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# From STEM to STEAM Education: Exploring the Importance, Need, and Rationale for Integrating Arts into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Learning

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## ABSTRACT

*Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education is a global priority because economies need innovation and skilled workers. However, moving from STEM to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) addresses the limits of discipline-based learning. Integrating the arts can strengthen creativity, critical thinking, communication, and human-centred problem-solving. This review examines the theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, implementation models, and policy implications of STEAM education. It explains why arts integration is educationally justified, necessary for learning systems, and important for preparing students to address complex future challenges. A systematic scoping review examined 43 peer-reviewed publications from Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Springer, and Taylor & Francis, published between 2010 and 2025. Included sources covered empirical research, theoretical frameworks, and policy analyses related to STEAM education, interdisciplinary learning, design thinking, and twenty-first-century competencies. Studies were assessed using quality-appraisal parameters. Thematic synthesis organised evidence into conceptual foundations, learning outcomes, implementation challenges, and research gaps. The literature indicates that STEAM education can produce stronger learning outcomes than STEM-only approaches, including for emerging bilingual and underrepresented students. Arts integration improves understanding of STEM concepts, motivation, engagement, creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. Its rationale is supported by constructivism, experiential learning, design thinking, and social constructivism. However, implementation is limited by unclear definitions, insufficient teacher preparation, assessment difficulties, and unequal access to resources. Effective STEAM education requires integrated curricula, extensive teacher training, suitable assessment models, equitable resources, and alignment among policy, funding, and institutional structures. Teacher education must develop skills in arts-based STEM teaching, design thinking, and culturally responsive practice. STEAM does not weaken STEM rigor. Instead, it adds creativity, design awareness, cultural meaning-making, ethical understanding, communication, and human-centred innovation. Strategic investment in curriculum, teacher capacity, and equitable implementation can support all learners, innovation, and changing careers.*

## Introduction

### The Global Rise of STEM Education and the Emerging Transition toward STEAM

In the last 20 years, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education has been a strategic priority in nations and education systems all over the world. Governments, schools, and employers have put a lot of effort into increasing the amount of STEM curricula, teacher preparation, and STEM learning, in part because of worries about economic competitiveness, workforce readiness and the technological requirements of the 21st century knowledge economy. STEM education fosters innovation, creativity, and affords students the chance to build critical thinking, problem solving and analytical skills all of which are vital for sustainable development. (Alali et al., 2023)

However, there is a significant gap in STEM education pedagogics and conceptual development, even with significant investments in STEM education on a global scale. The human capacities that make for innovation and human flourishing — including creativity, design sensibility, aesthetic judgment, communication, empathy, and ethical reasoning — have been the subject of criticism of the traditional STEM methods, which emphasize knowledge of STEM disciplines in isolation and focus on technical and computational abilities. This recognition has been the impetus to a substantial education movement: transforming STEM education to STEAM education, where the Arts are incorporated formally and meaningfully into science, technology, engineering, and math education.

Internationally, interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary learning in schools is a growing and popular field for educational reform, and the term Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) has been used to discuss educational paradigms that aim to incorporate learning in the arts into learning in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). This pedagogical shift mirrors theoretical progress in science education and the social needs for learners to be equipped with the ability to handle complexity, find innovative solutions, engage in interdisciplinary communication, and bring value in societies with swift changes.

### The Case for Arts Integration: From Necessity to Educational Imperative

There are several arguments in favor of STEAM education, which are interdependent. First, creativity and innovation are no longer a luxury in the current economies, but core skills that are required across all sectors. Arts integration fosters divergent thinking and imaginative problem-solving skills and produces multiple solutions to problems that are not well defined—skills that are catalytic for innovation and are often underdeveloped in traditional STEM teaching.

Second, authentic problem solving, especially in addressing global problems, requires human-centered, multi-disciplinary approaches. In engineering design, scientific innovation, and technological development, technical skills in addition to communication, visualization, empathy, and aesthetic judgment, which are fostered in arts education, are increasingly essential. The literature claims that the education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) must be authentic, yet models and modelling offers a foundation to make the STEM disciplines more authentic, but how to make STEM education authentic is still difficult to determine. (Hallström et al., 2023)

Third, student engagement and motivation are at the core of issues of persistence and achievement in STEM fields, especially in the case of historically underrepresented student groups. Arts-integrated strategies can boost intrinsic motivation, provide context for learning, and establish more inclusive learning environments where diverse students see ways to participate and contribute.

Fourthly, cognitive science has shown that one can use a variety of representations and expressions such as visual, kinesthetic, musical, and performance to support understanding of concepts and retention of knowledge. Arts integration takes advantage of a variety of intelligences and ways of learning, leading to deeper and more lasting learning for all students.

Fifth, equity and inclusion require educational strategies that recognize and honor students' various identities, cultural experiences and ways of knowing. Culture responsive STEAM education opens up opportunity for students' cultural expression, artistic traditions, and meaning making processes to be seen as a form of knowledge and creativity.

## Problem Statement, Research Gap, and Contribution

Although there is an increasing interest and enthusiasm towards STEAM education worldwide, there are still many gaps in systematic knowledge. There is confusion among many educators, policy makers, and researchers about the theoretical underpinnings for arts integration, the evidence of its effectiveness as STEAM, and the systemic conditions needed to successfully implement it. Previous reviews have been limited either to specific STEAM models or to specific grades, and have not offered a broad synthesis in a variety of implementation settings, theory, or outcomes.

This mini-guide review fills these gaps by presenting a robust and evidence-based synthesis of STEAM education that considers conceptual frameworks, empirical research, implementation models, equity implications, and policy directions. The review is designed to be useful to a variety of audiences, including educational policymakers interested in matching the system-level changes required for STEAM in schools to evidence from research; curriculum designers and instructional leaders who are developing STEAM curriculum; teacher educators who are developing teachers for STEAM instruction; and researchers interested in exploring the field of STEAM pedagogy and outcomes.

## Research Questions and Objectives

The following broad questions will help guide this review:

1. What is the concept of STEAM education and how is it different conceptually and pedagogically from traditional STEM approaches?
2. What are the theories that justify and support the STEM to STEAM shift?
3. What is the evidence of the effectiveness of STEAM education for student learning, engagement, and outcomes for diverse populations?
4. What are the models of STEAM implementation and what are their unique characteristics, strengths and limitations?
5. What are the big challenges and blockers to meaningful, scale STEAM implementation?
6. What policy, curricular, pedagogical and systemic changes are needed to support equitable STEAM education?

The goals are to: (a) synthesize and critically analyze the literature on STEAM education from 2010-2025, (b) present coherent theoretical frameworks for why STEAM education is beneficial for STEM learning, (c) examine the empirical evidence for STEAM outcomes, (d) identify STEAM implementation models and implementation challenges, (e) examine equity dimensions and implications for inclusion, and (f) articulate recommendations for policy and practice that are evidence-based.

### Contribution and Significance

This review is a significant advancement to the research, theory, and practice of STEAM education because it serves to systematically and comprehensively synthesize the literature. It provides clarity about the conceptual ambiguities surrounding definitions and models of STEAM, synthesizes evidence across multiple outcome domains, and makes the case that STEAM is not just a curricular innovation, but an educationally justified and necessary response to the current need for learning. The review synthesizes theory and research into a knowledge base for substantively reimagining STEAM education to be high quality and equitable for all.

## Conceptual Background

### Defining STEM and STEAM Education

It is important to have a clear understanding of some key definitions and why there's a need to move away from STEM education.

STEM Education is an interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics to cultivate skills in these interdependent fields. It is an issue recognized and has been a challenge in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) education worldwide, and STEM education has been emphasized at all levels in schools because the students are required to apply the knowledge of the various disciplines in an interdisciplinary way to solve problems. The characteristics of STEM education are usually focused on practical learning, project learning, inquiry learning, problem-solving, and application of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) knowledge in practical activities. (Darmawansah et al., 2023) Although STEM education is a welcome departure from the disciplinary approach to teaching, current STEM curricula have come under attack for excluding the qualitative and human aspects of knowledge and expression.

STEAM Education is a way of enriching STEM with a deliberate and meaningful integration of the Arts. STEM and STEAM education is about connecting science, technology, engineering, mathematics and the arts, and STEAM is about favoring deep and collaborative learning on students through curricular integration in K-12 science education. The Arts in STEAM involves several modalities and domains: (Videla et al., 2021)

- **Visual Arts:** Painting, drawing, sculpture, design, visual communication and graphic design developing spatial reasoning, aesthetic judgment and representational thinking.
- **Performing Arts:** Music, dance, theatre and movement involving embodied learning, rhythmic thinking and emotional expression.

- **Design:** User centered design, product design, architecture, industrial design and design thinking that focuses on human needs, innovation and an iterative approach to problem-solving.
- **Humanities:** literature, history, philosophy, and cultural studies that offer a historical context, an ethical framework, and a humanistic perspective on technology and science.
- **Communication and Media Arts:** Writing, rhetoric, digital media, journalism and multimedia production that builds communication clarity and awareness of the audience.
- **Aesthetics and Creative Expression:** Developing aesthetic awareness, imagination, creative agency and a range of ways of making meaning and expressing them.

Importantly, the Arts in STEAM are not enrichment, nor are they add-on features to STEM curricula; rather they are integral to STEM curricula. Instead, they are central components that change the way we work with pedagogy, learning outcomes and learning experiences. By shifting the emphasis from the technical aspects of content delivery in STEAM to a whole person perspective, arts integration can help art graduates become creative, communicative, emotionally intelligent, and ethically aware human-centered innovators.

**Historical Development of STEM and STEAM Education**

In the early 2000s, STEM education became a clear policy priority in the United States, fueled by concerns about international competitiveness in science and technology, the predicted STEM labor shortage, and the perceived loss of interest and performance in science and mathematics by students. STEM education was put on a strategic level in federal policy and funding, through national reports such as the National Academies and National Science Foundation.

This policy emphasis was echoed in the subsequent growth of STEM programmes around the world. STEM programs, competitions and learning interventions were created by universities, schools and non-profit organizations. Teacher Education Providers integrated STEM pedagogy into curricula. Governments made curriculum standards and accountability measures congruent with STEM learning objectives.

But in the second decade of this millennium critical views came up. It was observed that there was a lack of awareness of STEM education and some STEM classrooms still used the conventional teaching model which is teacher-centred. Additionally, other important learning objectives were neglected: creativity, communication/collaboration and cultural meaning-making, as well as ethical reasoning. Sometimes the social, ethical, environmental and human aspects of authentic innovation were missing and standardized STEM curriculum frameworks reduced complex problems to simple technical solutions.

The shift to STEAM education was being explicitly recognized by education advocates, curriculum designers, and researchers as a way to integrate arts and humanities with STEM disciplines, as a means to build true 21st century competencies. Integrated or interdisciplinary curriculum is increasingly being recognized as a way to teach the 21st century competencies, with periods of implementation of integrated curriculum reviewed to consider their relevance to the 21st century, and multiple definitions currently in use to describe integrated curriculum identified on a continuum. This recognition is an extension of the long history of progressive education that promotes student-centered, interdisciplinary learning and of recent research on learning science and innovation requirements.

### How STEAM Differs from Traditional STEM Approaches

The differences between STEAM and traditional STEM is not just a matter of semantics, but a matter of pedagogical and philosophical difference as well:

**Epistemological Integration:** In traditional STEM curricula the disciplines are often taught separately and integration is mostly related to the application of mathematics (e.g., "take this engineering problem and solve it using math"). STEAM education combines epistemologies (ways of knowing and investigating) as each approach provides unique and complementary ways to investigate and express ideas: artistic thinking, scientific thinking, engineering thinking, and mathematics thinking.

**Creative and Aesthetic Dimensions:** STEAM makes creativity, imaginative thinking, aesthetic judgement and multiple modes of expression a primary learning goal, not a learning outcome. Design thinking and art thinking have intersections, with art thinking incorporating mindsets of emotional engagement, intuition, and tolerance of ambiguity as well as cognitive strategies such as the use of metacognition, resource banks, generators and constraints, prolonged research, problem-creation, conversation with the work, closure delay, and reflection and thematic coherence, and emphasizing these elements and strategies in design pedagogy can expand possibilities for creativity and innovation. (Jacobs, 2018)

**Human-Centered Problem Framing:** STEM tends to focus on problem-solving techniques, STEAM is specifically focused on human needs, perspectives, and contexts. Arts-informed design thinking/user-centered approaches guide problem definition and solution development.

