

Examination of Visual Arts Teacher Candidates' Perception of Cultural Heritage With Word Association Test

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This study aimed to determine the cognitive structures of pre-service visual arts teachers studying art education regarding the concepts of cultural heritage, value, history, museum, and local culture through a word association test. The research was designed using the general survey model, and the study group consisted of 54 pre-service teachers enrolled in the Department of Art Education at a university. Data were collected through a word association test and explanatory sentences written for each key concept, and analyzed using descriptive analysis methods. According to the findings, the participants most frequently associated the concept of "cultural heritage" with "art" and "tradition," indicating a strong awareness of its aesthetic and historical dimensions. However, some participants showed misconceptions by limiting cultural heritage to only physical remnants. While the concept of "value" was generally defined through its social and cultural aspects, a notable portion of participants described it in terms of personal emotions or material worth. The concept of "history" was addressed in a knowledge-based and event-oriented manner. The "museum" concept was mostly described as an educational and preservative institution, though some participants offered superficial or subjective interpretations. The concept of "local culture" was mostly associated with "tradition" and explained in terms of identity and belonging. Regarding the second sub-problem, the concept of cultural heritage was most frequently associated with history, value, and museum, while the museum and local culture concepts were also linked with history. This indicates that teacher candidates tend to interpret these concepts through a historical perspective. The value concept, on the other hand, did not form direct associations with other concepts, revealing some conceptual deficiencies.

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is a phenomenon that enables individuals to collectively organize various elements shaping their way of life. Tylor (1871) defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." In contrast, Geertz (1973) offered a classical cognitive definition of culture as "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (as cited in Rouhi, 2017).

Çelikkaya (1993) described culture as a fundamental phenomenon that shapes the identity and character of a society, regulates social life, and reflects the values upheld by communities. Just as it is inconceivable to imagine a person without a personality, it is equally unthinkable to conceive of a society devoid of culture. Therefore, culture is a social construct and an undeniable reality present in every community. It pertains to both the origins and essence of humanity. The way individuals think, feel, behave, what they desire, how they perceive themselves, and how they construct their values, ideals, and aspirations—these all constitute the core elements of culture (Yağcı, 2007). The environment in which people live, family structure, education and traditions constitute individual culture. The person finds his/her own identity with national culture and local culture. Local culture defines the cultural characteristics that have been shaped over time in the geography where a particular community lives and that are unique to them. According to Çüçen (2005), local culture is the values specific to a group of people living in the same geography in a certain period. In the same way, Bayraktar (2023) stated that a certain geography, its unique ethnic structure, beliefs, language, clothing style, family traditions, history and lifestyle constitute the local culture of that region. Every society has to protect the values and phenomena that constitute its culture and transfer them to future generations. This requires raising awareness of the cultural values of the society. Cultural heritage is an important concept in understanding, knowing and protecting cultural assets.

Cultural heritage is an element that represents the history and identity of a community and connects the past, present and future (Tunçer, 2017). Cultural heritage is an important accumulation shaped by common values and experiences that distinguish societies from each other (Yıldırım, 2022). Cultural heritage, the physical products and remains of our past, serve as an important reminder of where we come from, who we are and who we want to be (Mason & Avrami, 2002). The preservation and appropriation of cultural heritage are only possible through the recognition of a society's historical values. Museums, in this regard, are the most significant institutions for preserving and exhibiting these values (Aydoğan & Toprak, 2024). Therefore, concepts such as value, history, museum, and local culture are among the fundamental elements that represent various dimensions of cultural heritage. These concepts contribute to individuals' understanding of the past, the development of historical and cultural awareness, and the formation of a shared sense of belonging. In this

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respect, examining the relationships between concepts that define cultural characteristics enables the analysis of the meanings individuals attribute to cultural notions and reveals how cultural heritage is perceived.

For an element to be classified as cultural heritage, it must possess certain characteristics: it should carry historical value, pass through a societal filter, be consciously transmitted across generations, be preserved in its original form, exist as a tangible, intangible, or hybrid entity, and be socially embedded (Diker, 2024).

When cultural heritage is considered, tangible assets are typically the first to come to mind—such as sculptures, mosaics, historical monuments and buildings, and archaeological sites. However, over time, the concept has expanded to encompass intangible cultural elements as well, including local food, culinary and musical practices, rituals, and celebrations (Tunçer, 2017). Cultural heritage is not merely concerned with preserving cultural artifacts from the past; it also represents a dynamic structure that plays a vital role in the formation of individual identity. The bond individuals form with cultural heritage strengthens their sense of belonging and cultural identity. Furthermore, it contributes to the development of aesthetic perception and the capacity for artistic interpretation. According to Okuyucu (2021) notes, cultural heritage resources are important because they reflect a nation's identity, and they possess universal value as indicators of the technical, artistic, aesthetic, and scientific achievements attained by humanity throughout history.

