

DEVELOPING AESTHETIC COMPETENCE FOR 6th GRADERS THROUGH FOLKTALES: THE CASE OF HIGH SCHOOLS IN TRA VINH PROVINCE, VIETNAM

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Abstract – *The study was conducted to survey and analyze the level of aesthetic perception through Thanh Giong and The Legend of Ho Guom - the two 6th grade folktales. The study involved the participation of 138 pupils and 6 teachers teaching 6th grade Literature at Cang Long Ethnic Minority Boarding Lower Secondary School and Huyen Hoi Secondary School in Cang Long District, Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam. In this study, group discussion and role-playing pedagogy were the two methods utilized combining the Rubric technique to evaluate the experimental results. The results showed that there is a positive change in students' aesthetic perception ability when using the active learning method with pre-test score is 5.9, and post-test score is 8.0 for the story of Thanh Giong. As for The Legend of Ho Guom, the pre-test score is 6.4, and 8.1 for the post-test score. These results contribute to motivating teachers to improve teaching methods, enhance the quality of transmission, and develop aesthetic competence for 6th grade students through teaching and learning folktales in particular as well as in teaching and learning the subject of Literature in general.*

Keywords: *6th grade Literature, active learning method, aesthetic competence develop, folktale.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Aesthetic competence is one of the key competencies that is formed and developed mainly through certain subjects and educational activities, such as language competence, mathemati-

cal competence, scientific competence, technology competence, computer competence, aesthetic competence, and physical competence. In the Literature curriculum of 6th grade, pupils learn several literary genres including myths, legends, fairy tales, epics, jokes, folk songs, proverbs, riddles, rhymes, poetry, etc. Creative approaches are applied actively in teaching to facilitate students' understanding and comprehension. However, the challenge is how to help students appreciate the aesthetic beauty of literature in general and folktales in particular, which is an art of teaching. This study was conducted at the Cang Long Ethnic Minority Boarding Lower Secondary School and Huyen Hoi Secondary School in Cang Long District, Tra Vinh Province to investigate and analyze the level of aesthetic perception of students through folktales in the 6th grade Literature curriculum. Based on the application of active learning methods in lesson planning and pedagogical experiments, the study helped pupils explore and develop their aesthetic competence and humanistic values through folktales, as demonstrated by building two conflicting character images, good and evil, light and dark, beauty and ugliness, and the application of magical elements in narrative writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the article Valuating the students' aesthetics in literature teaching by Nguyen Duy Binh [1, p.10–44], the late Prime Minister Pham Van Dong stated: 'Within an essay, we usually teach the students the beauty of literature. Moreover, we should also show them the beauty of other aspects such as the soul, thoughts, and common senses...' The author mentioned that 'Literature plays the role of cultivating aesthetic abilities, stimulating sensitivity, and fostering a love for beauty in students.' He emphasizes that teaching

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literature must convey high spiritual values to the younger generation, contributing to building the strength of the nation and creating richness and power of socialist personality in society [1].

In the book *Current aesthetic education in Vietnam* by Le Vinh Quang [2, p.80–89], he said: ‘Literature contributes to fostering a healthy aesthetic perception for readers thanks to the rich aesthetic experiences it provides. Thus, the author claimed that we should develop the imaging system of the perceiving subject, evaluate and be creative in complementation in order to foster aesthetic competence.’

Phan Trong Luan [3, p.200] mentioned about aesthetic and emotional competence in the work *Literature - creative readers*. The author stated that ‘Competence of aesthetic emotions is an extremely crucial one in composing as well as enjoying and perceiving literature’. In addition, Nguyen Thi Thu Ha [4, p.19–21] focused on reading comprehension skills; aesthetics’ ‘stumbling blocks’ detecting skills; aesthetic signals interpreting skills; art images analyzing skills.

The 2018 General Education Curriculum aims to develop essential characteristics in students such as patriotism, compassion, diligence, honesty, and responsibility, while also developing core and specialized competences.

- General competences: These competences are formed through various subjects and educational activities, including self-management and self-learning, communication and collaboration, problem-solving and creativity.

