

The Role of Art Education in Responding to Social Issues: The Case of Road Accidents in Oman

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Abstract

In Oman, the issue of road accident has become of greater concern for individual members of society as well as for the government. In responding to these concerns, art education can play a significant role in this matter. On this basis, this research project assumes that student art practice can improve understanding of social issues, which, in turn, can improve quality of life. The purpose of this study was to personalize this social issue in relation to the social and cultural issue of road accidents from students own experiences and to give them the opportunity to express their feelings, beliefs, and thoughts on the issue in visual forms. 15 paintings were produced by students and described and interbred in relation to the reasons for, facts about, and consequencesa of road accidents. The results demonstrate the students' perspectives on the causes and consequences of road accidents in Oman as expressed in the art form of painting. Causes of accidents such as lack of concentration, speeding, use of mobile phones, and driving without wearing seatbelts were depicted in the students' artworks.

Keywords: Art education, teaching panting, social issues, road accidents, Oman

1. Introduction

Ulbricht (2002) argues “To serve current and future generations of students, art teachers need to spend more time promoting visual arts education in their schools and communities” (p.6). In addition, Ulbricht believes that to gain the support of their community, art educators need to show the public how art education can benefit everyone in the community. Moreover, they should evaluate the community’s perception of art’s particular characteristics and contribution. This will provide an opportunity to demonstrate how art can contribute to community development, and that it is a part of everyone’s life.

This, of course, will make the mission of art more complicated when it deals with life and the mission is not easy to identify, especially when we need to convince others about the role of the arts in society. Therefore, to assist lay people, parents and school administrators to understand why the arts have been fundamental to human experience since the very beginning of human life, it is necessary to emphasize art’s practical values in relation to social issues. It may be easy for artists to create objects associated with different aspects of society; however, when it comes to teaching art the issue becomes more complex because the rationale should go beyond the process of making and creating art. “Students make visual art not merely for its formal, technical, or even private value, but to communicate about social issues in social ways” (Kerry Freedman, 2003, p. 80).

UNESCO (2010) also confirmed that: Arts education can make a direct contribution to resolving the social and cultural challenges facing the world today. Of crucial importance to the success of arts education in meeting these challenges is the need to achieve high standards in the conception and delivery of programmes.

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Anderson (2003) also argues in his article “Art Education for Life” that art should be about something beyond itself. He confirms: “In most cultures around the world, through most of history, art has had very specific functions beyond being decorative or beautiful for its own sake. One of its primary functions has been to tell our human stories, to help us know who we are and how and what we believe” (p.59).

According to Anderson (2003), at the centre of art education is the need to assist students to understand a little about society, including themselves and others, in and through art. In an art-for-life curriculum, “art content and teaching and learning strategies are focused on things that count in students’ lives as personal and social expression” (p. 59). He emphasizes that works of art are regarded as windows into, and mirrors of, our lives, which explains why art education for life is a roots-based art education. Freedman (2003) also advocates social deconstructionist versions of these perspectives, which are founded on the basic principle and belief that “art education can make a difference in student understanding of and action in the world and that, difference can enrich and improve social life” (p.68).

Based on this belief about the role of art education in society, practising art could improve students’ understanding of social issues and concerns, which could improve their quality of life. Therefore, as Freedman (2003) indicates: “If we view art and art education as aids to making life meaningful, as reflections of liberty, and as means through which people might pursue a constructive form of happiness, art education is a socio-political act” (p.69). In this case, learners have the opportunity to study social life and social issues through practicing art. Freedman (2003) cites that the main function of art education is not to educate students about the technical and formal characteristics of artworks, but to demonstrate their importance to human existence. It is this relevance that has made art worthy of a place in formal education.

The primary purpose of the current research project is not merely to teach art processes and techniques. Neither is it just about individual emotions and expressions; it is about the personalization of social issues. Therefore, this research project intends to give students the opportunity to express their feelings, beliefs and thoughts in relation to the social and cultural issue of road accidents from their own experiences.

