

The perspectives of visual arts teachers on postmodernism

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ABSTRACT

Postmodernism has evolved in the field of art, and its presence and definition have been the topic of several studies. The overall perspectives of the visual arts teachers on postmodernism are important for incorporating postmodernism issues into the high school curriculum in Turkey, as they are teaching art history and conveying the practice of visual arts. A review of the literature reveals that there are no comparable studies that take visual arts teachers' perspectives on postmodernism into account. Therefore, this study aims to discover the perspectives of visual arts teachers on postmodernism. This article presents the findings and conclusions of the first research question of the Master's thesis, titled "examination of the reflections of postmodernism on art education". The study used a case study design, one of the qualitative research approaches. The sample of the study consisted of four visual arts teachers working in one of the central and three district schools in Yalova, Turkey. In the current research, two semi-structured interview forms and document analysis were utilized as data collection tools. The qualitative data were analyzed by the thematic analysis method. The themes of "teachers' general perceptions", "teaching process" and "reflection on students" were identified through the thematic analysis. This article includes a detailed analysis of the theme of "teachers' general perceptions". The results of the research identified the artistic and intellectual perspectives of the participating teachers toward postmodernism as outstanding features.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, pivotal moments in social history have been precipitated by advances in fields such as science, industry, technology, and communication. These changes also played an essential part in the evolution of art and art education. The term "postmodernism," which originated in Europe and made its way to the United States in the 1960s, was used to describe an architectural style that went beyond the fundamentals of modernism [1]. Over time, it has grown to include many different parts of society, such as painting, architecture, literature, philosophy, politics, economics, and family life [2].

In order to understand postmodernism, which is a critique of modernism, it might be facilitative to examine its characteristics. The idea of postmodernism is to eradicate the differences between popular and high culture and to break down the barriers between art and ordinary life. When it comes to the format-content debate, it places emphasis on form or style. Instead of the single and unchanging mind, it speaks of various minds. It opposes the thesis that the real work of art belongs only to geniuses and emphasizes the idea that art is created through repetition. It opposes the utilitarian and individualist ethics conceptions of ethics brought about by modernity and defends the 'other' ethics. It emphasizes the

importance of interdisciplinary and gives priority to local-regional spaces. Postmodernism is a philosophical movement that rejects dogmatism and partisanship while defending tolerance and plurality. Postmodernism places a high value on eclecticism [3].

Similar ideas are reflected when postmodernism is evaluated in the context of art. Postmodernism, which opposes elitist art, favors the integration of art and life. Therefore, in addition to artistic production, it also encompasses production based on commerce and technology. It encourages a variety of artistic endeavors by bringing together numerous works of art [4]. Postmodernism, which eliminates the distinction between high art and mass art, places imitation and assemblage at the forefront of artistic output [5]. Harvey [6] argued that postmodernism avoids the concepts of progress, historical continuity, and memory. On the other side, it plunders history and covers anything it can find in the current realm. Methods such as pastiche, irony, collage, and assemblage might be found in postmodern works of art, which are characterized by a pluralistic conception in which several art disciplines are combined [7].

It might be inconvenient to distinguish between modernism and postmodernism based on the chronological separation of art movements. Modernism and postmodernism cannot be divided by the 'iron wall' or the 'Great Wall,' as in Hassan's comparison [8]. Despite the fact that postmodern influences acquired strength after the second half of the 20th century, signs of postmodern art could be identified in the ready-made objects that Picasso and Braque included in their artworks and in the ready-made works that Duchamp exhibited as independent works of art. According to Fehr [9], the characteristics of postmodernism were identified by artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Sherrie Levine, Mary Kelly, and Barbara Kruger. In addition, Duchamp's vision of bringing ordinary life into art and his goal to undermine conceptions such as "the unique work of art" and "creative artist" prompted artists who followed him to question them [10]. Antmen [11] argues that Dada, one of the most significant movements of the 20th century, pioneered many techniques in contemporary art with its multidisciplinary structure that seeks to obliterate the barriers between life and art and the artist-audience relationship. The journey of art and artists continued with the effects of World War II. Over the years, many art movements have been observed, such as pop art, op art, minimalism, conceptual art, land art, performance art, fluxus, new expressionism, and video art.

