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## Arts and Crafts Teacher Candidates' Visual Literacy Skills

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### Abstract

In the world today, which is intertwined with visuals, the importance of communication skills with visuals are increasing day by day. Visual literacy is necessity for deeper communication with visuals. This necessity is more essential for the areas, which are intertwined with visuals. That's why this research was aimed to describe how was the visual literacy skills of the students studying in Department of Fine Arts Education who were candidate for being teacher. The sample size of this qualitative research was 140 (91 man, 49 woman) students who were studying at first and final classes of State Universities of Turkey, Faculty of Education Fine Arts Education Department. Data Gathering tool, which was developed by the researcher, consist of nine open-ended questions and class levels, genders and region of the universities of the teacher candidates were asked for demographic characteristics. Content analysis was used to analyze the gathered data. After the analysis, the data was coded in two groups. First group called "Visual Reading Classification"; "Accessing the Visual", "Visual Codes", "Analyzing the Visual", "Interpreting the Visual", "Evaluation of the Visual" and second group called "Visual Writing Classification"; "Prefers to Sketch", "Prefers to Write". And sub headings about the data were given inside. In the light of these codes data were examined. It is observed that responds of the teacher candidate students mostly did not correspond to the answers of the questions. There were no distinctive differences among classes' levels of the students in terms of their visual literacy levels. This was concluded due to the absence of visual literacy or related lectures in the departments of visual arts. Thus, the alternative solutions for this issue and increasing visual literacy levels of the students were recommended.

**Key words:** visual literacy, visual reading, visual writing, visual learning and qualitative research

### Introduction

Humans may establish their communications with their surroundings only with their sense organs and via the brain that processes these data. Eyesight, or the vision, has an important place in this communication, which is an extremely complicated process, because it

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is known that most part of the communication is formed by eyesight. Visual(s), which are known to be fast and influential communication means, include more than thousands of words in them (Simons, 2000: 48). It is necessary to read and understand the positive and negative influences of these thousands of messages. The way of doing this passes through visual literacy. For this reason, it is possible to claim that visual literacy is necessary in order for communication to follow a conscious route. The necessity and importance of visual literacy is increasing with the developments in communication.

John Debes opened visual literacy for discussion in 1969 with this viewpoint, and tried to define it. The first definition of visual literacy by Debes is as follows, as cited by Maria D. Avgerinou and John Ericson (1997: 281);

Visual Literacy refers to a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, symbols, natural or man-made, that he encounters in his environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, he is able to communicate with others. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, he is able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communication.

Petterson (1999:136) defined visual literacy in terms of education as being a concept in which various attitudes, knowledge and specific skills are taught, and claimed that these improved our ability to establish communications in various forms". In other words, visual literacy is a concept that can be learnt. For this reason, it is also possible to learn it in various ways. Visual literacy in art and art education, on the other hand, "refers to the ability and vocabulary used to discuss and criticize art and images and the ability to consider visual materials in a critical way (Snaveley and Columnist, 2005: 30). Today, the efficiency and the level of these skills are still discussed.

The individuals who are visually literate are supposed to know that the images that are formed through humans and machines are forms that are structured deliberately for the purpose of communication. It is expected that they see, read, and define the visuals around them; analyze and interpret the codes in them; and when necessary, reproduce these visuals. By doing so, the individuals who are visually literate renew their communication with visual texts as active participants instead of being passive receivers. This continuity helps the individuals to form a cognitive awareness on the contents of the visuals. Another purpose of this study is to illustrate the current visual literacy levels of the students of Faculty of Education, Fine Arts Education Department.

## **Methodology**

The Scanning Method has been used in this study in which the purpose is to illustrate the current visual literacy levels of the students of Faculty of Education, Fine Arts Education Department (Karasar, 2000). The sampling of the study consisted of 140 teacher candidates (91 female, 49 male) 20 of whom were from each grade (10 students from 1st Grades, 10 students from 4th Grades). The gender and area data of the teacher candidates were asked to be recorded as the demographical characteristics. The Data Collection Tool, which was developed by the author of the study, in which written answers were asked to questions and visuals, was used in the study. Open-ended questions were used in collecting the data. The



open-ended questions were prepared by consulting to 3 specialists one of whom was educational specialist for structural validity concerns. When the contents of these questions are examined, it is observed that there are two works that contain the portraits of famous painters, a well-known advertisement visual, a frame of an advertisement film, and a poster that is designed with cultural contents. The participants were asked question(s) about these visuals, and the answers to the first 4 questions were asked in written form. In the last question, on the other hand, the participants were asked to re-design a poster or to describe it verbally. The Content Analysis Method has been used to obtain the concepts and relations that might explain the data (Rose, 2003: 54). As a result of the analyses, the data were encoded based on the hypothetical frame with the support of the literature, and were conceptualized first; and then the themes were determined in the light of these concepts (Yıldırım and Simsek, 2008: 224).

