

## **THE EFFECT OF THE GRAPHIC DESIGN EDUCATION BASED ON THE VISUAL CULTURE THEORY ON STUDENTS' POSTER DESIGNS<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to enable students obtain information about visual culture, to increase their skills in design using the acquired information and to evaluate images critically. The purpose of the study is to support students to practice in viewing visual culture. The effect of the concepts represented in the visual images on cultural life and the visual culture in the context of graphic design education were evaluated. In this study, the answers were sought for the following questions "What are the conclusions of students' self-evaluation regarding their poster designs?" and "Did they apply the obtained information about Visual Culture Theory to their poster designs?" This study was conducted in action research design which is one of the qualitative research designs. The study group consists of 16 third grade students from Graphic Art Studio who received their education in second term of 2014-2015 academic year from Gazi University, Gazi Faculty of Education, Department of Fine Arts Education. Participants were selected according to convenient sampling method which is one of the purposive sampling methods. The study was carried on with one group, without a control group, using Quasi-experimental model. During the formation of experimental group, it has been paid attention that experimental group should have experience in poster design. The data of the survey were collected, in first phase, by using self-evaluation form, and, in second phase, by using performance-based situation determination form. Self-evaluation form used in the study was evaluated regarding to content analysis and Performance-based Determination form was evaluated with regard to analytical grading key. At the end of the study, it has been observed that self-assessment form has influenced the development of analysis skills of the students positively.

<sup>1</sup> This study was completed using data from the doctoral thesis entitled "The Effects of Graphic Design Education Supported by Visual Culture Theory on Students' Poster Designs."

Also, students could create images in the posters, transform those images into representations and establish a connection between image and representation.

**Keywords:** Visual culture, image, representation, critical thinking

## **INTRODUCTION**

Today, since culture depends on visual images and it almost turned into visuality, it is impossible to hear songs without videos, see singers without their fictionalised images, and introduce exhibitions, products and events without reflecting them on billboards (Soğancı, 2011).

Hence, there should be raised the awareness of individuals to escape from effects of the images which almost capture us in consumerist society in which we live. In this context, graphic arts are not only used for promoting society to consume but also used to contribute to the improvement of ethical, cultural and artistic values of the society (Iz Bolukoglu, 2004).

With this study, it is aimed to direct the students towards critical thinking, encourage them be productive individuals as this era suggests. Thus, it will be possible that the students are going to approach and create a platform to think and discuss the events, facts, posters and studies carried on by them by thinking from different point of views. An individual who is a critical thinker has abilities to think creatively and can produce new ideas.

Furthermore, critical thinking is accepted as the corner stone of visual culture studies. The analyses carried out in visual culture studies play an important role that the students are able to reach various judgments in the process of creating images and in perceiving the idea that some images can be expressed visually. Additionally, visual culture studies can be examined as an effective method in linking images together and in realising that some images are shaped with culture itself.

## **Visual Culture Theory**

Visual culture is the name of the effective power of visual images in the communication network of the age in which we live and the impact of this power on people. This effective power not only affects life through dominant visual images, but also identifies the cultural identity of the individuals of the society in which they live (Kırıoğlu, 2009:44). The world we live in is full of visual images. How we reflect, how we make sense, and how we communicate with the world around us depends on visual images. Accordingly, our culture is becoming gradually visualized. Over the past two centuries, Western culture has been ruled by visual media rather than oral or written media. Written words have turned into images first and then colored images in the late twentieth century. For example the newspapers, daily horoscope pages were visualized and colored to catch their readers and add meaning to the content of the stories. The images contain important contents (Morra and Smith, 2006:27).

It is a common view that mass media in modern societies and in developing countries spread unbroken messages and these messages have an undeniable role in economic, cultural and social life. The messages produced by the mass media which have their own discourse should be perceived, evaluated and interpreted critically. (Parsa,2007).

