

READING 1: Read the article and choose the correct answers A, B, C or D, according to the writer. The first one is done for you.

Arts education may be important, but the academic benefits are unproven

By Beng Huat See, University of Durham

Maths, science and literacy have been the focus of British schools for many years. These subjects are deemed to have greater currency in a competitive global economy. Competition with the international education system has also led to greater focus on these subjects in our schools.

But should more attention be given to the arts? In the US, concerns are being raised about the declining emphasis on arts in education following the *No Child Left Behind Act*. In the UK, there have also been calls from various sectors, MPs included, for greater emphasis on the arts in school.

The House of Lords recently argued for arts to be part of the core curriculum to encourage the development of creativity, critical thinking, motivation and self-confidence – skills necessary for innovation. Such skills are also believed to help children learn academically.

According to *The Telegraph*, fewer students are now taking arts subjects because of government reforms and a focus on the EBacc or English Baccalaureate, which focuses on English, maths, history or geography, the sciences and a language.

A report by the University of Warwick warned that it is children from low-income families that would be most badly affected as a result of **this**, and recommended that arts be included in the EBacc. Mike Leigh, the Oscar-award winning director, said that it was ridiculous to think of arts as the preserve of the privileged, and that 'art should be a core subject of all subjects, like English is, but even more so'.

Many of these arguments hinge on the belief that arts education is linked to academic attainment. But a systematic review carried out by myself and Dimitra Kokotsaki suggests that evidence for the academic benefits of arts education is unclear.

Looking at 199 international studies, covering pre-school through to sixteen-year-olds, we found that there are as many studies showing that arts participation in schools has no or negative impact on academic attainment and other non-academic outcomes as there are positive studies. Very few studies could establish a causal effect of arts participation.

We looked at studies on a broad range of subjects, including visual arts, music, dance, theatre, hip hop, poetry and creative writing.

So what does work?

Tentative evidence does suggest that both music training and integrating drama into the classroom may have beneficial effects.

Playing an instrument benefits creativity, spatial-temporal ability, IQ scores and reading and language. Some studies also suggest that it can improve self-concept, self-efficacy, motivation and behaviour for secondary-school children. Music education shows promise for learning outcomes and cognitive skills across all age groups.

Listening to music, however, does not seem to have a positive impact. Or at least there is no evidence to suggest that it does. Some studies showed that people who listened to classical music performed worse in memory tests than those who didn't. Results of experiments of the Mozart effect have produced conflicting results.

There is also no evidence that engagement in visual arts, such as painting, drawing and sculpture, can improve academic performance. Effects on other non-arts skills such as creative thinking and self-esteem were also inconclusive.

Because of weaknesses in these studies, and the lack of replication and inconsistent findings across them, the findings must be interpreted with caution. More robust and rigorous evaluations are needed to confirm any causal links.

But if improving attainment is the aim, then arts may not be the solution. Promising programmes already exist that can boost learning. Given the lack of evidence so far, perhaps we should think more broadly about the purpose of arts in the context of educational policy. Can it not be just for enjoyment? Must it have a utilitarian function?

The evidence we have now is just not good enough yet for us to make conclusive statements and more robust research is clearly needed. But of course there is an argument for pursuing arts education for its own sake – for enjoyment and appreciation.

If the arts make children happy and feel good about themselves, give them a sense of achievement and help them to appreciate beauty, then that is justification in itself.

0 The title suggests the article will surmise that arts subjects

A aren't useful because they don't improve academic performance. ☐

B are useful because they improve academic performance. ☐

C are useful although they don't improve academic performance. ☒

D aren't useful although they improve academic performance. ☐

1 The focus of British schools has been on maths, science and literacy because they

- A are more economically viable. ☐
- B aren't important international subjects. ☐
- C are part of global competition. ☐
- D benefit students more in today's world. ☐

2 Which skills 'are ... believed to help children learn academically'? (line 9)

- A the arts ☐
- B creativity, critical thinking, motivation and self- confidence ☐
- C maths, science and literacy ☐
- D all of the above ☐

3 What does 'this' (paragraph 5) refer to?

- A taking the English Baccalaureate ☐
- B arts being the preserve of the privileged ☐
- C the report by the University of Warwick ☐
- D the fact that fewer students are taking arts subjects ☐

4 Which of these sources offered a reason for the decline in arts education rather than arguing for its inclusion?

- A the House of Lords ☐
- B the University of Warwick ☐
- C The Telegraph newspaper ☐
- D Mike Leigh, the film director ☐

5 What did most of the 199 international studies show about the impact of arts participation on academic attainment?

- A Arts participation has a positive impact. ☐
- B Arts participation has a negative impact. ☐
- C Arts participation has no impact. ☐
- D The studies could provide no definitive proof. ☐

6 Which activity appears to have a negative effect on learning?

- A** acting ☐
- B** music education ☐
- C** listening to music ☐
- D** playing an instrument ☐

7 Which reason is not given for needing to interpret the findings of the studies with caution?

- A** The findings are different across the studies. ☐
- B** The findings aren't conclusive enough. ☐
- C** The studies aren't robust enough. ☐
- D** The studies haven't been repeated enough. ☐

8 What is the writer asking about the function of arts in education?

- A** Do arts have to be the solution? ☐
- B** Do students have to appreciate the arts? ☐
- C** Do arts have to be something that is liked? ☐
- D** Do arts have to be useful? ☐

9 Which reason is not given for justification of including the arts in education?

- A** They give children a better sense of how to behave. ☐
- B** They give children self-esteem. ☐
- C** They give children a sense of having done something. ☐
- D** They help children to understand the aesthetics in life. ☐

10 Which statement most closely matches the writer's attitude to including arts in the core curriculum?

- A** We shouldn't include arts because they don't improve academic achievement. ☐
- B** We should include arts because they do improve academic achievement. ☐
- C** We should include arts for the less tangible benefits they bring to children. ☐
- D** We should only include arts if studies establish a causal link with academic achievement. ☐