The term "value" can be defined as the principles, fundamental beliefs, and generally accepted standards that guide an individual's behavior (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). Value is an ongoing process that shapes an individual's identity and directs their future. Values, nourished by both the material and spiritual experiences of a society, possess cultural and social characteristics (Diksoy & Mercin, 2017). Society is constituted by "shared cultural traits" and "common values" (Arvidsson, 2005). According to Yılmaz (2019), value is one of the most important cultural elements that hold society together and shape its worldview. Values are not only based on individual preferences but also on cultural codes and social tendencies. The value of cultural heritage does not simply refer to material or artistic worth. Rather, it signifies a conscious approach and understanding toward the cultural assets encompassed within the concept of cultural heritage. Díaz-Andreu (2017) emphasizes that the term heritage values expresses the meanings and significance that individuals or groups attribute to heritage, including collections, buildings, archaeological sites, landscapes, and intangible cultural expressions such as traditions. Therefore, understanding the concept of cultural heritage is only possible through an awareness of value. Analyzing the meaning of the value of cultural assets leads to the conclusion that they constitute a legacy that must be preserved throughout history.

The concept of history encompasses two fundamental meanings: first, it refers to the entirety of real events experienced by a society or humanity over time; second, it denotes the body of knowledge acquired through the scientific investigation of these events (Yücel & Yediyıldız, 1988). While historical events are examined primarily through written documents, art history seeks to understand the past through works of art. The information produced by both disciplines complements and reinforces one another (Yiğit, 2017). Museums, which tangibly reflect history, are among the places where the traces of the past can be most profoundly experienced. Museums are institutions that may be housed in diverse settings, such as buildings, open-air sites, factories, or virtual environments. Despite these varied forms, all museums share common functions: collecting, exhibiting, restoring, preserving, promoting, educating, and providing visitors with an enjoyable experience (Mercin, 2017). The elements contained within museums establish a link between the past, present, and future, thereby ensuring cultural sustainability. Additionally, museums are regarded as institutions that objectively reflect a society's cultural heritage and identity (Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2014). In this context, museums serve as dynamic learning spaces that keep cultural heritage alive.

The concepts of cultural heritage, value, history, museum, and local culture hold significant positions in the process of art interpretation and art education. The fact that cultural heritage encompasses knowledge, meaning, and values transmitted from the past to the present; that history provides the contextual framework shaping the content of art; that museums serve as institutions preserving, exhibiting, and facilitating learning of these values; that local culture imparts authenticity and identity to artistic expressions; and that the concept of value includes the meaning an individual attributes to an artwork along with aesthetic pleasure—all point to strong interrelations among these concepts. A fundamental tenet of the sociology of art posits that art cannot be conceived independently from society, and that the economic, political, religious, and cultural characteristics of a society are inevitably reflected in its artworks (Ülker, 2010).

It is important to understand these interrelated concepts correctly and to analyse the relationships between them. It is especially valuable in terms of determining the misconceptions of prospective teachers who will provide art education and which concepts they establish connections between. For this reason, the word association test, which is an effective method in revealing the connections between concepts, comes to the fore as an appropriate tool.

In the word association test (WIT), the student is asked to say the concepts that he/she associates with a given key concept in a short period of time. This method reveals the connections between the concepts in the student's long-term memory and the semantic proximity between the concepts. According to the semantic proximity theory, concepts that are mentally closer to each other are remembered faster and are considered more closely related (Bahar & Özatlı, 2003).

Cultural heritage, museum and value concepts are among the basic concepts in the fields of social studies and tourism. In the literature, Sidekli and Karaca (2013); Avcı and Memişoğlu (2016); Demirezen and Aktaş (2020); Özbaş and Çulha Özbaş (2022); Erbaş (2021); Sağ and Kaymakçı (2024); Sevingen, Acun and Üztemur (2022); Yalçın and Güleç (2022); Dere (2021); Durmuş, Karadağoglu, and Kınacı (2023); Güngör, Öztürk, and Ogelman (2022); Kalaycı and Özçatalbaş (2021); Silva and Roders (2012); Smith and Campbell (2018); Brembeck and Ekström (2005); Mason and Avrami (2002).

Within the field of visual arts education, the studies of Özalp Hamarta stand out for their use of the word association test method in investigating the concepts of museum (2021) and aesthetics (2020). Other studies employing various methods on art-related concepts include Yalçın's (2015) metaphor analysis on the concept of artist and Ulus's (2023) metaphor analysis on creativity. On the other hand, although there are various studies addressing perceptions of cultural heritage within the field of social studies (Ay Selanik & Fidan Kurtde, 2013; Sidekli & Karaca, 2013; Tural, 2023), research revealing individuals' cognitive structures regarding the concept of cultural heritage in art education literature remains limited. This study is therefore considered to shed light on new approaches and evaluations in the relevant field.

Accordingly, this research aims to determine the cognitive structures and conceptual misunderstandings of prospective visual arts teachers regarding the concepts of cultural heritage, value, history, museum, and local culture through the word association test. Based on this aim, the following sub-problems have been formulated:

- 1- **What are the cognitive structures of prospective visual arts teachers in art education regarding the concepts of cultural heritage, value, history, museum, and local culture?**
- 2- **Which of the concepts of cultural heritage, value, history, museum, and local culture do prospective visual arts teachers in art education associate with each other within their cognitive structures?**

METHOD

In this section, the design of the study, the participants, the data collection tools and the techniques used in the analysis of the data are given.

