

Art Education Experiences in Unified Classrooms: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This research aims to create a perspective on the Visual Arts course through the eyes of unified classroom teachers and to reveal their experiences. It is a matter of curiosity how the unified classroom practice, which can be seen as a problem in terms of education, results in terms of art education. This is the first research in the literature in terms of analyzing the positive/negative situations experienced in the Visual Arts course applied in unified classrooms. Phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research designs, was preferred in the study. The study group of the research consisted of 10 classroom teachers (4 female and 6 male) working in primary schools in a provincial centre in Anatolia and teaching in combined classes. Data were collected through interview form, metaphor study and artificial intelligence drawing application. The data obtained from the metaphors were transformed into a meaningful text and concretised with a colourful drawing with artificial intelligence application. Debriefing was then carried out with the participants on the resulting image, aiming to ensure both the internal consistency of the study and the concretisation of abstract expressions. The results of the studies in the literature show that education in unified classrooms leads to a negative process and result. However, according to the results of this research; it was seen that art education in unified classrooms produced positive effects and results. It has been revealed that there is an interactive, collaborative process in unified classrooms and that there is no situation that would negatively affect education. In addition, it was also among the results that art education in unified classrooms is an important impact factor in terms of social, cognitive, kinetic and artistic sense in terms of being an individual for students and coping with life dynamics. This situation shows that art can be used as an important influence factor in the construction of individual and life. Repeating this research after the participants were given art education might make a difference in terms of both education and participants.

Keywords: Unified classrooms, art education, visual arts lesson.

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Introduction

The concept of unified classrooms, which is used in the primary education level in the education system, continues today. The development of economic, technological and social opportunities has not yet led to a radical change in this concept. For this reason, education in institutions with unified classrooms has been discussed in many discussions and researches. The opinions of teachers, the situation of students, the advantages or disadvantages of this practice have been frequently examined in the literature.

In this study, firstly, the processes of unified classrooms applications from past to present have been examined. Necessary inferences were made by taking into account the application areas formed by these two concepts, the observations and opinions of the practitioners and the application areas formed by these two concepts with the art education applied in the unified classrooms within the scope of the visual arts course. The aim of the study is to shed light on visual arts courses through the experiences of classroom teachers as the practitioners in unified classrooms. Unified classrooms are typically considered problematic in terms of instructional experiences and as educational settings. This study focused specifically on art classes as unified classroom experiences, and it is probably the first study in the literature to investigate art classes in a unified setting.

Literature Review

Combined Classroom Concept

In the ever-changing and developing world order, the importance of knowledge is increasing. Schools, which are educational institutions that provide knowledge in a systematic and organized way, are a part of this dynamic. Education and training are carried out with various applications according to the existing situation in schools. One of these applications is the unified class application shaped according to certain variables (Saadet, 2020). The combined class is defined as the low number of students arising from the low population required by geographical and economic conditions and the education of student groups at different grade levels in one class by one teacher (Binbaşıoğlu, 1983; Demirel, 2019; Köksal, 2009). In this practice, one or at most three teachers can provide education for students at different levels and needs. The concept of combined classrooms is generally referred to as "multigrade classes" by researchers as required by two important factors: administrative and economic conditions (Miller, 1999, p. 48).

The concept of unified classrooms in Turkey has a long history. In 1951, a study was initiated for village schools. Prof. K. V. Wofford was invited to this study. Wofford proposed a new system, the "grouping system", instead of the "grade level system". Thus, he suggested that an equal level program for groups would be more effective. It is also known that these suggestions were included in the 1968 Primary School Program (Binbaşıoğlu, 1983, p.2). Today, there is no program specifically applied to combined classes. Combined classes and independent classes are subject to the same program. However, it is seen that the grouping system is applied according to student needs in the combined classrooms applied in rural village schools (Gözbaba, 2020). Having a special program for combined classes will make this practice more effective. Looking at the 2011-2012 data, it was found that 256,581 students were in combined classrooms and 35% of primary schools were combined classrooms. When the 2018-2019 education data are examined, there are 292,810 students studying in village schools, 22,971 teachers and 5731 schools. This shows the existence of 23% combined classrooms (Gözbaba, 2020; Gül et al., 2020; MEB, 2012). In the light of these data, it is important to emphasise the importance of the education provided with this practice, which has a considerable amount of combined classrooms over the years.

Unified classrooms practice is also seen in many countries of the world. We can list these countries as follows: Canada, Japan, the United States of America, Germany, France, Finland, Denmark, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain and many other countries. In some states of the USA, such as the state of Alabama, the rate of combined class application is quite high. In the state of Alaska, although the number of teachers to carry out the combined classrooms practice is low, teacher recruitment is approached meticulously (ATP, 2015; Erdem, 2011). Recent statistics show that the rate of combined classrooms in Finland is 16.4%, in Austria 15.3%, and in South Africa 30%. Research also shows that the quality of education in combined classrooms in these countries is quite difficult, especially for practitioners (Blease & Condy, 2015; Statistik Austria, 2013).