**Communication and Representation:** STEAM education embraces multiple ways of communicating and representing, including visual, verbal, performative, kinesthetic, and numerical, and understands that form of expression varies based on the problem and the audience. Arts education fosters the ability to work in these modes.

**Cultural and Ethical Dimensions:** STEAM education explicitly considers the cultural, ethical and social justice aspects of scientific and technological progress. Such examination is provided by the humanities and arts.

**Engagement and Inclusion:** STEAM education expands the possibilities for how students may interact with scientific and mathematical practice, allowing students to see themselves as contributors to their own learning in a variety of different styles and formats, including visual, performance, narrative, design, and other forms of art.

## Theoretical Framework

### Constructivist Learning Theory

According to the constructivist learning theory, learning is a product of active construction by the learner, gained from experiences, reflections, and interactions with the environment, instead of a product of passive reception of the information presented by the teacher. Constructivism acts as an alternative to the educational process, especially in learning, where the knowledge of students is constructed on the exploration of knowledge through the activities in which the students are involved, giving the students opportunities to express their ideas and thoughts about the situation they experience, and promote students in creative and innovative learning, and in logical thinking. (Romdhon et al., 2024)

Arts integration is justified by constructivist principles, acknowledging that students build knowledge in a variety of representational systems and engagement modes as part of STEAM education. Students are actively building and sharing their knowledge when they make visual representations, design artifacts, write narratives, make demonstrations, or compose music while learning in STEM. The arts add more ways this construction can take place, thereby enabling deeper and more lasting learning.

**Experiential Learning Theory**

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) by David Kolb suggests that learning is a continuous process that involves four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. The four stages of the experiential learning models (experience, reflection, abstract concepts, and active experimentation) can improve student involvement in learning, improve the understanding of the subject matter better, prepare students to use critical and creative thinking in learning, and build a collaborative work, and can be applied at all levels of education. (Rahmi, 2024)

STEAM learning is very much in line with experiential learning, with concrete, multisensory experiences (e.g., hands-on design challenges, artistic creation, engineering prototyping), time for reflection and meaning-making, abstraction and concept-building, and active experimentation and iteration. The arts add the experiential aspects by involving kinesthetic, emotional and aesthetic aspects of learning.

**Social Constructivism**

Based on the work of Vygotsky and others, social constructivist theory highlights the social and cultural nature of learning and the importance of engaging in interaction with others and being mediated by cultural tools and practices. One of the dominant views that proliferated the learner-centered pedagogical model in education is the social constructivist approach that emphasizes on the critical, problem solving and collaborative learning strategies to promote meaningful learning achievement with students as active thinkers, co-constructors and active participants of the learning process. (Mishra, 2023)

STEAM education is consistent with the social constructivist learning approach because of its emphasis on project work, peer interaction, community involvement, and the consideration of cultural contexts and multiple ways of knowing. Arts integrated projects are frequently collaborative, critical by peers and exhibit to the community – all social interaction that is leveraged in order to learn and build knowledge.

**Design Thinking**

Design thinking is a problem-solving process that is used across various fields such as design, architecture, education, business, and social innovation. Design thinking originated from architecture, design and art and is now used in various fields and may be applied in the teaching/learning process to build twenty first century skills, enhance creativity and innovation, and is a human-centred problem solving approach. (Luka, 2020)

The DT process usually encompasses six stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, test and iterate, which focuses on understanding the user's needs, developing multiple ideas, making a representation, testing the ideas made, learning from the representation and feedback, and developing another new iteration. Design thinking is a people-first problem-solving approach, starting from human needs to provide creative solutions to different topics, focusing on the combination of team communication, the cooperation and exchange between interdisciplinary talents, and a new teaching model based on the changes in the design environment. (Tu et al., 2018)

Design thinking is arts-rooted and is natural to STEAM learning. It offers a pedagogical framework that focuses on human needs, creative ideation, iterative prototyping, and collaborative refinement, which all involve the use of artistic thinking, technical knowledge, and engineering practice.

**Creativity Theory and Multiple Ways of Thinking**

Creativity is at the heart of STEAM learning, which is defined as the production of new and useful ideas. STEM-based problem solving includes cognitive processes that enable learning across the sciences, mathematics and engineering, learning through problem solving, interdisciplinary concept development, in addition to the cognitive processes of critical thinking, incorporating critical mathematical modelling and philosophical inquiry, systems thinking and design based thinking, which all contribute to adaptive and innovative thinking, the end goal of which is learning innovation by the generation of powerful disciplinary knowledge and thinking processes that can be transferred to other problem challenges. (English, 2023)

In the field of current creativity researches, it is possible to differentiate between divergent thinking (generation of many new ideas) and convergent thinking (decision and selection of best ideas). Creativity is an important 21st century skill which encompasses the ability to think in unique and varied ways (divergent thinking) as well as the ability to select from ideas to reach a correct solution (convergent thinking); studies have indicated that those who are able to think in unique and detailed ways are also good at thinking convergently, so convergent thinking should be incorporated into theoretical frameworks of creativity. (Rawlings et al., 2025)

Both dimensions are developed: arts-based activities promote divergent thinking and generative; STEM content and engineering practices promote convergent thinking and evaluation. They build strong creative capacity as a team.

**Multiple Intelligences Theory**

According to Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory, intelligence is not a single one but there are multiple intelligences, which are basically different and relatively independent cognitive capabilities: Linguistic Intelligence, Logical-Mathematical Intelligence, Spatial Intelligence, Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence, Musical Intelligence, Interpersonal Intelligence, Intrapersonal Intelligence, and Naturalistic Intelligence. The traditional STEM education focuses on logical-mathematical and to some extent spatial intelligence, which may overlook students with other intelligences.

STEAM education, which integrates the visual arts, music, dance, theater, and interpersonal working together, brings a wider range of intelligences into play, and more students are finding a way to identify and cultivate their skills, and to see themselves as capable of STEM.

### Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Learning

Interdisciplinary learning means that multiple disciplines, content, methods and perspectives are considered and integrated purposefully in order to solve a complex problem or to explore a rich theme. The term transdisciplinary learning takes this one step further, creating frameworks and approaches that go beyond the disciplinary boundaries altogether. However, transdisciplinary approaches for sustainability involve bringing together researchers from natural and social sciences as well as non-researchers to address gaps in scientific understanding and to catalyze change, and research shows that one of the most important competencies of transdisciplinarians is the capacity for managing complex collaborative relationships for sustainability that involve different institutional logics, approaches, methods, goals and values. (Harris et al., 2024)

STEAM education is an interdisciplinary (and transdisciplinary) learning. It connects STEM subjects and the arts; it also fosters skills in working across disciplines, disciplines and humanities, and in the creation of new solutions that cross disciplinary lines.

### 21st-Century Skills Framework

In fact, the 4Cs (Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Creativity) are just some of the contemporary frameworks for 21st century competencies that focus on skills needed to thrive in dynamic, knowledge-based economies and complex social environments. The 21st century/4Cs skills are essential and are categorized into four competencies: "Communication," "Creativity," "Critical Thinking," and "Collaboration" and teachers' understanding of these skills may be the determining factor in the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions. (Herlinawati et al., 2024)

The learning is clearly geared towards the development of these skills in STEAM education. The 21st century skills that employers, higher education institutions and policymakers have identified as being essential are all developed through design challenges, collaborative projects, iterative problem-solving, multiple ways of communicating and connection to authentic problems.

### Integrative Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is shown in figure 1 that demonstrates how arts integration supports STEM learning in a variety of ways:

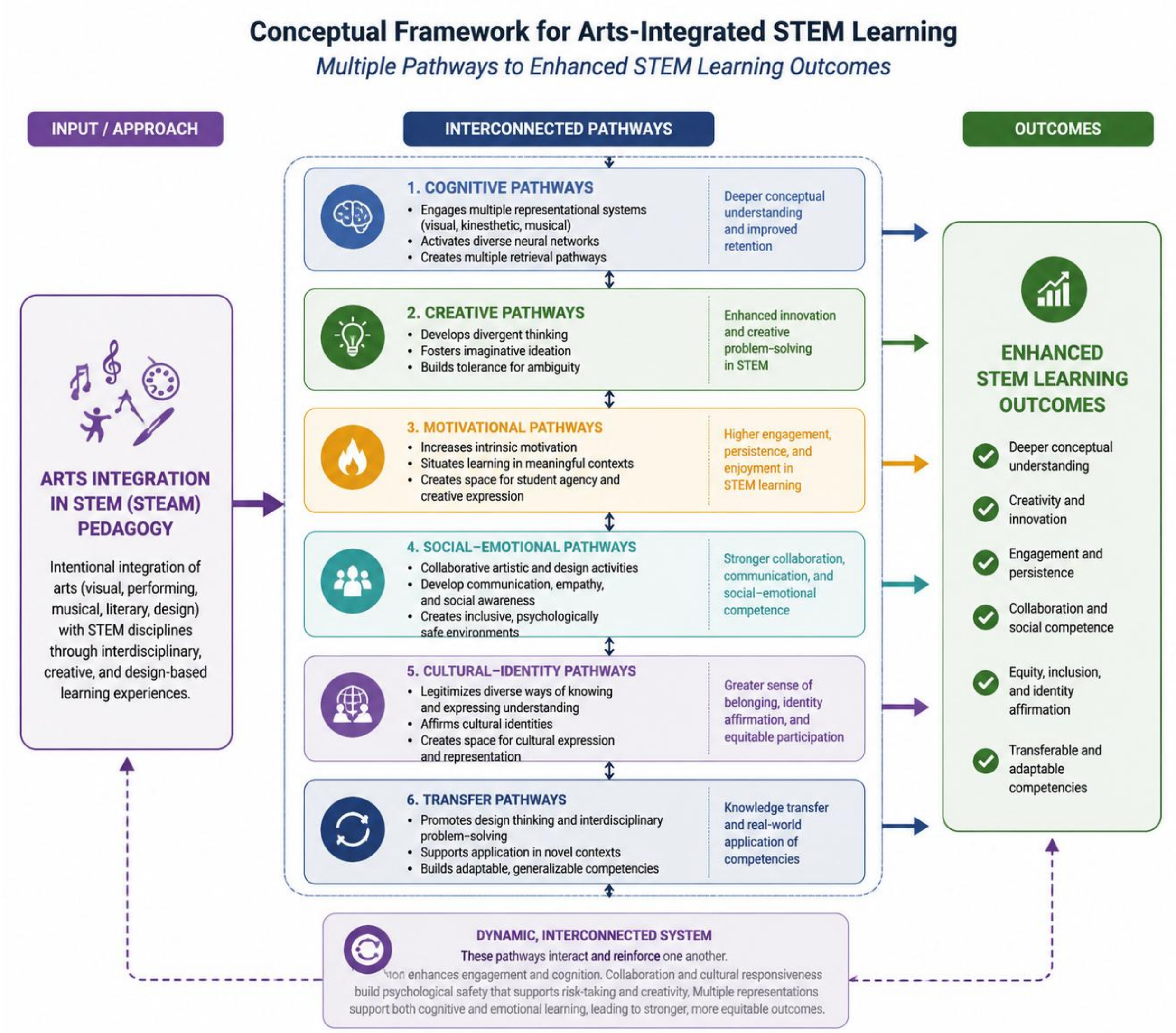


**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Arts-Integrated STEM Learning**

The framework proposes that arts integration works in a variety of mutually reinforcing ways to improve STEM learning outcomes:

**Cognitive Pathways:** Arts integration uses multiple representational systems (visual, kinesthetic, musical), resulting in multiple neural networks being activated, and multiple retrieval pathways for knowledge. This enhances conceptual knowledge and memory.

**Creative Pathways:** Artistic engagement fosters divergent thinking, imaginative ideation, and tolerance for ambiguity, all of which are key to innovation and creative problem-solving in STEM settings.

**Motivational Pathways:** Arts-integrated activities promote intrinsic motivation, provide meaningful contexts, and allow for and encourage student voice and choice, thereby improving engagement.

**Social-Emotional Pathways:** Artistic and design work in collaboration with others fosters communication, empathy, social awareness and social interaction, and provide inclusive and psychologically safe learning environments.