Research Design

This study was designed using the general survey model, one of the descriptive research designs. General survey models are research arrangements conducted on either the entire population or a selected group, sample, or subset, with the aim of making generalizations about a population consisting of a large number of elements. These models can be used for both single-variable and relational surveys. In many studies, arrangements are made to enable both types of surveys simultaneously (Karasar, 2005). Accordingly, in this study, new meanings and cognitive judgments were derived through a relational survey conducted within the word pool collected around key concepts.

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of pre-service teachers selected through criterion sampling, which is a type of purposive sampling strategy. According to Creswell (2017), criterion sampling is a sampling method in which all cases that meet predetermined criteria within the data system are examined in depth. Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, and Demirel (2018) state that if a study focuses on individuals, events, or situations with specific characteristics, the sample should include units that meet those criteria. In this context, the participants were pre-service teachers enrolled in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years of a higher education institution offering teacher education in the field of art education. These individuals were knowledgeable about the subject matter and voluntarily participated in the study, thus fulfilling the predetermined criteria. Accordingly, the study group consisted of a total of 54 pre-service teachers studying in the Department of Art Education at a higher education institution during the 2025–2026 academic year, all of whom participated voluntarily.

Data Collection Tool

The data were collected through the independent Word Association Test (WAT). The word association test is a tool capable of deeply assessing mental lexicon capacity and psychological association, depending on how it is used. When used as a psychological association test, the word association method contributes to understanding both individual and group characteristics (Sastra & Mardhiah, 2021). In the test form, each key concept was presented on a separate page, written ten times in a vertical list, with a blank space next to each instance for participants to fill in. Additionally, under each concept, there was a section titled “related sentence,” which allowed participants to construct a meaningful sentence about the given concept. This section was included to more clearly reveal how the participant interpreted the concept. The key concepts used in the study were “cultural heritage,” “value,” “history,” “museum,” and “local culture.”

Table 1. Example Structure of the Word Association Test

“What Concepts Does the Term “Cultural Heritage” Evoke for You?”
Please write 10 concepts that the term “Cultural Heritage” brings to mind.”
Cultural Heritage:
Cultural Heritage:
Cultural Heritage:
Cultural Heritage:
Cultural Heritage:
Cultural Heritage:
Cultural Heritage:
Cultural Heritage:
Cultural Heritage:
Cultural Heritage:
Related Sentence:

Data Collection and Analysis

During the data collection process, participants were asked to write up to ten words they considered closely related to each key concept within 30 seconds in the designated spaces on the data collection form. Additionally, at the end of each key concept, they were requested to construct a meaningful sentence related to that concept.

Descriptive analysis was employed to analyze the data of the study. According to this approach, data are summarized and interpreted based on predetermined themes. These descriptions are examined within cause-and-effect relationships to reach conclusions. The aim is to present the findings in an organized and interpreted manner (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The data obtained from the Word Association Test were analyzed using word frequency, semantic relation technique, and the number of relations between key

concepts. During the analysis process, the response words given to the key concepts were examined in detail. A frequency table was created to show how many times each word or concept was repeated for each key concept. According to the cut-off point technique by Bahar, Johnstone, and Sutcliffe (1999), in the frequency table, the cutoff point for any key concept in the Word Association Test is determined as 3 to 5 counts below the most frequently given response word. Responses with frequencies above this cutoff point are placed in the first section of the concept map. Subsequently, the cutoff point is lowered at certain intervals, and the process continues until all key words appear on the map. Accordingly, for any key concept in the Word Association Test, the cutoff point was set as a certain number below the highest frequency response. The most frequently repeated responses were placed in the first section of the concept network created for the initially determined cutoff point. Then, the cutoff point was gradually lowered at certain intervals, allowing all key words to be included in the concept network. To ensure participant confidentiality, no real names were used during data collection, analysis, and reporting processes; the participating pre-service teachers were anonymized as S1, S2, and so forth.

FINDINGS

In this section, the data obtained about the concepts were analysed in accordance with the frequency table and the findings were presented.

Findings According to the First Sub-Problem

Table 2. Distribution of Words Associated with Key Concepts

CULTURAL HERITAGE	f	VALUE	f	HISTORY	f	MUSEUM	f	LOCAL CULTURE	f
Art	64	Art	35	Time	53	Art	64	Tradition	50
Tradition	54	Culture	26	Culture	46	Archaeology	36	Belonging	34
Museum	31	Morality	26	Past	46	Culture	32	Art	34
History	27	Worth	23	War	41	History	29	History	24
Value	23	Love	21	Lesson	26	Tour	27	Food	15
Culture	21	Respect	21	Art	25	Artifact	22	Heritage	12
Past	21	Spiritual	19	Old	19	Sculpture	21	Clothing	10
Architecture	20	Important	18	Future	18	Old	20	Nation	10
Protection	11	Family	16	Atatürk	10	Exhibition	19		
						Value	15		
						Painting	12		
						Heritage	11		
						Past	11		

