

## Using Arts Integration to Foster Effective Reading Comprehension Skills at the High School Level

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### Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of arts integration in improving reading comprehension among high school students in Pakistan, particularly in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) contexts. It employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative needs analysis with qualitative feedback from three intervention cycles. These cycles utilized various arts integration strategies, such as narrative essay illustration, expository essay doodling and semantic mapping, and novel-based arts activities. Data collection included pre-and post-intervention questionnaires, diagnostic assessments, and reflective sessions. Findings reveal significant improvements in students' reading comprehension, memory retention, and motivation. Students reported better understanding, recall, and enjoyment of learning through arts-integrated activities. The study contributes to the literature on arts integration in language education and offers recommendations for curriculum design, teacher training, assessment practices, and community engagement to support and expand arts integration in education.

**Keywords:** Arts Integration, English as a Medium of Instruction, EMI, High School Students

### Introduction

English is the international lingua franca (Crystal, 2000) and is required for students as the mode through which they receive the bulk of their educational material. English is also the national language of Pakistan and the educational systems at the HSSC level are largely of the English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) context (Shamim, 2008; Rahman, 2016; Rashid, et al, 2016). Literacy in the English language is therefore the crucial door to obtaining modern education, since all the books, materials, examinations, etc. are in English. Reading is one of the four main linguistic skills, and on the whole, language learning is an intrinsically affective process (Krashen, 2009). Central to education, learning and student achievement is reading, at the core of all education. Students who do not read, or cannot read due to certain reasons, inarguably suffer in their learning outcomes (Wilson, 2016). Literature shows that reading should be developed in infancy; where it fosters linguistic and cognitive development, along with imagination (Pergar & Hadela, 2020); which forms the basis for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as critical thinking, reflexivity, and STEM concepts, later on in life. However, this is not the case in Pakistan, as is depicted through the current bulk of literature that is now emerging from the Pakistani context. Since there is minimal reading, there is also a minimal level of critical discourse, accompanied with a high level of post- colonial complacency and acceptance (Raza, 2020). It is a common misconception

that learners can be encouraged to develop, or rather that they will automatically develop reading habits at the high school level, when they are required to read (Pergar & Hadela, 2020). On the contrary, readers who are not made in the early years, seldom emerge as pleasure readers; focusing only on what is necessary for their testing and examinations (Kyung-Sook & Krashen, 2019).

## **Background**

### **Reading Skills in Pakistani Students**

The literacy rate in Pakistan has been recorded at 58% (Macrotrends, 2024) and this included all adults over 18 years of age who can read and write a simple sentence in their native tongue (OCHA Services, 2023). Out of these, 75% claim not to read any books at all and only 9% of the Pakistani population has emerged to be avid readers (Gallup Pakistan, 2019). Empirical studies conducted across Pakistan show that students are aware that reading is important, yet they are reluctant to delve into it extensively as they usually cite varied negative experiences in their primary and secondary levels (Fatima, et al, 2023). This seems to have diminished their zeal and has also made them fail to realize the importance of reading at their current level of studies (Solangi, et al, 2024). Young learners in Pakistan lack motivation (Khan, et al, 2023) and hence, face hindrances in their reading capability (Idrees, et al, 2022). Overall, students in the Pakistani context face multiple issues while reading, which leads to weak comprehension skills and understanding (Ali, et al, 2022). It has been pointed out by local literature on the subject that teachers should motivate their students from an early age to develop intensive reading skills (Dilshad, et al, 2013). In order to overcome the affective hurdles and the lack of motivation that students face while reading, teachers should introduce multiple strategies to enhance comprehension skills amongst their students. These include activation of prior knowledge, explaining the context of the material, using tactics such as scaffolding and graphic organizers (Enighe, 2024), along with approaches that cater to the students' cognitive and affective domains (Costa & Mariotti, 2021; Li, et al 2021; Ghaffar, 2024). This is expected to enhance their motivation and comprehension while reading either in the classroom or for the classroom i.e., while preparing for lectures and assessments.

### **Problem Statement**

I teach at the college level, where I cater to students of the premedical and the pre-engineering cohorts. They are required to carry out reading tasks for background information and also for understanding. Both cohorts need to study subjects of humanities and social sciences along with their subject specialties. Also, both cohorts have reading as a part of their curriculum. These cohorts are a mix of students with various reading comprehension skills; where some are very good at it, others are average readers, and a few are either reluctant to read or are unable to comprehend whatever they have read. Students having difficulty in reading comprehension, given a reading task prefer to ignore the reading task, or just try to do the bare minimum: either reading just a few paragraphs, or just skimming and scanning the surface of the text. This hinders my plans and strategies such as flipped classroom cannot be implemented, and it also affects the time allocation in class. I have noticed, however, that students do well in their science classes, since the texts of the science subjects are almost always accompanied by illustrations, graphic organizers, and charts. This gave me the idea to use these elements while teaching my English course as well. This is called arts integration (Wilson, 2016), and it has been found to be effective in fostering comprehension skills, especially the element of drawing and doodling being effective for comprehension and recall (Murraya, et al, 2024). The traditional method of teaching Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK) English at the college was predominantly based on the lecture method, book reading, and solving the '10- year' past papers questions. There was no element of discovery, margin notes or critical thinking. My aim was to have their English classes as illustrative as their science classes. Therefore, I have carried out intervention action research on

