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An Analysis of Children's Visual Artworks Through Free Drawing in Children Aged 5–7 Years

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Abstract

Children aged 5–7 years are in the preoperational stage of cognitive development. The problem that occurs in children of this age is that their ability to express their imagination through drawings is still limited. Previous research has not examined how visual expression emerges in early childhood drawings, particularly regarding drawing stages, object shapes, drawing duration, and sources of inspiration. This study aims to analyze the visual expression of drawings by children aged 5–7 years, focusing on drawing stages, object shapes, drawing duration, and sources of inspiration. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The subjects were 70 kindergarten children in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Data was collected through interviews, observation, and documentation, then analyzed using reduction, presentation, and conclusion-drawing techniques. The results showed that children's drawing process involves imagination, creativity, and storytelling. The most frequently drawn object was a butterfly, with the longest drawing duration being between 10–15 minutes. Most of the drawings were inspired by children's visual experiences. This study found that 61 children drew based on objects they imagined, while 9 children experienced difficulty expressing ideas visually. This research contributes to early childhood education by stimulating visual expression as a foundation for creativity in kindergarten learning. However, this study was limited to one region and a limited number of subjects, so it does not fully represent the cultural diversity of children. Future research can be conducted on a broader and more diverse range of subjects and children's drawings. Further research may also help children who have difficulty with visual expression.

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Introduction

Children aged 5–7 years are in the preoperational stage when they begin to develop symbolic, imaginative, and representational abilities. One way to achieve this is through free-form drawing activities. Drawing activities not only provide a means for children to express ideas and visual experiences but also play a crucial role in supporting various aspects of child development (Harun et al., 2025; Untung et al., 2023). Children tend to express objects that are close to their visual experience, although not all children are able to express their imagination clearly. In practice, it is still common to find children who experience difficulty drawing, either due to limited visual experience or a lack of self-confidence. Therefore, it is important to examine more deeply how children's drawings can reflect their visual abilities.

The development of drawing in early childhood is an important aspect in supporting their cognitive, social, and creative growth. According to Falvell & Piaget (1963), children aged 5–7 years are in the preoperational stage, which is characterized by the development of symbolic abilities, including the ability to express ideas through drawings. Meanwhile, Lowenfeld & Brittain (1964) emphasized that children aged 5–7 years are generally in the pre-schematic stage, where the resulting drawings reflect more imagination and personal experiences than realistic representations. Read (1958) also explained that drawing activities for children are one

medium for understanding and learning about the surrounding environment, or what is known as the theory of education through art.

The artwork that is most often done by kindergarten-age children is drawing. Drawing for children is expressing an object in visual form through strokes (Prayitno, Suryadi, et al., 2023). Drawing activities have benefits for children, one of which is that they can develop their creativity (Ernawati et al., 2022; Hayati et al., 2025). Children's emotional, interpersonal, and mental abilities emerge when drawing (Cornaggia et al., 2022). Drawing activities give children the opportunity to interact and improve social skills, thereby enhancing socio-emotional development (Zakaria et al., 2021). Drawing is one of the useful activities to help aspects of children's development. Drawing is a key activity for early childhood, serving as a medium for visual expression and stimulating creativity and social-emotional development. As such, drawing is an important tool for children's growth and development.

Drawing activities are one of the alternative activities that are easy to implement for children, this is because the tools and materials used are quite simple. Children are only given paper and pencils, and then they will express their drawings. The methods of drawing activities for children are varied; the most famous are the demonstration method and free expression. The demonstration method provides convenience for children, namely, the teacher will be guided or given steps on how to make a drawing object by the teacher. This method is quite popular, implemented by Tino Sidin in the 80s-90s (Setiawan & Angge, 2021). As time progresses in the current era, demonstration methods can also use animation media. This animation demonstrates how to make a drawing object for children (Prayitno, Harun, Syamsudin, et al., 2024). Apart from demonstrations, drawing can be done through free expression.

The free expression method is a method of drawing without the help of a teacher or other media; the work created is purely the expression of each child (Mayar, 2021). Children will confidently draw an object according to their point of view. Expression in drawing functions as a medium for documentation and reflection of kindergarten children (Kuperman et al., 2022). Expression of children's drawings, it is sometimes necessary to engage in dialogue with the child to understand the meaning. (Podobnik et al., 2021). Karya gambar anak merupakan representasi simbolik ekspresi anak dalam memahami lingkungan (Cunningham, 2022). Children who draw through the free expression method, the work produced has its meaning. This free expression method is one of the media to help children express visual-type drawing work.

