

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S PAINTINGS FROM A VISUAL ANALYSIS PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the qualitative and stylistic differences in paintings created by preschool-aged children aged 5 and 6 years, aiming to understand how developmental factors influence their artistic expression. Painting, as a universal medium for artistic expression, captures emotions, ideas, and moments through colors and textures, particularly evident in children's uninhibited creativity and spontaneity. Variations in children's painting abilities based on age reflect differing stages of motor and cognitive development, highlighting the need to comprehend these differences for effective early childhood art education. Employing observational methods and visual analysis, this research examines artworks from 13 preschool students at Holistik Preschool in Sarawak, Malaysia, analyzing artistic elements such as lines, shapes, colors, and composition. Findings reveal that 5-year-old children often depict simpler shapes, vibrant colors, and direct representations of objects, indicative of developing motor skills and cognitive abilities. In contrast, 6-year-olds exhibit more refined motor skills and cognitive development, creating artworks with intricate details, complex compositions, and sophisticated use of color and shading. These developmental milestones underscore the importance of nurturing creativity through enriched artistic environments and diverse stimuli in early childhood education. Recommendations emphasize integrating art into interdisciplinary learning to foster lifelong engagement with the arts from an early age, supporting holistic cognitive and emotional growth in children.

Keywords: Preschool-aged children, visual analysis, artistic expression, motor skill, painting

1. INTRODUCTION

Painting is a profound artistic expression that transcends cultures and eras. Through the expert application of colours and textures on a variety of surfaces, painting captures ideas, emotions, and moments in time (Shavkatovna, 2021). It is an effective tool for communication, enabling artists to express ideas, arouse feelings, and provoke critical thought through visual representation. In the world of art, children's paintings in particular have a special place. Its purity, spontaneity, and unbridled inventiveness define it. Youngsters approach painting with an endless supply of imagination, frequently expressing their views of the world around them with vivid colours and

strong brushstrokes (Abdulhameed & Rashid ,2022). Their creations serve as windows into their thoughts, emotions, and goals in addition to serving as visual representations of them.

Unlike more structured forms of adult art, children's painting is unrestricted by formal rules or conventions. It embraces experimentation and exploration, encouraging young artists to discover their unique artistic voices. Through painting, children develop crucial skills such as fine motor coordination, spatial awareness, and emotional expression (Hoffmann et al., 2021). Moreover, it fosters confidence, resilience, and a sense of accomplishment as they see their ideas come to life on canvas or paper (Walshe et al., 2020). In essence, children's painting is not just about creating aesthetically pleasing artworks but also about nurturing creativity, imagination, and cognitive development in young minds. It celebrates the joy of discovery and the limitless possibilities of artistic expression from a fresh and unfiltered perspective.

Disparities in preschoolers' painting abilities and creative expression based on age differences, particularly between 5 and 6 years old, have become a key focus in recent educational research. This interest stems from the recognition that developmental factors play a significant role in shaping children's artistic development and expression. Children at age 5 have varying experiences and exposure depending on their age differences. There are notable differences in the environments for children in these age groups, such as access to art supplies, exposure to various artistic influences, and participation in structured art education programs (Nurjanah & Hardiyanti, 2020). These differences influence how children engage with painting and express themselves creatively. This study seeks to investigate and compare the qualitative and stylistic aspects of paintings created by preschool-aged children from different age groups.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the realm of early childhood development, the artistic expressions of preschool children through painting offer a fascinating window into their evolving cognitive and emotional landscapes (Brown, 2020). This critical review delves into the visual analysis of preschool children's paintings, aiming to unravel the nuanced layers of meaning embedded within their artwork. As young children engage with colors, shapes, and textures on canvas, they not only explore their creative potential but also communicate their perceptions of the world around them.

By examining these paintings through a visual analysis lens, this review seeks to uncover patterns, themes, and variations across different age groups and cultural contexts. Moreover, it aims to explore how children's art reflects their burgeoning sense of identity, social interactions, and imaginative capacities (Martin & Spencer, 2020). Paintings created by children aged 5-6 years offer a fascinating window into their developmental journey, encompassing cognitive, emotional, educational, and cultural dimensions (Forouzandeh et al., 2020). Researchers often employ qualitative methods such as observations and interviews to study children's painting processes. These methods provide insights into how children conceptualize and create art, as well as the meanings they attribute to their creations (Tao & Kamarudin, 2023).