Reasons for Combined Classroom Practice

The practice of merged classrooms is based on some justifications. While one of them is geographical conditions, another one is the results of economic conditions. As a result of the changes in the population, there was a need for a unified classrooms practice in order to provide education in some way. The low number of students resulting from the low population brought along definitions according to rural areas. In addition, the problems of assigning teachers to these regions and the lack of sufficient number of classes made the combined class compulsory (Amaç & Yıldırım, 2020; Göçer & Palavan, 2017). Regarding this situation, UNESCO gathered the reasons for the unified classrooms practice under ten headings with the "Education for All" (EFA) report in 2005 (Little, 2004, p. 6):

1. In sparsely populated areas, all classes are taught together or with two teachers,
2. In sparsely populated areas, some educators teach combined classes within a school, while others teach separate classes,
3. Decrease in the number of educators and students in schools with self-contained classrooms over time,
4. The fact that there are school and classroom requirements in areas with increasing population, but these requirements are not met,
5. The lack of importance given to the school in the region due to the parents' desire to take their students to better schools,
6. A formal increase in the number of students enrolled in a branch, resulting in the merging of most students into other branches,
7. The presence of students of different ages and grade levels in mobile schools,
8. Teachers appointed to the regions do not go to these regions voluntarily and the need for teachers weakens in terms of quantity and quality,
9. The shortage of teachers in unified classrooms due to different reasons, despite the creation of a suitable educational environment and sufficient number of teachers,
10. Some schools find this practice more appropriate than regular education on the grounds of curricula and educational reasons.

When these items are taken into consideration, the reason for the use of combined classrooms is primarily the insufficient number of students due to the small population. In addition to this, reasons such as teacher shortage are among the items related to teachers. Only in the tenth item, it can be concluded that this practice is continued as a result of a preference. Due to the small number of students, it is considered more economical to teach all grade levels in one classroom with a single teacher instead of building several classrooms in a school. The idea that it would be safer for students at the primary school level to study with their families in terms of pedagogical aspects, and that it would be difficult for the child to leave the family from a young age with the transport system is considered important. From this point of view, it is considered as a social service provided by the state that students receive education in their regions (Göçer & Palavan, 2017; Gözbaba, 2020; Samancı, 2016; Taşar, 2014).

Advantages of Combined Classroom Practice

The concept of unified classrooms is a 'solution' rather than a 'problem' in the Turkish education system. Having a roof for education in rural areas with low and decreasing population is a system that provides a solution as it is a close option and easily accessible in conditions where geographical conditions are not suitable (Köksal, 2009; Ocakçı, 2017). When we look at the education applied in combined classes, it is seen that the goals to be achieved in self-contained classes emerge naturally in combined classes. With the development of students' self-discipline skills, self-learning, self-management, research, questioning and problem-solving skills develop. At the same time, it is seen that practices such as group work, co-operation and peer learning are more prominent. We can show the beneficial aspects of the unified classrooms practice as follows (Bilir, 2008; Erdem, 2019; Samancı, 2016; Şahin, 2015; Taşdemir, 2012):

1. Education can be provided in regions with low standards.
2. Teacher needs can be met and assignments can be made.
3. In rural areas with sparse populations, both the right to education and the principles of economy are respected without the need for large and costly schools.
4. Peer learning is realized by ensuring the interaction of student groups of different ages and levels.
5. Students develop their learning skills by working alone during homework hours when they are not under the responsibility of the teacher.
6. Sharing and cooperation behaviours are supported instead of competition among students.
7. Students who cannot reach the course outcomes with students at their own level for different reasons can learn from students at the previous level.
8. The small number of students allows the teacher to deal more easily with students with individual differences.
9. Depending on the class in which the lectures are given, the student has the opportunity to repeat the lessons of the previous year or to have preliminary knowledge about the lessons to be learnt in the following year.

Limitations of Combined Classroom Practice

Unified classrooms, which have a large proportion of primary schools among the institutions providing education within the state in Turkey, are considered important because they provide education to many students and are a different application. However, it has some limitations in terms of deficiencies in practice. These limitations can be listed as follows (Abay, 2007; Aksoy; 2008; Al, 2019; Ocakcı, 2017; Köklü, 2000; Köksal, 2009; Yılmaz, 2011):

1. Teachers who do not have experience in merged classrooms have difficulties in adapting to the location and merged classroom practice.
2. Facing transportation problems due to the fact that unified classrooms are generally far from city centers
3. Problems in accessing resources such as technology, infrastructure, school building needs, teaching materials
4. Migration from villages to cities and decrease in the number of students in this situation
5. The curriculum program applied in all schools is the same as the curriculum program applied in unified classrooms
6. The fact that teachers carry out the maintenance and administrative work of the school in addition to teaching
7. The problems of conducting lessons with different students according to age, individual differences, academic level, ability and knowledge variables at the point of reaching the desired goal.

The limitations listed in the literature are; adaptation problems of the teachers who are the implementers of the application, lack of a special program, technical infrastructure deficiencies, the difficulty of holistic conditions brought by different settlements.