- Specialized competences: These competences are primarily developed through specific subjects or certain educational activities, including language competence, mathematical competence, natural and social sciences, technology competence, information technology competence, aesthetic competence, and physical competence.

In the article ‘Exploring the role of art education in developing students’ qualities and capacities’ by Nguyen Trong Hoan, the author argues that in the General Education Curriculum, students’ aesthetic competence relates to music, fine arts, and literature competence. Each skill is demonstrated through activities as shown in Figure 1. [5]

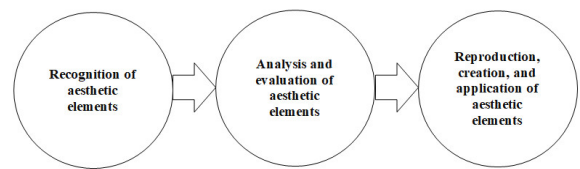


Fig. 1: Simulation of aesthetic competence according to the 2018 General Education Curriculum [5]

In addition, the curriculum also contributes to identifying and nurturing gifted and talented students.

According to Le Van Duong, Le Dinh Lac, Le Hong Van [6], aesthetic competence in Literature include exploratory and perceptual competences. (Figure 2)

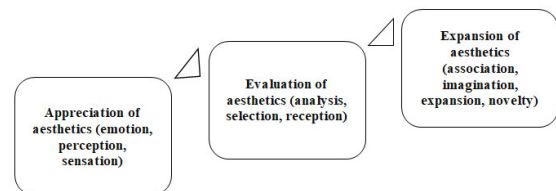


Fig. 2: The levels of aesthetic competence [6]

Therefore, the position and importance of aesthetic competence in the General Education Curriculum need to be implemented in interactive, multidimensional and cross-cutting relationships with many subjects and educational activities.

In general, it is extremely important to develop students’ competence to perceive aesthetics through literature as well as in life. If students acquire this ability, they will then discover the values, and evaluate the merits and demerits of the literary works. Literature subject not only nurtures the soul but also helps students to apply their knowledge and skills in life.

Through the review of literature, a number of related studies on aesthetics, literary perception, and aesthetic education for students through literature are found. However, there has not been any research related to aesthetic perception through folk tales in lower secondary education. Therefore, this is a new study with 6th-grade secondary school students as the survey targets. Hence, a

lot of new information and unique ideas can be used for this research in particular and teaching literature in general.

Within the scope of this topic, the author focuses on analyzing the levels of aesthetic competence through two folk tales in the 6th grade literature curriculum, namely Thánh Gióng [Saint Giong] and Sự tích Hồ Gươm [The Legend of Ho Guom] by using a rubric. Moreover, teaching methodologies will be further discussed and appropriate teaching methods will be then proposed to increase students' passion, interest, and appreciation of the beauty of folk tales.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in two phases:

(1) Theoretical basis research: reading documents on teaching and learning oriented towards capacity development in the Literature curriculum, thereby analyzing and synthesizing theoretical bases on educational innovation, and modern teaching methods according to the 2018 educational program.

(2) Practical research: This is the stage of collecting information for the research, so it is carried out through 2 steps: First: surveying the actual situation of teaching Literature in 6th grade through a questionnaire. Second: conducting a pedagogical experiment to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the methods of teaching folk tales proposed in this study.

To serve the research, the author chose two school locations: (1) Cang Long Ethnic Minority Boarding Lower Secondary School and (2) Huyen Hoi Secondary School, as shown in Table 1.

According to statistics, the total number of 6th graders in both schools is 138, and the number of teachers teaching Literature 6 is six. Therefore, to ensure objectivity, the author surveyed all the subjects.

Data was collected by asking for opinions from teachers and students, conducting surveys, surveying lesson plans, and observing Literature classes that included folk tales such as the story of *Thanh Giong* and *The Legend of the Ho Guom*. The survey content includes:

Table 1: Statistics on the number of 6th graders and Literature teachers Cang Long Ethnic Minority Boarding Lower Secondary School

No	Location	Quantity of students	Quantity of Literature teachers
1	Huyen Hoi Secondary School	68	4
2	Cang Long Secondary Boarding School for Ethnic Minority Students	70	2
Total		138	6

Source: Data surveyed by the authors at Department of Education and Training of Cang Long District, Tra Vinh Province

- Surveying teachers on teaching Literature with a focus on developing aesthetic competence for students.