The public expansion of visual culture is also realised by the media. Therefore, the media as an element that combines mass culture with visual culture, focusing on the shaping of the audience, constitutes the consumption audience of visuality (Atiker, 1998:57).

In this context, reasons that make visual culture education essential can be listed as follows:

- Visual culture is the concept formed by the objects that have visual images including aesthetic, communicational and functional purposes. Therefore, it plays an active role in creating cultural identity.
- People are impressed by cultural images rather than by the works of art they see in museums and galleries.
- Visual culture creates a complicated and cross culture by influencing the culture which is experienced. This case affects national culture in a negative way.
- In visual culture, the concern is raised over the contextual effects of the object, thereby visual culture objects take on new meanings and functions to increase aesthetic consumption.
- The density and prevalence of the visual culture area weakens the preminent art and narrow the boundaries between cultural products.
- The interaction of national culture with the products of historical, traditional, contemporary and other cultural products causes the scope of visual culture to become wider and more complex (Kirisoglu, 2009:44).

In visual culture education, in addition to the beauty of an object, it should be questioned that which purpose the beauty is oriented, how it is produced, for which mass it is brought into use, and whether it is suitable for health and the environment as well as its economic return. The fact that the image, symbol and signs of visuality are so important and dominant that it leads to the loss of the content values of the products and services, and the importance of the image and aspect. Beforehand, creating the images, then creating the products which can represent these images is the matter of fact. Advertisements are known as the most important images that represent visuality and they reach us via public and private areas. In this regard, we are heavily exposed to visuality. In the contemporary world, clothes, magazines, TV, Internet, stadium, transportation, public transport etc. everything can be appropriate for advertising and advertisements can symbolically take part in our daily lives. Advertisements represent the world and can force the perception of reality (Tavin, 2011).

The perceptions of individuals are open to the outside world when they are born, and by trying to perceive everything around them, they record images in their main memory. S/he combines the language s/he learns to use with the codes of the culture in which s/he lives. The individual begins to create new meanings by combining the images s/he interprets with the culture. This powerful language, arising from the combination of images and cultural facts, is the basis of visual culture (Turkkan, 2008).

Visual culture is a phenomenon that is beyond the study of images. It not only proposes to produce new perspectives by approaching theoretical methods but also proposes to produce new thinking methods. It is based on image in producing cultural meanings. The scope of topics it involves ranges from the analysis and interpretation of hearing, spatiality and visuality to the spiritual dynamics of the action of watching (Saybasili 2007).

## **METHOD**

Emancipatory/constructive/critical action research method which is known as a type of qualitative research design has been used in this study.

### **Participants**

The study group consists of 16 third grade students who received their education in second term of 2014-2015 academic year from Gazi University, Gazi Faculty of Education, Department of Fine Arts Education Graphic Design Workshop (RS-301A). Participants were chosen via purposive sampling followed by convenience sampling. When experimental group was formed it has been paid attention that experimental group should have experience in poster designing.

### **Data Collection Process**

In the practice period of the study, students were asked to design posters about “gender” and “racism” as a result of two weeks of lectures. In the process of determining these themes, it has been effective that visual culture is fueled with cultural problems and it covers political, philosophical, sociological, psychological and ecological issues. At the same time, visual culture puts emphasis on personal relations and solutions in social protests related to some issues such as war, human rights, women's liberation, conservation of the natural habitat etc. by playing a key role in analyzing complex structures of images of postmodern period. In the postmodern period in which globalization has gained importance, notions like freedom, human rights, environmental consciousness, religion and secularism, racism and gender come into prominence. Within this framework, students were asked to design posters about "racism" and "gender" themes keeping the effects of globalization and postmodernism in visual culture in mind. While 9 among 16 students have designed posters about "racism", 7 of them have chosen “gender” theme.

In the first stage, students were expected to ask questions in order to interpret, analyze and reach a conclusion while reading the visuals in their own. Collected data were examined under three headings. Therefore, participants were asked to examine their designs critically. Each student was expected to have an ability to interpret the handled theme consciously, describe the deficiencies in the design, give the national and international messages correctly and explain how the written message of the typography supported the idea in the poster. 16 questions were prepared and examined for 16 students in self-evaluation form.

