



## Examining the Effects of Aesthetic Education Program on Aesthetic Judgment Development of Five-Year-Old Children

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify the effectiveness of the Aesthetic Education Program on aesthetic judgment development of the five year old children. The pre-test and post-test control group experimental design was applied throughout the study. The group matching technique was employed in constitution of the study groups. Participants of the study consist of 36 five-year-old children attending at the Kocaeli University Application Kindergarten at the 2016-2017 academic year. Participants were assigned to experimental and control groups equally. Experimental group was taught through Aesthetic Education Program in twice a week for 10 weeks together with their curriculum. Participants in the control group thought through national early childhood curriculum. In the study THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale which was developed by Taylor and Helmstadter (1971) adapted Turkish culture and validated by Acer (2006) validity and reliability. The validity and reliability of THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale for five years olds children were by researcher. In statistical data analysis, Mann Whitney U-Test and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test were used. The results indicated that Aesthetic Education Program effects positively five-years old children's aesthetic judgment development.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic, Aesthetic judgment, Aesthetic education program, Aesthetic experience, Preschool education, Art

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## 1. Introduction

The term aesthetics was first used by German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten in 1744, in the sense of beauty science. The word aesthetics comes from the word *aesthetikos*, which is associated with the Greek perception of sense (Crawford, 1991). Although there is no definition to fully meet the concept of aesthetics, it is basic form of a person's reaction such as the art, movement, music and trying to find the best in life and love, being aware of the natural beauty in the nature and around us, and knowing the value of them, to see and enjoy the beauty, affective and cognitive sensation and feeling. Aesthetics is at the center of our daily life, because the colours, flavours and sensations in our environment contribute to the development of our aesthetic awareness (Fox and Schirmacher, 2014).

The aesthetic experience begins with birth and is gradually shaped by culture. The early stages of aesthetic development are universal (Parsons, 1987). Cottrell (1987) states that the artistic sense in children is composed of five developmental stages. First stage (from kindergarten to 3rd grade): Children perceive and discover aesthetic features. Perceptual discovery of aesthetic features involves the development of children's perceptual skills and they become aware of cultural traditions with the help of the world of art. Second stage (4th-6th grade): Includes the development of perceptual skills. Third stage (7th-9th grade): The sense of art history develops. Fourth stage (10th-11th grade): Child develops sample evaluation criteria. Final stage (Grade 12): Child Performs critical analysis (Wee, 2009). Education of aesthetics, such as art, music, cannot be considered as a discipline in itself, but in fact, education of aesthetics covers all fields of art. Education of aesthetics involves all aesthetic phenomena. This phenomenon includes aesthetic experiences, the production process of aesthetic products (object and situation) and the historical and cultural traditions created (Madeja, 1976).

An educational program should support the development of aesthetics with all its aspects. In order to provide this support, it is important that the training program consists of integrated activities. When it comes to supporting the development of aesthetics in children, only art-related activities such as painting or music in the education program come to mind. In fact, it should be known that aesthetic elements can be included in the training process in all activities. Arrangement of the learning environment in such a way as to improve the aesthetic sense of children shall also contribute to the integration of aesthetic education (Feeney and Moravcik, 1986). The pre-school education program, which was put into practice in Turkey in 2013, has two achievements and six indicators related to aesthetic development. All activities can be used to promote the development of aesthetics in pre-school education program (Turkish Ministry of Education, 2013). Through education of aesthetics, the child tends to see the details, to pay attention to the views that he has not noticed before. Education of Aesthetics is generally seen as the descriptor of art if it is taken into the art branch. It allows the children to indulge in through their characteristics such as the colors, lines, shapes, formations, proportion, harmony and symmetry in the work of art, and it reveals the spiritual forces inherent in children (Gültekin, 2011).

