VISUAL CULTURE AND COURSE CONTENTS:
THE USE OF VISUAL MATERIALS IN GENDER EDUCATION[1]

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ABSTRACT

Visual culture is becoming more and more effective in our lives due to the development of mass communication technologies. Visual resources are increasingly used in the content of university-level courses, as they have a major contribution to keep a subject in mind. On the other hand, gender education has become an increasingly important issue. As a result of the rapid development of mass communication, the use of visual materials in gender courses also increased. In this context, it is possible to say that visual communication, gender and sociology meet in common. In this respect, it will be useful to examine the use of visual materials in gender education. This study searches the lecturers' use of visual materials in gender education in university level courses. With this purpose, interviews were done with academicians providing education in the field of social sciences. In this study the tendency of academicians to use visual sources when teaching gender issues is searched. It is seen that academicians prefer to use visual sources when teaching gender. In the light of all these, after the examination of the importance of visual materials at university education, gender education and visual material relation will be examined in this study. Finally, results of the interviews will be analyzed.

Keywords: Visual materials, visual culture, gender, course contents, teaching.

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[1] A shorter version of this study was presented at 2nd International Symposium of Education and Values.

INTRODUCTION

On the cover page of his famous book "Ways of Seeing", John Berger (2008) writes that "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. Power of visuality is an important topic of research today. Contemporary society is an "information society" where much of the information has a visual nature (Berger, 2019). Interpretation and learning processes are becoming more and more visual in this "visual nature". In this age of visual communication, it is important to increase visual literacy and to include more visuals in learning processes.

According to a study, "approximately 40% of college students are visual learners, preferring to be taught through pictures, diagrams, flow charts, timelines, films, and demonstrations" (Clarke III et al., 2006: 218). With the impact of social media and visual culture, the number of visual learners is probably much higher today. In the future, the number of visual learners among university students is likely to increase. In the light of all these, we can think that the use of visual materials may help students to understand their courses.

At that point, if we look at the relation of sociology with the visual sources, early studies (Becker, 1974) have demonstrated the early use of photography as a research method (Fleischhauer and Brannan 1988, Wagner, 2002: 161). In addition to the developments within the sociology discipline itself, "anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists who work in fields of education, architecture and medicine started to collect and analyze data on the visual dimensions of social life" (Wagner, 2002: 162). Afterwards, it was seen that documentary filmmakers' and documentary photographers' work could also be used for social research. The visual sources that continued to be used as a side-source in this way for a while have become an area that was discussed in the 1970s as a research method (Banks, 1995). Today, visual materials such as cinema films, documentary films, photographs, animations and drawings are being used in sociology as main sources and/or analysis materials at university courses.

On the other hand, courses focusing on gender issues are an important part of university level courses. In this context, it can be said that the use of visual materials in courses which focus on gender issues may increase understanding and remembering levels of students. Based on this conceptualization, this study searches the tendency of academicians to use visual materials while teaching gender.

In the light of these, the study will examine the importance of visual materials at the university education first. Second, gender courses, their interdisciplinary context and the use of visual materials at gender course teaching will be discussed. Finally, interview results of the study will be analyzed.

Importance of Visual Materials at University Education

As it is mentioned above, "approximately 40% of college students are visual learners, preferring to be taught through pictures, diagrams, flow charts, timelines, films, and demonstrations" (Clarke III et al., 2006: 218). This is an important indicator. Since, if it so, without visual resources, some students might fail to meet expectations of the courses because of the differences between instructors' teaching styles and their learning styles. According to some studies, some university students learn better with visual resources, they can have a better balance between verbal and visual techniques with this method (Clarke III et al., 2006: 218). This situation is called as visual learning.

According to Felder and Soloman (2000), there are different learning styles as visual/verbal. "Visual learners remember best what they see, such as pictures, diagrams, flow charts, timelines, films, and demonstrations. Verbal learners remember best in written or spoken words, such as lectures and presentations" (Felder and Soloman, 2000). They advise students who have visual learning styles to find visual material such as diagrams, sketches, schematics, photographs or any other visual material for the course (Felder and Soloman, 2000). From this point forth we understand the importance of visual materials for the courses.