2.1. Cognitive Development

The examination of paintings created by 5- and 6-year-old children unveils significant insights into developmental, educational, and cultural influences. At age 5, children are in a phase marked by emerging motor and cognitive abilities, profoundly shaping their artistic output (Kirinčić et al., 2019). Their artworks often feature rudimentary shapes, vibrant hues, and straightforward depictions of familiar objects, reflecting their nascent mastery of fine motor skills and spatial relationships. In contrast, 6-year-olds demonstrate heightened motor and cognitive capabilities, facilitating the creation of more elaborate and refined compositions. Their artworks exhibit intricate details, sophisticated color palettes, and nuanced explorations of shading techniques (Kirinčić et al., 2019).

Cognitive development plays a pivotal role in these artistic transformations. At 5 years old, children begin to grasp fundamental spatial concepts and rudimentary proportions, which influence the simplicity of their artistic representations. As they approach 6 years old, advancements in memory, attention span, and symbolic thinking allow for more complex artistic expressions. This developmental stage enables children to depict scenes with greater spatial depth, employ symbolic elements to convey abstract ideas, and experiment with more sophisticated visual narratives (Profice et al., 2021). Moreover, artistic exploration during this period fosters creativity and self-expression. Six-year-olds exhibit a burgeoning autonomy in their artistic endeavors, exploring various techniques and materials to refine their technical skills and develop their individual artistic identities. This phase not only underscores the developmental trajectory of artistic abilities but also highlights the role of educational practices and cultural contexts in shaping children's artistic development (Schulte, 2021).

2.2. Educational Significance

From an educational perspective, the variations observed in paintings produced by 5- and 6-year-old children highlight the evolving landscape of early childhood art education. At the age of 5, educational programs often prioritize sensory exploration and the development of fundamental artistic skills as foundational elements (Đorđević, 2023). This approach recognizes the importance of tactile experiences and kinesthetic learning in fostering creativity and early artistic expression. By engaging children in activities that involve experimenting with colors, textures, and basic artistic techniques, educators aim to stimulate sensory awareness and cultivate a solid groundwork for future artistic endeavors.

As children progress to age 6, educational strategies shift towards promoting artistic confidence and encouraging more sophisticated forms of creative expression (Halverson & Sawyer, 2022). Programs at this stage are designed to expand children's repertoire of artistic techniques by introducing them to a variety of media and tools. This allows young artists to explore different artistic styles and methods, fostering a sense of autonomy and ownership over their creative process. Moreover, integrating art with other subjects such as science, mathematics, and language arts provides interdisciplinary learning opportunities, enriching children's understanding of how art intersects with various aspects of their education and daily lives.

2.3. Cultural Influence

Culturally, the backgrounds and societal contexts in which children are raised profoundly influence their artistic styles and thematic choices. Cultural perspectives shape the subjects depicted by children, drawing from personal experiences, traditional narratives, and contemporary influences (Ramli & Musa, 2020). For instance, children from cultures rich in storytelling traditions may incorporate mythical creatures or folk tales into their artwork, reflecting cultural heritage and values. In contrast, children growing up in urban settings influenced by digital media may depict modern technologies or urban landscapes in their paintings.

Moreover, technological advancements play a pivotal role in shaping how children engage with and perceive art. The introduction of new artistic mediums and digital tools expands the creative possibilities for young artists. This integration of technology not only diversifies artistic expressions but also encourages experimentation with multimedia approaches and digital art techniques (Qiu & Zhang, 2023).

By exploring the differences in paintings created by 5-year-old and 6-year-old children provides profound insights into their cognitive, emotional, and cultural development. Understanding these dynamics not only informs educational practices and curriculum design but also underscores the significance of fostering creative environments that support each child's unique artistic journey from early childhood onward (Brown, 2020). Future research endeavors can further delve into these interplays, enriching our comprehension of how cultural contexts influence children's artistic development across diverse global settings.

2.4. Process of children's painting

The process of children's painting production involves a detailed literature review focusing on visual analysis methods. Children's paintings often exhibit simpler designs compared to adult artworks due to their developmental stage and varying levels of experience in painting. Observational methods play a crucial role, where researchers assess children's responses and behaviors during painting activities (Su et al., 2022). This helps in understanding how children perceive and interpret the tasks given, often revealing emotions and imaginative expressions in their artwork. Imagination plays a significant role as children engage in the painting process. It allows them the freedom to express their thoughts and fantasies through art (Russ, 2020). Children often depict aspirations and imaginary scenarios, reflecting their interests and inspirations from their environment and personal experiences. This creative process not only enhances their artistic skills but also serves as a platform for emotional expression and cognitive development.

