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A PORTFOLIO INVENTORY: AN INVESTIGATION OF VISUAL ARTWORK MADE BY CHILDREN AS BEING TOOL OR ART ORIENTED IN STRUCTURE

(Research article)

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the visual artwork made by children as a result of the visual arts education practices of preschool teachers in institutions in terms of having tool- or art-oriented structures. The working group of the study consists of the visual artwork created by 763 children attending the lessons given by 61 teachers working at 18 independent kindergartens/nursery classes. The study used the general survey model. A “*Personal Information Form*” and “*Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure*” were used to collect data. In the study, the visual artwork made by children aged 48-60 months and over and displayed on the panels was collected using the "photograph recording method," one of the observation recording methods. To collect the data, a total of 18 schools were visited twice a week for five weeks with three to four days between both observations, and the visual artwork made by each class was observed. The two-step cluster method, which is formed by combining descriptive statistics with “k Means” (a non-hierarchical clustering technique from multiple statistics), and “Ward’s Minimum Variance” (a hierarchical technique), was used to analyze the data. As a result of the study, the first and second observations determined that there were two clusters, namely, tool-oriented structure and art-oriented structure and that the children’s mean scores in both clusters were low.

Keywords: Preschool education, arts education, preschool program, visual arts activities, documentation.

1. Introduction

Visual arts education, which is planned according to children’s interests, desires, needs, and development levels in early childhood, aims to help children make sense of the world through art by supporting their artistic potential and the development of their skills (Christensen & Kirkland, 2009). Developing and supporting children’s artistic abilities is an important goal of early childhood education programs (Hamilton, Jin & Krieg, 2019; Samuelsson, Sheridan & Williams, 2006). Visual arts education programs in early childhood focus on stimulating children’s ideas, reflection, expressing original thoughts, brain development, and developing their visual-spatial intelligence. The visual artwork created by children in visual arts education differs as their skills develop. Visual artwork varies depending on each child’s perception, what

sense they make of the object, and their capacity to re-symbolize. Individual differences should be taken into consideration in the creation of visual artwork by children. For this reason, activities carried out using different materials and techniques in the production of visual artwork will support the children's individual differences. The visual-spatial intelligence, imagination, aesthetic perception, and unique artistic-influencing abilities of children who develop skills in visual arts will also develop (Kim, Park & Lee, 2001, p.41; Mayesky, 1998; Novaković, 2015, p.153; Soh, 2017, p. 58). From this point of view, it is critically important that children's early artistic activities are carried out taking their individual differences into consideration.

Educators also have critical duties to fulfill when artistic activities are carried out in early childhood. Educators should plan art activities in which children have the opportunity to discuss their art activities individually or in groups by finding out what they think about the topic. Art activities should plan educational settings that will offer children the opportunity to explore their ideas through artwork (Gardner, 2011, p.205; Novaković, 2015, p.153; Sakr, Connelly & Wild, 2015, p. 278). Children express themselves through art in educational settings in which they can discuss their artistic ideas, and while doing this, they develop their cognitive abilities and motor skills by using symbols. This situation lets children discover, explain, and design their own inner world and the world that surrounds them.

In the Ministry of National Education 2013 Preschool Education Program (MEB, 2013), which is in practice in Turkey, an art center is listed among those learning centers recommended to be found in preschool education institutions. The education program defines the art center as follows:

"It is a center that aims to give children the opportunity to demonstrate new ideas and original works based on their past experience and what they have learned, a place where they can make discoveries and have different experiences by interacting with different materials. Children's aesthetic perceptions and manipulative skills develop during these activities." (MEB, 2013, p.40).

In the definition, it is stressed that children design original products. It is expected that the planning, implementation, and evaluation of activities for visual arts activities will be systematic and planned so that children can produce original works. Indeed, the artwork that children produce as a result of visual arts activities is an important indicator of the degree of qualified planning that went into the arts activities, their implementation, and how they were used. When the results of studies on visual arts education in Turkey (Avcı & Sağsöz, 2018; Çetingöz, 2012; Temiz, 2017; Yılmaz, 2009; Yılmaz & Özler, 2011) were examined, it was found that studies in which children would produce original work in arts activities were not supported. It was determined that children try to make products similar to those displayed by the teachers in visual arts activities by copying, making templates, or imitating. This is an indication that art activities are done more for instrumental structure than artistic structure. This being the case, the aim was to examine the portfolios created for the visual artwork that children make in early childhood in terms of artistic structure. To do this, first, an evaluation form was developed to evaluate artistic structure, and the visual artwork in the children's portfolios was examined using the developed evaluation form.

It is not easy for teachers to evaluate children's visual artwork in terms of artistic structure because teachers first need to move away from tool-oriented art activities and do art-oriented activities. In this context, teachers are expected to evaluate themselves and the education program when evaluating artwork (MEB, 2013). However, chief among the problems encountered by teachers is the inadequacy of the evaluation tools that will guide them on how to evaluate visual artwork and plan new arts activities. In this study, an attempt is made to determine the evaluation paradigm for visual artwork, which is an indicator of how they conduct

arts activities. To reveal this paradigm, it is necessary to explain the structure of visual artwork for the tool- or art-oriented evaluation of artwork. In this context, to evaluate the artistic work, the structure and elements of the artistic work are explained under the literature review heading.

1.1. Literature Review

Artistic production is a process of transformation, reinterpretation, and expression. In the artistic production process, artistic expression creates its language of form. "Expression" is the activity of the individual in the making process; "to express" is what an individual does. To put it another way, expression is to convey emotions in expressive ways. Perceptions or external reality take shape in imagination and become abstract, taking on form in art-making (Demir, 2006). The structure of a visual arts work contains *Visual elements* (point, line, color, space, texture), *Design of visual elements* (harmony, unification, balance, composition, ratio), and *Esthetic* (empathic relations, expression, self-to-object, object-to-object relationship, consistent Gestalt form structure - proximity, similarity, continuity) elements (Arnheim, 2004; Feldman, 1992, p. 207; Matthew, 1999, p. 26; Vecchi, 2010, p.5; Visual Arts Guidelines, 1999). Rationality is incomplete without emotion and empathy; imagination is incomplete without cognition and rationality. Therefore, the reality in the work of art exists not in the object, but in the mind of the individual. Rather than explaining reality directly, artistic images reveal imaginary reality based on individual perception as well as reality (Demir, 2006; Feldman, 1992, p.256; Hosper, 1955, p. 313). In this context, the visual elements of the artistic work's structure, the design of the visual elements, and empathy were explained in detail.