the students that required it to foster intensive reading and comprehension. Using arts integration at the higher secondary school level is yet a relatively unexplored phenomenon in the Pakistani context and this study aims at enriching the current literature, especially for students in the EMI context.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The students in Pakistan study in an EMI context (Khan et al., 2023) with English being their second language at best. These students require certain strategies to bridge the gap between their language proficiency and the language requirements. This study aims at fostering intensive reading and comprehension skills for higher secondary school students in Pakistan, while using arts integration as an intervention for struggling readers. The focus here will not be to inculcate an interest in the arts, rather to use the aspects of drawing and doodles as a medium and arts as a method for fostering explanation and instruction. This is an extension of one of the four main methodologies of reading skills i.e., graphic organizers (Li, et al, 2021) and semantic maps (Zamrizal, 2022). *Project 0* at Harvard has launched a named “Visible Thinking Routines” (Project Zero, 2022), which aims at semantically mapping the metacognitive strategies that students go through. There is also a plethora of literature in materials development for EFLs and using scaffolding and graphic organizers (Chinpakdee & Yongqi Gu, 2021).

### **Research Questions:**

RQ1: How does art integration enhance reading comprehension skills of students having low performance in reading skills at the college level?

RQ2: Which approach of art integration works best to enhance reading comprehension skills of students having low performance in reading skills at the college level?

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this intervention study, I will aim to enhance the reading comprehension skills of a group of weak students, using arts integrated lesson plans as instructional tools in order to enhance a higher level of achievement in their reading comprehension skills. At the primary and secondary levels of education, there are multiple methods and approaches to teaching that are utilized such as materials development, arts infusion, integrated curriculum, and the use of realia at the secondary and post-secondary levels (Crawford, 2005). However, common practice dictates that it is suddenly *assumed* at the post middle school level that students are ‘old enough’ to study and understand the course content, which results in the weaker students floundering (Pergar & Hadela, 2020). This results in college level students being left with insufficient support in their academics (OfS, 2023), while literature supports the contrary; students require as much support at this level as well (Killen & O’Toole, 2023; Baker, 2024).

### **Significance of the Study**

Curriculum integration has been proven to have multiple advantages in student outcome. One such integration is art integration, especially in the field of language teaching. Since our students are situated in an EMI context, they are perpetual language learners as well, be it any subject that they study. This research study is a pioneer in arts integration done at the college level in Pakistan since there is almost no literature available in the field. Students are already familiar with artistic elements in their science subjects as illustrations, diagrams, and graphic organizers. My aim was to extend the use of non-written explanations into their English language classes as well. I hope that other language teachers, subject teachers, and researchers further this filed in their own cities across Pakistan.

## **Theoretical Support for Arts Integration in English Language Classrooms**

**Multiple Intelligences Theory:** Howard Gardner's (Gardner, 1983) theory of multiple intelligences suggests that students have different kinds of intelligences, including linguistic, spatial, and musical. Integrating arts into language learning can cater to these diverse intelligences, making learning more effective and engaging.

**Constructivist Learning Theory:** Constructivist theorists like Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasize the importance of active, hands-on learning. Arts integration allows students to construct knowledge through creative activities, enhancing their understanding and retention of language concepts.

**Cognitive Load Theory:** This theory, proposed by John Sweller, (Sweller, 1988) posits that learning is more effective when cognitive load is managed. Arts integration can reduce cognitive load by presenting information in multiple formats (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), making it easier for students to process and understand complex language concepts

## **Literature Review**

### **Art Integration to Enhance Reading Comprehension**

One of the latest innovations in teaching is the concept of curriculum integration, which combines multiple disciplines and subject areas, resulting in a new approach to teaching, resulting in students being capable of developing a holistic and broader worldview of what is being taught in the classroom (Neendoor, 2024). There are many advantages resulting from curriculum integration such as enhanced comprehension and application of the concepts, coupled with longer retention of the content, while it also becomes easier to recall (Beane, 1997). One such strategy is art integration (Burnaford, et. al, 2022). This can either be done at the whole curriculum level, or in an individual subject (LACMA, 2024). An arts integrated curriculum uses the elements of the arts as an instructional strategy, rather than the more traditional lecture method, or 'direct teaching method', which provides student engagement by offering connections to un-interesting or difficult content. Proponents of the art integrated curriculum believe that it has multiple advantages to learners, such as higher levels of comprehension and learning, involvement, and critical thinking, since the arts comprise multiple elements; catering to a number of students demands and learning styles. An art integrated approach to teaching can easily motivate students to learn new content and can transform the learners from passive receivers to those who actively generate knowledge (Wilson, 2016). Arts integration is one method of extension of the increasing the interaction between reader and text, it is abridging of the gap in understanding, the doodles that they draw (Murraya, et. al, 2024) explanations and comprehension of the reading that is done in classes, aiming at catering to the multiple intelligences and learning styles that may not have been uncovered or reached with the current traditional teaching methods. Since students have multiple learning styles (Gardener, 1993), it is hoped that arts integration will be able to cater to a wider variety of students and will foster comprehension and memory (Wilson, 2016).