**Cultural-Identity Pathways**: STEAM education validates multiple approaches to thinking and understanding, gives voice and place to cultural expression, and affirm cultural identity, increasing sense of belonging.

**Transfer Pathways:** Learning to design and think with an interdisciplinary problem solving approach through STEAM experiences is extended to new situations, promoting flexible and transferable skills.

These pathways do not exist in isolation, but are interconnected. Increased motivation leads to greater content engagement, resulting in deeper conceptual understanding and creative ideas. Collaborative and culturally responsive pedagogies foster psychologically safe spaces that are conducive to risk taking and learning. Multiple representational systems facilitate cognitive and emotional learning.

## Methodology of the Review

### Review Design

This review uses a systematic scoping review methodology based on previously established frameworks by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and modified by Levac, Colquhoun and O'Brien (2010). The scoping review approach would be especially appropriate for a rapidly emerging, multidisciplinary field with a diverse literature, a contested definitional perimeter and the objective of providing a comprehensive picture of the research area and highlighting gaps and directions for future research, as is the case for STEAM education.

### Information Sources and Databases

To make sure the search was comprehensive, multiple databases in the academic community were searched:

- Scopus – multidisciplinary publication which covers the fields of education, psychology, engineering and social sciences
- Web of Science – core collection, journal coverage is comprehensive and citation tracking is available
- ERIC (Education Resource Information Center) – education-specific database with a lot of K-12 and higher education resources
- ScienceDirect – peer-reviewed journals in STEM and education fields
- Elsevier – scientific, medical and technical multi-disciplinary publisher with many STEAM-relevant journals
- Taylor & Francis and Sage – good coverage of education and social science publishers
- IEEE Xplore = engineering and technology education research
- Google Scholar – supplemental gray literature searching and coverage

These searches have been carried out from October 2024 to January 2025. No language restrictions were made, but the results were filtered to English-language publications. A variety of complementary approaches were used in the search strategy:

1. **Keyword searches:** Combining core terms with Boolean operators
2. **Citation tracking:** Examining reference lists of identified papers
3. **Hand searching:** Reviewing contents of key journals in STEAM education, science education, and curriculum

**Search Terms and Boolean Strings**

Primary search strings used were:

- "STEAM education" OR "arts integrated STEM" OR "STEM arts integration"
- "STEAM" AND (learning outcomes OR achievement OR engagement OR motivation)
- arts integration" AND ("science education" OR "STEM learning" OR "technology education")
- interdisciplinary learning AND (STEM OR science OR engineering)
- "design thinking" and ("education" or "pedagogy" or "learning")
- creativity and (STEM education or science education or problem-solving)
- 21st century skills AND STEAM or STEM or interdisciplinary
- (project-based learning) AND (STEM OR science)
- Constructivist learning AND (STEM OR science education)
- ("experiential learning" AND "STEM") OR ("experiential learning" AND "science") OR ("experiential learning" AND "engineering")

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

**Inclusion Criteria:**

**Publication Type:** Peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews and research reports from reputable organizations (UNESCO, OECD, National Academies)

**Time period:** 2010 – 2025 (seminal theoretical works prior to 2010 included if fundamental)

**Language:** English-language publications

**Focus:** STEAM education; STEM education with arts integration; interdisciplinary STEM; design thinking in education; creativity and innovation in STEM; 21st century competencies; curriculum reform; teacher preparation in STEM/STEAM; equity in STEM education

**Evidence type:** Empirical research (quantitative or qualitative or mixed methods), theoretical frameworks, systematic reviews, policy analyses, program evaluations

**Exclusion Criteria:**

- Non-peer-reviewed sources or Opinion pieces/editorials
- None of the publications cover aspects directly related to teaching and learning of STEM.
- Papers with inadequate methodology or detail

- Reproduce publications or secondary analyses with no new contribution
- Research that has been limited to single technologies or tools without an educational context.
- Any research on STEM subjects other than education, learning or pedagogy

**Screening and Selection Process**

A two-stage screening was done:

**Stage 1** – **Title and Abstract Review:** the titles and abstracts were reviewed independently by two reviewers according to the inclusion criteria. Articles that obviously met or might meet the criteria for inclusion moved to full-text review. Any disagreements were be settled by discussion or by calling in a third critic.

**Stage 2** – **Full Text Review:** Full texts of potentially relevant articles were retrieved and assessed in detail against inclusion criteria. Documentation of reasons of exclusion. The decision to include was done by consensus.

**Quality Appraisal**

The included studies were evaluated for methodological quality using modified versions of available rating scales (GRADE, Cochrane, CASP). In the case of empirical research, quality factors were:

- Well-defined research questions and objectives
- Appropriate research design
- Appropriate sampling method and number of samples
- Valid and reliable measurement instruments are used.
- Advanced statistical tools and analysis techniques.
- Description of dilimitations, limitations and boundaries of the research
- Relevant conclusions that are based on evidence

For theoretical/review papers:

- Well-defined scope and conceptual framework
- Comprehensive literature coverage
- Proficiency in handling complex data and analyses
- Articulated theoretical contributions that are clearly expressed.
- Working in a suitable place in the knowledge area

No studies were excluded based on quality alone, but rather quality assessments guided interpretation and weighting of different sources for synthesis.

**Data Extraction and Management**

An extraction form was designed and tested, and included:

- Title of the study, authors, year, country, journal name)
- Design, methodology, technical aspects of the study.
- Research questions and objectives

- Grade level, demographics, context (population/participants)
- Intervention/program description
- Outcome measures and results are clearly defined and aligned.
- Limitations and implications
- Theoretical frameworks employed

The data was then transferred to a structured spreadsheet for thematic synthesis and analysis.

**Thematic Synthesis Approach**

Thematic synthesis was used as a way of analyzing the data due to the heterogeneity of included studies. This involved:

1. **Coding:** Initial open coding of data extracted to identify concepts, themes and patterns
2. **Categorization:** Codes were organized into provisional themes in line with the review questions and conceptual framework.
3. **Refinement:** Definition of the theme and connections between themes through consensus discussion, iterative refinement.
4. **Integration:** Combining themes into a meaningful whole in terms of the major content areas.

The main themes with regard to the objectives of the review were:

- Theoretical bases and conceptual models
- Effective practice cases in STEAM education for the national level and beyond
- Student learning outcomes and achievement are covered by this.
- Pupil involvement, motivation and attitudes
- Development of creativity and innovation
- Interpersonal and teamwork abilities
- Equity and inclusion dimensions are:
- Teacher preparation and professional development.
- Assessments and measures to be used
- Some of the difficulties and obstacles to implementation are as follows:
- Policy and systemic considerations

**Limitations of Review Methodology**

This review recognizes that there are a number of limitations:

**Definitional Heterogeneity:** STEAM and interdisciplinary STEM are not consistently defined and operationalized across studies, which makes it difficult to compare and synthesize.

**Limited longitudinal data:** Many studies use cross-sectional and short-term designs and so inferences regarding long-term impacts are limited.

**Publication bias:** STEAM may be more effective than is seen in the studies that are getting published.

**Context Specificity:** The majority of the research is done in a North American and European context; it may not be generalizable to other regions.

**Measurement Challenges:** Uncertainties in the operationalization of outcomes (achievement, creativity, engagement) across studies make synthesis challenging.

**Implementation Fidelity:** Many studies have failed to describe or consider the quality of implementation, and it is unclear if "STEAM" was implemented meaningfully.

**Language Restrictions:** Only English-language publications may be used, which can also exclude research conducted in other languages.

**Emerging Field:** Evidence base is still relatively new and small for STEAM education compared to other more well-developed fields.

### PRISMA-Style Screening Flow

The PRISMA-Style Literature Screening Flow Diagram is shown in figure 2.

The PRISMA-style literature screening flow diagram shows how the studies were selected step by step. First, 2,847 records were identified through database searching. After removing duplicates, 1,804 records remained for screening. These records were checked by title and abstract, and 1,600 irrelevant studies were removed. After this, 204 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. From these, 161 articles were excluded because they did not meet the required criteria. Finally, 43 high-quality studies were included in the review for the final analysis.

## Importance of Steam Education

### Creativity and Innovation

Creativity is a basic imperative of the 21st-century economies and societies. Creative thinking is the foundation of innovation, which is the development of new solutions, products, and approaches. However, traditional STEM education has frequently privileged technical and analytical thinking, while neglecting creative and generative thinking, and imagination.

STEAM education has a very clear purpose of promoting creativity in several ways. Divergent thinking (generating many different, novel ideas) is fostered through artistic engagement. Problem-solving that is open-ended with no correct answer allows for imaginative solving. Creative contribution is normalised in collaborative ideation activities. Models and inspiration for innovative thinking through exposure to art and creative processes.

The ability to collaborate to solve problems – including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication (4Cs) – is the most important skill in the context of the 21st century learning skills development; design jams and playful design activity show that participants were motivated, and that playful design jams increased their creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaborative engagement. (Tang et al., 2020)

The link between arts and innovation is not just correlational, but mechanistic: arts education leads to cognitive flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, aesthetic sensitivity and imaginative thinking abilities that are essential to real innovation. This is becoming more and more apparent—Google, IDEO, and Apple, for example, hire arts-trained people expressly for their cognitive abilities that can help propel their company's innovation.

## Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

STEAM education is about sophisticated critical thinking and problem solving. The four STEAM programs studied comparatively taught both discipline specific and beyond discipline character-building skills, with the skills taught including critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration and communication; and creativity and innovation. (Bertrand & Namukasa, 2020)

Multidisciplinary problems are ill-structured problems and are typical of real world problems that involve combining evidence from various sources, taking into account different viewpoints, assessing alternative solutions and operating under conditions of uncertainty. These processes require thinking. Arts-integrated approaches facilitate such thinking by: (a) creating problems with multiple points of view (technical, aesthetic, ethical, human-centered); (b) valuing a diversity of evidence and points of view; (c) emphasizing iteration and refinement instead of single “right” answers; and (d) encouraging dialectical thinking that holds tensions between competing values and constraints.

## Student Engagement and Motivation

Students' engagement and motivation are key indicators of achievement and retention in learning. However, research is robust on the decline of engagement in STEM, especially among girls, students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, and low-income students. Student-centered, course-based undergraduate research experiences (CUREs) are designed to expand students' access to authentic science opportunities and literature suggests that involvement in a CURE is correlated with student science identity development, science self-efficacy, motivation, and "thinking like a scientist" as well as pre-post increases in these variables, with multiple regression analyses showing that both student and instructor CURE interactive behaviors and a CURE were strong predictors of pre/postsemester increases in student motivation, science identity development, collaboration, and perceived opportunity to make relevant scientific contributions. (Esparza et al., 2020)

There are a number of mechanisms by which STEAM education boosts engagement. Relevance is increased by authentic problems that are meaningful and placed in real world situations. Activities in creative expression and art production offer intrinsically motivating activities. Social engagement and support through collaborative work. The use of multiple content areas to learn about and show understanding of the subject matter, increases multiple avenues for success and recognition.

## Conceptual Understanding in STEM Subjects

One of the major tenets of STEAM education is that the arts enhance understanding of the STEM content. The study found that students in the STEAM lessons showed more growth in physical science benchmark assessments than students in the STEM-only physical science curriculum, supporting the hypothesis that the arts could serve as a powerful tool for upper-elementary students, who were still concrete thinkers, when it came to imagining phenomena they could not see directly. (Graham & Brouillette, 2017)

Mechanisms are based on learning science. Multiple representational systems: Visual, kinesthetic, narrative, symbolic, which provides multiple neural pathways to store and retrieve knowledge. The use of dramatic inquiry, dance, visual arts and physical education components in preK-3 science and technology, engineering and mathematics units resulted in a substantial improvement in understanding of engineering and technology, with average effect sizes for increases in student understanding of what engineers do mostly large for grades 4-8 and effect sizes for increases in understanding of technology mostly large for grades 4-8. (Malone et al., 2018)

Especially the visual representation helps build abstract phenomena to conceptualize. When students sketch phenomena, create diagrams, design models, or choreograph movement to represent scientific processes, they externalize their thinking, make implicit understandings explicit and develop objects for reflection and refinement.

