

# Cultural Literacy Skills of University Students Who Get Arts Education on Art Works

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## Abstract

This study aims to determine the perception levels of art educator candidate students of traditional culture and popular culture symbols or expressions on the works of art. This study is important in terms comprehension of students' perception skills and to determine whether these understandings are reflected in their artistic skills or not. A survey was conducted to find out the perception of culture on a total of 70 students studying in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> grades at the Painting Education Department of Necmettin Erbakan University, Ahmet Keleşoğlu Education Faculty, Fine Arts Education Department. Art works containing cultural symbols and expressions were used by the researcher in the study. Student views were taken over eight works of art with details from different cultures. The data of the research where the qualitative research method was used are collected in the form of written opinions about the works. In the analysis of the work, the data obtained from the views taken with the help of the questions which reveal the nature of the art history of the work was analyzed and interpreted through content analysis.

**Keywords:** Culture, Popular Culture, Art Education, Cultural Perception.

## 1. Introduction

The society is matured in a common systematic wheel that programs people and guides the future in the light of history such as history, faith, morality, customs, dressing, eating habits. The cultural traces of the work of art produced in such an environment make itself felt in every period. It is necessary to have certain knowledge and experience in order to understand it. Although knowledge accumulation is a condition acquired over time and depending on the person, experience is a voluntary or involuntary achievement of life that every individual who lives in a society obtains. It is about the education that an individual is aware of the cultural values he has, the history he knows and the ability to distinguish them in any environment. The work of art, which best reflects the culture and social events of each country, is a historical document. Being able to analyse works of art provides understanding of some properties belonging to that geography. In order to increase the productivity and creativity of a student in art education, it is necessary for the student to understand, interpret and synthesize the art work.

### 1.1. Culture

Culture is a natural reflection and it shapes the thinking of individuals. The individual expressions formed by the influence of the culture are unique in creating meaning. In order to sense-make or understand what the cultures refer to, it is necessary to treat them in their cultural context. Although sense-making is formed in the mind, it is essentially the culture which creates that thought. The communication of some of the tools which cultures have with each other enables us to make interpretation of the world. No one can do sense-making except for symbolic systems of the culture (Bruner, 1996).

All social systems require sense-making. Sheltering emerges as the result of a need, but it becomes a meaningful system in which social differences begin to gain importance in this respect. Culture is defined as the co-product of two reciprocal componential processes. The first one is informative, internally meaningful; externally represented, and it is a stable process that is produced as a society and reproduced, in which there are human actions and interactions. The second one forms the basis of the former one and is a pragmatic cultural component of practical knowledge with a pragmatic structure (Patterson, 2014). The pragmatic characteristic of the culture is originated from its developing the society and giving it character. E.B. Taylor also defines culture as a complex integrity that includes knowledge, belief, art, morality, law, customs, and all other abilities and habits that the individual gains as a member of society (Eagleton, 2000). In addition to all these abilities and habits that shape the society, physical environment is also influential in creating community cultures and giving them different meanings. The unique qualities of this emerging system are seen in customs, traditions, architecture,

artworks, music, and language. The things which distinguish one culture from another are icons, symbols or events.

Culture is the integrated structure of the knowledge and life experiences of the geography in which it is located. As time went on, this structure began to coincide with the increase in interaction over the entire geography; similar qualities have increased. The probability of sense-making the facts or events of the own culture decreased in societies where symbolism or sense-making is globalized. This is sometimes seen in the linguistic qualities of societies and sometimes in social relations and lifestyles. On this situation Eagleton (2000) draws attention to the time-varying words among the individuals and their universal meanings. An expression in the form of "He rejected my proposal", "He insisted on his decision although how much I insisted" would be "he ain't got it", "said hey" or "he gonna put down n I dunno" or something similar in American Style English for young people. This situation, which is seen as a natural consequence of globalization, is also the end of some features that give a character to the society. In the globalizing world, it is very important for cultural literacy of individuals to know, recognize, and appreciate the things belonging to other cultures as well as to protect their own cultural values and to know the importance and place of their cultural items among these values. In this regard, the education of cultural values, which is a means of non-verbal communication among human beings, brings them closer to each other in today's world where globalization is inevitable (Zor, 2014).

