

## Students' Attitudes and Perceptions of Reading through Analysis of Their Paintings

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the attitudes and perceptions of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in terms of reading. The study group consists of 10 participants, 6 girls and 4 boys, attending the 5<sup>th</sup> grade of a public school. This research is a qualitative study with a descriptive phenomenology design. As a data collection tool, the students' drawings and face to face interviews with the students were used. At the stage of collecting the data, the students were asked the question "Can you draw a picture that reflects your thinking about reading?" Afterwards, face-to-face interviews were made to explain their drawings. The students' attitudes and perceptions about reading were examined through paintings and face-to-face interviews. A total of 3 different themes were created. It is seen that "Dream World" theme is the most drawn with 4 paintings among these themes. According to the results obtained, it is seen that all the students in the study group have a positive perception towards reading.

**Key words:** Reading, Perception, Painting, Visual Reading

### INTRODUCTION

Reading is not merely vocalizing words, but making sense of a text through cognitive processes. In this context, the definition of reading has been made by many researchers. Akyol (2005) defines reading as the process of establishing meaning in a regular environment, based on effective communication between the writer and the reader in using pre-information. Turkish Language Society (2018) defines reading in the current Turkish dictionary as follows; an agreement with words or signs to inform people what they think and hear, language. Reading is not just a mental activity that benefits individuals but also contributes to the development of societies. Reading is one of the most important requirements of an individually developed personality, a socially efficient economy, a democratic life and a healthy society (Devrimci, 1993). Reading is one of the important variables that affect students' individual, social, cognitive, affective, academic and environmental development. The age of information technology and its rapid development each day have given reading an important position.

Reading is a language skill that enriches human life, plays a key role in human knowledge and culture, and is necessary to be developed for life. According to Townsend (2002), self-esteem increases as reading ability increases. Therefore, improving students' reading skills has been considered as an important goal at all levels of education. Texts should be read in depth in the reading process. Readers should make contact with their own knowledge and experience with the

text. The act of reading, from beginning to end, is an interaction between the past, present and future of experiences (Göktürk, 1997). According to Demirel (1990), reading is the activity of meaningful expression from written symbols by the interaction of cognitive behavior and psycho-motor skills. In another definition of reading, Aytaş (2003) refers to reading as a complex activity consisting of eyes and the various movements of five organs and the ability to comprehend mental comprehension. According to Alpay (1991), reading is to be aware of yourself and your environment, to understand, and to establish a relationship with the world outside. Reading is a complex process consisting of various stages of development. First of all, it is a perception process in which symbols are recognized. Converting them into mental concepts turns out later (Bamberger, 1990). Based on the forgoing definitions, reading can be defined as a mental sensing process that is spoken and by seeing the written letters.

It is very important to create a fun environment for children to enjoy reading and to continue their lifelong reading. Especially, parents and teachers should develop individual reading activities for children. In addition, each child's attitudes and perceptions about reading should be known by their parents and teachers. Particularly if children have reading problems, recognition of these attitudes and perceptions by parents and teachers plays an important role in the solution of the problem and creating positive attitudes and behaviors' continuity towards reading in their long life.

### Using Pictures to Identify Attitudes and Perceptions

Many researchers (Ajzen, 2005; Baker, 1992; Eagly & Chaiken, 2007; Moodley, 2003) mention that attitudes and perceptions directly are not measurable and that such a measurement is very subjective. There are many ways to learn the attitudes and perceptions of students. To apply a questionnaire and interview form, to interview, to make observation, to develop metaphor, to keep a log, to print a composition, and to draw pictures are some of these methods. The most effective and fun way for children is to draw pictures. Drawing a picture for children is a pleasant experience which allows them to express themselves in the pictures they draw because each child reflects something from their inner world in their draws. In this context, drawing and analyzing the pictures play an important role in understanding the inner world of children.