1.1.1. Visual Elements

Visual design elements are the components in any visual design that can be broken down and defined. Just as words can be broken down into letters, visual artwork can be divided into elements: point, line, color, shape, and texture. Moreover, we can learn to focus on these visual elements. The visual elements that form the building blocks of the work have a wide variety of expressive powers. In other words, they are elements used to create a design or artistic work. Visual design elements are like eggs, milk, and flour ingredients used in baking a cake or the materials used to build a house, such as nails, wood, and bricks. Without these elements, no design or artistic work can be created. Visual design elements consist of *point, line, texture, shape, form, space (void), and color* (Feldman, 1992, p.207; Gezer, 2019, p.601-602; Parashar, 2021). The point is the smallest visual unit that can form the line and then the surface. Even though the line itself is very simple, they are important since lines can result in very different forms when they come together. It can act as a symbolic language or convey emotions through its character and direction. The line is a versatile tool, its use in combination with other lines and elements leads to the development of other elements of design, form, and value. The line under the art direction has symbolic significance and reflects the expression and flow of the form. Therefore, a line can be said to be a symbolic sign that expresses movement and force as measured by our eyes. (Parashar, 2021). In its simplest definition, texture in visual art and design is the tactile effect that occurs in the eye. Textures that can be felt by touching become textures that can be felt without touching when they are brought into the visual world. Everything that our eyes see has a texture, some are very distinct and some are much less noticeable. The condition resulting from the impression on the eye of a light perceived after the interaction of rays from a light source with objects having no light source of their own is called color, and different light sources possess different colors due to their makeup. There are three primary light colors in color theory. The color element contains the concepts of tone and hue. Tone is the new colors that result from the mixing of colors with each other. Tone is the transition between colors. By its shortest definition, hue is the degree of lightness and darkness

of a color tone. It is the degree of saturation of the color. As the pigments of the color increase, so the color intensifies and becomes more saturated. Shape is the two-dimensional state of objects. Wherever there is a shape, there is always a backdrop. In other words, a backdrop is needed for the shape to emerge. The properties of the backdrop also help with the perception of the shape. The relationship between shape and backdrop greatly affects the first look. The concept of form (form) is of great importance in the world of art and design. The desire to form is what lies at the heart of art and design. Shape is two-dimensional and form is three-dimensional. Form covers all objects that have volume and shape. Space is the space or gap between objects such as surfaces, objects, bodies, or figures (Bharadwaj, 2021; Feldman, 1992, p.207; Jain, 2021; Gezer, 2019, p.602; Visual Arts Guidelines, 1999).

A basic understanding of visual elements is essential for purposeful applications in visual arts. Line, shape, form, color and tone, pattern and rhythm, and texture, and spatial organization are the foundations of two-dimensional and three-dimensional composition. Children learn to use visual elements in a meaningful way and for design purposes, with opportunities to take a closer look at the visual environment and to draw and paint themes that have personal significance for them. Simple printing and creative work on fabric and fiber help drive this improvement. Children gain a sense of form very quickly by working with clay and similar kneading materials. How people, objects, or abstract elements relate to each other in space is a major source of concern in the art of children as well as artists. The teacher should be aware of the visual elements in the work of children, the work of the artists, and in the observed environment and should informally draw attention to them. Knowing the visual elements and their interactions is essential for quality design in both two- and three-dimensional work, including craft. An evolving visual vocabulary and an increasing ability to think visually and spatially help children focus as they strive for visual expression (National Core Arts Standards, 2014; Visual Arts Guidelines, 1999).

1.1.2. Design of Visual Elements

The elements of an artistic work are arranged to be seen, regardless of its purpose. Artistic works have a common purpose beyond their personal, social, or physical goals. This goal can be called organization for visual effectiveness or design. Design is a process common to the creation of all artistic works. Even works that do not have functional features such as paintings, sculptures, or decorative objects are seen through their visual orientation. Design, regardless of its purpose, is the main way of controlling what the artist sees (Feldman, 1992, p. 235).

Gestalt psychology influenced the arts and admitted that the perception of the whole occurs before the perception of the parts, recognizing that human perceptions are formed as a result of the accumulation and assembly of sensory particles. Accordingly, the whole is perceived before the parts, the whole is easier to perceive than the parts that comprise the whole, the whole tends to be complete, simple, symmetrical, and good. At the heart of Gestalt theory, which explains visual perception, is the principle “*the whole is more meaningful than the sum of its constituent parts.*” Regardless of its subject, a design needs balance in terms of the design of its visual elements so that it is not uncomfortable to look at. Balance is the orderly distribution of the elements that make up the design; in a sense, it is the condition of visual contrasts being in balance with each other (Özsoy et al., 2016; Yağmur, 2014). The main goal of a design is to achieve visual unity. This means that the elements that make up the design agree. The most basic way to ensure integrity in a work is for it to be known that each item used is related to another (Gezer, 2019, p. 602).

Learning in the arts is activity-based and developmental. It is based on children's previous experiences. Children develop an awareness of visual elements and how they interact by making art, looking at their artwork, and interacting with it. When making art, the process of making is just as valuable as the final product. The emphasis focuses on discovering and experimenting with the expressive possibilities of different materials, tools, and media and the choices they offer for different tasks. Talking about their work and because they work when appropriate is at the center of this process. The atmosphere during the art class should always be challenging, motivating, and supportive and allow children to express a personal understanding of their world. Teachers should be constantly alert to their needs (National Core Arts Standards, 2014; Visual Arts Guidelines, 1999).

1.1.3. Esthetics

It is stated that the esthetic experience of visual arts takes place in two stages. After exposure to a work of visual art for the first time, the viewer automatically creates an overall impression or essence of the work. This first impression includes the content regarding the work of visual art, its general structural organization and style, its significance, and an affective reaction to it. In this context, the mental operations that need to be done just to look at a picture involve regulating the senses, focusing attention, resolving emotions, recognizing forms, creating images, and comparing what we are seeing with what we have seen before. When it is accepted that the basic information in a work of visual art is of sufficient interest to an observer, the second stage of esthetic processing emerges. This consists of guided focus exploration of the image to satisfy cognitive curiosity and expand knowledge about the compositional characteristics and organization of the work to enhance the esthetic evaluation of a composition. During this discovery, the individual evaluates the work in relationships such as forming self-to-object or object-to-object relations, and consistent Gestalt form structure - proximity, similarity, continuity (Feldman, 1992, p. 252; Locher, 2015). Esthetic work that arouses pleasure and appreciation in those who look at it for the sole purpose of taking pleasure by isolating it from the interest relationship is troublesome in this respect; it includes full capacity and tries to reach "beautiful" in physical suitability and mental alertness. In this regard, esthetics in art is not a passive activity. It is a kind of physical, mental, and emotional work (Demirel, 2018; Feldman, 1992, p. 252).

1.2. The Present Study

The main reason children make art is because art is fun (Kim, Park & Lee, 2001, p. 41). Preschool children, in particular, are at one with visual art elements such as scribbling, drawing, and using colors (Zupančič, 2017, p.35). However, in the early years, it is critical not only to support the development of artistic skills but also to stimulate artistic perspective (Zou & Jin, 2018, p.1). The biggest factor in enhancing children's creativity and artistic talents is preschool teachers who provide motivational encouragement. It is inevitable that teachers who give opportunities for children's freedom, who encourage and appreciate their interests and opportunities in art activities, support the esthetic and creative potential of children. Visual art activities held in the preschool period should be planned by teachers, taking into account the developmental stages of children and the artistic talents and skills they have acquired. Activities in various art fields should be organized in such a way as to generate internal motivation in children. These activities should be presented in a way that is not based on direct teacher guidance; the material list and the activity should not be based on strict rules and teacher configuration (Zupančič, 2017, p.37; Zou & Jin, 2018, p.1). In supporting children's artistic development and creativity, preschool teachers should be of a disposition that gives them enough time to explore, respects their thoughts and ideas, offers a variety of open-ended materials and techniques, uses a language that will enable them to produce new products, and

provides guidance instead of intervening with the children (Zou & Jin, 2018, p. 2). Chapman (1978) argues that guiding the artistic process for preschool children can contribute to improving the quality of this process. This can happen if the educator guides children to understand the relationship between the meanings they want to express and the visual images to convey them.