The visual theory proposed by Lowenfeld explains that there are two types of images produced by children, namely the haptic type and the visual type. The visual type is the type of image produced based on real experience through children's visual observation (Prayitno, Harun, & Syamsudin, 2024). Children who remember and recount visual experiences will increase their ability to integrate explicit memory with implicit memory (Siegel & Bryson, 2024). The results of the drawings by 5 out of 6 children are visual-type drawings (Handayani et al., 2023). The types of images produced by children are mostly visual, namely 76% are visual and 24% are haptic (Prayitno, 2022). Other research results also show that 69% of children's drawings are of the visual type, and 39% of children's drawings are of the haptic type (Simorangkir et al., 2022). The results of the study all stated that the drawings produced by children are of the visual type. This is supported by various studies that show that most children's drawings have visual characteristics based on real experiences and observations of children.

The problem that we often encounter in drawing free expression is that many children draw objects of mountains. The results of a survey of 63 kindergarten teachers, the most common problem experienced by children in drawing is the weak ability of imagination in expressing the object of the drawing, namely, 60.3%. Other problems include weak fine motor skills at 25.4%, difficulty in making basic shapes at 11.1%, difficulty in making basic lines at 1.6%, and lack of confidence in children in making scribbles at 1.6% (Prayitno, Harun, & Syamsudin, 2024). This factor is also influenced by PAUD educators who still have limitations in drawing. The results of the study showed that 54% of 37 PAUD teachers were not yet skilled in drawing simple objects (Prayitno, Sudaryanti, et al., 2023). This problem is a factor in the difficulty of children

expressing image objects or artwork. This study aims to analyze visual-type artwork through the free expression method in children aged 5-7 years.

Previous research provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how children's drawings reveal emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of development. Scholars have highlighted that drawing functions as a form of self-expression, enabling children to communicate inner feelings and experiences beyond verbal language (Zeynep & Gunes, 2021; Hong et al., 2021). It also becomes a social-cognitive arena where imagination and observation intersect, reflecting how children construct meaning through interaction with their surroundings (De Andrade et al., 2022). Furthermore, studies demonstrate that drawing activities are intertwined with linguistic competence and the presence of imaginary companions, suggesting that artistic creation contributes to children's symbolic thinking and representational abilities (Imafuku & Seto, 2022). In addition, children's drawings often embody social affiliations and emotional connections with peers, reflecting the relational and affective dimensions of early visual expression (Shinohara et al., 2022).

Building upon these insights, the present study extends previous discussions by focusing on children's visual artworks produced through free drawing among children aged 5–7 years. In contrast to prior studies emphasizing structured themes or guided tasks, this research explores the stages of drawing, the diversity of object forms, the duration of drawing, and the sources of inspiration within a free-expression framework. This reflective and interpretive approach positions children's drawings as visual articulations of lived experience—revealing how perception, imagination, and emotion are synthesized through spontaneous artistic creation. In doing so, this study not only complements earlier works but also broadens analytical understanding of how young children engage in meaning-making through visual art as part of their developmental and expressive growth.

Methods

Research Design

The research method used in this study is qualitative with a descriptive approach to analyze visual type drawing works through the free expression method. Qualitative methods as a tool to explore and understand deep insights (Lim, 2024). This research was conducted from October to December 2024. A qualitative approach was chosen because the aim of the research was to analyze in depth the process of children aged 5–7 years in expressing their drawings.

Research Subjects

The subjects of this study were children aged 5-7 years in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The number of research subjects was 70, consisting of 32 boys and 38 girls. The number of subjects was obtained through purposive sampling with a non-formal approach. Children were recruited by research assistants through family and neighborhood networks, such as younger siblings, nieces, nephews, or neighbors' children, across five regencies or cities in the Special Region of Yogyakarta: Yogyakarta City, Sleman, Bantul, Kulon Progo, and Gunungkidul. The process of children drawing was done individually in their respective homes, so that children did not copy each other. This approach was chosen because the research is exploratory and does not rely on formal educational institutions. Data collection was carried out individually in each child's home, thus minimizing bias due to mutual imitation, which ultimately strengthened the validity of the research data.