**Communication and Collaboration**

Skills in communicating with a wide range of people and working collaboratively across subject areas are integral to knowledge economies. Science communication skills, science identity, and science self-efficacy were all predictors of student motivation and behaviors in STEM community engagement, with findings revealing that STEM students are motivated to do community engagement but lack opportunities to actually do these behaviors. (Murphy & Kelp, 2023)

STEAM education promotes communication in many ways: oral, visual, written, performance, multimedia. Collaborative design and engineering projects foster communication, a prerequisite to coordinating work, negotiating viewpoints, and incorporating contributions. Arts-integrated contexts establish authentic purposes for communication (e.g., explaining design rationale to an audience, explaining scientific thinking to an audience) and multiple media in which to communicate.

**Cultural Relevance and Inclusive Learning**

Educational equity imperatives call for curricula and pedagogies that acknowledge and value the cultural background, identities, and ways of knowing students bring to learning. There are a number of ways that STEAM supports inclusion:

**Legitimising diversity of ways of knowing:** STEAM education recognises and includes a range of ways of knowing, including artistic and design ways of knowing as well as scientific and mathematical ways of knowing.

**Cultural expression:** Arts integration opens up room for student's cultural traditions, art practices, and meaning-making to be understood as legitimate contributions to learning.

**Identity affirmation:** Students with strengths in the artistic fields see themselves in curricula and can imagine themselves as competent learning of science and mathematics.

**Community connection:** STEAM education focuses on students' discussion and problem solving, cultivating students' practical ability while promoting collaboration among the five disciplines, and teaching students to apply knowledge to solve actual problems, so it is necessary to have equity, accessibility and inclusivity at the forefront of educators' minds in STEAM subjects in this changing and complex world. (Kumar & Mehta, 2024)

## Design, Aesthetics, and Imagination

Design is about the systematic process of generating solutions that address human needs, and is all about aesthetics and imagination. Although design is a practice regularly performed by engineers and scientists, traditional STEM education typically treats function separately from form, and aesthetics is a discipline that is separate from engineering and science.

STEAM education emphasizes aesthetics and design because beautiful, elegant solutions tend to work better, aesthetic considerations are what drive human uptake of technologies and imagination – the ability to see possibilities – is the basis for design innovations. Students are taught about sensibilities that are valuable to engineering and science through artistic creation, design challenges, and aesthetic reflection.

## Entrepreneurial Thinking

Today, entrepreneurship, the ability to recognize opportunities, mobilize resources and create value, is no longer limited to careers in the business world, but is also a defining feature of careers in other industries. Educating self-efficacy in entrepreneurial competencies is important for their students to be active and successful members of the future society and future teachers showed high interest in all competencies but they reported the lowest self-efficacy and highest costs on teaching competencies in working life and entrepreneurship, and also in ICT. (Ranta et al., 2022)

Entrepreneurial thinking is fostered with STEAM education as they work through the different design challenges where they have to deal with resource limitations, make multiple iterations, try things out without fear of failure, and make changes based on feedback. In entrepreneurship education, arts based approaches (design thinking) are applied in an explicit manner.

## Digital Literacy and Emerging Technologies

Digital literacy of the contemporary society is not only technical but creative skills in digital media, design and communication. Robotics has played an important role in STEM learning design, with robotics-based STEM education studies indicating that LEGO was the most used tool, technology (programming) was the predominant robotics-based STEM discipline, and project-based learning (PBL) was the most frequently employed learning strategy, with STEM learning and transferable skills as the most popular educational goals. (Darmawansah et al., 2023)

STEAM education enables arts to be fused with new technologies such as 3D printing, digital design, coding for creative expression and interactive media, generating situations in which technical and creative skills converge.

## Workforce Readiness and Future Skills

Employers report that they require workers to be creative, communicate, collaborate and adapt as well as have technical skills. A matrix of ten employability skills for STEM students was constructed and four competencies were identified as being more relevant in both countries: (i) management and design of processes, technologies and people's work, (ii) adaptation to changes,

(iii) ability to manage uncertainty and (iv) innovation and companies' human resources managers were asked about their attitudes towards these employability skills. (Abina et al., 2024)

STEAM education directly meets the workforce needs by building these integrative competencies along with technical knowledge.

**Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning**

In addition to academic achievement, STEAM education also fosters social-emotional learning (SEL) and moral growth. Social skills and emotional intelligence are developed in collaborative projects. The five core competencies of SEL—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and social skills—are essential for students' academic success, emotional well-being, and social relationships, and research has shown that SEL improves executive functions, such as attention control and persistence, and leads to measurable academic gains. (Pham, 2024)

Design-based problem solving provides room for dealing with the ethical issues: Who are the stakeholders? What is the impact on the environment? How to obtain equal access? STEAM education promotes ethical awareness and social responsibility, by centring technical learning in human contexts.

## Need And Rationale For Shifting From Stem To Steam

**Limitations of Discipline-Siloed STEM Instruction**

Although STEM education is an improvement compared to traditional education based on subjects, the traditional STEM approaches still have a number of limitations that warrant the transition to STEAM.

**1. Disconnected Knowledge:** STEM instruction, being discipline siloed often results in students with knowledge that is disjointed and contained within the individual disciplines. Students learn about mathematics in math class, science in science class, technology in technology class, but they do not grasp how mathematics, science, and technology are connected in real world problems. This fragmentation is detrimental to transfer and application.

**2. Insufficient Motivation:** Problem- and project-based learning are correlated with students' interest in STEM careers, their intrinsic motivation for science and their ability beliefs for science and math, and mediation analysis indicated that science intrinsic motivation and ability beliefs mediate the association between perceived PBL experiences and student interest in STEM careers. However, the traditional STEM teaching model is not designed to provide meaningful contexts that can maintain motivation, especially for students who do not have a tight definition of STEM. (LaForce et al., 2017)

**3. Narrow Engagement Pathways:** STEM education can be designed to focus on analytical, computational, and technical aspects, leading to narrow pathways for engagement. Students who are good at visual thinking, narration, kinesthetic learning and working in a team may not identify themselves as “STEM students,” even though they may be able to contribute meaningfully in STEM related fields.

**4. Insufficient Communication Development:** Communication is often non-focused in STEM education and is limited in systematic development of skills necessary for explaining, defending and disseminating STEM work.

**5. Limited ethical and social awareness:** Traditional STEM teaching usually views science and engineering problems as technically neutral while neglecting to explore social and ethical issues, the environment and justice.

### Demand for Creativity in Innovation Economies

Economies today can be defined as creative or innovation economies that are based on new solutions, aesthetic differences, user-oriented development, etc. The skills of critical thinking, problem solving and analysis that are developed through STEM education are key to sustainable development; application of these skills in real world scenarios can help reduce social, economic and environmental challenges; STEM education brings new solutions and technologies that help sustainable development. (Alali et al., 2023)

Creativity is a key component of innovation. However, STEM education is frequently non-creative and creativity is rarely viewed as a deliberate, systematic process that can be taught. This is disputed by research. Through systems of cultivating creative thinking through arts engagement, capacities of innovation are strengthened. The ability to innovate has become a key element of the competitiveness of organisations, and this is why arts-trained employees are increasingly prized.

### Need for Human-Centered Problem-Solving

Authentic challenges from other parts of the world relating to climate change, healthcare, sustainable development, social justice are not purely technical but rather challenges with a human and complex social, economic, cultural and environmental dimension. Solutions need empathy, ethical thinking, cultural sensitivity as well as technical knowledge, and awareness of human needs and contexts.

Arts-rooted, human-centered design thinking offers a solution to such challenges. There was high consensus among the panel on the potential of STEM education to help learning that transcends the boundaries of traditional subject disciplines, with panellists emphasising the importance of STEM disciplines being taught together, and that modelling is vital to bring STEM education to real-world relevance and that model-based integrated STEM education approaches give opportunities for authentic problem solving. (Hallström et al., 2023)

### Role of Arts in Scientific Imagination and Design

A study of the history of significant scientific and engineering achievements demonstrates the importance of imagination, visualization and creative thinking. Einstein's thought experiments, da Vinci's sketches, and today's computational visualization are all instances illustrating how imaginative and creative thinking can lead to scientific progress. However, imagination has been overlooked in traditional STEM education, which focuses on algorithmic procedure.

Arts education takes systematic development of imagination. Students use imaginative thought to create things, practice envisioning possibilities, and become comfortable with ambiguity and experimentation – all important in scientific work.

**Importance of Communication and Visual Representation**

Visual and written communication is an integral part of scientific communication, engineering design, and technological innovation. Scientists have to interpret their results by means of figures, diagrams and written explanations. Engineers have to convey their designs in sketches, blueprints, and specifications. Tech folks have to design user interfaces and experiences that get the message across.

However, visual communication and design skills aren't always given the same importance in traditional STEM education. STEAM education fills this void by combining visualization, design and communication arts with STEM education, so that students are equipped with capacities in representational modalities.

**Student Diversity, Identity, and Inclusion**

Gender, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status gaps in STEM achievement and representation are equity issues and are a wastage of talent. Worse math and science self-concept of ability and less likelihood of STEM college major was reported by female and first-generation college students; gender gaps and college generation gaps in STEM were observed as early as the beginning of high school and continued through STEM college choice. (Jiang et al., 2020)

These gaps are not necessarily due to differences in ability, but instead may be the result of stereotype threat, restricted views of who belongs in STEM, and curricula that fail to validate diverse identities and ways of knowing. STEAM education helps to combat these disparities by recognizing different routes to STEM and fostering inclusive STEM learning environments.

Science efficacy always predicted STEM identity and vice versa, with a two-year span of time showing that the relationship between science efficacy and STEM identity for girls was related to their interest in becoming a scientist and that these relationships were bidirectional, underscoring the importance of improving science efficacy and STEM identity to promote interest in being a scientist among adolescents. (Zhao et al., 2023)

STEAM education ensures more equitable access to STEM by providing space to experience seeing oneself reflected, providing space to contribute with one's strengths, and affirming in one's identity.

**Preparing Learners for Complex Global Challenges**

The issues of the 21st century, such as climate change, pandemic disease, governance of artificial intelligence, economic inequality and migration and displacement are extremely complex, interweaving technical, social, ethical and aesthetic aspects. To equip learners for such challenges, education must be grounded in STEM rigor and balance with humanistic wisdom, ethical reasoning and thinking, creative thinking, and communication skills.

Two important features in Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM) education are integration and solving real world problems, with the planning of STEM education programs focusing on relevant global issues related to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that integrate the existing curriculum standards offering a way to assist educators in planning similar STEM education lesson or programmes or activities through integration of the existing individual STEM disciplines curriculum standards for different level and context relevant to the students. (Ling et al., 2019)

STEAM education explicitly prepares them for such complex engagement, by cultivating integrative thinking and human-centered approaches.

**Alignment with 21st-Century Learning Goals**

International documents, e.g. UNESCO, OECD and national documents of 21st-century learning focus on skills like creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking in addition to knowledge of disciplines. The symbiotic nature of 21st century skills and STEM is especially important and the integrated STEM approach using the pedagogical approach of Project-Oriented Problem-Based Learning has demonstrated that students' overall 21st century skills show a significant increase with the high productivity skills of the students moving from moderate to high proficiency. (AlAli, 2024)

STEAM education actually dovetails directly into these frameworks and the systematic development of the whole range of 21st century skills.

## Models And Approaches to Steam Integration

There are multiple models and approaches for implementing STEAM education, which vary in terms of pedagogical philosophy, grade levels, contexts, and emphasis of implementation.

**Arts-Enhanced STEM**

Arts-enhanced STEM approaches involve arts as additional enrichment in STEM curriculum. For instance, students could make illustrations that help to explain science concepts, write poems about the environment, or make music that represents physical phenomena. Arts supplement engagement and concept but are a subordinate means to an end for STEM content and goals.

**Strengths:** Very easy for schools with little arts resources to access; very easy to fit into current STEM curricula; proves that arts are valuable to STEM learning.

**Limitation:** May provide only surface level engagement with the arts; May not fully engage students' arts competencies; May not fully change basic pedagogical practices.

**Arts-Integrated STEM**

Arts-integrated STEM approaches involves a more complete integration of arts and STEM, where the arts and STEM are equally valued in the learning outcomes. Students experience real-world problems or investigations that demand students to integrate STEM and arts knowledge and skills. For instance, the sustainable architecture design involves integrated architecture, engineering, mathematics, environmental science, and artistic/design thinking.

**Strengths:** The problem-solving environment may be less authentic; problem-solving situations may be simpler; not enough problem-solving activities.

