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ASSESSMENT OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT THROUGH
DRAWING OBSERVATION: A CASE STUDY

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received: 22 July 2025 Revised: 4 Aug 2025 Accepted: 28 Aug 2025 Published: 1 Sept 2025</p>	<p>This study was conducted to assess the development of preschool children through visual art activities, specifically drawing, as a form of assessment. Drawing is often regarded as an important medium for self-expression in early childhood education. However, children are sometimes faced with challenges in using art tools and materials correctly during such activities. Therefore, this study aimed to evaluate and identify a child's potential based on drawings produced, focusing on four main developmental domains: fine motor skills, cognitive ability, creativity, and communication. This qualitative case study involved one preschooler as the subject. Observation and interview methods were used for data collection. Three drawings themed "Keluarga Saya," "Rumah Saya," and "Lukisan Bebas" were analysed using a checklist and rating scale instruments. The analysis revealed that the preschooler demonstrated good development in fine motor skills and communication abilities, while creativity and conceptual understanding were at a moderate level but showed strong potential for improvement. The findings also indicated that emotional factors, social relationships, and parental support significantly influenced the child's drawing outcomes and self-expression. This study recommends that preschool teachers implement the Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach in visual art activities to provide more space for meaningful self-exploration. Future studies may focus on the development of a standardized visual art assessment rubric or explore the relationship between interest in art activities and socio-emotional development in children.</p>
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Assessment, Visual Arts, Development, preschooler</p> <p></p>	

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INTRODUCTION

Visual art is an important form of self-expression in early childhood education. According to Nurmhamadovich and Nurullaevna (2021), art plays a significant role in various aspects of a child's development, including social, spiritual, and physical domains. Art products are visual expressions of ideas manifested through various skills such as drawing, printmaking, carving, and others (Sebbeh, 2022). In fact, children's drawings often reflect their life experiences; as Omatseye and Emeriewen (2013) note, even simple sketches by children can represent their personal experiences. Drawing activities not only nurture artistic talent but also contribute to the development of fine motor skills, conceptual understanding, imagination, and communication abilities in children. In the context of early childhood education, evaluating a child's drawing can serve as an effective assessment approach to understand their overall developmental level.

However, the implementation of drawing activities in pre-school education has not been given sufficient attention and is often not carried out systematically. Children face several constraints in using art tools and materials correctly during these activities. Consequently, the potential of visual art as a medium for helping teachers assess children's strengths and needs has not been optimally utilised. Therefore, this study was conducted to evaluate the drawings of a pre-school child across three thematic tasks – "Keluarga Saya", "Rumah Saya" and "Lukisan Bebas" – with a focus on four main developmental domains: fine motor skills, cognitive (conceptual understanding), creativity (self-expression), and communication. The study also sought to determine the extent to which external factors such as social relationships, emotional influences, and family support affect the child's artistic expression, and to suggest improvements that can be implemented in visual art activities in pre-school teaching and learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Creativity is considered one of the freest forms of self-expression, and drawing can be a vital medium for children to express themselves. Georgiou et al. (2022) assert that creativity provides a channel for uninhibited self-expression; thus, drawing activities can serve as an important medium for children to convey their thoughts and feelings. Similarly, a study by Taisin (2018) found that drawing functions as an early communication medium for children, especially for those not yet fluent in speech. Through drawings, children are able to express emotions, ideas, and experiences more freely. This expressive outlet can indirectly build their self-confidence. Talking about their own drawings can make children more confident in interacting with others – be it teachers, peers, or even the wider community. Taisin's findings demonstrate that drawing not only benefits creativity and fine motor development, but also contributes directly to the holistic improvement of children's self-confidence.

Research by Mohd Rafi and Halim (2022) highlighted unique aspects of how children create drawings. They observed that the drawing process of children shares basic similarities with that of adult artists: it often begins with rough sketches and gradually develops into more organised forms. Their findings showed that a child's drawing might start with simple geometric shapes and then progress to more realistic forms as the child's ideas and personal experiences evolve. Furthermore, drawing serves as a form of visual storytelling that grows in tandem with a child's imagination and environment. Artistic elements such as form and colour are utilised naturally by children, demonstrating their early understanding of visual structure. Overall, Mohd Rafi and Halim (2022) concluded that a child's drawing is not merely an expressive activity, but also a learning process that supports cognitive development, emotional growth, and basic artistic understanding.

