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DEVELOPING VISUAL ARTS COMPETENCE AMONG PRE-SERVICE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS THROUGH COMPOSITION PRACTICE AND CHILDREN-THEMED PAINTING

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of visual arts competence among pre-service primary school teachers through composition practice and children-themed painting. Using literature review, analysis, synthesis, comparison, and systematization, the study identifies four components of visual arts competence: composition organization, form construction and the use of line, the use of color, and idea expression. Based on these components, the study examines how visual arts competence can be developed through practice and proposes a five-step process: (1) observation and analysis; (2) idea development; (3) sketching and composition selection; (4) art-making and completion; and (5) presentation, assessment, and refinement. The study also clarifies the relationships among practical activities, competence components, and evidence of learning, and proposes a four-level rubric for assessing both the learning process and students' artwork. The proposed framework emphasizes the alignment of competence-based objectives, practical activities, feedback, and assessment, thereby providing a basis for organizing visual arts instruction from a competence-based perspective in primary teacher education. As the study is based on secondary data, the proposed framework requires further empirical validation in teacher education settings.

KEYWORDS: visual arts competence; composition; painting; thematic painting for children; pre-service primary school teachers; primary teacher education

1. INTRODUCTION

In primary teacher education, Visual Arts not only provides students with knowledge and art-making skills but also contributes to the development of aesthetic competence, creativity, and the ability to organize arts education activities. For pre-service primary school teachers, an understanding of the fundamental principles of composition, form, line, and color provides an essential foundation for creating artwork and, at the same time, develops the professional knowledge and skills required to teach Visual Arts in primary schools in the future (Nguyễn Thị Đông et al., 2019; Nguyễn Quốc Toàn et al., 2007).

Among the practical components of Visual Arts education, composition and children-themed painting provide opportunities to integrate multiple components of visual arts competence. To complete an artwork, students need to determine the content, develop ideas, select appropriate images, establish relationships between primary and secondary elements, arrange visual forms, use lines and colors, and convey the content and emotions associated with the chosen theme. Therefore, painting practice is not merely an exercise in technical skills but a process in which students integrate and apply their knowledge, skills, and visual thinking. Learning in Visual Arts is concerned not only with producing finished artwork but also with providing opportunities for learners to observe, generate ideas, experiment, express themselves, and reflect throughout the creative process (Sheridan et al., 2022).

In the context of competence-based teacher education, students are expected not only to understand the principles of visual arts but, more importantly, to apply these principles in the process of creating artwork. This requires practical activities to be organized through an appropriate sequence that provides students with opportunities to observe, analyze, develop ideas, experiment, engage in art-making, receive feedback, and refine their work.

Based on a synthesis of relevant studies and literature, this article focuses on clarifying the concept and components of visual arts competence, examining the potential of composition practice and children-themed painting to develop such competence, and proposing appropriate content and a process for organizing practical activities for pre-service primary school teachers.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study primarily employs a secondary research approach. The data sources include research studies, scholarly books, textbooks, journal articles, curriculum documents, and other materials related to Visual Arts education, visual arts competence, principles of composition, painting practice, and primary teacher education.

The collected literature was reviewed and organized into three thematic areas: (1) concepts and components of visual arts competence; (2) visual elements, including composition, form, line, and color; and (3) methods and processes for organizing Visual Arts practice for learners. The study employs analysis, synthesis, comparison, and systematization to identify the core components of visual arts competence and to develop a framework for organizing practical activities.

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, a framework was developed to foster visual arts competence among pre-service primary school teachers through composition practice and children-themed painting. As the study relies on secondary data, its findings are primarily analytical and conceptual, with an emphasis on proposing an applicable framework rather than empirically determining the effects of the proposed activities on students.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Visual arts competence of pre-service primary school teachers

3.1.1. *Basis for identifying the components of visual arts competence*

Identifying the structure of visual arts competence among pre-service primary school teachers requires consideration of both the characteristics of art-making activities and the professional requirements of primary school teachers. In Visual Arts, an artwork is not the result of a single skill but is created through the selection, organization, and integration of multiple visual elements, such as form, line, color, space, and composition, to communicate particular content or ideas. Visual arts competence should therefore be regarded as an integrated competence that reflects the ability to mobilize knowledge, skills, and aesthetic thinking in accomplishing art-making tasks.