Art Education

The existence of art is an indicator of an integrated phenomenon that begins with the existence of humanity and manifests itself in every aspect of life. Throughout the historical process, it has taken place in different cultures, different perspectives, and in this respect, in every position where human beings are located. While it is in question in every period, it has reached to the present day by being kneaded in the circle of human feelings and thoughts. In this case, the absence of a common definition specific to art is one of the most normal results. Famous philosophers and writers for the definition of art, have

defined art from their own perspectives. While Picasso sees art as a way of life, according to Hegel, art is the appearance of the soul in the essence. Bacon, on the other hand, sees art as the human being who settles in nature, and art is the life of man as a whole and the ability to convey his thoughts (Bakırhan, 2019; Türkdoğan, 1981; Yılmaz, 2021). Erinç (2010) defines art as "doing a job like a master and the product produced for the work done is the work of a master" (p. 102). Artut (2006) defines art as "Art is a universal means of communication and the most effective tool for the individual to express himself/herself and therefore to realize himself/herself" (p. 139). Balcı and Say (2013) define art as "Art is a human-specific activity and on this basis, everything that affects human beings also affects art" (p. 44).

Although the concept of art is a part of human and society, it is the common denominator of every change and development. Art, which is constantly developing, renewing and strengthening its bond with the period, introduces itself to new ages and generations. In addition to creating the dynamics of society and culture, it prepares the ground for the formation of great interactions. Art education is needed for the transfer of art knowledge. In this case, individuals are introduced to art education at a very young age and trainings are given from primary school level in order for the interpretation process to progress more quickly (Başbuğ & Başbuğ, 2016).

As societies have developed and changed depending on various variables, art education has also developed and changed depending on these variables. Art education, which closely follows the cultural, scientific, economic, geographical and political transformations of societies, has made progress within the framework of certain rules and planning. As the society has different expectations for the education system, the need for art education has been implemented according to different purposes and methods. In addition, the emergence of new fields of science such as psychology, philosophy, logic, natural science, sociology, anthropology and aesthetics has affected the sustainability of these aims and methods. With the emergence of movement formations and artists who pioneered the movement, the existence of new conceptions of art has been recognized. Thus, societies' different perspectives on art and artists have created new ways of thinking. The developments brought about by this situation have helped to start studies on the scientific basis of art education. Art education has gone through many stages in terms of history and has enabled societies and itself to progress by renewing (Şahin, 2018). Just as art is seen as a means of communication, art education is a phenomenon that enables this tool to be used in the most accurate way. Art education is one of the best ways to carry the traces of the past to today's world. Art education, which is planned and programd under the roof of education, shows order and responsibility to individuals. Art education enables individuals to have beautiful identities such as being rational, consistent, original, sensitive and harmonious, as well as being able to gain multidimensional thinking, research, questioning, creative thinking skills (Çellek, 2003; Gökdere, 2018).

Aim of Art Education

Education through art sheds light on the creativity of individuals, and emotions and thoughts are filtered and included in the construction process. Art education, which is the main element of intuitive education, aims at the development of individuals by considering the unity of characteristic features and skills (San, 1977). The aims of art education are defined by Read (1981) as; "To make emotional states understandable and shareable, to transfer experiences in the flow of consciousness, to be specific and standardized to the natural structure of perception and sensation" (p. 132). San (1977), on the other hand, stated the aims of art education according to today's perception as "emphasising the importance of art in human life, using art as a means of communication, supporting skills such as critical, creative and artistic thinking, creating aesthetic concern, shedding light on one's own cultural values as well as versatility" (p. 21). Based on these aims, art education should contribute to being productive and creative according to the age levels at which it will be effective. While supporting the behavioural and cognitive development of individuals, the goals are achieved by supporting the development of emotions (Yılmaz, 2021).

Art education starts with play in childhood for the first time in an individual's life. The behaviours, skills and emotions developed in this period prepare the ground for the child to discover himself/herself. In this process, the child begins to reveal what he/she experiences and what makes him/her feel through

art. In addition, while experiencing psychological relaxation, he/she starts to express himself/herself more comfortably and becomes emotionally stronger (San, 1983). Art education, especially in primary and secondary school periods, is the most important step of the child's personality and character development (Aslantaş, 2014). Art education is organized under various course names at primary and secondary school levels. These course names are 'Visual Arts', 'Art Activities' and 'Technology and Design' (Uygun, 2019, p. 15).

Visual Arts Education at Primary School Level

Visual Arts Education is the name given to all the theoretical and practice-based studies in higher education levels, including pre-school period, which gathers many art branches under one title, including painting, architecture, sculpture, graphic, industrial and practical arts, as well as photography, cinema and fashion art (Kırıçoğlu, 2009). The Visual Arts course in the current program was previously called 'Painting and Drawing'. The reason for changing the name of the course was that art education, which has intense goals in line with the effect of multiple perception stimuli brought by the conditions of our age, cannot achieve its goals under only one discipline area. In order to ensure awareness and adaptation in the age we live in, we must be prepared for constantly increasing stimuli. In this way, the Visual Arts course, which develops awareness and adaptation in individuals, should provide a broader perspective on the universally changing culture, art, science and life styles (Türkkan, 2008).

Visual arts course takes the important responsibility of raising art producers and consumers who are sensitive to art through the development of students' creativity and aesthetic consciousness. The main aim of this course is to raise creative, thinking, perceiving, expressing emotions and productive individuals who involve themselves in art, have aesthetic personality perception, take part in the construction of society. Visual Arts course does not aim to train students as artists. What is important is to help them develop intellectual, perceptual, intuitive and emotional aspects in the process. In this context, the discovery of artistic talents involves the process itself. Each stage in the process is possible by guiding the process in order to discover the student's innate talents. These guidance teachings are stated as showing the differences between looking and seeing, making the student feel visual discrimination, helping him/her transform his/her experiences into artistic form, supporting him/her to express his/her artistic expressions well according to the correct use of materials.