Table 2 displays the words associated with the five key concepts—cultural heritage, value, history, museum, and local culture—and their corresponding frequency counts. Accordingly, the word “art,” which has the highest frequency for both the concepts “cultural heritage” and “museum,” is highlighted in red. For the concept “history,” the words “culture,” “past,” and “war” fall within the second highest frequency range, indicated in blue. Within the third highest frequency range, marked in yellow, the concept “cultural heritage” is associated with the concept “museum.” In the same range, the concept “value” is linked with the word “art”; the concept “museum” with “archaeology” and “culture”; and the concept “local culture” with “belonging” and “art.” In the fourth frequency range, shown in green, the word most frequently associated with “cultural heritage” is “history.” The concept “value” is mostly related to “culture” and “morality”; “history” is mainly associated with “lesson”; “museum” with “history”; and “local culture” again with the word “history.”

Among the lowest frequency ranges, repeated words include “protection” associated with “cultural heritage.” The concept “value” is linked to the word “family”; “history” to “Atatürk”; “museum” to “heritage” and “past”; and “local culture” to “clothing” and “nation.”

Table 3. Distribution of Related Sentences According to Key Concepts

Answers	Key Concepts				
	Cultural Heritage (f)	Value (f)	History (f)	Museum(f)	Local Culture (f)
Valid Answers	46	30	46	39	42
Invalid Answers	6	21	6	12	3
Empty	2	3	2	3	9
TOTAL			54		

Table 3 presents the distribution of sentences that accurately or inaccurately reflect the meanings of the key concepts. Accordingly, 46 pre-service teachers provided valid responses that correctly explained the concept of "cultural heritage."

According to Table 3, 46 teachers stated: "Cultural heritage is the accumulation of written or unwritten knowledge that sheds light on society and is passed down to future generations by a society (S3)," "Cultural heritage is our past and identity that we must protect (S18)," "Artifacts with historical and cultural value that have reached us from past periods (S39)," "All kinds of values that form the identity of a nation (S50)." The most dominant common point among the valid responses given by the students is that cultural heritage is seen as a structure that should be transferred and preserved, that forms identity, and that holds social value. Six students, however, gave invalid responses regarding the concept of "cultural heritage": "The place where ruins are found (S15)," "Those who do not know their past cannot shape their future (S14)," "A ruined architectural structure has been taken into the restoration process (S29)." These kinds of statements tend to make generalizations or offer superficial observations rather than defining or explaining the concept of cultural heritage. As in the examples, these sentences are far from conveying the essence of cultural heritage and fail to reach the contextual depth of the concept.

Regarding the concept of "value," 30 pre-service teachers provided valid responses. Some example sentences are: "Our values should be passed on to future generations and protected (S51)," "Although the traditions belonging to our culture, preserved by our ancestors in the past, are still highly valued today, they are not adequately protected (S4)," "As a society and humanity, we have important values (S48)," "The value a society places on art reflects that society's level of development (S16)." For this concept, 21 pre-service teachers gave invalid responses. Examples include: "It is important to feel valuable and to make others feel valuable (S20)," "You should determine the things you value in life (S25)," "The things a person values are values (S38)."

For the concept of "history," 46 pre-service teachers provided valid responses. Some example statements include: "History is a body of knowledge that explains the past of a society (S3)," "The events passed on from one generation to the next (S17)," "A society that does not know its history is doomed to perish (S54)." In contrast, 6 pre-service teachers gave invalid responses regarding the concept of history. Examples include: "So many dates have passed, but he didn't come (S25)," "In order to look to the future, we must learn our past well and derive lessons from it to give meaning to the future (S51)."

For the concept of "museum," 39 pre-service teachers provided valid responses. Some of the statements explaining the concept of museum include: "Museums are tools that contain past lives and guide the future (S11)," "A place that preserves old and valuable objects (S15)," "An artistic space that contains elements worth presenting throughout history (S18)," "A place where every kind of valuable and meaningful object is preserved, exhibited, and stored with appreciation (S50)." The common feature of the valid responses is that the concept of "museum" is defined as an institution that preserves, educates, sustains cultural heritage, establishes historical connections, and supports social identity. A total of 12 invalid responses were given regarding the concept of museum. Some of these include: "Clusters of ideas and thoughts flying around in museums (S32)," "Museum visits are very boring (S54)," "He created a collection from the museums he visited and the photos he took (S12)." The invalid responses consist of statements that do not directly connect with the definition of a museum, ignore its functional aspects, or reflect subjective judgments.

For the concept of “local culture,” 42 pre-service teachers provided valid responses. Some of these include: “Local culture defines a society’s own unique values (S11),” “All cultural elements belonging to a specific region (S52),” “The way of life passed down from the past to the present within a community, carrying similar and regional characteristics (S38),” “Kindergarten students performed a Zeybek dance wearing traditional costumes on April 23 (S22).” The most frequently emphasized points in student statements regarding local culture were identity formation, the transmission and protection of cultural values, and the use of traditional tangible elements (such as clothing, handicrafts, food, etc.). Three students gave invalid responses regarding the concept of “local culture.” Examples include: “Forming new perspectives through examination (S32),” “I don’t like Konya’s deep-rooted local culture (S54).”