- Surveying students on the aesthetic value of folk tales and the method of learning folk tales.

The criteria for evaluating the development of aesthetic competence in teaching folk tales are proposed in Table 2.

Rating: Evaluation criteria are on a 10-point scale, rounded to 1 decimal place, and no criterion is scored 0.

- Poor: 0–2 points
- Weak: 3–4 points
- Average: 5–6 points
- Good: 7–8 points
- Excellent: 9–10 points

For pedagogical experiment : The author designs a teaching plan for folk tales based on the analysis of the current teaching of folk tales and on the knowledge of education, psychology, and cognitive level of each subject. In addition, the teaching of folk tales at the two schools mentioned above is organized, and the students' perception is evaluated through experiment to provide some teaching methods and skills for teaching folk tales through *Thanh Giong* and *The Legend of the Ho Guom* that are suitable for 6th graders.

Table 2: Rubric for evaluating aesthetic competencies

Types of competence	Level of competence					Total
	Poor (0–2 points)	Weak (>2–4,9 points)	Average (5–5,9 points)	Good (6–7,9 points)	Excellent (8–10 points)	
1. Exploring Aesthetics						4,0
1.1. Identifying basic aesthetic elements in the work: language, artistic imagery, value, meaning	No identification = 0.4 points	Identifying some elements = 0.8 points	Identifying a relatively sufficient number of elements = 1.2 points	Identifying a fairly sufficient number of elements = 1.6 points	Identifying a full range of elements = 2.0 points	2,0
1.2. Emotionally responding to the aesthetic elements	No emotional response = 0.4 points	Slightly emotionally responsive = 0.8 points	Relatively emotionally responsive = 1.2 points	Fairly emotionally responsive = 1.6 points	Deeply emotionally responsive = 2.0 points	2,0
2. Appreciating Aesthetics						6,0
2.1. Sensing beauty	Unable to sense = 0.3 points	Sensing partially = 0.6 points	Sensing relatively well = 0.9 points	Sensing quite a lot = 1.2 points	Sensing fully = 1.5 points	1,5
2.2. Analyzing beauty	Unable to analyze = 0.3 points	Analyzing partially = 0.6 points	Analyzing relatively well = 0.9 points	Analyzing in detail = 1.2 points	Analyzing fully = 1.5 points	1,5
2.3. Evaluating beauty	Unable to evaluate = 0.3 points	Evaluating partially = 0.6 points	Evaluating relatively well = 0.9 points	Evaluating quite well = 1.2 points	Evaluating fully = 1.5 points	1,5
2.4. Recreating aesthetic elements	Unable to recreate = 0.3 points	Recreating partially = 0.6 points	Recreating relatively well = 0.9 points	Recreating quite well = 1.2 points	Recreating well = 1.5 points	1,5

Source: Proposed by the authors

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

Starting from the academic year 2022-2023, the education sector will implement the teaching of the 2018 General Education Curriculum in grade 6 with three textbooks: *Cánh diều* [Kites], *Chân trời sáng tạo* [Creative horizons], *Kết nối tri thức với cuộc sống* [Connecting knowledge to life]. The knowledge of the subjects in Literature in grade 6 is diversified compared to the previous textbook program. The reading comprehension section includes many new literary works, some of which were previously taught in grade 8 and grade 9 of the 2006 General Education Curriculum, but have now been implemented in grade 6, such as *Cô bé bán diêm* [The little match girl] in grade 8 and the poem *Mây và Sóng* [Clouds and waves] in grade 9. Additionally, the poem *May va Song* was originally scheduled to be taught in

the middle of the second semester of grade 9, but the literature textbook series *Kết nối tri thức với cuộc sống* for grade 6 has arranged it as one of the first lessons in the first semester, when students are just entering secondary school.