Considering the relationship of culture with the art, Erinç (2004) appears to have expressed that art is not a concept beside or outside the culture; on the contrary, it is a concept that constitutes its content. Culture is influential in creating an individual's artistic views, and at the same time one's own culture is shaped by his understanding of art. In the same way, besides acquiring the culture from life, the person can also provide it through things he learns about the historical dimensions of the work of art. Some art educators have included examining "controversial" works of art into the curriculum in order to interpret or develop a critical perspective of the students. (Anderson & Garoian, 1995; Barrett & Rab, 1990; Henley, 1997; Sweeny, 2007; Tapley, 2002; Darts, 2008).

### *1.2. Perception of Historical Dimension of the Work in Art Education and Cultural Literacy*

In art education to understand a work of art, it is necessary to know when, where, under which conditions and by whom the work of art was made or to examine the relationship of it with a legend, a historical event, or a mythological story. Boydas (2004: 33) states that knowledge about art requires being aware of and defining the function, style, and cultural and social environment which the artist works in (cited in Deliduman and Sezer, 2015).

It is a frequently asked question how art history teaching, art criticism or aesthetic inquiry should be in art education. The answer to this question can be thought of as a combination of social, economic, educational and personal goals in general. Art history methodology and aesthetic inquiry mean that learners learn to evaluate artwork, environment and culture (Smoke, 1988). The culture that the artist reflects in his work is the same as the artistic competence that the spectator brings to the dissolution of the work. Scientific knowledge differs from everyday experience (indicated by instant understanding) as it contains awareness of conditions permitting sufficient perception. The purpose of analyzing the work of art is to make it possible to comprehend the work immediately in terms of both scientific and meaning, in other words to make it possible to understand the culture (Bordieu, 1984). In order to make sense of the culture which the work belongs to, some features belonging to that culture need to be known. It is like trying to make sense of a cryptically written text to perceive what meaning a symbol was used for, what affects a historical event in the past created on that community, and the reflection of all these statements on the work of art. It should be accepted that an art work is a historical document and a reflection of culture as well as an aesthetical appeal to the person. In this respect, we can also say that perusing an art work is perusing the culture. According to Köksal (2010), cultural literacy is the ability to understand and appreciate the similarities and differences in the values, traditions and beliefs of your own culture and other cultures. When cultural literacy is mentioned, in fact, two dimensions are talked about. The first is the perception of an individual of how his own culture influences his own thoughts, attitudes and behaviours and the evaluation of his own culture from a historical perspective. In other words, it is being capable of handling the culture throughout the transformations it has gone and conditions that it was influenced by or it influenced in a systematic way by examining the evidences from the first hand, its basic texts and symbolic personalities. The other is the realisation of an individual of the effects of other cultures that exists in the same time period on his own culture; and the effect of his own culture on other cultures within the historical dimension. (Steinhaeuser; 2002 cited in Köksal, 2010). Individuals are more influenced by the culture they are in and are inclined more to the images that symbolize the culture they belong to. Related to this topic, In order to

answer the questions such as “How do people perceive artificial visual images such as photographs or drawings that are influenced by their culture?”, “How intimate is it that the members of certain cultures embody the forms of dominant representation in drawings and pictures?”, Masuda et al investigated whether there were systematic cultural differences in the styles of the works considered as masterpieces in their own societies. They also investigated whether there are cultural differences in the aesthetic preferences of drawing and photographic styles created by contemporary cultural group members. Evidence supporting the hypothesis that the environment influences what is seen has been found. The relationship between the object and the context depends on the structural environment. Even physical environments such as buildings, billboards and the structure of roads are the result of the cultural values of society. Such visual representations bear cultural values. This situation transfers cultural values into different periods, which provides a basis for developing our way of seeing the world (Masuda, Gonzales, Kwan & Nisbett, 2008).