Concept Network with an Cut-off Point of 50 and Above

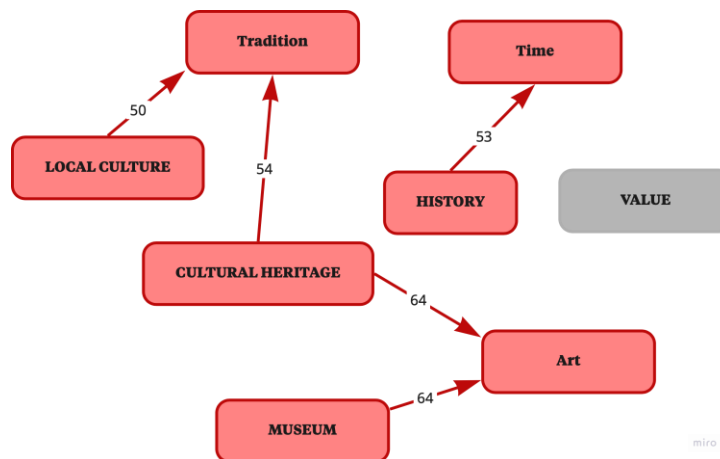


Figure 1. Concept Network with Cut-off Point 50 and Above

In Figure 1, conceptual relationships with a cut-off point of 50 and above are shown in red. In this direction, the words ‘art (f=64)’ and ‘tradition (f=54)’ were associated with the concept of cultural heritage. The word ‘time (f=53)’ was associated with the concept of history, ‘art (f=64)’ with the concept of museum, and ‘tradition (f=50)’ with the concept of local culture.

Concept Network with Cut-off Point 49-40

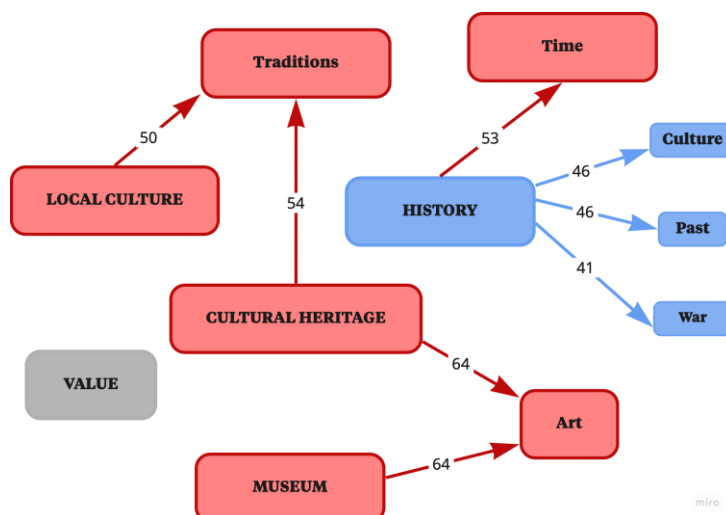


Figure 2. Concept Network Showing the Cut-off Point 49-40 Interval

In this section, the cut-off point 49-40 range is represented by blue colour. In Figure 2, the cut-off point is associated with the words 'culture (f=46),' 'past" (f=46) and 'war (f=41)' with the concept of history in the 49-40 frequency range.