## **Empirical Studies:**

### **International Empirical Researches on Art Integration**

In the United States, the Kennedy Center's CETA Program is a pioneer in the art integration movement (kennedy\_center.org, 2024). US Literature on the subject also comprises multiple books and researches on the subject, some of which are 'Artful Teaching', by Donahue & Stuart, 2024, 'Arts Integration', by Goldberg, 2021 and 'Arts Integrated Curriculum', by Ewing Gibson, 2020. In New Zealand, Zhang (2024) highlighted multiple advantages of art integration, including teacher perceptions and practices. An empirical study from Australia, conducted by Lovejoy et al. (2021) found benefits for both students and teachers, with enriched curriculum leading to clearer

student understanding. In the eastern context, there are also multiple works and studies conducted in Sri Lanka, China, Turkey, and Malaysia, all espousing deeply on benefits to reading comprehension in terms of engagement, deeper understanding, and metacognition. In India, a study by Gandhioke and Singh (2024) demonstrated that using art in ESL/EFL classrooms enhanced language production, vocabulary building, and critical thinking (Gandhioke & Singh, 2024). NEP 2020 called for art integration in classrooms. Sharma et al. (2024) found higher levels of empathy, emotional literacy, and cultural sensitivity. Paveen (2021) conducted an intervention study showing positive results in engagement and understanding. Surbhi & Sharma (2023) developed lesson plans, finding increased comprehension and curiosity among students. In Pakistan, art is a separate subject (National Curriculum Pakistan 2022-2023). Arts are underrepresented, with traditional methods still prevalent (Degruyter.com). Sadik et al. (2021) suggested arts education could improve secondary education. Phillips Collection's 2013 visit left recommendations for social change through art (phillipscollection.org). while, Saud et al. (2024) conducted a meta-analysis on art integration in English language classes, finding increased student engagement, language acquisition, and cultural understanding.

## **Methodology**

### **Action Research**

Action research is a democratic and collaborative approach, used as a tool for change for disadvantaged groups and is used for eliciting desired outcomes; used to establish local practice to solve a context-relevant problem (Johnson, 2020). Although present before, Kurt Lewin formally named it in the 1930s, through his own practice and observation (Masters, 1995). In the case of academic action research, the teacher researcher endeavors to bring about effective and observable change through an intervention in the academic norms. Intervention action research can be described as changing education through a spiral of self-reflexivity cycles, which comprise planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to finally emancipate all parties involved. Reflexivity follows systemic cycles of identification of problem action reflection until the solution has been streamlined (Mertler, 2011). The teacher researcher (in this case, the first author) and the learners both collaborate to define meaning to the problem and to develop emancipatory solutions (Walford, 1998). It is the questioning of the regular behavior that is the *modus operandi*, but does not garner the desired results, thus critical praxis questions the hegemony of structure and leads to empowerment and agency especially when it changes the existing paradigm through collaboration of all parties involved. The parties have the same interest, which is emancipation, but their point of view is different (Merriam, 2009). The critique though, is that paradoxically action research aims at changing the status quo which is the very thing that is sought out to 'fix' and reestablishes it on its own terms. The question thus arises: Is emancipation ever possible? Is it ever value free? The answer lies with the results and reflection of the intervention. (Cohen, et al, 2007).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

This is intervention- action research, using the mixed methods approach. The needs analysis was quantitative, while the feedback and data from the intervention cycles was qualitative. There was a final questionnaire which was a modification of the needs analysis questionnaire. This too, was quantitative in nature.

### **Situation Analysis: Description of The Research Context**

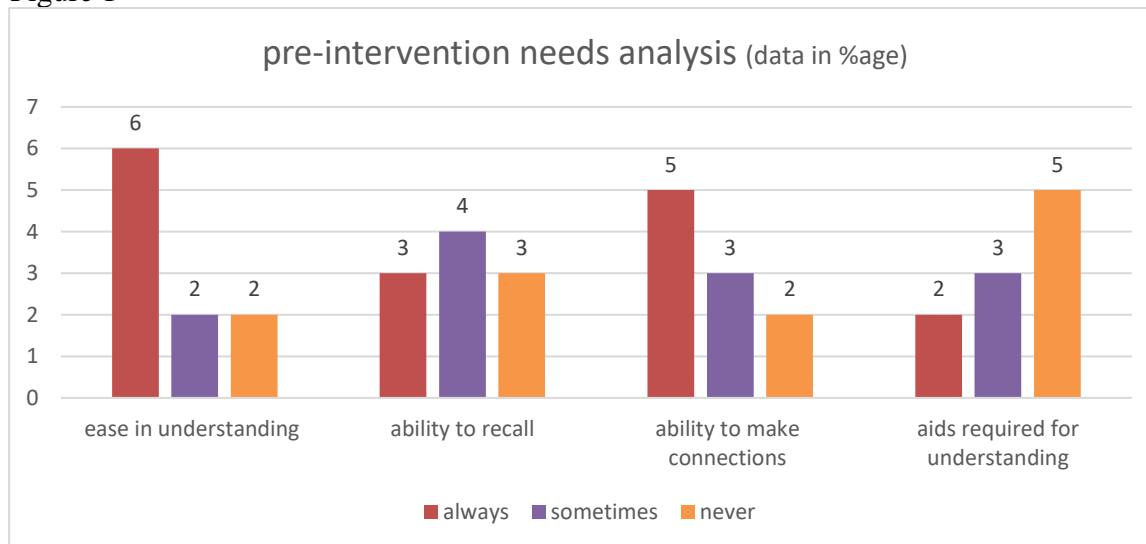
The data was collected from a private college in Karachi, from the students of grade 12. Permission for the intervention was granted through the principal. There are 60 students in each class, and there are three classes that I teach in grade 12 [180 total]. I first conducted a needs analysis for all the students, then I chose 10 of the weakest students for the intervention. These students indicated

a requirement of certain ‘helping’ strategies, or an explanation method that fosters comprehension skills individually. Despite having English reading skills and capability, they lack the motivation that is required at this level. We faced one issue, however, and that was how to protect the self-esteem of the students from their classmates, since staying back for extra class would be obvious that they are receiving remedial aid. In this regard, online forums were a great help and we conducted online classes on google meet, which had many advantages in terms of time, comfort, and privacy.