According to Christensen and James (2008), drawing is a fun and relaxing activity that helps children express emotions, thoughts, and beliefs both inside and outside the classroom. Since the picture is considered as an indication of the way the child perceives the outside world, it helps adults to communicate with the child and overcome the difficulties that the child encountered (Artut, 2002). The children can interpret their perceptions and observations about the environment with their original thoughts via their draws and thus, they describe the forms of perception of the outside world (Belet and Türkkan, 2007). Malchiodi (1998) states that the pictures drawn by children allow children to express their views in a more multidimensional way, as opposed to their answers to the questionnaires. In their paintings, children show their imagery about their emotional and intellectual life. Children have an inner world with their contradictions, desires, joy and uneasiness with the world of social and objective realities that need to adapt. The child, who can express his feelings and thoughts about the world of truth through the language of common expression, may not always express his feelings and thoughts about his inner world with this language (Kırışoğlu, 2002). For this reason, painting for some children is both an entertainment and an expression technique (Hague, 2001).

A way to increase the understanding of what children's pictorial expressions mean is to listen to children's talking about their pictures (Malchiodi, 2005). Because children tend to draw what they know rather than what they see in their paintings (Toomela, 2006).

When the literature is examined, it is seen that there are many studies conducted by children's drawings. Murriss and Thompson (2016) examined the perceptions of children towards picture books through their pictures. Kendrick and McKay (2004) also used pictures to measure children's perceptions of reading. In addition, Picker and Berry (2000) perceived the mathematical perception of children, Rijey and Van Rooy (2007) perception of health concept, Belet and Türkkan (2007) perception of European Union, Pehlivan (2008) mythological perceptions, Stokrochi and Samoraj (2002) perception of church, Türkkan (2004) examined the perception of family through the pictures of children, Batur, Başar and Süzen (2018) tried to examine the critical visual reading skills of students. In the present study, students'

paintings were analyzed to detect 5<sup>th</sup> grade students' perceptions about reading. No study was conducted to determine students' perception of reading. Our study is based on 5<sup>th</sup> grade students and it is vital importance that similar studies should be done at other grade levels.

### Objectives and Researches Questions

The aim of this study is to determine the attitudes and perceptions of 5<sup>th</sup> students by analyzing their paintings. The following questions will be sought in the research for this general purpose:

1. How do the 5<sup>th</sup> students express their perceptions of reading in their paintings?
2. How do the 5<sup>th</sup> students express their perceptions of reading in interviews?

### METHOD

In this study, it was aimed to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in terms of reading. In this section, the model of the research, the participants, the data collection tools and the data analysis process are explained in detail for this purpose.

### Research Design

This research is a qualitative study and descriptive phenomenology was used as a research design. Descriptive phenomenology is intended to reveal and interpret individual perceptions or perspectives for a particular phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). This method focuses on how individuals or groups perceive and interpret a situation, concept and phenomenon in line with their own lives (Christensen, Johnson & Turner, 2015). According to Marshall and Rossman (2010), phenomenology is known as a qualitative research design related to education. Phenomenology is a method that seeks to answer the question is "What is truth?". The phenomenology is based on individual experiences. In this approach, the researcher is interested in the personal (subjective) experiences of the participant and examines the perceptions of the individual and the meanings they have attributed to the events. Phenomenology is descriptive research. In this context, it is important not to make generalizations but to define the facts (Baş & Akturan, 2008). Even if we are aware of descriptive phenomenology, it provides an in-depth examination of the situations in which we have difficulty in understanding and analyzing (Creswell, 2012; Sart, 2015). According to Creswell (2013), the main purpose of a phenomenological study is to reach the participants' experiences and thoughts on a subject. In this research, the pictures of the students about the reading and the explanations they made in the interviews made about these pictures were examined in order to determine the students' perception of reading.

### Participants

The study group consisted of six female and four male students and totaly ten 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, in a public school

located in the central district of Usak. In study group selection stage, it was stated that participation in the study was voluntary. A total of ten students decided to participate in the study voluntarily. All these participatory selection stages were conducted by the responsible teachers and the researcher. The real names of the students were not included in the study. Instead, the use of pseudonyms is preferred. Some names that commonly used in Turkey have been selected for pseudonyms. Ali, Emre, Akin, Ayaz were selected for male students and Ayşe, Azra, Ece, Gökçe, Bilge, Fatma were selected for female students. Before proceeding, all students in the study group and responsible teachers were informed about the aim, stages of study and what are expected.

### Data Collection

Datas were collected in two different ways. First one is the pictures that participants draw. The second one is face-to-face interviews that they express what do they mean in their draws.