Many theories and approaches emerged in art education in the 80s with the influence of the postmodern mindset and discourses. "Multiculturalism", "visual culture", and "interdisciplinarity" are approaches that have traces of postmodern thought and are partly reflected in the curriculum [12]. Milbrandt [13] whose study asserts that critique is inherent to postmodernism, has proposed techniques for enhancing the postmodern education curriculum. In his paper on the design elements and ideas taught in art courses, Gude [14] underlined and critiqued the general application of these principles. He asserted that his pupils did not learn to appreciate the aesthetic context of the artist and society through form-based instruction, and he devised a program that he claimed was motivated only by the spirit of modernism.

In 2005-2006, the visual arts curriculum in Turkey was restructured and implemented according to the constructivist philosophy [15]. Adopting the constructivist method, which is consistent with postmodern beliefs, as opposed to the behaviorist approach, which is compatible with contemporary views, has been a significant development in education [16]. Cognitive skills of students, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis, are promoted in learning environments where this idea is accepted [17]. reflections of discipline-based art education may be observed in the visual arts curriculum as a result of its implementation using a constructivist perspective. The curriculum includes three learning areas titled "visual communication and formation," "cultural heritage," and "art criticism and aesthetics". When considered within the scope of discipline-based art education, applied studies in the field of 'visual communication and formation' learning, art history in the field of 'cultural heritage' learning, description, analysis, interpretation and judgment stages of art criticism in the field of 'art criticism and aesthetics' are used [18].

Postmodernism is specifically explored from the perspectives of issues like diversity, visual culture, and interdisciplinary art education, according to an analysis of research conducted in Turkey. Communication between cultures has been enhanced and broadened by globalization and technological advancements. Different cultures may interact or come together depending on the advancements encountered [19]. As a result, the objective of multicultural education, which has recently emerged as an essential concept in the field of education, is for teachers to instill in their pupils respect for people who come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and a belief that differences can also be sources of richness [20].

In his article written in 2014, Mamur [21] examined the reflections of postmodernism on art education within the scope of visual culture and critical pedagogy. As a result of the research, it was revealed that the formalist approach of modernism was still effective, but studies continued to include visual culture teaching with a postmodern character in international art education programs. In 2019, research based on the cooperation of visual arts and archaeology was conducted in order to realize the achievement of the learning outcomes related to recognizing and protecting cultural heritage in the curriculum. According to Bozok and Okur [22], it was revealed that the interdisciplinary application of visual arts and archaeology produced favorable outcomes. It is seen that studies on postmodernism in Turkey started in the 90s. In the 2000s,

studies continued with the examination of the reflections of postmodernism on art and education. When we analyze the recent studies, it is seen that postmodernism is handled specifically in art education.

Postmodernism is included in the 11th and 12th-grade learning outcomes in the visual arts curriculum in Turkey. As previously stated, research in Turkey is conducted in the areas of interdisciplinary art education, visual culture, and diversity within the context of postmodernism. Despite the fact that postmodernism topics are incorporated in the visual arts curriculum in accordance with its learning outcomes, there is no study on the practices and perspectives of teachers regarding postmodernism. Considering the condition of being a teacher as the primary means of attaining postmodernist accomplishments, this research seeks to refer to the perspectives of teachers. As a result, this study aims to investigate the views of visual arts teachers responsible for teaching art history and art studies about postmodernism to attain learning outcomes. In addition, it is considered significant in terms of its contribution to the body of knowledge, as the research topic has not been investigated before.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

In this part of the study, the research design, participants, data collecting instruments, and data analysis are explained. The related literature and structure of the research are given. Additionally, limitations of the study are mentioned.

2.1. Research design

The current study entails the detailed analysis of one of the research questions of the master's thesis titled "examination of the reflections of postmodernism on art education" the research question in inquiry is "what are the overall perceptions of art teachers about postmodernism?". Creswell [23] defined a case study as an approach in which detailed information about real life or one or more situations is gathered through interviews, observations, and audiovisual material. Accordingly, the 'case study' design was used from qualitative research methods in order to examine and analyze in detail the views of visual arts teachers towards postmodernism.