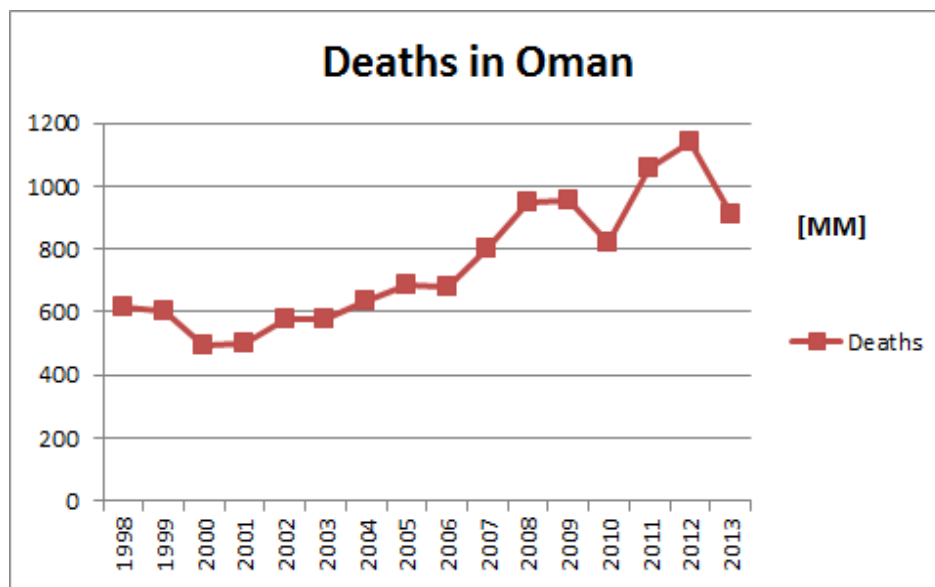
2. Background to the Research Project

The world’s first fatality caused by a motor vehicle took place in London on 17 August 1896. More than a century later, each year millions of people around the world die in road accidents, especially in developing countries (Skinne et al., 1997). Injuries caused by road accidents are largely preventable and predictable; the issue is a man-made problem whose risks can be rationally analysed and measures put in place to counter them. There has been a lot of research carried out in the field of road safety in Oman; for example, Bates et al. (2014a), Bates et al. (2014b), Al-Maniri et al. (2013), and Al-Reesi et al. (2013). Much of this research suggests that more attention should be paid to encouraging all sectors of society to work together to tackle the root causes of road-traffic accidents and reduce the related death and disability toll.

For example, in Oman since 2000 nearly 10,000 men, women, and children have lost their lives in accidents on the roads, and more than 110,000 have been injured, many of whom will be disabled for the rest of their lives. These are appalling statistics for a small, developing nation and the escalating trend threatens to undermine more than 40 years of nation-building and development. Table 1 shows the statistical record of road accidents in Oman between 1998 and 2013, and Figure 1 shows the trend in the number of deaths as a result of car accidents during the same time period.

Table 1: Statistics for road accidents in Oman, 1998–2013 (adapted from Salim and Salimah Organization)

Year	Deaths	Injured	Accidents
1998	614	7,913	8,049
1999	604	8,183	8,947
2000	492	9,323	13,040
2001	499	9,625	13,101
2002	580	7,907	9,107
2003	578	6,375	10,197
2004	637	6,636	9,460
2005	689	6,658	9,247
2006	681	7,548	9,669
2007	798	8,531	8,816
2008	951	10,558	7,982
2009	953	9,783	7,253
2010	820	10,066	7,571
2011	1,056	11,437	7,719
2012	1,139	11,618	8,209
2013	913	10,802	7,829

Figure 1: Number of deaths as a result of car accidents in Oman, 1998–2013(adapted from Salim and Salimah Organization)

Within the Omani context, Bates et al. (2014a) stated that Oman has one of the highest rates of road-accident mortality in the world at 30.4 in every 100,000 people compared with the global average of 19.0 in every 100,000 people. This issue has increasingly become a concern for individual citizens. In fact, the issue of road accidents is affecting our lives in Oman to a greater extent than it is in other countries. Much of the literature relevant and appropriate to the Omani context found that young car drivers are five to 10 times more likely to experience injuries as a result of road accidents when compared with drivers among the safest age group (Bates et al., 2014a; Bates et al., 2014b; Al-Maniri et al., 2013; Al-Reesi et al., 2013).

For example, Omani research by Al-Reesi et al. (2013) showed that young Omani drivers reported higher levels of risky driving behaviours than the wider community of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) drivers and international samples. This elevated risk of accident is not a new phenomenon and has been reported for at least the last 30 years.