Data Collection

Data collection techniques include documentation of drawing work, observation of drawing activities, and interviews or dialogue with children regarding the results of drawing work. The analysis aspects used are the shape of the drawing object and the color. The data obtained in this study were obtained from informed parental consent. Parents were explained the purpose and procedures of the study, and only children with parental consent were included. Children's identities were protected, and activities were conducted in a safe, home environment.

Research Instruments

The drawing object and color are aspects of drawing assessment to analyze children's drawing work, whether the drawing work is in accordance with the child's development or not. The drawing assessments were conducted directly by the researchers using validated observation guidelines for children's drawings. To maintain reliability, the researchers conducted internal consistency tests by reassessing some of the data at different times (intra-rater reliability) and discussing the assessment criteria with experts before the study was conducted.

Table 1. Observation Aspects of Children's Drawing Results

Aspects	Indicator
Drawing object	The lines are firm
	The shape is clear
	There are details
Color	Variegated
	Matching colors
	Full coloring

(Mayar, 2021; Prayitno, 2021; Prayitno, Harun, Syamsudin, et al., 2024)

This research procedure consists of three interrelated stages: imagining, creating, and storytelling. In the imagining stage, children reconstruct their visual experiences into symbolic ideas that form the basis of images. The creating stage demonstrates children's ability to express these ideas in visual form, namely the image object. Furthermore, the storytelling stage demonstrates children's narrative competence and emotional expression when explaining the meaning of their drawings. These stages form a complete analytical framework for identifying the visual types of children's drawings..



Figure 1. Stages of Children's Drawing Visual Type

Data Analysis

The data analysis used starts from data reduction, displaying data, and finally drawing conclusions (Waruwu, 2024). Data analysis of children's drawings was carried out through three main stages. First, at the data reduction stage, such as analyzing aspects of the shape of the image object and the color created to understand the visual meaning that appears (Prayitno, 2021; Prayitno, Harun, Syamsudin, et al., 2024). Furthermore, the reduced data was displayed systematically to see the tendency of children's visual expression. Finally, based on the results of the analysis, conclusions were made regarding the visual type of drawings produced by the children.

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, which involved comparing children's drawings, interviews with children about the meaning of their drawings, and observations made by researchers during the drawing process. This way, data interpretation was based not only on the drawings but also on the children's explanations and behaviors during the activity. Therefore, the data obtained was reliable.

Result

The results of this study analyze the expression of visual type drawing works in children aged 5-7 years through the free expression method. The number of children's works analyzed was 70, consisting of 32 works by boys and 38 works by girls. The main point of the analysis of this visual type drawing work is the expression of the shape of the drawing object produced by the child and the visual experience that is the basis of the child's imagination. The drawing objects created cannot be separated from the real visual experience experienced by the child. Children who have a good visual experience or sense of sight will be affected by their drawing work.

Stages of Expressing Image Objects

The results of the children's graphic expression in this study went through three stages. These stages start from imagining, creating, and finally telling stories. First, children try to remember visual experiences and get ideas for making pictures. Imagining takes time to get drawing ideas. Second, children will create the results of their imagination in the form of drawings. Third, children tell the results of the drawings they have created. Children's visual experience will determine the objects of the drawings they will make. The media used are pencils, oil pastels, and drawing paper.

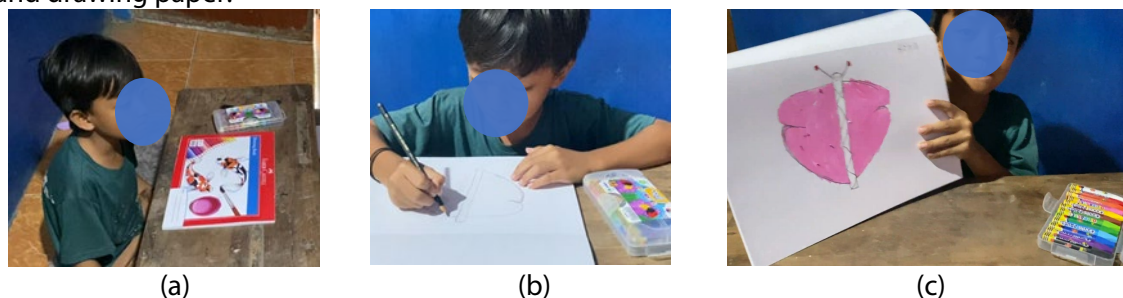


Figure 2. Stages of Expressing Image Objects (a) Imagining (b) Creating (c) Storytelling