The Visual Arts Course program, which undertakes the tasks of art education at the primary and secondary school level, is included in the primary and secondary school curricula renewed in 2018. This program was accepted to be implemented gradually by including the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades at primary and secondary school level (MEB, 2018). The program is planned with a constructivist approach, which is a student-centred understanding, taking into account universal values and stimuli suitable for today's age. It emphasized the need to prepare educational environments for this purpose by giving importance to out-of-class activities as well as in-class activities. For this purpose, the desired art environment will be achieved in terms of motivating students more easily, attracting their interest and directing them to artistic activities. With the program, the formation of aesthetic perception, development of hand-eye coordination, transfer of cognitive and affective experiences, application of interdisciplinary methods and techniques in a different way and putting them into practice with conscious guidance are important tasks undertaken by the program. However, in addition to the applications, the program includes theoretical examination and understanding of artworks from the past to the present, visual reading-writing and the development of art history awareness and art accumulation (Demir, 2014; MEB, 2018; Türkkan, 2008).

Primary and Secondary School Visual Arts (Grades 1-8) Curriculum

The program includes visual arts education for eight years and consists of successive stages: primary school (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades) in the first stage and secondary school (5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades) in the second stage. In the first stage, the Visual Arts course is taught by classroom teachers, while in the second stage it is taught by teachers with a Visual Arts branch. It is seen that the curricula prepared for each discipline have common titles such as General Objectives of Curricula, Values, Competencies, Measurement and Evaluation Approach in Curricula, Individual Development and Curricula, and

Conclusion. Specific objectives, field-specific skills, points to be considered and explanations with achievements are prepared specifically for each course.

Specific Objectives of the Visual Arts Curriculum

Visual Arts education does not require an individual to be an artist or to have superior talents. Visual Arts education is a necessity for individuals from all age groups at all levels, as it provides advantages in terms of positive acquisitions and societies, such as self-expression, gaining aesthetic consciousness.

The aims of the Visual Arts Curriculum prepared in the light of these requirements:

1. Have visual literacy, perception and aesthetic awareness,
2. To have knowledge, skills and understanding of basic concepts and practices in the field of visual arts,
3. Actively participates in discussions about visual arts and evaluates these discussions,
4. Analyses the nature and origin of visual arts and questions its value,
5. Consciously monitors current culture-art objects/designs,
6. Understands the value of the cultural heritage of his/her own culture and other cultures and protects them,
7. Expresses his/her thoughts by using knowledge, materials, skills, techniques and technology effectively and safely in visual art works,
8. Associate visual arts with other disciplines,
9. Demonstrating ethical behaviour in the field of art,
10. Recognized professions related to the field of art,
11. To educate individuals who are willing to learn and apply Visual Arts.

Visual Arts Lessons in Combined Classes

When the literature was examined, only one study on the Visual Arts course given in unified classrooms was found. In this respect, our study is considered important in order to complete the deficiency in this field. The only study in the field is Kayalıoğlu's (2020) study titled "Investigation of Visual Arts Course Duration in Primary Schools with and without Unified Classes between 1948-2019" (p. 544). In this study, comparisons were made between the periods given to the Visual Arts course in independent and unified classrooms between certain years and suggestions were made for the necessity of extending the course periods. In the study, it is not possible to talk about a specially prepared program for combined and independent classes except for certain years. According to the results, it was decided that the Visual Arts course should be taught by the teacher of the class in all classes since 2012. At the same time, in the study, the problems of the classroom teachers arising from the lack of materials, workshops and materials in independent classrooms were determined. In addition to this, the problems of classroom teachers working in combined classrooms have been pointed out with a comment on how much difficulties classroom teachers who have difficulties in independent classrooms may have in combined classrooms.

When the current studies in this field are examined, the attitudes of teachers towards the Visual Arts course taught by classroom teachers in primary school and the problems they encounter are discussed. Özcan (2017) examined the evaluation of the Visual Arts curriculum by classroom teachers. In his study, classroom teachers stated that although they considered the curriculum sufficient, they did not have enough information about the curriculum, there were no areas for the course, there was no room for group work due to the crowded classes, and they had problems with insufficient class time. In the study conducted by Gökdemir and Filiz (2018) in order to identify the problems experienced by 3rd and 4th grade teachers in Visual Arts lessons and to suggest solutions to these problems, it was concluded that teachers' attitudes towards the Visual Arts course were positive, but they encountered some problems. These problems were expressed as lack of materials for most of the teachers, not being supported by the school administration, not having special workshops for the course, the achievements not being at an

understandable and applicable level, being a course that seems unnecessary for parents, and not bringing the materials. Şenkaya (2021), in his study, met with 108 educators on the problems encountered by classroom teachers in the Visual Arts course and the evaluation of teachers' opinions. Classroom teachers emphasized that teaching art to students within the scope of the Visual Arts course is very important for raising individuals who enjoy life. It was concluded that the classroom teachers were competent in the visual arts program, that they were able to transfer the methods and techniques to the students, and that they did not have difficulties in the implementation, feedback and evaluation stages. However, it was also concluded that some teachers did not feel themselves competent in the field of cultural heritage. In addition, it was stated that the general problem was due to the insufficient duration of the lessons.