**Limitations:** Teachers must be competent across disciplines; may be more difficult to assess; more time required for instruction.

**Interdisciplinary STEAM**

Explicitly organized curricula that has big ideas or themes that require knowledge from multiple disciplines is Interdisciplinary STEAM. For instance, a unit on 'Water' could include physics, chemistry, biology, geography, engineering, visual arts, literature and social studies. Disciplines preserves integrity and they are used in common problems.

**Strengths:** Damaged, no longer movable, or difficult to access; doesn't serve the knowledge transfer process well; doesn't provide authentic context for learning.

**Limitations:** It takes careful curriculum design; it takes collaboration between teachers of different disciplines; assessment can be difficult.

**Transdisciplinary STEAM**

Transdisciplinary STEAM takes this a step further by creating models and approaches that are interdisciplinary. For instance, design thinking becomes a transdisciplinary approach, combining STEM and arts. Proposed by a dialogue between the physicist, the computer scientist, the educationalist and the industrial end user, quantum literacy aims to tackle the need for transdisciplinary research to solve the complex problems that lie at the core of issues pertaining to global sustainability, propelling visualization through puzzles to provide intuitive yet rigorous understanding of universal quantum computation, and aiding the goals of quantum literacy. (Nita et al., 2021)

**Strengths:** Builds a capacity to operate across boundaries; supports innovation; builds flexible, adaptable approaches to new problems.

**Limitations:** Needs more advanced pedagogically knowledge; assessment is complex; may be overwhelming to student without clear disciplinary foundation.

**Project-Based STEAM Learning**

Project-based STEAM structures learning around long term projects to solve real-world problems. Educational robotics as a tool to implement project-based learning (PBL) approach in all four disciplines STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), PBL approach using educational robotics fulfilling the identity of each STEM curriculum and PBL approach using educational robotics as the hands on and mind on learning approach to encourage higher order thinking in students. (Hussin et al., 2019)

Projects are usually long-term, multi-week or month, collaborative team efforts and require research and revision and lead to a product or presentation. True problems requirements create STEAM dimensions. Creating and making a robot to solve a community problem, for instance, involves engineering, technology, mathematics, creativity, communication, and social issues.

**Strengths:** Delivers authentic contexts; builds collaboration and communication; allows for creativity and iterations; boosts engagement and motivation.

**Limitation:** It is time consuming, needs a lot of planning and resources, and can be difficult to assess; some pupils may find it difficult to cope with ambiguity and long time scales.

### Design-Based STEAM Learning

In design-based STEAM, design thinking processes are applied as an organizing principle. Stanford Design Thinking was introduced to integrated design curriculum education as a creativity teaching method, and the findings indicated that the design thinking method can improve teaching, promote students' participation, provide students with significant help in real interviews, give students more discussion on design-related issues, set up a good teaching environment, facilitate positive interaction between teachers and students, and make students more attentive in class. (Tu et al., 2018)

Students go through the process of problem definition, ideation, prototyping, testing and iterations based on empathy. The emphasis on human needs and on iterative refinement, leads to real-world contexts that are very engaging for integrated STEM and arts learning.

**Strengths:** Lacks specific methodology; focuses on human-centred approaches; promotes creative and critical thinking.

**Limitations:** Teacher needs to be trained in design thinking; takes a lot of time; assessment demands understanding of the design thinking process, not just the products.

### Inquiry-Based STEAM Learning

Inquiry based STEAM uses the scientific inquiry processes as an organizing framework, but also incorporates the investigation of art, design exploration, and technological experimentation. Informed by responsive teaching and based on the NGSS scientific and engineering practices, the framework for a Comprehensive Inquiry-Based Science Education (CIBSE) focuses on student reasoning and explanation and the interplay between brief exploration and scaffolded support, with the goal of providing a more integrated framework for inquiry-based science instruction that synthesizes elements from existing models and from the fields of cognitivism, constructivism, and sociocultural learning theories. (Morris, 2025)

**Strengths:** promotes scientific literacy, multiple ways of inquiry, science standards.

**Limitations:** Teachers may not be trained in expanded inquiry; maintaining a balance between modes of inquiry may be difficult.

### Maker Education and Creative Technology

Maker education is about making and creating, and may involve both traditional crafts and digital tools such as 3D printing, coding, electronics, and robotics. STEAM maker education integrates this making emphasis with STEM learning and artistic expression.

**Strengths:** very engaging, enhances practical skills and digital literacy, and allow for iterations and learning from failure.

**Limitations:** Resource intensive, specialized equipment needed, equity issues of access, if not designed well, can place a premium on technical skills rather than conceptual skills.

### Digital Media, Robotics, Coding, and Arts-Based Learning

Emerging STEAM is an approach that combines emerging technologies (coding, robotics, AI, VR) with artistic expression and design. Such as interactive art installations, where the student builds and programs robots to perform and convey a story or build games that incorporate storytelling and computational thinking. The use of AI was appreciated for its efficiency, interactivity, and adaptability, especially in tools that facilitate personalized learning and lesson planning, such as ChatGPT and MagicSchool. There were also areas of concern, including technical issues, alignment with curriculum standards, ethical considerations, and cultural barriers, such as context-specific challenges in using AI-generated content. (FİLİZ et al., 2025)

**Strengths:** Clear modern and exciting; promotes digital literacy; fosters creativity and technical learning; workforce relevance.

**Limitations:** Quickly changing technologies = moving targets, Equity in access issues, Ethical issues need to be addressed, Teacher preparation is not keeping up with technology.

## Evidence of Steam Outcomes

### Academic Achievement and STEM Learning

There is empirical evidence of the positive effects of STEAM on achievement. Results indicated that the STEAM first approach resulted in much higher science learning gains for both EF and EB learners showing some higher science learning gains for EF learners, however with greater advantages in science learning gains for STEAM first order of effect for the EB learners, suggesting that the order of effect for STEAM first is particularly beneficial to emerging bilingual learners. (Hughes et al., 2022)

The mechanisms build upon learning science: multiple representational systems facilitate conceptual understanding and retention; real-world contexts boost engagement and motivation; collaborative work aids knowledge construction. By applying the concept of project-based learning, robot and self-made toy in problem-solving, it was proven that the problem-based learning model using robot and self-made toy was an effective model in fostering the STEM learning outcomes of children in elementary school and the relationship between STEM learning outcomes and attitudes of children was confirmed by clustering analysis. (Hu et al., 2023)

### STEM Interest and Attitudes

Through STEAM education, interest in STEM fields and positive attitudes towards STEM subjects are increased. Student rating of PBL is related to interest in a STEM career, intrinsic motivation for science and students' ability beliefs in science and mathematics, suggesting that PBL could have a positive impact on building student STEM attitudes and interest in STEM careers. (LaForce et al., 2017)

The transition to STEAM is especially key to expanding participation. STEAM offers multiple entry points to STEM and provides ways of engaging STEM thinking that may not be as appealing to students who do not connect with traditional STEM approaches.

**Creativity and Innovation Skills**

Through STEAM education, creativity and innovation skills are greatly developed. Integrated STEAM units resulted in significant gains in student understanding of engineering and technology for 4-8 year old students, with an average increase of 55% for students' understanding of what engineers do, and 36% for students' understanding of technology, with mostly large effect sizes for all the grade levels. (Malone et al., 2018)

Arts engagement and design-based problem solving enhances divergent thinking, creative ideation and tolerance of ambiguity.

**Problem-Solving Ability**

Integrated STEM as problem-solving practices includes four integrated STEM practices that are essential in high-quality STEM learning experiences for students to leverage the discipline specific content to solve authentic problems: (1) critical and creative thinking to define and solve a problem, (2) collaboration to engage in iterative problem solving, (3) communication of problem solutions based on evidence and data, and (4) recognizing and using structures in real-world systems. (Roberts et al., 2022)

Design thinking, iteration, and human-centered problem solving are the hallmarks of STEAM approaches that cultivate the most sophisticated problem solving skills.

**Collaboration and Communication**

These skills are greatly enhanced through STEAM projects that require collaborative teamwork and communication in multiple ways. The participants expressed their motivation and the collaborative design activity enhanced their creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaborative engagement in the design jams. (Tang et al., 2020)

The need for multi-point coordination, for explaining reasoning to team mates and presenting the work to an audience provides genuine contexts for the development of communication and collaboration.

**Student Engagement**

Students in the section using a gamified learning analytics dashboard showed increased engagement and that students' final grade scores were on average 13% higher than the other non-dashboard section, with low cost and little time invested, indicating that gamified dashboards could be of significant impact on students' performance in large-scale STEM lecture courses. (Alam et al., 2023)

Arts-integrated, authentic projects and creative expression enhance engagement and motivation.

## Inclusion of Underrepresented Groups

Most important, STEAM education expands inclusion and support of traditionally underrepresented groups of students in STEM. Only high intensity active learning classes showed a reduction in achievement gaps in examination scores (33%) and achievement gaps in passing rates (45%), supporting a call to move beyond the traditional lecture and design courses based on evidence and active learning across the STEM disciplines. (Theobald et al., 2020)

The finding that both EB and EF students benefit similarly and significantly from the integration in the classrooms with high fidelity of implementation, indicated that STEAM before STEM possibly entails a strong compensating order of integration effect for the EB population of learners. (Hughes et al., 2022)

STEAM fosters more inclusive learning environments that allow for a wider range of participation, by supporting the validation of multiple approaches to learning and thinking about STEM.

## Teacher Pedagogy and Professional Practice

Professional development for STEAM education enhances STEAM pedagogical practices. Teachers who participated in engineering education workshops significantly improved their confidence in engineering pedagogy, as well as their knowledge of engineering careers and precollege preparation for post-secondary engineering, viewing engineering as a potentially powerful tool in developing students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. (Christian et al., 2021)

Interdisciplinary collaboration, student-centered pedagogies and design thinking bring a change to the teacher practices with more innovative and engaging teaching-learning activities.

## Research Gaps and Limitations

Although there is increasing evidence that STEAM is effective, there are still large gaps in the research:

1. Limited longitudinal studies to monitor long-term implications for achievement, career and professional success
2. Measurement of outcomes varies from study to study and makes it difficult to synthesize and compare results.
3. Lack of research on STEAM outside of North America and Europe.
4. Unclear implementation mechanisms – what STEAM features are most important for effectiveness.
5. There is limited research on cost-effectiveness and scalability
6. Lesser known effects on particular groups (students with disabilities, English language learners, rural students, etc.)
7. Some outcomes with mixed results, need more research

## Challenges and Criticisms

However, significant barriers have hindered the broad and equitable adoption of STEAM education, in spite of a strong case for such an approach and the growing body of research on the topic.

### Conceptual Ambiguity and Lack of Standardized Definitions

One of the ongoing issues is that there is no consistent definition of STEAM learning. Is there a need for explicit arts content or can arts dimensions be integrated into STEM? What is the amount of arts integration required for it to be considered "STEAM"? When considering how STEAM pedagogy can promote deep and collaborative learning for students through curricular integration of STEAM in K-12 science education, the enactive and ecological perspective of understanding STEAM learning and its deep roots is important; however, the concept of mixed reality (XR) as a developing approach to education needs current foundations and a general disposition on how to understand digital immersion from ecological psychology. (Videla et al., 2021)

The definitional ambiguity poses problems for curriculum development, teacher preparation, policy and research. Superficial "STEAM" programs with little or no arts integration or rigorous STEM content may be used in schools.

### Implementation Challenges and Weak Models

Many STEAM implementations are not the ideal envisioned. Teacher confidence/competence in arts integration is an issue. Curricula can be weak in disciplines or fail to see that the arts are integral to the curriculum. Assessment systems can not be STEAM aligned. There may be insufficient resources.

There is a long way to go from theory to practice in STEAM. In this 18-year study of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK)-based professional development for teachers, the conceptualization and enactment of TPACK in professional development went through three different stages, the last of which was a systemic, school-based approach to researching and extending TPACK for mathematics and other STEM/STEAM teachers, and it is suggested that further research and practice on TPACK should facilitate sustainability of teacher professional learning initiatives (Meletiou-Mavrotheris & Paparistodemou, 2024)

### Teacher Preparation Gaps

Teacher preparation programs are not adequately equipping teachers to teach STEAM. Elementary teachers are not always competent in science and math, and science teachers lack competency in the arts. Most members of each group are not usually taught or prepared for design thinking, interdisciplinary pedagogy, or arts-integrated instruction.