Expression of Drawing Object Shapes

Based on the results of the analysis of the drawings made by children aged 5-7 years in D.I. Yogyakarta, all children draw according to their expressions. The drawings created have various drawing objects, most of which express animal objects, and there are still children who have difficulty expressing the drawing objects or are vague. The drawings made use of dry media, such as pencils, oil pastels, and drawing paper. The drawings created by children have various drawing objects. The drawing objects consist of a camel, lion, wolf, cow, turtle, panda, bee, turtle, butterfly, cat, rabbit, giraffe, fish, sheep, duck, chicken, and swan.



Figure 3. Butterfly Objects Expressed in Different Drawings, and the Most Drawn Objects
(a) Drawings Expressed by Boys (b) Drawings Expressed by Girls

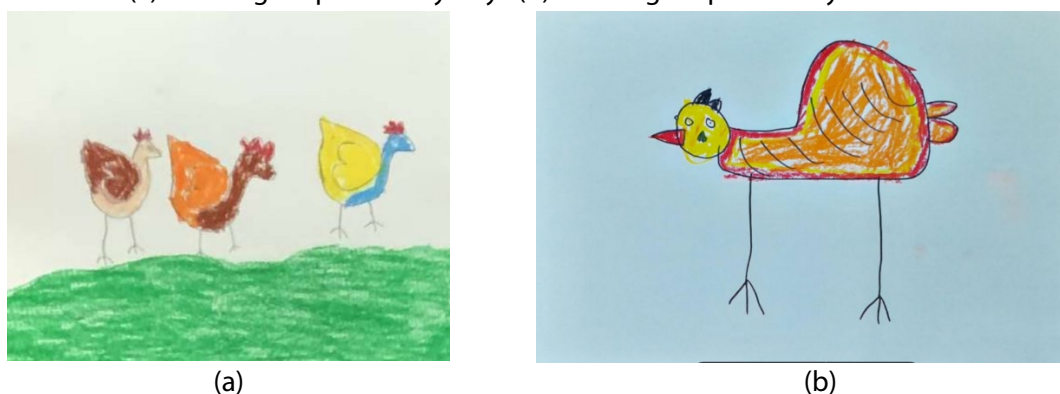


Figure 4. Chicken Objects Expressed in Different Drawing Works (a) Drawing Works of Chicken Expressed by Boys (b) Drawing Works of Chicken Expressed by Girls

Children aged 5-7 years are most often found drawing butterflies. This is because these objects have simple, symmetrical shapes, beautiful shapes, varied colors, and are often seen in their surroundings. Then, the next most commonly drawn object is a fish. Fish objects are popular with children because they are often found in their surroundings, pets, and their simple shapes. The main reason butterflies and fish objects are most often created by children is that they are easy to draw, and children often see these objects in their surroundings. Cats are quite popular objects for children to express in the form of drawings, because these animals are often encountered and seen by children. The objects drawn least often by children aged 5-7 were camel, lion, wolf, cow, turtle, panda, bee, sheep, and swan. This is because their shapes are more difficult, and children rarely encounter these animals in their environment.



Figure 5. One of the Least Drawn Objects (a Cow) by Children

The drawing in Figure 5 shows one of the few drawings made by children aged 5-7 years. The drawing depicts a cow, with illustrations and other supporting elements added. This cow was created by only one out of 70 children. This cow is a highly detailed and difficult shape. These details include four legs, horns, a tail, and a distinctive striped color. Furthermore, cows are not found in every place where children live. Therefore, cows are rarely visualized or expressed in drawings. Children prefer to draw things that have simple shapes and are often found in their environment.

Some of the children analyzed still had difficulty expressing their drawings. The indicator of the drawing work does not resemble any form or is vague. The shape of the object in the drawing is not clear. The lines made are also unclear, and there are no details that indicate or characterize that the work is directed at a particular object of the drawing. For example, the case of a child in this study. The child said that the work created was a fish, but from the aspect of the shape of the object, lines, details, and even the color, it was not directed at the fish object. However, when asked again, the child answered that he was drawing a particular animal.



