



## A Comparative Study of Primary School Visual Arts Curriculum in Australia, Canada, Iran and Ireland

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 10 August 2020            Revised: 06 September 2020            Accepted: 27 January 2021            Online: 15 June 2021</p>	<p>The purpose of this study was a comparative investigation of visual arts education curricula in Australia, Canada, Iran and Ireland. The research method is qualitative comparative; the unit of observation and analysis is at macro level. The study population includes all countries of the world and country selection strategies are "similar systems, similar outputs" (Australia, Canada, Ireland) and "different systems, different outputs" (Iran) using purposeful sampling method. The findings were presented based on Bereday's approach. Findings showed that teaching visual arts in Iran is less important than other school subjects compared to other countries. Also, there are limitation of time for teaching and lack of special space for visual arts curriculum. With respect to the goal component, the findings show that selected countries have jointly addressed issues of aesthetics, familiarity with history and culture, understanding of creativity and nature. Relating to the content component, all countries have pointed out importance of creativity and aesthetics. Also, Australia and Canada, compared to Iran and Ireland, have been more successful in recognizing and using Indigenous art in visual arts education. As for teaching strategies component, all selected countries refer to role of teacher facilitation in art education. Canada differs from Australia, Iran and Ireland in use of art professionals alongside teachers. In terms of educational materials and resources, all four countries have designated educational resources based on national curriculum and teacher guide. Regarding teaching and learning activities, Canada and Australia have a special focus on teaching visual arts based on art of indigenous peoples and are more flexible in implementing art program compared to Iran and Ireland. In terms of educational space, Iran is at a lower level compared to other three countries, while Ireland is a leader. From time aspect, Iran has allocated fewer hours to art curriculum compared to other countries. Referring assessment component, the findings show that use of formative-descriptive and portfolio methods are common in all selected countries, although in Iran there is no formal plan for assessment. According to findings and in order to develop the position of visual arts curriculum in formal education of Iran, it is recommended that art education and its components be seriously and properly considered by educational policy makers.</p>
<p><b>KEYWORDS</b></p> <p>Curriculum            Primary Education            Visual Arts</p>	

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## **1. Introduction**

Today, many educators consider art education to be important in strengthening individual and social skills; so that its role in the process of education is undeniable. Also, many proponents of open educational systems believe that art more than any human knowledge can contribute to indirect education of students (Children of World Research Institute, 2015). Art enhances students' progress by providing different ways of learning (April, 2001). Cooper-Solomon's research (as cited in Richard, 2003: 20) found that if a school devoted 25 percent of its curriculum time to teaching art, students would find extraordinary scientific abilities. In fact, the word "art" has had various meanings over time. Visual art, which is one of the main branches of art, is referring to making and shaping materials. In other words, the "embodiment" of the artist's beliefs, imaginations, ideas and feelings by visible materials is main process of forming a visual work. For this reason, visual arts from the beginning affect human's sense of sight (Gholizadeh et al., 2012). Before the nineteenth century, visual arts specifically referred to painting, design, sculpture, architecture and graphics, decorative arts and some handicrafts. Later, animation and illustration were added to it with invention of photography and cinema and development of graphic industry (Hosseini Rad, 2017).

Recent research shows important position of art curriculum in educational system of all countries. Fallah Tafti, Jafari Harandi & Tabatabai (2020) comparatively examined objectives of art curriculum in primary schools of Iran, Brazil, Greece and South Korea analyzing national upstream documents of education. Findings showed the most important difference among countries is in students' participation in artistic experimentation, and special perspective about visual arts and the most important difference is considering art as a tool for intercultural exchange. Khosravi Mashizi, Soltani, & Alinejad (2019) through a comparative study of primary art curriculum in Iran and Canada, noticed the attention of both educational systems to indigenous culture and also found differences in matters such as content and employing art professionals with teachers in Canada. Relating to the assessment component, in Canada the emphasis is on improving learning and in Iran on ability of learner.

Firoozi, Seifi, Hosseini Mehr & Faghihi (2017) tried to identify and extract the gap between theory and practice in art education of first year of middle schools based on elements of Klein theory. Findings show that the first reason of gap can be explained through analysis of national

and international resources. Kian and Mehr Mohammadi (2013) identified neglected dimensions of primary school art curriculum by analytical comparison between desired and actual model of art curriculum. Results indicated that optimal model of art curriculum is based on principles of formal and public education system's upstream documents in Iran, but time devoted to teaching art and calligraphy in the school curriculum was neglected by teachers and principals.