Art making is a process that results in a product. This process ends with the product being put on display. Adults often appreciate children's ability to make art in their early years. This appreciation is widely demonstrated, especially in early childhood classes, when children's artwork is displayed in prominent parts of the classroom. The practice of exhibiting children's artwork in pre-school education institutions is considered part of the early childhood experience for children (Boone, 2007, p.1). Seefeldt (2002) emphasizes the importance of carefully displaying children's artwork. By displaying children's work, teachers validate the children's thoughts and dreams, beautify their worlds, communicate with others, document what children learn, and expand children's learning (Seefeldt, 2002, p.11).

However, when the related literature is examined, few studies examine this aspect of the school experience (Boone, 2007; Eckhoff, 2019; Twigg, 2011; Wein, Guyevskey and Berdoussis, 2011). Although the importance of this practice in early childhood classes is emphasized, it has been observed that the existing research in the field of early childhood arts education focuses on general applications (Epstein, 2001; Bae, 2004; Bautista et al., 2018; Wright, 1991). The idea has been emphasized in recent years that it is important for children's cognitive and socio-emotional development that they express themselves through art (Richards, 2018); however, early art pedagogy, which places emphasis on children's individual expressions and natural creativity, consolidates education myths that prevent teachers from talking about child art, from guiding it or assessing it. This results in early childhood teachers being unwilling or unable to interact with children while making, resulting in the artwork created being uniform, far from the children's individual expressions and creativity. In a similar study examining what types of visual arts practices have emerged in Finnish early childhood education, Rusanena, Pusab, and Mäenpää (2018) reported two approaches to visual arts education, naming them the "instrumentally focused approach" and "art-focused approach". It was concluded that motor skills such as cutting, gluing, and painting are prioritized in instrumentally focused approach and that the teacher needs less support in terms of artistic content, which makes the teacher more comfortable in practicing the activity. In the art-focused approach, it was determined that settings emerge within the context of specific themes and processes at specific stages of the process that are based on children's freedom to choose direction, that are open to their initiatives, inspiring and encouraging them to experiment, and that this planning is based entirely on the teacher being receptive to the child's initiative.

From this point of view, artistic structure assessment tools that can be used as a portfolio tool can have an important value in teacher education to reveal more understanding of how children should "consider and interpret" visual artwork by focusing on the visual elements, the design of visual elements, and the esthetic elements. However, evaluating the existing materials and activities offered by teachers in visual arts activities will provide the opportunity for evaluating the resulting work to see if it is *tool-oriented based on motor skills* or *art-oriented based on artistic impression* and for self-assessment in terms of offering and more variety and structure for art education. In this context, the study is important for developing a portfolio inventory for evaluating the visual artwork displayed by children in preschool education institutions in terms of its artistic structure, with a view to describing the quality of the art activities provided to children and the extent to which their needs are met. Based on this, a "*Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure*" was developed to evaluate the visual artwork in the children's

portfolios. The validity and reliability findings of the data collection tool developed in the study are included under the title Validity and Reliability of the Data Collection Tool in the Method section. This study sought to answer the following three research questions when examining the visual artwork in children's portfolios using the "*Form for Evaluating Visual Artwork in Terms of Artistic Structure.*"

- 1) What is the working medium of the visual artwork displayed by children in preschool institutions? (paint, paper, kneading, collage)
- 2) What is the format of the visual artwork displayed by children in preschool institutions?
- 3) In which cluster is the visual artwork displayed by children in preschool institutions in terms of their artistic structure (tool-oriented cluster or art-oriented cluster)?

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

This study, which was conducted to examine the artistic structure of visual artwork made with children within the scope of visual arts activities carried out by preschool teachers, was carried out in line with the survey model, a quantitative research method. The survey model aims to describe a past or current situation as it is, and tries to define the event, individual, or objects subject to the study under their own conditions. In survey studies, just as objects or individuals can be examined directly, they can also be interpreted systematically using various previously-kept records (written documents, pictures, audio or video recordings, etc.) (Karasar, 2012, p. 77).

The visual artwork made by children aged 48-60 months and over, displayed on the panels in the study, was collected using the "photograph recording method," one of the methods of recording observation. In the kindergartens/nursery classes where the observations were made, the visual artwork made by the children and displayed on panels and in exhibition areas were included in the study without discrimination so as to reflect the overall class.

2.2. Working Group

The study's working group consists of the visual artwork made by children aged 48-60 months and over attending the classes of the teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. In this context, the working group consisted of a total of 18 schools, including the nursery classes of 11 primary/secondary schools affiliated with the Çankaya and Yenimahalle districts in Ankara Province and seven independent kindergartens, the 61 teachers in these schools, and 763 children aged 48-60 months and over attending their classes. Of the children in the working group, 50.1% (n = 382) were girls and 49.9% (n = 381) were boys.

While 57.4% of the teachers were 38 years or older (n = 35), 27.9% of them were aged between 32 and 37 (n = 17); 50.8% of them had seniority of 16 years or more (n = 31); 60.7% (n = 37) of them worked in the state-run kindergarten under the Ministry of National Education, and 39.3% (n = 24) of them worked in an independent kindergarten affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. Furthermore, 73.8% (n = 45) of the teachers had not taken any courses that would increase visual arts knowledge at the undergraduate level, and 90.2% (n = 55) had not received any in-service training relating to visual arts, while 67.2% (n = 41) stated that they had taken part in visual arts activities from time to time.

2.3. Data Collection Tool

In the study, a "*Personal Information Form*" was used to collect the children's and teachers' personal data, and the "*Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children*

in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure” developed by the researchers was used to evaluate the children’s visual artwork.

Personal Information Form: The form was prepared by the researchers to obtain the children’s and teachers’ personal information. The personal information form prepared for children collected the gender and age of the children while the personal information form prepared for the teacher was aimed to determine the teacher’s age, seniority, completed an undergraduate program, the type of institution he worked in, and any training received in visual arts education.

Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure” prepared by the researchers had two sections. The first section was designed to determine the field of art activity (paints, kneading, collage, paper, etc.) the children worked in preschool institutions, the method and technique used (paint and dripping technique, etc.); in light of this information, the second part was designed to evaluate the resulting artwork in terms of the sub-dimensions of *visual elements, visual element design, and esthetics* taking into consideration the dimensions that make up artistic structure.

2.3.1. Validity of the Data Collection Tool

The structure and scope validity stages in the preparation of the “*Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children Displayed in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure*” were carried out as follows:

In the first stage; A literature review was made by examining the relevant literature. As a result of this review, the artistic form of a piece of visual artwork and the sub-dimensions that make up this form were determined and the methods that should be used in art studies, the techniques, and features for supporting children’s artistic perspective were identified.

In the second stage, in revealing the artistic perspective according to the relevant literature, the artistic structure and sub-dimensions were defined. In this context, the theoretical sub-dimensions in the structuring of a piece of visual artwork are given in Table 1 in light of the relevant literature, considering the art elements that include objective accuracy, perception, observable object form representation, reinterpretation, formative order, emotion, and fantasy.