Figure 6. Drawings by Children Who Have Difficulty Expressing Objects

In the expression of the drawing work made by children aged 5-7 years in this study, all the objects are animals. The animals drawn are of various types; some live on land, in the sea, and in the air. Children express their drawings as a medium for children to understand the animal world. Understanding the surrounding environment, such as animals, is visualized differently by each child. There are 61 children who succeeded in expressing in visual form, while those who did not have a form or had difficulty expressing the drawing object were 9 children.

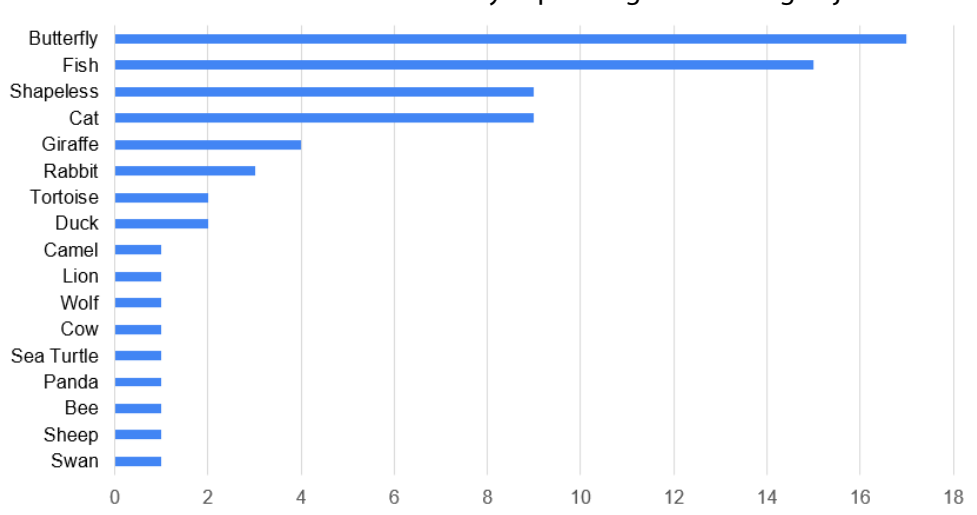


Figure 7. Number of Objects Drawn

Table 2. Table of the Number of Drawing Objects Created

Object	Number of Children
Swan	1
Sheep	1
Bee	1
Panda	1
Sea Turtle	1
Cow	1
Wolf	1
Lion	1
Camel	1
Duck	2
Tortoise	2
Rabbit	3
Giraffe	4
Cat	9
Shapeless	9
Fish	15
Butterfly	17
Total	70

Drawing Process Time Duration

The results of the drawing process analysis in this study were that most children completed it in 10-15 minutes; there were 26 children. Children who completed the drawing in the fastest time, namely 1-5 minutes, there were 7 children. The child who took the longest to complete his drawing, namely, more than 60 minutes, was 1 child. This shows that most children are able to complete the drawing process in a relatively short time. Differences in the duration of completing the drawing can be influenced by various factors, such as concentration levels, fine motor skills, imagination skills, and children's interest in drawing activities. Some children are

quick to draw, while others are slow to express objects. Children who draw quickly tend to have spontaneous, confident strokes and a good imagination. Conversely, children who take a long time to draw are experiencing understimulation of their imagination and lack self-confidence. This results in hesitation when drawing.