### Needs Analysis

Needs analysis was first introduced by Munby (1981) and was refined into the domains of “needs, lacks, and wants” by Hutchinson & Waters (1987), eventually being established as a norm in curriculum development by Dudley- Evans and St. John, (1998). It is a process through which the current standing of the learner is assuaged using a tool (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), which accurately describes the learners in terms of their necessities, lacks and wants. This provides a concrete starting point for the intervention to start. The needs analysis is usually coupled with situation analysis (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986), which depicts the context and the corporate culture of the institution. Together, the information gathered from both these analysis studies is regarded as baseline data, which the participant researcher (the teacher) can then apply different strategies until the most effective one is found (EdgeHill, 2024). This is done in cycles (Lewin, 1946); applying the strategies that work, dropping the ones that don’t and while continually reflecting over the results. Eventually, after 3-4 cycles, a plan of action is revealed as being the most effective in context. For the current study, a google form questionnaire was constructed as needs analysis, based on the approach outlined in the book *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*, by Jack C. Richards (2001), while the questionnaire was adapted from the appendix given in the same book. Contemporary researchers have also referred to the same approach as is illustrated in the items and process discussed in Arshad & Noureen (2020); Sanaullah et. al (2023); and Fatima, et al, (2023). The questionnaire, comprising thirteen questions, was based on the intensity scale never, sometimes, always. It had three parts to it, the first part consisted of the demographics, the second one asked about their comprehension skills, whereas part three looked into the art integration aspect.

Figure 1



	Ease of Understanding (Comprehension Skills)	Ability to Recall Information (Comprehension Skills)	Ability to Make Connections (Comprehension Skills)	Aids Required for Understanding (Art Integration)
Always	65%	50%	30%	5% (intervention applied)
Sometimes	30%	45%	55%	65%
Never	5% (intervention applied)	5% (intervention applied)	5% (intervention applied)	30%

Table 1: Selected Sample Size of the Population (10 students out of 180 i.e., ~ 6%)

Students who answered ‘never’ regarding their ease in understanding, ability to recall and their ability to make connections with different parts of the text were chosen, as were those students who said that they always required external aids for understanding, which denotes the fact that is a need for intervention. This was a total of 10 students, who fell below the baseline of expected performance (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), hence were chosen as the sample for this intervention study; as shown in Table 1.

### Five Cycles of Action Research

Kurt Lewin (1946) has identified the cycles of action research. This research project comprised 3 cycles, finally arriving at the desired conclusion. As a teacher- researcher, in order to have a concrete plan of the art integration intervention, I took an online course that would allow me to design observable student learning outcomes, design lesson plans and to administer assessments. This intervention is an amalgamation of my own experiences with art integration that have proven to be effective within context in the past, coupled with the ideas from the course (LACMA, 2024).

#### Cycle 1: Narrative Essay Reading and Story Writing: Illustrating the Main Scenes of the Story and Plotting It on A Graphic Organizer

In the BIEK syllabus, there are narrative essays that are followed by questions. Students have been led to believe that they can “read the notes and pass”, hence it has been observed that they avoid intensive reading and in-depth analysis of the texts. At the primary level, stories are traditionally paired with drawings, which also helps in creating the scene and mood of the text. At the higher secondary level, however, their books comprise pure text, with no focal point of interest for the reader. I wanted to bring the elements of pictures back into their classroom, hence the arts integration of this cycle was illustrating the stories, especially the opening scenes. I drew simple sketches of the opening scenes or the pertinent scene in the stories. Alternatively, teachers can use AI (artificial intelligence) illustrators to generate the scene as well. This was done a day prior to the class and shared on their WhatsApp groups, so that they had a chance to study the scene before coming to class. In the classroom, I drew the same sketch on the board, which only took me a couple of minutes. Alternatively, teachers can bring a printout or use a projector to share the drawing. The story was then analyzed according to the sketch and the story plot pyramid. This allowed for an in-depth analysis of the events mentioned in the story, while allowing the students autonomy of questioning (LACMA, 2024). This way, they can improve their discovery- based (Alyne, et al, 2024; Muliati, 2020) comprehension skills, without being dependent on bulk-produced and unreliable notes. Another exam question in the BIEK system is writing a story based on an idiom. Common idioms included are ‘A snake in the grass’, ‘A stitch in time saves nine’, etc. I used an image generator to create an image of the idioms. Once displayed, I used the inductive reasoning approach to decipher the image. This was the see-wonder-think strategy of visual