## **Findings**

When the data were being classified methodologically; the works of Ausburn and Ausburn, 1978; Box and Cochenour, 1988; Avgerinou and Ericson, 1997; Kellner, 1998; Heinich et al., 1999; Brill and Branch, 2001; Stokes, 2002; Uçar, Uçar, Kılıç, Orhon and Taşcıoğlu, 2011; Akyol, 2012; Barret, 2012; Buehl, 2014; and the works of Barret (2012), which were collected under the title of “Interpretational Perspectives” on visual literacy were made use of. In the end, two categories were formed under the names of “Visual Reading” and “Visual Writing”. The visual reading and visual writing classification obtained at the end of the study are as follows:

The distribution of the 1727 answers classified under the title of “Visual Reading” according to the grades of the students are as follows; 847 First Graders, 880 Fourth Graders; the distribution according to gender is as follows; 1113 female and 614 male. It is observed that 1727 classified answers are collected under the title of “Visual Reading” 1008 of which are collected under the title of “Interpreting the Visual”, 336 of which are collected under the title of “Evaluating the Visual”, 219 “Visual Codes”, 88 “Visual Analysis” and 76 “Access to Visuals”.

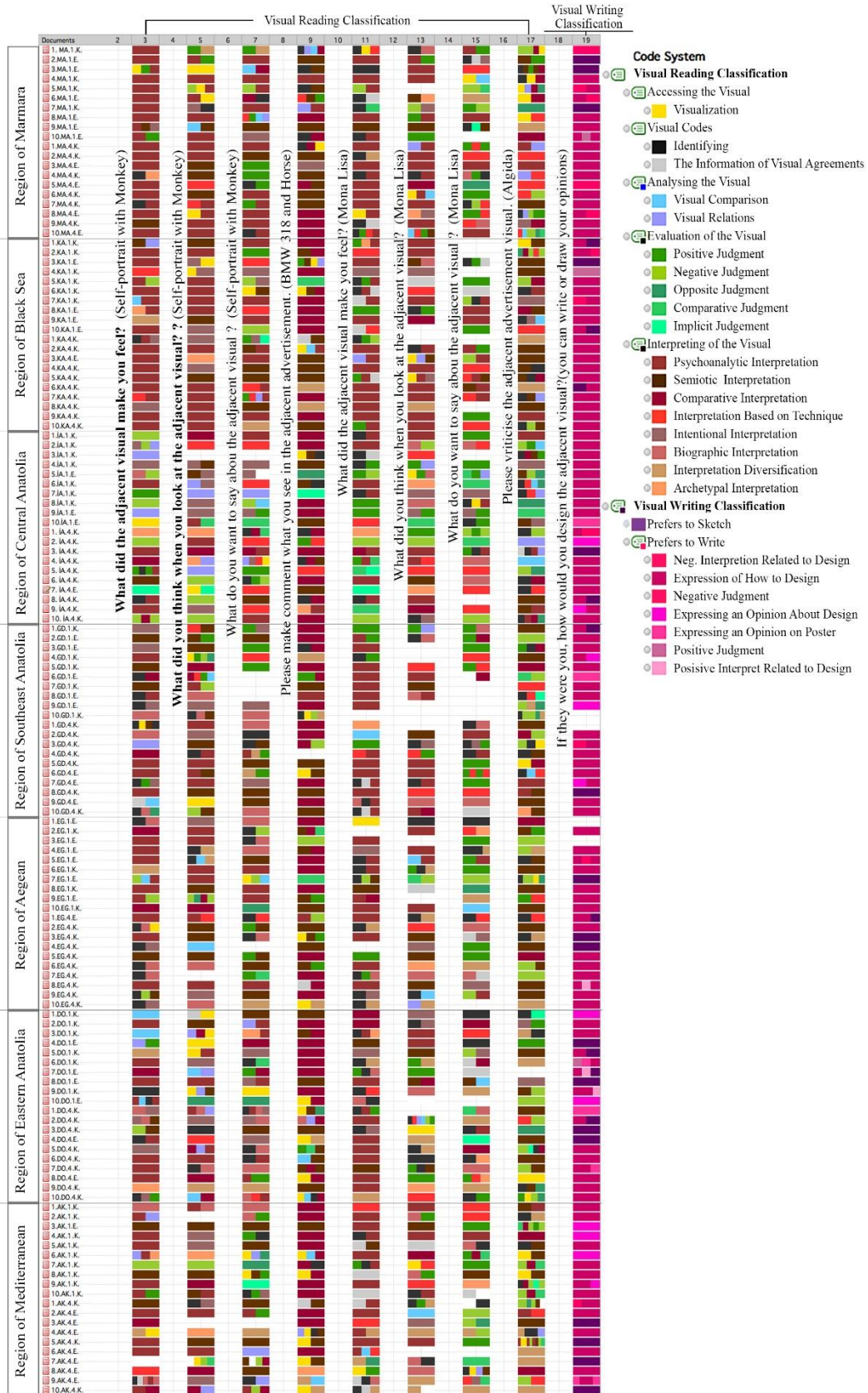
Visual Writing Classification: Prefers to Sketch, and Prefers to Write (Negative Interpretation Related to Design, Expression of How to Design, Negative Judgment, Expressing an Opinion About Design, Expressing an Opinion on Poster, Positive Judgment, Positive Interpreting Related to Design). There are 200 classified answers under the title of “Visual Writing” 99 of which are from 1st Grades, and 101 of whom are 4th Grades.

