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## Visual Literacy During The Period of Architectural Education

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### Abstract

During the period of architectural education, the students visually contact with several objects. In order to conduct this communication properly, it is required to possess visual language. In this study, it is aimed to analyze the students' skill level of visual literacy by comparing first-grade ones from Karadeniz Technical University Department of Architecture with final- year ones of Tevfik Serdar Anatolia High School. Consequently, the study examines the level inequity between two groups and handles the question whether or not 1-year period of architectural education makes any contribution to development of the students' visual literacy. It is concluded that it is enabled to improve - in a short time - visual literacy in architectural education by taking advantage of art objects.

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### 1. Introduction

For human being, improving his visual world in parallel with his visual thinking skill begins with perceiving built environment. Visual perception is described as learning how to see and being able to benefit from all visual components. A variety of images appearing as a result of perceiving external world come into existence by means of affective (emotional) and visual impressions. The definition “visual literacy” was first coined by Debes, in 1969, at the first national conference on Visual Literacy. He offered the following definition “Visual Literacy refers to a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating

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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 (Debes, 1969).” Visual thinking is the ability to see visual objects as images of impressions and structures determined by exact lines. Visual thinking is considered as integration of behaviors like seeing, imagining, and drawing (Ipek, 2003). One of the main purposes of Architectural Education is to enable students to make concepts, rules, and principles being learned throughout the education period into useful knowledge. In order to enable students to observe their environment impressionably, it is required to increase their ability of visual expression and improve their visual language. Some studies (Cubukcu & Dundar, 2007) suggest that the ability of visual thinking plays a more important role in design education than that of verbal thinking. Developing visual thinking skill is based on learning visual language and expressions. Existence of aforementioned visual design elements in lesson content during education period enables students to acquire the ability to perceive and interpret better what they see by applying their visual literacy skill. Improving visual literacy makes a crucial contribution to students’ ability to express themselves very well in the forthcoming years of architectural education and career. As in all fields of design - peculiarly in the field of architecture -, how to improve visual thinking skill is an issue which continuously preoccupies design trainers (Cubukcu & Dundar, 2007). It is believed that all branches of art can be benefited from in order to improve this language throughout the period of architectural education. There seem to be several studies that support this approach (Çubukçu & Dündar, 2007; Oxman, 1999; Garcia, 2009). As from the first year of architectural education, many objects/images are given to students. These are sometimes artworks. All artworks actively or passively establish a visual dialogue with individuals. These visual expressions can make sense in students’ mind and be read by means of design elements including dot, line, direction, size, form, space, ratio, texture, color, value, and design principles including repetition, symmetry, harmony, contrast, dominance, balance, and unity. It is likely that a way to make it easy and faster to read them is to take advantage of visual arts. Therefore, it is quite such an important issue that lessons which support visual literacy should be available as part of visual language and expression during education period, and methods to enhance visual literacy immediately should be found out within the scope of these lessons. In two practices which are applied within the scope of the study, the way to benefit from artworks is determined so as to enhance visual language. Given Arnheim’s declaration “Thinking calls for images and images contain thought. Therefore the visual arts are a home ground of visual thinking... Some of the objectives attributed to art are means of making visual thinking possible”, it is not out of question to support the abovementioned way (Arnheim, 1997). There are also several studies promoting that visual language must be enhanced by means of artworks and imaginativeness be improved (Kılıçaslan, Kuloğlu & Asasoğlu, 2011). In both practices applied for the purpose of tryout as part of the study, painting art - one of the visual arts – is used to create space. In these practices, the aim is to enhance the visual language by means of design elements / principles and also speed up the design process. Within the scope of this text, an experimental study conducted on the two practices before mentioned is introduced.

## 2. Method

The study concludes that visual literacy can be soon enhanced by means of other branches of art in architectural education. Within this framework, it aims at obtaining some results over the practices which were performed in two separate academic years. A visual literacy test consisting of 9 questions so as to ask within the study is developed. The patterns involved in the test were chosen among the design studies conducted as part of the lesson “Architectural Project and Presentation Techniques” by the first year students from Karadeniz Technical University Department of Architecture. Two design studies; “Interpreting Mondrian’s” in 2009-2010 academic year, and “Designing with Von Ebneith” in 2011-2012 academic year were carried out by separate groups. The architectural design studies were conducted based on 5 of Mondrian’s artworks and 4 of Von Ebneith’s artworks. Within the scope of the design studies, the artists’ two-dimensional artworks were transformed into three-dimensional spaces without being exposed to any damage. The design patterns chosen for this study are the term projects belonging to a single executive among the products of aforementioned two academic years. The practices were conducted by a volunteer group consisting of the first year students from Karadeniz Technical University Department of Architecture, and the final year students from Tevfik Serdar Anatolia High School. The aim of this study is to

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