Table 1. *Form for evaluating visual artwork in Terms of Artistic Structure, dimensions, and indicators*

Dimensions	Indicators	Source
Visual Elements	Line, color, light, shadow, texture	Arnheim, 2004;
Design of Visual Elements	Harmony, unification, balance, composition, proportion	ECAE, 2016; Bharadwaj, 2021;
Esthetics	Empathic relationships, expression, self-to-object, object-to-object relationship, consistent Gestalt form structure - proximity, similarity, continuity-	Feldman, 1992, p.207; Jain, 2021; Matthew, 1999, p.26; National Core Arts Standards, 2014; Parashar, 2021; Vecchi, 2010; Visual Arts Guidelines, 1999

According to Table 1, the form for evaluating visual artwork in Terms of Artistic Structure consists of three sub-dimensions, namely, visual elements, design of visual elements, and esthetics. The form of evaluating visual artwork in Terms of Artistic Structure aims to determine whether the products are art- or tool-oriented. To do this, the evaluation form was

designed in two parts. The first part includes items for the methods and techniques used in art studies; the second part includes items for evaluating all sub-dimensions of pieces of visual art taking into consideration the *visual elements, visual element design, and esthetics* sub-dimensions.

The third stage: In this stage, the items in the evaluation form were explained. The first part consists of eight items based on the visual arts field of study and the methods and techniques used in the study. The second part was structured to consist of 14 items in total four in the visual elements sub-dimension (E.g. M3: *Different tones of one color were used*), six in the visual element design sub-dimension (E.g. M7: *In the study, the forms were arranged in an original way by the child*), and four in the esthetics sub-dimension (E.g. M12: *The relationship between the elements of artistic structure is in a consistent form*) configured from the item pool taking into consideration the sub-dimensions of the artistic structure. The items for evaluating the artistic structure were organized according to each sub-dimension and configured as an evaluation form based on a binary evaluation of yes-no, including whether the specified criteria were met or not.

The fourth stage: To ensure content validity regarding the two-part evaluation form, the opinions of five experts, including four preschool education experts and one visual arts education expert, were taken concerning the suitability of the form items for purpose, clarity, and comprehensibility. The experts were asked to criticize the items in the evaluation form in terms of their suitability to the purpose of the study, their clarity, and comprehensibility and to state their opinions about changing, correcting, or removing the items when they deemed it necessary. In addition, within the scope of the validity study, they were asked to assess the suitability of the items on the form using a three-point Likert scale with the values “*Suitable,* ” “*Not Suitable,* ” and “*May be Replaced.* ”

When evaluating the expert opinions in line with the expert opinion forms, content validity ratio (CVR) was calculated for each item. Then, the content validity index (CVI) was determined by taking the mean of the calculated CVRs. This index is used for each item to determine whether the experts consider that item necessary or not (Yurdugül, 2005). This value was calculated for the items’ degree of suitability. Since there were five experts, it was concluded that the content validity of items with a CVR value greater than 0.99 was ensured (Yurdugül, 2005).

CVR values for the scale items were calculated using the results of the experts’ opinions. The decision was made to keep all items in the form since the CVR values and CVI of all items were “1.” “*Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children Displayed in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure*” was given its final shape. After the validity studies, the reliability studies began.

2.3.2. Reliability of Data Collection Tool

Reliability studies for the preparation of the Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure were carried out in three stages. While the first two stages were about the data collection stage and planner objectivity, the third staged examined the correlation value between the data collected in the first two stages.

The first stage: In the first stage of the reliability studies for the data collection tool, each piece of visual artwork collected from the 763 children was numbered individually by two

independent observers and scored according to the observation form. “Kappa coefficients” were calculated to examine the rate of agreement among the observers of the visual artwork scored following the first data collection. The agreement between the observers following the first data collection was found to have a kappa value of 0.90.

Second stage: This is the stage in which data were collected for the same children four to five days later according to the enumeration of the visual artwork collected from the children’s portfolios in the first stage. The children’s visual artwork was scored again by two independent observers according to the data collected from the children’s portfolios. The “kappa coefficients” were examined to calculate agreement among the observers and the kappa value was found to be 0.95 following the second application.

In this regard, it can be said that the observer scoring of the data collected in both the first and second stages is objective. After this, the study moved on to the third stage.

Third stage: The correlation value between the scores of the data collected in the first and second stages was calculated and the reliability value was calculated according to the test-retest score of the data collection tool. Test-retest reliability coefficient was calculated by scoring two different applications of the same observation form for the same children. The period between both applications was approximately four days. Since the scoring difference between the independent observers is very low, the reliability values of the study were calculated using the data of the randomly selected first observer.

Table 2. *Correlation, descriptive, and normality statistical values of the first and second observations.*

Dimensions	Pearson’s r correlation coefficients			Descriptive stats		Normality stats	
	Observation	1st	2nd	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Visual Elements	1st	1		1.70	.92	.169	-.650
	2nd	.705**	1	1.47	.90	.592	-.450
Design of Visual Elements	1st	1		1.56	1.21	-.125	.745
	2nd	.651**	1	1.69	1.41	.340	.430
Esthetics	1st	1		1.40	.97	-.136	.450
	2nd	.678**	1	1.10	.71	.165	.251
Total	1st	1		4.69	2.90	-.110	.135
	2nd	.704**	1	4.23	2.90	.230	.225

N = 763 **p<.05

When Table 2 is examined, the fact that the values of skewness and kurtosis are between ± 1 indicates that the distribution is normal. However, the average score for the first application was 4.69, while the average score for the second application was 4.23. “*Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure*” The correlation between the scores obtained from the first and second observations ($r = .704$) is high and positive. In other words, it can be stated that the children who scored high in the first application also scored high in the second application, and the children who scored low in the first application also scored low in the second application and the score increase progressed in a directly proportional manner. In this context, it can be argued that the sum and dimensions of the data collection tool are valid and reliable.

2.4. Data Collection

To obtain the data to answer the research questions, the necessary official permissions were obtained for the schools in the districts specified in the study group. The schools were

visited to photograph the visual artwork made by 763 children aged 48-60 months and over attending the lessons of 61 teachers from 18 official primary/secondary school nursery classes affiliated with the Ankara Provincial National Education Directorate and official independent kindergartens, displayed on panels and in exhibition areas then placed in the children's portfolios. To collect the data, a total of 18 schools were visited twice a week for five weeks with three to four days between both observations, and the artwork made by each class in a total of 10 different visual art activities was observed. When the teachers who participated in the study voluntarily went to their classes, the teachers were first interviewed and the personal information form for the teacher was completed. The children's personal information forms were completed using the information obtained from the children's files. When the research data were being collected, the panel for the visual artwork on display was photographed and the evaluation forms prepared by the researchers were completed for the photographs taken. To make the second observation, photographs of the visual artwork made by the same class were taken a second time three to four days after the first observation. However, if the desired data could not be obtained or if visual art activities were not held on the day of the observation, some classes were observed a third time.

2.5. Data Analysis

The analysis of the data in the study is explained in two parts. The first part is the analysis of the data made in the validity and reliability work. The second part is the analysis of the data that constitutes the findings to answer the research questions.