When Grading Key (GK) was prepared in the second phase, the opinions of experts in assessment and evaluation field were received for the questions prepared. The purpose of the GK (Rubric) is to identify the learning levels of students and define their achievements in learning. In this respect, the limit of the expected students' performance was determined depending on their studies. Qualification standards (levels) were expressed clearly. After informing study group about Visual Culture Theory and showing the images to them, they were given "gender" and "racism" issues and asked to design posters. The ability of the participants in using the acquired information about Visual Culture Theory was assessed focusing on the posters they designed. Performance-based Determination Scale was developed by the researcher so as to carry out the evaluation.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of data collection in the research has been determined as six weeks and the duration of the weekly lecture has been determined as 6 hours. In the first stage, the data was collected through ensuring the students to evaluate their own designs themselves with the self-evaluation questions. Posters designed by participants were evaluated in order to collect the data obtained from Grading Key.

Data obtained from qualitative research method were analyzed by using content analysis and it has been expected to reach at concepts and relations to explain the collected data. The answers given to the questions by the participants were recorded in a recorder. Then, content analysis was made by getting the printout of the responses. Data provided from printout were cited in the research as an example.

Themes were grouped according to the data obtained from self-evaluation form in the research. Citations from students were frequently included in the analysis.

In the second phase, GK is a grading tool that shows students according to which criterion their studies will be evaluated and to which level of grading their performances are going to be equal (Kutlu and others, 2008:47, 48). Performance based situation scale form used in the research was assessed according to GK.

### **Findings and Interpretation**

In the research, findings were obtained through data collection tools. The codes were developed within the framework of data analysed with the content analysis in the qualitative research.

As part of first subgoal of research, the questions, concerning poster designs of study group, in the self-evaluation form were according to the answers given by the students. If the processes of self-evaluation of 9 students who discussed "racism" and 7 students who discussed "gender" issues were examined, the poster designs of students, during process of interpretation, analysing and reasoning, were analysed in positive and negative aspects.

Considering the second subgoal of research, were obtained as a result of assessment, done by experts, of poster designs made by study group within the context of Visual Culture Theory and, Analytical Grading Key. As participants have knowledge about Visual Culture, it was aimed that they could use the notions such as image, representation, message, perception and present them aesthetically by interpreting semantic components in their designs. Thus, Analytical Grading Key Prepared for Poster Designs (GK) was developed by the researcher so as to evaluate the poster designs made by study group. The validity of the developed scale was provided by obtaining opinions from 3 experts and then the designs of the study group was evaluated.

An evaluation was made with Analytical Grading Key Prepared for Poster Designs (GK) in terms of message-image integrity, message, verbal hierarchy, remarkability, perception, representation, discovery and creativity. Analytical Grading Key Prepared for Poster Designs (GK) contains four success level; (3) highly successful, (2) acceptable, (1) need to be improved, (0) insufficient, and grading was done according to those units. In assessments, gradings such as "successful", "mediocre", "unsuccessful" were formed. At the end of research, poster designs on research object made by students had been evaluated by 3 experts with the help of Grading Key.

For each student, grades in criterions of Grading Key were shown in Table 1 by getting the average of the grades given by 3 experts.