For pre-service primary school teachers, these requirements differ from those in the education of Visual Arts majors. The aim is not to train professional artists but to develop the essential foundation in Visual Arts that enables students to engage in art-making, appreciate art, and organize Visual Arts educational activities for pupils in their future teaching practice. Accordingly, the identification of competence components should prioritize fundamental abilities that can be observed during the practical process and can contribute to the development of professional teaching competence.

From this perspective, the study identifies four components of visual arts competence: composition organization; form construction and the use of line; the use of color; and idea expression. Composition organization refers to the ability to arrange visual elements within a given space; form construction and the use of line involve the ability to recognize, generalize, and depict objects; the use of color refers to the ability to select and combine colors to create visual relationships and convey emotions; and idea expression reflects the ability to transform content, thoughts, and emotions into visual imagery. Although these four components can be identified separately for assessment purposes, they continuously interact throughout the process of creating a complete artwork.

3.1.2. *Components and manifestations of visual arts competence*

In this study, visual arts competence is understood as the ability to mobilize knowledge, skills, and aesthetic thinking to select, organize, and use visual elements to communicate content or ideas through artwork (Nguyễn Quốc Toàn et al., 2007; Sheridan et al., 2022).

For pre-service primary school teachers, the development of visual arts competence is not intended to prepare them as professional artists; rather, it focuses on their ability to understand, practice, and apply knowledge of Visual Arts in their future professional practice. From this perspective, four core components of visual arts competence can be identified. These components are closely interrelated and are mobilized simultaneously throughout the process of painting practice.



Figure 1. Four Components of Visual Arts Competence and Their Manifestations

Figure 1 shows that the four components of visual arts competence are manifested through observable actions during practical activities. To provide a clearer basis for identifying and assessing this competence, the manifestations of each component are further specified in Table 1.

Table 1. Components and Manifestations of Visual Arts Competence among Pre-Service Primary School Teachers

No.	Competence Component	Manifestations of Competence
1	Composition Organization	Identifies primary and secondary images; selects appropriate positions and proportions and arranges visual forms; creates balance, rhythm, and a focal point within the composition.
2	Form Construction and Use of Line	Generalizes the characteristics of objects; constructs forms appropriate to the content; uses lines purposefully to depict form and convey emotion.
3	Use of Color	Selects and combines colors appropriately; establishes color relationships; uses color to support the expression of content and emotion in the artwork.
4	Idea Expression	Identifies the theme and develops an idea; selects appropriate imagery; organizes visual elements to communicate content, emotion, and an individual perspective.

The four components do not function independently but interact throughout the art-making process. Composition organization provides the visual structure of the artwork; form and line give concrete expression to the subject; color contributes to visual relationships and emotional expression; and idea expression guides the selection and integration of visual elements. Therefore, the development of

visual arts competence should be considered in terms of students' ability to mobilize these components simultaneously when performing a specific Visual Arts task.

3.2. The role of composition practice and children-themed painting

3.2.1. Mechanism for developing visual arts competence through practical activities

Practice contributes meaningfully to competence development only when learners move beyond the repetition of technical procedures and actively engage in solving art-making tasks. In this process, students are required to mobilize previously acquired knowledge, select appropriate approaches, experiment, identify limitations, and refine their artwork. Therefore, the relationship between practice and competence development can be conceptualized as the following sequence: *visual arts knowledge → application to a task → artwork production → feedback → refinement → development of art-making experience*.

First, observation and analysis help students transform theoretical knowledge of composition, form, line, and color into the ability to identify these elements in specific artworks. When analyzing a painting, students need to identify the primary images, the arrangement of visual forms, color relationships, and the ways in which content is expressed. This process provides a foundation for visual arts knowledge to become a cognitive tool in practical activities.

Next, the processes of idea development and sketching enable students to move from recognition to application. Rather than immediately executing a single solution, producing multiple sketches requires learners to experiment with different arrangements and compare the strengths and limitations of each option before making a selection. This decision-making process contributes to the development of compositional thinking and the ability to make informed artistic decisions.

During the art-making stage, the components of visual arts competence are mobilized simultaneously. Students must address the relationships between figure and ground, primary and secondary elements, line and form, and color, content, and ideas. Problems arising during the process require learners to continuously observe and refine their work. Therefore, the artwork serves both as an outcome and as evidence of the process through which visual arts competence is mobilized.