Concept Network Showing the Interval 39-30 at the Cut-off Point

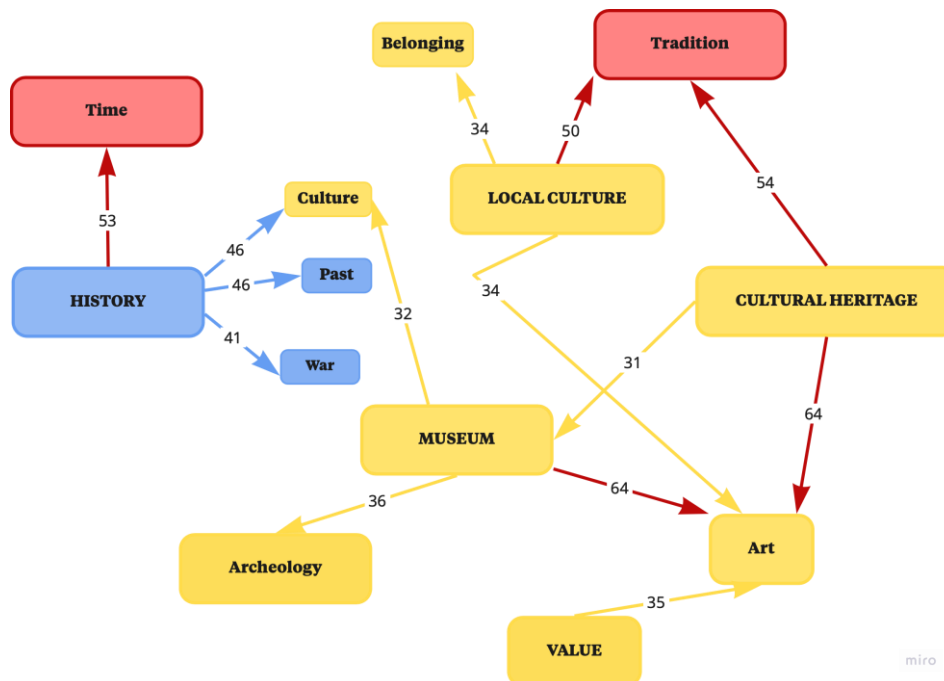


Figure 3. Concept Network Showing the Cut-off Point 39-30 Interval

As shown in Figure 3, the cut-off point within the 39–30 frequency range is represented in yellow. In this range, the word "museum" (f=31) is associated with the concept of cultural heritage. The words "belonging" (f=34) and "art" (f=34) are associated with the concept of local culture; the words "archaeology" (f=36) and "culture" (f=32) are associated with the concept of museum; and the word "art" (f=35) is associated with the concept of value.

Concept Network Showing the Cut-off Point 29-20 Interval

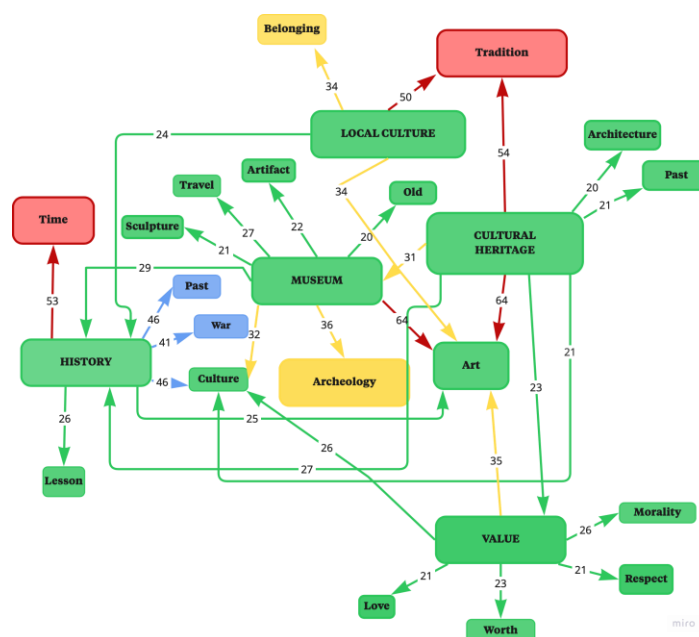


Figure 4. Concept Network Showing the Cut-off Point 29-20 Interval

In Figure 4, the cut-off point within the 29–20 frequency range is represented in green. Within this specified range, the concept of cultural heritage is associated with the words “history” (f=27), “value” (f=23), “culture” (f=21), “past” (f=21), and “architecture” (f=20). The concept of value is associated with the words “culture” (f=26), “morality” (f=26), “worth” (f=23), “love” (f=21), and “respect” (f=21); the concept of history is associated with the words “lesson” (f=26) and “art” (f=25); the concept of museum is associated with the words “history” (f=29), “travel” (f=27), “artifact” (f=22), “sculpture” (f=21), and “old” (f=20); and the concept of local culture is associated with the word “history” (f=24).