In an application-based course, students can only learn techniques. The study of art history in the education of fine arts develops tolerance towards complex views, as well as investigation and information about one’s own culture and world cultural heritage, and understanding and appreciation of arts for students. In connection with a research on art history, students need to explore and research artworks in their own culture as much as the global ones. Inasmuch as works of art are the universal records of the past. If they cannot improve the understanding of the past, they cannot help to understand the present (Erdem, 2016). Through examination of art, students can learn their national characteristics and cultural principles. It is known that works of art best convey the expression of national value. Thus, learners can also learn the complexity of human nature, such as regularity-irregularity, necessity of proportion, promotion of superior ability, and appreciation of virtue and sorrow through works of art (Özsoy, 2003). Ministry of National Education, Elective Visual Arts Curriculum aims to determine the similarities and differences among the works of art in different cultures within the cultural heritage learning area of the students. For this reason, art works belonging to especially Turkish culture and also different cultures such as Europe, Asia, Africa and so on, are examined (Ministry of National Education, Elective Visual Arts Course Curriculum, 2014). At the same time, it is emphasized that art galleries, museums, cultural institutions, etc. enrich the life and imagination power of the individual, and the symbols in the works of art which are studied by focusing on the symbols which have different meanings in the work of art are recognized in this way. It is aimed to realize the effect of social and cultural beliefs on the work of art. Making awareness of the popular culture’s influence on the contemporary art and the influence of elements such as image, writing and symbols in the contemporary media on the art of painting is among the other purposes (Ministry of National Education, Elective Visual Arts Course Curriculum, 2014).

## 2. Methods

Qualitative research method was used in this study. The qualitative research is a type of research focused on meaning and understanding. The overall aim of the qualitative research is to develop an understanding of how people make sense of their lives, and to reveal how people interpret what they are experiencing. Content and analytic inductions are two less common analysis techniques in qualitative research. In qualitative research, the units of measurement focus on communication, especially the diversity and frequency of messages, and the number of times a particular speech pattern or group of words is used (Merriam, 2013). In this study, students used their experiences and knowledge to comment on the pictures and wrote down their own ideas. Some visual images made different participants feel the same, so some expressions were used more than once.

### 2.1. Working Group (Sample)

A total of 70 students studying in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> grades at the Painting Education Department of Necmettin Erbakan University, Ahmet Keleşoğlu Education Faculty, Fine Arts Education Department constitute the study group.

### 2.2. Data Collection Tool

As a means of data collection in the survey, an open-ended questionnaire was applied for each of the 8 works with visual qualities from different cultures. The questions used in the stages of art criticism are designed to reveal more of the historical dimension of the work based on the steps of analysis and interpretation. Questions are as follows; "Is there anything you see as an icon in the work? If yes, what is it? How is it used? What does it reflect? What kind of tradition, culture and customs does the work show? How do you know? What does the

artist say about time, place, idea, belief and cultural and social differences? Did the artist make his work by dramatizing a legend, a story or a mythological theme? If yes, what are they? "

The response time for each work was 10 minutes and the survey was completed in 80 minutes in total. The works were shown by using a projector respectively in a way in which all the students to be able to easily examine the works. During this time, the students didn't communicate with each other.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

In order to evaluate the data of the research, the answers given to the questions based on the evaluation of the cultural structure of the work were examined in detail. Categories which define cultural construction in general terms such as Architectural Structure, Icon, Symbol, Religion (Belief), Social Nature, Historical Period (Time) were created.

In the answers given for each work, frequency tables are created to show which words or concepts are repeated for how many times. According to the frequency of repetition in these tables, the results are reached about what students concentrated most attention on the work.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Findings and Comments on the Evaluation of Cultural Structure of Picture A



Table 1. Repetition Frequency of Cultural Concepts Related to Picture A

Picture A	f	%
Architectural Structure	19	7,5
Icon - Symbol	96	38
Religion (Belief)	24	9,5
Social Quality	76	30
Historical Period (Time)	37	14,6
Total	252	99,6

For the picture A, it is observed that the images on the visible side of the picture such as figure, object, colour, event and motif are mostly repeated. Images such as pottery, goat, ram and throne are repeated the most under the icon-symbol category. It can be seen that clothes, skin colours of the figures and their movements in the icon-symbol category are interpreted and concentrated on specific cultures. The concepts of Egyptian, Indian or Far Eastern cultures are emphasized here more often. *"Indian culture and Hinduism are largely felt in the picture. There are symbols of their beliefs. The presence of two people holding pots in their hands and a large man may reflect a religious ceremony."* (S1). *"It reminds me of Far Eastern cultures. The clothes and the patterns of the rug lay on the ground and the figure sitting cross-legged on the cushion may show that he is an important person."* (S6). In the historical period (Time) category, it was concluded that the work reflects a traditional event of ancient times. *"I think there are things that bear characteristics of ancient Egyptian period and Egyptian region such as pottery, engraving, clothes, hair and life. It is a picture depicting life in Egypt, the servants and the Pharaoh."* (S4). It is expressed that it has an emphasizing meaning about social differences within the social nature category. *"It depicts a ruling king and his assistants. It may be a society with social differences."* (S15). *"He portrayed a tradition with class differences. There is an Egyptian tradition. I can understand it from*