Finally, feedback and refinement help students develop reflective capacity. By comparing their artwork with predetermined objectives and criteria, students can identify its strengths and limitations and determine appropriate ways to improve it. Thus, visual arts competence develops not simply through the number of practical exercises completed, but through the quality of the **experience–feedback–refinement cycle** embedded in each learning task.

3.2.2. The role of composition practice and children-themed painting in developing visual arts competence

Composition practice and children-themed painting play an important role in developing visual arts competence among pre-service primary school teachers. Composition practice helps students develop the ability to organize visual elements within a defined space, address relationships between primary and secondary images, figure and ground, and positive and negative space, while applying the principles of balance, rhythm, contrast, and emphasis in their artwork. Recognizing and applying visual elements and principles through practical activities is important for the development of learners' skills and expressive abilities (Farr, 2026; Nguyễn Quốc Toàn et al., 2007).

During the learning process, students should be encouraged to produce three to five compositional sketches, compare them, and select the most appropriate option before completing the final artwork. This approach emphasizes the process of visual thinking rather than focusing solely on the final product. On this basis, children-themed painting provides a context in which students can integrate multiple components of visual arts competence through themes familiar to children, such as family, school, play, festivals, environmental protection, hometown, and dreams. The processes of selecting content, constructing visual imagery, organizing composition, depicting figures, and using line and color enable students to develop multiple components of visual arts competence simultaneously while connecting practical activities with their future professional context. However, children-themed painting does not mean imitating children's drawing styles. Students need to understand the characteristics of children's aesthetic perception and visual world while demonstrating visual organization and artistic thinking appropriate to university-level study.

3.3. System of activities and process for developing visual arts competence

The organization of practical activities progressing from observation and idea development to experimentation and feedback is consistent with Sheridan et al.'s (2022) perspective on developing habits of mind through Visual Arts learning. Based on a synthesis of the theoretical literature and the requirements of primary teacher education, this study proposes a five-step process.



Figure 2. Steps for Organizing Activities to Develop Students' Visual Arts Competence

Step 1. Observation and Analysis: Students observe and analyze selected artworks, identifying primary and secondary images, composition, form, line, color, and the content being expressed. This activity helps students transform theoretical knowledge into the ability to visually identify and analyze artistic elements.

Step 2. Idea Development: Students select a theme, determine the content, identify the main visual imagery, and formulate the idea they wish to express. This provides a basis for guiding their subsequent choices regarding composition, imagery, and color during the practical process.

Step 3. Sketching and Composition Selection: Students produce several small compositional sketches, discuss, compare, and refine them before selecting the most appropriate option to develop into a finished artwork.

Step 4. Art-Making and Completion: Based on the selected composition, students refine the imagery, adjust the use of line, and select and combine colors. The instructor guides students in considering the relationships among form, line, color, and expressive content while encouraging autonomy and diversity in artistic expression.

Step 5. Presentation, Assessment, and Refinement: Students display their artwork, explain their ideas, conduct self-assessment, and receive feedback from the instructor and peers based on predetermined criteria. Through this process, students identify the strengths and limitations of their work and continue to revise and refine the artwork.

Table 2. Relationships between practical activities and the components of visual arts competence

No.	Step	Student Activities	Primary Competence Components	Evidence of Learning
1	Observation and Analysis	Observe and analyze artworks; identify primary and secondary elements, form, line, and color.	Composition organization; form and line; use of color	Results of artwork analysis
2	Idea Development	Identify the theme, content, and visual imagery.	Idea expression	Proposed idea/approach
3	Sketching	Develop 3–5 options, compare them, and select the most appropriate one.	Composition organization; idea expression	Sketches

4	Art-Making	Refine form, line, color, and content.	All four components	Artwork produced during practice
5	Feedback and Refinement	Conduct self-assessment and peer assessment, and revise the artwork.	Idea expression and capacity for refinement	Artwork before and after refinement

Table 2 shows that each step of the process involves more than the performance of a technical procedure; it creates learning tasks associated with specific components of visual arts competence. In particular, the sketches, artworks produced during practice, and artworks after refinement form a sequence of evidence that enables instructors to monitor students' competence development throughout the learning process, rather than relying solely on the final product.

Thus, the process of developing visual arts competence through practice can be summarized as follows: Analysis → Idea Development → Sketching → Art-Making → Feedback and Refinement. This process enables students to simultaneously mobilize the four components of visual arts competence—composition organization, form construction and the use of line, the use of color, and idea expression—throughout the art-making process.