The development of children's drawings can also be understood through established theories. For example, Lowenfeld's theory (as discussed by Nahrawi et al., 2022) explains that the progression of children's artwork is influenced by their stages of physical, mental, social, intellectual, and aesthetic development. External factors like family background, sociocultural environment, and surroundings further impact the drawings children produce. Lowenfeld delineated several developmental stages of children's art by age range: the scribbling stage (ages 2–4), preschematic stage (4–7 years), schematic stage (7–9 years), dawning realism or "gang age" stage (9–12 years), pseudo-naturalistic stage (12–14 years), and the period of decision or adolescent art (14–17 years). These stages illustrate how children's drawings evolve from random scribbles to more structured and realistic representations as they grow older.

Despite the benefits of drawing, many children face difficulties in effectively using art materials and tools. Sari et al. (2020) found that the majority of pre-school children have not yet mastered basic art-related skills such as properly holding, controlling, and selecting appropriate art tools. Their study emphasized that many children become confused or overwhelmed when presented with a variety of materials like coloured pencils, crayons, paintbrushes or scissors, largely due to a lack of exposure and continuous guidance from teachers. As a result, these children may quickly grow bored, lose focus, feel less confident, and fail to express themselves optimally during art activities. These constraints negatively affect the quality of the drawings produced and the level of the children's engagement in visual art activities. Early exposure to diverse materials, along with systematic training and guidance, is thus crucial for building children's confidence and basic art skills.

Active involvement from parents can also significantly enhance children's creative development. A study by Mohd Zubir and Tokiman (2024) revealed that direct parental participation in children's learning activities at home and school, including drawing, is very important for fostering creativity. Active parental involvement can contribute to improved academic performance and ensure the child's emotions remain stable and positive, thereby increasing the child's interest and regular attendance in class. This collaboration between parents and educators helps strengthen family relationships, build the child's confidence, and ensure more holistic development.

In summary, the literature suggests that drawing activities can have a substantial impact on various aspects of a child's development. Prior studies indicate that factors such as the teacher's skills and guidance, the child's mastery in handling art materials, and support from parents all influence the outcomes of children's drawings. These findings reinforce the idea that drawing is not only an artistic endeavour for young children but also a valuable educational tool that reflects and supports their developmental progress.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Participant

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a case study. This design was selected because it allows the researcher to examine in depth the child's potential and development through the production of drawings based on specified themes. The approach enables analysis not only of the final drawings but also of the creative process, the interactions that occur during the activity, and the social support that influences the child's artwork. The participant was preschooler aged 6 years old.

Research Instruments

The observation method is a form of continuous assessment strongly recommended by Malaysia's Ministry of Education (Murgaiyah & Bakar, 2024). Accordingly, this study collected data through observation using checklist and rating-scale instruments, along with interviews. This approach was chosen to obtain a comprehensive picture of the preschooler's development from multiple angles. Observation allowed the researcher to note the preschooler's naturally occurring behaviors during drawing activities, while interviews were used to gather qualitative information from individuals close to the preschooler. Using both methods yielded richer data—covering process-focused observations as well as supporting information on external factors that influence preschooler's artwork. In addition, this mixed approach enhanced the validity and reliability of the data collected, thereby supporting the study's objectives. Also, this multi-instrument approach ensured that the data collected was thorough and pertinent to the study's objectives. These instruments were specifically designed to identify and assess specific skills that preschooler can master across four key developmental domains: fine motor, cognitive, creativity, and communication.

The first instrument was a checklist used to evaluate two drawings themed "Keluarga Saya" and "Lukisan Bebas." This checklist contained 13 to 14 observation items covering the four main developmental domains. According to Vargavan et al. (2021), the use of a checklist can make the observation process more systematic and focused on the specific aspects under investigation.

The second instrument was a rating scale used to evaluate a drawing themed “Rumah Saya.” This rating scale measured the preschooler’s level of achievement with five defined levels of mastery for the specified criteria. The mastery levels used were: 1 = Very Weak; 2 = Weak; 3 = Moderate; 4 = Good; and 5 = Very Good. To ensure a systematic and transparent evaluation, the researcher also included descriptive explanations for each score level. This was accomplished by using a dedicated scoring rubric that clearly interpreted each score according to the established criteria. Both the checklist and the rating scale were reviewed by an expert in early childhood education, who is also a lecturer at a local educational institution. This expert review was crucial in ensuring that the instruments were valid and appropriate for the study.