While teacher preparation reform is needed, it is also difficult. It demands: (a) to broaden curricular areas and add content that goes beyond what is traditionally taught; (b) to build faculty capacity; (c) to build interdisciplinary partnerships; (d) to provide adequate time; (e) to adapt assessment strategies.

**Curriculum Overload**

There is a concern that the arts are being thrown into STEM and causing curriculum overload in schools where there is not enough instructional time and pressure to do state standards. Time is a significant constraint to implementation, as reported by teachers.

National education policy changes demand that teachers not just have expertise in technology, but also 21st-century skills and readiness to teach using innovative learning, quantitative analysis of the data showing that 21st-century skills have a greater impact on readiness than technology skills, while qualitative analysis indicated personal, structural and cultural dimensions of the implementation of deep learning. (Fitrah et al., 2025)

**Assessment Difficulties**

Assessing STEAM learning is complicated. Traditional standardised tests are not suitable to assess creativity, design thinking, collaboration and communication. Authentic assessment method (portfolios, project evaluation, performances) more suitable – but time consuming and take more teacher expertise to implement well.

Assessment of learning outcomes is about why we assess and what we do when we don't assess, learning outcomes as the basis for assessing learning, and how to measure the affective domain and the psychomotor field, and what it implies for an educator who wants to make use of the classical and alternative assessment methods, and the impact of focusing on what the learner can do rather than what the learner cannot do (Koşan, 2021)

**Unequal Access to Arts-Rich Learning**

There are some resources that are important to meaningful STEAM learning: art supplies, design tools, technology, maker space infrastructure. There are few resources available in many schools, especially in low-income schools.

The inequity in resources is likely to increase equity gaps. The inequities between underresourced and affluent schools may be worsened if only wealthier schools are able to access STEAM education.

**Risk of Superficial Arts Integration**

Unequal access to arts education is related to resource gaps. Arts have been severely cut back in many schools, especially in low-income neighborhoods, for budget reasons. Strong arts education programs are essential to STEAM education, but, in many communities, arts programs have been slashed.

While access to K-12 STEAM is must needed for all students, many schools are currently lacking STEAM education, inequities in STEAM education may affect diversity in STEAM careers, and a lack of comprehensive STEAM curriculum may limit future career options for students. (Kumar & Mehta, 2024).

### Limited Longitudinal Evidence

One danger is superficial arts integration in which arts activities are added to the STEM without being linked to the content of the STEM or the learning goals. For instance, students may be asked to colour diagrams of atoms or to write acrostic poems about photosynthesis, which aren't productive for either arts or STEM.

To avoid this superficiality, there should be clear learning objectives, authentic integration and assessment of the arts and STEM dimensions.

### Limited Longitudinal Evidence

Although there are short-term studies of the effects of STEAM, few longitudinal studies have investigated if STEAM education leads to lasting achievement, career interest, and career success. This gap makes it difficult to go to policy and practice decisions.

### Tensions between Arts and STEM Approaches

There is a conflict between arts pedagogies and STEM pedagogies. Algorithms, converging to a single solution, and "right" answers predominate in STEM instruction. Instruction in the arts is often based on divergent thinking, creative expression and multiple valid approaches. Pedagogical sophistication is needed to balance these.

In the absence of adequate management of these tensions, one discipline takes over, or true integration is never achieved.

## Tables and Figures

### Tables and Figures

**Table 1: Definitions and Distinctions between STEM and STEAM**

| Dimension | STEM Education | STEAM Education |
|---|---|---|
| **Disciplines** | Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics | Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics |
| **Primary Focus** | Technical knowledge and skills; disciplinary content | Integration of technical and creative thinking; human-centered innovation |
| **Pedagogical Emphasis** | Problem-solving, inquiry, investigation | Problem-solving, design thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration |
| **Learning Modalities** | Primarily analytical, computational, technical | Multiple modalities: analytical, visual, kinesthetic, narrative, performative |
| **Representation Systems** | Symbolic (mathematical, technical) | Multiple systems: symbolic, visual, kinesthetic, narrative, artistic |
| **Assessment** | Standardized tests, technical competency | Portfolios, projects, performances, multiple measures |
| **Outcome Goals** | Technical literacy, problem-solving, achievement | 21st-century skills, innovation, creativity, communication, collaboration |
| **Inclusion of Humanities** | Limited | Integrated; history, ethics, social implications |

| Dimension | STEM Education | STEAM Education |
|---|---|---|
| **Cultural Dimensions** | Often marginal | Central; cultural expression, diverse ways of knowing |
| **Teacher Background** | STEM subject specialists | Interdisciplinary; STEM and arts competencies |
| **Typical Activities** | Labs, calculations, projects | Design challenges, artistic creation, collaborative projects, performances |

**Table 2: Theoretical Foundations of STEAM Education**

| Theoretical Framework | Key Concepts | Application in STEAM |
|---|---|---|
| **Constructivist Learning Theory** | Active knowledge construction; multiple representations; reflection | Students construct understanding through artistic and technical engagement; multiple modalities support knowledge construction |
| **Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb)** | Learning cycle: experience, reflection, conceptualization, experimentation | STEAM projects engage all four stages; artistic engagement deepens experience and reflection |
| **Social Constructivism (Vygotsky)** | Learning through social interaction; scaffolding; ZPD | Collaborative STEAM projects; peer interaction supports learning; teacher scaffolding guides development |
| **Design Thinking** | Human-centered problem-solving; empathy; iteration; prototyping | Design methodology frames STEAM work; emphasis on human needs; iterative refinement |
| **Creativity Theory** | Divergent and convergent thinking; creative confidence | Arts develop divergent thinking; STEM develops convergent thinking; integration supports both |
| **Multiple Intelligences Theory (Gardner)** | Multiple cognitive capacities; diverse ways of knowing | STEAM engages broader range of intelligences; valuing diverse strengths |
| **Interdisciplinary Learning** | Integration across disciplines; holistic understanding | STEAM integrates STEM disciplines and arts; supports transfer and flexible knowledge |
| **21st-Century Skills Framework** | Communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity | STEAM develops all 4Cs explicitly |

**Table 3: Models of STEAM Integration and Classroom Examples**

| Model | Definition | Classroom Example |
|---|---|---|
| **Arts-Enhanced STEM** | Arts supplements STEM instruction | Students create visual representations of cell division; write poetry about ecosystems |
| **Arts-Integrated STEM** | Arts and STEM equally important; integrated learning objectives | Designing sustainable architecture: combines architecture, engineering, mathematics, design, environmental science |
| **Interdisciplinary STEAM** | Organized around themes; disciplines | "Water" unit: physics (flow, pressure), chemistry (states, compounds), biology |

| Model | Definition | Classroom Example |
|---|---|---|
| | maintain integrity but applied to shared problems | (aquatic life), geography (watersheds), engineering (water systems), arts (water in art and literature) |
| **Transdisciplinary STEAM** | Frameworks transcend disciplinary boundaries; design thinking as organizing framework | Problem-based learning applying design thinking to community challenge (e.g., homelessness, food security); integrated STEM and arts throughout |
| **Project-Based STEAM** | Extended projects addressing authentic problems | Design and build community water filter; requires engineering, materials science, systems thinking, design, communication |
| **Design-Based STEAM** | Design thinking methodology as explicit framework | Students empathize with problem users, define problems, ideate solutions, prototype, test, iterate; applies to engineering, environmental, social challenges |
| **Inquiry-Based STEAM** | Scientific inquiry expanded to include artistic investigation and design exploration | Students investigate: "How do animals camouflage?" through observation, experimentation, artistic study, design challenge to create camouflaged object |
| **Maker STEAM** | Hands-on creation using digital and traditional tools; emphasis on making and iteration | Students design and 3D-print prosthetics; learn CAD, materials science, engineering; present designs; iterate based on feedback |
| **Digital Media/Emerging Tech STEAM** | Integration with emerging technologies: coding, robotics, AI, VR | Students code interactive art; design robotic performances; create games blending storytelling and programming; create virtual environments |

**Table 4: Reported Benefits and Supporting Evidence**

| Outcome Domain | Reported Benefits | Supporting Evidence |
|---|---|---|
| **Academic Achievement** | Improved learning in STEM subjects; particularly strong for emerging bilingual learners | STEAM-first approach produced significantly higher science learning gains; large effect sizes in engineering and technology understanding |
| **Engagement and Motivation** | Increased intrinsic motivation; sustained engagement; reduced stereotype threat | Active learning reduced achievement gaps 33-45%; project-based learning associated with career interest |
| **Creativity** | Divergent thinking; creative confidence; novel problem-solving | Participants reported creativity improvements; large effect sizes for creative thinking development |
| **Communication** | Multiple modes of communication; audience awareness; clarity of expression | Collaborative projects develop communication; presentation requirements support skill development |
| **Collaboration** | Teamwork skills; conflict | Interactive behaviors increase in |

| Outcome Domain | Reported Benefits | Supporting Evidence |
|---|---|---|
| | resolution; perspective-taking | STEAM contexts; collaborative projects develop social skills |
| **Conceptual Understanding** | Deeper, more durable understanding; multiple representations support learning | Multiple representational systems enhance retention; visual arts support understanding of abstract concepts |
| **Critical Thinking** | Analysis; evaluation; problem-framing; ethical reasoning | Design thinking emphasizes problem definition; authentic problems require critical analysis |
| **Inclusion and Equity** | Broader participation; reduced achievement gaps; inclusion of underrepresented groups | Emerging bilingual learners particularly benefit; active learning narrows gaps; diverse entry points support inclusion |
| **21st-Century Skills** | Integrated development of 4Cs: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity | Project-based STEAM significantly increases 21st-century skills; multiple competencies developed simultaneously |
| **Science Identity** | Science efficacy; identity development; career interest | STEM identity predicts career interest; efficacy and identity mutually influence each other; STEAM supports identity development |

**Table 5: Challenges, Limitations, and Mitigation Strategies**

| Challenge | Description | Mitigation Strategies |
|---|---|---|
| **Definitional Ambiguity** | Lack of agreed-upon definition of STEAM; wide variation in implementation | Develop clear, flexible definitions; research on core STEAM components; professional learning on STEAM principles |
| **Teacher Preparation Gaps** | Insufficient preparation for interdisciplinary, arts-integrated instruction | Reform teacher education programs; interdisciplinary faculty collaboration; professional development; co-teaching models |
| **Limited Resources** | Insufficient art supplies, design tools, technology; budget constraints | Grant funding; community partnerships; maker space sharing; open-source tools; teacher training in resource-efficient practices |
| **Assessment Challenges** | Difficulty assessing creativity, collaboration, design thinking; misalignment with standardized tests | Develop authentic assessment approaches; portfolio assessment; performance assessments; rubrics for interdisciplinary work |
| **Curriculum Overload** | Time constraints; competing standards and pressures | Integrate STEAM within existing curricula rather than adding; alignment of standards across disciplines |
| **Superficial Integration** | Arts treated as decoration; weak connections between disciplines | Clear learning objectives; authentic integration; assessment of both arts and STEM; teacher professional learning |

| Challenge | Description | Mitigation Strategies |
|---|---|---|
| **Unequal Access** | Resource disparities; arts education cuts in low-income schools | Policy advocacy for arts funding; equitable resource allocation; alternative resource strategies |
| **Implementation Fidelity** | Gap between STEAM ideology and practice; inconsistent quality | Clear implementation guidance; fidelity monitoring; professional development; exemplars and case studies |
| **Limited Evidence** | Short-term studies; limited longitudinal data; context-specific findings | Funding for rigorous longitudinal research; multi-site studies; diverse contexts |
| **Tensions Between Disciplines** | Different pedagogies and values; difficulty balancing disciplines | Professional learning on both disciplines; co-teaching; explicit integration frameworks; respect for disciplinary integrity |