In the validity and reliability study of the data collection tool, the content validity rate (CVR) of each item was calculated as part of content validity. Content validity index (CVI) was determined by taking the mean of the CVRs as part of content validity. The observations in the study were made by two different field experts to make the results of the independent observers objective. "Kappa coefficients" were calculated to examine the agreement between the observers. Pearson's r correlation coefficient value was calculated between the different applications following the reliability studies.

The SPSS package program was used to analyze the data collected from the "*Personal Information Form*" and the "*Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure.*" In the analysis of the data obtained through the "Personal Information Form," the data were interpreted using frequency and percentage statistics. Descriptive statistics and multiple statistics were used in the analysis of the data obtained from the "*Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure.*" These statistics include "Cluster analysis," which is the process of finding similarities between data according to features in the data and grouping similar data objects to form discrete and homogeneous groups. It is grouping similar objects in one set and dissimilar objects in another set. The Two-Step Cluster method is a hybrid clustering technique made by combining the "*k Means*" non-hierarchical clustering technique and the "*Ward's Minimum Variance*" hierarchical technique (Chiu, Fang, Chen, Wang, & Jerris, 2001; SPSS Technical Report, 2004).

3. Findings

In this section, the findings of the research questions are explained in order. Each finding for the research questions is interpreted from the perspective of making sense in the discussion.

What is the working medium of the visual artwork displayed by children in preschool institutions? The findings of the research question (paint, paper, kneading, collage) are given in Table 3.

Table 3. *Distribution of the 1st and 2nd Observations Concerning the Working Context of the Children's Artwork on Display*

The working context of the artwork		Paint		Paper		Kneading		Collage	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1st Observation	No	312	40.9	212	27.8	750	98.3	454	59.5
	Yes	451	59.1%	551	72.2	13	1.7	309	40.5
	Total	763	100.0	763	100.0	763	100.0	763	100.0
2nd Observation	No	317	41.5	268	35.1	720	94.4	629	82.4
	Yes	446	58.5	495	64.9	43	5.6	134	17.6
	Total	763	100.0	763	100.0	763	100.0	763	100.0

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that children worked with paper at the highest rate in both the first (n = 551, 72.2%) and second observations (n = 495, 64.9%). In the first application, it was determined that 98% (n = 750) of the artwork did not include kneading work and that 59.5% (n = 454) did not include collages. Similarly, in the second application, it was seen that 94.4% (n = 720) did not include kneading work and that 82.4% (n = 629) did not include collages.

What form does the visual artwork displayed by children in preschool institutions take? The findings of the research question are given in Table 4.

Table 4. *Distribution of the 1st and 2nd Observations Concerning the Form Type of the Children's Artwork on Display*

1st Observation			2nd Observation		
Form Type	f	%	Form Type	f	%
Two-dimensional work	684	69.645	Two-dimensional work	717	93.971
Three-dimensional work	79	10.353	Three-dimensional work	46	6.029
Total	763	100.0	Total	763	100.0

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that 69.6% (n = 684) of the artwork was two-dimensional and 10.3% (n = 79) of the artwork was three-dimensional. When the 2nd observation is examined, it can be seen that 93.9% (n = 717) of the artwork was two-dimensional and only 6.02% (n = 46) of the artwork was three-dimensional.

In which cluster is the visual artwork displayed by children in preschool institutions found in terms of their artistic structure (tool-oriented cluster or art-oriented cluster)? The findings of the research question are given in Graphic 1.

According to Graph 1, when the results of cluster analysis are examined, it can be seen that 287 children make up the tool-oriented structure cluster in the first observation and the mean score of these children is 1.90. It can be seen that 476 children make up the art-oriented structure cluster and the mean score of these children is 6.37. When the findings regarding the quality of the clusters are examined, it can be seen how homogeneous the individuals inside the clusters

are with each other and how heterogeneous they are with the other cluster. Clusters at a good level are separated from each other. The importance level of Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 is 1. The ratio of cluster sizes is 1.66. According to the group category in the tool-oriented structure cluster, the group that provides the best example is the group belonging to teacher T27 with 4.4%. According to the group category in the art-oriented structure cluster, the group that provides the best example is the group belonging to teacher T43 with 7.0%. When the importance level of the groups showing the most frequent frequency in the clusters is examined, it is seen to be .73.

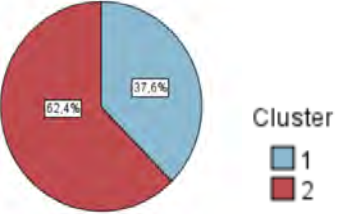
When the cluster analysis results of the second observation are examined, it can be seen that 506 children make up the tool-oriented structure cluster and the average score of these children is 2.52 points. It can be seen that 476 children make up the art-oriented structure cluster and the mean score of these children is 6.37. In the second application, the separation quality of the clusters is at a good level. The importance level of Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 is 1. The ratio of cluster sizes is 1.97. According to the group category in the tool-oriented structure cluster, the group that provides the best example is the group belonging to teacher T27 with 7.0%. According to the group category in the art-oriented structure cluster, the group that provides the best example is the group belonging to teacher T26 with 4.2%. When the importance level of the groups showing the most frequent frequency in the clusters is examined, it is seen to be .62.

When the percentage of agreement between clusters between the first and second observations is examined, it can be seen that 440 children are in the same cluster in both the first and second observations, and 323 children are in a different cluster in the first and second observations. Based on this finding, it was determined that the percentage of agreement of children in the clusters in the first and second observations is 57.667%. In other words, it can be said that the children who were in the tool-oriented structure cluster in the first observation were also in the tool-oriented structure cluster in the second observation and that the children who were in the art-oriented structure cluster in the first observation were also in the art-oriented structure cluster in the second observation.

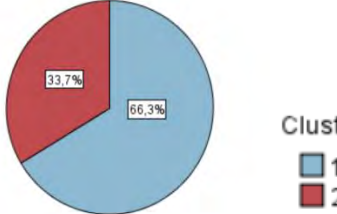
In the first observation, the mean score of the children in the art-oriented structure cluster was 6.37, while in the second observation the mean score of the children in the art-oriented cluster was 7.61. However, in both observations, it was determined that they scored half the observation form's maximum possible score of 14.