In addition to the checklist and rating scale, an interview protocol was used to gather information from the preschooler’s mother. This protocol contained open-ended questions related to her observations of the preschooler’s drawing skills and development at home. The interview provided deeper insight from the respondent’s perspective, complementing the data from the other instruments. Some of the questions posed to her were:

1. “Has your child been fond of drawing from an early age?”
2. “How do you encourage or support your child’s interest in drawing?”
3. “What is your reaction when your child draws in a place where they are not supposed to, such as on the wall?”

The use of these diverse instruments indirectly strengthened the data analysis. This multi-instrument approach led to more robust findings. Consequently, a clearer picture of the child’s developmental level was obtained (Mohd Nor & Haron, 2023).

Data Collection Procedure

Study data were collected through direct observation and interviews. Observations were conducted throughout the drawing sessions in a relaxed, after-school setting. They focused on the preschooler’s grip on drawing tools, the steps taken in producing the drawings, colour selection, object arrangement, and the preschooler’s interactions and responses while drawing. Subsequently, an interview was conducted with the preschooler’s mother to obtain contextual information on the preschooler’s background, interest in art, and the support and encouragement provided at home. The interview was carried out in a relaxed, unstructured manner to allow the respondent to share information openly and naturally.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed descriptively by examining the preschooler’s drawings alongside information obtained from observations and interviews. Each drawing was analyzed with reference to four predefined developmental domains. To analyze the drawings, the study also employed a visual analysis approach, focusing on art elements such as color use, space, symbols or images depicted, the precision of line and form, and the clarity of expression. This approach provided a more comprehensive picture of the preschooler’s artistic expressive potential. Operationally, items for the checklist and criteria for the rating scale were aligned to these art elements. Scores from both instruments were then used to determine the preschooler’s overall level of mastery in each domain. Interview data were subsequently used to corroborate the findings and to provide broader context regarding external factors that influenced the production of the child’s artwork. The analysis was undertaken to produce a comprehensive discussion explaining the preschooler’s development and potential.

Figure 1: Flowchart of the Data Collection and Analysis Process

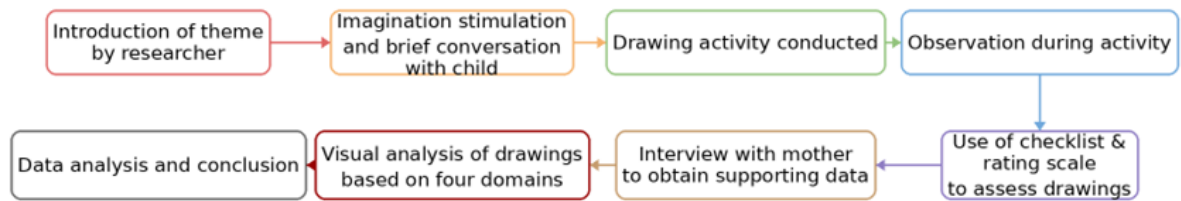


Figure 1 illustrates the flowchart of the data collection and analysis process, which was developed with reference to the visual analysis design introduced by Park and Kim (2007). This process began with the researcher introducing the drawing theme to the students. The preschooler was given the opportunity to reflect and generate ideas for their drawings using their own imagination and creativity. Subsequently, the researcher engaged in a brief conversation to stimulate the preschooler's imagination and provided guidance to help them delve deeper into the given theme.

Afterwards, the preschooler carried out the drawing activity according to the theme. The researcher observed the students during this activity and simultaneously noted any behaviors, interactions, or skills demonstrated. The preschooler's drawings were analyzed using a visual analysis method and evaluated with a checklist and rating scale to identify artistic elements that reflected the preschooler's developmental level. Finally, data from interviews and observations were used to support the research findings. All information was analyzed comprehensively to provide a clear picture of the students' developmental level.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

These research findings were obtained by analyzing three drawings produced by preschooler under the themes "Keluarga Saya," "Rumah Saya," and "Lukisan Bebas". The analysis was conducted based on four primary developmental domains, namely fine motor development, conceptual and cognitive understanding, creativity and self-expression, and communication skills. The scores obtained from the checklist and rating scale instruments were subsequently converted into percentages to indicate the students' overall level of achievement in each domain. In addition, data from anecdotal records and informal interviews were also used to support the assessments.