3.4. Criteria for assessing visual arts competence

The assessment of visual arts competence should focus on both the learning process and the resulting artwork, thereby providing opportunities for learners to review, reflect on, and refine their practical work (Sheridan et al., 2022). The assessment process should consider students' ability to develop ideas, produce and select sketches, experiment with different visual solutions, engage in art-making, respond to feedback, and refine their artwork. This approach provides a more comprehensive assessment of students' competence development while encouraging them to think independently, experiment, and progressively improve their modes of artistic expression.

Table 3. Rubric for assessing students' visual arts competence

Criterion	Level 1 – Below Expectations	Level 2 – Satisfactory	Level 3 – Proficient	Level 4 – Good
Composition	The arrangement is fragmented, with no clear distinction between	A basic composition is established, with identifiable primary and	The composition is appropriate and has a clear focal point.	The composition is coherent and balanced, with rhythm and strong visual impact.

	primary and secondary elements.	secondary elements.		
Form and Line	Forms are unclear, and lines are used without clear intention.	Forms are generally appropriate to the content.	Forms are clear, and lines are appropriate to the characteristics of the subject.	Forms are effectively generalized, and lines are flexible and support expression.
Color	Color relationships are weak or inconsistent.	Demonstrates a basic ability to select and combine colors.	Colors are harmonious and appropriate to the content.	Colors are used purposefully to create emotion and enhance expressive effect.
Content and Idea	The theme is not clearly expressed.	The basic content is communicated.	The idea is clear and appropriate to the theme.	The idea is clear, developed in depth, and expressed in an individual manner.
Creativity	The work is largely imitative.	Some individual choices are evident.	Demonstrates an individual approach to exploring and expressing the theme.	Employs original visual solutions and demonstrates a distinct personal style.
Refinement	Does not yet identify limitations in the work.	Makes revisions with guidance.	Actively responds to feedback and refines the work.	Reflects independently, selectively uses appropriate feedback, and demonstrates clear improvement in the artwork.

The rubric is used consistently for instructor assessment, self-assessment, and peer assessment. Each criterion can be scored from 1 to 4, corresponding to the four performance levels. The use of the rubric is intended not only to determine the degree of completion of the artwork but also to collect evidence of students' visual arts competence development across different stages of practice.

The assessment criteria can be derived from the core dimensions of visual arts competence, including composition, form, line, color, content and ideas, creativity, and the capacity for refinement. Composition is assessed in terms of the appropriate arrangement of visual elements and the establishment of primary and secondary elements and a focal point. Form is considered in terms of clarity, relevance to the theme, and expressive capacity, while line is assessed according to its appropriateness to the characteristics of the forms and the intended ideas. Color is evaluated in terms of the selection and harmonious combination of colors, the establishment of color relationships, and their appropriateness to the content. The content and idea criterion focuses on the extent to which the theme is expressed and the content is developed, whereas creativity is identified through students' individual choices and modes of expression. In addition, the capacity for refinement should be considered an important criterion, as it reflects learners' ability to respond to feedback, recognize limitations, and proactively improve their artwork.

Assessment should be aligned with learning objectives and the learning process, thereby providing information that enables learners to recognize their achievements and continue refining their learning activities (Thái Duy Tuyên, 2001). Assessment should combine instructor assessment, self-assessment, and peer assessment. The instructor provides guidance and evaluates students' performance based on predetermined criteria; students review their own practical processes and outcomes while also evaluating their peers' artwork according to shared criteria. This combination not only provides multiple perspectives on students' performance but also develops their abilities to observe, analyze, reflect, and articulate professional feedback.

To ensure transparency and facilitate practical application, the assessment criteria should be operationalized in a rubric with clearly defined performance levels, such as Below Expectations, Satisfactory, Proficient, and Good. The rubric should be introduced to students before the practical activities begin so that they understand the requirements, actively monitor their progress, and make appropriate adjustments. In this way, assessment serves not only to evaluate the outcome of an artwork but also as an integral part of the learning process, contributing to the development of students' visual arts competence.

3.5. Conditions and Principles for Implementation

For the proposed process of developing visual arts competence through composition practice and children-themed painting to be effective, several fundamental principles should be ensured in the organization of teaching and learning activities.