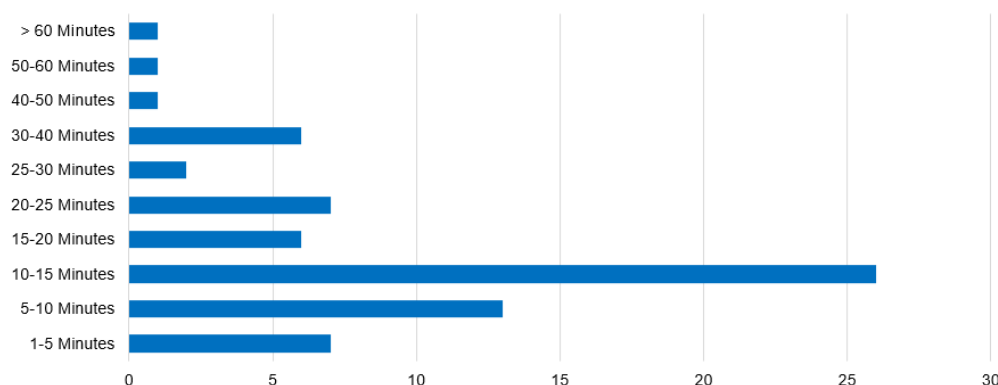


Figure 8. Duration of Time the Child Draws

Visual Experiences That Are the Basis for Children's Imagination

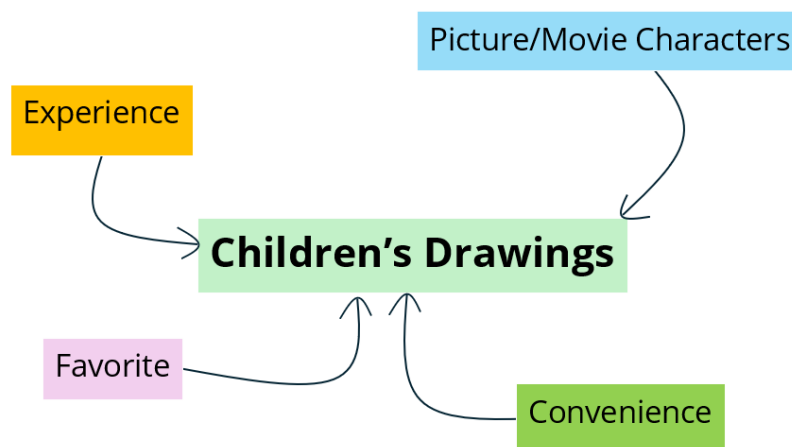


Figure 9. Children's Inspiration in Drawing

The drawings created by children are all visual types. The drawings made by children in this study were inspired by visual experiences that children have experienced or seen. The imagination obtained by children is based on their liking for the objects drawn, the ease of drawing objects, the objects being pets, the children having seen the animals, and even seeing the objects through characters in pictures or films. The results of the analysis of children's drawings in this study showed that children drew more objects that were made because of the ease of making them.

The Animal Visuals drawn include animals that live on land, in the sea, and the air. Each drawing reflects the child's imagination and perspective on the surrounding environment. The reason children draw the most objects they make is because they like them; they like the object. Other reasons are the ease of making it, the experience of meeting the object, and seeing it from the character of the picture or film. Here are some results of interviews with children and the reasons why children draw the objects they make.

The results of an interview with a child named G, aged 5 years, explained that:

"Because butterflies are beautiful and easier to draw, I also like butterflies."

An interview with a child named G (5 years old) showed that he preferred drawing butterflies because they were considered "beautiful and easier to draw." This statement reflects

two main tendencies: first, children often choose drawing objects based on aesthetic appeal; and second, the perceived level of difficulty also influences their choice. Similar patterns were found in the responses of other children, indicating that beauty and ease were important factors in determining the theme of the drawing.

A child named D.E.A., aged 7, said:

"Likes fish and has a pet fish"

An interview with a child named D.E.A. (7 years old) revealed that she enjoyed drawing fish because she had a pet fish. This indicates that children's choices in drawing are often influenced by their immediate environment and personal experiences. These findings confirm the role of real-life experiences in shaping visual expression and children's tendency to represent familiar objects in their drawings.

A child named N.H.M., aged 5 years, said:

"Because he was inspired by the character Marlin in the film Finding Nemo, and seeing a fish aquarium in a restaurant."

An interview with a child named N.H.M. (5 years old) showed that his interest in drawing fish was inspired by the media, namely the character Marlin in the film Finding Nemo and direct observation of a fish aquarium in a restaurant. This illustrates that children's visual expressions are shaped not only by personal experiences, but also by environmental influences that expand the child's source of imagination.

A child named T.N.S., aged 5 years, explained:

"Because I like fish, and these animals are very cute."

An interview with a child named T.N.S. (5 years old) showed that he enjoyed drawing fish purely because of personal preference, arguing that the animal was "very cute." This indicates that children's choices in drawing can also be driven by affective factors such as emotional attachment.

A child named M.T.P., aged 5 years, gave the reason that:

"Because I like fish, I draw fish."

An interview with a child named M.T.P. (5 years old) showed that the motivation to draw fish arose solely from personal preference. The simple reason "because I like fish" illustrates that children's artistic choices are often based on intrinsic interest and spontaneous liking, not solely due to external influences.