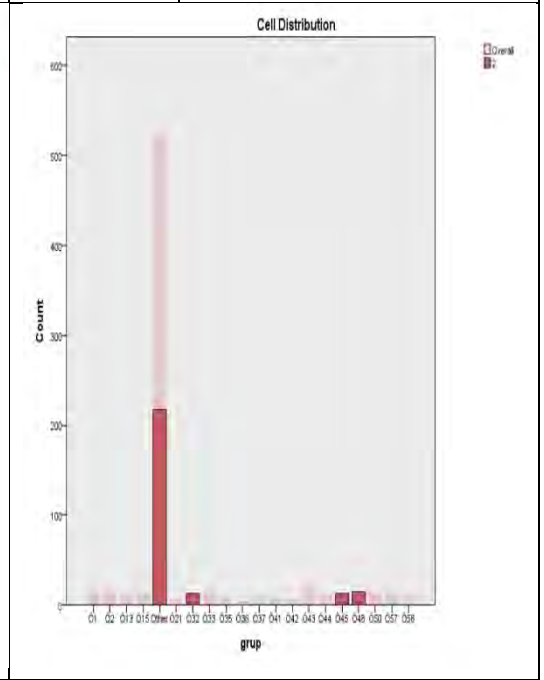
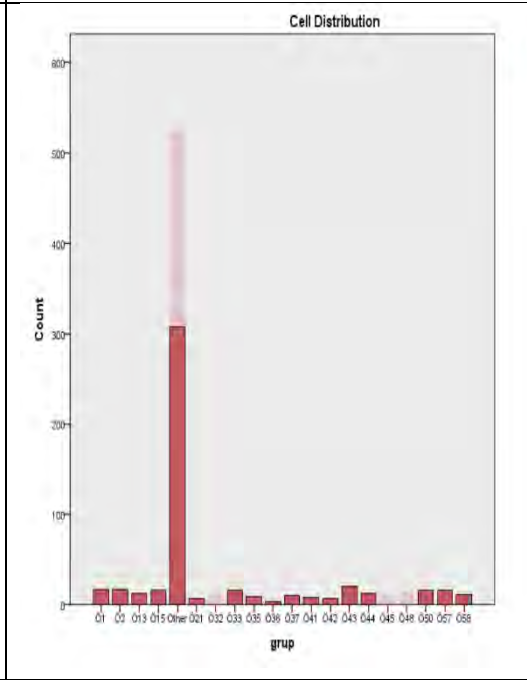
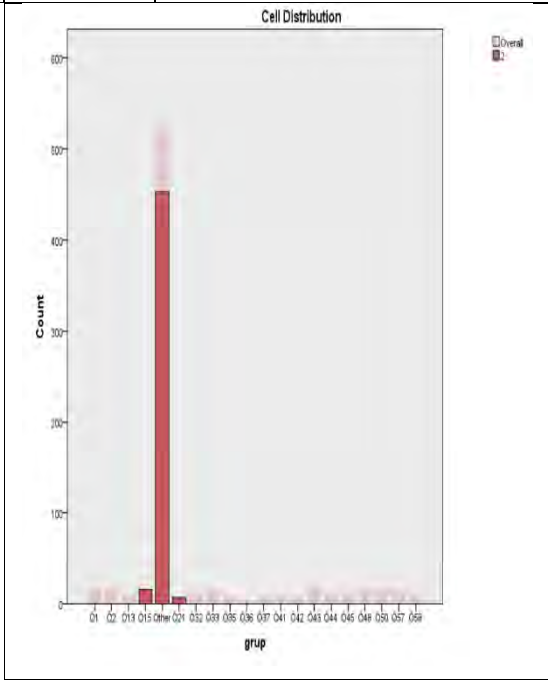
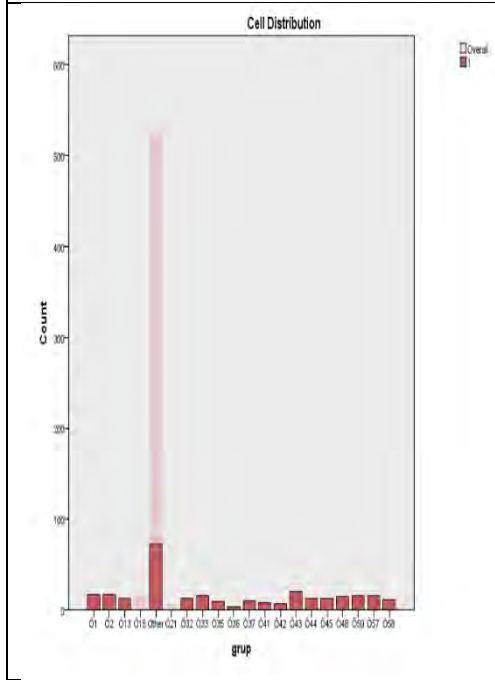
Consistent with the cluster analysis results, Pictures 1 and 2 include the work for the group belonging to teacher T27 which provided the best example of an art-oriented structure cluster in both observations.

Observation 1

	Cluster	Tool-oriented (1)	Art-oriented (2)
	n	287	476
	%	37.6	62.4
	Importance	1	1
	\bar{x}	1.90	6.37
Ratio of sizes:	1.66		

Observation 2

	Cluster	Tool-oriented (1)	Art-oriented (2)
	n	506	257
	%	66.3	33.7
	Importance	1	1
	\bar{x}	2.52	7.61
Ratio of sizes:	1.97		



Cluster 1		Cluster 2		Cluster 1		Cluster 2	
Group Most Frequent Category	T27	Group Most Frequent Category	T43	Group Most Frequent Category	T27	Group Most Frequent Category	T26
%	4.4	%	7.0	%	4.2	%	7.0
Group Importance	.73	Group Importance	.73	Group Importance	.62	Group Importance	.62

Graph 1. Size of cluster observation 1 and observation 2



Picture 1. First observation example of teacher T27

Picture 2. Second observation example of teacher T27

It can be seen from Pictures 1 and 2 that the children in the tool-oriented artistic structure cluster were given cardboard and uniform materials of the same color and shape, and were asked to use the materials in the same way. The resulting works are so similar as to be identical. It can be interpreted that works based on cutting and pasting do not carry traces of the children's individual differences, past life experiences, imagination, or artistic expression and consist of ready-made templates that contain neither visual element design nor esthetic elements. However, it was determined that the resulting works were made for tool-oriented skill development rather than artistic creation.

Consistent with the cluster analysis results, Pictures 3 and 4 include the work for the groups belonging to teachers T43 and T26, which provided the best examples of the art-oriented structure cluster.



Picture 3. First observation example of teacher T43

Picture 4. Second observation example of teacher T26

From Picture 3 it can be seen that teacher T43 gave open-ended materials with various features to the children, and the children produced works in different forms by designing the materials according to their own wishes. It is seen that the resulting works contain features in the visual element design and esthetic dimensions of artistic creation such as forming a relationship between objects, combination, composition, and forming similarities. It can be interpreted that teacher T43 provided the children with the guidance to reveal their artistic expressions in combinations and compositions for the design of visual elements.

When Picture 4 is examined, it is seen that teacher T26 gave the children the black circle shape on the same surface as a clue and guided children to design the shape in line with

their artistic expressions. It has been determined that the children were free to choose color and composition and that each child created work quite different from the other. In terms of the esthetic and visual element design dimensions of artistic creation, it can be seen that the children reflected their artistic expressions by emphasizing their individual differences in color, harmony, balance, composition, combination, and forming relationships between objects.

4. Discussion

This study aims to examine the artwork made by children following the implementation of visual art activities planned by preschool teachers from a tool- or art-oriented structure standpoint. To this end, the artwork produced by the children was examined in terms of working context, form, and tool- or art-oriented product properties. In this section, the findings are discussed in line with the study's aims and research questions, respectively.

