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Significance of visual perception in education of art history

Havva Arslangazi a *

a Dr., Near East University, Faculty of Architecture, Yakın Doğu Bulvarı, Leffosa/KKTC, Mersin 10 Turkey

Abstract

Education of art history is that, one of the most important factors provides to sustain and increase to level of cultural awareness and aesthetic of communities. Besides being in departments of art history, it support and nourish to some departments of arts as a theoretical and complementary course. Art history as a discipline, the adoption to the present day, had developed a serious academic sense. In this process, education of art history has been studied to give in many ways to be more efficient teaching and to provide permanent learning. Academicians of art history, has endeavored to go beyond classical education with techniques such as the experimental approach and on-site observation of the works of art and architecture. In this study, it firstly focused on the changing and developing methods in education of art history from beginning to present and then the significance of visual perception was discussed with an applied teaching method to consolidate the theoretical knowledge in this education.

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1. Introduction

Art history is an academic discipline researches to evaluation and stylistic context of objects of art that man has created through the ages. It primarily involved with art types called “visual art” or “plastic art” such as paintings, sculpture, architecture, etc (Mülayim, 1983). It aimed to classify them in the framework of a method. It appeared in Germany in the 19th century as an academic discipline. However art history was mentioned by antique philosophers like Plato, Plinius and later Vasari, etc (Sözen & Tanyeli, 1994). Wölfflin, Panofsky, and Gombrich are most important art historians who influenced the literature of the 20th century.

Education is a process that provides development, socializing, and acquiring specific behaviors and outcomes in human life (Artut, 2002). Education of art history attaches great importance to provide understanding of art and artist, the impact of social and technological changes on artworks and artists. At the same time, this education has played to essential role on artists and artworks, that are cultural values, are recognized and sustained. By becoming as an academic discipline, an education program was formed to train qualified people in this field. In addition, art history can be seen as a complementary course in different art education, because it has significant role in development of aesthetics values and perception, in creative thinking, in increasing the cultural awareness.

The education of art history has been taught with various methods like explanation, discussion, observation, and experimental approach. Today they aren’t separately so efficient in education, because of the increasing knowledge accumulation, the changes in socio-cultural and technological conditions. This has caused to search to new teaching...
methods. The aim of the study is to develop a new teaching method different from classic methods in education of art history, to provide permanent learning for the students with this method, and to help them to be active and creative. Furthermore, determining the efficient and complementary contribution of different fields of this new method of teaching art history is among the main objectives of the study. With these goals and objectives, first of all, teaching methods in education of art history and the significance of visual perception were conceptually studied; then the new practical method “the draft drawings of the artwork seen” that applied for visual perception to be cognitive activity and the students to actively use their visual perceptions, was explained; and then measurements of their success were examined. In the result, visual perception played an active role and efficient, permanent learning provided, a new teaching model was tried to be developed in the field of art history.

2. The Teaching Methods in Education of Art History

Education of art history is an important field that should provide cultural sustainability and wealth, has a complementary role in various academic fields. Different teaching methods have been applied in this education since 19th century. Both in art history and different art disciplines, education of art history can be seen. In all fields, education of art history has been applied through different or similar methods. In the programs of these fields, the aim of course of art history determines the teaching methods. The name of the courses such as “History of Art, History of Interior Design and Furniture, History of Art and Architecture, History of Textile, History of Civilization” refers to the differences and similarities in programs.

The main aims of education of art history are to transfer of the information, to teach the students the style, artists and artworks formed in different periods and civilizations, to bring the student cultural awareness and perception, to develop the students’ creativity. This education will provide an accumulation to recognize, learn and choose to arts (Kıršoğlu, 2005). The most widespread teaching method is the explanation and presentation method in education of art history. Within a chronological order, definitions of artworks and art periods are explained in this method. So students use audio and visual perceptions, it can be efficient. However student is generally passive and memorizes names, dates and details. Another one is research method that is more efficient because students take attention. Students should be directed with open-ended questions. The combination of the other art disciplines (practice, art criticism, and aesthetics) and art history is another method. The teachers use the artworks (generally the similar copies / reproductions) to motivate the students to find their art styles or the themes. They are active in their learning, but it is not easy to apply in all lectures (Yolcu, 2004; Göğebakan, 2011).

The observation-field trip method is important in the education of art history. In the trips of museums and historical places, the artworks are actively, efficiently learned by direct seeing, hearing, studying, applying and even by experiencing. Thus more exciting and permanent learning occurred (Buyurgan ve Buyurgan, 2007; Göğebakan, 2011). Therefore, art history became a practical study to students joined with their emotions, perceptions, comments and solutions (Kıršoğlu, 2005). However it is not possible to go to see artworks in all places of world. Making discussion and comparison is suggested method, because student is more active (Kıršoğlu, 2005). The education of art history would be useful by taking the students attention at the peak and with efficient applied method (Rouve, 1973; Kıršoğlu, 2005).