Cang Long Ethnic Minority Boarding Lower Secondary School and Huyen Hoi Secondary School in Cang Long District, Tra Vinh Province have been using the *Chân trời sáng tạo* textbook series since the academic year 2020. The grade 6 Literature program consists of 140 periods, including 72 periods in the first semester and 68 periods in the second semester, which lasts for 19 and 18 weeks respectively. Four literary works, namely *Thanh Giong*, *Sọ Dưa*, *The Legend of Ho Guom* and *Em bé thông minh* [The smart kid], are arranged to be taught in the first semester.

Results from teachers' survey and class observation

Teachers' teaching methodology: Figure 3 shows that teachers mainly use traditional methods such as lecturing in which students listen to the lectures and take notes or read the passage expressively, then answer questions from teachers, etc. The consequences of the traditional methods often include:

- Firstly, learners are passive since they write down and learn exactly what the teacher lectures and tells them to do.

- Secondly, learners 'learn by rote' or learn word by word without understanding the lesson.

- Thirdly, the teachers just give their opinions, and students' views are not expressed and discussed.

These things generally create boredom in Literature lessons, making learners feel uninterested and unpleasant to learn and consider literature a 'sorrowful' subject.

Students are fascinated by folk tales and they suppose that these imaginative elements of the stories literally happen in reality. For instance, these are comments collected from students: 'I thought Golden Turtle can actually speak.' or 'How on earth could iron horse run and fight?' or 'I don't think people can grow that quickly as Thánh Gióng does.' Therefore, folktales seem to be more attractive and interesting compared to other genres.

Table 3 shows that teachers follow the lesson plan when teaching. The average evaluation score for Thánh Gióng is 5.9/10.0, and for Sự tích Hồ Gươm is 6.4/10.0. According to the observations, the class seems quiet. The students may feel anxious about being observed or may not prepare well for the lesson in advance (>50%). Therefore, the students could not read the literary work clearly and show the appropriate intonation of the dialogue. Besides, they failed to summarize the plot since they did not understand the work. However, the facial expressions showed that the children paid attention and were interested in Thánh Gióng, as well as the golden turtle and the magic sword. Regarding the asking and answering questions section: The teacher instructed students relatively in questions with increasing levels of difficulty as Table 4.

According to the results presented in Table 4, students possess cognitive skills to recognize aesthetic qualities, distinguish between good and evil, and exhibit empathy (such as towards Thánh Gióng's parents) in folk stories. Nevertheless, the current teaching method relies only on traditional techniques, which involve asking questions and providing explanations from the teacher's point of view. The implementation of a modern approach (active teaching method), could potentially improve the student's ability to perceive the aesthetics of these narratives.

Pedagogical experiments on proposed methods of teaching literature with a focus on developing aesthetic abilities for 6th-grade students

A pedagogical experiment was conducted with 6th grade students at Cang Long Ethnic Minority Boarding and Huyen Hoi Secondary School, Cang Long District, using detailed information presented in Table 5. The proposed teaching methods in literature for folk tales, aimed at developing students' aesthetic competence, were group discussion and role-playing, which were applied in the pedagogical experiment.

Role play as a teaching method

Role-playing is a form of experiential learning [7]. Students take on assigned roles and perform those roles through a script or by playing the role of the character to retell the story. Role-playing activities can be carried out individually (personal role-playing) or in groups, with each member in the group taking on a role/character. The role and rules for a role to perform are clearly defined in the script. Role-playing can provide very effective learning experiences for students by putting them in simulated situations in the real world, where they play a specific role/character in a safe environment.

The teaching process using the role-playing method is described in Figure 4.

In the warm-up stage: The teacher needs to create a learning mindset, help students understand the task of learning and have an interest in the literary work. At the same time, help students understand the characteristics of the genre, develop reading comprehension skills, analyze and identify the interesting plot.