2.2. Sample

The sample for this study was created by adopting the method of purposeful sampling [23] which means that the researcher chose the participants and locations that were included in the sample. Purposeful sampling aims to select rich settings to explain the problems to be addressed, and as a result, there are a variety of ways [24]. Criterion sampling, which is one of the deliberate sampling procedures, was chosen for the application of the first interview form. The criteria determined for the first interview form are as having visual arts classes with 11th and 12th-grade high school students and having at least four years of professional experience as a visual arts teacher.

The homogeneous sampling strategy targeted for the implementation of the second interview form in the research could not be implemented due to reasons such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the suspension of in-person education, and the negative response of many of the teachers who were asked to participate in the research. Therefore, interview form 1 was administered to participants who accepted the proposal to participate in the study, and then interview form 2 was administered using the convenient sampling strategy. Convenient sampling is an approach that "depends on the circumstances" and emphasizes doing what is feasible [24], [25]. The information about the semi-structured interview is displayed in Table 1.

The sample of the study consisted of four visual arts teachers working in the spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. The data collected from one of from one of the central schools and three from the district schools (Ciftlikkoy, Altinova) in the province of Yalova, Turkey. The information about the visual arts teachers who constitute the sample of the research is displayed in Table 2.

Table 1. Information about the semi-structured interview

Interviewee code name		Interview date	Meeting time	Interview duration
Interview form 1	Participant 1	05.06.2021	12:00	10 min.
	Participant 2	01.06.2021	13:00	10 min.
	Participant 3	09.06.2021	14:00	15 min.
	Participant 4	11.06.2021	15:00	12 min.
Interview form 2	Participant 1	05.06.2021	17:00	15 min.
	Participant 2	08.06.2021	14:00	15 min.
	Participant 3	23.06.2021	13:30	31 min.
	Participant 4	25.06.2021	18:00	32 min.

Table 2. Details of the participants of the semi-structured interview

Interviewer codename	Gender	School type	Experience in profession
Participant 1	Female	State school	20 years
Participant 2	Male	State school	6 years
Participant 3	Male	State school	8 years
Participant 4	Female	State school	4 years

2.3. Data collection tools

There are several interview methods that are used as data collection instruments in qualitative research. In this study, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The researcher employs this strategy by asking all subjects identical questions that were previously prepared [26]. Moreover, the researcher can eliminate unnecessary questions or introduce new ones while asking the preset questions [27]. The semi-structured interview questions for the study were prepared based on the purpose of the research and the research questions. The prepared interview questions were finalized by making the necessary changes based on the opinions of two faculty members at Bursa Uludag University Faculty of Education who were experts in fine arts education and qualitative research methods.

In the study, semi-structured interview forms were used as the main data source. At the same time, the document review method was used to diversify the data and increase the validity of the research. In the document review, the visual arts curriculum was taken from the official website of the Ministry of National Education, student works were collected from the participating teachers, and all written-visual resources, including the research topic, were included.

2.4. Data analysis

‘Thematic analysis’ method was used to analyze the research data. In the analysis process, which aims to extract meaning from the data, the data are divided into pieces and brought back together [28]. The pieces in the data set that can partially answer research questions are data units. Data units can be short sentences or long paragraphs expressing the participants’ opinions, definitions and feelings [25].

The entire data analysis process was carried out by taking the opinions of two faculty members who are experts in the field of visual arts education and qualitative research methods at Uludag University, Faculty of Education. In the code-category-theme creation process, the audio recordings obtained from interview forms 1 and 2 were converted into written documents, and page numbers were given. After carefully reading the documents, a code guide containing the code and the description of the code was created. In the first interview with the experts, the codes were examined, and it was checked whether these codes represented the explanations of the participants. Codes that did not answer the research questions were eliminated, and codes that were similar in content were combined. Some codes were renamed in accordance with the descriptions of the participants.

Internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity criteria were considered during the second step of the study, which consisted of the creation of categories [24]. Therefore, the consistency and uniformity of the data inside the categories offer internal homogeneity, and the discrepancies across the categories provide external heterogeneity. In the process of defining the categories, the opinions of experts were solicited once again. Several modifications to the categories were suggested and implemented throughout the interview. For instance, categories with comparable content but distinct names were merged. The order of the codes under the categories was re-examined and arranged by providing a meaningful order. Some categories were renamed to match their content. In the last interview with the experts, the categories combined and showed similarities by adhering to the research questions were gathered under three themes. It was important that the concepts were distinct from one another while yet forming a substantial whole.

In the process of developing code-category-theme from the collected data, controls were implemented, expert opinions were solicited, and any required adjustments were made through interviews with specific academic experts. Creswell [23] described this procedure as crucial for the verifiability of the study, as an external audit. Among the themes developed within the scope of the research, the theme of ‘teachers’ general perceptions,’ in which teachers’ opinions were explored, is investigated in depth in the current study. Table 3 displays the information regarding the interviews with faculty members.

Miles and Huberman designed questions to assure internal and external validity in qualitative research and expected the researcher to provide accurate responses to those questions [29]. Accordingly, in questions about the external validity of the research; a detailed description of research methods and stages; issues such as collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reaching conclusions ought to be specified clearly. In addition, the researcher should include a detailed description of the sample selection and the data collected through methods such as observation and interviews. The issue of internal validity in research is whether the research questions are comprehensible and consistent with the conceptual framework of the study, whether

the research conclusion are compatible whit the data, and whether the research’s methodology is clear and unambiguous. The data should be acquired in line with the purpose of the study and the research questions, and the data analysis should involve a thorough evaluation. Based on this information, the study took into account the methods Miles and Huberman used to discuss the reliability of the research.

Table 3 Details of interviews with faculty members during the data analysis process

	Interview dates
Consultant and field expert	21.10.2021
Consultant and field expert	01.11.2021
Consultant and field expert	08.11.2021

2.5. Limitations of the study

The perspectives and practices of four visual arts teachers working in one central school and three district schools in Yalova province during the academic year 2020-2021 were used as the basis for the findings and conclusions of the current study. The data collection tools of the research were limited to two semi-structured interview forms and an analysis of relevant documents. The data analysis was restricted to the use of thematic analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data gathered using the thematic analysis approach were categorized as ‘teachers’ general perceptions.’ This theme included the categories of ‘definitions’ and ‘personal views.’ ‘Definitions’ was the category in which the participating teachers explained postmodernism’s aesthetic and philosophical elements. ‘Personal views’ refers to their aesthetic concerns in the formal and intellectual sense of postmodernism. The categories and codes within the theme of “teachers’ general perceptions” are shown in Figure 1.

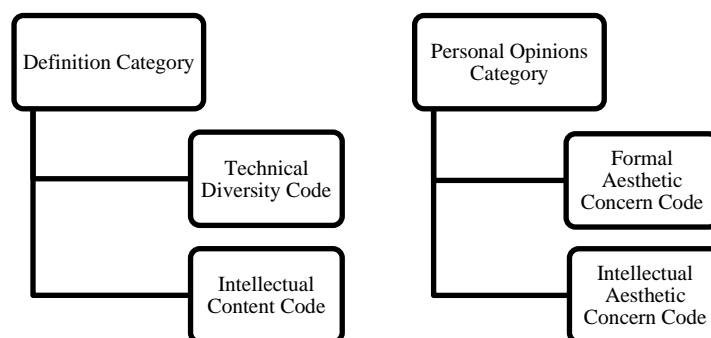


Figure 1. Distribution of categories and codes within the theme of general perceptions of teachers

3.1. Definitions

The definitions category consists of two codes: ‘technical diversity’ and ‘intellectual content’. This category consists of the explanations of visual arts teachers regarding what postmodernism is and its features. In postmodernism, the concept of diversity is seen as the use of different branches of art together or the use of works belonging to different branches of art together [4]. In a sense, postmodernism seeks to overcome the distinction between art forms [3].

When the technical diversity code was examined in detail, one of the issues that the participating teachers focused on about postmodernism was technical diversity. Participant 2 emphasized that the technical diversity provided by postmodernism contributes to the expansion of the expression areas of individuals with the following statement,

“Thanks to the diversity of postmodernism’s effect on art, I can say that it is divided into branches where students or people can express themselves more. Because there is diversity in techniques.” (Interview 2, p.4).