Drawing 1: "Keluarga Saya"

Figure 2: Outcome of Drawing 1



Based on the results of Drawing 1 evaluated using a checklist, it can be observed that the drawing produced closely adheres to the assigned theme. This indicates that the student's comprehension of the given activity instructions is at a good level. According to the checklist, that Preschooler appears to understand the concept of "family," as they are able to identify and draw all of their family members appropriately.

The drawing produced by preschooler clearly depicts human figures with important details such as faces, legs, arms, and clothing. Preschooler also differentiates between the genders of the family members by using distinct clothing: the female family members are drawn wearing dresses, whereas the male family members are drawn wearing a shirt and pants. Furthermore, preschooler had added a "heart shape" on the clothing of the female figures to further emphasize this gender distinction.

Additionally, the arrangement of the family members in the drawing appears logical, even though some figures are drawn overlapping. The overlapping figures still look realistic; preschooler successfully portrays the "father" figure as if he is standing behind the others. This aspect of the drawing suggests that the student is able to use their imagination effectively.

However, the proportional sizing of the family members in the drawing is not realistic. This is evident in that preschooler drew their older sister larger in size than the mother and father. Similarly, the two older brothers are drawn smaller than the figure representing Student A.

Drawing 2: "Rumah Saya"

Figure 3: Outcome of Drawing 2



An examination of preschooler's Drawing 2 clearly indicates that the drawing adheres to the assigned theme. The content and composition align with the expectations set for the task. Based on the evaluation rubric, preschooler achieved a score of 5 (very good) on the "complete house structure" criterion for drawing a house that includes all major structural components (walls, a door, and windows).

Furthermore, preschooler depicted the house's structural elements in a logical arrangement by placing the window higher than the door, which earned a score of 4 (good). This outcome demonstrates that the student has a solid understanding of a house's structural layout. In addition, the ability to construct a complete structure also indicates that Student A can draw basic shapes proficiently (score 4, good).

Preschooler also received a score of 4 (good) on the "house background added" criterion for incorporating several additional elements beyond the house itself. For instance, they drew a tree to depict the outdoor environment and added colorful circles around the house as decorative elements. This shows that preschooler are effectively utilized the empty space surrounding the house in the drawing.

Finally, the color choices in the drawing are very appealing and appropriate, earning a score of 5 (very good). For example, preschooler used green and brown to depict the tree, which mirrors natural colors and lends realism to the drawing. Such deliberate color selection demonstrates a thoughtful approach that enhances the overall visual appeal of the artwork.

Drawing 3: "Lukisan Bebas"

Figure 4: Outcome of Drawing 3



For the third drawing, the task served primarily to assess the preschooler's creativity and imaginative capacity through an open-ended "free drawing" without a specified theme. According to the checklist, preschooler produced the drawing entirely (100%) from her own imagination without copying any existing exemplar, demonstrating the ability to generate original work even in the absence of teacher-provided themes.

Checklist evidence further indicates that preschooler shows a preference for fantasy characters—specifically a prince and a princess—constituting a distinctive element in her artwork. She added clarifying details, such as crowns for each character, to make their identities explicit. In addition, preschooler incorporated the symbol "v/s" to denote competition between the paired figures.

While the drawing employed more than one color, preschooler deliberately limited the palette to two tones to accentuate the contrast between the two prince–princess pairs, thereby reinforcing the impression of rivalry. Notably, after completing all three required drawings, Student A enthusiastically requested additional sheets and independently produced three more drawings, indicating strong intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement with the activity.

