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## Enhancing Oral Language Skills in 5-Year-Old Children Through Drawing Activities in the Classroom

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**Abstract.** Sound oral language skills (OLS) are the foundation for academic success, and building language skills through fun learning experiences is essential to children's language development. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of improving the OLS of 5-year-old children in the classroom through drawing activities. Using a case study design under qualitative methods, 4 children were selected as the study participants through purposive sampling for a 3-week drawing activity intervention, specifically from 1 September to 21 September 2023. This study was conducted in a kindergarten affiliated with a university in eastern China, and data were collected through observations, interviews, and teachers' reflective journals. Observations focused on vocabulary richness and sentence coherence. The results of the study indicated that the drawing activity intervention provided children with rich opportunities to develop their OLS compared to traditional classroom activities. Children's active participation in classroom interactions through drawing activities enhanced their vocabulary richness and sentence coherence. This study highlights the potential of drawing activities in children's oral language development and provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers. Thus, it is recommended that educators introduce targeted language development scaffolding strategies in drawing activities, as well as

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increased collaboration with parents so as to enhance language learning in these activities.

**Keywords:** early childhood education; oral language; drawing activity; vocabulary; sentence

## 1. Background of the Study

With the advent of a globalised world, the need for Oral Language Skills (OLS) is evident for children. Since most young children have not yet acquired fluent reading skills, they are not yet able to rely on reading for independent learning either. At this phase, children must rely on oral language to access information and communicate with peers and teachers. The development of OLS, as the focus of early childhood education, is a tool conceptualised for the purpose of knowledge acquisition and social participation (Amorsen & Miller, 2017). Children in China, regardless of their mother tongue or social background, have the right to access language learning opportunities. OLS is considered a core experience in the learning and development of Chinese children and an indispensable element in the development of comprehensive qualities in pre-school children (Wang, 2018). Researchers have agreed that young children's OLS in preschool is highly predictive of their later literacy skills (Noe et al., 2014; Zanchi et al., 2020). Therefore, this study is of practical and theoretical interest. China's Learning and Development Guidelines for 3-6-year-olds show that vocabulary richness and sentence coherence are considered two important indicators of oral language development (Yang et al., 2021). However, some studies have shown that Chinese children have weaknesses in OLS as early as preschool age 5 (Fong & Ho, 2019). This implies that there is room for improvement in the current level of OLS of 5-year-olds (Su et al., 2021). As such, these different perspectives have raised concerns among some scholars about the quality of preschool education in China. In recent years, the Chinese government has been committed to expanding the coverage of preschool education; however, the quality of preschool education in some kindergartens remains relatively low (Su et al., 2021). Significantly, Li et al. (2019) highlighted that a high level of preschool education quality contributes to children's language development, early math skills, and social cognitive abilities.

To gain a deeper understanding of OLS development, this study aims to focus on vocabulary richness and sentence coherence in Mandarin speaking 5-year-old children in China through an intervention of observational drawing activities. study is on. In exploring the value of drawing activities for children's OLS development, it is crucial to consider that this is their mother tongue environment. Through this study, the researcher hopes to improve the 5-year-old children's OLS and reveal possible problems of OLS development of children. The findings could provide valuable information on the effectiveness of drawing activities as an educational strategy and explore their potential in promoting children's OLS development. Recognising the critical role that OLS plays in children's academic success and future social participation, the study poses the following research question:

How can drawing activities be used in the classroom to improve the oral language skills (OLS) of 5-year-olds, with a focus on vocabulary richness and sentence coherence?

The social and academic contributions of this study are reflected in several key areas. First, it extends researchers' understanding of the relationship between drawing activities and children's oral language development. By exploring in-depth the OLS of 5-year-old children during drawing activities, this study provides new insights into how language competence can be promoted through drawing activities. Secondly, this study highlights the importance of implementing interdisciplinary development of language skills in early education, providing innovative ways of approaching educational practice. This approach is especially important in a multilingual society such as China. In addition, this study will help parents and educators to understand and utilise everyday activities, such as drawing, to enrich children's educational experiences and social interactions, thereby contributing to children's holistic development.

## **2. Literature Review**

Children's language development has always been a hot topic in early education. This is especially true for 5-year-old children, who are at a critical stage of language development. This literature review will focus on two areas: firstly, the importance of children's oral language and, secondly, the relationship between drawing activities and the development of children's OLS.