Concept Network Showing the Interval 19-10 at the Cut-off Point

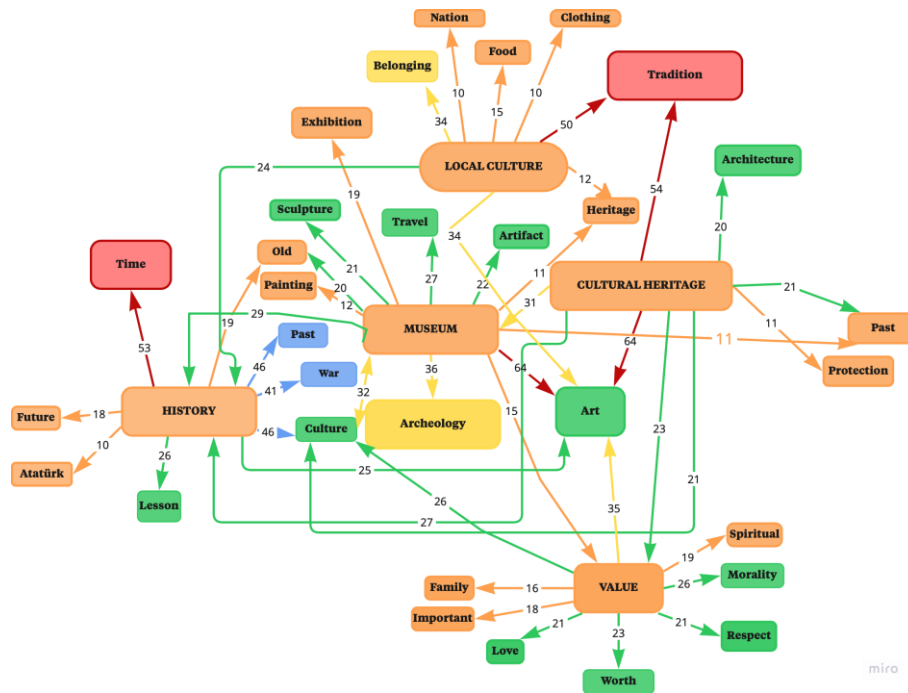


Figure 5. Concept Network Showing the Cut-off Point Range 19-10

As shown in Figure 5, the cut-off point within the 19–10 frequency range is represented in orange. Within this specified range, the concept of cultural heritage is associated with the word “protection” (f=11). The concept of value is associated with the words “spiritual” (f=19), “importance” (f=18), and “family” (f=16); the concept of history is associated with the words “old” (f=19), “future” (f=18), and “Atatürk” (f=10); the concept of museum is associated with the words “exhibition” (f=19), “value” (f=15), “painting” (f=12), “heritage” (f=11), and “past” (f=11); and the concept of local culture is associated with the words “food” (f=15), “heritage” (f=12), “clothing” (f=10), and “nation” (f=10).

Findings According to the Second Sub-Problem

Concept Network Showing the Relationship of Key Concepts with Each Other

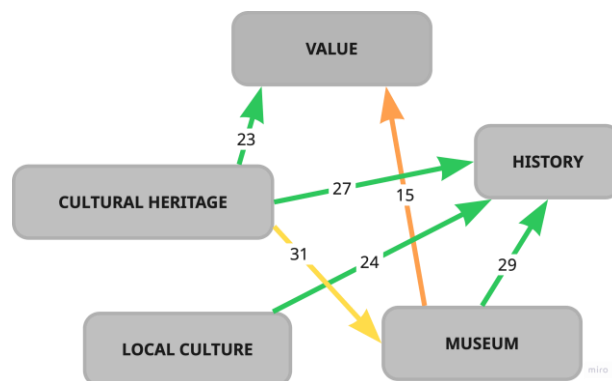


Figure 6. Concept Network Showing the Relationship of Key Concepts

Figure 6 illustrates the status and direction of relationships among the key concepts. Accordingly, no relationships were observed among the concepts within the frequency ranges of 50 and above and 40–49. In the 39–30 frequency range, represented in yellow, the concept of “cultural heritage” is associated with the concept of “museum” ($f=31$). No meaningful connections were established among the other key concepts. In the 29–20 frequency range, represented in green, “cultural heritage” is most strongly associated with the concepts of “history” ($f=27$) and “value” ($f=23$). Within the same frequency range, the concept of “museum” is associated with “history” ($f=29$), and the concept of “local culture” is again associated with “history” ($f=24$). In the 19–10 frequency range, represented in orange, the concept of “museum” is associated with the concept of “value” ($f=15$).

RESULT and DISCUSSION

Based on the findings obtained from the first sub-problem of the study, the following results were reached: The word most frequently associated with the concept of “cultural heritage” was “art,” while the least associated word was “protection.” The fact that the prospective teachers most frequently associated the concept of cultural heritage with “art” ($f=64$) and “tradition” ($f=54$) indicates a high level of awareness regarding the aesthetic and historical dimensions of this concept. In relation to this result, Van Doorselaere (2024) stated that prospective teachers tend to perceive cultural heritage predominantly in terms of traditional, historical, and monumental structures. A total of 46 prospective teachers defined the concept of cultural heritage with a focus on identity, transmission, and protection. Expressions such as “Cultural heritage is our past and self that we must preserve” (S18) and “All kinds of values that constitute the identity of a nation” (S50) indicate that prospective teachers possess a strong sense of identity related to cultural heritage and a sense of responsibility for its transmission to future generations. In addition, expressions such as “an artwork belonging to a culture is part of that society’s cultural heritage” (S16) and “the works in the museum are part of our cultural heritage” (S9) indicate that the prospective teachers also draw attention to the artistic dimension of cultural heritage. According to the results of the study conducted by Ay Selanik and Fidan Kurtdele (2013), the metaphors produced by the participants reveal that prospective teachers perceive cultural heritage as a fundamental value of society and feel a sense of responsibility for its protection and transmission. Similarly, in the study conducted by Kendir (2020), it was found that the most frequent response given by the participating students was “We must preserve a greater number of cultural heritage assets for future generations.” Sidekli and Karaca (2013) concluded that the majority of prospective teachers displayed positive attitudes toward cultural heritage and its protection. In a similar vein, Tural (2023) reported that prospective teachers regarded cultural heritage as a valuable social element that should be preserved and passed on. In the study by Akbaş (2020), which investigated the perceptions of geography graduates regarding the concept of cultural heritage, it was revealed that cultural heritage was predominantly perceived as a historical legacy that must be transmitted to future generations. However, six prospective teachers demonstrated misconceptions regarding the concept of cultural heritage; with expressions such as “a place where ruins are found” (S15) and “dilapidated architectural structures are taken into the restoration process” (S29), they appeared to limit cultural heritage solely to physical and historical remnants.