*the scene of an important big man sitting down and others serving him." (S16). In the category of Religion (Belief), it can be seen that the symbols in the work, the situation of the figures, their clothes and the place are related to a ritual or a ceremony. "It looks as if belongs to Indian culture. A religious ceremony is being described." (S20). "They might believe in a monotheistic religion and even the rams behind them might be regarded as a religious symbol for them." (S63). In the category of architectural structure, it is observed that important and spectacular architectural structures with important status such as temple, palace or kingdom are repeated more often. "It shows musical instruments and figures similar to Indian people. The figure on the front is big. This condition seems to be a hierarchical order in the picture. The place contains a palace and an embroidered throne in it. The clothes bear Hindu clothes features. The figure on the front in big size shows that he is important. The sitting position is a way of ritual or entertainment." (S29). As you can see, the students did not only make sense of the clothes or movements of the figures; they also evaluated their size and place composition.*

### 3.2. Findings and Comments on the Evaluation of Cultural Structure of Picture B



Table 2. Repetition Frequency of Cultural Concepts Related to Picture B

Picture B	f	%
Icon- Symbol	77	50,9
Religion (Belief)	17	11,2
Historical Period	20	13,2
Social Quality	37	24,5
Total	151	99,8

For the picture B, it appears that the images on the visible side of the picture such as figure, object, colour, event and motif are mostly repeated. Under the icon-symbol category, images such as horse, text and colour are repeated the most. It seems to be more concentrated on Eastern cultures starting from the beliefs and lifestyles that are symbolized in the icon-symbol and social nature categories. We can see a holistic meaning emerging combining a horse figurine with colours. *"A horse figure being used alone might be used as an icon. There are patterns similar to different animal figures in the lower parts of the picture. The blue colour and the horse figure in the picture may be symbolizing freedom." (S56). While the writing form was interpreted as death or tombstone by some of the students, they were regarded as an element symbolizing the state by some other students. "The deformation of the horse and the shape of the structure above symbolize an expressive image. A horse under a tombstone resembles of the old Turkish traditions. It reflects the resurrection of the Turks after death." (S29). The horse figure representing power and the correspondence of heroism in Turkish culture can be considered as the most significant sense-making of the students. "The work reflects a nomadic or a warrior culture that values the horse." (Ö30). "It is similar to a writing tablet and blue tones were used. The horse and a warrior reflect a state. I think it is the East, the old Turkish culture." (Ö32). "There is a horse as an icon in the work. The work seems to reflect the traditions of the Anatolian Seljuks." (Ö35). When the students interpreted the horse, text and colour elements together, they concluded that the work reflects eastern culture and mostly the Turkish culture.*

### 3.3. Findings and Comments on the Evaluation of Cultural Structure of Picture C



Table 3. Repetition Frequency of Cultural Concepts Related to Picture C

Picture C	f	%
Icon- Symbol	40	31,4
Social Quality	18	14,1
Historical Period (Popular Culture)	69	54,3
Total	127	99,8

For Picture C, students have made interpretations such as beauty, women's power, colours, Marilyn Monroe, consuming society and modernity under the icon-symbol category. It is stated that the picture has an emphasizing meaning about social differences within the society under the social qualification item of the work. At the same time, it can also be said that the message about the presence of perception and perceptual similarities brought by modern cultures is conveyed. In the historical period on the other hand, the students say that the work reflects popular culture more and the work is the best representation of Pop Art and Postmodern process. *"The artist was influenced by the pop art movement and created a social perception by using a face familiar to people."* (S22) *"The work bears the characteristics of the popular culture. I think it's a picture that advocates fame and popularity. It describes the years of 1962 in the fields of social, cultural and time."* (S26). *"The work was created in pop art style. In fact, the aim of drawing these kinds of paintings is to criticize the consuming society. The work has an innovative understanding. It reflects the thoughts about the future, not the past."* (S30). *"The work was made by the effect of the traces of capitalism of the United States."* (S25). When interpreting or reviewing this work, it was observed that the students had prior knowledge about the work. This situation can also be understood from the given answers. Speaking of the influence of popular cultures, students express a general perception by using all kinds of visual images about popular culture and pop art. *"The artist was influenced by the pop art movement and created a social perception using a face familiar to people."* (S22). According to David Gauntlett (1995), who emphasizes the inevitability of this perception, the true effects of media consumption on contemporary audiences are unpredictable. Visual culture theorists defending media images, messages and works emphasize that the popular culture is often confusing and contradictory, depending on multiple social, cultural, personal, economic, educational and historical contexts (Du Gay, 1997; Mirzoeff, 1999; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001 cited in Darts, 2008).