The first research question was "*What is the working medium of the visual artwork displayed by children in preschool institutions?*" When this is examined, it is seen that in both observations, the children worked with paper the most. In both the first and second observations, it was seen that kneading and collage work was hardly ever done. Working with paper is a form of art that helps children to develop their skills. It covers such work as paper graffiti, symmetrical paper folding, cutting, tearing, pasting, and rolling. Participation in these activities helps improve children's paper-cutting skills. Also, prolonged paper-cutting exercise is conducive to developing refined dexterity motor skills. Working with paper is a meticulous and systematic activity. Children need to prepare all kinds of materials and tools necessary for this work, then work carefully according to the prescribed procedures. Therefore, it can help improve process and planning skills (Chun, 2018). However, the planning of work with paper as an activity that requires the children to imitate, such as making copies or templates, predominantly develops children's tool-oriented imitation skills. The art curriculum can and does change given that art encompasses the human tendency to beautify, organize, personalize, create meaning, and express oneself esthetically, the art curriculum changes. The most important aspect of this curriculum is to develop not only children's instrumental skills but also their skills at expressing their thoughts and feelings artistically (Massey, 2017). Being able to bring something more clearly to consciousness is what lies in the visualization of ideas and the expression or representation of ideas (Brooks, 2009). When planning a meaningful arts curriculum, it is essential to choose materials that best express children's thoughts, ideas, and stories. As the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy advocates, the child should be encouraged to develop their individual understanding of the world and the objects in it (Samuelsson, Sheridan & Williams, 2006). Working with a variety of materials provides opportunities to deepen existing understandings of the visual world (Eckhoff & Spearman, 2009). Whether they are art teachers or classroom teachers, the chosen materials will affect the children's artistic achievement. While even the most talented adult artist has difficulty expressing himself with just red, blue, and yellow crayons, the difficulties that a child with still developing skills will face must be considered. The most fundamental element of the curriculum is to focus on art-oriented work with materials that are esthetically pleasing, responsive to children's ideas, and open-ended (Cutcher & Boyd, 2016; Massey, 2017). The visual arts activities in preschool classrooms included in the study were conducted by the class teacher, and there were no arts instructors in the classrooms. There are also institutions in Turkey where art activities in preschool education institutions are conducted by an art teacher. However, many art teachers also do not have a background in early childhood education. The lack of knowledge and pedagogy about teaching art and teaching art in isolation raises various problems regarding how art education is included in the early childhood curriculum in Turkey and how art is taught to young children. One of these problems is that the so-called children's

workbooks used predominantly in preschool classrooms tend to emphasize manual paper and paint activities that promote simple skills and rapidly made products rather than helping children find meaning through art. Art activities through these books generally focus on formal elements such as color, line, and shape rather than the meaning of art (Zimmerman & Zimmerman, 2000, p.87). Another important problem is that art is not perceived as a discipline. Children in preschool classrooms can engage in activities that appear to be related to the arts but that have nothing to do with art education. As supported by the study's findings, preschool teachers mostly use mechanically prepared materials and children follow the directions or colors in the shapes on the same pages as predetermined colors and patterns according to their rules. These types of activities do not include art-oriented skills. They do not encourage children to look at, understand, or talk about other people's artwork. It makes no sense to defend such experiences as art activities. Such activities can only develop specific small motor skills through activities such as cutting and pasting and painting in predetermined lines (Zimmerman & Zimmerman, 2000, p.87).

When the *"Form of artwork,"* the study's second research question, is examined, it can be seen that in both observations, two-dimensional work dominates while three-dimensional work is quite limited. Early Childhood Art Educators (ECAE, 2016) Early Childhood Art Education Position Statement said that one of the eight underlying principles of art should be *"A child's access to a wide variety of art media that support two- and three-dimensional expression."* All children should have access to high-quality art experiences, especially in early childhood. Early childhood art has always been closely associated with the discovery of sensory play and materials, such as discovering how paint flows from a large brush down the sloping plane of paper attached to an easel (McClure, Tarr, Thompson & Eckhoff, 2017). The desire to construct meaning with visual materials is often inspired by the materials themselves. Beautiful, interesting, and attractive materials require touch, use, and play (Garvis, 2012a; Massey, 2017). Children can express their inner feelings and experiences with the art forms they create with different materials. Therefore, the expression of their inner feelings should be respected in children's art education (Wan, 2019, p.1119). Children's interests and needs determine the content and structure of a child-centered curriculum. The teacher is the facilitator of children's need for expression. The emphasis in the arts curriculum is on helping each child express their personal needs and develop his/her capacity and skills in the arts (Zimmerman & Zimmerman, 2000, p.88). Materials that react to pressure, touch, and movement are excellent channels for children's self-expression. When planning an artistic experience, it is very important to choose material that liberates children's language of artistic form. Open-ended materials such as sticks, pebbles, dried plants, and recycled materials give children the opportunity to create visual meaning regardless of their current skills. By including recycled materials in the art class, students are provided with unique opportunities to combine ordinary, discarded objects with personal artistic creations (Eckhoff & Spearman, 2009). These materials can be played with, arranged, or rebuilt. Therefore, these materials have metaphorical potential (Massey, 2017). According to the study's findings, the reason for the limited number of three-dimensional studies is the presentation of materials and setting the scene in the art activity, visual elements such as depth and perspective perception, and teachers not having sufficient interest, knowledge, or artistic background for guiding the design of these visual elements. However, given the importance of the contribution to children's creativity of three-dimensional work made with recycled materials, it is revealed that teachers' pedagogical content knowledge regarding these materials and the art education they receive during their undergraduate education is also insufficient. Visual arts are at the center of children's holistic, play-based learning, but early childhood educators' visual arts self-efficacy beliefs and subject content knowledge influence their pedagogical choices. When early childhood educators lack the confidence, skills, and knowledge of the visual arts necessary to support children's visual arts

learning and participation effectively, children's learning in the visual arts may be restricted; This can cause a negative cycle of effect (Garvis, 2012b; Lindsay, 2020). Some pedagogical practices are critically important, such as accepting and responding to children's perspectives on their artistic experiences, providing new stimuli that build on their discoveries, providing a purpose for their art, and supporting their access to art materials and ongoing projects (Richards, 2018; Lindsay, 2016). While early childhood educators readily acknowledge the desire to provide a range of educational and fun art activities, similar studies support the findings of this study, suggesting that these educators lack pedagogical content knowledge and the confidence to support children's learning and personally engage in art-making processes (McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002; Terreni, 2010; Twigg & Garvis, 2010; Garvis, 2012b). The aim of establishing a rich art setting is to provide configurations with rich and engaging stimuli that will allow children to act. Such an environment is vital for children to develop their esthetic awareness, artistic skills, and their ability to think critically, abstractly, collaboratively, and creatively. The role of a proactive educator in children's development is very important. For this reason, teachers should be supported in terms of readying themselves for the profession and in-service professional development (Cutcher & Boyd, 2016; Smyth, 2017).