Most people get information from visual materials and then remember them better than written or spoken text (Dale 1969). But, most of the social science literature is as written since "traditional teaching techniques are designed for auditory sequential learners…. But, for visual spatial learners, concepts are rapidly understood when they are presented within a context and related to other concepts" (Sword, 2000). Especially in today's world which is surrounded by digital images, videos, photographs and games, students are more and more visually thinking and learning.

The use of films, photographs, drawings, sketches and, videotapes and dramatizations is suggested to instructors to illustrate lessons and increase level of understanding of students, especially of those who are visual learners (Felder and Henriques, 1995: 24). Felder and Henriques (1995: 28) wrote for the university instructors: "Make liberal use of visuals. Use photographs, drawings, sketches, and cartoons to illustrate and reinforce the meanings of vocabulary words. Show films, videotapes, and live dramatizations to illustrate lessons in texts (visual, global.)" Visualization is the key factor for visual spatial learners since they think and remember in images or pictures and like videos or moving images (Sword, 2000).

Since visual learning is a learning process of brain, some studies examined the process of developing visual annotations to reflect the memory function. According to this, it is possible to state that "the visual depiction is based on four essential elements: (a) Attention is focused on a central image, (b) main themes radiate as branches from the central image, (c) topics of lesser importance are represented by higher-level branches, and (d) branches connect in a nodal structure" (Buzan, 1991 in Clarke III et al., 2006: 219). Thus, it might be useful for the university lecturers to pay attention to visual learners and visual learning processes of students and so, to use visual materials in their courses.

Nowadays digital visual sources, social media and digital games affect our lives extensively. For instance, there are around 43 million facebook users and 37 million instagram users in Turkey (www.statista.com, 2018). Besides, there are around 22 million digital gamers in Turkey according to a study (Kepenek, 2018: 652). These are visual based social media platforms and most of the content is shared throughout visuals such as videos, photographs, animations, sketches etc. But on the other hand, most of the social sciences courses have still been designed for verbal learners. Hence, using visual materials in course contents can increase students' level of understanding and remembering the contents.

In an environment where visual communication is so effective, the importance of visual literacy increases as well. Visual literacy and visual learning are among the important concepts of visual communication. Even though visual intelligence is a cognitive process[2], visual literacy can be improved. The development of visual literacy will enable us to perceive the visuals we see every day with more awareness.

> Visual literacy is defined in terms of two constant components- first, the ability to understand visual images and, second, the ability to create or use images as means of expression and communication. This distinction parallels the read and write characteristics of print literacy.… In terms of broad educational goals, visual literacy can be seen as promoting greater experience in the workings of visual media coupled with a heightened conscious awareness of those workings (Messaris and Moriarthy, 2005: 482).

This situation is directly related to our education levels, our knowledge and perspectives towards life. Because we do not perceive what we see exactly as it really is. "Rather our brains combine information from our eyes with data from our other senses, synthesize it, and draw on our past experience to give us a workable image of our world. This image orients us, allows us to comprehend our situation, and helps us to recognize significant factors within it," (Barry, 1997: 16). Therefore, it is important to use visuals consciously and to develop students' visual literacies while teaching.

When it comes to gender courses, it is possible to reach many visual aids about gender and to use them in classes in order to increase their visual literacies[3].

Gender Education and Visual Material

Women studies[4] emerged as a study area at the end of the 1960s. Today, besides being taught as a course in universities, it is also the subject of many courses. "Gender studies has both a 'formal' presence in the academy where it is a recognized discipline (though one subject to the vicissitudes of funding and institutional support) and an 'informal' one, where existing subject areas offer courses or aspects of courses that specifically deal with women and/or gender difference" (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2005: 176). This situation brings a high interdisciplinarity and discussions of interdisciplinarity to the field.

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[2] Please see, Barry, 1997 and Williams, Newton, 2007: 99-16
[3] Please see Table 2 for the visual material preferences of the interviewees
[4] As being aware of the difference between gender studies and women studies concepts, both the two concepts are used in this study.