In education of art history, all of these methods don’t separately provide sufficient and efficient teaching and play a complementary role of the programs. New methods must be developed and tools should be used. Students must be active in these new methods. A teaching method depends on the visual perception as a cognitive activity will be so significant and provide complementary contribution.

3. Significance of Visual Perception in Education

Perception is the process of attaining information and understanding of effects of environment through sense organs and nervous system in the brain (Güngör, 2005). It is one of the most important concepts used to be able to put a person into an aesthetic and intellectual field (Alp, 2009). According to the German-born, film and art theorist Rudolf Arnheim, who mostly known with his works on perceptional psychology; the sense of sight is the most
efficient organ of the ability of human cognition, because it takes in visual data and records them. However visual perception is necessary for thinking process. Senses are not the only mediums of the ability of cognition; in addition to perception is planning and filtering (Arnheim, 2009; Özsezgin, 2009). Therefore visual perception is completely an active performance. That is, visual perception is a cognitive activity (Arnheim, 2002).

Visual perception refer to the visual framework of spatial location of entire seen objects right here or a part of visual world (Arnheim, 2002). By furnishing images of kinds of qualities, objects, and events, visual perception lays the groundwork of concept formation. Because perception gathers types of things, that is, concepts, can perceptual material be used for thought. There is the collaboration of perceiving and thinking in cognition. Thinking is process the output of perception. The cognitive means all mental operations involved in the receiving, storing and processing of information: sensory perception, memory, thinking, and learning. In this way, visual perception is visual thinking (Arnheim, 2009). Visual thinking is an essential part of the learning process. Before we learn to connect ideas and meanings with words through speaking or writing, we learn to identify elements of our world using visual cues such as rudimentary shapes and colors (Brizee, 2003). This cognitive process of perceiving and thinking provides an efficient learning.

Consequently, visual perception and thinking have become so significant in education. Because of providing an efficient and permanent learning, ability of seeing should be improved and become active. Learning to see is learning to visual thinking, to provide unity on matters such as light/shadow, perspective, figure/background or form/ground relationship, color harmony. This learning involves practice, directing and informing (Kırşoğlu, 1992). In education of art history, significant and purposeful focusing on components (color, form, texture, and proportion) formed artworks; both would be immensely efficient in improvement of ability of visual perception, and would provide a permanent learning and creative thinking. (Figure 1)

![Cognitive process and learning development after the active seeing](image)

**Figure 1. Cognitive process and learning development after the active seeing**

### 4. In Education of Art History the Teaching Method based on Visual Perception

In the Near East University, Faculty of Architecture, departments of Architecture and Interior Architecture, within the course of “History of Art and Architecture” and “History of Interior Architecture and Furniture”, with the aim of strengthening the theoretical knowledge of the students and integrating their education, a practical teaching method was tried to be developed. This method that, can be applied in education of art history, is proposal that not only based on human visual and audio sensory but also being a cognitive process provided students would be able to seeing, perceiving and thinking. Consequently, their learning occurs and their creativity can develop, when the students is actively realized information.

Free hand drawings of the visual artworks reflecting by the computer were asked to be done to students, the visual perception being actively, supporting the method of the classical presentation/explanation by using the equipment that based on the instructor lecturing and the students listening. In these drawing processes, it is aimed to the students to be active, and their visual perception to be efficient by directing the visual sensory.
In the practice of this method, during the explanation of theoretical information, the artworks shown was asked to be drawn in drafts, grant an extension of time for this. (Figure 2) At the same time, the visual sensory of the students were directed by the instructor, questions asked to the students and the information repeated. In this process the students asked questions to the instructor, investigated the subject, and discussed the issue. During a semester in the method practiced, the draft drawings were collected in each lesson, and then evaluated. Their marks were added to the students’ grades at the end of semester. By informing the student about this, at the beginning of the semester, the students were encouraged and directed. Furthermore the students were asked to make drawings in the exam at the end of the semester. Thus the permanency and efficiency of the learning was tried to be quantified.
5. Conclusion

As a result, this study examined the teaching models and qualifications of the education of art history, tried to develop a new and efficient method. In art history, which is a conceptual course, by this practical method “the draft drawing of the artwork seen”, it was determined that the students to attain information permanently and creative thinking, to play an active role in their teaching.

This study has shown that the directed and encouraged students in this method should use their visual sensory actively and perceive efficiently, because the students who had these experiences, started to ask questions to the instructor, investigated the subject and discussed the issue. At the same time, this situation has indicated that visual thinking should rise with the start of an efficient visual perception. In addition, it substantially provided the permanent and efficient learning, because the students were mostly able to answer the questions and to draw the artworks in the exam. By this permanent information and the ability of visual thinking, this method would be a complementary part of the education in the different fields. (Figure 3)

![Figure 3. The Teaching Method Based on Visual Perception in Education of Art History](image_url)

In conclusion, it can be assert that visual perception is an essential part of the learning process of art history. It is expected that this practical teaching method based on the visual perception, by developing the students’ creativity, would be a complementary part of the design courses of architecture and interior design. This will be discussed and measured in the design courses in the following semesters.

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