The researches address the problems experienced by classroom teachers in the Visual Arts course as a result of the inadequacy of the program, workshops, materials and class hours. These problems are within the scope of the problems experienced by classroom teachers teaching in self-contained classrooms. In unified classrooms, it should not be difficult to estimate the quality of the Visual Arts course, which is taught for one hour in the curriculum. It is a known fact that more of these problems are experienced.

Aim of Study

The aim of this study is to create a perspective on the Visual Arts course from the perspective of the classroom teacher who is the implementer of the lessons in unified classrooms and to reveal the experiences. It is a matter of curiosity what kind of results the unified classrooms practice, which can sometimes be seen as a problem or an advantage in terms of education, produces in terms of art education.

For this reason, this study is considered important as it is the first study in the literature in terms of analyzing the positive and negative situations related to the Visual Arts course implemented in unified classrooms. In the study, the opinions of primary school teachers, their metaphorical descriptions and the conversations (debriefing) on the image obtained from the artificial intelligence application (Image 1.) were used as sources to obtain data.

Method

Research Model/Design

Phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research designs, was preferred in the study. In phenomenological research, it is aimed to reveal the perceptions and experiences of the participants from their perspective (Ersoy, 2016). In this study, the phenomenology design was preferred since the participants' perceptions and experiences about visual art education in unified classrooms were tried to be revealed.

Group of Study

The study group of this research consists of 10 classroom teachers (4 female and 6 male) working in primary schools in a provincial centers in Anatolia and teaching in combined classrooms. In determining the study group, convenient sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was taken as a basis. In this sampling, which prioritizes being easily accessible and convenient at the same time, the easiest and most accessible subjects are evaluated in the context of data until the sample of the required size is obtained (Berg & Lune, 2019; Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018).

Data Collection Tool

In this study, semi-structured interview form, metaphor study and artificial intelligence drawing application were used as data collection methods. The data obtained from the metaphors were transformed into a meaningful text and concretized with a colored drawing (Figure 1.) with an artificial intelligence application. The instruction given to artificial intelligence was limited to one time only. Afterwards, conversations (Debriefing) were held with the participants on the resulting visual to ensure

the internal consistency of the study and to concretize abstract expressions. The instruction given to the artificial intelligence was presented together with the visual.

Data Analysis

Within the scope of the research, categorical analysis technique, one of the types of descriptive content analysis, was used to analyze the data. The themes, categories and subcategories were tabulated and analyzed to make in-depth inferences.

The processes of data collection and analysis were reported in detail, filed and recorded in computer programs. The documents and findings were evaluated by another researcher and the similarities between the two evaluations were taken into consideration. For the consistency of this study, Miles & Huberman (1994) calculation formula [$\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}} \times 100$] was used. As a result, an acceptance rate of 90% was obtained. At the same time, artificial intelligence drawing and debriefing phases also contributed in this sense (Fraenkel et al., 2012). With the debriefing technique, participants were made to talk about the visual (Image 1.). The compatibility of the data obtained from these conversations and the metaphors presented regarding the situation of art education in unified classrooms is expressed as a percentage in Table 7. Thus, the research was supported in terms of internal consistency.

Results

Visual arts theme

Under the visual arts theme, there are social, cognitive, kinesthetic, artistic and spatial categories. Categories and subcategories were tabulated and analyzed.

Table 1.

Participants' opinions about the visual arts course

Theme	Category	Sub-Category	Frekans(n)
Visual Arts	Social	Self-expression	6
		Reflective	2
	Cognitive	Original thinking	5
		Synapse	1
	Kinesthetic	Skill development	3
	Artistic	Creativity	3
		Development of aesthetic perception	1
	Spatial	Imagination	5
		Detachment from reality	3
		Three-dimensional thinking	1

Looking at the data (Table 1.); it is seen that the participants constructed the visual arts course in their minds in five categories. At the top of these categories are the "social" ($f=8$) and "cognitive" ($f=6$) benefits of the visual arts course. The "social" benefits of the course: "expressing oneself" ($f=6$) and using competencies in a "reflective" way ($f=2$). In terms of "cognitive" benefits, "original thinking" ($f=5$) and "synapses" in the brain ($f=1$) becoming effective are among the schemas that participants have in their minds about the course. When the positioning of the course in the minds of the participants is analyzed, it is seen that "kinesthetic", "artistic" and "spatial" benefits are also expressed by many participants. Three participants stated that the course supported skill development in the kinesthetic sense. In terms of "artistic", participants stated that the course contributed more to the development of "creativity" ($f=3$), while one participant emphasized the effect on "aesthetic perspective". In the category of "spatial" intelligence, the participants emphasized the concepts of "imagination" ($f=5$), "getting away from reality" ($f=3$) and "three-dimensional thinking" ($f=1$). P2 expressed her opinion on this theme in one-to-one interviews as follows: "It expresses the imagination of the students to me. Because it allows students to get away from the real world by going out of their own world and discover their imaginary world" (P2, 2023).

When these data are evaluated, it can be concluded that the participants schematized the visual arts course as "what can be the benefits?" in relation to real life. Especially in terms of its contribution to students, they stated that the visual arts course can make a difference and support the development of

people in many subjects. It can be inferred from the data that creative, reflective, original and self-expressive individuals who can get away from reality can be possible with visual arts education.