First, practical tasks should be aligned with the objectives of primary teacher education. The content should not place excessive emphasis on advanced art-making techniques required of Visual Arts majors; rather, it should focus on students' ability to apply visual arts knowledge, aesthetic thinking, and visual expression. The selected themes should be closely related to children's lives and their world,

thereby establishing a connection between visual arts competence and students' future professional requirements.

Second, greater emphasis should be placed on the learning process rather than solely on the assessment of the final product. Instructors should observe the entire process, from idea development and sketching to option selection, art-making, and revision. Sketches and successive versions of students' artwork at different stages provide important evidence for identifying their progress.

Third, opportunities should be provided for experimentation and individual differences. Given the same theme, students may select different content, imagery, compositions, and approaches to color. Instructors should avoid directing learners toward a single model product; instead, they should encourage multiple solutions to art-making tasks while helping students articulate the rationale for their choices.

Fourth, feedback should be integrated throughout the practical process. Instructor feedback should focus on the problems to be addressed and suggest possible directions for improvement rather than directly modifying students' artwork. In addition, self-assessment and peer assessment should be organized according to predetermined criteria communicated in advance, enabling students to gradually develop their capacity for professional judgment and reflection.

Finally, the use of rubrics should be integrated into learning activities rather than being limited to the grading stage. When students are introduced to the assessment criteria before beginning practical activities, they are better able to understand task requirements, monitor their own progress, and refine their artwork accordingly. In this way, the rubric serves not only as an assessment tool but also as a means of supporting learning and competence development.

3.6. Discussion and limitations of the proposed framework

The framework for developing visual arts competence proposed in this study suggests that composition practice and children-themed painting can be organized as a competence-development process rather than as a sequence of exercises primarily focused on technical skill development. The central emphasis of the framework is not on increasing the number of artworks produced, but on ensuring that students engage in the full sequence of analysis, idea development, experimentation with alternative solutions, art-making, feedback, and refinement.

The alignment among the four competence components, the five-step process, and the assessment rubric also establishes a relatively coherent structure linking objectives, activities, and assessment. Each competence component is operationalized through observable indicators; the practical steps provide opportunities for these indicators to be demonstrated; and the rubric provides a basis for instructors and students to identify levels of attainment. This approach helps address the potential

misalignment in which learning objectives are formulated in terms of competence while learning activities and assessment remain primarily focused on the degree of completion of the final artwork.

However, the proposed framework was developed through the analysis and synthesis of existing literature and has not yet been validated using empirical data. Therefore, the four components, their indicators, and the performance levels in the rubric should, at this stage, be regarded as a proposed framework for instructional implementation and further research rather than as a validated competence measurement scale. To more fully evaluate the value of the framework, future studies should implement it with specific groups of pre-service primary school teachers and use artworks produced before and after the practical process, rubric-based assessments, and learner feedback to examine changes in each component of visual arts competence. In addition, inter-rater agreement in the use of the rubric should be examined, and the descriptors for each performance level should be refined where necessary.

4. CONCLUSION

This study identified four interrelated components of visual arts competence among pre-service primary school teachers: composition organization, form construction and the use of line, the use of color, and idea expression. On this basis, the study proposed a five-step process for developing visual arts competence through composition practice and children-themed painting: observation and analysis; idea development; sketching and composition selection; art-making and completion; and presentation, assessment, and refinement. Linking each activity to specific competence components and evidence of learning makes it possible to examine students' development throughout the creative process rather than relying solely on the final artwork.

In addition to the practical process, the study specified observable manifestations of visual arts competence and proposed a four-level assessment rubric, thereby establishing alignment among competence-based objectives, practical activities, evidence of learning, and assessment. This approach emphasizes students' active engagement in observation, idea development, experimentation, creation, response to feedback, and refinement of their artwork. At the same time, it provides a framework for organizing Visual Arts practice in accordance with the requirements of primary teacher education.

As the study is primarily based on the analysis and synthesis of existing literature, the proposed competence framework, process, and rubric have not yet been empirically validated as a measurement scale. Future research should implement the framework with pre-service primary school teachers to examine the appropriateness of its components and indicators, changes in visual arts competence throughout the practical process, and the reliability of rubric-based assessment across different assessors. Such empirical validation will provide a basis for further refining and improving the model for developing visual arts competence in primary teacher education.

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