The early discussions of women studies focus on the issue that the field must be interdisciplinary since the women studies could not be understood without the knowledge of social sciences, humanities and mainstream sciences of the time (Friedman, 2001: 504-505). Because "feminist research emphasizes equity and social justice and starts from the premise that gender and sexuality intersect with race, class, (dis)ability, age, religion, geography, and others, which are identity aspects historically conditioned by social and political power" (Keifer, Smith-Shank, 2017).

Although there are discussions on the interdisciplinarity of the field, there is a well-developed interdisciplinary teaching mission for gender studies (Allen and Kitch, 1998: 275). Nowadays, gender issues are taught in many courses. Eventually, women studies have a practice which is towards qualifications and key ideas (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2005: 178). "Interdisciplinary research can yield new findings, theories, or methods otherwise inaccessible via disciplinary or even multi- disciplinary paths" (Allen and Kitch, 1998: 277). For instance, there are various multidisciplinary studies, campaigns and projects about violence against women (Kuloğlu, 2017: 215-217). Because of these, the subjects of other disciplines such as law, history, literature, psychology and sociology can illuminate the limitations (Allen and Kitch, 1998: 278).

At this point, the relationship between gender and visuals is important. Gender studies, which are related to many fields, cannot be separated from visual sources. Moreover, "gender equity requires research into visual culture from a gender consciousness… The dialogue between image and text provides multifaceted opportunities for making meaning" (Keifer, Smith-Shank, 2017). A lot of visuals include sexist contents and this gendered discourse is in every aspect of our lives. Gendered visual culture affects our perceptions about reality since we learn through the visual experiences in our daily lives (Keifer, Smith-Shank, 2017). Therefore, it is very important to examine visual resources with gender consciousness. There are various studies on this subject. "Central issues faced by feminist researchers of visual culture are power, social structures, property, symbols, and periodization/cartographies or lineages that connect ideas and artworks," (Keifer, Smith-Shank, 2017).

On the other hand, visual resources can be used not only to become conscious about the gendered discourse, but also to learn about important topics such as gender history, woman rights and important thinkers of the area. To sum up, the use of visual materials such as cinema films, photographs and documentaries are among the important supporters of the gender course contents.

METHOD

Within this scope, interviews were conducted with 11 academicians on social sciences field. Interview forms are used as the data collection material. Semi-structured interview questions were addressed to the interviewees. 7 of them are women (W) and 4 of them are men (M). 4 of them have PhD on sociology, 2 of them have PhD on history, 1 of them has PhD on Graphical Design, 1 of them has PhD on International Relations, 1 of them has PhD on Social Politics and 1 of them has PhD on Radio-Television and Cinema. Interviewees were asked a wide range of questions concerning their use of visual materials and the reasons for

using them if they are using it while teaching gender. Their answers to these questions were analyzed under the "Visual Material Preferences", "Feedback from Students" and "Reasons of the Use and Contents of Visual Materials" titles.

Table 1. Interviewees and Their Specialization Fields

Interviewee	PhD Field	Specialization Field	Courses in which Gender Issues Taught
A1 (W)	Sociology	Gender Studies	Introduction to Gender Studies, Feminist Methodology
A2 (W)	Sociology	Sociology of the Body, Sociology of Disability, Sociology of Youth	Gender and Social Service, Post-Modern Theories, Sociology of Environment
A3 (W)	Sociology	Gender Studies, Sociology of Communication	Gender Equality
A4 (W)	International Relations	Middle East Politics, Foreign Policy, Gender in International Relations	Gender in International Relations
A5 (W)	Ataturk's Principles and History of Turkish Revolution	Media, Communication and Journalism	Radio and Television Newscast, Television Production-Directing, Sociology of News
A6 (W)	Radio-Cinema and Television	Theories of Communication, Sociology of Communication	Introduction to Communication 1, Introduction to Communication 2
A7 (W)	Media and Communications	Visual Culture, Communication Studies	Short Film Production I, Short Film Production II, Basic Photography, Visual Methodology and Photography
A8(M)	Social Politics	Sociology of Migration, Economic Sociology	Sociology of Migration, Sociology of Leisure Times, Sociology of Institutions, Social Anthropology
A9 (M)	Sociology	Sociology of Scientific Knowledge	Introduction to Sociology
A10 (M)	Ataturk's Principles and History of Turkish Revolution	Early Republican History	Ataturk's Principles and History of Turkish Revolution II
A11 (M)	Graphical Design	Illustration and Mobile Applications	Advertising Graphics, Project Management

FINDINGS

Answers of the interviewees were analyzed under the "Visual Material Preferences", "Feedback from Students" and "Reasons of the Use and Contents of Visual Materials" titles.