The actual act of painting among children showcases a style characterized by simplicity and spontaneity. Their use of lines, shapes, and colors may lack the refined techniques of adult painters but demonstrates their unique perspectives and creative instincts. This process aids in understanding how children perceive and communicate visually, offering insights into their cognitive and emotional development through artistic expression (Holochwost et al., 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

Based on the study conducted, researcher visited the Holistik Preschool, which is located at the Malaysian Institute of Teacher Education, Sarawak Campus. The researcher selected the Holistik Preschool at the Malaysian Institute of Teacher Education, Sarawak Campus. This preschool offers significant advantages, including sufficient infrastructure and a location in an urban area (Basaruddin, 2016). Before conducting any activities, the researchers sought and obtained permission from the preschool authorities to carry out their research.

The research involved the participation of 13 children from the preschool. All the five children aged 5 years and eight children aged 6 years were selected technique to take part in the research activities as shown in Figure 1. The activities were conducted on 20th June 2024 during a specific time period, from 10 am to 11 am. This time frame was likely chosen to ensure consistency and to accommodate the preschool's schedule.

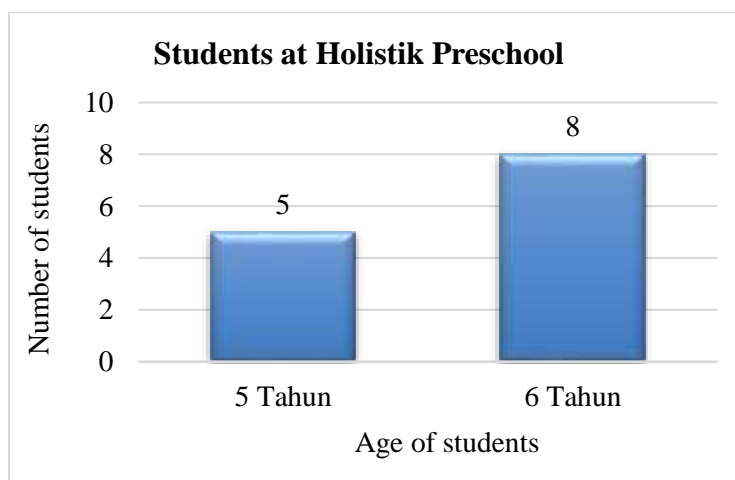


Figure 1: Number of students at Holistik Preschool by age group

The preschool students were asked to paint based on different themes. This study was conducted using observational methods to deeply observe the process of children's painting production and their behaviors towards drawing. In the subsequent process, the researcher applied visual analysis methods to the paintings of children, utilizing artistic elements such as lines, shapes, form, color, space, and texture. The steps of analyzing children's paintings based on artistic elements will be further explained to ensure clarity and understanding for the readers in that section.

4. FINDINGS

The researchers have categorized the paintings of young children into two age groups, namely five and six years old. They selected several paintings, noting painting prompts, artistic elements, and critiques related to these artistic elements. Based on the paintings produced by children, analysis has been conducted referring to artistic elements such as lines, shapes, forms, colors, space, and composition. The researcher found that elements numbered 1 to 3 were most frequently utilized, while elements numbered 4 to 6 were less commonly used.

4.1. Students Age 5

Student 1 was asked to paint on the theme "Playing with Friends." The resulting painting showed controlled and orderly lines, with figures resembling human figures. Additionally, the use of colors varied throughout the painting. The child demonstrated understanding of shapes such as squares, triangles, and irregular shapes. The question posed aligned well with the painting produced. Student 2 was tasked with painting on the theme "My Ambitions." The child produced a painting combining colors to create harmony. However, human figures were not successfully represented in the painting. Furthermore, line control was uneven and not prominent. The child managed to create a painting based on the given answer, depicting people playing soccer and an object of a gun indicating an interest in becoming a police officer.