### **2.1 The importance of oral language**

Children's OLS is currently an important issue of widespread academic interest (Snowling & Hulme, 2021; Whorrall & Cabell, 2016). Honig (2007) defined oral language as a complex system linking sound to meaning, often including phonology, syntax, semantics, morphology and pragmatics. According to Cabell et al. (2022), oral language refers to the understanding and production of language, including lexical and grammatical knowledge, while Owens (2004) classified OLS into the dimensions of phonological skills, syntactic skills, morphological skills, pragmatics and lexical skills. Therefore, this study defines it as the process of children's learning through listening, speaking, describing, and interacting with others, focusing on vocabulary and grammatical skills.

An increasing body of research emphasises that early OLS is a cornerstone of children's future academic and social success (Liu et al., 2020). Not only that, but oral language also supports the development of literacy skills and writing (Peterson et al., 2016). A similar view mentioned that children's oral language development is closely related to early literacy (Xiao et al., 2023a). In addition, according to the requirements for high-quality development of preschool education in China (for example, the Guidelines for the Learning and Development of 3-6 Year Olds and the Guidelines for Assessing the Quality of Kindergarten Care and Education), children's language is emphasised as a key component of their development. Research and policy documents have emphasised the importance of developing oral language in kindergartens (MOE,

2012; Yang & Li, 2022) with children's OLS widely recognised as a core part of their general competence (Metsala et al., 2021). Brodin and Renblad (2020) further stated that good OLS not only contributes to children's academic performance in school but also improves their social interaction skills. Also, Kim (2020) found that OLS developed by children in the early stages positively subsequently affects their cognitive and emotional development.

In educational practice, many educators and scholars have emphasised the importance of OLS development as key to children's overall development (Amorsen & Miller, 2017). West et al. (2021) confirmed that, in science, intentional oral language instruction and meaningful content instruction have many benefits for children's vocabulary development, such as remembering more science content words and being able to better express their understanding. It has also been shown that science instruction that supports oral language development, among other things, is beneficial for literacy development. Although a great deal of research has demonstrated the importance of OLS in children, as argued by Piasta et al. (2020), there are, however, many areas still to be explored on how to develop this skill more effectively. Future research could further explore the relationship between children's OLS and other cognitive abilities (Hulme et al., 2020).

## **2.2 Links between children's drawings and oral language**

In exploring the importance of children's oral language and the relationship between drawing activities and the development of children's OLS, it is important to understand the age profile of the 5-year-old child. Children at this age are in what Vygotsky (1978) describes as the "egocentric speech" stage, where social interaction is essential for language acquisition. In addition, in his socio-cultural theory, learning is a socially interactive process and children construct knowledge by engaging in culturally significant activities, which is particularly important for language learning. Piaget's (1964) theory of cognitive development emphasises that children begin to use symbolic thinking at this age and that drawing becomes an important means of expressing and making sense of the world. Therefore, drawing activities not only support children's artistic expression, but also provide a language-rich environment that promotes the natural development of their OLS.

Depending on the child's developmental and cognitive level, children may not have enough vocabulary to express their experiences and how they feel (Sourkes, 2018). However, the literature finds that art can be effective in building shared understanding and language in practice (Wong, 2020). Drawing can be seen as a process of meaning construction in which children draw symbols to express their understanding and ideas in the form of visual graphics. Lines, dots and colours are some of the resources or indicators that make up visual graphic symbols (Kress, 1997). Meanwhile, research by Che Dalim et al. (2020) demonstrated that augmented reality methods support participation and communication with those who are not able or confident enough to express themselves verbally. Søndergaard and Reventlow (2019) also argued that drawing is an effective method of facilitating dialogue with children about

difficult and taboo issues; through drawing, children can express feelings, emotions and experiences that are difficult to put into words.

For this topic, there are also studies that have been conducted to address the practice; for instance, using play or art to communicate with children can facilitate adult-child dialogue and deepen adults' understanding of children's experiences (Wong, 2019). Not only that, Bat Or et al. (2022) studied how children narrate stories through drawing and showed that drawing not only enhances children's narrative skills, but also helps them to better understand complex plots. Similarly narrative skills have a significant impact on children's language as well as emergent literacy skills (Puspitasari et al., 2023). There is a positive link between drawing activities and subject areas such as math and science (Aragón et al., 2023). As noted by Sunday and Conley (2020), drawing can be used as an effective interdisciplinary teaching tool to help children progress in other areas of learning. This shows that drawing is linked to OLS in children's education.