Visual Material Preferences

Almost all cinema films can be analyzed throughout the gender representations. Because, "movies are accepted as important and complex social documents in their own right, serving a variety of functions" (Radner and Stringer, 2011). Besides, there is a wide range of visuals which lecturers can use in their gender courses. In this part of the study, visual material preferences of the interviewees will be examined.

When the visual material preferences were asked to interviewees, 7 of them answered that they screen cinema films related with gender issues in their courses. In this context, one of most preferred visual materials for the courses are cinema films. When we asked the visual material preferences, interviewee A3[5] answered the question as; "If we think that films are the representation of social life, students may find examples from their own lives in films and discuss them." A2 said that "Watching a film about the topic of the lesson increases memorability", so she prefers screening cinema films at her classes as well as documentaries. She stated that she screened "Desert Flower" (2009, Director: Sherry Hormann) film when telling female circumcision as an example. "Başka Dilde Aşk/Love in Another Language" (2009, Director: İlksen Başarır) film is another example she gave when answering the questions. A9 answered the question as "In general, I think they (students) understand better by watching." He gave "Made in Dagenham" (2010, Director: Nigel Cole) film as an example and A8 gave "Sufragette" (2015, Director: Sarah Gavron) film as an example to the films he which screens at the class and stated that "In the historical context, visual materials are useful in understanding gender struggles."

In this manner, we can state that interviewees think that audience may learn easier from cinema films since they may identify themselves with the characters and easily remember through a storified concept. Identification with the characters is an important part of cinematic fictions (Smith, 1995). Besides, watching a fiction film might help to visual learners to learn better.

When it comes to photographs, 6 of the interviewees stated that they used photographs as a visual material in their courses. With reference to photography's reminding, archiving and expression power, this is an expected consequence. Interviewee A1 answered the question that she used printed photography books when she needed to show photographs about a topic. She added that she prepared and selected the photographs before the class. A5, A7 and A9 stated that they used news photos. A5 stated that she used news photos when she teaches news ethics and gender equality. Photographs were also used for history classes. Interviewee 10 said "I show important women figures' photos in my lessons". Interviewees also expressed that they showed photos

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[5] Interviewees will be referred to as A1, A2, A3... in the text.

about history of women rights, women poverty, effects of war on women, immigration and women at their courses.

In the light of all these, it is possible to state that photography is a preferred teaching material for academicians. Because "mass photography, as a form and a practice, is both familiar and elusive as a research subject. It has become a commonplace to observe that we live in an image-saturated world and one where the visual penetrates all aspects of our public and private lives" (Pollen, 2016: 3). This situation creates a catchy effect for photographs and this catchy effect of photographs helps academicians to teach gender issues.

Table 2. Visual Material Preferences of the Interviewees and Gender Issues They Teach

Interviewee	Visual Material Preferences while Teaching Gender	Gender Issues in the Lessons
A1 (W)	Cinema films, documentaries, photographs, infographics	Gender Studies
A2 (W)	Cinema films, documentaries, cartoons, YouTube videos	Sociology of the Body, Sociology of Disability, Sociology of Youth
A3 (W)	Cinema films, documentaries, advertisement videos	Gender Studies, Sociology of Communication
A4 (W)	Photographs	Middle East Politics, Foreign Policy, Gender in International Relations
A5 (W)	News videos, news photographs	Media, Communication and Journalism
A6 (W)	Cinema films, advertisement videos, photographs	Theories of Communication, Sociology of Communication
A7 (W)	(Printed and Animated) films, short films, photographs	Visual Culture, Communication Studies
A8 (M)	Cinema films, photographs	Sociology of Migration, Economic Sociology
A9 (M)	Cinema films, documentaries	Sociology of Scientific Knowledge
A10 (M)	Photographs	Early Republican History
A11 (M)	Infographics, posters	Illustration and Mobile Applications

Another visual material which the interviewees use is documentary. 4 of the interviewees stated that they use or suggest documentaries to students when teaching gender. Documentary, as a non-fictional film, is one of the most important visual tools which reflect real life. Hence, lecturers prefer screening documentaries related

with the content of the courses[6]. When the interviewees were asked to give examples from these documentary films, they gave "Feminists: What Were They Thinking?" (2018, Director: Johanna Demetrakas) "Women in War Zones" (2009, Directors: Scott Blanding, Brad Labriola) "İsyan-ı Nisvan" (2008, Director: Melek Özman) and "He Named Me Malala" (2015, Director: Davis Guggenheim) documentary films as examples.