The word most frequently associated with the concept of “value” was “art,” while the least associated word was “family.” Among the 54 prospective teachers participating in the study, 30 focused on meanings of the concept of value related to society, culture, art, and moral structure, as reflected in expressions such as “the value a society places on art indicates its level of development” (S16), “our values are the whole that makes us a nation” (S39), and “values bind people together” (S47). They mostly defined value according to its functions of aesthetic appreciation, social cohesion, and serving as a bridge between the past and the future. Similarly, Aydın and Sulak (2015) reported that, in their study, the metaphors developed by classroom teachers described value as an indispensable element that holds individuals and societies together. However, 21 prospective teachers associated the concept of value with personal emotions and material worth, as in the expression “an individual determines the value of the other person” (S21), thereby overlooking the behavioral, social, and cultural dimensions of the concept. This finding reveals the presence of misconceptions among these participants. Özalp (2020) stated in her study that while some prospective teachers related the concept of “value” to artistic and cultural meanings, the majority defined it within the contexts of personal feelings, economic worth, and social characteristics.

Regarding the concept of "history," prospective teachers predominantly provided knowledge-based and academic definitions. Expressions such as "History is the body of knowledge that narrates the past of society" (S3) and "A society that does not know its history is doomed to disappear" (S54) indicate an adopted awareness of historical consciousness and a sense of responsibility toward the past. Additionally, the word association findings show that the concept of "history" was most frequently paired with the concept of "time" ($f=53$), suggesting that historical knowledge is perceived through an event-centered structure. In the study conducted by Candan and Öztaş (2017), metaphors developed by secondary school students regarding the concept of history were examined through content analysis and categorized into nine conceptual groups. Among these categories, the perception of history as a "time indicator" particularly revealed that students view history as a tool for positioning events within a temporal framework.

The word most frequently associated with the concept of "museum" was "art," while the least associated word was "past." In contrast to this finding, studies by Özalp (2020), Tural (2018), and Yeter & Fidan Kurtde (2018) concluded that the concept of "museum" was most often associated with the concept of "history." Among 54 students, 39 defined the concept of museum as an educational institution that preserves and transmits the past and culture. Definitions such as "Museums are tools that house previous lives and guide the future" (S11) and "The museum is an important library that accumulates knowledge" (S37) indicate an awareness of the educational, cultural heritage-preserving, and identity-building aspects of museums. However, subjective expressions by some students ($f=12$), such as "museum visits are very boring" (S54), reveal that the concept of museum is largely limited to personal experience, aesthetic appreciation, or leisure activities. This indicates various misconceptions and definitional deficiencies regarding the concept of museum. Achille and Fiorillo (2022), in their study on cultural heritage education among middle school students, concluded that teaching the concept of cultural heritage should encompass both awareness of heritage value and excellent practical and theoretical skills.

The concept of "local culture" was most frequently associated with the word "tradition" and least frequently associated with the word "nation." Similarly, in the study conducted by Özalp Hamarta (2021), the concept most frequently associated with culture was "customs and traditions." Expressions such as "Local culture determines a society's unique values" (S11), "It refers to the regional characteristics of lifestyles that have persisted in a community from past to present" (S38), and "Local culture preserves traditions and values" (S47) indicate that prospective teachers explained the concept of local culture primarily based on identity, tradition, and belonging.

Based on the findings obtained from the second sub-problem of the study, the following conclusions were drawn: The concept of cultural heritage was associated with the concepts of history, value, and museum; the concept of museum was associated with history and value; whereas local culture was connected only with history. The common association of cultural heritage, museum, and local culture concepts with the concept of history indicates that prospective teachers conceptualize these terms within a historical framework. The concept of value did not directly relate to any other concept but was linked through associations directed from both cultural heritage and museum concepts. This finding reveals that prospective teachers did not refer to other concepts when defining the concept of value.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that comprehensive and interdisciplinary content addressing these concepts be incorporated into teacher education programs to enable prospective teachers to establish holistic relationships among cultural concepts and to eliminate conceptual misconceptions. In particular, conceptual connections should be strengthened through activities that address the concepts of cultural heritage, value, history, museum, and local culture collectively. Case studies supporting the association of the concept of value with cultural structures, museum visits, and practical studies related to local culture should be included in educational processes. Furthermore, to help prospective teachers move beyond history-centered approaches, it is important to employ contemporary methods and materials that facilitate understanding of the relationship between cultural heritage and the present and future. Within this scope, methods such as word association tests, conceptual maps, and metaphor analyses can be used to more effectively develop candidates' mental structures regarding the concepts. In conclusion, it is recommended that interdisciplinary and applied content be incorporated into art education programs to enable prospective teachers to establish more holistic and in-depth relationships among cultural concepts. Conceptual awareness should be enhanced through activities that address the concepts of cultural heritage, value, history, museum,

and local culture together; museum visits, practices related to local culture, and contemporary methods should be utilized to strengthen the connection of these concepts with the present.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed by the author(s) with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Ethics Approval

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Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the research team's ethics committee of the Necmettin Erbakan University (Approval Number/ID: 30/05/2025/512. Hereby, we as the authors consciously assure that for the manuscript the following is fulfilled:

- This material is the authors' own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere.
- The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner.
- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly disclosed.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

1st author contributed 50%, 2nd author 50%.

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