thinking (LACMA, 2024). It allowed the students to analyze the scenario and to apply it in their daily lives. For the narrative construction, I used my self-constructed plot pyramid to brainstorm the events (Appendix 1). This allowed them to visually plan the story before writing it; thus, giving equal attention to all paragraphs, instead of starting strong and then running out of time, as students usually do. Once the students exhibited an improvement in their performance (Merriam, 2009), I decided to stop this cycle and then proceed towards the next. The improvement in performance was garnered through observation, which was recorded after eliciting responses from reflective prompts at different sections of the intervention. The improvement in the students' performance was gauged through simple assessment and observation practices. After every task that I planned, I also incorporated an assessment and feedback element to see the standing of the students in terms of change in performance and improvement in understanding. This comprised a result-oriented task of one narrative comprehension, along with one idiom-based story writing task. Out of the 10 students, 6 were able to gain 55% marks (previously they had no more than 36%), while the other four still struggled and attained between 35% - 40%. This was not a graded assignment; considered as a part of their syllabus, rather it was a diagnostic test. I also held a reflection session, based on open discussion that was guided by open ended generic questions. These were based on the three principles of needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) needs, lacks, and wants. The questions were framed along the lines of 'What was easy?', 'What was difficult?' and 'Where do you want more support?'

## **Cycle 2: Expository Essay Reading and Retention: Doodling Motifs and Semantic Mapping of the Themes**

### **Rationale for Starting the Second Cycle**

Since students had gained a relative amount of improvement in their narrative skills, I decided to move onto the expository element of the curriculum. There are two types of essays in the BIEK syllabus: stories and expository texts. Expository texts are fact based and contain many elements to be understood. After the plot pyramid garnered positive feedback from the students, I decided to introduce the semantic mapping method, which has been shown to garner positive feedback from subsequent studies in literature (Zamrizal, 2022). This was coupled with self-designed icons as doodles to represent the themes in the essays, which has been shown to aid with recalling previous concepts (Murray, et al, 2024). As before, the art-integrated material was shared virtually prior to class. In the classroom, the students were asked to read each paragraph, and the floor was then opened to questions and discussion. As the themes emerged, I drew the icons on the board, along with the flow chart of ideas. Eventually, a complete semantic map was created that comprised doodles, symbols, keywords and arrows. Ongoing feedback that emerged during the second cycle reflected the students' attitudes towards these two strategies. They enjoyed the icons, and also contributed to their formation. As for the semantic mapping, students complained that they were too confusing. This prompted me to shorten the semantic map to pertain to sections of the essay, rather than the whole essay encapsulated in a single map. The long semantic maps were then replaced with simplified timelines and doodles. By the time we were done with the essays, it had been revealed that this group of students was responding well to the doodles, symbols, and the simplified semantic maps as well. The improvement from the intervention in this cycle was again gauged through observation, which was recorded after eliciting responses from reflective prompts at different sections of the second cycle. Additionally, this was accompanied by a non-graded, result-oriented, diagnostic assessment task of one comprehension exercise. This time, out of the 10 students, 5 were able to gain 50% marks, 2 were able to perform at the 45% mark, while the while the other three showed only slight areas of improvement. The reasons here could be the resulting confusion from the semantic mapping, or it could be that the expository genre proved challenging for them. This was also followed by a reflection session, based on open discussion that was guided



by open-ended generic questions. These again were based on the three principles of needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) needs, lacks, and wants. The questions were framed along the lines of ‘What was easy (this time)?’, ‘What was difficult (this time)?’ and ‘Where do you want more support? (in the next cycle)’.

### **Cycle 3: The prisoner of Zenda Novel: Multiple Arts Integration Strategies Rationale for Starting the Third Cycle**

The students had shown marked improvement in their previous cycles, and so I decided to proceed towards the third cycle. This was the last cycle in the intervention, and I used their novel as the base for this. The elements of the arts in this cycle were illustrations of certain scenes from the novel, plotting the main events onto the storyline plot diagram, role play involving the students, mapping the scenes and the places mentioned in the novel, and culture study on the obvious differences between the Germans and the British (since these are the two main nationalities mentioned). These activities widened the horizons of the novel from being merely a compulsory classroom task to an enjoyable read about literature, culture, and people. The intervention at this stage of the research was more mutual than the first two cycles. I would broach the type of activity and arts integration, while the students would brainstorm ways to explore the text. For example, for the role play, they chose the scene where Rupert of Hentzau feigns to turn around and then throws his knife into the hero’s shoulder. This consolidated the scene into their minds, while allowing for avenues of interpretation of the novel in terms of character sketches, plot development and relevance of the scene to the plot twist. Culture study was done through watching and discussing short videos on you-tube, especially those that explicitly discuss cultural differences. The elements of the cultures were then compiled into a semantic map, that was designed by the students. The scene containing the drawbridge and moat was studied through a cartoon clip of Tom & Jerry, where a drawbridge is drawn over a moat. This allowed for the students to understand the engineering and skill required to operate the entrances at a palace, and how invaders might be able to breach the security. After each art element was introduced, a drawing or mind map was created, to foster understanding and to aid in recalling elements of the novel during assessments. Once the students exhibited an improvement in their performance, I decided to stop this cycle and then proceed towards the next. The results of the intervention were again compiled through observations and after eliciting responses from reflective prompts at different sections of the intervention. The students were quite familiar with the procedure by the third cycle and freely shared their inputs, sometimes even recalling aspects of the first and second cycles. Furthermore, this was again followed by a non- graded, result- oriented, diagnostic task of a few short answer questions. Out of the 10 students, 6 were able to gain 50% marks, while three attained 40% - 49%. One student, who had been very weak since the beginning showed no marked improvement in either his improvement, motivation, or interest. The reflection session at the end of the third cycle acted as a conclusion for the whole intervention project and covered aspects of all three cycles. The open-ended questions were similar, but students were given more time and freer rein in answering their questions. The questions were framed along the lines of ‘What was the best aspect?’, ‘What was the most difficult?’ and ‘How can English teaching be changed for the future?’, and ‘Where would you like continued further support?’.