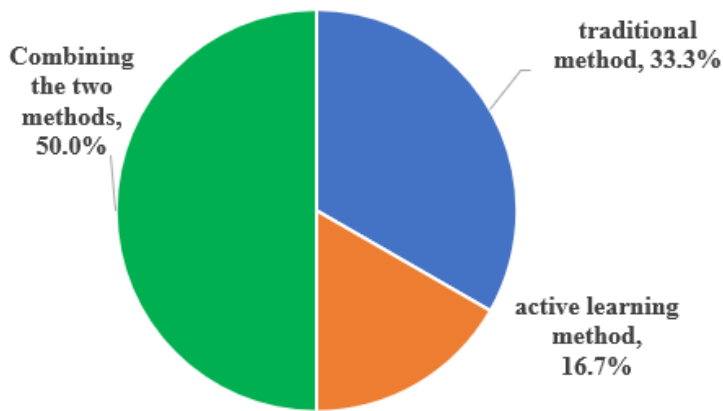


Fig. 3: Literature teaching methods

Source: Survey data of 06 literature teachers of 6th grade

Table 3: Assessment sheet for the development of students’ aesthetic competence through the work of Thánh Gióng and Sự tích Hồ Gươm

STT	Competencies	Maximum score	Average score	
			Thanh Giong	The Legend of Ho Guom
1	Aesthetic exploration	4,0	2,1	2,4
1.1	The exploration of aesthetic fundamental elements: languages, images, values, meanings	2,0	1,1	1,2
1.2	Sympathy for aesthetic elements	2,0	1,1	1,2
2	Aesthetic appreciation	6,0	3,8	4,0
2.1	Beauty perception	1,5	1,0	1,0
2.2	Beauty analysis	1,5	0,9	1,0
2.3	Beauty assessment	1,5	1,0	1,1
2.4	Re-enactment of aesthetic elements	1,5	1,0	1,0
Total score		10,0	5,9	6,4

Source: Observing the lessons of Thánh Gióng and Sự tích Hồ Gươm in 6^h grade

In the formation of new knowledge stage: Students develop their aesthetic competence by ‘Trying storytelling’ or in other words, ‘Playing the role of the character to retell the story’. For the literary work Thánh Gióng, there will be some impressive characters, and students choose a character they like and play the role of that character to retell the story.

In the practice stage: The aesthetic value of the story (beauty, sadness, humor, etc.) of the story are evaluated.

In the application stage: Applying the value of the works in real-life situation are raised

through lessons from the works. After reading the story Thánh Gióng, what do students think about the tradition of patriotism and resistance against foreign aggression of our people?

In the exploration and expansion stage: The teacher asks the question ‘When Thánh Gióng defeated the An invaders, why did he fly up to the sky instead of staying with his parents?’ At this point, students will express their thoughts about Thánh Gióng, expressing the feelings of Thánh Gióng when he flew to the sky. At the end of the lesson, remind students of the ancient relics that still exist today (Heavenly King of Phu dong

Table 4: Lesson evaluation

NO.	Teacher's activities	Students' activities	Teacher's observation
I	Thanh Giong		
1	How many parts does the story have? What is the content of each part?	The story has 3 parts - Part 1: from beginning to "stay there" - Part 2: to "to the sky" - Part 3: the left	Students' answer was partly correct as they did not mention the main idea of each part: the birth, the growth of Giong, and the process that he fought against the invaders.
2	What are the characters of the story? Who is the main character?	Old couple, the King, the envoy, neighbors, <i>Thanh Giong</i> . <i>Thanh Giong</i> is the main character.	Students answered correctly
3	When did the little boy start to speak?	He was unable to speak until he heard that the envoy was looking for someone to save the country.	Students answered correctly
4	What was Thanh Giong's first statement in life?	"Mom, let the envoy in."	Students answered correctly
5	What is your thinking about the statement of Thanh Giong?		This question requires students' thinking skills. They were unable to answer yet.
6	Can you figure out the magical detail in the literary work? What is it?	<i>Thanh Giong</i> grew up by leaps and bounds.	This question requires students' cognitive skills. Students only pointed out the detail "grew up by leaps and bounds"
II	The Legend of Ho Guom		
7	How many parts does the story have? What is the main idea of each part?	Part 1: from the beginning to "the country" Part 2: the left	Students' answer was partly correct as they did not mention the main idea of the part in which Long Quan lends the insurgents a magic sword and then he reclaims it.
8	How is the magical strength of the magic sword?	This is a magic sword that can win any fight.	This question requires students' cognitive skills, so they were unable to explain the meaning as well as come up with the answer.
9	In which situation did Long Quan lend the sword?	The golden turtle grabbed it and then dived deeply into the lake.	