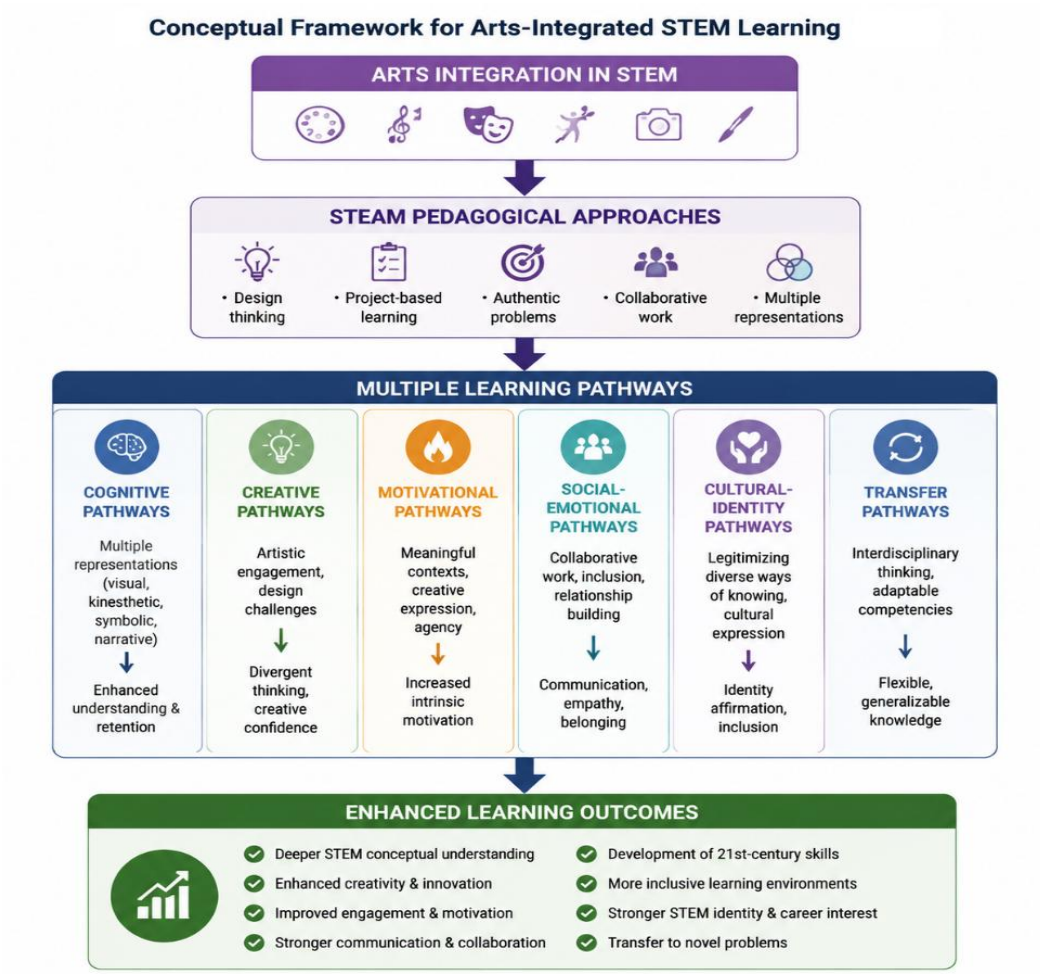


**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Arts-Integrated STEM Learning**

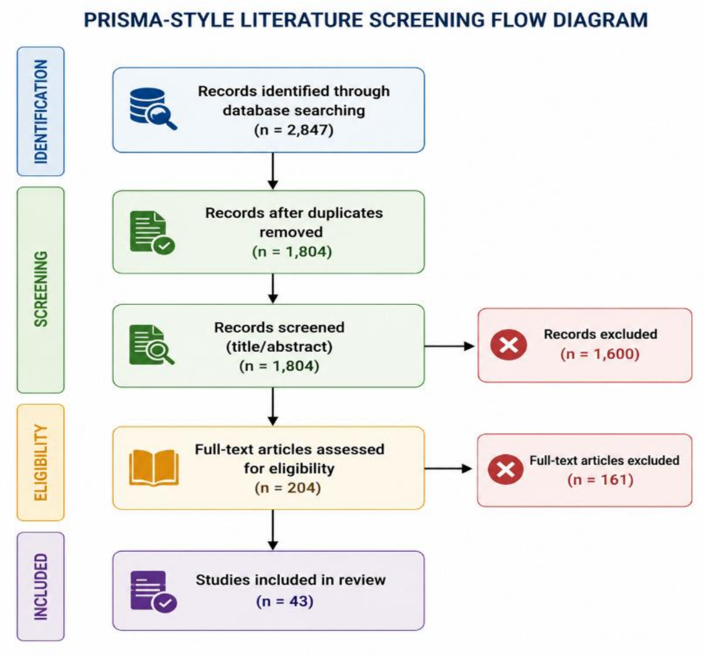


**Figure 2: PRISMA-Style Literature Screening Flow Diagram**

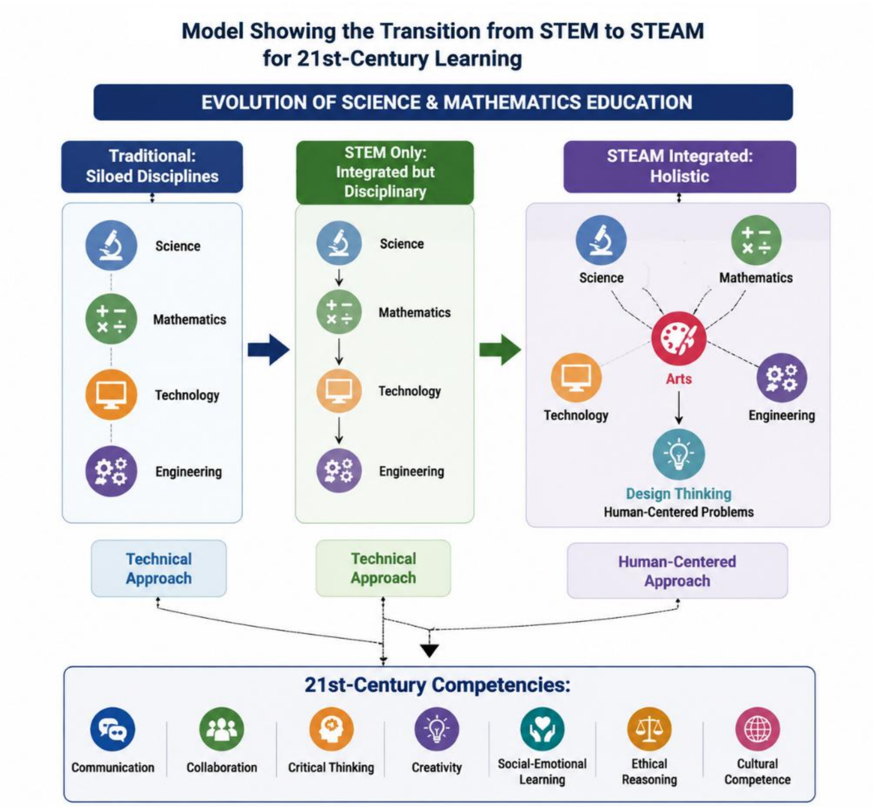


**Figure 3: Model Showing the Transition from STEM to STEAM for 21st-Century Learning**

## Discussion

### How STEAM Expands the Goals of STEM Education

STEAM education is not anti-STEM or anti-weakening STEM education goals, it is an expansion of, and an enhancement of STEM education goals. Traditional STEM is about technical knowledge, problem solving, and competence in subject. While STEAM maintains these goals, it also incorporates:

1. Creative and imaginative thinking and analytical thinking

2. Communication using more than one mode and mathematical or technical language

3. Human-centered and ethical strategies, and technical problem-solving

4. Making sense of culture in parallel with (co)creating knowledge

5. Identity affirmation and inclusion along with achievement

6. Across domains integration and depth in disciplines.

STEAM is STEM, taken to the next level and enhanced by arts and humanistic elements.

### How Arts Integration Supports Creativity, Design, Innovation, and Human-Centered Learning

The pathways that arts integration can improve STEAM are sound in learning science and in cognitive psychology theory:

Divergent Thinking: Artistic engagement is a process of systematic development of divergent thinking ability which is the ability to generate multiple and novel ideas. This is the creative power, which is the basis of innovation. There is content domain from the STEM contexts and arts engagement for the generative thinking.

This is the aesthetic sensitivity that is at the core of the processes of design, innovation and engineering. What is elegant? What is beautiful? What is it that causes user satisfaction? These aesthetic aspects influence adoption of and usage of technologies. Arts education fosters aesthetic awareness, which is a key to real innovation.

Embodied and Multi-Modal Learning: Artistic creation involves kinesthetic, visual/auditory and emotional learning. Such embedded experiences elicit stronger and longer-lasting memories and knowledge than abstract learning that involves only symbolic representation.

Iterative Refinement: Artistic and design processes are always iterative, involve feedback and are refined. This is similar to the way real engineers and scientists solve problems, as they often get things wrong first time, too.

Human-Centered Perspective: Arts education fosters empathy, perspective-taking, and attends to human experience. Arts-based DT has an emphasis on understanding the user and human contexts. It is this human-centric approach that is crucial for innovation, which is aimed at addressing human problems.

**Tensions between STEM Rigor and Arts-Based Pedagogy**

There are real issues between STEM pedagogies and arts pedagogies which are worthy of discussion:

**Convergent vs. Divergent:** STEM teaching is traditionally focused on convergent thinking (the right answer). Arts lessons focus on divergent thinking (coming up with many options). In integration, it's a combination of creative thinking and careful assessment.

**Predetermined vs. Open-Ended:** STEM can be about predetermined correct answers. The arts has been known to be open ended in which there are several answers that are acceptable. Learning to work within constraints, yet still hold the creative possibility is the integration part.

**Disciplinary Boundaries vs. Integration:** STEM disciplines have unique content, method and vocabulary. Arts have also their own traditions. Integration means giving credit to the disciplinary integrity and going beyond disciplinary boundaries.

These tensions are not tensions to be solved, but are productive tensions to be handled with dexterity. REAL STEAM learning is a dialectical process that uses the tension of one to reinforce the other.

## Policy and Practice Implications

### Recommendations for Policymakers

**1. Curriculum Standards and Alignment**

- Add arts integration objectives to STEM standards
- Create interdisciplinary standards frameworks with focus on integrated competencies (design thinking, communication, collaboration)
- Embrace aligned standards across STEM and arts disciplines and not stand alone
- Explicitly reference 21st century competencies (creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, communication) in standards

**2. Funding and Resource Allocation**

- Apply sufficient resources to STEAM activities – both start-up and ongoing expenses
- Explore ways to develop funding avenues dedicated to interdisciplinary programs
- Protect arts education funding, consider arts as essential, not enrichment.
- Enable fair resource allocation in under-resourced schools to ensure access to STEAM
- Support research and evaluation to develop an evidence base.

**3. Accountability and Assessment**

- Create assessment strategies for STEAM learning environments (portfolios, performances, projects)
- Think outside of standardized testing for accountability measure
- Incorporate creativity, collaboration and communication into accountability systems
- Develop authentic assessments in school

**4. Teacher Preparation and Professional Development**

- Ensure that interdisciplinary and arts-integrated pedagogy are a part of all teacher preparation programs.
- Provide significant professional development in STEAM to practicing educators
- Provide regular support for collaborative planning time for interdisciplinary teaching teams
- Create certification and credentialing requirements for STEAM teachers

**5. Equity and Access**

- Develop a policy to make STEAM accessible to every school and community
- Funding and support for resources issues
- Ensure culturally responsive pedagogy and focusing on equity in implementing STEAM
- Monitor and report on STEAM enrollment and achievement by demographic groups

**Recommendations for Curriculum Developers**

**1. Design Principles**

- Focus on real world problems, with a focus on authenticity
- Integrate disciplines in a substantive, rather than superficial way; and include both arts and STEM disciplines in an appropriate way.
- Incorporate feedback and iteration in design process
- Provide chances for creative expression and ways to show it in more than one way
- Regularly review and share policy and guidelines on cultural responsiveness and cultural expression opportunities.

**2. Learning Objectives**

- State goals for STEM content, arts skills and 21st century skills
- Set goals for creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking
- Communicate goals for interdisciplinary thinking and transfer
- Add S.E.L. / ethical learning goals

**3. Assessment**

- Create multi-faceted forms of assessment such as performance assessment, portfolio and projects.
- Evaluate both STEM and arts skills
- Introduce collaboration, communication, and creativity measures
- Formative assessment to support learning and iteration

**Recommendations for School Leaders**

**1. Vision and Culture**

- Communicate a clear vision for STEAM education that is in line with school mission and goals.
- Establish a common language with staff, families and community
- Create culture valuing creativity, risk-taking, and iteration

- Facilitate secure and inclusive learning environments psychologically

**2. Collaborative Structures**

- Provide opportunities for teacher reflection and revision, including interdisciplinary planning time.
- Set up interdisciplinary teaching teams
- Facilitate co-teaching models
- Create learning communities for teachers to develop STEAM expertise

**3. Professional Learning**

- Commit to investing in professional development of STEAM pedagogy in a significant manner
- Give continuous learning opportunities, rather than single workshops;
- Coach, mentor and peer observe to support teacher learning
- Provide opportunities for teacher experimentation and learning from failure.