**Table 1. Obtained Measurements As a Result of Expert Assessments  
Made For Poster Designs of students (Rubric)**

	Mess age- Imag e Integ rity	Mess age	Verb al Hiera rchy	Rem arkab ility	Perce ption	Repr esent ation	Disc over y and Creat ivity	Tota l
S1	2.33	2.33	0.00	2.67	2.67	2.67	1.67	14.33
S2	3.00	2.67	0.00	3.00	3.00	2.67	3.00	17.33
S3	1.67	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.67	1.67	1.00	8.00
S4	2.00	2.00	2.33	1.67	2.00	2.00	0.00	12.00
S5	2.00	2.33	1.33	1.67	2.00	2.67	0.33	12.33
S6	2.67	2.00	1.67	1.67	1.67	1.33	1.00	12.00
S7	1.00	2.00	0.67	2.33	1.67	2.67	1.67	12.00
S8	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	2.67	2.67	2.67	15.00
S9	2.67	2.00	0.00	2.67	2.00	3.00	2.67	15.00
S10	0.00	0.33	0.00	0.00	1.33	2.00	0.67	4.33
S11	1.33	1.67	1.67	1.67	1.67	1.33	1.33	10.67
S12	1.67	2.33	0.00	2.00	1.67	2.67	1.33	11.67
S13	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.33	0.00	0.00	1.33
S14	2.67	2.33	3.00	3.00	2.33	3.00	2.33	18.67
S15	1.00	1.67	0.00	1.67	1.67	1.00	0.00	7.00
S16	0.33	1.00	0.00	1.33	1.00	0.33	0.00	4.00
Total	26.33	27.67	12.67	28.33	29.33	31.67	19.67	175.67
Average	1.65	1.73	0.79	1.77	1.83	1.98	1.23	10.98

0 = insufficient, 1 = need to be improved, 2 = acceptable, 3 = highly successful

It is obviously seen that the most successful student is K14 and the weakest student is K13 when the total grades in Table 1 are examined. If we consider the fact that grades that students have been able to get range from 0 and 21, it can be said the average point of students (10,98) is at medium-level. In other words, students in the class are neither very successful nor very unsuccessful. Also, if the average grades of criterions in Grading Key are analysed, it could be clearly observed that the criterion in which the students are most successful is "Representation". ( $\bar{X} = 1,98$ ) When average grades of "Representation" criterion are analyzed, it has been clearly seen that it is close to "acceptable" level and students could not reach "highly successful" level even in the criterion they are most successful. Also, it can be seen that the criterion in which the students are most unsuccessful is "verbal hierarchy". ( $\bar{X} = 0,79$ ) When the average grades of "verbal hierarchy" are examined, it has been seen that it is close to "need to be improved" level. It has been observed that students are not close to "insufficient" level even in

the criterion they are most unsuccessful. However, the most important reason for this is that students have not included all the verbal information in most of their poster designs, such as heading, subheading, slogan which will ensure verbal hierarchy. The students have backed up their posters only with a slogan.

When the criteria of Grading Key are examined one by one, it can be said that the average grade of students in "message-image integrity" criterion is 1,65 and it is close to "acceptable" level. Accordingly, it can be interpreted in this way that students think the message expresses image better. When the average grade of "message" criterion is analysed, it can be said that its average is 1,73 and it is close to "acceptable" level in general. In this case, it means that the message used for the poster designed by students is suitable for the topic of poster but not effective. The average grade of "verbal hierarchy" criterion is 0,79 and is close to "need to be improved" level. Then, it could be said that there is a disconnection in poster designs between title and subtitles. The average grade of "remarkability criterion" is 1,77 and of "perception" criterion is 1,83 and it could be said that the average grades of these criteria are close to "acceptable" level. At this point, images and writings used in designs for the posters made by students have expressed the topic but are not effective. It can be interpreted that images used in the posters have been perceived but are not sufficient. The average grade of "representation" criterion is 1,98 and it could be said that it is close to "acceptable" level. This case can be interpreted as the posters have some values to represent but these values are not clear. As for "discovery and creativity" criterion, the average grade is 1,23 and it has been seen that it is close to "need to be improved" level. At this point, it can be said that students could not completely produce a new idea and develop a different interpretation for the posters they have designed.

To sum up, it has been observed that the posters need to be improved in terms of verbal hierarchy and discovery and creativity criteria, on the other hand they are acceptable in terms of message-image integrity, message, remarkability, perception and representation criteria.