Summary of Observational Findings

Figure 5: Percentage Comparison for Each Drawing

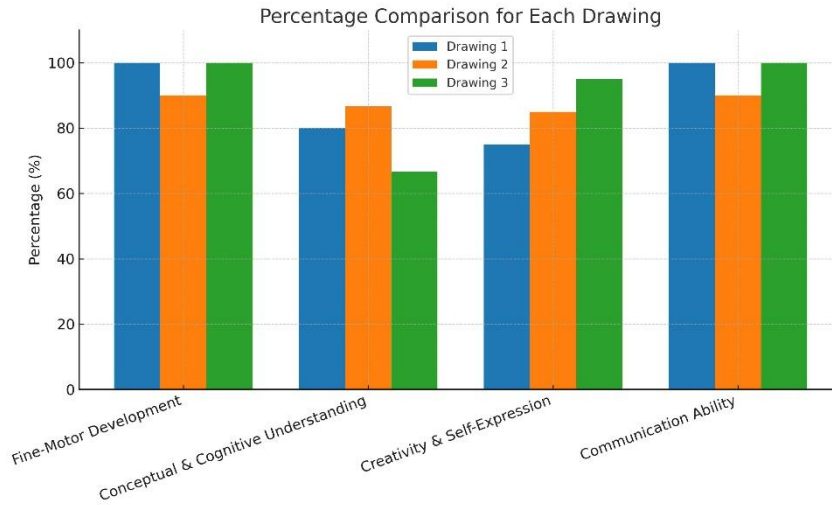


Figure 5 presents the percentage comparison for each drawing across the developmental domains. The fine-motor development and communication ability domains show consistently high percentages for all drawings, each reaching 100% in Drawing 1 and Drawing 3, with a slight decrease in Drawing 2. For conceptual and cognitive understanding, performance varies: Drawing 1 records 80%, rising to 86.67% in Drawing 2, then declining to 66.67% in Drawing 3. Creativity and self-expression increase from Drawing 1 to Drawing 2 and reach their highest level in Drawing 3.

Figure 6: Overall Average Percentage by Domain

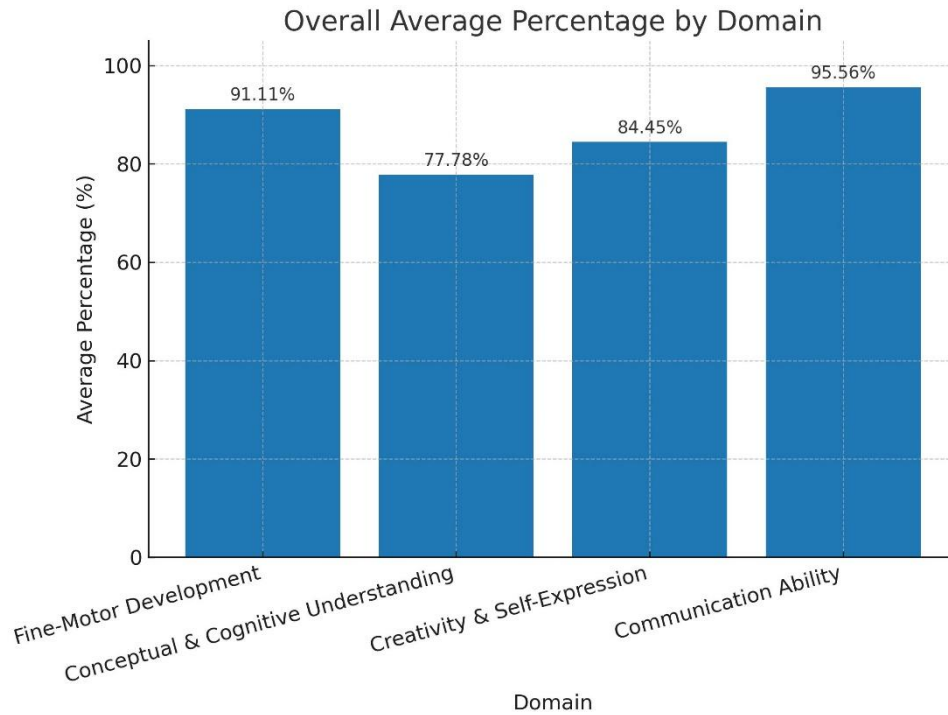


Figure 6 presents a bar chart depicting the overall average percentage for each developmental domain. Communication ability records the highest average (95.56%), followed by fine-motor development (91.11%), creativity and self-expression (84.45%), and conceptual and cognitive understanding with the lowest average (77.78%). This analysis indicates that the preschooler shows stronger mastery in communication and fine-motor domains than in conceptual and cognitive understanding.