A brief look at history of art education in Iran shows lack of support from educational policy makers in the field of art education so that from 1937 to 1994, the average hours of art lessons in different grades of primary school decreased to 3.9 and from this year to 2004 to 1.7. At present in Iranian primary schools, in Grades 1 and 2, art classes are 2 hours per week, and in Grade 3 it is common with science and in Grades 4 and 5 (jointly with social studies), on average, 5 1 hour and in Grade 6, one hour per week, which shows a significant decline in art education position in school curricula. In addition, until 1994, for the fourth and fifth grades, a special book was published for art lessons, the content of which included items such as painting, handicrafts and calligraphy, but from 1995, this textbook was removed from the curriculum. In the resolution of the 647 session of Supreme Council of Education in 2000, a program was developed to revive art lessons in schools, the result of which was production of "Art Curriculum Guide". The objectives of this program included emphasizing the increase of students' knowledge, attitude and artistic skills and its content included items such as handicrafts, paintings, stories, plays, familiarity with artistic disciplines, and familiarity with cultural heritage (Saber, 2016). In this study, the Klein model is used to examine primary school curriculum for teaching visual arts (Klein, 1986). The main purpose of research is comparative study of primary school curriculum in Ireland, Australia, Canada and Iran and questions are:

- What is current status of visual arts curriculum according to Klein model in selected countries (description stage)
- What are similarities among visual arts curriculum in selected countries (interpretation, juxtaposition and comparison stages)
- What are differences among visual arts curriculum in selected countries (interpretation, juxtaposition and comparison stages)

## 2. Research Method

The method of present study is qualitative comparative, the unit of observation is macro and the sampling method is informed and purposeful. The strategies of "similar systems, same results" (including Ireland, Australia, Canada), and "different systems, different results" (Iran) were used by researchers to select countries. Data collection method was documentary by studying valid library and electronic written and printed documents available in reputable scientific sites, research reports, organization homepages, and official homepages of the Ministry of Education in selected countries. The research tools included notes from 60 official sources of visual arts curriculum related to Ireland, Canada and Australia from 1999 to 2019 and 40 Persian documents from 2008 to 2020. Adequate notes preparations were made for description stage. In the interpretation stage, collected information was checked and analyzed. Then, in the juxtaposition stage, information prepared in previous stages was classified in order to create a coherent framework. This classification was based on nine elements of Francis Klein's curriculum model. In the final step, the data were presented in comparative tables. In order to determine reliability, stability and consistency of data, the opinions of comparativists at Kharazmi University, Tehran were used.

## 3. Findings

Data analysis was categorized based on the content of each country's national curriculum regulations and the nine elements of Francis Klein. In response to the first question of the research, the current status of the elementary school curriculum in each country is presented separately and in two stages:

### *A) Description and Interpretation*

#### *- Australia*

In Australia, schools are generally divided into public and private. All public and private primary schools have a common curriculum (ACARA, 2013). The goals of Australian Visual Arts Curriculum include a codified program that seeks to nurture creative ideas, boost self-confidence, arouse curiosity, familiarize students with visual aids, and strengthen critical thinking and respect for historical traditions (Lemon & Graves, 2013). The content of the Canadian Visual Arts Curriculum is designed to help students learn how to express and demonstrate their ideas, experiences, observations, and imagination by creating a visual product. In the visual arts curriculum, perceptual and conceptual ideas and representations through design and research processes create critical and creative thinking, build self-confidence, curiosity, imagination and

aesthetic development, and develop critical thinking in learners. It also makes it possible for learners to interact with the environment and become familiar with different cultures through interaction with the visual arts. In terms of learner participation, Canadian students typically share their artwork with their peers and try to experience the concept of visual arts as an audience (Queensland Visual Arts Curriculum, 2007). In teaching approaches, Canadian teachers emphasize social concepts and skills to make pupils familiar with history and culture so that each student's different needs can be met by creating art works (Russell-Bowie, 2011). Teaching-learning activities in the visual arts curriculum are done by making two-dimensional and three-dimensional works, as well as visiting workshops, exhibitions and historical centers. In teaching-learning activities, learners are introduced to a wide range of visual works of art, as well as Australian works of art - including Indigenous and Torres Strait art. Educational materials and resources are based on two-dimensional drawing through pencils, acrylics and watercolors, pastels on paper and cardboard, and in three-dimensional drawing through sculpture with soil and mud, and handicrafts with cardboard and disposable materials. Students are encouraged to visit historical cultural heritage centers, exhibitions, and workshops to discover ideas, experiences, and observations of the art-making process (Wittber, 2017). Education in Australia starts at preschool or kindergarten (for children of 3.5 or 4 years old) and preparatory period (before first grade of primary school) for five-year-olds. Primary education includes Grades 1 to 6 and provides sufficient time for instruction and classroom activities, and learning is not limited to class schedule. The educational space is designed in accordance with students' activities and classroom is an exhibition of students' works with the help and participation of teachers. The assessment process involves work-folder processing and a set of tasks such as experimenting, exploring and refining a wide range of visual art projects (ACARA, 2013).