Some art experts think that young children do not have the maturity to perform aesthetic reactions. Therefore, they think that aesthetics is not a suitable subject at an early age. However, early childhood educators know that children love the beautiful, the nature, and they like to create, look and talk about art (Feeney and Moravcik, 1986). Taking all these into consideration, it is emphasized that any activity daily planned in 2013 the Turkey preschool education program should be of the quality to promote the creativity and aesthetic skills. However, it is thought that the activities supporting the aesthetic skills are insufficient in both the examples of the activities of the teachers and the resource books that the teachers benefit from. As a result of the literature review, it has been observed that the studies related to this subject are insufficient.

### 1.1. Purpose

The aim of this study is to reveal the effects of Aesthetic Education Program applied on five-year-old children on the development of their aesthetic judgement. In accordance with this main objective, it is aimed to make a difference with an application to be carried out without disrupting the current program flow the Aesthetic Education Program to be prepared by the researcher.

Based on this purpose, this research study aims to find out answer the questions below;

1. In terms of the effect of the Aesthetic Education Program on the Aesthetic Judgement scores of the experimental and control groups;
  - 1.1. Is there a significant difference between the experimental group aesthetic judgement pre-test and post-test scores?
  - 1.2. Is there a significant difference between the control group aesthetic judgement pre-test and post-test scores?
  - 1.3. Is there a significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Study model

In the research, experimental patterns with pretest-posttest control group was used. The experimental pattern is the model in which the data to be observed are produced and certainly compared with the aim of trying to determine cause-effect relationships (Karasar, 2003). The pretest-posttest control group pattern requires the measurement of the participants in relation to the dependent variable before and after the experimental procedure (Büyüköztürk, 2010). In the pretest-posttest control group model, there are two groups formed by random method. One of these is called experimental and the other one is called control group. Measurements are performed on both groups before and after the experiment (Karasar, 2003).

**Table-1. Experimental Research Design**

	Pretest	Program	Posttest
Experimental Group	Taylor-Helmstadter Pair Comparison Scale of Aesthetic Judgment	Aesthetic Education Program	Taylor-Helmstadter Pair Comparison Scale of Aesthetic Judgment
Control Group		Instruction based on current curriculum	

Experimental group was taught through Aesthetic Education Program in twice a week for 10 weeks together with their curriculum. The control group continued to study their preschool curriculum. Aesthetic Education Program was presented below.

**Table-2. Aesthetic Education Program**

Weeks	Activities
1.	“Children's Games” Pieter Bruegel
	Shared book reading
2.	“Shoes” review
	Shared book reading
3.	“Happy Children” photo taken by Ara Güler
	Museum visit
4.	Light table activities
	“Forest trip” Nature review
5.	“The Weeping Woman” Pablo Picasso
	Museum visit
6.	“The Starry Night” Vincent van Gogh
	Shadow puppet
7.	“Cups” review
	“Clouds” Nature review
8.	Museum visit
	Shadows
9.	Optical illusion
	Painting exhibition visit
10.	Installation Art
	Virtual museum visit

Aesthetic Education Program developed by authors and other tables have statistical data

## 2.2. Sampling

The study group of this study consisted of five-year-old children attending Kocaeli University Kocaeli University Application Kindergarden in 2016-2017 school year. In this study, group matching technique method was used to create study groups. The reason why Kocaeli University Application Kindergarden was chosen for the study is that the variables of children (physical conditions of the school, socio-cultural level of the family) are similar, and there are two classes in five-age group and maximum 20 children in each class, and it was permitted to carry out the study, which would take 1-3 hours on two days of the week, a vehicle could be provided for planned trips, and the school administration and teachers have a positive approach and willingness for the study.

**Table-3.** The results of the pre-test scores of THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale for experimental and control group

Scale	Group	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	Z	P
Aesthetic Judgement Scale	Experimental	18	321.50	17.86	150.50	-3.73	.709
	Control	18	344.50	19.14			
		36					

As shown in Table 3, results of the Mann Whitney-U test reveals that there is not any significant difference between the THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale pretest scores of experimental and control groups. According to this result, it can be said that the aesthetic judgement levels of the two groups are equal before the application.

