

FROM SYLLABUS-TO-INSIGHT: EVALUATING PEDAGOGICAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT SATISFACTION IN ART AND DESIGN APPRECIATION EDUCATION

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Abstract. Art and Design Appreciation (VCS105) is a compulsory two-credit course within the Diploma of Art and Design programme at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), designed to cultivate foundational visual literacy and critical art analysis skills among first-year students. This study evaluates the effectiveness of VCS105 syllabus delivery by examining two complementary datasets from the October 2025 – February 2026 semester: student academic achievement through a standardised Individual Written Assignment (IWA) and syllabus-focused student satisfaction as measured by selected constructs of the Student's Feedback Online (SuFO) instrument. A total of 21 students from Group AD1111B participated in the achievement analysis, while 42 students across two groups (AD1111A and AD1111B) contributed SuFO responses pertaining to overall course impression, lecturer professionalism, and teaching and learning activities. Descriptive statistics revealed a mean IWA score of 67.33 (SD = 6.27), with a 100% pass rate. SuFO data yielded an Excellent performance indicator of 95.59% when averaged across the two pedagogical constructs for both groups. The findings indicate that structured, syllabus-aligned pedagogy combining systematic content delivery, clear assessment design, and responsive academic guidance produces strong convergence between demonstrated achievement and perceived learning satisfaction. Implications for syllabus improvement and pedagogical practice in creative arts diploma programmes are discussed. Keywords: art appreciation education; syllabus effectiveness; student achievement; pedagogical satisfaction; SuFO; diploma education; UiTM; VCS105; written assessment; creative arts pedagogy.

Keywords: *art appreciation education, syllabus effectiveness, student achievement, pedagogical satisfaction, SuFO, diploma education*

Introduction

Art and design education plays a critical role in cultivating not only technical skills but also broader capacities for visual thinking, cultural sensitivity, and aesthetic judgment. Within higher education institutions, foundational courses serve as entry points through which students begin to develop a systematic vocabulary for engaging with visual culture. At Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Art and Design Appreciation (VCS105) is a two-credit compulsory course within the Diploma of Art and Design programme, spanning topics from prehistoric and ancient art traditions through to contemporary design movements and Malaysian art. The growing complexity of the Malaysian art landscape, which is increasingly shaped by the interplay of technology, tradition, and hybrid artistic practice, makes foundational art appreciation literacy ever more essential for emerging creative professionals (Michael et al., 2024; Perreau et al., 2023). Despite the perceived importance of such foundational courses, empirical evidence examining their actual syllabus effectiveness, particularly in terms of measurable student learning outcomes and pedagogical satisfaction, remains

relatively sparse within the Malaysian higher education literature. Most existing studies focus on specific art-making skills or disciplinary content knowledge, with comparatively little attention paid to how broad-based appreciation courses perform when evaluated through systematic course review mechanisms.

This paper addresses that gap by presenting a course-level evaluation of VCS105 based on two empirical data sources: formal student assessment results from a standardised Individual Written Assignment (IWA) and syllabus-relevant student perception data from the Student's Feedback Online (SuFO) instrument administered at semester end. Together, these datasets provide a multidimensional view of how effectively the course achieves its stated learning outcomes, which include developing students' ability to describe the basic language of art and design (CLO1), analyse the form and content of artworks (CLO2), and demonstrate teamwork through engagement with diverse art styles (CLO3). The study is situated within the broader discourse on quality assurance in creative arts education, and aligns with growing institutional interest in evidence-based course improvement within Malaysian polytechnics and universities.

Literature review

Art appreciation education in higher learning

Art appreciation as a discipline occupies a unique pedagogical space: it does not train students to produce art per se, but rather equips them with the conceptual tools to decode, contextualise, and critically evaluate artistic production across history and culture. According to Efland (2002), art education that integrates historical, critical, and aesthetic dimensions fosters broader cognitive flexibility in learners, extending beyond the studio into capacities for cultural literacy and cross-disciplinary reasoning. Similarly, Eisner (2002) argued that art education cultivates forms of thinking, including attention to nuance, tolerance for ambiguity, and the ability to construct meaning from symbolic forms, that are not easily replicated in other subject areas. This interdisciplinary cognitive dividend of arts-based education has been affirmed in the Malaysian context: Hassan et al. (2024) demonstrated that arts-based approaches can serve as powerful catalysts for broader cognitive and communicative development, underscoring the value of systematic arts engagement beyond purely technical training. Within the Malaysian context, creative arts education at the diploma and undergraduate level has been shaped by UiTM's commitment to producing graduates with both technical proficiency and cultural awareness (Mahamood, 2007). The VCS105 course aligns with this dual mandate by covering art movements from antiquity to Post-Modernism, requiring students to not only absorb historical knowledge but also engage analytically with artworks and design principles. Critically, recent scholarship highlights that Gen Z creative design students, who constitute the primary cohort in diploma programmes, demonstrate distinct learning preferences, gravitating toward structured guidance balanced with opportunities for self-directed engagement (Wardi et al., 2025). Understanding these preferences is therefore central to designing effective syllabus delivery in art and design appreciation courses.