Student 3 was asked to paint on the theme "Vacationing at Home." The resulting painting showed objects of various shapes, some understood and some not understood by the researcher. The arrangement of the painting was disorderly. The shapes of the objects produced varied widely. Additionally, the use of lines in the painting appeared wavy, possibly due to a lack of control over the pencil in painting. Student 4 was asked to paint on the theme "My Favorite Food." The painting depicted shapes resembling circles and stick figures. Furthermore, representations of humans and foods like donuts were significant as the student pointed out in the question. The production of line drawings appeared simple and cautious due to the limited depiction of arms and legs. Student 5 was asked to paint on the theme "My Family." The resulting painting depicted the child's family based on the questions asked. The lines were controlled, showing the child's imagination. Additionally, the child constructed complete human figure sketches.

4.2. Students Age 6

Student 6 was asked to paint on the theme "My Ambitions." The painting depicted cartoon Transformers and humans. The lines created formed imaginative cartoon characters. Within the space, the child drew a large-looking truck and small-looking humans. The cartoon truck was colored red. Student 7 was asked to paint on the theme "Memories with Family." In reference to the painting, thick lines were produced using crayons. The artistic elements focused on human figures and flowers. Additionally, the child created various shapes to complete human figures. The child showed skill in using different colors to depict the images created.

Student 8 was asked to paint on the theme "My Favorite Foods." This painting showed the child creating various circular shapes. The child used thin lines, and some curved lines were left unfinished. The painting resembled shapes like ice cream, balloons, and unknown forms. Student 9 was asked to paint on the theme "Favorite Toys." The child's painting depicted various-sized circular shapes. Additionally, the lines drawn were thin, regular, repetitive, resembling moving circles surrounding the central circles. The child drew shapes according to their imagination, and the objects were not clearly identifiable. Student 10 was asked to paint on the theme "My Ambitions." Referring to the painting, the artistic elements produced included books, houses, humans, and cars. The child then drew small-sized shapes. The line drawings were thin, regular, and more cautious. Student 11 was asked to paint on the theme "Favorite Toys." The artwork

drawn by the child depicted a figure riding in an armored car with several weapons inside. The child then created shapes with a variety. The line control produced was still not controlled to the depiction of their imagination.

Student 12 was asked to paint on the theme "My Family." The painting depicts the situation where the child is with the family having a meal together. The lines drawn were thin, controlled, and regular. In addition, the shapes were drawn small and resembled a cartoon depiction. The painting answered the question posed. Student 13 was asked to paint on the theme "My Family." The child created sketches resembling humans and also spider insects. Meanwhile, the shapes were more towards spider animals because of the integration of heads, bodies, legs, and arms. The lines drawn were thin and slightly thickened in some parts. The use of color shows that the child understands the use of colors in clothing.

Table 1: Artistic Elements Used by Holistik Preschool Children

Student/ Element	Line	Form	Shape	Colour	Space	Composition
Age 5						
Student 1	1	3		2		
Student 2	2	3		1		
Student 3	1	4	3	2		
Student 4	1	2	4	3		
Student 5	4	2	3	1		
Age 6						
Student 6	2					
Student 7	2	1		4	3	
Student 8	1	2	3	4		
Student 9	2	3	1			
Student 10						
Student 11						
Student 12						
Student 13						

Table 1 shows the artistic elements used by Holistik Preschool children. The preschool children frequently utilize lines extensively in their paintings, employing various types such as thick, thin, jagged, and curved lines to depict objects from their imagination. Their use of lines is notable for its regularity and careful application, highlighting their attention to detail in creating sketches. Additionally, these children often depict forms such as human figures and various everyday objects like toys, clothing, and household items. These forms are used to narrate imagined scenarios and situations that reflect the children's interests and observations. Shapes play a significant role as well, with children easily drawing circles, squares, triangles, and rectangles to represent different subjects, particularly human figures. In terms of color, preschoolers demonstrate proficiency in using colors to depict objects realistically and achieve harmony in their artwork through the use of diverse color palettes. However, elements such as space and composition are less frequently utilized by preschool children, suggesting a developing understanding and application of these artistic concepts in their paintings.

5. DISCUSSION

Paintings by five- and six-year-old preschoolers at Holistik Preschool were studied, and the results provided fascinating insights into the artistic expression and development of the students. The study explores the creative expressions of five- and six-year-old children through their paintings, concentrating on composition, space, lines, forms, and colours. Finding developmental patterns and variations in artistic expression between these two age groups is the goal of this comparative analysis.

5.1. Utilization of Artistic Elements

The utilization of artistic elements by preschool-aged children shows a progression from basic line control and simple forms at age five to more intricate and expressive use of lines, forms, colors, and composition by age six, reflecting developmental growth in creativity and visual expression which lines with previous findings by Itczak (2022).