Participant 3, on the other hand, highlighted that postmodernism eliminates some stereotyped boundaries by providing technical diversity in stereotypical artistic productions.

“In the modern era, we could easily categorize art. Here is painting, architecture, and sculpture. But we can’t make a category in the postmodern era because we’re out of it now. I mean, biennials, performances, that’s not just a product. An artist could make art with sound; in other words, he performs his art only with sound.” (Interview 2, p.5)

It can be stated that postmodernism, which emerged in response to the established forms of modernism [30], poses a challenge for definition. When the intellectual content code is examined in detail, one of the issues that the participating teachers mentioned while making their definitions was the intellectual infrastructure of postmodernism. While participant 3 emphasized that postmodernism developed as an opposing idea to modernism, participant 4 expressed his thoughts by referring to the differences between modernism and postmodernism. Accordingly, the expressions of participant 4:

“In terms of modernism and postmodernism, modernism is characterized by a single thought, a single type of person; it is rational and scientific; hence, it focuses on a single truth. On similar matters, there is a homogeneous mindset, a homogenous human structure, and a homogeneous perspective. However, when we consider postmodernism as an ideology, multiple viewpoints are permissible; not everyone must hold identical beliefs. There is no one right. Here are the internal realities of several societies, whether political or cultural.” (Interview 1, p.2)

The differences are sacred for postmodernism. That values new media and literary texts on the same level [31]. It was seen that the participating teachers mentioned a structure that attaches importance to differences and locality in their definitions of postmodernism.

3.2. Personal opinions

In the category of personal opinions, the formal and intellectual assessments of postmodern art by the participating teachers were included. According to the qualitative analysis of data from the semi-structured interviews, the participating teachers described their preferences for postmodernism. They provided aesthetic assessments, such as whether they felt close to it or not. Therefore, the category of personal opinions included the codes of ‘Formal aesthetic concern’ and ‘Intellectual aesthetic concern’.

The views of the participants that constitute the formal aesthetic concern code; participant 3 said,

“You know, Maslow has a hierarchy. Here are the physiological needs, and shelter; after a certain point, you take care of the economic part, and then here comes the aesthetic concern. I think postmodern art cannot fill that aesthetic concern. I speak for people, that is, for painting, people could fill it better in modern art movements.” (Interview 1, p.1)

Similarly, participant 1 expressed himself as, *“Although it means after and beyond modernism, it seems far from aesthetics to me.”* It is understood from the expressions of both participants that they did not find postmodernism aesthetic compared to modernism. Contrary to the other participants, participant 4 continued his words by giving examples from the works of Duchamp and Picasso and talking about turning the objects out of their functions into art objects as:

“...it is a normal object of use, and innovative, different way of thinking takes it out and transforms it into an art object...that is the purpose of art anyway. All kinds of painting or art increase your power regarding how much analysis, synthesis and interpretation you can do...” (Interview 2, p.4)

The intellectual aesthetic concern code consists of the findings of the participants’ intellectual approaches to postmodernism. According to the opinions gathered under this code, for example, participant 2 stated, *“You cannot agree with the whole history of postmodernism, of course. But I can say that there are aspects that I like too.”* Participant 4, additionally expressed similar views to participant 2 in the following words, *“I find myself close to postmodernism.”* Participant 3, unlike the other participants, he did not find himself close to postmodernism in terms of intellectual aesthetics with the following statement:

“I believe that the art movement of postmodernism is artistic burnout. I think, of course, this is my opinion, so I don’t mean to criticize people and evaluate those who perform. For me, for example, modern art movements are more valuable. Why is it valuable? Personally, I don’t believe that it is possible for ordinary people, educated or uneducated, when we think about Van Gogh, for example,

to become so prominent in postmodernism. In this sense, I think it is an idea put forward by people who believe that there is nothing that can be done.” (Interview 1, p.2)

In the data obtained from the themes and categories of teachers' general views, the opinions of the participating teachers about the artistic and intellectual structure of postmodernism were included. When evaluated in general, there were opinions that postmodernism provided unlimitedness in artistic expression forms and in the way of expression of the individual due to its eclectic and pluralistic structure. Because of its heterogeneous nature, they expressed their positive views on postmodernism for bringing different cultures and ideas together. Within the category of personal opinions of the participants, varying positive and negative views were identified.