Measuring syllabus effectiveness: Achievement and pedagogical satisfaction

Syllabus effectiveness in higher education is conventionally evaluated through two complementary constructs: student academic achievement and student satisfaction

(Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Academic achievement, typically operationalised through assessment scores, provides an objective measure of knowledge and skill acquisition aligned with course learning outcomes. Satisfaction surveys capture the affective and pedagogical dimensions of the learning experience, including perceptions of content delivery, course relevance, assessment clarity, and the quality of academic guidance received. In Malaysia, the Student's Feedback Online (SuFO) system has become a standardised institutional instrument for measuring student satisfaction across UiTM programmes. For the purposes of syllabus evaluation, the most pertinent SuFO constructs are those pertaining to students' overall course impression, lecturer professionalism in content delivery, and the quality of teaching and learning activities, as these directly reflect students' experience of the syllabus in action. Studies employing SuFO data have found consistent correlations between high satisfaction scores on pedagogical items and positive academic engagement outcomes. Assessment design is equally central to syllabus effectiveness. Biggs and Tang (2011) emphasise the importance of constructive alignment, which refers to ensuring that assessment tasks directly measure the stated learning outcomes. In VCS105, the Individual Written Assignment (IWA) is explicitly aligned with CLO3 (analysis of art based on form and content), requiring students to respond in essay form to questions spanning major art historical periods and design movements. This alignment between CLO, syllabus delivery, and assessment is considered foundational to valid measurement of student learning.

Written assessment as a measure of art historical understanding

Written examinations and essay assignments remain among the most widely used instruments for assessing conceptual understanding in humanities disciplines (Marzano, 2001). In art history and appreciation courses, essay questions require students to synthesise historical knowledge, apply analytical frameworks, and construct arguments. These are cognitive operations at Bloom's higher-order levels of analysis and evaluation (Bloom et al., 1956). Critically, the effectiveness of written assessment in creative arts education is closely tied to the quality of visual teaching tools and instructional resources deployed throughout the course. Hassan et al. (2023) established that thoughtfully designed visual teaching materials, particularly those grounded in the VARK (Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, Kinaesthetic) model, significantly influence students' capacity for engagement, comprehension, and knowledge retention in arts-based learning contexts. The VCS105 IWA requires students to answer two from four essay questions covering Medieval to Renaissance Art, Baroque and Rococo Art, 19th Century Art Movements, and the evolution of design from Pre-Industrial to Post-Modernism, all of which are core topics within the course's scheme of work, delivered through structured lecture slides and study hint materials aligned with this evidence-based pedagogy.

Materials and Methods

Research design

This study employs a quantitative descriptive research design, using secondary data generated through course assessment and institutional feedback mechanisms. The evaluation was guided by the Course Effectiveness Evaluation Framework for Art and

Design Appreciation (CEEf-ADA), developed by the authors to operationalise the dual measurement of academic achievement and syllabus-relevant student satisfaction as convergent indicators of course effectiveness. The CEEf-ADA framework (*Figure 1*) integrates three input dimensions, namely course design, teaching process, and student profile, that flow through the course delivery layer into two parallel evaluation instruments: the IWA and the SuFO syllabus constructs. These two streams converge at the output layer to produce composite indicators of course effectiveness. This approach is consistent with established practice in arts programme evaluation research within the Malaysian context. Hassan et al. (2025), in their evaluation of the ART’UISM programme, similarly employed structured evaluation frameworks and pre- and post-survey instruments to measure the effectiveness of an art-based intervention on cognitive and affective development outcomes. A post-test-only evaluative framework was applied, whereby student performance on the summative written assignment, administered in Week 12 of the semester, was analysed as the outcome measure of academic achievement. This was complemented by end-of-semester SuFO data, focusing specifically on constructs related to overall course impression, lecturer professionalism, and teaching and learning activities, as these most directly reflect students’ experience of the syllabus. Together, these datasets enable a holistic evaluation of syllabus delivery aligned with the CEEf-ADA framework.