### Drawings of Participants

To determine the attitudes and perceptions of participants towards reading, the researcher wrote this question "Can you draw a picture that reflects your thinking about reading?" on board. And participants were asked to answer this question by drawing a picture. For this purpose, participants were given a lesson time. The practice was done in groups of five so that the participants were not affected from each other. The students were divided into two groups of five. Arrangements were made for one student to sit at each desk and the students were well spaced to avoid seeing each other's papers. Physical (suitable light environment, suitable heat environment, fresh air environment) and psychological conveniences (anxiety-reducing environment, soft music) were provided to the students to make them feel comfortable during the proceeding. It was stated that the participants can draw their pictures in color or colorless according to their wishes. In addition, it was emphasized that students are not subject to any rules when drawing their paintings and they are completely free in the paintings. A white A4 paper and crayons were placed on the desk of each student. While the students were drawing their pictures, the researcher was present in the classroom.

### Face to Face Interviews

After the participants completed their paintings, pictures of the participants were collected. Then, the participants were interviewed about their pictures in the school art classroom during the appropriate hours. In this face-to-face interview, an art teacher and researcher were present and did interviews together. Each student was asked to explain his/her picture in general and was asked follow up questions when needed. The interviews lasted between 5 and 10 minutes on average and were recorded.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

In this stage, one of the main problems frequently encountered in image analysis studies is that the pictures are analyzed with the adult perspective. In order to eliminate this problem, an interview should be made with the child who drew picture (Leonard, 2006). Therefore, face-to-face interviews were held with the students and the opinions about their draws were taken. In the second part of the data analysis stage, the art teacher and the researcher examined the paintings of the participants and the statements they described about their own draws. Also, three academicians who expert in art education and Turkish Language education examined students' views on paintings and drawings. Afterwards, the paintings were examined to see whether they were consistent with participants' statements within the frame of the feedback received from the experts. After all these stages, common themes were created. These themes were shared in the findings section of the study.

## FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

### Findings of Students' Perceptions of Reading in the Drawings they Draw

Three themes were determined from the data obtained from pictures they drew and the face-to-face interviews in which the students expressed what do they mean in the paintings. These themes are: "Dream World", "Nature", "Source of Information".

#### Dream World

When the dream world theme paintings (Figures 1-3) are analyzed, it is seen that students potrait their imaginations. They drew the reflections of the word of book and reading on their imagination. The opinions of the students who draw dream world themed paintings are given below.

In the painting (Figure 1) drawn by Emre, a cheerful boy is reading book sitting in the chair. In this Picture, by dint of reading book it is seen that birillant ideas come to mind, can communicate effectively, brain becomes more powerful, keeps out of harm's way. In the interview, Emre stated that he had drawn himself in this picture. In his face-to-face



Figure 1. Emre's perception of reading

interview, Emre explained the picture as follows: *“A bright idea comes to the minds of those who read the book, they speak fluently, their brains grow, their intelligence becomes stronger, they are protected from dragons by help of books. Their lives always shine. I wanted to tell you all this in this picture.”*

In the painting (Figure 2) drawn by Ayaz, it is seen that he portrayed the dream world of a child who reads lots of book. In this painting, it shows that he drew his dream because there are lots of creatures that are difficult to coexist normally. It shows that the appearance of a flying penguin, cat, dog, giraffe, bat and four-winged bird reflects the participant’s imagination to the painting he drew. Ayaz explains his painting with the following statements: *“In this picture, I wanted to tell you that reading books is a useful activity. I think that the more books I read, the more my imagination will develop. I wanted to show the dream of a child who reads a book in my painting.”*

In Figure 3, Ayşe stated that she had depicted herself in the drawing. She explained the drawing as follows: *“In this picture, I wanted to show that my imagination advances while reading a book. Actually, I drew myself in this picture. I always dream when I read a book. I imagine myself in the book. I talk to the character in the book. Sometimes, I read a few pages and dream about contents of book for a*

*long time. I dream so much that I forget about book. I love dreaming.”*

Akın tells us his dream directly in the drawing (Figure 4) he drew. He expresses his dream as follows: *“I like to dream. In this painting, I wanna tell you raining like a book rain and everyone be happy. I always dream of the book falling from the sky instead of rain and snow. Then, everybody can read. People don’t have buy books.”*

Four of the participants who draw dream world theme paintings mentioned that they like to dream, they always dream when they read, and that their imagination improve as they read books.