The number of the classified answers is higher than the number of the teacher candidates who participated in the study. This was caused by one answer of a teacher candidate including more than one classification, or the existence of more than one content in one answer.

**Table 1.** The themes and meanings.

THEMES	MEANINGS
1.MA.1.K.	Number. Region. Class. Gender.
MA. KA. İA. GD. EG. DO. AK.	(Region) MA: Marmara KA: Black Sea IA: Central Anatolia GD: Southeastern Anatolia EG: Aegean DO: Eastern Anatolia AK: Mediterranean
3 (Column)	The color theme of the answer given to the question "What did the adjacent visual make you feel?" is found. (Self-portrait with Monkey)
5 (Column)	The color theme of the answer given to the question "What did you think when you looked at the adjacent visual?" is found. (Self-portrait with Monkey)
7 (Column)	The color theme of the answer given to the question "What do you want to say about the adjacent visual?" is found. (Self-portrait with Monkey)
9 (Column)	The color theme of the answer given to the question "Please make an interpretation of what you see in the adjacent advertisement" is found. (BMW 318 and Horse)
11 (Column)	The color theme of the answer given to the question "What did the adjacent visual make you feel?" is found. (Mona Lisa)
13 (Column)	The color theme of the answer given to the question "What did you think when you look at the adjacent visual?" is found. (Mona Lisa)
15 (Column)	The color theme of the answer given to the question "What do you want to say about the adjacent visual?" is found. (Mona Lisa)
17 (Column)	The color theme of the answer given to the question "Please criticize the adjacent advertisement visual" is found. (Algida)
19 (Column)	The answer to the question "If they were you, how would you design the adjacent visual?" is found. (on Southeastern Anatolian Region) (You can write or draw your opinions)

**Figure 1:** The thematized classification of the data obtained from the teacher candidates (1<sup>st</sup> Graders and 4<sup>th</sup> Graders together).



## **Results**

When all these findings are considered it has been observed that the answers given by the teacher candidates at Faculty of Education, Fine Arts Department were not corresponding to the questions in most cases. It has also been observed that the medium and the contents of the visuals are the determinants of the answers given by the teacher candidates. Some visuals were given in the scale that was prepared for the study, and questions were asked to them to be answered over these visuals. When the findings of the study are examined it has been observed that the awareness on the purpose of the questions, their feelings, thoughts and on what they wanted to say, criticize and interpret is at low level. When the findings obtained as a result of the classification of the answers of the teacher candidates, who participated in the study from 1st and 4th Grades, are examined under the titles such as access to the visual, visual codes, visual analysis, interpreting on the visual and evaluating it, no significant differences were detected between the 1st and 4th Graders. It is observed that the majority of the participants are between the ages of 18 and 25. When the relation between the classified answers on the visual literacy and the ages of the teacher candidates are examined it is observed that there are no significant differences. According to the findings, 1727 visual reading findings were obtained from 140 teacher candidates. 1113 classified findings were obtained from 91 female teacher candidates, and 614 classified findings were obtained from 49 male teacher candidates. It has been determined that the rate of the findings obtained from the female teacher candidates to the number of the female teacher candidates (12.2) is parallel to the rate of the findings obtained from the male teacher candidates to the number of the male teacher candidates (12.5). The literacy of the teacher candidates has been examined under two titles in the study, which are the visual reading and visual writing. It has been observed that the teacher candidates prefer reading visuals under these two titles (26 of the 140 participants expressed themselves by drawing in the visual writing part, and all of the other participants preferred only verbal expressions).