According to official statistics, the number of road accidents in Oman increased by 20% to 1,368 in the first two months of 2013, compared with the same period in 2012. The same statistics show that on average 10,000 new vehicles are being registered every month. Moreover, recent statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) covering the period from January to November 2013 stated that there is one death for every 10 road accidents in the Sultanate. During this period, 6,600 road accidents were recorded, resulting in 823 fatalities and 9,081 injuries, compared with 7,529 accidents resulting in 1,059 fatalities and 10,737 injuries during same period in 2012 (Times News, 2014).

Besides, the social and economic costs of road deaths are huge. For example, at the household level, if the breadwinner in a family loses his/her life, the financial burden on the family is unimaginable. People who are injured also put a great burden on their families and the State in terms of their medical treatment and rehabilitation. Moreover, road accidents have recently led to resources being wasted and the capacities of the respective ministries being consumed, either in terms of health issues or financial resources. In a large-scale Oman-based study of hospitalized road-accident casualties, Al-Naamani et al. (2007) found that the majority of patients were young with multiple injuries and that a significant number had symptoms of brain injuries.

In October 2009 His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said made a public speech during one of his royal tours. It is worth recalling here what His Majesty the Sultan said at that time: What is happening on our roads should be of everybody's concern. Misuse of vehicles of different categories by different people causing many deaths is an irritating and worrisome phenomenon. The distressing fact is while we believe that life and death are destined by Allah, at the same time Allah's order is not to kill ourselves. While some may die in these accidents, others, who may remain alive, may be disabled and a burden for himself, his family and society. We share His Majesty's concern about loss of life on the road, because Oman has one of the highest accident rates in the Arab Gulf States and, despite several measures taken by the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and other authorities concerned, this rate has not fallen. We should all be aware of the perils of reckless and irresponsible driving. Last year's ROP statistics speak for themselves: there were 7,253 road accidents, in which 953 people were killed and 9,783 were injured. As a proportion of the small population of the country, the number of people losing their lives prematurely is extremely high (Times News, 2014). The situation calls for serious and stringent steps, which the authorities appear to be contemplating, as the current measures seem to have had no effect on deterring errant drivers.

According to what we have reviewed here regarding the increasing number of people killed in road accidents in Oman, the issue has become a worrying subject for everyone, and cars have become nothing more than a blunt instrument for killing young people.

3. The Islamic Perspective on Car Accidents

Oman is an Arab country on the Arabian Peninsula. It is predominantly Muslim nation, therefore, understanding the Islamic viewpoint regarding road accident is the key element for deeper understanding of such social issue. From the Islamic point of view, the issue of car accidents is quite clear. Muslims must not harm others, including themselves. As the Holy Quran says, "And those who do not invoke with Allah another deity or kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed], except by right [...] And whoever should do that will meet a penalty" (The Holy Quran, Sūrat l-fur'qān, 68, p.366).

Another clear statement from the Quran is "And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right. And whoever is killed unjustly - We have given his heir authority, but let him not exceed limits in [the matter of] taking life. Indeed, he has been supported [by the law]" (The Holy Quran, Sūrat Al-'Isra', 33, p.258). Allah also said: Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you. [He commands] that you do not associate anything with Him, and to parents, good treatment, and do not kill your children out of poverty; We will provide for you and them. And do not approach immoralities – what is apparent of them and what is concealed. And do not kill the soul, which Allah has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right. This has He instructed you that you may use reason. (The Holy Quran, Surat Al-'An`ām, 151, p.148).

These extracts, along with others in the *Quran*, confirm the importance of the soul in Islam, even the souls of people who are not believers. Therefore, Muslims should not kill anyone without cause, as Allah has forbidden. Although Muslims are obliged to protect themselves and not expose themselves to destruction or danger, three areas of responsibility are made clear about the above issue. First, it is necessary to protect one-self and property; as Allah says in the *Quran*, "Don't subject yourselves to destruction" (The Holy Quran, Surat Al-Baqarh, 195, p.30). Moreover, the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) has ordered Muslims not to dispose of wealth. Secondly, the Islamic faith calls for the necessity to maintain self, mind, religion, children and property. This is supported by the Prophet's sermon 'not to harm or be harmed', whatever the reasons may be. As a result, road accidents are, in their very nature, a crime against people and society.