### Nature

When the nature themed paintings (Figures 5-7) are analyzed, it is seen that the students draw a picture of trees, a waterfall and a rose reminiscent of nature. The participants used elements of nature in their drawings.

In the painting (Figure 5) drawn by Ali, it is seen that the student drew a beautiful waterfall landscape. Sunny day and waterfall show that he loves quiet and peaceful places. In the face-to-face interview, the participant explains the painting he drew in the following sentences: *“When I hear the word of book, nature comes to my mind. I imagine the*



Figure 2. The reflection of Ayaz about the reading



Figure 4. Akın’s dreaming about reading



Figure 3. The drawing of Ayşe about reading

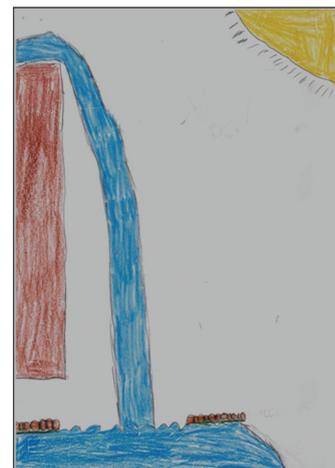


Figure 5. The nature landscape created by books in Ali’s mind

sound of water, the cool water of waterfall and a sunny day. I would like to read books, do picnic around waterfall and swim in it. In a quiet place, I think that I will understand better the book I read. In this painting, I wanted to tell all of these."

Ece has drawn a beautiful rose (Figure 6) in the center of paper. It is seen that she drew rose roots, thorns, leaves and the rose itself in hookline and sinker. When was asked about what she wanted to express with a single rose picture, Ece gave the following answer:

*In this painting [Figure 6], I wanted to tell you that reading books is a good habit, but it is known by some people as something boring. I remember there is no rose without a thorn proverb and I wanted to draw a rose. The reason for drawing a rose is to compare the rose with reading a book. Rose is beautiful flower and also reading book is good habit. Its thorns are harmful because they can hurt you. I wanted to tell about people's boring towards reading by drawing rose thorns. Reading books is something useful, even if reading regularly is boring and difficult according to some. I wanted to tell all of these in my painting.*

In the painting (Figure 7) of Fatma, she illustrated a tree that half part is green and half part is burned. On the right

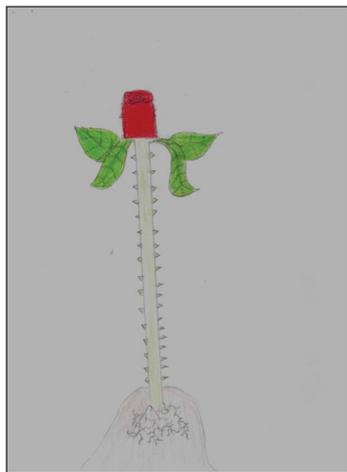


Figure 6. The connotation of book in Ece's mind



Figure 7. Fatma's perspective on reading book

side of the picture is a man sitting with a book in his hand, on the left side of the picture is seen a man with a cigarette in his hand. The individual with a book in his hand seems happy, the person with a cigarette in his hand is seen unhappy. Fatma explained the painting as follows: "Those who read books are happy, but those who don't read books are unhappy. Those who do not read books have bad behavior such as smoking. The life of the person reading the book is green but who does not read is dark."

It is understood from the drawings that these three students love nature. The beauty of reading a book near the waterfall on a sunny day and the reflection of a beautiful rose painting on the reading of books stand out in the participants' paintings.

### Source of Information

When the source of information theme paintings (Figures 8-10) are examined, it is seen that the students draw clean, colorful and tidy libraries. They drew the library which more colorful and more attractive instead of an ordinary library. It is seen that the Z-library (rich stimulus) in their school influence on these participants' drawings. The statements of participants who drew source information theme paintings are given below.

In the painting (Figure 8) drawn by Azra, it is seen that she drew a colored library and depicted the tables in library by resembling hearth and flower. It is seen that she drew clean and tidy library. In the face to face interview, when was asked why the tables in the library were drawn in the shape of hearth and flower, participant responded: "I love flowers, sir. Heart picture reminds me happy people. In this picture, I drew the library in our school. Everything in the library looks like a flower to me. I'm very happy when I'm at the library. The library in our school is a place like flower garden."