In summary, drawing activities are not only a platform for children's self-expression but are also closely related to their social skills, narrative skills, and cognitive development. However, the specific promotion of OLS development through drawing activities at this critical stage of language development in 5-year-old children remains a relatively unexplored area. This study will utilise Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory to explore how drawing activities can be used as a tool to promote children's OLS in teaching practice. While these theories and studies provide valuable perspectives, few studies have analysed in-depth the oral language performance of 5-year-olds during drawing and how these interactions affect their OLS. Therefore, the aim of this study is to fill this gap by focusing on vocabulary richness and sentence coherence in 5-year-old children through an intervention in drawing activities. Through in-depth analyses of children's interactions with teachers and peers during drawing, this study aims to reveal the intrinsic links between drawing and OLS and provide useful insights for frontline educators to support the development of children's OLS more effectively in the classroom.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

#### **3.1. Research design and locale**

This study was a case study design using a qualitative approach and was chosen as the methodology based on Merriam's (1998) recommendations as it provides a way to explore a complex educational phenomenon. This approach allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the activities, processes, and individuals in each context, and is essential for revealing the potential of drawing activities to contribute to the development of OLS in 5-year-old children. In addition, case studies can capture the richness and complexity of teaching and learning processes and learning experiences (Merriam, 2009). The research site was a kindergarten affiliated with a public university in eastern China. This kindergarten was selected as a provincial model kindergarten for 25 consecutive years and is known for its unique painting programme. In addition, this kindergarten was intentionally chosen to represent the study due to its

participation in “The National High Quality Development School” programme. Although language skills development covers several aspects, this study deliberately focused only on two key dimensions, namely, vocabulary richness as well as sentence coherence. Figure 1 presents the research framework, consisting of six targeted drawing activities and interactions between four children and a teacher, designed to capture and analyse children’s demonstration of OLS during these activities. The framework places particular emphasis on the diversity of data collection by combining observations, teacher journals and teacher interviews to explore in an integrated way the role of drawing in children’s OLS development.

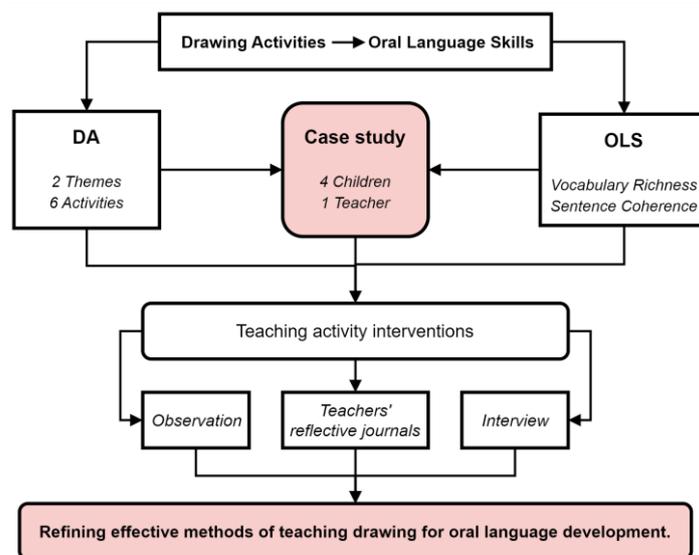


Figure 1: Research framework

### 3.2 Participants

The target population was all five-year-old children in the kindergarten, and purposive sampling was used to refine the participants considering that the researcher made use of the case study design. The selection criteria are shown in Table 1. To ensure the depth and focus of the study, the researcher selected four children as representatives from the overall sample, which was determined based on the children’s oral development scores from the previous term, and who were at the exploratory level in terms of oral skills (see Table 1). Among them were two boys (B1, B2) and two girls (G1, G2). They were native Mandarin speakers with no learning disabilities and no speech or hearing problems. In addition, the selected children were all interested in drawing. All four children came from middle-class families (see **Appendix 1**). It is worth noting that an important criterion for the selection of respondents was that, regardless of the children’s experiences and personal backgrounds, they were expected to first obtain parental consent to take part in the study, which this was duly given (see **Appendix 2**), and an anonymous name code was assigned to each child to protect their privacy. The researcher did not include any identifying information about the children throughout the study. In addition, one teacher was selected for the sample, to gain insights from an educator’s perspective; the role of the teacher participant was used for data analysis only. This teacher was selected

based on her professional experience in the field of early childhood education, teaching effectiveness and drawing skills. See **Appendix 3** for more detailed information about this teacher.