In responding to these concerns, all sections of society should shoulder some of the responsibility for limiting the number of road accidents, and art education can play a significant role in this matter. On this basis, this research project assumes that student art practice can improve understanding of social issues, which, in turn, can improve quality of life.

4. Focus of the Research Project

The objectives of the project were: firstly, to raise students' awareness of road accidents and draw their attention to the issue; secondly, to give students the opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts about road accidents in form of visual images; thirdly, to identify the causes and consequences of road accidents from students' points of view; and fourthly, to raise awareness among different groups in society about road safety which might take a form of art exhibition addressing the issue of safer roads.

5. Research Design and Methodology

According to the above information and in response to the research's issue, the researchers began to consider how to introduce the road accidents to college students within art education major (pre-service art teachers) and stimulate their interests in it. This project engaged second year students in working for painting project in academic environment by providing their opinions, reflections and creations on road accidents as social issue. To meet the target of this research, the researchers planned a project for the ARED 2230 painting II course run by the Art Education Department at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). The initial sample comprised students who enrolled in the above course in the academic year 2012/2013. The total number of this group was 24 pre-service art teachers. This included 14 females and 10 males. From this population, the researchers selected only (N=15) paintings representing the work of 15 students as a sample for this study. Because these students met only once a week (5 contact hours) during the teaching semester (Full 2012), the amount of time the students had to complete the work was in three teaching weeks (15 contact hours); followed by semi-structured interviews. Here is an overall outline of the project and instructional schedule: Students were introduced to the concept of road accidents as a basic theme for studying painting course within other course requirements.

1. Defining a project entitled the "Road Accident Painting Project" for all students registered in the course. Stimulating students attentions to the project through photographs and films about road accidents in generally and in Oman particularly.
2. Drew on His Majesty's speech to define the social and cultural issue of road accidents from students experiences.
3. Series discussions with students were conducted about the reasons for, facts about, and consequences of road accidents.
4. As a starting point for the experimental approach, the researchers first asked students to describe their emotions connected to their experiences of road accidents involving their relatives or friends, or even someone in the street.
5. Students were asked to express their feeling, beliefs and thoughts on road accidents and personalize this issue from their own experiences using painting technique.
6. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students immediately after they finish their paintings.

The purpose of these interviews is to get an inside feelings and beliefs of students in relation to the issue of road accidents. Questions such as: what do you think about your painting? What elements or icons in your painting represent reasons for, facts about, and consequences of road accidents? and What can we learn from your painting? Some of students' answers of these questions were integrated in the researchers' interpretations section.

7. Since the painting is the primary data collected in this study, the methodology used for interpreting these painting was based on looking at three basic factors: the reasons for, facts about, and consequences of road accidents. The researchers' interpretations of these paintings were associated with students' responses and reflections about their own creations. The both components provide a framework for analysing and interpreting the project's outcomes and discern whether and the degree to which the paintings respond to the issue that drive this study.

6. Outcomes of the Research Project

As mentioned above this project consist of 24 paintings created by college students during their study at the course (ARED 2230 painting II) in Full 2012. This section showcases efforts to move art education forward in Oman and it advocates for students to use painting to explore important care accidents-local issues, critically impacting their families and communities. The following discussions are responses of the researchers' interpretations integrated with students' belief and reflections about their paintings. For limitation in this study the researchers selected only 15 paintings as a sample for summarizes the outcomes in this study.

Figure 2 demonstrates the causes and consequences of road accidents due to excessive speed and the driver's lack of care. Speeding is illustrated by the image of a speedometer. Student commented that "My painting refers to a board game called *Carrom*, in which the players roll dice. I replaced the dice image with a car. It depicts fate on the one hand, and the imprudence of the driver on the other". Furthermore, she emphasised that "The game board is yellow and red; red symbolizes death, while yellow symbolizes the approach of danger". In the researchers' point of view, the consequences of car accidents are tragic and the loss they cause is irreparable. The task was to put the spotlight on the consequences of fatal car accidents caused by the recklessness and childishness of road users. The researchers then asked the students to comment on the causes and consequences of road accidents as presented in this painting, Student emphasised that "The result is a tragic loss of lives and property; my painting shows the damaged cars scattered everywhere and piled on top of each other due to collisions and excessive speed".