### 3.4. Findings and Comments on the Evaluation of Cultural Structure of Picture D



Table 4. Repetition Frequency of Cultural Concepts Related to Picture D

Picture D	f	%
Society Culture	65	34,3
Icon-Symbol	65	34,3
Social Nature	32	16,9
Place (Geographical Attribute)	13	6,8
Religion (Belief)	6	3,1
Historical Period (Time)	8	4,2
Total	189	99,6

It was observed that students repeated far more responses from far eastern cultures such as Chinese culture, Japanese culture and Central Asia under the community culture category. By evaluating the work, the students expressed that the work reflects the cultures of Central Asia or Far East. It has been observed that details such as clothing (kimono), writing, fan, and slanting eyes are considered as icons or cultural symbols. *"The picture shows people in Japanese Culture. They are wearing traditional Japanese clothes. The transition from the bridge and the clothes symbolize Japanese culture and customs."* (S29). *"The needle like thing on the woman's head may be an icon. Chinese buildings."* (S57). *"The written alphabet is an icon. It is inspired by Chinese culture. The alphabet and clothes are used. Chinese belief is Buddhism. This is the way people live."* (S51). There are the cases which reflect the quality of the society such as class difference, migration, agriculture and tradition under the social structure category. *"Ordinary village people can be seen in their traditional clothes. The epigraphs and the inscriptions on them bear the characteristics of Japanese culture. The life and agriculture belonging to that region are revealed."* (S36). *"When I first saw the figures, they evoked the war or the samurai feelings. There is an immigration situation in people. The old times, it is understood from the clothes of people."* (Ö56). The students studied the geographical qualities reflected in the work under the category of place. They have tried to solve the cultural construction by taking advantage of geographical conditions and architectural features. *"The place found in the work is like a place in Asia in terms of shape and architecture. The bridge stands long and high."* (S26). Some students evaluate the work in terms of religious belief and social life accordingly. *"The picture shows Chinese people. Frequently arrayed things that look like straw piles at the back and clothes might be their icon. The places at the back, which we call tents in which they stay, describe the collective life in different regions. For this community it may be the practice of coming to such places during certain days of the months or the years to do something like worship."* (S63). Under the category of time or historical period, students evaluated the period in which the cultural character of the work was reflected. *"Bridge and clothes are like the Ottoman period."* (S35).

### 3.5. Findings and Comments on the Evaluation of Cultural Structure of Picture E



Table 5. Repetition Frequency of Cultural Concepts Related to Picture E

Picture E	F	%
Icon- Symbol	48	32,2
Place	17	11,4
Religion (Belief)	4	2,6
Social Nature	18	12
Society Culture	33	22,1
No Icon	29	19,4
Total	149	99,7