**Table 1: Criteria for sample selection**

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Age	5-year-olds	4 & 6 years old
Language	Mandarin	Dialects
Interest in drawing	Interested in drawing	No interest in drawing
Oral level	Average level	Low or high level
Health indicators	No learning disabilities, no language disorders	language disorders
Family background	Middle class	/

### 3.3 Research instruments

During the study, the researcher worked closely with the kindergarten teacher on a 3-week drawing activity intervention. It consisted of two themes (character and animal themes) and contained six activities (see **Appendix 4**). The two themes chosen for this study were closely related to the themes of the participating children's kindergartens for that term. This correspondence ensured that the content of the activities was both familiar and appealing to the children, thus allowing for a more natural integration into their daily learning environment. In addition, considering the children's daily life experiences and their known areas of knowledge, the researcher, with the help of the classroom teacher, redesigned the six drawing activity scenarios to ensure that they would be able to use existing vocabulary in their communication and attempt to construct new vocabulary and sentences. The drawing tools included crayons or watercolours, A5 (148mm x 210mm) blank paper, and drawing consumables that were applied to each drawing topic. It is worth emphasising that neither the children nor the teacher had any previous experience using drawing in the classroom to develop oral skills. Therefore, the instructors received prior training on facilitating drawing to develop these. In addition, video recording was used as an important research tool in this study to record children's performance and interactions during drawing activities for detailed observation and analysis. A detailed description of the specific methods of data collection, including observation, interviews with a teacher and their reflective journals, will be further explained in the next section, "Data collection".

### 3.4 Data collection methods

Three methods were used in collecting the data, namely, observation, research journal and a teacher interview. Children were given drawing activities for both themes, a choice designed to provide a focused view of children's performance in vocabulary and sentence coherence through drawing activities. Each drawing activity lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and was observed over a period of three weeks. Observations were made through video recordings (recorded

scenes as in Figure 2). In particular, the video recording was used to observe and record the children's participation in drawing activities and the development of OLS, including vocabulary richness and sentence coherence. It is worth noting that vocabulary richness is assessed using a list of words related to the theme of the drawing. Sentence coherence, on the other hand, was chosen to observe the children's sentence structure construction as well as connectives in their conversations to understand the children's ideas and perspectives. Direct observation enables the capture of participants' behaviour in the environment and first-hand experience (Patton, 2014). In addition to observations, the teaching staff were asked to keep a reflective diary, focusing on the children's participation in drawing activities and the development of the children's OLS. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the teacher at the end of the overall project with the aim to collect their insights about the usefulness of drawing activities in improving children's vocabulary richness and sentence coherence. It is worth noting that all data in this study, including teacher-child dialogues, were collected in Mandarin and have been accurately translated into English for an international audience.