Interview Findings

The interview with the preschooler's mother revealed several important details about the preschooler's background and the support provided at home. The mother stated, "...my child has loved drawing since she was little." She added, "...I always praise the drawings she produces." She further noted, "...I have never stopped or scolded her for drawing, even when she once drew on the wall at home." These insights provide deeper context for interpreting the drawings and highlight the importance of emotional and social support in children's artistic expression.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that several factors influence preschooler's drawings. One is fine-motor development. Well-developed fine-motor skills enable better control of hand and finger movements (Mohd Sharif et al., 2021), which in turn supports the production of neater, more detailed drawings (Loke et al., 2013). Appropriate color selection also enhances aesthetic quality and interpretability. As Janius et al. (2023) note, suitable colors can serve as symbols in everyday life. Colors not only beautify a drawing but also convey emotional and psychological meanings (Frankie Rizal et al., 2024). Conversely, weaknesses in color recognition may affect development—not only creativity but also other day-to-day skills (Seider et al., 2020).

Emotional and social factors likewise shape preschooler's artwork. Rosen (2023) observes that preschooler's emotions and relationships often appear directly in their drawings. In Drawing 1, for example, preschooler depicted her sister using her favorite color, placed centrally on the page, and larger than other family members. Observations during the drawing process also showed that the sister was the first-person preschooler drew when asked to illustrate "Keluarga Saya." This suggests a close emotional bond and that the sister may be perceived as the most important person in the family.

Support and encouragement from adults—parents and teachers—are also pivotal. Motivational support from significant adults can boost children's confidence to create. Manisah and Noorfaziha (2018) report that such support has a positive impact on development. In this study, the mother's encouragement appears to have fostered preschooler's confidence, as evidenced by her beginning to draw immediately after receiving instructions—even for the free-drawing task without a theme. As Arthur et al. (2022) argue, developing motivation can drive students to deepen their interest in a subject. Anecdotal notes recorded preschooler's spontaneous request to produce three additional drawings, despite being told they would not be assessed. This behavior aligns with the cultivation of intrinsic motivation, often nurtured by consistent parental praise and the absence of prohibitions against creative activity. Intrinsic motivation tends to have longer-term effects than extrinsic motivation because it reflects the child's own desire to engage without coercion (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Wan Naliza & Siti, 2020). Continuous parental support further encourages children to remain actively involved in activities (James et al., 2023), helping to build the confidence and courage to express ideas and emotions through drawing.

In sum, interactions between internal factors (e.g., fine-motor control, imagination, intrinsic motivation) and external factors (e.g., emotional climate, relationships, adult encouragement) play a crucial role in shaping preschoolers' artwork. These findings underscore the need for holistic, alternative assessment approaches in early childhood education. Using drawing as an assessment tool can help teachers evaluate development in a more comprehensive and meaningful way.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the study demonstrates that preschoolers' developmental level can be assessed through visual-arts activity, particularly drawing. The preschooler shows strong fine-motor development and communication ability, while conceptual and cognitive understanding and creativity/self-expression can be further strengthened. The study affirms drawing as an effective and holistic alternative assessment tool in early childhood settings. Personal experience, emotion, and parental support also influence drawing outcomes; thus, teachers and parents should play active roles in encouraging children and providing opportunities to create, so that imagination and skills continue to develop through visual-arts activities. As a recommendation, teachers may integrate Project-Based Learning (PBL) into visual arts planning for preschoolers, creating opportunities for children to explore their creativity more freely. As Stucke et al. (2022) suggest, allowing ample time is important to encourage meaningful exploration. Teachers can also expose children to a wide variety of materials and media to broaden artistic skills and experiences. Parents can support by setting up a dedicated space for art at home and ensuring sufficient supplies. Meanwhile, for further research, new studies should include larger samples to obtain more generalisable findings. Further work could also develop a more standardised and systematic visual-arts assessment rubric, and examine in greater depth the relationship between interest in art activities and preschoolers' socio-emotional development.

Co-Author Contribution

Author 1 wrote the research methodology and did the data entry, and overlooked the whole article's write up. Author 2 carried out the fieldwork, prepared the literature review and carried out the statistical analysis and interpretation of the results.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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