Students have accepted the colour and clog or slipper form as cultural icons or symbols in this work. From these two elements, they have given religious, social, geographical and community meanings. *"The clogs symbolize the city they are used in. The continuity of the object used determines the quality of the culture of the city it represents."* (S30). It is seen that the slipper form is associated with the geographical position for the purpose of use in the place category. The clogs considered to be a cultural icon and are seen more as a reflection of eastern cultures. *"I think they belong to Turkish culture. As these slippers are in the bath and the bath belongs to Turkish culture"* (S12). *"The work has transformed an object known as traditional and ordinary in Turkish culture into a work of art. It is just like a urinal. It is an object that we can always meet in everyday life, but not an artwork."* (S21). *"Clogs as an icon are the use of today's shoes of the old Turkish structure. I think it is eastern culture. It is a shoe from the old times. I think it is a product of Turkish tradition."* (S34). *"The picture is offering an object to us containing features of a culture. It is a Turkish cultural tradition."* (S36). *"Turkish culture. My dear Ottoman. Bath slippers."* (S42). Some of the students think that the colour and form seen in the work have a religious character. They are accepted as an object symbolizing religious phenomena. *"A sample belonging to us, Muslims, and the blue colour attracted my attention. In terms of belief, that is to say, it is an article belonging to Muslims according to my knowledge."* (S52). *"Clogs always reminded me of mosques. Perhaps the artist who made it might be thinking something like that."* (S40). Interpretations have been made to solve the composition, social content, or social construction that appears in the work. The words of equality, unity, wars and social change are repeated more often in this area. *"Slippers are used as an icon. The fact that the slippers are so numerous and lined can in fact represent equality. It gives the message that everyone is equal."* (S4). *"This is not the colour of clogs as an icon. I can see clogs painted in blue. Clogs in a large number can be a reference to collective human deaths. The colour blue and the presence of many clogs reminded me of the Bosnian massacre. It might have been made to draw attention to the Bosnian massacre."* (S25). This work also reminded the events belonging to different societies. For some of the students there is no symbol or expression in the work.

### 3.6. Findings and Comments on the Evaluation of Cultural Structure of Picture F



Table 6. Repetition Frequency of Cultural Concepts Related to Picture F

Picture F	F	%
Icon-Symbol	66	37,2
Social Nature	59	33,3
Cultural structure and phenomenon	20	11,2
Historical Period (Time)	28	15,8
No idea – No cultural reflection	4	2,2
Total	177	99,7

For the picture F, it can be seen that concepts considered being symbolic such as clothing, slippers, mirror, woman's pregnancy, dog and chandelier are repeated the most. It is emphasized that the pregnancy represents more fertility, the dog represents loyalty among spouses, the chandelier represents richness, and the mirror is a means of reflecting the structure of the society as well as the presentation of the future. The students' awareness about the period the work was made, the event it is aimed to describe was understood from the responses they gave when they saw the work, and from their responses received afterwards. *"The dog might be loyalty. The mirror might be a show or sincerity. Fur can be nobility and red is dignity. It can be the traditional outfit of the palace and palace aristocrats. There is a celebratory atmosphere. The social difference of the old times, the use of fur on a noble individual, the woman who makes her hair like a horn can be thought to be superior to other"*



women." (S11). There are also studies aimed to analyze the social structure and the period in which the clothes of the figures reflect. Here, the concepts of class differences, bourgeois class, and nobility and European lifestyle seem to be repeated more often. "The picture reflects the Renaissance or Baroque period because of the style of the room and the lack of eyebrows of the figures. There is a woman as an icon in the work. The pregnancy of the woman symbolizes the fertility and her hands on her belly means motherhood sensation. We can understand that they are a noble family as a social difference." (S4). "It reflects the bourgeois class people. The chandelier represents wealth. European culture and a wedding ceremony are reflected in the picture. It shows a rich family." (S13). "It shows respect in the man, the charm and richness of the things and they live in a noble culture. There are cultural and social differences. The first eye-catching characteristic is that they are noble, because the man respects the woman, and he graciously greets her" (S18). "We can see the use of Renaissance clothes and colours. We can understand that there is social status and they are noble and rich. However the artist reflects himself and gives the impression that he is in." (S19). "It is a bourgeois family. Their outfits are rather exaggerated and flashy. The woman is wearing a green, long-tailed silk dress. Arnolfini, the merchant, has fur on him. The only candle burning in the chandelier on the top is known as the light of the God. The white cover on the woman's head is referring to purity and cleanliness. It shows the Renaissance period and the bourgeoisie." (S22). Students attribute cultural events on some religious rules and traditions. There is a thought that the sanctity of the wedding and the marriage is reflected. "It is a religious marriage ceremony. Women and men respect each other. The white covering on the woman's head is the symbol of the sanctity of the marriage." (S20). "The male figure has lifted his right hand up, holding the hand of his wife with his left hand, and making the marriage vow." (S27). In the historical period category, the characteristics of the period in which the work was made and the historical events it reflects are presented. "The picture shows cultural characteristics of Medieval Europe. It shows a society and cultural period in which the feudal and scholastic thinking dominated in the Middle Ages in European geography." (S29). The answers given are based on the work's depicting a cultural ceremony. There are also answers that indicate that they cannot interpret the work or they have no idea.