- *Canada*

Primary education students in Canada typically deal with one teacher during the school year and in a single class. Primary education in Canada is compulsory for all children and usually starts at the age of 6 or 7. The curriculum includes a number of subject areas such as mathematics, reading, language (usually English and French in Quebec), social studies, history, geography, science, music, art and physical education. The school year usually starts in September and lasts until June of the following year (Iwai, 2003). The objectives of visual arts curriculum include elements such as line, shape and form, space, color, texture and quantity. The principles of contrast, repetition and rhythm, diversity, emphasis, proportion, balance, unity and harmony, movement and

familiarity with the history, culture and art of the natives are included. The content of curriculum includes a wide range of forms, genres and styles, traditional arts drawing, painting, sculpture, printing, architecture, photography, commercial art, handicrafts and traditional and fine arts, performing arts and media and electronics arts (Ontario Curriculum, 2009). In terms of learning activities, Canadian students participate in production of meaningful and open artwork. The visual arts curriculum helps students to develop individual creativity and connect with world around them through practice and cognition while expressing personal feelings and ideas (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2000). From teaching strategies aspect, different teaching approaches with the help of experts and artists alongside teachers help pupils in classroom. Students also express their personal feelings and ideas by emphasizing thematic concepts. From dimension of learners' groups, teachers are expected to introduce a wide range of high quality art products to students. As a result, students will have high-quality tools and materials to observe and learn how to work in a team. They use imagination, observation and construction of volumes and shapes with various tools and recycled materials to produce and develop visual ideas that lead to creation of works of art (Visual Arts Primer, 2000). Schooling time for Canadian children start from ages of three, and primary school starts at age six. The primary school curriculum in various Canadian states includes rhythmic movements, music, drama, visual arts, and there is ample time for them. A special educational space has been provided for art education in schools and access to art facilities has led to growth of students' talents. These separate spaces provide an opportunity for students to present works. Students' assessment is done qualitatively and they are taught to comment on their work and that of their classmates to present different ideas. Children learn to understand and analyze the inner meaning of each art work (Prince Edward Island Art Curriculum, 2011).

- *Iran*

Iran's education programs were formed in primary schools from 1927 and in the secondary schools from 1307, and extensive efforts were made to produce uniform textbooks for all schools. These efforts led to establishment of the Research and Curriculum Office (1945) and then the Iran School Textbook Organization (1962). In 1964, the two Ministries of Education and Higher Education were separated. Also in this year, a new three-year secondary education system was approved after a five-year primary education. Until 1977, the powers of educational planners in all elements of curriculum increased and provided the ground for limiting teacher and his role in school curriculum. After the victory of the Revolution in 1978, the "Council for Fundamental Change of Education System" was formed with the aim of changing content of textbooks and curricula. Also

in 1989, the "General Plan of Education System of Islamic Republic of Iran" was approved by Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. In 1992, the specialization approach led to change of old system and formation of a new educational system. Finally, in 2008, the "Education Vision Document" was approved, which strengthened the curriculum (Musapour, 2008). In this regard, important indicators, especially in elements of visual arts curriculum can be expressed as follows:

**Objectives:** The curriculum is based on aesthetics and familiarity with source of creation, familiarity with history of Iranian art, production of creative artwork and art criticism (Higher Education Council, 2012). Also, the content of program is based on shared learning, multiplicity of resources and methods, learning opportunities and visual cognition capabilities with the help of effective tools that can be effective in learning (Radpour et al., 2012a). Regarding teaching strategies, the teacher acts as a facilitator and her/his teaching strategies are production process, use participatory education, attention to Islamic and Iranian culture, and familiarity with handicrafts. Teaching and learning activities include possibility of developing individual creativity and group collaboration. Educational materials and resources include attention to effective tools such as hand printing, calligraphy, using recycled materials, and visiting historical, artistic and cultural sightseeing. Learners' participation includes encouraging to form learning groups with cooperation of teachers (Radpour et al., 2012b). The time of school entrance for primary school in Iran is 6 years and the time allocated to art education is varied from 1.5 to 2 hours per week - depend on educational level. The content of activities includes the form of painting, printing, handicrafts, and calligraphy. In terms of educational space, teaching is usually done by a teacher in the classroom and there is no separate space for teaching art. The assessment methods are descriptive-qualitative, formative evaluation and work-folder (Radpour et al., 2012a).

- *Ireland*

In the European country of Ireland, the legal age for entering primary school is 6 and the length of study is also 6 years. Under the current Irish Primary Education Act - which has been in force since 1971 - the Art Curriculum was published in the 1990s and has been mandatory in schools since 1999. This program includes six branches of design, dyeing, clay, fabric and fibers, printing and manufacturing (NCCA, 1999). Implementing a visual arts curriculum helps children connect naturally with the environment and real life. Murphy's research (2018) showed that in the field of "construction", children's sense of responsibility, resilience, independence, joy of success and awareness of their surroundings increases. The goals of Irish Visual Arts Curriculum are to create