### **Visual Reading Results**

When all these findings are considered it has been observed that the answers given by the It has been observed that the Access to Visual statements in the Visual Reading title are few in number when compared with the number of the questions and the participants. The number of the findings obtained from 140 candidates on Visual Agreement, which is under the title of Classifying the Visual Codes in Visual Reading, is 34. However, it has been observed that the number of the Definition Statements under the same title (generally do not include detailed definition statements) to the number of the teacher candidates is at the expected level (185 classified data). It has been concluded that the number of the definition statements being in the expected level shows that the visuals given in the study are already known by the teacher candidates. It has been considered that the visual agreements being few in number will not mean that the majority of the teacher candidates do not have this information (the definition information confirms this), they just prefer writing their ideas by converting them into statements. It is observed that the findings under the title of Visual Analysis are few in number when compared with the other classified findings. The Interpreting the Visual Findings are Psychoanalytical Interpretation, Semiotic Interpretation, Comparative Interpretation, Interpretation Based on Technique, Intentional Interpretation,



Biographic Interpretation, Interpretation Diversification and Archetypal Interpretation, respectively from the highest to the lowest value. Psychoanalytic Interpretation has been preferred mostly in Mona Lisa and Self-portrait with Monkey visuals. Semiotic Interpretation has been preferred mostly in the Algida and BMW visual. Comparative Judgment has been used mostly in BMW visual. As far as it is understood from the data obtained in the study, the Interpretation Based on Technique has been used mostly in the content and technique of the Mona Lisa and Algida visuals. The Intentional Interpretation and the Biographic Interpretation have been used mostly in Self-portrait with Monkey and Mona Lisa, and the reasons for this has been considered to be related with the awareness on the visuals and with the departments of the teacher candidates. The Interpretation Diversification has been observed in all visual reading questions, and it has not been observed that there is intensity on any of the questions. Archetypal Interpretation, on the other hand, is the least frequently observed interpretation type among the findings. The findings with the highest frequency in Evaluation of the Visual findings are the positive-negative judgment statements. It has been observed that the Positive Judgment statements intensify on the Mona Lisa and Self-portrait with Monkey visuals. The Negative Judgment statements intensify on the Algida advertisement frame and on Self-portrait with Monkey visuals. It has been observed that sexuality is evaluated in a negative way in the Algida frame, and the contents in the Self-portrait with Monkey visual is also evaluated in a negative manner (the drawing of the eyebrows, the existence of the monkey, etc.). It has also been observed that the Opposite Judgments intensify on Algida advertisement frame. This is understood in the data showing that the visual has judgments against marketing strategies. Comparative Judgment has been observed less than the other judgment findings. When the statements of the teacher candidates under the Comparative Judgment have been examined it has been observed that the teacher candidates made evaluations by making comparisons between their personal expectations and the visuals. The Implicit Judgment title is the one that has the fewest findings when compared with the other judgment statements. It has been observed that the teacher candidates do not prefer indirect judgment statements in the contents of the Implicit Judgment, but preferred using the open and direct judgments.

## **Visual Writing Results**

It has been observed in the Visual Writing findings that the ages and grades (1st Grade or 4th Grade) of the teacher candidates who preferred drawing (26 candidates) are not influential on their drawing preferences. The findings observed in the Verbal Statements title of the Visual Writing findings are mostly on how to design and on negative judgments of the design. The statements among the other visual writing findings are negative judgments, saying their ideas on the design, expressing the ideas over the poster, positive interpretation on the design and positive judgment, respectively from the highest to the lowest value.

## **Recommendations**

It has been observed that the answers given by the teacher candidates at Faculty of Education, Fine Arts Education Department on visual literacy are not corresponding to the questions in most cases. The reason for this situation must be investigated. The awareness of the teacher candidates on how to express what they feel, what they want to say, what they think; and their awareness on interpretation, judgment and criticism must be increased. It has been determined that the awareness of the teacher candidates on visual analysis and access to

the visuals is low. Studies must be conducted to eliminate this missing point. The area, grade, gender and age differences have been cared for on Visual Literacy; however, no significant differences have been obtained in the study. The reasons for this must be investigated as well. When the titles such as Access to Visual, Visual Codes, Visual Analysis, Interpreting the Visual and Evaluating the Visual in the Visual Reading title are examined, no significant differences are observed between the 1st and 4th Grades. In terms of Visual Reading, it is recommended that the contents of the classes in Fine Arts Education Departments must be revised to eliminate the abovementioned missing points. It has been observed in the study that the teacher candidates usually do not prefer drawing in Visual Writing, and use written statements instead of drawing. Studies must also be conducted on the reasons of this preference of the students, who participated in the study. The scale that was prepared for the study is limited with 2-dimensional and artistic, marketing and media visuals. The areas other than these must also be investigated.

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