Source: Observing the lessons of *Thánh Gióng* and *Sự tích Hồ Gươm* in 6th grade

Table 5: Planning pedagogical experiments

Class	Quantity of students	Teacher of experimental teaching	Location	Items	Quantity of teachers involved in assessment
Class 6A	35		Cang Long Secondary Boarding School for Ethnic Minority Students	The Legend of Ho Guom	6
Class 6.2	36		Huyen Hoi Secondary School	Thanh Giong	6

Source: Proposed by the authors

Temple, Giong village). Table 6 presents the role-playing method in teaching *Thánh Gióng*.

Group discussion method with tablecloth technique

The "tablecloth" technique is a form of collaborative activity that combines individual and group activities to promote active participation and enhance interaction among students. The authors applied this technique to develop a group discussion program in the literary work *Sự tích Hồ Gươm*. (Table 7)

To evaluate the development of aesthetic abilities for grade 6 students through learning folktales, the authors used a rubric tool to compare the results before and after the experiment, with a rating system on a scale of 10, rounded to 2 decimal places, and with no criteria scored 0. (Table 8)

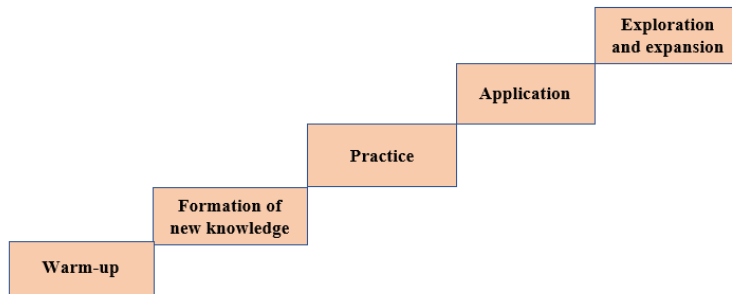


Fig. 4: Teaching process

Source: Proposed by the authors

Table 6: Assigning roles

Character	Scenario
Thánh Gióng	Playing the role of Thánh Gióng to narrate the legend of Thánh Gióng
Mother of Gióng	Playing the role of mother of Thánh Gióng to narrate the legend of Thánh Gióng
Emissary	Playing the role of a emissary to narrate the legend of Thánh Gióng
Imaginary character	Playing the role of an imaginary character to narrate the legend of Thánh Gióng
Villager in Gióng's village	Playing the role of a villager to narrate the legend of Thánh Gióng

Source: Proposed by the authors

Table 7: Assigning discussion topics

Group	Quantity of students	Discussion topics
Group 1	8	What do you know about Hồ Gươm (Hanoi)?
Group 2	8	Why is the sword in this story called the "magic sword"? What does this characteristic of the legend represent?
Group 3	8	How did Long Quân [River god] lend Lam Sơn army the sword?
Group 4	8	When the golden turtle demanded the sword, what did the King "understand"?
Group 5	8	Some people say that <i>Sự tích Hồ Gươm</i> simply borrows the story of Lê Lợi returning the magic sword to "explain the place name Hồ Gươm." Do you agree or disagree with this opinion? Why?

Source: Proposed by the authors

As a result of the empirical lesson, the evaluation results of six teachers were collected, as shown in Table 4. According to the evaluation scores, the total evaluation scores for the two works were 8.0 and 8.1, these are the scores that the students achieved after the class, which are considered excellent. This demonstrates how the two methods have enabled students to understand the aesthetic quality of the works and the

significance of the characters, the plot, and even the details.