Figure 2: Painting of road accidents as a carrom game, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



In figure 3, the painting deals with the cause of accidents and the grave consequences resulting from them. There is an hourglass, some traffic signals, a steering wheel and a speedometer. There are also written phrases, metal rods with hands behind them, roads about to collapse, and some red stains on the steering wheel. In responding to the causes of road accidents, student stated that "Speeding and non-compliance with traffic regulations are the most important causes of car accidents and my artwork highlights the cause of speeding; the hourglass aims to highlight the relationship between speed and accidents. With higher speed, the time taken for the driver to reach the final destination is shorter, but the probability of an accident is higher".

In this painting, we notice that roads have begun to collapse, falling down inside the hourglass. These roads corrode inside the time machine, going back to their original state – and – an indication of death in this context, as the time and sand are limited. Next to the steering wheel, we also notice a mobile phone to highlight its misuse while driving. We asked student to comment on the use of mobile phone while driving, student responded “This is the most worrying cause of traffic accidents. As a tragic consequence, the representation of an orphan and the written words ‘My father, don’t leave us!’ and ‘When are you coming back?’ reveal a strong message”. The above children’ statements with other icons such as prison bars, death of loved persons, steering wheel and accident itself representing the consequences of car accidents.

Figure 3: Painting includes several signals symbolizing of the car accidents, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



Painting 4 has two elements (Figure 4). The first shows the immediate causes of traffic accidents, while the second reflects their catastrophic consequences. Student described her work by saying “My painting depicts roads, traffic signals and human silhouettes. It is dominated by red and black, with a small amount of grey and a complete absence of light. Also there are straight and curved lines”. Student in this painting belief in respecting the traffic signs system, she emphasised that “The traffic signals and signs are the most important tools”. Furthermore, she explains her signs by saying “The silhouette of a man overwhelmed with melancholy represents a sign for controlling on traffic public roads. The deep, dark colours are exemplified by red, which announces the approach of danger”. It can be also said that the black colour represents sorrow and condolence. Furthermore, there is a complete absence of white in this work.

Figure 4: Silhouette of a man overwhelmed with melancholy represents a sign for controlling traffic on public roads. (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



In figure 5, the painting refers to the immediate and material losses resulting from road accidents. We notice that a lot of objects are scattered from the rear of the vehicle, falling to the ground as a result of the force of a collision. In the background we notice dust billowing up due to high speed. Student explains his opinion saying “I think face to face accident is very dangerous and this happens because of car overtaking in wrong time and wrong place and that why I did my painting in this composition”.

Figure 5: Painting face to face accident, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



In Figure 6, there are several components: damaged cars, cars driving on roads, speedometers and traffic signals. We also find an incarnation of faces and hands. There are several landscapes in this painting. The work is painted in dark, deep colours. Red signifies danger and fear. Black and grey signify sorrow, and again there is a complete absence of white. Student described her painting by saying: “In my painting, you can see shapes and most of them are curved or bent to signify speed and the indifference of road users to traffic rules. Also in the top left-hand corner of the work a young boy is showing signs of sorrow, due to the loss of a relative or a loved one. On the top right of the painting is a weeping eye, enveloped in the painting’s background, which is dominated by black and red. At the centre is a palm held up displaying the English word ‘Stop’, signifying disregard for the traffic rules”.

The above statement shows the student's feelings and beliefs about the issue of road accidents. Furthermore, In the bottom right-hand corner, a hand emerges from the soil (a grave) to snatch the lives of people speeding. This hand holding a speedometer indicating a high speed. We can also see a wheelchair on the speedometer’s gauge, suggesting the relation between higher speed and increased possibility of death. All these demonstrate student's perspective on the causes and consequences of road accidents in Oman.

Figure 6: symbols of causes and consequences of road accidents, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



The composition of painting (Figure 7) can be divided into three parts. Student in this painting calmed that “One depicts the result of a car accident, and the other two address the causes. The colours used are mostly dull and washed out, suggesting grief. The lines are sharp, and simple geometrical shapes are used”. It can be said also, the level of light is low and has no definite source. Moreover, this student emphasised that “The content of middle panel in my painting implies the effects of not wearing a seat-belt. Also, in the middle of the road there are cars that have been damaged in an accident and blood is strongly represented”.