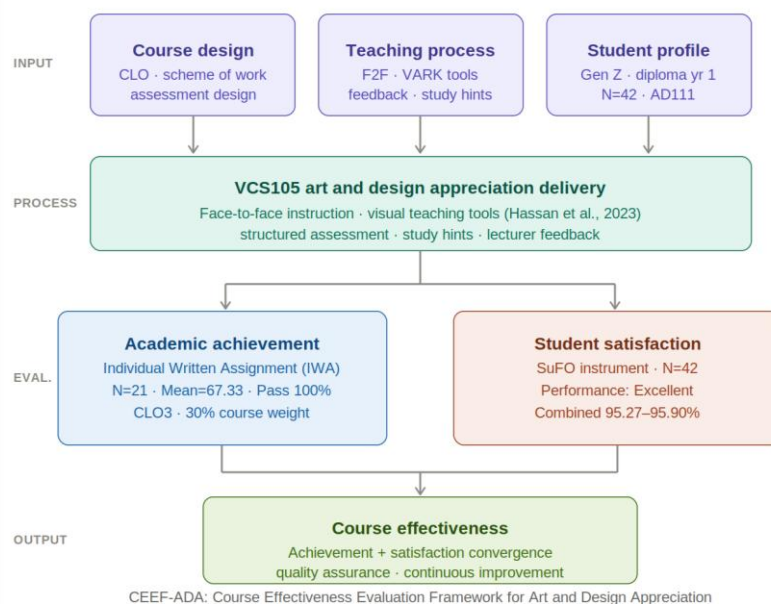


Figure 1. CEEf-ADA: Course Effectiveness Evaluation Framework for Art and Design Appreciation.

Course context, participants and instruments

VCS105 was delivered across two parallel groups, AD1111A and AD1111B, during the October 2025 – February 2026 semester at UiTM Kampus Samarahan. The course carries two credit hours, equivalent to 80 student learning time hours comprising 28 face-to-face and 52 non-face-to-face hours, and is structured over 14 teaching weeks. The Scheme of Work follows a chronological survey of art history, from introductory concepts in Week 1 through to Malaysian and contemporary art in Week 11, with formal assessments integrated at Week 7 (Quiz, 30%), Week 12 (Individual Written

Assignment, 30%), and Week 14 (Group Presentation, 30%). Two groups of first-year Diploma in Art and Design students participated in this study. For the academic achievement component, 21 students from Group AD1111B were included, all of whom completed the IWA and had their results recorded in the official UiTM Marking Report (LE15). For the student satisfaction component, both groups (AD1111A and AD1111B) contributed SuFO responses, yielding a combined sample of 42 respondents (21 per group). All participants were full-time, first-part (Part 1) students enrolled in the Diploma of Art and Design (AD111) programme.

Individual Written Assignment (IWA)

The IWA is a two-hour essay examination carrying 30% of the total course grade. Students are required to answer two from four questions, each worth 15 marks. Questions cover: (Q1) Medieval to Renaissance Art, (Q2) Baroque and Rococo Art, (Q3) 19th Century Art Movements, and (Q4) Design Evolution from Pre-Industrial to Post-Modernism. Marking is guided by a rubric assessing content accuracy, analytical depth, use of specific examples, and response organisation. A minimum passing score is 15 out of 30 (50%). The IWA is directly aligned with CLO3: Analyze appropriate appreciation of art based on the aspects of form and content.

SuFO: Syllabus-relevant constructs

SuFO is UiTM's standardised end-of-semester student feedback instrument comprising 24 items rated on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). For the purposes of this study, analysis was restricted to the three constructs most directly pertaining to syllabus delivery: Section A (Overall Course Impression, 4 items), Section B (Lecturer Professionalism, 7 items), and Section C (Teaching and Learning Activities, 11 items). Within these sections, items specifically relevant to syllabus content and pedagogical delivery include Q2 (course content relevance to field of study), Q3 (assessment methods enhanced learning), Q12 (lecturer explains course content), Q13 (lecturer explains course outcomes), Q15 (lecturer teaches according to plan), Q16 (active student involvement in learning), Q19 (delivery challenges students intellectually), and Q20 (feedback on assessments and assignments). The institutional performance indicator is calculated as the mean of Sections B and C, with scores of 90% and above classified as Excellent.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and grade frequency distribution were computed for the IWA marks. SuFO data were analysed by section and individual item for both groups, with cross-group comparison conducted for key syllabus-relevant items. All student identifiers were anonymised to protect confidentiality, consistent with UiTM's data privacy regulations.

