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# The effects of different student backgrounds in basic design education

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## Abstract

Higher institutions offering undergraduate degree in design accepts whether science-based students whose qualitative and quantitative reasoning abilities are evaluated by student selection examination, or art-based students going through aptitude exams, in Turkey. The aim of the study is to investigate the differences between these two groups as science-based and art-based. Through the works done by freshman design students in basic design course, the effect of diverse backgrounds on design education is tried to be evaluated. The responses of the so called student groups are compared on the basis of creative capacity and the ability to generate new approaches to the concepts presented.

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*Keywords:* Basic design education; science-based; art-based; intuition.

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## 1. Introduction

The design process is identified as bringing about change in man-made things as a series of events which starts with the supply of materials and components and ends with the evolutionary effects upon society (Jones, 1992). So design profession not only applies artistic skills, but also a variety of fields from natural sciences to social sciences. The designer, regardless of field of specialization, is expected to be equipped with artistic, scientific and social sensitivity.

Turkish education system offers two methods for students who are likely to become designers. The students who want to be enrolled in one of design departments need to take either the student selection examination which is organised once a year by Student Selection and Placement Centre, or aptitude exam which is independently organised by the higher education institution giving bachelor's degree in art and design. Student selection examination score needed to be enrolled in a design department such as architecture, landscape architecture, city planning, industrial design and interior architecture is based on the evaluation of qualitative and quantitative reasoning abilities. On the other hand departments of fine arts, graphic design, and visual communication design accept students by aptitude exams. Generally these aptitude exams are based on the evaluation of special skills, such as drawing, and general and academic knowledge. So it can be claimed that the art and design departments in

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Turkish Higher Education System accepts whether science-based students taking student selection examination, and art-based students going through aptitude exams.

The aim of the study is to investigate the differences in these two groups of design students. Through basic design exercises carried out with freshman industrial design and visual communication design students of Gazi University Faculty of Fine Arts, the effect of diverse student backgrounds is tried to be evaluated. The responses of the so called student groups are compared on the basis of creative capacity and the ability to generate new approaches in design.

## **2. Basic Design Education**

Fundamentally, the aim of educational practice is to provide knowledge, skills and sensitivity on certain subjects (Saranlı, 1998). Similarly, design education curriculum, in general, consists of courses that develop design knowledge, artistic skills and technical background (Demirbaş, Demirkan, 2003; Uluoğlu, 2000), which are structured around the main spine of curriculum, the design studio courses. The design courses are in a sense the simulation ground for the students where the outcomes of the other courses are combined and utilized within the studio projects carried out.

Among the design courses, basic design stands crucial since the freshman design students encounter with the phenomenon of design first in basic design course (Denel, 1998). In first year's curriculum of every university art and design department, regardless of the fields of specialization, there is always a course called basic design which deals with the grammar of visual language. This visual language is the basis of design creation and a designer must be equipped with the knowledge of principles, rules and concepts of visual organization in order to enhance his capability in visual organization (Wong, 1993).

Most people already know a great deal about design however very few of them recognize the visual sophistication (Zelanski, Fisher, 1996). For this reason the course aims to awaken an awareness of design by enhancing visual sensitivity. It can be regarded as a foundation course for further design studios for all design departments varying from architecture to graphic design which provides the students the fundamental skills and knowledge needed for design education.

In general, the course curriculum includes topics such as:

1. Elements of design: point, line, direction, size, shape, value, texture, color
2. Visual perception: organization principles, proximity relationship, similarity, shape properties, figure-ground relationship.
3. Principles of Design: repetition, harmony, contrast, concept, balance, unity, hegemony
4. Space, form and geometry: two and three dimensional concepts (Gürer, 1998)

Although the course is designed within a defined framework, it aims to provide the students with fundamental behaviors and skills needed for design act. Denel (1998) separates this fundamental/basic education into three phases. The first phase aims to provide the students the basic skills while the second phase provides certain professional course of conduct. The third and the last phase is named as the most important and the hardest phase which aims the student to create his/her own scale of values. This phase is best thought by discussions and case presentations. The discussions are carried out whether individually between student and teacher, or publicly between student and design jury. In fact verbal interaction is a significant component of design studio (Wender, Roger, 1995).

## **3. Art Education at Secondary School Level**

Before enrolling a design department, students generally go through art education at a limited level during secondary education. Turkish secondary education comprises of mainly two categories of institutions which are general high schools and vocational and technical high schools. In both of the categories, minimum 4 years of education is obligatory which aims to provide the students general knowledge and to prepare them, in line with their interests and talents, for institutions of higher learning. While general high schools aim to prepare students for higher education, vocational high schools provide specialized instruction with the aim of training qualified personnel (OSYM, 2006). General high schools have sub branches which are specialized in language education that

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