Other visuals preferred by the participants include infographics, posters, cartoons, illustrations, advertisement videos and YouTube videos. A1 said that "I use United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW)'s infographics and I think it is very useful to students when teaching gender equality." A11 also stated that he uses infographics in his classes and expressed that "I warn students to pay attention to gender equality. For example, in most infographics, women pictograms are drawn in skirts. I make students design women pictograms also in trousers."

Besides these, visual material can aid learning of text material as well. For instance, illustrations can aid learning of text material (Levie, Lentz (1982) as well as infographics, posters, cartoons and YouTube videos. To sum up, it is seen that interviewees use various visual materials when teaching gender (Table 2).

Feedback from Students

Feedback from students in the lessons is always important. In this way, lecturers can shape their courses according to the needs of the students. From this point of view, we asked feedback of students about visual material use in the lessons. A3 answered the question as; "When I ask a question, students answer it with referring to characters or scenes in a film which they watch in the class. They emphasize the course content by remembering a scene in a film or a photograph. Besides, during the exams, they answer the exam questions with referring to films that I screened in the lesson". A1 answered the question similarly: "Students answer the exam questions with referring to films or documentaries that I screened in the lesson."

On the other hand, watching visual material in the lessons not only makes students to understand the lessons better, but also shapes their daily lives. A8 expressed that "A student told me that she wrote an article to an art magazine about the film she watched in the lessons." A9 expressed that there was a discussion session at the end of his lessons and students gave examples with referring to films and/or photographs they saw in the lessons. Besides, A8 stated that students expressed that the films provided a better understanding of today's social problems. A2 also stated that students found the films interesting and wanted to watch other films about the subject.

Another point that interviewees emphasized is the demand of students to use visual materials. A6 stated that students often demanded the use of visual materials: "If the subject is very theoretical, they want the use of visual materials in order to understand it better." A10 also said that students demanded the use of visual materials. A11 said that "Students often demand the use of visual materials. This is very normal because they

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[6] For a study about the use of documentaries in the lessons, please see: McCormick; Hubbard,2011

grew up in a digital and visual age." Demands of students demands overlap with today's world which is surrounded by digital images, videos, photographs and games.

These answers might be explained as the effect of identification and storifying as well. Storifying and identification are elements of learning process and especially when students watch a film or a documentary, storifying and identification with the characters make them understand and remember the subject better (Smith, 1995). Besides, seeing visual data help visual learners to understand the subject.

Reasons of the Use and Contents of Visual Materials

There may be different reasons for using visuals in lessons. However, all the interviewees stated that they prefer to use visual materials because their contribution to the learning levels of the students. We asked the interviewees the courses they teach gender studies (Please see Table 1), topics they teach in the courses and their visual material preferences (Please see Table 2).

As we can see in the table 1, interviewees teach gender issues in a wide range of lessons such as Introduction to Gender Studies, Feminist Methodology, Gender and Social Service, Post-Modern Theories, Sociology of Environment, Gender Equality, Gender in International Relations, Radio and Television Newscast, Television Production-Directing, Sociology of News, Introduction to Communication, Short Film Production, Sociology of Migration, Sociology of Leisure Times, Sociology of Institutions, Social Anthropology , Introduction to Sociology, Ataturk's Principles and History of Turkish Revolution II and Advertising Graphics.

We also asked the interviewees in which topics they use visual material in their courses. They mentioned the topics such as Woman Rights, Gender Equality, Feminist Theories, Violence Against Woman, Woman and Labor, Feminist Movements, Woman and Media, Woman and Environment, Women Suffragettes, Women Leaders, Refugee Women and Children, News About Woman, Discriminatory News Language, Women Workers in Media, International Women's Day, Semiology and Woman, Masculinity, Gender Roles, Gender Stratification, Violence Against Woman, Woman Rights in Turkey and Social Change and Women.