### **Key Findings**

Maintaining the anonymity of each student, to protect them from duress, a final Google Form was generated, to be filled in by the 10 students upon whom the intervention was carried out. The questions were as follows:

- Concerning the drawings that were used for explaining the essays, poems, and novels in your English classes:

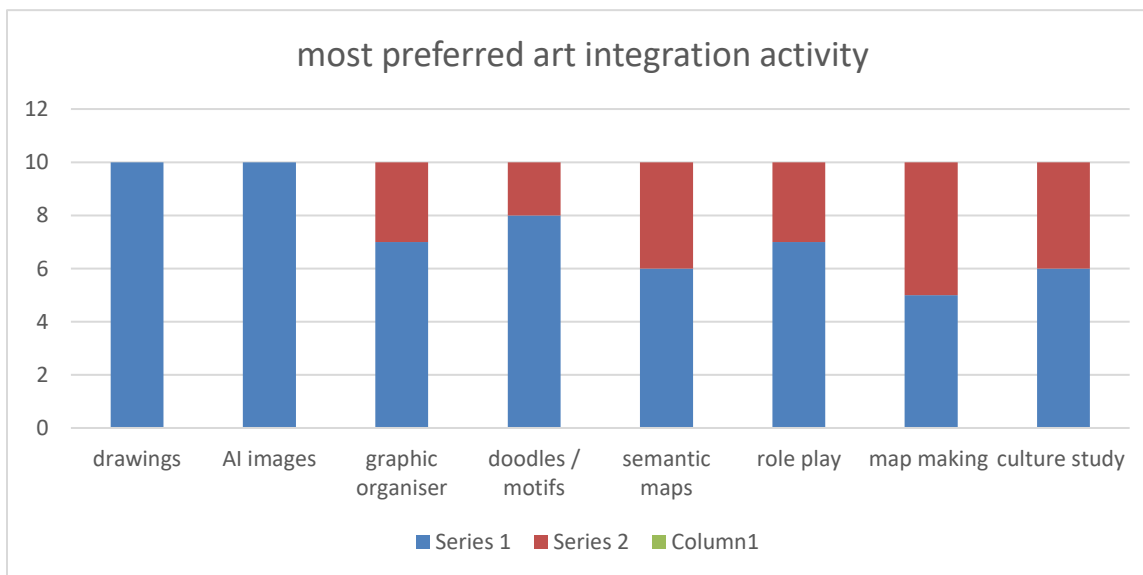
- a) Were they helpful, as compared to the normal way of teaching?
- b) In what ways were they helpful?
- c) Which technique did you like best?
- d) What could improve the explanations more?
- e) What was difficult in your English classes?

**Findings**

The findings are as follows:

Snippets from Data	Emergent Theme	Co-Relation from Literature
catchy, fun, and interesting	Student involvement	Students are more involved with the material (Wilson, 2016)
They were easy to understand. It was a good explanation	Comprehension	Art integration fosters deeper comprehension of the content (Alyne, Firdaus, & Yukamana, 2024)
I recalled everything I remembered little details	Ability to recall	Doodles and drawings enhance memory and episodic recall (Enighe, 2024) (Li, Tong, Rivera, Irby, & Rafel, 2021) (Murraya, Ridgillova, Feketova, Danielsson, & Djurhuus, 2024)
I think it will be easy to read other things too	Motivation	(Alyne, Firdaus, & Yukamana, 2024)
I wish the book had more pictures and could have been colorful	Multiple Learning Styles	Teachers reach a wider range of students, and cater to varied learning styles (Chinpakdee & Yongqi Gu, 2021) (Costa & Mariotti, 2021)
I also shared the whole story with my dad, I remembered everything at home!	Motivation, memory, enjoyment and involvement	Deep level of textual appreciation (Ghaffar, 2024) (LACMA, 2024)