When the average grades the students have taken from the criteria of Grading Key are taken into consideration, it has been seen that the average grades are generally at "need to be improved" and "acceptable" levels. However, any criterion has not been identified as insufficient. In the same way, there is no criterion identified as highly successful. If this case is taken into account, it could be said that the students have partly obtained information about Visual Culture Theory.

## **CONCLUSION**

According to the results obtained from the Self-Evaluation Form used in individual interviews with students;

- The students have found the chance to discuss about their designs and have focused on the meaning of the images while reading their designs. It has been seen that Self-Evaluation Form has affected students positively in improvement of analysing skills of the students.
- It has been verified that the students have determined the appropriate target audience for the issues they have studied in their designs. They have comprehensively done a research when choosing the message, slogan and images they wanted to reflect on target audience. However, it has been observed that some students have had difficulty in choosing appropriate message, slogan and image for their topics. Various factors such as the lack of visual culture knowledge of students and participation of students in the courses have been effective in this respect.
- The students have explained the reasons and meaning of the images they have used in their designs and put emphasis on what their designs do not have and what should be in their designs. Moreover, they have explained the changes they wanted to make in order to have much more effective design if they had the chance to design the same posters. However, the majority of the students have stressed that they have experienced difficulties in the context of time and that they could not complete their posters as they wished.
- In the question about sense organs, it has been observed that some of the students have understood visuals (images) better and have been able to establish the relationship between visuals and events.
- The students have been able to use their questioning and evaluation skills about visuals effectively. Thus, it has been ensured that they can realise the semantic levels that visual images contain. In this regard, the students have questioned whom or what the images they have used in their visual culture studies represent. The students have questioned these factors at national and international level, and have examined and interpreted the topics. Therefore, while the majority of the students have focused on individual and social contexts which are attributed to meaning of the image, a few of them could not reflect the individual and social contexts to their posters.
- The students have also examined their self-evaluations from a critical point of view in the cultural and social context. It has been seen that the study of visual culture has helped students to improve their critical perspectives and questioning skills.
- At the end of the visual culture course, the students have been able to understand the importance of handling the events according to different perspectives instead of a single perspective. The analysis made by students on visual images in their posters has allowed them to develop a pluralistic perspective with the awareness that there is no single meaning in what is seen.

- The search for meaning made on visual images has made it possible for students to question popular culture which has unquestioningly entered into their lives and thus to be protected from the harmful effects of popular culture.
- The students have stated that behind the images they have used have stories and they have discovered the meanings of their surroundings through these stories.
- The students have been able to express ideological ideas, beliefs and values through images. Also, they have been able to explain how the images represent and present the ideology.
- The students have perceive the impact of the image on the person. They have realised that the images can affect subconscious, desires and social taboos and can establish an intertextual connection influencing ideas and beliefs.
- In this study which has been planned as theoretical for two weeks and applied course activity for four weeks, it has been concluded that visual culture practices and questioning made in this context are effective in terms of giving a critical view to the students,realizing the meaning that the images contain and developing a pluralistic viewpoint.
- The students have learnt what the image, which is discussed in the visual culture context, means not for itself, but for the individual and society. In this regard, importance of visual literacy has been perceived by the students.

The results regarding the reflection of information about Visual Culture Theory learnt by study group on poster designs;

- In this study, it has been tried to determine to what extent the information about the Visual Culture Theory is reflected on the poster designs of the students. Particularly, it has been observed that the students who have studied on "racism" topic could not reflect the variety of thoughts on their designs during the practice phase. Some of the students have had difficulty in their works.
- The students have been able to create images in their posters, transform these images into representations, and develop their imagination by establishing the link between image and representation. However, it has been seen that some of the students have had difficulty in establishing the connection between image and representation.
- In the process of creating images, the students have reached various judgments and have been able to reflect them on their posters. Also, they have tried to provide integrity in their posters linking the images they have created to other images. They have produced their own comprehension by realising that images and feelings are to be expressed visually.
- The students have been encouraged in questioning the topics given them in visual culture studies. They are supported to think on the designs they would create by being addressed

questions to them about cultural dimension of the study in order to realise the importance of the cultural factors. The students have given messages using cultural images in their poster designs. It has been observed that the students who have discussed the gender issue have made interpretation through conditions which they experience or observe in their daily life. Majority of the students who have discussed the racism issue have formed an opinion through researching about it via internet. Therefore, the students have had the opportunity to examine the issues in the context of social, cultural, political and beliefs by carrying out researches on different cultures.

