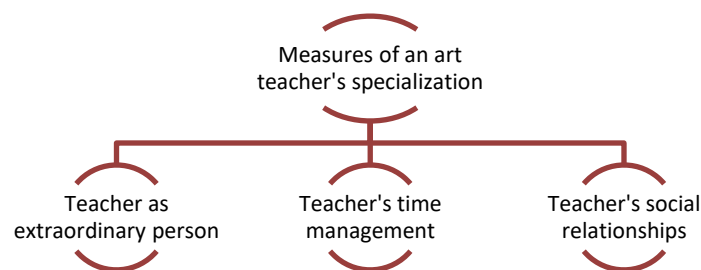
Because transferring knowledge is a process between sender (teaching staff at schools of art education) and recipient (art education candidate teachers), it is very important to understand that the recipient has a limited capacity; the recipient's mind is similar to an 'aggregation container' (Grant, 1996, p.111). Art education candidate teachers join the course after leaving secondary school; therefore, they sometimes face difficulties when entering schools of art at a university level, especially in relation to practical modules, such as ceramics, sculpture and painting. This means that their ability to receive artistic skills and knowledge may be limited. This impression was confirmed by Grant (1996), who asserted that: 'at both individual and organizational levels, knowledge absorption depends upon the recipient's ability to add new knowledge to existing knowledge' (p.111).

Art knowledge, including theoretical knowledge and skills, must be treated as 'tacit knowledge'. This type of knowledge is not useful unless it is transferred through application to productive activities (Grant, 1996, p.111). Indeed, this is why some ancient art practices are unexplainable in terms of their techniques, materials and methodological backgrounds. In

their book *Intangible Heritage*, Smith and Akagawa (2009) defined tacit knowledge as ‘such knowledge, which is frequently culturally and/or geographically located, cannot be codified and can only be transmitted via training or gained through direct personal experience – such as learning a skill – but not in a way that can be easily written down...tacit knowledge is opposite to the concept of explicit knowledge’ (pp.275–276). For example, until recent times, there were no explanations for how the animal skulls and beads that appeared on the front of Omani wooden ships in the Musandam region were made. The most comprehensive study on this issue, a book entitled *The Arts Heritage of Oman* by Richardson and Dorr (2003), concluded that there is no definitive explanation, even though they conducted many interviews with artists in the field (Almamari, 2012).

Simon (1991) suggested that because human minds have ‘limited capacity to acquire, store and process knowledge’, humans (including art education candidate teachers) have to specialize in specific types of knowledge (pp.125–134). Bearing in mind that Simon’s argument is now 20 years old, and knowledge has become more complex, with more branches, it is worthwhile for artists in the same enterprise to specialize in specific techniques, artistic themes or materials (internationally, ceramicists such as Phil Rogers (UK) specializes in ash glazing, while William Melstrom (USA) specializes in crystalline glazing). Therefore, the development of specializations in arts enterprises through the transmission of traditional knowledge is dependent on the types of traditional knowledge available and the way in which it is transmitted (Almamari, 2012).

To understand specialization in the arts specifically, it is possible to summarize three recognizable elements. First, art teachers become specialized only when they are considered as an ‘extraordinary person’, at least in their educational environment. Second, the level of an art education teacher’s specialization is usually measured by their ability to manage their production time accurately. This can be evaluated when the teacher compares their production time with their ‘lost’ time and applies a solution to solve the problem. Third, a specialized art education teacher is also evaluated in terms of their exchange relationships in the community. Figure 1 below shows suggested measures of specialization according to the previous analysis:



**Figure 1: Measures of specialization**

Different from the general concept of professionalism, ‘professionalism in the arts’ refers to arts training, the old styles of the guilds, and arts education, as described in the article ‘Capacity-building for Cultural Enterprise in Developing Countries Framework’. Previous to that, it referred to the Arts and Crafts Movement (England) and Bauhaus (German) publications (Almamari, 2012).

This led to an investigation of professionalism as a concept that refers to education within the arts. The investigation was carried out by making a comparison between arts education in Oman and three recognizable stages of the Arts and Crafts Movement (represented by the William Morris Company in England), the Bauhaus school (represented by the Weimar School established by Walter Gropius in Germany), and post-war styles of training and education in the arts (Almamari, 2012).

To make this comparison, it is essential to identify the comparison factors to be used as measurements for evaluating the training systems. Therefore, the researcher extracted seven factors to be used in the comparison: consumerism; personal professional skills; the domination of machines; the creativity of the art teacher; imitation and copyright; understanding the use of materials; basic art skills (colour, drawing, styles, tastes, and appreciation); and government (financial and managerial) support (Almamari, 2012). Table 1 below shows the final results of comparison.