Lastly, we asked the interviewees why they preferred visual materials in their courses. One of the main reasons of visual material use is their memorability. A1 stated that "I support the course with visual materials rather than just giving theoretical information. I think this way is catchier." A4 expressed that she used photographs of women suffragettes, women leaders, refugee women and children in her courses. She stated that using photographs increases memorability of the topic. A5 indicated "Analyzes made on news photos are more memorable and raise awareness of students." A6 said that she used visual material to make the topics more concrete for the students and to connect them with the topic. Answers of the interviewees show us that, the memorability of visuals is an important factor for them when teaching gender.

Another reason of visual material use may be explained with identification. When we watch a fiction film or a documentary, we watch other people's stories either fictional or real life. Storifying of a subject is a method of

teaching. People may learn and storify concepts easier (Coles, 1989). Therefore, films and documentaries may help to the learning process of a course. A8 said "In the historical context, visual materials are useful in understanding gender struggles. During the evaluation of social relations in the context of gender, visual materials reveal the power and power relations better. Besides, students understand that the literature corresponds with the real human experiences through visual materials. " A3 expressed that "If I screen a cinema film, students identify themselves with the characters in the film and they easily remember the message of the film or social issues in the film." Actually, when someone watches a film and/or documentary; identification intercedes. Identification is a mechanism which audience of a film or a television program or readers of a novel identify themselves with characters (Basil, 1996). This situation lets the audience to understand the subject and social problems which are being represented in the film. This situation might be used when teaching gender studies as well.

When we asked the reasons of photographs, posters and illustrations use as a visual material, A11 answered as; "I think that the support of visual material when telling a subject improves the students' capacity for learning and understanding. It helps abstract concepts to be embodied in their minds." Photographs, posters and illustrations lead us to archive the history visually. Besides, they are great visual aids to embody historical facts and theoretical knowledge. Thus, the use of visuals while teaching gender issues might help lecturer to make theoretical and abstract knowledge concrete. Actually, "visual support to information which is meant to be explained, or its totally visual presentation, facilitates its reaching to the target audience. Information transfer throughout images is a long process, ranging from pictograms to graphics and even to motion graphics. We frequently meet with these images in our everyday lives." (Delil, 2017: 1178).

In sum, when we investigate contents and reasons of the use of visual materials at the courses, we see that interviewees prefer to use visual materials because they think that it helps students to understand and remember the subject throughout identification and embodiment of abstract concepts as it can be seen in table 2.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

Nowadays we live under the influence of visual culture. Especially in today's world which is surrounded by digital images, videos and photographs, people increasingly think and learn throughout visuals. This situation increases the use of visual materials in education. The development of visual literacy gains importance at this point. The development of visual literacy enables us to perceive the visuals that surround us more consciously. Thus, it is important to increase visual literacy and to include more visuals in learning processes.

When it comes to university courses, gender studies have a big importance among social sciences disciplines. Nowadays, gender issues are discussed in many courses. Visual materials have increasingly been used in social science courses. At this point, the use of visuals in gender issues becomes important. This study investigates the visual material tendencies of university lecturers who teach gender in their courses.

With this aim, we conducted interviews with 11 academicians who teach gender issues. We see that interviewees prefer to use various visual materials including cinema films, documentaries, photographs, posters, news photos, infographics, cartoons and illustrations in their courses. Interviewees think that students learn and remember better when they use visual materials. Students also give feedbacks that they understood better when they watch a film or see a photograph about the topic of the course. In sum, this study found out that the use of visual materials will increase visual literacy on gender issues. Besides, we can state that supporting gender issues with visual materials may help to make teaching easier and productive.

SUGGESTIONS

Visual culture affects many areas of our lives. Nowadays lecturers are increasingly use visual materials in their classes. In this study, the instructors stated that the courses they use visual materials were more productive. Starting from this point, increase of the use of visual materials both in gender courses and other courses will help to learning processes and development of visual literacies of the students.

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