Figure 7: Painting of accident three in one, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



In Figure 8, the painting deals with the causes of road accidents and the damage they do to people and property. Student described his painting as: “complex work and can be divided into several sections; some representing the causes of accidents, and others addressing the resulting effects. The colours used are of great importance. They have distinctive symbolism: red symbolizes danger, and black symbolizes sorrow in general and death in particular”.

As the elements composing the work, it can be suggested that the speedometer stained with blood symbolizing speeding, the most frequent cause of accidents. This is a reference to the close relationship between death and dangerous driving or lack of control of the car as student's interpretation of this painting.

Figure 8: Painting of speedometer stained with blood symbolizing speeding, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



The painting in figure 9 has a pyramidal composition. This places great importance on the background. The student has concentrated on creating perspective by using the lines of the road, which draw the viewer's eyes to the focal point and the work's visual interest: the speedometer that the driver is heading toward. This was supported by student when she said “My painting places the viewer in the position of the driver. From this perspective, the viewer can see some human skulls emerging from the speedometer, and two damaged cars in front of it, on a road that has been torn apart”. All these elements signify the danger of driving too fast on public roads and draw attention to follow the traffic system with respect and dignity.

Figure 9: Representing driver as viewer with reference to causes and consequences of road accidents, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



Painting in figure 10, deals with the damage that road accidents do to people and property. Student explains her painting by saying: “The composition in my painting divides into two horizontal sections: the bottom one represents a child (consequences), and the middle one stands for the road and car (causes). The bottom section portrays a picture of a child looking sad due to the loss of a loved one, and the car in the middle section is behind him. The purpose is to show that the car is the cause of this tragedy. A skeleton of a human hand holds a road sign that drips with blood”.

Furthermore, from the heart of the work, student protrudes a ghost-like face that signifies death. Complementary colours are used to imply the close relationship between pain and road accidents. This painting also representing the level of understanding the connection between the causes of road accident and the consequences and this relationship was presented clearly in this painting.

Figure 10: visible and invisible damages of road accidents, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



The composition of painting (Figure 11) is vertical and the elements are distributed from bottom to top in the shape of a pyramid. The elements that consist the painting are roads, cars, buildings and a child. Juxtaposition and paradox are represented by the cold and warm colour tones.

Student exemplifies this by pointing out that “The colours in my painting do not follow the laws of harmony, representing the disharmonic feelings of loss that the child is experiencing, vacillating between orphanhood and instability. Besides, there are a variety of viewing angles within the work; we find them near to the child, trucks and buildings”. The child’s posture is a reminder of the lack of purpose gripping him as a result of the recent accident. A road is splitting the child’s life in two.

Figure 11: Painting presenting the curse of road accident, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



In Figure 12, many signs and signals show us the damage caused by road accidents. The general composition of the painting is divided into several parts or elements. In this painting, we see women, children, cars, a wheelchair, roads, buildings, skulls and a speedometer. Student of this painting, comments: Every element in my painting has its own significance, symbolism and purpose. You can also find a variety of viewing angles; there are central, horizontal and vertical ones. I used range of colours from warm to cold. The structure of the painting is horizontal, and the extension travels up.

In this painting, we see a weeping woman placing her hands over her face, crying over the loss of a loved one and looking dejected and sad. Two children are also crying over the loss. This student explains her symbols furthermore by saying “The elements reminding us of the fallout from accidents are the human skulls, which lead to the context of the death. The viewers can also find a person using a wheelchair, which shows the harm that road accidents inflict on those involved”. Reflecting on the student’s statements and the composition of her painting, the researchers also sees the elements that represent the causes of these accidents are the cars and speedometer, since speeding is the leading cause of road accidents.

Figure 12: Speeding is the leading cause of road accidents, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



Painting in figure 13 addresses the causes and effects of road accidents due to disregarding road signs. The signs, cars, roads and a face constitute the painting. Moreover, of the colours that are present, red takes the lion's share. As student emphasised that "My painting representing danger and death of the road accidents. The painting background is a mixture of cold and warm primary and secondary colours. There are geometrical and curved shapes in this work". In this painting, text is also present in the 'Stop' sign. The meanings conveyed by these elements are the close affinity between pain and sorrow on the one hand, and accidents on the other. In addition, road signs replace the eyes of the face on the left, and other signs appear above the head. All these icons and art elements present causes and consequences of road accidents in abstract forms and symbolic way.