exercises to empower pupils to realize their artistic and academic abilities with a focus on developing visual features, development of ability to produce critical thinking and familiarity with tools of visual arts and visual arts disciplines (Department of Education and Science and the Arts Council, 2018). The content of these programs plays an important role to increase student's creative thinking and in formation of critical thinking and analytical skills - based on problem solving. Also, art education is very effective in cultivating students' ability to communicate with environment (Hickey, 2005). Teaching strategies in the Irish educational system include attention to activities and teaching different artistic skills and techniques, getting acquainted with different materials and tools for design, emphasizing different teaching approaches, visiting workshops and art and historical exhibitions. Educational materials, tools and resources and everything a student needs to learn the visual arts are widely available. Teaching and learning activities include inquiry activities, emphasis on concepts, and development of independence (NCCA, 1999). Learners' participation in individual and group practices encourages active learning - which leads to self-esteem, academic achievement, self-direction, participatory learning, attention to indigenous cultural contexts, and production of artistic activity. The relevance of learners' developmental characteristics to the content of the curriculum has been considered by the authors of school textbooks (NCCA, 1999). In terms of time of schooling, Irish pupils from the age of three to six are educated in kindergartens and pre-schools. The primary education starts from age of six and more time is allocated to art education during the week - in accordance with educational grades and level. The educational space of classrooms is designed in accordance with pupils' activities such as doing art on the floor of classroom, and installing paintings on the wall. In addition to the official curriculum time, students are given more time for doing art works. Assessment of learners' activities is considered qualitative based on work-folder processing and attention to increasing visual skills and handicrafts (NCCA, 1999).

### *B) Juxtaposition*

This section provides a more detailed analysis of the characteristics of the elements of the visual arts curriculum of the four countries:

- What are similarities among primary school art curricula in selected countries (Juxtaposition stage)?
- What are differences among primary school art curricula in selected countries (Juxtaposition stage)

Table 1. Juxtaposition of Art Curriculum Goals

Country	Goals
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realization of perceptual and conceptual ideas and representations through design processes</li> <li>• Assisting visual arts techniques, materials, processes and technologies in building self-confidence and a desire for curiosity and imagination (ACARA, 2013)</li> <li>• Enhancing critical and creative thinking using the languages, theories, and practices of the visual arts</li> <li>• Respect and endorse diverse maps, innovations, traditions, histories and cultures (Lemon &amp; Graves, 2013)</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual arts curriculum is rooted in experience of art production</li> <li>• Provides visual arts techniques for describing, examining, and responding</li> <li>• Students' participation in meaningful art production activities and helping to express personal feelings and ideas</li> <li>• Art is a way of expressing ideas, experiences and feelings (Ontario Curriculum, 2009).</li> </ul>
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling students to study cultural forms and context</li> <li>• Ability to master visual features</li> <li>• Ability to produce presentation of thought (Visual Arts Curriculum, 1999)</li> <li>• Relation of visual arts with other artistic disciplines and subject areas (Department of Education and Science and the Arts Council, 2018)</li> </ul>
Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aesthetics (Higher Education Council, 2012)</li> <li>• Familiarity with history of Iranian art</li> <li>• Production of artistic work and development of thinking abilities (Radpour et al., 2012a)</li> <li>• Art criticism and tendency to express thoughts and feelings (Radpour et al. 2012b).</li> </ul>

Table 2. Juxtaposition of Art Curriculum Contents

Country	Contents
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discover new ways of making things</li> <li>• Familiarity with indigenous culture and use of illustration tools</li> <li>• Learning visual arts based on a framework (ACARA, 2013).</li> <li>• Nurture ability to communicate through purposeful role in structured activities</li> <li>• Sharing artwork with your peers as an audience (Queensland Visual Arts Curriculum, 2007).</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A wide range of forms, genres and styles such as traditional arts of design, painting, sculpture, printing, architecture and photography and commercial art.</li> <li>• Training in handicrafts and industrial design</li> <li>• Learning and using tools in visual methods</li> <li>• Curiosity and expansion of students' discoveries about relationships and personal experiences</li> <li>• Cultivate imagination and ability to invent ways of expression through the visual arts (Ontario Curriculum, 2009).</li> </ul>
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizing competencies and joint learning based on national curriculum</li> <li>• Introduction to history and traditional arts of Iran (Higher Education Council, 2012)</li> <li>• Learning and using tools in visual methods and calligraphy based on textbook</li> </ul>

	<p>exercises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curiosity and expansion of students' discoveries about connection with nature and personal experiences</li> <li>• Using different sources and methods in creating a work of art</li> <li>• Nurturing imagination and innovation ability based on learning and coordination sequence (Radpour et al., 2012a).</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The visual arts curriculum stimulates thinking</li> <li>• Creating critical thinking towards contemporary media</li> <li>• Develop students' analytical skills in problem solving and divergent thinking (Department of Education and Science and the Arts Council, 2018).</li> <li>• Uniting child's abilities in learning and development</li> <li>• Develop ability to communicate between the environment and interests through the presentation of visual images</li> <li>• Provide opportunities to explore and explore visual elements in environment (Hickey, 2005).</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