## 2.3. Data Collection Tools

### 2.3.1. Taylor-Helmstadter Pair Comparison Scale of Aesthetic Judgment (THPC)

The THPC Aesthetic Judgement Scale is an assessment tool developed by Taylor and Helmstadter (1971) in order to measure aesthetic judgement in children aged four and over based on the Gestalt Theory. The scale consists of 38 pairs of images among which various images with or without artistic value like furniture design; sculpture, painting and home appliances are contained. The applied instrument one-to-one takes 15-20 minutes. It was adapted by Acer (2006) to Turkish Culture for 6-year-old children. As a result of the validity studies conducted by Acer (2006) pairs of images were reduced to 16 pairs. The reliability and validity study was conducted for 5 years old children by the researcher. According to the results of this study, the scale was found to be valid (CVI of 0.86 and  $CVI \geq CVO$ ) and reliable (Cronbah's alpha of 0.66) (Unluer and Zembat, 2017).

## 2.4. Analyzing of Data

In order to determine the tests to be used in the analysis of the data, it has been tested whether the data is normally distributed or not. As a result of hypothesis testing, it was found that the data did not meet the normality hypothesis. Therefore, nonparametric tests were performed.

**Table-4.** The Results of the Hypothesis Test Showing that THPC Aesthetic Judgement Data is not Distributed Normally

Aesthetic Judgement Scale	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro Wilk W		
	Statistic	df	P	Statistic	df	P
	.173	36	.008	.935	36	.037

The data obtained from the study were evaluated by using "SPSS 18.0" statistical package program. In this context, the following statistical techniques were implemented. The frequency and percentage values of the demographic characteristics of the study group were determined. Mann Whitney U-Test (MWU) was used to compare the pretest-posttest scores of the experimental and control groups. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was used to compare the pre and post-tests of the experimental and control groups.

### 3. Findings/Results

Findings of this study were presented below.

**Table-5.** The results of the pre-test and post-test scores of THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale for experimental group

Scale	Group	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Z	P
Aesthetic Judgement Scale	Negative ranks	0	.00	.00	-3.65*	.00 **
	Pozitif ranks	17	9.0	153.00		
	Ties	1				
	Total	18				

\*Based on negative rank

\*\* p<.01

As shown in Table 5, results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test reveals that there is significant difference between the THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale pretest and posttest scores of experimental group ( $z=3.65$ ;  $p<.01$ ). Taking mean rank and sums of the difference scores into consideration, it is given that the observed difference is in favour of the positive ranks, in other words, the post-tests. These findings, it can be concluded that the Aesthetic Education Program effected positively the development of aesthetic judgement of the five-year old children.

**Table-6.** The results of the pre-test and post-test scores of THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale for control group

Scale	Group	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Z	P
Aesthetic Judgement Scale	Negative ranks	0	.00	.00	-1.732 *	.08**
	Pozitif ranks	3	2.00	6.00		
	Ties	15				
	Total	18				

\*Based on negative rank

\*\* p<.05

As shown in Table 6, results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test reveals that there is not any significant difference between the THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale pretest and posttest scores of control group ( $z=1.732$ ;  $p>.05$ ). According to this result, it can be said that MEB 2013 pre-school education program did not contribute to the development of aesthetic judgement skills of children.

**Table-7.** The results of the post-test scores of THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale for experimental and control group

Scale	Group	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	Z	P
Aesthetic Judgement Scale	Experimental	18	453.50	25.19	41.50	-3.89	.00*
	Control	18	212.50	11.81			
		36					

\*p<.01

As shown in Table 7., as a result of the Mann Whitney- U test reveals that there is statistically significant difference between the scores ( $U=41.50$ ;  $p<.01$ ) of THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale in terms of the experimental and control group post-tests. Considering their mean ranks, it can be seen that the difference is in favour of the experimental group. According to the results, the aesthetic judgement skills of the children in the experimental group participating in the Aesthetic Education Program are higher than that of the children in the control group who did not participate in the training. This findings show that the program has a positive effect on children's aesthetic judgement skills.

### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

When the THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale post-test scores of the experimental and control groups were compared, there was a significant difference in favour of the experimental group. This result shows that the children in the experimental group have higher aesthetic judgement level than the children in the control group and that the applied Aesthetic Education Program effects significantly the development of the aesthetic judgement levels of children. Accordingly, the aesthetic judgement levels of the children in the experimental group participating in the Aesthetic Education Program were higher than the children in the control group who did not participate in the training. The fact that the aesthetic judgement levels of the children attending the Aesthetic Education Program are higher than the ones attending the preschool education program of TME (2013) and not participating in this program is considered to stem from the fundamental principles which constitute the Aesthetic Education Program. The reason why the program has shown the expected development is related with the fundamental principles of the program such as drawing attention of the children by means of activities, organising

the class atmosphere within the framework of aesthetic principles, giving feedbacks to children and suggesting different educational atmosphere.

When the results of the study related to the aesthetic judgement level are examined, it can be seen that similar results have been reached with various studies conducted in Turkey and abroad (Taylor, 1971; Eckhoff, 2006; Davun, 2009; Özalp, 2012; Kocamanoglu and Acer, 2015).

In the study conducted by Taylor (1971) one of the researchers who developed the scale, the effect of the aesthetic education given with artistic products on the perception development and aesthetic judgement levels of the 4-5-year-old children who were attending pre-school education were examined. THPC Aesthetic Judgment Scale, which he developed with Helmstadler, was applied and it was determined whether the environment and education had an effect on aesthetic preference and aesthetic development. According to the results of the study, it was determined that the aesthetic preferences of the students in the experimental group were higher than the other group. The findings of this study coincide with the findings of our study.

Eckhoff (2006) studied the effect of museum education on the aesthetic appreciation of children. In his study, he worked with 63 children between the ages of four and eleven, and he found that the children who were actively experienced art could assess the artworks. This result is consistent with the results of our study. In both programs, there are stages such as examination, interpretation and recreation of artworks by children, which enables them to actively participate in the aesthetic process from the very first stage and develop their aesthetic judgment skills. Results of this study show similarities in terms of developing children's aesthetic skills since museum visits were included in the both aesthetic education program. Results of both studies imply the importance and contribution of museums on aesthetic skills of children.

According to the definition of postmodern art, story book covers, which are part of a visual and popular culture, are accepted as an artwork (Freedman, 2003). Illustrated books offer excellent opportunities for aesthetic experiences (Nodelman, 1988). The aesthetic experiences of children were tried to be increased with the illustrated story books included in the prepared Aesthetic Education Program. (Chou and Cheng, 2015) showed that reading aesthetic books by sharing with their families improved their aesthetic skills. In addition, Justice *et al.* (2009) found that books read in the classroom increased the aesthetic experience of children. These studies are in parallel with the findings of our research.

Acer and Ömerodlu (2008) conducted a similar experimental study with 6 year old children by implementing a different aesthetic education program. However, the aforementioned study found out that aesthetic education program did not show any important effect on the development of children's aesthetic judgment. The reason for the discrepancy between the results of this study and their might be age of the participants and the difference of the applied programs.

## 5. Recommendations

The Aesthetic Education Program can be compared with the findings obtained by applying it in different economic, social and cultural environments.

- A larger-scale study including children of different ages can be achieved, and the results can be broadened to a wider audience.
- The assessment of the impacts of the Aesthetic Education Program can be strengthened to a certain extent through feedback from children, as well as feedback from families and teachers and from an independent observer. At the same time, the effectiveness of the program can be measured using different measurement tools.
- The study group is limited to 36 children. In the future, research may be repeated with larger study groups and the ones which vary in terms of socio-economic levels.

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