Figure 13, Symbolic way of road accidents, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



In figure 14, student addresses the effects of accidents on people and their relatives. As student described: My painting portrays a funeral scene in which a father is seen in a graveyard showing signs of sorrow and melancholy. A 'Stop' sign is installed behind him in the top left of the work, which is one of the focal points, and the child is wrapped in clouds of smoke instead of a coffin. At the bottom of my work, there is a group of three people who have been injured in the accident that has taken the child's life. The general composition of this painting is circular, making the child and graveyard the centre of the circle in an attempt to draw the viewer's attention to the necessity of linking the two issues. The shapes present in the work are mostly curved, and the colours used are faint, engulfed by death from all sides.

Figure 14: Shown the effects of accidents on people and their relatives, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



Figure 15 points to the causes and catastrophic consequences of road accidents. The work is composed of a host of elements, such as a photograph, a roll of negatives, a speedometer, a wrecked car on the road, and a mobile phone. On the left-hand side a woman's face and a picture of two children are wrapped in the rolls of negatives. Student explains about this painting by saying "My work attempts to go deeper into the memories that road accidents leave, and the pictures and negatives make reference to these memories. The matrix of dark colours has been used to suggest sorrow and dejection". It can be seen that the elements of this painting have been scattered all over the painting to signify the homelessness of the family and the state of chaos. We can also observe a mobile phone dripping with blood, implying the danger of using mobiles while driving with references to the danger of driving too fast which are leading cause of road accidents.

Figure 15: showing deep memories of road accidents and sadness, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



Figure 16 shows the tragic outcome of a traffic accident due to the use of a mobile phone too. Student emphasised the consequences of road accidents by saying "The result is a road stained with blood, suggesting the disappearance of people and the shock of hearing the news. I represented the family's memories by a family photograph, are scattered on the road". The presence of the photograph also suggests that family was the driver's most important priority.

Figure 16: presenting family's memories in references to road accidents, (oil on canvas), 75cm × 55cm.



Finally, from the students' paintings and students' interpretations of these paintings, we categorized that primary causes of road accidents in Oman appear to be a result of driver behaviour, for example, not using seat-belts, speeding, using mobile phones, sending text messages, adjusting the radio or the CD player.

7. Conclusion

Art in this project is multidisciplinary and multidimensional. Within the framework of this study, we examine how college students with art education major make connections to social problems. Using painting to approach the study of social issues connected with road accidents was an experimental way to increase students' awareness of the factors and the reasons behind this issue. One student commented in this project by saying "I think this is an excellent project and this experimental project is a successful alternative to traditional road-safety campaigns, and has helped me acquire the power of imagination in emotional and visual practical terms". As a result of this experimental project applied in the context of the problem of road accidents in Omani society, the creativity and imagination of students increased considerably and visual and aesthetic values were discovered. Another student also commented in this project by confirming that "Producing the works of art enabled me to develop my skills in painting and drawing, which I will need in my future career as an art teacher. These art skills were accompanied by aesthetic concerns as well as an increased my knowledge of the causes of accidents, which gives me the ability to imagine a composition that deals with the multidimensional issues relating to road accidents". From the researchers' point of view students will be more experienced, and more successful, when they face future challenges concerning public issues such as road accidents.

With this approach, students had the opportunity to face problems concerning social issues. This was quite a different experience from those of other painting courses, which are based on landscape or still life. As a result of this project, students were able to connect the social public issues with personal emotional experiences and family's memories. As one student emphasised that "through the road accidents project, I had the opportunity to express my own emotions and feelings. This helped me to rediscover my own relationship with society as individual creator". The voice of student do appear in this study and therefore someone could determine student emotions and feelings expressed during the research project visual in terms of painting as well as orally in terms of students' voices as indicated in the outcome of this project. The results of this project also show that the students were able to rediscover their relationship with society by their art creation and reflections. As conclusion for this research project, the analysis framework of both the authors' interpretations and students' responses visual and orally confirm that students were applied to personalize the social issue in relation to the social and cultural issue of road accident from their own experiences. Finally, this research project grounded in data about road accidents in Oman-a serious social issue worthy of study- and a project in a painting course in response to this social issue and these two components are tied together well in this study.

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