4. CONCLUSION

In this research, which investigates the overall perspectives of visual arts teachers toward postmodernism, the defining characteristics of postmodernism were examined, followed by its implications in art and art education. On the basis of the available data, it is possible to assert that the pluralistic and eclectic structure of postmodern works of art is present in contemporary works of art, along with technological variation. In addition, the emphasis of postmodernism on locality and diversity might be linked to the development of communication networks and the interaction they facilitate. The significant concerns of postmodernism include the emphasis it places on disparities in several intellectual and cultural issues. It is possible to argue that diversity, visual culture, and postmodern ideas influence interdisciplinarity in art education. As postmodernism and themes within postmodernism are included in their curriculum, the overall perceptions and definitions of art teachers are critical as they have leading roles in transferring the history and practice of art to their students.

According to the results, the participating teachers primarily emphasized the technical diversity offered by postmodernism for art studies and the ability to eliminate the boundaries for the ways of expression by using many fields. In addition, in parallel with the related literature, they underlined postmodernism's opposition to modernism. In contrast to modernism's dedication to a uniform person and ideal, they highlighted postmodernism's appreciation for heterogeneity, pluralism, and emphasis on locality. The current study discussed the views of visual arts teachers on postmodernism. In future research, the scope of the research can be expanded by including the opinions of the students who are exposed to postmodernism-related themes in the visual arts course process. Thus, the perceptions of the students related to making sense of the art of the age, gaining awareness, and enriching their works of art with various expression methods can be revealed. In addition, the results of the study did not reveal the perspectives of visual arts teachers on the strengths, advantages, or weaknesses of postmodernism; instead, only those results consistent with the requirement of teaching postmodern art as a part of art education are discussed. For this reason, future studies can be conducted to discuss the advantages and weaknesses of postmodernism.




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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS






Ismail Tetikçi    graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts at Atatürk University in 2000. After completing his master's degree in painting at the same faculty in 2002, he enrolled in the doctoral program in the Institute of Social Sciences, focusing on the History of Art. After that, Tetikçi started to Sufficent in Art (doctoral) Program in the Basic Art Department of Painting in the institute of Social Sciences, and started to work as a research assistant at the Faculty of Fine Arts at MSGSÜ in 2005. From 2010 to 2015, he worked as an assistant to a Professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Atatürk University. He was appointed as an Associate Professor in 2018. He has presented his paintings in 9 solo exhibitions and has participated in more than 100 group exhibitions. He has received awards from national and international art competitions and has been a jury member in three painting competitions. He can be contacted at email: ismailtetikci@uludag.edu.tr.



Gonca Erim    graduated from the Arts Education Department of the Faculty of Education of Uludag University with an undergraduate degree in Graphic Design. After receiving her Master's degree from the Arts Education/Graphic Design department from the Social Sciences Institute of Uludag University, she went on to receive her Ph.D. and Proficiency in Arts title from the Graphic Design Department of the Fine Arts Faculty in Marmara University School. Dr. Erim started her academic career as a research assistant in the Arts Education Department of Uludag University and became a lecturer of the faculty in 1992. She has been appointed the Head of the Arts Education Department in 2010 and she became the Head of the Fine Arts Education Department in 2014 and served until 2018. She served as an academic consultant for the Turkish Ministry of Education on the curriculum development for visual arts education in high schools and as an editor for the implementation guide for the same curriculum. She can be contacted at email: goncae@uludag.edu.tr.



Kevser Baykan    was born in Bursa, Turkey. Her education was completed Uludag University, Faculty of Education, Department of Fine Arts Education, and in 2022 she finished her Master's Program at the Department of Fine Arts Education in Uludag University. She still continues her studies in regards to painting and working in Uzmanlar college as art teacher in Yalova, Turkey. She can be contacted at email: 801742002@ogr.uludag.edu.tr.