The theme of art education in combined classrooms

Under this theme are the categories of culture, psychomotor benefit, social need and psycho-social benefit. Similar to the previous theme, a tabulation and analysis process was carried out.

Table 2.

Participants' opinions on the necessity of art education in unified classrooms

Theme	Category	Sub-Category	Frekans(n)
Art education in combined classrooms	Culture	Love of art	6
		Cognitive	Higher order thinking
	Psychomotor	Ability to express	4
		Skill development	5
		Social need	Aesthetic life
	Psycho-social	Making sense of life	2
		Getting to know the child	3
		Fun mode	2

The participants responded to the interview question about the necessity of art education in unified classrooms with answers in the categories of "culture", "psychomotor", "social need" and "psycho-social". As "culture", the necessity of the course was emphasized for the formation of "love of art" ($f=6$) in individuals. As "cognitive", the concepts frequently expressed by the participants that art education develops situations such as "high-level thinking" ($f=6$) and "expression ability" ($f=4$) in individuals were included in Table 2. In terms of "psychomotor", the importance of "skill development" ($f=5$), which reflects the internal dynamics of the course, is shown. The necessity of art education as a "social need" is associated with "aesthetic life" ($f=4$) and "making life meaningful" ($f=2$). At the same time, the "psycho-social" aspects of art were expressed in terms of "getting to know children" ($f=3$) and "having fun" ($f=2$). Participant P5 gave the following response to this question: "In this activity that children will do all together, I include more group work, which increases cooperation, responsibility and sociability skills" (P5, 2023).

These data show that art education (visual art education) is very necessary as a life-oriented and individual need according to the statements of teachers who are in the kitchen. It emerges that art education has a great role in shaping the individual and life and should be thought about in a real sense.

The theme of self-efficacy

How do the participants evaluate themselves in terms of being able to provide and conduct art education? The answers revealed by the interviews were analyzed under this theme with the categories of negative emotion, positive perception and dedication and related subcategories.

Table 3.

Participants' thoughts on their self-efficacy in providing art education

Theme	Category	Sub-Category	Frekans(n)
Domain knowledge/self-efficacy	Negative emotion	Feeling incomplete in implementation	6
		Positive perception	An enjoyable process
	Dedication	Everyone is happy	1
		Theoretically I'm fine	1
		Preparing thoughtfully	5
	Outstanding effort	4	

Table 3 shows the participants' views on their ability to provide art education. According to this, the participants mostly saw themselves as deficient in terms of being able to provide art education. This "negative feeling" ($f=6$) was expressed as "feeling incomplete" in the presentation of the course in terms of practice. The participants stated that they had more or less knowledge, but they did not have enough equipment to be able to practice. Regarding this situation, P6 and P1 stated the following: "I am someone who reads and writes on my own. However, I do not consider myself very competent in terms of visual arts" (P6, 2023).

Some of the participants also had a "positive perception" about self-efficacy in art education. They defined this situation as "enjoyable" and "a process where everyone can be happy" (f=1). In addition, only one of the participants stated that he was "theoretically" good in the context of art education. Continuing with the analysis of the data, it is seen that the participants have a "dedication" to art education. "Preparing for the lesson by thinking" (f=5) and spending "superior effort" (f=4) are at the forefront. The statements of K1, one of the participants regarding this situation are given below.

Since it is a field that I love and am interested in, I enjoy doing these activities with my students. I try to teach students what I have learned about this subject. I do not think that I am inadequate in providing art education. Of course, there may be some points where I am lacking because I am not an expert in this subject. But I try to do my best to help primary school students gain the skills I mentioned above within the limits of the possibilities. Maybe if our possibilities were different, I could express more clearly that I could get better results. But unfortunately not (P1, 2023).

When these data are evaluated, it is seen that the participants are sensitive about art education as a teacher and that they put forth their best efforts. However, it is revealed that the participants are insufficient in field-based practical issues. The suggestions of the participants about "what can be done" regarding this situation are presented in Table 4.

What can be done to improve art education (visual arts) in schools with unified classrooms?

In this section, what can be done in schools with unified classrooms to improve art education? The question was addressed. In this sense, the situations experienced by the participants and their experiences were deciphered as suggestions. The analysis process related to this was included.

Table 4.
Participants' opinions on improvements in art education

Theme	Category	Sub-Category	Frekans(n)
Improvement of schools with unified classrooms	Economic investment	Workshop	6
		Transportation	1
		Travel	1
		Technological capability	1
	System	Lesson hours	3
		Village Institutes	1
	Auxiliary resources	Guidebook	4

When the data in Table 4 are analyzed, it is seen that the idea that measures in terms of "economic investments", "system" and "auxiliary resources" can contribute to art education in unified classrooms is dominant. Especially in terms of "economic investment", the creation of "workshop" (f=6) opportunities was expressed by more than half of the participants. In addition, improving "technology", "excursion" and "transportation" opportunities (f=1) are among the other economic investments that should be considered by the participants. In terms of "system", participants suggested "increasing the number of class hours" (f=3) and "village institutes" style education (f=1). Many participants (f=4) emphasized that a "guide book" that they can refer to when they get into a deadlock can also be important in this sense. Some one-to-one excerpts of the participants' responses under this theme are as follows:

In order to create a common art culture in students, I would prepare a guidebook for teachers to use in their lessons. There could be works that teachers could do at their fingertips, appropriate to the level of the students, that they could enjoy. The other contribution I would like to make would be technology. Since technology is in our lives, creative artistic coding training could be included in this course (P1, 2023). The achievements that should be given in other courses can be simplified and the lesson hours allocated for art can be increased (P4, 2023).