### 3.7. Findings and Comments on the Evaluation of Cultural Structure of Picture G



Table 7. Repetition Frequency of Cultural Concepts Related to Picture G

Picture G	f	%
Icon-Symbol	112	66,6
American Culture	22	13
National Festival-Celebration	17	10,1
Religion (Belief)	2	1,1
Social Difference	15	8,9
Total	168	99,7

Under the icon-symbol category for Image G, it can be seen that the concepts thought to be symbolic such as flag, America, black people, pigeon, independence, white t-shirt and racism are repeated the most frequently. Due to the flag and the black people, the repetition frequency of racism and independence phenomena is far more. Repeated expressions such as national holiday and Independence Day celebrations are mostly originated from the "happy July 4 Bang" inscription in the work. The students also stated that this writing is a detail symbolizing the day of freedom. It is thought that the pigeon and the sun represent freedom and hope. "There is an American flag as an icon. It reminds us of the day of American independence." (S57). In the work the artist wanted to point out that black people are also American citizens like other people. We are one." (S40). "Black culture, racial differences have been addressed. A day of remembrance was depicted." (S16). "The pigeon symbolizes freedom. There are two pigeons flying. An American oath ceremony in front of the flag is illustrated

and I can understand it from the posture of the children. The picture tries to give information about the black men also being modern but attached to their own flag." (S14). "Flag symbolizes country, barbecue stands for celebration, white means unity, peace and cleanliness. It's a traditional celebration feature. The flag and the writings indicate it." (S11). "An American flag can be seen as an icon. Unity and solidarity is illustrated here. It gives information about America's salvation. The message there is the unity message. I like the picture because it doesn't mention official racism." (S55). It seems that there is much detail that symbolizes American culture in the cultural sense in the work. The most prominent element among them is the black people. In this respect, it has been observed that the repetition frequency of students using expressions of colonial culture or American culture is high. "The white pigeon next to the sun is like a symbol of peace. It is like black people, the mass murders of the United States against blacks and compensation of the colonialism. There are white clothes and white pigeons." (S50). "The American flag is an icon. It shows a flag a girl wants to hold out to two boys and the boys want to handle it with honour. It is a work that criticizes American society harshly in the name of racism. The pigeon is expressing peace. July 4<sup>th</sup> is the liberation of the United States. Social differences are now no longer what a specific issue is like, and it is a message to eliminate racism." (S34). "The work depicts the day-to-day reflection of the discrimination applied to black people. It is a picture symbolizing peace." (S23). "Two pigeons on the top of the picture symbolize peace while the black children are directing the US flag to racism." (S22). Some students have analyzed the work from a different point of view, either due to misinterpretation or lack of information. "We can understand from the American flag that they are American people. So is the architecture and place. Flag, barbecue and children's skin colour show American culture. A rich family is celebrating the child's 4th birthday in the garden of their home. The picture is representing a social family." (S13). As interpreted by this statement of the learner, some interpretations are made only on fiction which appears on the work but cannot be interpreted.

### 3.8. Findings and Comments on the Evaluation of Cultural Structure of Picture H



Table 8. Repetition Frequency of Cultural Concepts Related to Picture H

Picture H	F	%
Icon-Symbol	42	17,8
Turkish Culture	97	41,2
Place (Geography)	30	12,7
Local Clothes	34	14,4
Turkish Flag	32	13,6
Total	235	99,7

Picture H is a work, in which students can easily feel their own culture. It is observed that concepts considered being symbolic such as the drum, the clarion, tractor and handkerchief are repeated most frequently in the icon-symbol category of this work. Phenomena related to Turkish culture have been repeated more than other categories. The concepts of tradition, halay (folk dances) wedding and belief are repeated the most under this category. "Anatolian people are used in the picture. The artist benefited from Turkish traditions and customs. Apparently it belongs to Anatolian people according to their clothes. The picture clearly states that it has a different society." (S5). "Halay is a must. The drum. He mentions about the clothes belonging to Turkish culture and our culture in daily life." (S20). "There are objects that symbolize a wedding in the picture. The work is depicted in accordance with the culture and tradition of Turkish society. Turkish flag, clothes and entertainment style represent it." (S30). "He portrayed how Turkish people have fun at a wedding. Halay shows the local characteristics of the dancing figures. The work reflects the culture of the Turkish nation, its naturalness, traditions, customs and clothes." (S24). In the category of place it is stated that the geographical qualities of the work are taken into consideration and it is a cultural symptom. "It reflects Eastern culture and traditions. We got