B. Discussion

Figure 5 and 6 demonstrate how incorporating active learning methods into the teaching literature, particularly role-playing and group discussions, significantly enhances students' development of an aesthetic sense. These methods provide opportunities to practice expressing their thoughts, feelings, and behavior through a hypothetical role. Moreover, this helps them to think deeply about a particular issue by standing in the shoes and perspective of the characters, focusing on a specific event that they observe from their point of view. For example:

- In Thánh Gióng, the ability to discover aesthetics increased from 2.1/4.0 to 2.8/4.0, the ability to appreciate aesthetics increased from 3.4/6.0 to 5.2/6.0, and the total score increased from 5.9/10.0 to 8.0/10.0.

- In Sự tích Hồ Gươm, the ability to discover aesthetics increased from 2.4/4.0 to 2.9/4.0, the ability to appreciate aesthetics increased from 4.0/6.0 to 5.2/6.0, and the total score increased from 6.4/10.0 to 8.1/10.0.

These results reflect that the proposed solution to develop students' aesthetic abilities in 6th grade through folktales is appropriate and effective.

Table 8: Assessment of students’ aesthetics abilities after the empirical based on assessment rubrics

No.	Competencies	Average score		
		Maximum score	Thánh Gióng	Sự tích Hồ Gươm
1	Aesthetic exploration	4,0	2,8	2,9
1.1	Exploring the aesthetic elements in the work: language, character concept art, value, meaning.	2,0	1,5	1,5
1.2	Aesthetic sensitivity	2,0	1,4	1,4
2	Aesthetic appreciation	6,0	5,2	5,2
2.1	Beauty perception	1,5	1,2	1,2
2.2	Beauty analysis	1,5	1,3	1,3
2.3	Beauty assessment	1,5	1,4	1,3
2.4	Re-enactment of aesthetic elements	1,5	1,4	1,4
Total score		10,0	8,0	8,1

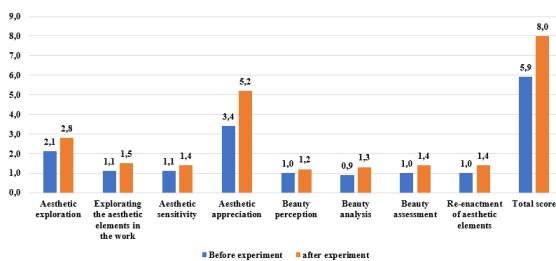


Fig. 5: Comparing the pre and post-test results of Thánh Gióng

Source: Authors’ empirical evaluation

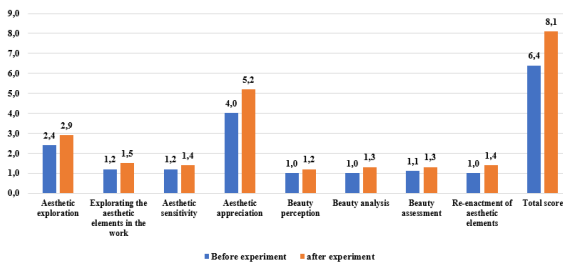


Fig. 6: Comparing the pre and post-test results of Sự tích Hồ Gươm

Source: Authors’ empirical evaluation

V. CONCLUSION

Aesthetic competence is a set of mental and physiological attributes that includes the need for aesthetics, aesthetic emotions, and aesthetic taste. Literature is the most dominant subject for developing students’ aesthetic abilities. As a result, teachers must encourage students’ creativity and imagination and raise their feelings about the

beauty of their work while they are learning.

The empirical research shows that the students find interest in the new teaching methods and experiences. Therefore, using teaching methods that encourage active learning, such as group discussions, storytelling, and role-play, needs to be emphasized. Teachers should also pay attention to the specific teaching methods of each topic and focus on designing and using different types of questions for different levels to implement differentiated teaching and guide students in reading comprehension and developing reading skills.

Pedagogical experimentation is only the initial step in the long-term teaching process. Spending time on preparation and teaching with enthusiasm will help the lesson be as effective as possible. The proposed method of teaching group discussion and role-playing may have certain limitations, so in future studies, the authors will expand the scope of the study, the surveyed areas and experiments, as well as apply this method in different literary works to have a comprehensive view of applying positive methods to enhance aesthetic abilities for 6th graders in particular, and secondary school students in general.

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