Results and Discussion

Academic Achievement: Individual Written Assignment (IWA)

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the IWA scores of Group AD1111B (N = 21). The distribution reveals a mean score of 67.33 out of 100 (SD = 6.27), indicating

moderate to good performance within the B to B- range under UiTM's grading system. All 21 students achieved scores at or above 62, well above the passing threshold of 50, yielding a 100% pass rate for this assessment component. *Table 2* presents the grade frequency distribution, segmented according to UiTM's standard grading scheme. The largest proportion of students (47.62%) fell within the B- band (scores of 60 to 64), reflecting a foundational level of competency in art historical analysis consistent with first-year diploma entry. Notably, 33.33% of students achieved at the A or A- level, suggesting that a meaningful sub-group demonstrated superior analytical and writing capacity in engaging with the syllabus content. Only one student (4.76%) achieved the highest grade of A, with a score of 83, indicating that the assessment successfully discriminated between performance levels and rewarded depth of art historical knowledge. The concentration of scores in the B- band is not atypical for foundational art history courses administered to first-year diploma students who are encountering formal art historical discourse for the first time. Comparable patterns have been observed in introductory humanities courses, where students often demonstrate satisfactory breadth of content knowledge but require further development in analytical depth and argumentative clarity (Marzano, 2001). The assessment design, which required two essays with specific reference to artworks, artists, and historical context drawn directly from the syllabus, appears to have appropriately challenged students at this entry level, while remaining accessible enough for all to achieve a passing grade.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for IWA scores (Group AD1111B, N = 21).

Statistical measure	Value
Sample size (N)	21
Mean score	67.33
Standard deviation	6.27
Median	65.00
Minimum score	62
Maximum score	83
Range	21
Pass rate	100%

Table 2. Grade frequency distribution of IWA scores (Group AD1111B).

Grade	Mark range	GPA points	Frequency	Percentage
A	80–100	4.00	1	4.76
A-	75–79	3.67	3	14.29
B+	70–74	3.33	3	14.29
B	65–69	3.00	4	19.05
B-	60–64	2.67	10	47.62
Total	n/a	n/a	21	100.00

Syllabus-Focused Student Satisfaction: SuFO Analysis

Table 3 presents the SuFO section averages for the three syllabus-relevant constructs across both groups. Both AD1111A and AD1111B achieved an overall Performance Indicator rating of Excellent. The composite performance indicator, calculated as the mean of Sections B and C, stood at 95.90% for AD1111A and 95.27% for AD1111B, yielding a combined indicator of 95.59%. The overall average across Sections A, B, and C was 95.18% for AD1111A and 94.57% for AD1111B. *Table 4* presents scores for the eight SuFO items most directly pertaining to syllabus delivery and pedagogical quality.

These items were selected because they specifically capture students' experience of the course content, assessment clarity, and the lecturer's execution of the planned teaching programme. Among the eight items, Q12 (lecturer explains course content) and Q20 (lecturer provides feedback for assessments) recorded the highest scores at 96.43% and 95.84% respectively, indicating that students consistently valued systematic content explanation and timely assessment feedback as pillars of effective syllabus delivery. Q13 (lecturer explains course outcomes) scored an identical 96.43% across both groups, reflecting consistent communication of learning objectives throughout the semester. This finding aligns with Biggs and Tang (2011) principle of constructive alignment, which emphasises that students learn more effectively when they understand the intended purpose of each syllabus component.

Table 3. *SuFO Syllabus Constructs by Group (N = 21 per group).*

SuFO Construct	AD1111A (%)	AD1111B (%)	Combined (%)
Section A: Overall Course Impression	93.75	93.16	93.46
Section B: Lecturer Professionalism	95.58	95.41	95.50
Section C: Teaching and Learning Activities	96.21	95.13	95.67
Overall Average (Sections A, B and C)	95.18	94.57	94.88
Performance Indicator (Sections B and C / 2)	95.90	95.27	95.59
Rating	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent

Table 4. *Key Syllabus-Relevant SuFO Item Scores by Group.*

Item	SuFO Statement	A (%)	B (%)	Mean (%)
Q2	Course content is related to my field of study	92.86	92.86	92.86
Q3	Assessment methods enhanced my learning ability	94.05	94.05	94.05
Q12	Lecturer explains the course content	97.62	95.24	96.43
Q13	Lecturer explains the outcomes of the course	96.43	96.43	96.43
Q15	Lecturer teaches according to plan	94.05	95.24	94.64
Q16	Lecturer actively involves students in the learning process	96.43	96.43	96.43
Q19	Delivery style challenges the mind	95.24	90.48	92.86
Q20	Lecturer provides feedback for assessments and assignments	97.62	94.05	95.84
Mean across 8 items		95.54	94.35	94.94