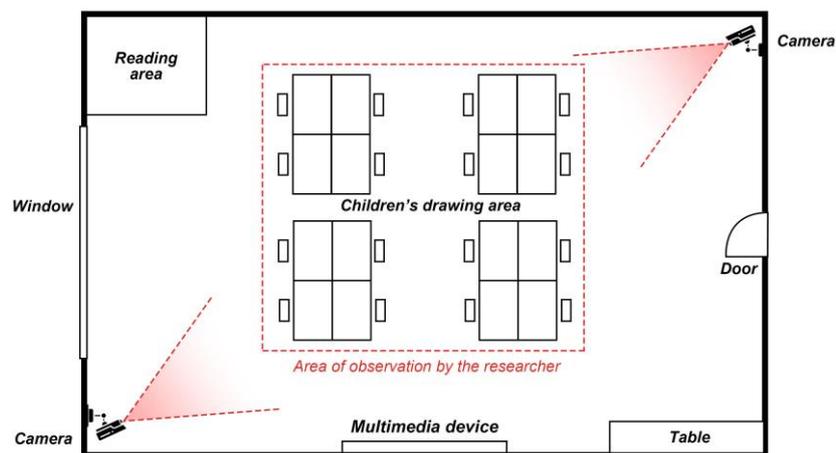


Figure 2: Children's drawing activity classroom floor plan

### 3.5 Data analysis

This study adopted content analysis as the primary method of data analysis to explore the vocabulary richness and sentence coherence of 5-year-old children's OLS. During the study, data were collected and analysed continuously and simultaneously and steps in the analysis included data coding, thematic extraction and finding key features to learn more about how children learn to speak and understand language (Merriam, 1998). To obtain a better look at the child's expressive vocabulary and sentence structure, all video recordings were played back and watched repeatedly to capture important details that were missed during real-time observations. Data coding was crucial in distinguishing between the children's different OLS. For vocabulary, the researcher identified and recorded vocabulary use. For sentences, the focus was on analysing sentence structure and the use of connectives. In addition, to ensure the validity and reliability of the data from this qualitative study, triangulation was used as well as inviting an early childhood teacher to participate in the data analysis.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

To answer the research question regarding how can drawing activities be used in the classroom to improve the OLS of 5-year-olds, the results are presented focusing on their vocabulary richness and sentence coherence, which was the only scope of this investigation.

##### 4.1 Richness of children's vocabulary in drawing activities

In observing the children's participation in drawing activities, the researcher noticed that they showed richness in their use of vocabulary, using a variety of adjectives, nouns, and verbs in describing the scenes and situations they drew. Among these four children, by comparing their language samples before and after the activity, it was found that B1, G1 and G2 showed richer and more varied vocabulary use. This change was reflected in the number of new vocabulary words they used. However, for child B2, his language sample did not demonstrate a similar trend in terms of vocabulary before and after the drawing activity. This was because B1, G1 and G2 showed a strong interest in the subject matter of the drawing from the very beginning. In the first theme "Characters", the children were asked to draw a scene from "Little Environmental Heroes" (see Table 2).

**Table 2: "Little Environmental Heroes" by G1**

	<b>Theme</b>	
	Little Environmental Heroes	
	<b>Name</b>	G1
	<b>Time</b>	30 minutes
	<b>Date</b>	4 September 2023

The dialogue was always initiated by the teacher, and the children were gradually involved. As shown in the emergent talk between G1 and the teacher (Sample Talk 1), child G1 used simple and general vocabulary at the beginning, such as "water", "white cloud", "fish", "trash bin" and "sun", which suggests that, at the beginning, her vocabulary was limited. During observation, it was noted that the teacher's guidance played a crucial role in the development of children's oral skills. Firstly, the teacher stimulated children's desire for verbal expression by asking questions and encouraging them. When child G1 started to describe her drawing, she simply said, "This is water, and this is white clouds", but under the guidance of the teacher, such as asking, "What are some things on the white clouds?". G1 further described, "There is a big white flower on the white cloud". This means that, with teacher guidance and questions, G1 began to use more adjectives, nouns, and verbs to enrich their dialogue. This was confirmed by the results of the teacher's interviews:

*When I use strategies, such as questioning, repeating, and inspiring, the children can say more words back to me.*

The fact that the child actively used verbs when describing the drawn scene shows that she was not only able to express static elements. Simultaneously, G1 was able to provide more detailed and vivid descriptions, including the colour, size, and position of objects. In addition, she could describe the actions and interactions of the characters involved in the scene, using vocabulary such as “cheerfully picking up litter”. These vocabulary words enriched her speech and enabled her to express her opinions and emotions more clearly.

### **Sample Talk 1:**

*Teacher: Can you tell me what is in your drawing?*

*G1: There is water, white clouds, fish, and the sun.*

*Teacher: Good, now, tell me more about these white clouds.*

*G1: The white clouds are white and big.*

*Teacher: What are some things on the white clouds?*

*G1: There is a big white flower on the white cloud.*

*Teacher: What colour is the sun?*

*G1: The sun was golden, and it was very bright.*

*Teacher: And what else do you see?*

*G1: In the sea, I drew lots of fish and they are all very beautiful. They are all sorts of colours, there are red, blue, yellow and rainbow fish. They swim around happily in the water, just like dancing. But... But... I saw rubbish too.*

*Teacher: Rubbish? Where is it?*

*G1: Yes, rubbish. Some rubbish was floating on the water, and I didn't like them there, so I picked up the rubbish, and threw them in the bin.*

From the above-mentioned conversations between the teacher and child B1, it is evident that drawing activities provide an environment that promotes the development of vocabulary richness and verbal skills. Research has shown that children use body movements along with language to express their ideas (Xiao et al., 2023b). In this way, children are able to actively participate in verbal communication, use a more varied vocabulary to describe their creations, and engage in situations.