When these data are evaluated, it is seen that when teachers are provided with sufficient help and opportunities, a much more effective structure will be formed in the name of art education. The most important of these aids are workshop facilities, guidebooks and increasing the number of class hours. Thus, it may be possible to create healthy individuals in terms of healthy education and the healing power of art.

The metaphorical depictions of art education (visual arts) in the minds of the participants in unified classrooms

In this section, the analysis of the participants' metaphorical perceptions about the visual arts course being given in unified classrooms and the process of concretizing the resulting data through artificial intelligence are presented.

Table 5.

Participants' metaphorical descriptions of art education in unified classrooms

Theme	Category	Frekans(n)
Art education in combined classes	Rainbow	3
	A riot of colors	3
	Diversity	2
	Holding hands	2
	Potential	2
	Cooperation	2
	Colorful brush strokes	2
	White	2
	Gray	1
	Excitement	1
	Discovering	1
	Black	1
	Creativity	1
	Colored palette	1
	Joy	1

Participants associated art education in unified classrooms with colors, differences, unity and originality in terms of representation. The categories of "*rainbow*" and "*riot of colors*" ($f=3$) were mostly produced as metaphors for art education in unified classrooms. In addition, "*diversity*", "*holding hands*", "*potential*", "*cooperation*", "*colorful brush strokes*" and "*white*" ($f=2$) color categories are also seen as the most frequently used metaphors for the theme of art education in unified classrooms. In this sense, some of the direct quotations for the metaphors produced by the participants are as follows: "Art education in unified classrooms is like a rainbow, because there are every color in art" (P7, 2023). "..... is like joy, it is a cause of happiness for every student I see" (P8, 2023).

When we look at the other metaphors produced, it is seen that the concepts of "*gray*" and "*black*" in terms of color, "*excitement*", "*discovery*", "*creativity*", "*colored palette*" and "*joy*" are categorized as the dynamism provided by the course ($f=1$). Some of the direct quotations for the metaphors produced by the participants related to these categories are as follows:

I think art education in unified classrooms is gray, because I think village children have a great potential artistically because they live in nature, they are not buried in concrete, they are in a very favorable environment for art, this is a white color. On the one hand, the fact that they are forgotten evokes a black color. When both are mixed, it becomes gray" (P6, 2023). It is like a riot of colors that come together with colorful brush strokes, because it is complex, potential, ready to be discovered, where differences are together, exciting (P1, 2023).

When we look at the metaphors produced by the participants, art education can be described as an artistic and socially unifying, entertaining, creativity-enhancing field that has the potential to include many colors. In this sense, unified classrooms can be an opportunity for empathic skills and collaborative attitudes in terms of art education. When all these metaphorical descriptions come together, what kind of a picture would emerge if art education was transformed into a picture? In this sense, an artificial intelligence supported product (Image 1.) was created to concretize the metaphors. This artificial intelligence description below belongs to the picture that emerged from this text after the metaphors were transformed into a meaningful text. The text is presented together with the picture.



I would say it is a riot of colors coming together with colorful brushstrokes. It would be an exciting work where differences come together, complex but with potential, ready to be explored. In this work, there will be creativity that will emerge by shifting the brushstrokes and creating new combinations. A work that evokes the impression of diversity, unity and collaboration. A palette of various colors in a painting, different figures coming together and holding hands, would symbolize students learning together in diversity and the unifying power of art.

Figure 1. The Participants' Responses for the Metaphor Study Applied as "Art Education is Like, Because" Were Transformed into a Picture with an Artificial Intelligence Application After Being Transformed into a Meaningful Paragraph

At the same time, the accuracy of this picture of the participants' metaphorical perceptions was also reviewed for the participants. The internal consistency of the study was supported by asking the participants to what extent the picture created with artificial intelligence reflects your metaphorical perceptions of art education. In this sense, the percentage data regarding the participants' responses to this question are given in Table 6.

Table 6.

Percentage responses of the participants regarding the extent to which artificial intelligence drawing overlaps with the metaphorical perceptions they produced for their own art education

Participant	%
P1	60
P2	100
P3	70
P4	80
P5	85
P6	85
P7	90
P8	85
P9	85
P10	85

Most of the participants stated that the picture created with the artificial intelligence application reflected their own views to a great extent. When the averages of the answers given by the participants in percentages are taken, a rate of 92.5% emerges. This shows that there is consistency between the drawing and the opinions. In this sense, it can be shown among the results of the study that the data of the artificial intelligence application can be used as an important factor in concretizing the research data.

Discussion and Conclusion

The practice of merged classrooms continues for some reasons. The most prominent ones are geographical and economic conditions. Population distribution and variable population rates are other factors. The definitions of rural and urban due to the insufficiency of the population have created effects at this level. In addition, there are problems in teacher assignments in rural and less populated areas. For this reason, it is inevitable that the classes are combined and transformed into combined classes. This situation creates different positive-negative situations (such as efficiency-inefficiency, success-failure, job satisfaction, etc.) on behalf of education.