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### Appendix 1. Self-Evaluation Form

Date:	Time (Start and Finish):	/
<p>Dear Students;</p> <p>My doctoral thesis on "The Effects of Graphic Design Education Based On The Visual Culture Theory On Poster Designs Made By Students" aims to evaluate The Visual Culture Theory depending on the remarks of the third grade students from Graphic Art Studio.</p> <p>The data in this form will not be used for any purposes rather than the related doctoral thesis study. The interview will last 30 minutes, approximately.</p> <p>Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research and for sparing your valuable time.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Melike BAKAR FINDIKCI</b> <b>Gazi University</b> <b>Postgraduate in Art Teaching Department</b></p>		

1. What is the basic idea (main topic) in this poster in your opinion?
2. Who is the target audience of this poster in your opinion?
3. What do the visuals in this poster bring to your mind?
4. What makes this poster striking?
5. Which fragrance, sounds and images it reminds you of?
6. Does this poster reflect anything from your life?
7. Can you associate this poster with an art movement or work of art you have seen before?
8. What can you tell about popular culture, belief, images and manners of the period on the basis of this poster?
9. Does the image used in this poster represent a particular period?
10. What are the points wanted to be expressed in social, cultural and historical context in this poster?
11. In your opinion, what does this poster express regarding our culture?
12. What are the international/universal messages of this poster?
13. In this poster, what are the effective images in the foreground? What is to be emphasized primarily?
14. In which aspects do the typographic-written messages used in the poster support the intended meaning? wh

15. What does the poster include and what should it include?

16. If you had done it again, what would you do to achieve a more effective result?

**Appendix 2. Analytical Grading Key for The Posters (Rubric)**

Criteria	Success Levels			
	Insufficient (0)	Need To Be Improved (1)	Acceptable (2)	Highly Successful (3)
<b>Message-Image Integrity</b>	There is no message-image integrity.	The image used and the message meant to be expressed need to support each other more.	The message can express the image better.	The image and message integrate each other completely.
<b>Message</b>	The message meant to be expressed is indirect.	The message contains double-entendre.	The message used is appropriate for the topic of poster but not effective.	The message serves for the topic of poster, completely.
<b>Verbal Hierarchy</b>	All the verbal expressions have same emphasis and effect.	There is a disconnection between heading and subheading in the design.	The heading and subheading are appropriate for the topic meant to be expressed but not effective.	Verbal hierarchical structure is appropriate for order of importance.
<b>Remarkability</b>	The writing and image follow each other.	The writing is flowery and not legible. The image and writing need to be more effective.	The visuals and writing used in the design have expressed the topic but not effective.	An image fit for purpose has been used and textual structure has been able to built in the design. Remarkable.
<b>Perception</b>	The image used in the poster can not be understood.	The image used in the poster does not provide absolute perception.	The images used in the poster can be perceived but not effective.	The image used in the poster can be completely perceived.
<b>Representation</b>	The image used in the poster represents nothing.	The values it represents do not express the topic completely.	It represents some values but not clear.	The slogan and image have represented the topic completely. The values it represents has been expressed clearly.

<b>Discovery and Creativity</b>	There is not a new idea and a different interpretation.	It has produced a new idea and a different interpretation, partially.	It has produced a new idea and a different interpretation but not effective.	The poster has inventive (new) thinking in it and it is a genuine (original) and effective poster.
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**Total Success Grade**