5.1.1. Lines

Both age groups show a preference for heavily utilizing lines in their artwork. Five-year-olds often draw people and everyday objects using neat, ordered lines that vary in thickness and style. In contrast, six-year-olds demonstrate more self-assurance in their line work, using it to create imaginative characters and settings that are more detailed and creative. This finding aligns with previous research by Iigaya et al. (2020), which highlighted the progression of children's artistic skills and confidence as they age. Iigaya et al. observed that as children develop, their increased cognitive and motor skills contribute to more sophisticated and imaginative artistic expressions. This progression underscores the importance of age-related developmental factors in shaping children's artistic abilities and preferences.

5.1.2. Forms and Shapes

These young artists create narratives in which forms and shapes are central to the story. When drawing human figures and objects related to specific themes, five-year-olds use simple shapes like squares, triangles, and circles. At the same time, six-year-olds display a wider variety of forms, including more complex shapes and depictions such as cartoon characters and minute details of commonplace items. This finding aligns with previous research by Callahan and Winder (2023), which emphasizes that preschool development involves a progression in the complexity of children's artistic expressions. According to their study in Tasman's Psychiatry, the authors highlight that as children grow, their cognitive and motor skills enhance, allowing for more intricate and varied representations in their artwork. This developmental trajectory underscores the increasing sophistication in the use of shapes and forms from age five to six.

5.1.3. Colors

The use of colors reflects the developmental progression in both age groups. Five-year-olds employ colors to differentiate objects and create visual interest, while six-year-olds demonstrate a

more sophisticated understanding of color harmony and shading, enhancing the realism and vibrancy of their artworks. This finding aligns with previous research by Goodman (2020), who noted that children's use of color evolves significantly with age. Goodman observed that younger children often use bold and contrasting colors to capture attention and distinguish between different elements in their drawings. In contrast, older children begin to experiment with more nuanced color combinations and techniques, indicating a deeper comprehension of how colors interact and affect the overall aesthetic of their art.

5.1.4. Space and Composition

Spatial awareness and compositional skills show marked differences between the two age groups. Five-year-olds tend to produce paintings with a less organized spatial arrangement, often featuring crowded or scattered elements. In contrast, six-year-olds exhibit improved spatial organization and composition, arranging elements purposefully within the pictorial space to enhance visual storytelling and aesthetic appeal.

5.2. Developmental Insights

The results highlight artistic milestones in children's development between the ages of five and six. Five-year-olds demonstrate basic skills in colour application, line control, and basic form depiction, which reflects their early exploration of artistic concepts (Đorđević, 2023). Their works are typified by simple compositions and simplified forms, frequently presenting literal interpretations of assigned themes. Six-year-olds, on the other hand, demonstrate improvements in artistic expression through the more subtle application of artistic elements. They exhibit more imaginative representations of form and shape, more nuanced colour schemes, and better spatial organisation (Đorđević, 2023). Their meticulous characterizations and well-composed pieces demonstrate a deeper engagement with imaginative storytelling and thematic exploration in their artwork.

6. CONCLUSION

The examination of paintings by preschool-aged children, specifically comparing those aged 5 and 6 years, offers profound insights into their evolving artistic expression. Through meticulous analysis, it becomes evident that children's artwork undergoes significant transformations as they mature, reflecting advancements in motor skills, cognitive abilities, and cultural influences. Five-year-olds typically exhibit a rudimentary grasp of artistic elements such as lines, shapes, and colors, often portraying familiar objects in a straightforward and uncomplicated manner. In contrast, six-year-olds demonstrate more sophisticated compositions characterized by richer narratives, enhanced spatial awareness, and a refined application of artistic techniques. To nurture and support children's artistic development effectively, educational institutions and preschools should foster enriching artistic environments enriched with diverse materials and cultural stimuli. Integrating art throughout the curriculum can enhance educational experiences and facilitate interdisciplinary learning. Moreover, continuous professional development for educators is essential to adeptly facilitate artistic activities tailored to children's developmental stages. Collaboration between educators and parents plays a pivotal role in further exploring the factors

influencing artistic growth and fostering lifelong engagement with the arts. Ongoing research efforts should continue to delve into these dynamics, aiming to deepen our understanding of children's creative development and enhance educational practices accordingly.

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