When the study's third research question, "*Is the artwork made by preschool children tool-oriented or art-oriented?*" was examined, according to the study's findings, it was concluded that the mean scores of the children who were divided into the tool-oriented and art-oriented building clusters as a result of both the first observation and the second observation were quite low, and the resulting products had little in the way of the visual elements that form the artistic structure, the design of visual elements, or esthetic elements. However, it was found that more children were in the art-oriented structure cluster in the first observation than in the second observation. In other words, the first observation contains relatively more artistic features than the second observation. This situation, especially on two different observation days, shows that there were changes in the attitudes of teachers, that the products that emerged in the second observation were more limited in terms of the visual element design and esthetic dimensions, and that in their lessons toward the end of the week, teachers did more tool-oriented work supporting artistic skills rather than artistic creation. However, given the mean scores for the clusters in both observations, it is remarkable that the teachers mainly had the children do tool-oriented work using such materials as ready-made molds drawings, and templates so that each child would produce almost identical work. It has been determined that the artwork was prepared and displayed on the panels in line with the concern of being liked while having little to do with artistic design. It is seen that while the emphasis made in the MEB's 2013 Preschool Education Program relating to the implementation of art activities supports the visual art education fields of "*visual thinking,*" "*visual language,*" "*esthetics and creativity,*" and "*eye-motor coordination,*" (Kandır, Gözüm & Türkoğlu, 2016) it does lead to differences in practice. This study's findings are in parallel with the results of similar studies conducted in Turkey (Avcı & Sağsöz, 2018; Çetingöz, 2012; Temiz, 2017; Yılmaz, 2009; Yılmaz & Özler, 2011). They show that visual arts activities do not support the development of children's creativity, that the work mainly takes the form of copying, using templates, and imitating, that these are activities aimed solely at improving dexterity and getting children to make use of their free time, that teachers demonstrate a product-oriented approach in their activity practices, and that they lack the knowledge required to plan creative activities. This situation highlights the desire to have parents appreciate the artwork on display. Jalongo (1999, p.205) states that teachers' own negative experiences and their feelings of inadequacy in art affect their practices. They further argue that they think qualifying a piece of artwork as good means the quality in its ability to imitate. In this respect, if a piece of visual artwork is a recognizable representation of something, it is considered "good" but "bad" if it is not.

However, the purpose of art is not just to copy, but to express impressions and feelings. If almost every experienced teacher knows about an art activity and has done it at one time or another, then it is time to quit this activity. This is because such molds are the opposite of creativity and art. Children should be offered open-ended activities that challenge their imaginations and minds. “Art” or “craft” activities that homogenize children’s reactions and cause everyone to be alike have little to do with creativity. Children should be free in art as a source of fun and pleasure. For this reason, teachers’ own values and experiences of art form the basis of the guidance they offer to children. Open-ended activities that focus on the process and not the result offer children unique, differentiated, and holistic methods of exploration and learning. Encouraging children to be willing to participate creatively in an esthetic problem-solving process that allows them to choose, represent, and explain their thoughts and actions will help them develop the skills necessary for artistic expression and art (McLennan, 2010, p. 1). The artistic background of the teachers and their understanding of planning creative art activities for children will directly affect the children’s artistic potential. However, Lowenfeld and Brittain (1970 as cited in Twigg, 2011, p. 264) state that individuals who examine children’s artwork evaluate the value of one product relative to another, regardless of how much effort teachers make to represent children’s artwork equally in their classrooms. In parallel with the findings of the study, it can be said that this anxiety of being admired led teachers to conduct tool-oriented work based on producing almost identical products, a far cry from artistic expression. Art integration, which supports artistic expression and creation, especially within art activities, is complex because it encompasses different forms of practice and interdisciplinary interaction. How to plan and implement the integration of art into the classroom and incorporate it into art activities is an art in itself. This process is entirely based on the teacher’s interest, knowledge, and artistic background (LaJevic, 2013, p.3). Early childhood teachers need access to professional learning opportunities, especially where they can learn how best to bring art education to the classroom (Twigg & Garvis, 2010, p. 201). While there is a need for both tool-oriented and art-oriented work, children’s sense of achievement stems from their actual artwork and the positive feedback they receive from the surrounding community. Achieving success can sometimes mean not working according to models, but not actually reaching the desired goal can be disappointing (Rusanen, Pusa & Mäenpää, 2018, p.1678). For the educators at Reggio, each discipline consists of rationality, imagination, emotion, and esthetics. Cultures that strictly separate these qualities and thinking processes inevitably tend to exclude some of the processes from various disciplines (Vecchi, 2010, p.6). In this context, it will be effective to make a transition to an esthetic process based on the child’s imagination and endeavors by creating a positive attitude toward art in the child through art activities that are familiar and easy. A holistic approach to the artistic development of early childhood teacher education could provide high-quality art education experiences for children in early childhood education settings.

5. Conclusion

As a result of the study, it was determined that as a tool for assessing portfolios in preschool classrooms in terms of planning and evaluating teachers’ art activities and supporting children’s artistic processes, the “*Form for Evaluating the Exhibited Visual Artwork of Children Displayed in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure*” is a valid and reliable assessment tool. As far as visual arts activities in classrooms are concerned, it was determined that mainly tool-oriented painting and working with paper is carried out, with almost no work involving collage or, particularly, kneading materials. As a result of the first and second observations in the evaluation of the displayed visual artwork in terms of its artistic structure, it was determined that there are two groups divided into tool-oriented and art-oriented structure clusters and that the mean scores of children in both groups in the “*Form for*

Evaluating Visual Artwork of Children Displayed in Preschool Institutions in Terms of Artistic Structure” were quite low. It was determined that even the children in the art-oriented structure cluster have very low scores and that their work is quite lacking in terms of artistic elements.

6. Recommendations

The “*Form for Evaluating the Displayed Visual Artwork of Children in Terms of Artistic Structure*” can be used as a portfolio assessment tool to evaluate the art activities that teachers have planned individually and to make developmental observations of the children through their resulting artwork. When an educator’s own experience of making art is limited, it will be difficult for him/her to support the development of visual arts in children. Preschool teachers should be provided aimed at supporting the development of their basic skills, artistic learning at school, and artistic creation by including art education as a part of preservice training and continuing professional development. In art activities, instead of routinized work that causes every child to produce the same product, settings should be provided based on projects and group collaboration as much as individual effort where children can shape their work according to their interests, wishes, and needs and enrich their work by forming connections between different methods and techniques. Teachers should be provided with seminars that are supportive of their artistic background with regard to supporting children’s creativity in different dimensions, documenting the exhibiting the language used in artistic processes and the resulting artwork, and making use of artistic learning. They should be encouraged to attend these training seminars. Two-dimensional and three-dimensional work and different methods such as kneading materials and collage should be included within the scope of visual art activities in supporting children’s artistic creations. Given their economic disadvantages, incentives can be provided for using kneading materials in later art activities by making them together with children in the classroom. Instead of ready-made templates and contoured drawings, rich and open-ended materials that support children’s imagination should be presented. Teachers should be individually encouraged to participate in art activities to gain an artistic perspective. Considering work that involves family participation, families should provide recycled material support to enrich the art activities with recycled material. Since the visual arts education that teachers receive at the undergraduate level and the visual art activities they practice do not overlap with each other, it should be ensured that implementation-oriented content is enriched, particularly in undergraduate education. Research should be conducted in the context of interdisciplinary studies to support the creativity of preschool children, particularly in the field of visual arts. Since art education is an important part of the educational program for children and since children learn how to put their artwork on display for adult audiences, there is an obvious need for research into the practice of displaying children’s artwork in early childhood classrooms and its impact on children.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to the visual artwork made by the children for the art activities of the teachers participating in the working group. Art educators in institutions providing visual arts education are not included. For this reason, it may be important for future studies to compare those educational institutions that have art educators with those that do not. The evaluation form, designed to evaluate the visual artwork of preschool children, can be used by researchers to evaluate the program-teacher-child triangle and can be used in future research as a valuable portfolio assessment tool.

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