Table 3. Juxtaposition of Art curriculum Teaching strategies

Country	Teaching strategies
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training through questions and answers</li> <li>• Familiarity with different materials and tools for designing and painting and inventing two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art and discovering skills.</li> <li>• Emphasis on social concepts and skills and familiarity with history of culture</li> <li>• Using different teaching approaches (Russell_ Bowie, 2011).</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training familiarity with handicraft tools and art history</li> <li>• Familiarity with different materials and tools for designing, painting, two-dimensional and three-dimensional works</li> <li>• Art teachers use different teaching approaches appropriate to different needs of each student</li> <li>• Visiting workshops, exhibitions and historical centers, as well as getting acquainted with the culture and artistic tools of the natives (Ontario Curriculum, 2009)._</li> </ul>
Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher as a guide and facilitator in education (Higher Education Council, 2012)</li> <li>• Diversity of learning environments and the active role of students in the art curriculum (Radpour et al. 2012b)</li> <li>• Creating a field of self-leadership, discussion on the subject and participatory learning, question and answer method</li> <li>• attention to indigenous cultural fields and process and product of artistic activity, visiting cultural and artistic centers to acquaint students with cultural heritage (Radpour et al., 2012a)</li> </ul>
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to activities and teaching various artistic skills and techniques</li> <li>• Familiarity with different materials and tools for designing, painting, inventing and discovering art teaching skills in making two-dimensional and three-dimensional works</li> <li>• Emphasis on social concepts and skills and familiarity with history of culture, visiting workshops, exhibitions and historical centers</li> <li>• Applying different teaching approaches according to different needs of each student and their preferred learning method (NCCA, 1999).</li> </ul>

Table 4. Juxtaposition of Art Curriculum Materials and Resources

Country	Materials and resources
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workbook guide as the main source (ACARA, 2013)</li> <li>• The main resources of learning learners such as visual elements and design principles</li> <li>• Types of design, painting, printing and sculpture activities</li> <li>• Experimentation through materials, production and development of visual ideas based on disposable materials</li> <li>• Different materials, techniques, technologies and processes for making works of art by the natives (Whittber, 2017).</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workbook guide as one of the main sources for learners for some design elements and principles (Ontario Curriculum, 2009).</li> <li>• Participate in a variety of design, painting, printing and sculpture activities</li> <li>• Experimenting with materials to produce and develop visual ideas</li> <li>• Students tell stories and express their thoughts, feelings, and insights (Elementary Visual Arts, 2000).</li> </ul>
Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Curriculum Guide is one of the main resources for learners (Higher Education Council, 2012)</li> <li>• Two-dimensional drawings using pencil, acrylic and watercolor, pastel on paper and cardboard (Radpour et al. 2012a).</li> <li>• Three-dimensional drawing of sculpture with flowers and handicrafts with cardboard disposable materials</li> <li>• Attending and visiting historical cultural heritage centers, exhibitions and workshops (Radpour et al., 2012b).</li> </ul>
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workbook program guide as one of the main resources of learners</li> <li>• Two-dimensional drawing such as pencil, acrylic and watercolor, pastel on cardboard paper</li> <li>• Three-dimensional face sculpture with flowers and handicrafts with disposable cardboard</li> <li>• Presence and visit of historical cultural heritage centers, exhibitions and workshops (NCCA, 1999)</li> </ul>

Table 5. Juxtaposition of Art Curriculum Teaching and Learning Activities

Country	Teaching and learning activities
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of guiding and facilitating the teacher during education and emphasizing participation in education</li> <li>• Strengthen and understand the meaning and interpretation, forms and styles related to social and cultural contexts (ACARA, 2013).</li> <li>• Active role of the student as a questioner</li> <li>• Informing students through acquaintance with historical artists</li> <li>• Attention to where and why people make visual artwork (Whitber, 2017).</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience of various works of art by students</li> <li>• The teacher's effort to the student to understand the true meaning of the work of art</li> <li>• Not considering each lesson as a separate entity</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examining the works of artists according to cultural and racial diversity and evaluating the quality of their works by teachers (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2000).</li> </ul>
Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The teacher has the role of guiding and facilitating him during education (Higher Education Council, 2012)</li> <li>Diversity of learning environments</li> <li>Active role of students in the art curriculum (Radpour et al. 2012a).</li> <li>Adequate study and smoothing of the executive fields of the harmonizer (Radpour et al., 2012b).</li> </ul>
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designing is an instinctive way to communicate and participate in class reviews</li> <li>Enlightenment, care and risk-taking</li> <li>Active role of students and teachers in the art curriculum with emphasis on concepts and works of art</li> <li>Strengthening the spirit of inquiry and research skills, developing independence and evaluating the quality of their works (NCCA, 1999)</li> </ul>