*this idea from the events, clothes and objects in the work. The place is the wedding area of the village." (S48). "We can infer that there is a more local culture. We can understand this from people's clothing, place and drums played. In the village square there appears to be a community which is attached to their traditions." (S56). "The picture illustrates the eastern region. The outfits of people and the folk dance reminded me of it. The artist made a study about the weddings of the Eastern Anatolia Region. Colours are generally used in brown tones. The Drum and the clarion are remarkable. This gives us information about the traditions and customs of the local people of that area." (S31). Local clothing is a cultural icon and is among the most repeated categories among the student responses. "A village wedding in local clothes is depicted. The flag reveals the dignity of the Turkish nation. The wedding gives the message that it is performed according to locality. Every nation has its customs and traditions." (S14). It was observed that the Turkish flag category was accepted as one of the best icon reflecting the culture and answers are as follows; "Turkish flag can be an icon. It shows Turkish culture and traditions." (S6). "Each of Turkish flag, bride-groom, drums-clarions, halay, and tractor is an icon. The picture shows the characteristic of Turkish culture, tradition and customs." (S17).*

#### **4. Conclusion and Evaluation**

The analysis of artworks made by using the steps of art criticism gives opportunity to examine the work also in the cultural context.

The students who participated in the research expressed their opinions about the eight artworks reflecting different cultures. They were able to produce more diverse ideas when interpreting works reflecting Eastern culture or Turkish culture. In addition to this, it has been observed that they interpreted the works they had knowledge about before, using their historical knowledge. Images such as Turkish flag, the drum and halay were directly perceived by the students and helped them to relate them to their own cultures. It was easier for students to evaluate works belonging to their own cultures. Likewise, the American flag was described as an image that directly reflects American culture. In general, the flag image is remembered with the nation it belongs to in the human mind and is considered holy. Nevertheless, most of the students had trouble with what they would pay attention to when examining the historical dimension of the work. The work which students had no information about before was more meaningless for the students and they wrote indefinite things in order not to leave the question blank. Some students on the other hand misinterpreted the period in which the work was made under the time or historical period category. For instance, although the question 4 was a picture reflecting a far eastern culture, one student commented: "The bridge and clothes look like the Ottoman period." (S35). The period and its characteristics of the work, the feature of reflecting historical event, and acquired information about the artist have increased perception of the cultural structure of the work. In this sense, the necessity of lectures for artistic analysis or art criticism steps emerges in applied courses in the institutions where art education is given. At the same time, it is observed that students in this survey lacked reading and writing skills related to the field. In this respect, applied courses should be planned with the aim of reading and research related to the student's field.

Students studying art should learn not only about the cultural characteristics they belong to, but also about the contents of other cultures and artworks produced in this context. It is necessary to educate a student as an individual who reads in the field of art, understands what he reads, interprets them, and reflects them on his work by synthesizing them all and to develop a programme based on this purpose. Through art education, people or societies who embrace a work of an artist who is not from his own country, appreciates and protects artworks created by different civilizations thousands of years ago and who are making an effort to leave a cultural heritage to future generations can be called as cultured and emphatic cultures and communities. If we do not want unbalanced and incompatible societies, we need to educate the people who make that society. Because cultivating art culture and ensuring that societies are made up of harmonious individuals is one of the goals of art education (Mercin and Alakuş, 2007). In fact, it is necessary to educate each art educator candidate as a culture literate person. Culture literate students realize the effects of culture on behaviours and beliefs of themselves and others. They accept the existence of different beliefs, approaches and lifestyles. They recognize that historical knowledge is a fiction shaped by social, political and personal factors. They distinguish the differences between popular and non-popular cultural products. They know the main events in the history of different nations and estimate how they affect their thoughts, behaviours and beliefs (Köksal, 2010). In applied courses, in addition to the transfer of theoretical knowledge, recognizing the works in the museums, analyzing their historical dimension and evaluating them in terms of aesthetics can be considered as cultural literacy in art education. Museum education courses are also an effective element in evaluating the historical dimension of the works.

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