Furthermore, recent research has also shown that choosing drawing themes that match children's interests is effective in reducing their tension and making it easier for them to express their thoughts (Richards & Terreni, 2022). This was clearly demonstrated when conducting the second drawing theme. From the observations, it was easy to see that, in the first theme, children often needed guidance from the teacher before they started to express themselves. However, when the “Animal” theme was introduced and, the children's favourite, “Chickens” were specifically chosen as the subject of the drawing, it was clear that they were more excited and engaged, and that the vocabulary they used was richer and more specific.

In this activity, the children were invited to create drawings that focused on “Chickens”. At the beginning, the teacher described a scene for them: “Chickens

on Holiday". This made the children naturally relate their thoughts to their own holiday experiences. Based on this, the children started to communicate and share actively. Especially, B1, B2 and G1 took the initiative to share their thoughts with their peers. The vocabulary they used increased as they began to discuss and communicate. The discussion on the theme of "Chickens' Holiday Life" was a vivid example of the growth in the richness of children's vocabulary, as shown in Sample Talk 2.

### Sample Talk 2:

*Teacher: Okay, kids, today we are going to draw a scene: the holiday life of a chick. You can think about it first. If it's you, how would you draw it?*

*G1: I would draw the chick building a castle by the sea!*

*B2: I would draw the chicks exploring the woods and looking for treasure!*

*B1: I remember that last weekend, my mom, and I went to play on a big lawn. There were lots of children playing there, and some insects and butterflies were flying around. I think the chicks would like to be there too.*

*Teacher: That sounds wonderful, B1! So, what do the chicks do on your lawn?*

*B1: This chick and its mom are playing on the lawn. Its mom is hatching eggs while the chick is happily catching bugs.*

*G1: Oh, what kind of bugs are the chicks catching?*

*B1: It's some little grasshoppers and ladybirds. And there was a yellow butterfly dancing.*

*B2: The chick has a red hat.*

*B1: No, it's not; it's the chick's crown, which is red, and the feathers are yellow, and it looks very happy.*

Furthermore, in the drawing process, B1 presented a work that depicted how a chicken spends its holiday happily on a green lawn, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: "Chicken's Holiday Life" by B1**

	Theme	
	Chicken's Holiday Life	
	Name	B1
	Time	25 minutes
	Date	12 September 2023

As Wong (2020) emphasised, drawings have a strong learning potential as they not only enrich children's creativity and imagination, but also provide opportunities for children to expand their language. This was confirmed by the teacher's reflective journals as quoted below.

*“Child B1 drew a vivid picture of a chick spending its holiday on the lawn. He used a lot of new vocabulary in his conversations with me and my companions, such as “butterfly”, “hatch”, “play”, “dance” and “merrily”. I noticed that B1’s vocabulary richness increased significantly through this drawing activity. This activity made me realise once again that drawing is not just an artistic expression; it is also a valuable platform for children to learn and explore new vocabulary” (Teacher’s Reflective Journal, September 18, 2023).*

Children’s vocabulary richness is an observation that should not be overlooked during drawing activities. The present study found that appropriate drawing themes and effective teacher guidance could stimulate children’s interest and encourage them to use richer vocabulary for description. Applying children’s drawings, as emphasised by Trifunovic et al. (2022), can be the basis for measuring effective learning and practice in children’s skills to express themselves in the classroom.

#### 4.2 Coherence of sentences in children’s drawing activities

In observing children’s performance in drawing activities, the researcher noticed that children initially tended to lack sentence coherence, rather they used simple vocabulary to express their ideas, such as object names, colours, and basic lines. Returning to G1’s drawing scene, it was clear that her initial description was opened by the teacher’s guidance. However, as the conversation continued, the researcher observed that her language gradually became more coherent. She began to be able to connect different ideas and events to form a more complete narrative. This increase in sentence coherence was inextricably linked to her deeper thinking about the subject of the drawing, as well as the teacher’s questions and guidance. Similarly, in the second activity, the “Animal” theme, children were invited to draw a scene from “Chicken’s Holiday Life” (see Table 4).