A child named N.L., aged 7 years, gave the reason that:

"like drawing butterflies"

An interview with a child named N.L. (7 years old) showed a simple preference for drawing butterflies, expressed as "likes drawing butterflies." This suggests that children's artistic choices can be guided by a direct sense of pleasure towards a particular object, reflecting simple intrinsic motivation without the need for complex reasoning.

A child named T, aged 5 years, tells:

"Because at school earlier I saw worms and giraffes, and because I had seen a giraffe statue."

An interview with a child named T (5 years old) showed that his choice to draw worms and giraffes was influenced by recent experiences, namely seeing worms at school and seeing a giraffe statue. This indicates that children's drawing preferences are often shaped by direct experiences with their environment, where both real observations and symbolic representations serve as sources of visual inspiration.

A child named M.A.S., aged 6 years, gave the reason that:

"Because I like cows."

An interview with a child named M.A.S. (6 years old) showed that he enjoyed drawing cows simply because of personal preference. This reflects the role of intrinsic interest and emotional attachment in shaping children's artistic choices, where liking a particular animal becomes the main source of their imagination.

From the results of the interview, it can be concluded that the reasons for children choosing drawing objects are greatly influenced by factors of preference, ease in drawing, personal experience, and inspiration from films or the surrounding environment. The objects drawn reflect the world of imagination and the child's perspective on the surrounding environment. The aspect of liking an animal object is the most common reason found in drawing objects. This shows that the drawing process for children is a means to express their experiences in the surrounding environment.

Discussion

The drawing process in this study begins with children imagining, creating, and telling stories, which are essential components of artistic expression (Hendri et al., 2017; Pandanwangi, 2022). Imagination not only enables children to produce works of art but also stimulates their cognitive development, as supported by (Boyle et al., 2023; Veraksa et al., 2022). According to Piaget's theory, children aged 5–7 years are in the preoperational stage of cognitive development, where symbolic thinking is emerging. In this phase, children respond strongly to symbols, images, colors, and signs that contain meaning (Babakr et al., 2019; Putra, 2022). Thus, drawing becomes an important medium for children to translate abstract concepts into concrete visual forms, demonstrating the interaction between imagination, creation, and storytelling..

Butterflies emerged as the most frequently drawn object by children aged 5–7. This preference can be explained by the simplicity of the butterfly's shape, which makes it easier to draw, its frequent presence in children's environments, and its allure of beauty. These choices demonstrate how visual appeal influences children's artistic expression. More importantly, this drawing activity stimulates imagination and creativity, competencies that align with the objectives of the independent learning curriculum (BSKAP Kemdikbudristek, 2024) and are widely recognized as core to early childhood development (NAEYC, 2022; UNICEF, 2023).

Analysis of children aged 5–7 years shows that some children draw simple objects in a short time, while others draw for a long time. This is due to several factors. First, the child's habit of drawing frequently affects the speed at which they create the drawing. Second, children have difficulty imagining and visualizing objects in drawing form. This is due to the child's experience with the objects they see; the more frequently they see a particular object, the easier it becomes to visualize it. This statement aligns with the visual type theory proposed by Victor Lowenfeld (Fabris et al., 2023; Gil-Ruiz et al., 2025; Long et al., 2024). Third, another factor is the child's level of self-confidence. Children with good self-confidence will usually draw immediately without much consideration. However, if the child has a low level of self-confidence, they will usually take a long time to draw and often erase their strokes.

The findings in this study were that all 61 children aged 5–7 years drew animal objects, although there were around 9 children whose objects were still vague or unidentified. Factors that influence children in expressing drawing objects are their visual experience and their interest in the object. Children's expressions expressed through drawings can help aspects of early childhood development, especially for children aged 5–7 years (Poowanna et al., 2022; Zakaria et al., 2021). Furthermore, drawing serves as a natural medium for children to express their imagination and cognitive processes. It also provides educators with valuable insights into each child's developmental stage.

The implications of this study suggest that free drawing activities can be an effective tool for stimulating visual intelligence in early childhood. Children are allowed to express their ideas through drawings. This activity also helps stimulate children's imagination (Imafuku & Seto, 2022). This can help develop cognitive aspects in children aged 5–7 years. This implication is important for teachers designing learning at the kindergarten level (Basak & Erdem, 2022; Elfeky et al., 2022; Ozkan, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2023). This implication is in line with the fact that drawing is a learning medium for children (Hong et al., 2021; Stevens-Ballenger & Wilson, 2024). Drawing

activities for children are also a form of expressing something when children cannot yet convey it through actions or speech.