**Table 1: Comparison between the Art and Crafts Movement, Bauhaus and the post-war period regarding professionalism in art education**

Comparison factor	Professionalism			
	Arts and Crafts Movement: William Morris Company	Bauhaus: Weimar School	Post-war training styles	Art Education in Oman
Consumerism	William Morris placed what he called <i>modern art</i> in a larger social context, including employment issues, social justice and consumerism (Metcalf, 1999).	'The importance of industrialised production and its aesthetic effects was a central question for both movements' (Gropius, in the manifesto of the Weimar School).	Today, reform is happening as a reaction not to industrialization but to a combination of consumerism and globalization.	Art education programmes in Oman have no courses that focus on improving students' consumerism skills.
Personal professional skills	Because this movement was established to fight against the threat of machines, it is clear that manual (handicraft) skills were a priority.	The school was built to unify arts and crafts, so they referred to artists as 'masters of forms' and 'masters of techniques' (Smock, 2004, p.19).	Examples of the ceramicists Soetsu Yanagi, Bernard Leach and Hamada demonstrate the importance of personal skills in craft workshops (Harrod, 1999).	In some courses, such as ceramics, sculpture and painting, students show high levels of skill only after completing the course.
Domination of machines	William Morris was aware of the disaster of mass-production and the negative effects of machines on craft, which led to the fall of the arts in the nineteenth century (Scheidig, 1967).	Bauhaus stressed 'the importance of designing for mass production' (Winton, 2007).	Artists were trained to work in small enterprises to solve the problem of unemployment (Harrod, 1999)	There is a large involvement of machines in some courses, such as sculpture and handicraft processes, but not in others, such as ceramics and painting.
Art teacher's creativity	The firm's founders stressed 'the creative independence of individual craftspeople' (Design Museum, 2010), which was a reaction against the negative effects of machines on the craftsman's existence.	The Bauhaus was the first school to attach art objects to the concepts and style of modernity, and craftsmen started looking to art for a 'stylistic or conceptual framework' (Naylor, 1980).	Influenced by 'industrial design' technologies, concepts and theories. This period also witnessed a creative reaction in opposition to the inter-war arts traditions (Harrod, 1999).	The last 2011 study plan for the courses at SQU illustrated a greater focus on creativity.
Imitation and copyright	Even though the Arts and Crafts Movement was against the industrial	This school adopted 'quality of work' from craftsmen, but adopted creativity	This period also witnessed a creative reaction in opposition to inter-war arts traditions	The new assessment tools applied in art schools have made a strong

	revolution, it adopted the tradition of the Pre-Raphaelites, who believed that 'art' meant individuality and explored 'truth'. Truth, for them, was based on nature and an escape from medievalism and the imitation of Gothic artistic themes (Naylor, 1980)	from artists. This influenced the training system used by the school (Scheidig, 1967)	in relation to technology (Harrod, 1999).	contribution to protecting copyright and preventing the imitation of other people's artwork.
Basic art skills (colour, drawing, styles, tastes, appreciation and so on) for establishing artist-Artsman	The direct connection with Pre-Raphaelites (artists) and the firm contributed to developing art skills in Morris & Co. (Naylor, 1980).	Merging arts and crafts was the most recognisable aspect of this school: 'for Germany the year 1907 marked the beginning of a new relationship between manufacturers and their machines, Artsmen and their quality work, and the artists and their conception of form' (Scheidig, 1967, p.9).	Appearance of the 'studio Artsman', who usually graduated from an art school or at least got enough training to be distinguished from other ordinary artspeople.	There are very intensive modules within art education programmes in Oman, which give students the basic skills they need to be able to work towards achieving highly professional skills.
Government (financial and managerial) support.	Mostly private firms.	Mostly private firms.	Arts enterprises in this period received more non-political support from local government, including financial and logistics management support (Harrod, 1999).	Almost all governmental art education institutions are supported financially, including the costs of art materials.

#### 4. WAYS TO DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL ART EDUCATION TEACHERS

From the information shown in Table 1, it is apparent that art education programmes in Oman do not include any modules dedicated to improving students' consumerism skills. When students are not prepared enough to understand the importance of consumerism skills, the art they produce cannot meet the field demands.

In addition, further observations in the field have shown that, for some courses, such as ceramics, sculpture and painting, students demonstrated a high level of skill only after completing the course. This reflects the high quality of the content of these courses and the knowledge that is instilled in students.

Furthermore, the results showed that machinery is involved to a great extent in some courses, such as sculpture and handicrafts processes, but not in others, such as ceramics and painting. It may be the case, therefore, that these variations

reflect the contemporary direction of using special, modern materials in the teaching of sculpture and handicrafts.

We found a positive correlation between the new improvements in the study plan and the overall outcomes of the courses. This improvement became apparent after applying the last (2011) study plan of the courses at SQU, which showed more of a focus on creativity. In addition to the development of a more effective study plan, the new assessment tools applied in the school of art have made a strong contribution to protecting copyright and preventing the imitation of other people's artworks.

Recently, very intensive courses have been introduced in art education programmes in Oman to give students the basic skills they need to be able to work towards achieving high levels of professional skill. Regarding this point, the evidence from this study suggests that courses in the first and second years have prepared students very well.

Finally, field visits and observations showed that all governmental art education institutions in Oman are supported financially, including the provision of art materials. However, in future, these institutions should build a new system in order to fund themselves. This is especially important in a country where the funding of these institutions is affected by oil prices.

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