In this family theme painting (Figure 9), Gökçe had drawn a happy family picture. In the painting, everyone is happy. Father is standing near library and taking a book, this shows that he is role model in family. The fact that mother and children have rose and book in hands and smiling face show that they like reading books. Gökçe



Figure 8. Azra's drawing for reading book



**Figure 9.** The picture of happiness drawn by Gökce



**Figure 10.** The drawing in which Bilge depicts information

explained her drawing with the following expressions: *“In this Picture [Figure 9], I wanted to tell everyone in family should read books. The more books we read, the more we happy.”*

Bilge illustrated many objects together in her painting (Figure 10). It is seen that an information well, a water heater with information instead of water, a smiling girl are drawn in painting. When asked what she wanted to tell in this painting, she replied: *“When I read the book, I think our mind is filled with knowledge. What we have learned is filling in the information well and getting back information when we need it. I drew myself here. I feel happy while reading a book. Reading a book reminds me a person whose brain is full of information.”*

## DISCUSSION

Student drawings are used by educators and researchers for different purposes. Student drawings were used to determine attitudes and perceptions of reading in this study. According to Golomb (2004), the drawings of children have always attracted the attention of psychologists, educators, art historians and artists. The drawings are seen as immature concepts of their world, mental maps or mental copies of their mental life. It is possible to reveal the feelings and thoughts about a

subject in a more concrete and holistic way with the help of drawings (Yalçın and Enginer, 2014).

When the literature is scanned, there are many studies that have been done based on students' drawings. These studies are related to education (Akbaba, 2007; Aydın, 2008; Güven, 2009; Şansal, 2014; Sönmez, 2014; Yalçın & Enginer, 2014; Yıldırım & Uğur, 2011), psychology (Bezci, 1986; Çakır, 2017; Çelik, 2018; Solmaz, 2016; Yıldız, 2016; Yılmaz, 1995), child mental health (Ayvalı, 1997; Kaynal, 1995; Miyandoab, 2008; Polat, 1996; Şen, 2005; Tarancı, 1999; Yılmaz, 2009), culture in the social sciences (Erişti, 2010; Türkcan & Yaşar, 2011), examination of attitudes towards internet perceptions (Ersoy & Türkkan, 2009), analysis of environmental problems according to socio-economic differences (Sadık, Çakan, & Artut, 2011), science and technology (Avcı, 2008; Burhan, 2008; Coşkun, 2009; Ergün & Balçın, 2018; Eyceyurt, Akkuş & Tüzün, 2013;; Herdem, Aygün & Çinicı, 2014; Korkmaz & Kavak, 2010; Özalp, 2006; Tokiz, 2013; Türkoğuz, Balım & Çeliker, 2014; Ormancı & Balım, 2014; Yörek, 2007; Yüce, Önel & Bekis, 2016), and math education (Ünal, 2003).

When the related literature is analyzed, it is seen that the studies aiming to determine the attitudes and perceptions of the students based on their drawings abound (Kendrick & McKay, 2002; Nkomo, 2018; Platt, 1977).

## CONCLUSION

As a result of the pictures examined, it is seen that all the students have a positive attitude towards books and reading. No student has given a negative meaning to reading. In the pictures they draw, the students depicted reading as a source of information, a colorful and pleasant time spent in the library, a plant and a tranquil landscape of nature. The students generally preferred light tones in their paintings. They often used light-toned colors and this shows that they have a positive view of reading. The portrayal of human figures in the paintings with a smiling face shows that students feel happy while drawing these paintings.

This study has methodological implications. Considering the students who are studying at the first level of primary education, it is fun for them to draw pictures. They can express their feelings and thoughts clearly in the pictures they draw. As a result of this study, which aims to determine students' attitudes and perceptions towards reading through the drawings they draw, a lot of information can be obtained such as whether they like to read or not, they see reading as useful or useless, they are ready to read or not, and what do they think about reading?.

Researchers, interested in the study of students' reading attitudes, can carry out studies at different grade levels. Perceptions of students with different economic levels can be determined. Reading perceptions of students from different socio-cultural backgrounds can be determined. Apart from reading, attitudes towards various different topics can be determined.

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