Item Q2 (course content is related to my field of study) scored 92.86% for both groups, indicating strong agreement that the VCS105 syllabus, despite its broad historical scope from prehistoric art through to Post-Modern design, is perceived as professionally relevant by diploma students in graphic design and fine art. This perception of syllabus relevance is a critical precondition for motivated engagement with course content (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Item Q3 (assessment methods enhanced learning) similarly scored 94.05% for both groups, suggesting that the IWA essay format was viewed as a meaningful learning activity rather than merely a summative gatekeeping mechanism. Item Q15 (teaches according to plan) scored 94.05% for AD1111A and 95.24% for AD1111B, confirming that the Scheme of Work was consistently followed across both groups. This consistency in syllabus execution is noteworthy given the content-dense nature of the course, which requires covering art history across more than four millennia within 14 teaching weeks. Item Q19 (delivery challenges the mind) recorded the widest cross-group variation, at 95.24% for AD1111A and 90.48% for AD1111B, suggesting a modest difference in the perceived intellectual stretch of the delivery between groups. While both scores remain within the Excellent band, this variation merits attention in future course planning, particularly regarding the depth of in-class analytical discussion relative to content coverage.

Taken together, the IWA results and syllabus-focused SuFO data converge on a positive picture of VCS105's pedagogical effectiveness for the October 2025 – February 2026 cohort. The 100% pass rate confirms that all students met the minimum

threshold for art analytical competency as defined by the course's learning outcomes. The SuFO ratings in the Excellent band reinforce this from the student perspective, affirming that the syllabus delivery approach, which combined systematic content coverage following the Scheme of Work, a clear assessment rubric, detailed study hints, and responsive feedback, was experienced as pedagogically effective. Notably, the distribution of IWA marks, with nearly half of students (47.62%) concentrated in the B-band, signals an area for syllabus refinement. While all students passed, strengthening higher-order analytical skills and the ability to provide specific, well-contextualised examples from art history could help shift more students into the B and above bands. This may be addressed through more scaffolded in-class discussion of model essay responses, formative writing practice prior to the IWA, or the embedding of visual analysis tasks within weekly lecture sessions to reinforce the connection between art historical knowledge and critical written expression. The strong Section B (Lecturer Professionalism) scores, particularly for items related to approachability (Q8: 96.43% and 95.24%) and accessibility for discussion (Q9: 96.43% and 95.24%), indicate that students felt supported in engaging with challenging syllabus content. This relational dimension of teaching quality is increasingly recognised in the education literature as a mediating factor in student academic engagement and performance (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). When students perceive their lecturer as approachable and knowledgeable, they are more likely to seek clarification on difficult content, participate actively in discussion, and approach assessments with greater confidence.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the syllabus delivery effectiveness of VCS105 (Art and Design Appreciation) during the October 2025 – February 2026 semester at UiTM Kampus Samarahan, using two convergent evidence sources: Individual Written Assignment performance data and syllabus-focused student satisfaction constructs from the SuFO instrument. The findings indicate that the course successfully achieved its primary learning goals, as evidenced by a 100% pass rate and a mean IWA score of 67.33, alongside an Excellent performance indicator of 95.59% across the two student groups. These results contribute to a growing body of evidence supporting the value of structured, syllabus-aligned pedagogy in creative arts appreciation courses at diploma level. They also underscore the importance of multi-source course evaluation, using both achievement data and pedagogical satisfaction feedback, as a basis for continuous syllabus improvement. Importantly, the findings resonate with the broader argument that art-based educational programmes, when well-designed and rigorously evaluated, yield measurable gains in student confidence, knowledge, and engagement (Hassan et al., 2025). The role of visual teaching tools and lecturer-facilitated instruction in supporting these outcomes further aligns with recent scholarship on learning preferences among Gen Z creative design students (Wardi et al., 2025), affirming that responsive, structured syllabus delivery remains central to effective arts education in the Malaysian higher education landscape.

Future research should incorporate comparative analysis across multiple semesters to identify longitudinal trends in IWA performance and SuFO satisfaction patterns. The inclusion of pre-semester diagnostic data alongside post-assessment results would allow more rigorous pre-post evaluation of learning gain. Additionally, qualitative data from student focus groups or reflective journals would provide richer insight into how

students construct understanding of art history through the VCS105 syllabus, and which topics within the scheme of work are most and least accessible to first-year diploma learners. The findings have practical implications for faculty course coordinators and curriculum designers within creative arts programmes in Malaysia. Prioritising formative feedback tied directly to syllabus topics, scaffolding analytical writing skills from early weeks, and maintaining consistent syllabus execution across parallel teaching groups appear to be key drivers of both academic achievement and pedagogical satisfaction in foundational art appreciation courses.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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