In this study, a phenomenological evaluation was made on art education in the Visual Arts course from the perspective of classroom teachers who are the implementers of the lessons in unified classrooms. The aim is to create a perspective and to reveal the experiences. The results of the unified classroom practice, which can be seen as a problem in terms of education, in terms of art education were revealed with the views of the participants.

When the literature was examined, a study was found in which unified classrooms and Visual Arts course were handled together. Kayalıoğlu (2020) comparatively examined the course hours of the Visual Arts course in independent and combined classes in the curricula between 1948-2019. As a result of this examination, it was stated that the duration of the Visual Arts course in grades 1-4 was not sufficient for grades and should be increased rapidly. For this reason, this study can be seen as the first study in the literature in terms of analyzing the positive and negative situations related to the Visual Arts course implemented in combined classes. In the study, the opinions of primary school teachers, their metaphorical descriptions and the conversations (debriefing) on the image obtained from the artificial intelligence application (Figure 1.) were evaluated as sources.

Studies (Aydın, Coşkun, & Sidekli, 2015; Özdemir, Özdemir, & Gül, 2020; Tabur, 2023; Temizyürek, 2019) have revealed that the curriculum should be reviewed in the context of art education and branch teachers should be evaluated in terms of course presentation. It was observed that the theoretical knowledge that classroom teachers received during their undergraduate education about unified classrooms could not find its equivalent at the application stage. As a result of the studies, it was revealed that the teaching practices in the undergraduate education process are generally carried out in city centres, and teachers who encounter this practice in villages without seeing the unified classroom practice experience adaptation problems. In addition, the collection of combined and independent classroom curricula and course materials under the same roof causes problems for education stakeholders (Aydın, Coşkun, & Sidekli, 2015; Özdemir, Özdemir, & Gül, 2020). Classroom teachers may consider themselves inadequate in terms of presenting these lessons. Kahraman (2007), in his study examining the problems encountered by classroom teachers in the implementation of the visual arts curriculum, expressed the opinions and suggestions that the curriculum is incomplete in terms of suitability to the level and that the curriculum should be restructured, that branch teachers should teach the course based on the opinions that the course is not important, and that classroom teachers should get in-service training due to their inadequacy in most studies. Adıgüzel & Tomsur (2010) revealed the problems of classroom teachers that the Visual Arts course is ignored by administrators and parents, that there is a lack of suitable areas and materials for the course, and that teachers are insufficient in supporting students' artistic works. There are similar situations with this study. Especially in terms of materials, workshops and reviewing the course hours.

Likewise, there are studies (Gökdemir & Filiz 2018; Özcan, 2017) that reveal similar results with this study in terms of the contributions of the course to students. Researchers have determined that the Visual Arts course develops creativity, self-confidence, self-discipline and imagination skills in students. In addition, they suggested taking steps such as increasing the course hours in the programme, making the achievements suitable for age and level, raising awareness of parents and administrators towards the course, and providing workshops and materials in order to teach the course in a better quality. Similarly, Gökdere (2018) presented the gains provided by the use of activities in the implementation of the general objectives of the visual arts course taught at the primary school level to the opinions of classroom teachers. The general aims of the course were analysed in three categories: perceptual, aesthetic and technical aims. According to the results of the study, the teachers commented that at the perceptual level,

students' level of perception and imagination improved, their creative thinking and action skills improved, their visual perception level increased and artistic expressions were formed. In the direction of aesthetic and technical purposes, the teachers expressed the opinions that the students' perspectives on the concepts of art, artist and artwork changed, that they benefited from aesthetic art values while expressing themselves, that they were able to make appropriate choices in the use of tools and equipment, and that they improved their ability to make use of different techniques.

The results of this study revealed a more positive perspective compared to other studies. As a result of the research, it was revealed that teachers constructed the lesson more on the basis of its benefits. That is to say, they considered the course in terms of utilitarianism (in terms of society and students; individuals who can get away from reality, creative, reflective, original and self-expressive). The statements of the teachers who are in the kitchen revealed that art education (visual art education) is very necessary as a life orientation and an individual need. It was seen that the role of art education in shaping the individual and life is great and should be considered in real terms. It is seen in the results of some studies (Adıgüzel & Tomsur 2010; Kahraman 2007; Tabur, 2023; Temizyürek, 2019) that classroom teachers feel inadequate in providing art education. Similar results were also found in this study. However, it was observed that there were idealistic teachers who were self-confident and tried to put forth their best efforts at the highest level. Contrary to the literature; in this study, it was reflected in the results of the research that art education in unified classes had positive results and had a positive effect on both social development and artistic development. Especially the metaphor study and the artificial intelligence supported picture study created in this context revealed this. The picture study concretised the teachers' views on art education in unified classrooms and revealed a positive perspective according to their own views. It is thought that the subjective structure of art, its unifying / calming and impressive power is an effective situation in this regard.

The research can be repeated by implementing visual art training (in-service training) to classroom teachers. In addition, it can be reconsidered through a similar situation in a regional or another country. A new study supported by artificial intelligence can be designed. Teachers' opinions after the creation of the guidebook can also be evaluated.

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