This research contributes to the field of early childhood education, especially kindergarten, regarding how free drawing activities reflect and support the development of visual intelligence in children aged 5–7 years (Pahrul et al., 2019). Learning to draw can be a tool to help children recognize and understand objects in their environment. Through their drawings, children can express various concepts through the shapes and colors they create. This is following the research results (Zeynep & Gunes, 2021).

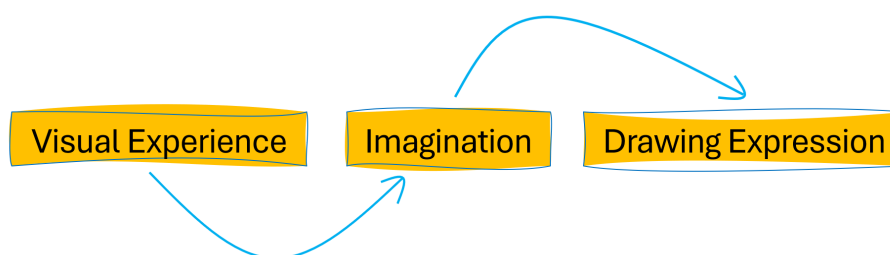


Figure 10. The Drawing Process Begins with Visual Experience

The results of this study indicate that children's drawing begins with visual experience, then imagination, and finally expression through drawing. Children's visual experiences, such as observing animals in their everyday environment, serve as the initial stimulus that captures their attention. These experiences are then processed into imagination, where children internalize and reconstruct what they see in their minds. This imagination is then expressed in the form of drawings, which become concrete representations of children's cognitive and emotional processes. This flow not only illustrates how children perceive and process reality but also emphasizes the function of drawing as a bridge between experience, thought, and expression.

This study analyzes the drawings of children aged 5-7 years using a free expression approach. The resulting works are diverse. Children aged 5-7 years in the Special Region of Yogyakarta mostly draw animals. The animals drawn are objects often seen in the child's environment, such as butterflies, fish, and cats. Drawing activities help stimulate aspects of child development. Early childhood children who frequently draw freely, have a good imagination, and have a wealth of experience in seeing objects in their surroundings will easily express their drawings. Good drawings for children aged 5-7 years are works that are made according to the objects being described. The results of this study are also discussed and supported by previous research.

A limitation of this study is that the subjects were recruited through informal networks, rather than from formal school settings, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. This subject may not be representative of the broader range of children in formal educational settings, as children's experiences and drawing habits may differ. It is recommended that future researchers recruit subjects from formal schools. This will better represent the conditions of children in formal education. This way, findings can be more comprehensively compared between formal and non-formal settings.

Conclusion

This study concluded that children aged 5–7 years old express their visual experiences through free-drawing activities, with a tendency to choose animal objects, particularly butterflies and fish. This preference suggests that familiar and frequently encountered objects influence children's imagination and ability to express symbols. Most children are able to depict objects clearly, but a small number still struggle to translate ideas into identifiable forms. The drawing process, which begins with imagining, creating, and storytelling, supports Victor Lowenfeld's

visual theory and Piaget's theory of cognitive development in the preoperational stage, where symbols, colors, and shapes play a crucial role in the process of meaning-making.

The results of this study imply that free-drawing is not only a visual art activity but also a pedagogical tool for stimulating visual intelligence, imagination, and cognitive development in early childhood. Teachers can utilize drawing activities as a medium for children to externalize their thoughts and communicate experiences that cannot yet be fully expressed verbally. To optimize drawing activities, they should be integrated into the early childhood education curriculum by providing children with a variety of visual stimuli and opportunities for free imagination. However, this study has limitations because subjects were recruited through informal networks, so the results are not fully representative of children in formal educational institutions. Therefore, further research is recommended involving participants from formal schools and comparing children's visual expressions across various educational contexts.

Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

Prayitno coordinated the overall research process and served as the primary author responsible for structuring and drafting the manuscript. Harun conducted the research evaluation, ensuring the validity and reliability of the study. Amir Syamsudin performed the data analysis, interpreting the findings to derive meaningful conclusions. Siti Zubaedah processed and organized the data, ensuring its accuracy and consistency. All authors contributed to the manuscript, reviewed its content, and approved the final version for submission.

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Data Availability Statement

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interests Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Additional Information

No additional information is available.

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