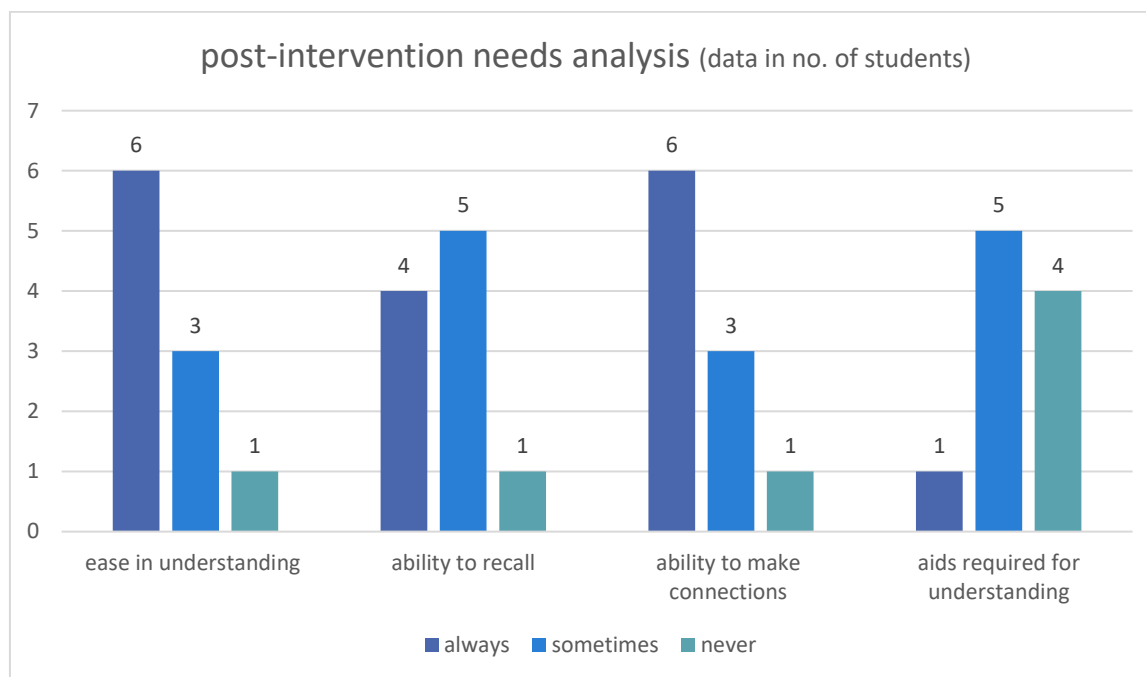
Figure 2: Most preferred art integration activity



## Results

To review the progress made by the students through art integration, the same google form questionnaire was once again administered. This helped to gauge the difference in the student learning, pre- and post-intervention. This time, there was a marked improvement in most of their answers (as shown in Table 2) which was also reflected in the assessment tasks that were administered to them after each cycle. Table 3 shows the difference between pre and post interventions.

Figure 3. Student wise post intervention questionnaire results



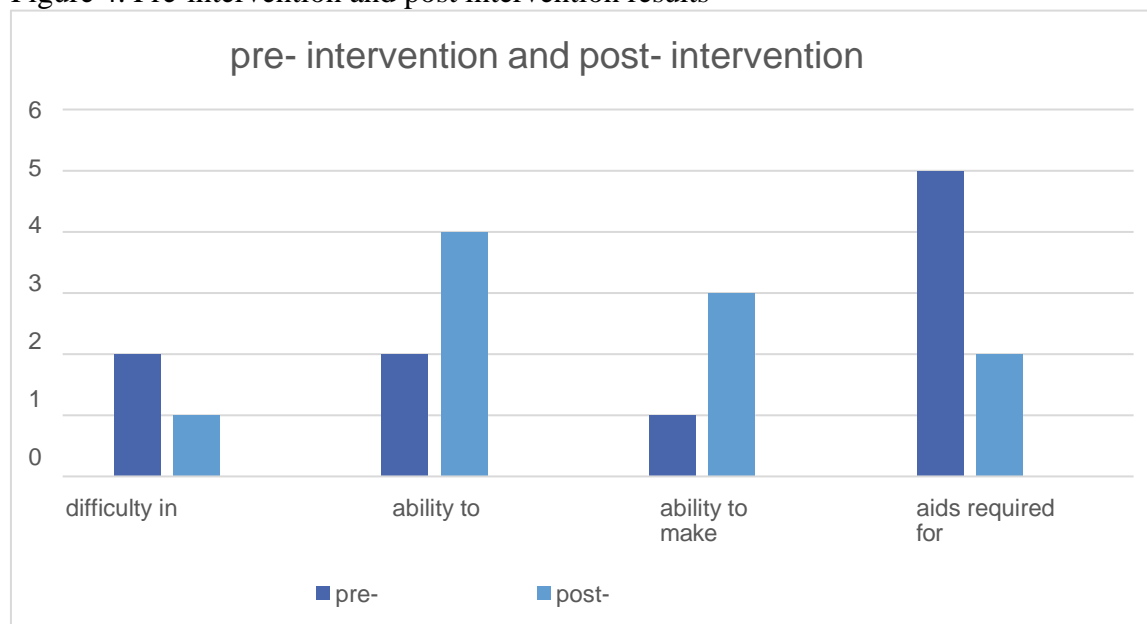
Out of the ten students, 6 had showed marked improvement, 3 had shown relative improvement while one student didn't show much improvement at all. Further research along the lines of a case study might interpret the reasons.