Table 6. Juxtaposition of Art Curriculum Learners' Participation

Country	Learners' participation
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation in the teaching and learning process (ACARA, 2013)</li> <li>Familiarity with different cultures and indigenous art / cooperation in a joint project</li> <li>Gathering information with the teacher to determine how well students have achieved the overall objectives of the lesson during the class activity (Whittber, 2017).</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation of a wide range of high quality art products by the teacher with the participation of students (Ontario Curriculum, 2009)</li> <li>Increasing artistic knowledge with the help of various works of art and observing cultures and works of art</li> <li>Selection of a wide range of works, including works by men and women, and attention to the cultural diversity of Canada and the world (Elementary visual arts, 2000).</li> </ul>
Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration in the form of individual and group methods and encouraging active learning to build self-esteem (Higher Education Council, 2012)</li> <li>Creating the field of self-direction, participatory learning, paying attention to local and regional cultural, historical and religious contexts (Radpour et al. 2012b)</li> <li>Proportion to students' developmental characteristics (Radpour et al., 2012a)</li> </ul>
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group participation of teachers and encouraging learners to actively learn to build self-confidence</li> <li>Creating a context for participatory learning, paying attention to indigenous cultural contexts, paying attention to the process and how the product is produced</li> <li>Artistic activity, paving the way for all-round growth, fit with developmental characteristics (Visual Arts Education Teacher Guidelines, 1999).</li> </ul>

Table 7. Juxtaposition of Art Curriculum, Time for Teaching

Country	Time for teaching
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian children enter primary school from age 7 / Primary school consists of six years (first to sixth year) / Class hours are flexible (ACARA, 2013).</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are educated in kindergartens and preschools from the age of three to six / elementary school starts at age six / class hours are flexible (Prince Edward Island Art Curriculum, 2011).</li> </ul>
Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student entry to school from the age of 6 / Art education is 2 hours per week (Radpour et al., 2012a).</li> </ul>
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual arts education starts before the age of seven / Training hours are flexible (NCCA, 1999).</li> </ul>

Table 8. Juxtaposition of Art Curriculum, Space for Teaching

Country	Space for Teaching
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fit of the educational space with the characteristics of children to express emotions (ACARA, 2013).</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a separate space for visual stimuli and various arts, including a wide range of forms, genres and styles</li> <li>• Children's access to visual arts tools and the possibility of exploration (Ontario Curriculum, 2009).</li> </ul>
Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity of educational spaces in art curriculum has been emphasized / education outside classroom and outside school / emphasis on use of cyberspace and communication and information technology (Radpour et al., 2012b).</li> </ul>
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separate space for presentation in the classroom / formation of classes equipped with online teaching / drawing murals / visiting the exhibition and holding an exhibition of students' works</li> <li>• Use of textbooks and websites related to contemporary art, art galleries and museums (NCCA, 1999).</li> </ul>

Table 9. Juxtaposition of Art Curriculum, Method of Assessment

Country	Method of Assessment
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portfolio processing, including students' visual arts workbook</li> <li>• Techniques used for formative assessment.</li> <li>• Comparative assessment that provides feedback for students, parents, and teachers, and general information about how well students have progressed at the end of educational stage (Queensland Visual Arts Course, 2007).</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, students evaluate how different media affect the communication and interpretation of ideas by themselves and others.</li> <li>• Second, a class evaluation of how they have achieved the processes and methods of art production and an analysis of their work (Ontario Curriculum, 2009).</li> </ul>
Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive-qualitative evaluation has existed in the art curriculum since 2005 and has a national implementation in the first to third grades, has not changed in the program (Radpour et al., 2012a).</li> </ul>

Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portfolio processing includes a collection of student work that demonstrates experiments, discoveries, manipulations, and refinement of a wide range of visual arts projects. This section contains 40% of the final score.</li> <li>• Comparative study of learners' encounter with works of art and comparison of methods of perception and analysis of each student</li> <li>• Exhibition of student works of art and evaluation by principals (NCCA, 1999).</li> </ul>
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### C) Comparison

In response to the question of what are similarities and differences between primary school curricula in selected countries, the nine elements of art curriculum were compared:

Table 10. Comparison of Art Curriculum Dimensions in Selected Countries

Country/ dimensions	Components	Iran	Ireland	Canada	Australia
Goals	Understanding concepts of aesthetics	*	*	*	*
	Familiarity with history of art and culture	*	*	*	*
	Art production and development of thinking abilities	*	*	*	*
	Expressing personal ideas, experiences and feelings	*	*	*	*
	Incidence of creative and critical thinking in students	*	*	*	*
	Discover new ways to make things	*	*	*	*
Contents	Learning and using tools in visual methods based on practice manuals	*	*	-	*
	Learning arts based on a framework	*	*	*	*
	Develop ideas and curiosity about relationships and personal experiences	*	*	*	*
Teaching Strategies	Teacher as a guide and facilitator	*	*	*	*
	Employing professionals and artists alongside teachers of art	=	-	*	-
	Use different teaching approaches	*	*	*	*
	Emphasis on social concepts and skills and familiarity with history and culture	*	*	*	*
	Familiarity with history and culture of indigenous and use of art to produce art works of indigenous	-	-	*	*
Educational Sources	National Curriculum Guide as a main resources for learners	*	*	*	*
	Two-dimensional drawing through pencil, acrylic and watercolor, pastel on cardboard paper	*	*	*	*