**4. Resource Management**

- Create and allocate resources for STEAM (supplies, tools, technologies, space)
- Set up or maintain maker spaces or design studios
- Link with community resources and partnerships.
- Discuss equitable resource allocation in schools and classrooms

**Recommendations for STEM Teachers and Arts Teachers**

**1. Pedagogical Development**

- Build abilities in STEM and Arts areas; look for opportunities to learn.
- Discover design thinking and human centered problem solving tools, frameworks and mindsets
- Gain skills to facilitate student-centered learning that is collaborative and engaging.
- Develop an understanding of assessment for complex learning
- Evaluate, plan and review practice and learning from outcomes on an on-going basis

**2. Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

- Develop teamwork with subject teachers
- Plan intentionally to integrate content and methods
- Co-teach, as possible, to model interdisciplinary thinking
- Learn from others; exchange knowledge and skills.

**3. Authentic Problem-Based Learning**

- Make problems meaningful to design learning
- Engage students in problem definition and ownership
- Access community resources and authenticity audiences
- Include iteration and feedback mechanisms

**4. Inclusive Practice**

- Use culturally responsive pedagogy

- Differentiate learning time and access to the learning space to ensure opportunities for all students to develop their thinking, comprehension, and communication skills.
- Explicitly attend to equity and inclusion
- Turn attention to biases and barriers to participation and monitor them

**Recommendations for Teacher Education Institutions**

**1. Program Redesign**

- Incorporate arts, design thinking and interdisciplinary approaches in teacher education.
- Ensure all teachers have an STEM and arts course requirement
- Develop interdisciplinary content and methods courses
- Equip teachers to support collaborative, student-centered learning
- Include assessment approaches appropriate for STEAM

**2. Faculty Development**

- Provide support to faculty learning in interdisciplinary pedagogy
- Support inter-professional working and partnership working
- Create a STEAM lesson plan and materials for a specific grade level and/or subject area
- Practice interdisciplinary education in teacher training

**3. Field Experiences**

- STEAM teaching observations and practice by student teachers will be ensured.
- Provide student teachers with exemplary STEAM teachers
- Integrate community projects and experiences into learning activities
- Use interdisciplinary working practices for children with complex needs and provide mentoring in this approach

**Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions**

**1. Curriculum and Program Development**

- Apply DT and Innovation in STEM programs
- Include humanities and social sciences that respond to social implications of technology
- Ensure proper support of interdisciplinary programs and research centres
- Develop creative and communicative STEM graduates.

**2. Faculty Development**

- Support faculty in developing pedagogies supporting creativity and innovation
- Foster Interdisciplinary collaboration and research
- Incorporate Innovation and Entrepreneurship training.

**3. Community Engagement**

- Relate research to real world issues in the community
- Engage communities as partners in problem solving
- Promote student involvement in service learning & social innovation

**Recommendations for Researchers**

**1. Research Priorities**

- Collect in-depth and sustained evidence of the effect of STEAM on achievement, engagement, and career pathways
- Investigate strategies to incorporate arts into the curriculum and learning process
- Discuss implementation fidelity and implementation supports for effective STEAM implementation
- Explore effects in a variety of situations and populations
- Discuss cost effectiveness and scalability of STEAM programs
- Explore teacher preparation and effectiveness

**2. Methodological Rigor**

- Use a variety of research techniques (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods)
- Employ comparison groups and control conditions, where ethical
- Collect multiple data points on outcomes, other than achievement
- Use diverse samples as research participants
- Do not overgeneralize and state limitations with honesty

**3. Dissemination**

- Speak at conferences and present at practitioner journals
- Make presentations to policy makers and practitioners
- Enable access of research using multiple formats
- Interact with practitioners in a bi-directional manner

**Recommendations for Industry and Community Partners**

**1. Problem-Based Learning Partnerships**

- Connect with schools to work on real-life problems based on it
- Implement adjustments to class schedules and assignments
- Institute field experiences and internships in host field
- Support maker spaces and design studios

**2. Workforce Development**

- Communicate skills necessary for the job market
- Participate in curriculum development for alignment to workforce needs
- Internships and early career opportunities are provided to each other.
- Facilitate talent recruitment in a variety of ways

**3. Resource Support**

- Provide materials, equipment and expertise for donation
- Support outings and community learning experiences
- Host STEAM contests and events

## Future Research Directions

### Longitudinal Studies on STEAM Outcomes

Further studies are needed to investigate long-term consequences. Key questions include:

STEAM in K-12's impact on achievement and engagement in secondary STEM.

How are STEAM graduates different from STEM-only graduates with regards to career choice, persistence and success in STEM careers?

Do STEAM students have a higher level of innovation and entrepreneurship in adult careers?

How STEAM are experiences impacting students' identities and sense of belonging in STEM?

### Comparative Studies across Countries and Education Levels

STEAM education is global but the majority of research has been centered in North America and Europe. Comparative research examining:

- Successful applications of STEAM in different educational systems and countries around the world
- Cultural differences in arts traditions and the ways arts link with STEM
- How STEAM approaches might be altered in various settings
- Effect on other underrepresented communities internationally

### Validated Tools for Measuring Creativity and Interdisciplinary Learning

For, we need valid and reliable measurement instruments for:

- Evaluating creativity in STEAM situations
- Assessing interdisciplinary thinking and transfer
- Assessing DT skills
- Assessing partnership and partnership working skills
- Analyzing the perception of identity and belongingness of the students

### STEAM Assessment Frameworks

Complete assessment systems should:

- Use a variety of assessment techniques (performance, portfolio, project-based)
- Include STEAM content and 21st century skills
- Be in line with learning objectives
- Provide formative feedback and learning
- Discuss how to accommodate students with special needs in assessments

### Teacher Professional Development Models

Research on:

- Models for the preparation of teachers in STEAM pedagogy that are effective

Factors that facilitated ongoing behaviour change

- Change in professional practice as a result of professional development
- Impact of professional development on student outcomes
- Strategies for assisting with interdisciplinary collaboration between teachers

**Impact on Underrepresented Learners**

Research examining:

- How STEAM affects achievement and engagement for girls, students of color, low-income students
- How STEAM can be used to promote inclusion at the national, state, and local levels.
- How STEAM can work to overcome identity barriers to STEM participation
- STEAM approaches that are culturally responsive.

**Digital STEAM, AI, Robotics, Maker Education, and Emerging Technologies**

Technologies are developing at a fast pace, research should be undertaken on:

- How to use AI, robotics and digital media to teach STEAM education
- The influence of maker education and hands-on making on personalized learning and effective teaching and learning practices
- Access to new and cutting-edge technology on an equal basis
- How to use emerging technologies to support creativity and innovation processes
- Ethical issues related to technology in STEAM learning and teaching.

**Cost-Effectiveness and Scalability**

- Evidence is needed on: Policy and practice.
- The cost-effectiveness of STEAM programs is a potential element of the study.
- Transferability of STEAM approaches to other contexts
- This is to ensure the quality of the implementation and the requirements for the resources.
- Strategies for sustaining STEAM in under-resourced schools
- Return on investment in STEAM education

## Limitations

This review has certain limitations:

1**. Definitional Variation:** STEAM and related constructs are inconsistently defined in the literature making synthesis and comparison difficult. It is important for readers to understand that there are differences in the way that "STEAM" is thought about and executed.

2. **Study Design Differences:** The included studies use a variety of study designs (RCTs, quasi-experimental, qualitative, case studies) which makes comparisons difficult. The level of evidence is different for each outcome.

3. **Limited Longitudinal Data:** Many studies are short-term; fewer studies address the long-term consequences. There is a need for caution in sustainability of effects.

4. **Context Specificity:** Research is focused on specific geographic areas (North America, Western Europe) and school contexts. Generalizability to other regions and contexts is unclear.

5. **Publication bias:** Positive results studies may be more likely to be published. Actual impacts of effects may vary from what is published.

6. **Language Restriction:** English-language restriction may result in exclusion of relevant research in other languages.

7. **Measurement Inconsistency:** It is difficult to synthesize and meta-analyse outcomes between studies due to the inconsistencies in their operationalization and measurement.

8. **Implementation Fidelity:** Several studies fail to provide a sufficient description of implementation quality and fidelity; in other words, it is unclear whether there was meaningful implementation of "STEAM.

9. **Limited detail on mechanisms:** Outcomes reported but mechanisms of action of STEAM are to be further explored.

10. **Emerging Field:** STEAM education research is still fairly new, with less evidence than more established areas of research.

## Conclusion

This is a comprehensive review that synthesizes evidence that the transition from STEM to STEAM learning is not necessarily a dilution of STEM learning but a complement and extension of STEM learning that adds creative, communicative, human-centered and ethical components that are necessary for true innovation and to address complex challenges.

There are several interlocking reasons why STEAM education is important:

**Theoretical:** Arts integration in STEM has strong theoretical underpinnings in the theories of constructivist, experiential, and social constructivist learning. Arts contributions to innovation and problem-solving are explicit in the design thinking and creativity theory.

**Empirical:** Research is increasingly showing that STEAM education leads to improved academic outcomes, especially for emerging bilingual learners and underrepresented populations; more engagement, motivation, and creativity; more communication and collaboration skills; more development of 21st century skills; and more positive impact on STEM identity and interest in STEM careers.

**Societal:** Technical solutions alone are not enough to address the complex challenges of today's society, such as climate change, pandemic disease, governing artificial intelligence or social inequality. STEAM education equips learners for such engagement.

**Equity:** STEAM education can help build more inclusive and equitable learning environments and increases participation in STEM by legitimizing alternative understandings of knowledge, providing multiple avenues for engagement, and affirming students' identities and cultural backgrounds.

However, there are major barriers to STEAM implementation. Ambiguity of definition leads to confusion about what is STEAM. The gaps in teacher preparation prevent educators from being ready to teach interdisciplinary and the arts-integrated approach. There is a risk of gaps in equity being exacerbated by unequal access to resources, with only the more affluent schools having access to STEAM. STEAM outcomes are difficult to measure because of assessment challenges. Implementation fidelity gaps lead to superficial arts integration that does not promote meaningful development of either STEM or arts competence.

To attain a vision of equitable comprehensive STEAM education, a systemic change is needed:

- Curriculum reform with STEAM integration in all disciplines, focusing on interdisciplinary skills and 21st century skills
- Teacher education reform to prepare teachers in STEM and arts, interdisciplinary pedagogy, design thinking and more.
- Assessment innovation creating approaches suitable to measure complex and interdisciplinary learning
- Resource commitment to provide equity in STEAM learning experiences in every school and community
- Investigate building of strong evidence for STEAM implementation and impacts
- Policy alignment ensuring standards, accountability, and funding systems support STEAM education

The evidence is compelling: STEAM education is not just a “nice to have” on top of STEM, but an educational imperative and an evidence-based movement for modern education systems. Incorporating the arts into the teaching and learning of science, technology, engineering and mathematics expands the intellectual and creative capacities of the students, builds skills necessary for innovation and solving complex problems, makes the STEM environment more inclusive for all students, including those who do not perceive themselves as creative, and equips students to prepare for a uncertain and dynamic future that will require both technical and human qualities.

The addition of A in STEM, to create STEAM, is an advancement of thought in the field of excellence in education. It is a statement asserting that creativity and technical skill are not mutually exclusive; that communication and mathematics are languages in which to express and test ideas; that the ways of thinking in art and the ways of thinking in science are valuable and different; and that humans need to develop the full range of their intellectual, creative, emotional and ethical capacities for human flourishing.

In an era when educational systems around the globe are struggling to prepare their students for the challenges of the 21st century, STEAM education is an interesting, evidence-based model for rigorous, creative, engaging, equitable and transformative approaches to education. Comprehensive investments in STEAM education are investments in human potential and in the future of communities and societies.

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