## Discussion

The two research questions that this study set out to answer were 1) how art integration increases student comprehension and 2) which integration strategy students enjoyed the most. Furthermore, this study shows that students have different preferences for the individual arts integration strategies; some preferred drawings while others seemed to understand better with the semantic mapping strategies. Almost all the students enjoyed the role play, while a few of them were shy as well. The findings indicate that arts integration strategies, such as illustrating scenes from narratives, creating semantic maps with doodles, and engaging in role-play activities, positively impacted students' comprehension, content recall, motivation, and overall involvement with the material. One of the key emergent themes from the study was the increased student involvement and motivation when artistic elements were integrated into the learning process. This aligns with existing literature that suggests varied instructional methods can cater to different learning styles and enhance overall engagement (Chinpakdee & Yongqi Gu, 2021; Costa & Mariotti, 2021). By tapping into multiple intelligences and learning preferences, arts integration not only improves comprehension but also fosters a deeper connection to the subject matter. Moreover, the findings also highlighted the role of arts integration in enhancing memory and recall. Students reported

remembering details more effectively when they were associated with visual representations or when they actively participated in creating visual aids like semantic maps. This finding corroborates previous research on the cognitive benefits of visual learning strategies (Enighe, 2024; Li et al., 2021; Murraya et al., 2024). The study's implications extend beyond the classroom to suggest broader pedagogical strategies for improving language education in Pakistan. Integrating arts into language teaching can make learning more enjoyable, accessible, and effective for students, especially those who struggle with traditional reading comprehension methods. It opens avenues for creativity, critical thinking, and deeper textual appreciation, aligning with the goals of modern education to develop 21st-century skills (Ghaffar, 2024; LACMA, 2024). However, not all students resonated equally well with the intervention. Three out of the ten students failed to perform as proficiently as expected. Two out of these three have exhibited difficulties in learning and might require ongoing remedial classes. The third student would usually fall asleep in class and was reluctant throughout the intervention in taking part in the discussions. This may denote domestic/ family issues which require another type of intervention. As his teacher, I have informed the concerned administration i.e., the Vice Principal who has assured me that he will take up the matter. Literature also denotes that different students may respond differently to various art integration activities, and further research could explore personalized approaches based on individual learning profiles. Additionally, continuous professional development for teachers on effective arts integration strategies can ensure sustained implementation and positive outcomes in language education (Saud & et.al, 2024).

Figure 4. Pre-intervention and post intervention results



### Recommendations

**Training and Professional Development:** Conduct workshops and training sessions for teachers to familiarize them with effective arts integration strategies. This includes providing guidance on how to incorporate visual aids, doodles, role-play activities, and other artistic elements into their lesson plans. Continuous professional development can enhance teachers' ability to implement arts integration effectively and adapt it to diverse learning needs.

**Curriculum Design:** Revise curriculum guidelines to include arts integration as a recognized pedagogical approach. Provide educators with resources, templates, and examples of arts-

integrated lesson plans across different subjects. Encourage collaboration between language teachers and subject specialists to develop interdisciplinary arts integration activities that reinforce learning objectives.

**Assessment and Feedback:** Develop assessment tools that align with arts integration methodologies. Incorporate formative assessments that evaluate students' comprehension, creativity, and critical thinking skills through artistic expressions. Provide timely and constructive feedback to students to guide their progress and encourage further engagement with arts-integrated learning activities.

**Student Engagement and Motivation:** Create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that fosters creativity, curiosity, and active participation. Encourage students to express themselves through various artistic mediums, such as drawing, storytelling, drama, and multimedia presentations. Celebrate students' artistic achievements and contributions to reinforce their motivation and self-esteem.

**Technology Integration:** Explore digital tools and platforms that facilitate arts integration in language teaching. Utilize educational apps, interactive whiteboards, virtual reality simulations, and online collaboration platforms to enhance students' visual learning experiences. Provide access to digital resources and multimedia content that complement arts-integrated lesson plans.

**Research and Evaluation:** Encourage ongoing research and evaluation of arts integration strategies in language education. Collaborate with educational researchers, institutions, and policymakers to gather data on the effectiveness of arts-integrated interventions on student learning outcomes. Share best practices, case studies, and success stories to inspire other educators and contribute to evidence-based pedagogy.

**Institutional Support:** Engage school administrators, policymakers, and educational stakeholders in recognizing the value of arts integration in improving learning outcomes, fostering creativity, and preparing students for success in a globalized world.

## Conclusion

This study underscores the transformative potential of arts integration in enhancing reading comprehension among high school students in Pakistan, particularly within English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) contexts. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the research demonstrates that integrating artistic elements such as narrative illustrations, semantic mapping, and role-play activities significantly improves students' comprehension, memory retention, and motivation. The findings reveal that arts integration not only makes learning more engaging and enjoyable but also caters to diverse learning styles, thereby fostering a deeper connection to the subject matter. The positive impact on students' recall and understanding highlights the cognitive benefits of visual learning strategies, aligning with existing literature on the subject. The theoretical support for arts integration is grounded in several educational theories. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences suggests that students have different kinds of intelligences and learning styles, and arts integration can cater to these diverse intelligences by providing multiple pathways to understanding (Burnaford, et. al, 2022). Additionally, cognitive and affective theories highlight the role of emotions and cognitive processes in learning, suggesting that engaging students emotionally through arts can enhance their cognitive processing and retention of information; while brain-based learning theories also support the use of arts in

education, indicating that artistic activities can stimulate neural connections and enhance overall cognitive function (Bradshaw, 2017). However, the study also acknowledges that not all students respond equally to arts integration, suggesting the need for personalized approaches and continuous professional development for educators. The recommendations provided aim to support the sustained implementation of arts integration through teacher training, curriculum design, and the use of technology. In conclusion, this research contributes valuable insights into the field of language education and offers practical strategies for integrating arts into the curriculum. By doing so, it opens new avenues for creativity, critical thinking, and effective learning, ultimately preparing students for success in a globalized world. Future research should continue to explore personalized arts integration approaches and their long-term impact on student outcomes.

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