	Three-dimensional drawing through sculpture with flowers, handicrafts with cardboard and disposable materials	*	*	*	*
	Visit historical and cultural heritage centers, exhibitions and workshops	*	*	*	*
	Using the techniques and art of indigenous tribes in making works of art	-	-	*	*
Teaching/ Learning activities	Role of teacher as a facilitator in education	*	*	*	*
	Diversity in learning environments	*	*	*	*
	Active role of student in art curriculum	*	*	*	*
	Alignment of works of art in accordance with national curriculum	*	*	-	-
	Using tools and raw materials to enhance students' learning	*	*	*	*
Learners Groups	Provide a group collaboration space for students to learn	*	*	*	*
	Student participation in design and construction of joint works of art	-	*	*	*
	Forming indigenous and tribal arts learning groups	-	-	*	*
	Provide educational space for drawing walls and murals	-	*	*	*
Space	Providing workshop space for art at school	-	*	*	*
	Using cyberspace for art classes	*	*	*	*
	Visiting nature and organizing art classes outside the university	*	*	*	*
Time	Students enter school from the age of 6 or 7	*	*	*	*
	2 hours per week for art lessons	-	*	*	*
	No time limitation for students' artistic activity at school	-	*	*	*
Assessment	Descriptive and qualitative cumulative evaluation based on the national program framework	*	*	*	-
	Using work-folder for formative evaluation	*	*	*	*
	Comparative evaluation of students' works	-	*	*	*
	Evaluation based on comparison of students' works in exhibition	*	*	*	*

According to the data in Table 10, in this step the elements of art curriculum are compared more accurately:

### 1) Similarities

- Objectives: All the studied countries are similar in objectives of visual arts curriculum, such as understanding concepts of aesthetics, familiarity with history and culture, emergence of ideas and creative thinking in works of art, and development of visual arts curriculum.
- Content: All selected countries are similar in terms of familiarity with handicrafts and indigenous culture, use of visual arts tools, cultivating creative ideas, spreading curiosity and discovering students' personal relationships and experiences with nature.
- Teaching strategies: All selected countries are similar in such things as role of teacher as a guide and facilitator, attention to techniques working with various tools, familiarity with history of art, and visiting art exhibitions.
- Materials and educational resources: All countries are similar in matters such as using national curriculum document, teacher handbook, making works of art, producing and drawing two-dimensional and making three-dimensional volumes and visiting art centers and exhibitions.
- Teaching and learning activities: All countries are similar in matters such as active role of students and use of different teaching methods.
- Time of Teaching: Selected countries have different opinions about time of teaching, but in national curriculum documents, use of time capacities is emphasized and also ages of 6 to 7 were determined as a perfect age for teaching visual arts to pupils.
- Space for training: Selected countries have different opinions about training space, but in national curriculum documents, use of all spatial capacities such as visiting nature and parks, murals, and virtual classrooms are similar cases among countries.
- Assessment: Selected countries have different opinions about assessment methods, but in national curriculum documents, use of formative evaluation, portfolio, and evaluation based on understanding and analysis of works of art by students and conducting exhibition are similar cases among countries.

## *2) Differences*

- Objectives: Canada and Australia, compared to Iran and Ireland, pay more attention to indigenous arts education and participation of students in artistic activities and production of meaningful visual works.
- Content: In Canadian education system, compared to Iran, Australia and Ireland, the content of visual arts curriculum is based on general understanding of students in analysis and expression of art concepts.
- Teaching Strategies: In Canada and Australia, more attention is paid to racial and cultural diversity in art education than in Iran and Ireland. Teaching strategies are also based on students' creative understanding and production of works of art based on heritage of

indigenous tribes. In addition, in Canada, artists and art professionals are used alongside teachers to teach.

- Educational materials and resources: Canada and Australia pay more attention to the use of indigenous art techniques and materials than Iran and Ireland.
- Teaching and learning activities: Canada and Australia have shown more flexibility in implementation of visual arts curriculum than Iran and Ireland.
- Participation of learners: Compared to Ireland, Australia and Canada, the Iran's educational system has not had a formal and written program in benefiting from the participation of students in making handicrafts, special indigenous arts and drawing murals.
- Space: The educational system of Ireland, Canada, Australia compared to Iran has shown more attention to use of special spaces (such as workshops hall) for art education.
- Time of Teaching: Ireland, Canada, Australia have devoted more time to art education than Iran and also have prepared more free time for students.
- Assessment: Compared to Australia, Ireland and Canada, Iran has made less use of the capacity of comparative assessment in visual arts curriculum, which includes such things as using students' understanding and analysis to critique their own work and that of their peers.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Findings of previous research indicated that in all countries there is a well-written textbook for teaching visual arts - designed by the Ministry of Education and supervised by experts. Findings of present study reveal that the purpose of the visual arts education program in these four countries is based on concepts such as aesthetics education, understanding the concepts of creativity and nature, and familiarity with art history. Findings indicate that the Canadian and Australian educational systems pay more attention to teaching traditional indigenous arts to young generation. This is consistent with the finding of Kargozar, Kabuk, & Al-Daghi (2018), Kian and Mehr Mohammadi (2013), Fallah et al. (2020) and Khosravi et al. (2019).

The research findings about content of art education indicated that all selected countries act on the basis of legal frameworks and upstream documents of the Ministry of Education. This finding has already been reported in research of ACARA (2013); Department of Education and Science and the Arts Council (2018); Fallah et al. (2020); Hickey (2005); Kargozar, Kabuk, & Al-Daghi (2018); Khosravi et al. (2019); Ontario Curriculum, (2009); Radpour et al. (2012a) and Visual Arts Curriculum Queensland (2007). Another finding of the study shows that in all selected countries, the teacher has a guiding and facilitating role and uses different skills and techniques for teaching. The present researchers also found that in Ireland, Australia and Canada, in addition to teachers,

artists and art professionals also attend classes. This issue has been emphasized in previous researches (NCCA, 1999; Higher Education Council, 2012; Ontario Curriculum, 2009; Radpour et al., 2012a, b; Russell-Bowie, 2011; Visual Arts for Elementary School, 2000).

The findings of the comparison stage showed that in all four selected countries, visual arts education is mainly based on the formal national curriculum and teachers' guidebooks. Also, the Canadian and Australian education systems - compared to Iran and Ireland - use more indigenous art and techniques in art education. This supports the research findings of Fallah et al. (2020) and Khosravi et al. (2019). Another finding reveals that in teaching visual arts, the role of teacher as a guide and active participant has been considered in all countries although Canada and Australia have shown more flexibility in art curriculum implementation. Findings related to learners' participation indicate the active role and participation of pupils in art classes and existence of a diverse space for designing and using new tools and methods. Previous research - such as ACARA (2013); Department of Education and Science and the Arts Council (2018); Higher Education Council (2012); NCCA (1999); Ontario Curriculum (2009), Prince Edward Island Art Curriculum (2011); the Queensland Visual Arts Curriculum (2007) and Radpour et al. (2012b) - illustrate the space devoted to teaching visual arts in a variety of ways. Indeed, in national curriculum documents of selected countries use of virtual class capacities along with face-to-face classes and visiting art spaces has been emphasized. Also, the findings of this study support the research results of Fallah et al. (2020); Kargozar, Kabuk, & Al-Daghi (2018); Khosravi et al. (2019), and Mollainejad and Zakavati (2008) that there is no specific space for art curriculum in Iran's schools. Findings related to "time for art education" showed that in the upstream and national documents of selected countries, there is no specific time for art education and there are different opinions among policy makers. However, in most of these documents, the beginning of visual arts education is considered from the age of 6 to 7 years. An important difference between Ireland, Canada, Australia and Iran is that these countries devote different time to art education - in the form of classrooms and free time; while this research supports findings of Fallah et al. (2020); Khosravi et al. (2019), and Kian and Mehr Mohammadi (2013) that revealed there is not enough time for art education in Iran's schools. Findings related to assessment method of visual arts education showed that educational planners of selected countries have different opinions about method of assessment, but the national curriculum documents emphasize use of formative and work-folder assessment methods.

Based on research findings, it is suggested that art education planners in Iran provide appropriate content for young generation by recognizing indigenous arts. Also it is suggested to give more time and opportunity to art teacher - as a guide and facilitator - with active participation of students. Also in the extracurricular activities of primary schools in Iran, visual arts, quality improvement of methods and tools for creating works and increasing quality of art curriculum should be considered by principals and teachers. Allocating a specific space for teaching visual arts in schools along with out-of-school visits to workshops and exhibitions and online education are other suggestions of this research. The present researchers insist on developing a coherent program for participation of art professionals and masters in teaching indigenous arts and handicrafts in Iran. In addition, according to the research findings, quality improvement of art education content, increasing learning time in the form of participatory projects and learning indigenous arts in different regions of Iran is recommended to teachers. Evaluation of the visual arts curriculum in Iran - as in other countries - should be based on formative evaluation and comparative evaluation instead of emphasizing final evaluation. In this way, learners will be able to critique and analyze their own and others' works of art. Familiarity with the content of art education in other countries can provide a good opportunity for Iranian teachers to get acquainted with the valuable artistic experiences and heritage of the world and pass it on to students.

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