Table 4: “Chicken’s Holiday Life” by B2

	<b>Theme</b>	
	Chicken’s Holiday Life	
	<b>Name</b>	B2
	<b>Time</b>	25 minutes
	<b>Date</b>	12 September 2023

Likewise, the conversation between child B2 and the teacher (see Sample Talk 3) shows that the drawing activity does help to improve the coherence of the children’s sentences. The contents of the talk are as follows:

**Sample Talk 3:**

*Teacher: B2, can you tell me a little bit about your drawing?*

*B2: Well, I drew a bunny and a chicken. They are both standing on the beach with baskets.*

*Teacher: What are the little animals doing?*

*B2: The bunny is eating a carrot, and the chicken is looking for food.*

*Teacher: What's in this basket?*

*B2: There are carrots, hearts, and some biscuits in this basket.*

*Teacher: Good, now tell me more about this little bunny and the chick.*

*B2: This bunny is red, and its eyes are black. The chick is yellow, and it's a hen, so it's looking for worms because it wants to hatch its babies.*

*Teacher: That sounds like fun! Can you also tell me what colour the sea is?*

*B2: Yes, the sea is blue. I think the sea is blue, just like the sky.*

*Teacher: You mentioned some hearts. What are these hearts about?*

*B2: Those hearts are decorated. They are floating on the sea, just like the stars in the sky.*

*Teacher: That's very creative! What about the house?*

*B2: That's the chick's house. Chickens and rabbits are friends, so they live together. Their house is cosy and has a yellow roof and a big window.*

From the conversation above, the researcher found that children B2 tended to start with shorter sentences to describe objects and basic actions in the picture, for example, "the bunny is eating a carrot". Through interactive discussion and teacher guidance, children gradually showed sentence coherence. B2 was able to use transitional words or phrases, for example, "and", "because", "so", etc. Similarly, the teacher mentioned in their interview:

*Children can speak in a complete sentence based on their drawings and use connecting words when communicating with their peers.*

It was found that children use connectives to better link different elements and gradually build a coherent narrative. The emergence of this transitional language suggests that they are trying to bring different elements together to form a complete description of the scene. This process reflects the positive impact of their in-depth reflection on the theme of the drawing and the dialogue guide, which helped to stimulate the development of their oral language.

In addition, the observations revealed an interesting phenomenon: the coherence of children's sentences in their conversations in the paintings varied according to the themes of the paintings. For example, in the drawing of "Little Environmental Heroes", G2's communication with peers B1 and B2 and the teacher vividly demonstrates this variation (e.g., Sample Talk 4), and Table 5 provides an image of G2's drawing, which further supports this view.

Table 5: "Little Environmental Heroes "by G2

	<b>Theme</b>	
	Little Environmental Heroes	
	<b>Name</b>	G2
	<b>Time</b>	30 minutes
	<b>Date</b>	4 September 2023

**Sample Talk 4:**

G2: Teacher, I noticed the sea water has become dirty and black in colour.

Teacher: Oh, so what to do, G2?

G2: Look, I draw here, and I'm going to use this big pipe, suck it up, and filter out the pollution.

B1: Will this really make the sea clean?

G2: Well, see, the coloured water after filtering is blue, and I'm going to put it back into the ocean.

B2: Is that brown and green frame a window? Why are there windows in the ocean?

G2: It's not a window, B2. That's a filter pipe I draw. It helps the sea water become clean.

B1: Oh, I see! So, the water in that pipe is clean!

B2: Wow, those little fish look so happy!

G2: Yeah, because their home is clean again. The little fish are swimming happily in the water.

During this drawing activity, the researcher made an in-depth observation of the children's sentence coherence when describing and explaining their work. G2 positively and proactively showed her work, starting with describing the polluted sea water, talking about the filtering process, and ending with describing the little fish swimming happily in the clear sea water. This also revealed an interesting phenomenon: although G2 appeared to be a little shy in her daily life, when she got into something she loved, she became very active and fully committed. When B2 misinterpreted the pipe in the drawing that indicated sewage treatment, G2 not only corrected it quickly but also logically and explained its real meaning, demonstrating her coherence of sentence structure and logical thinking. This is highly consistent with the idea mentioned by Coates (2002) that children explain to each other the meaning of what they have drawn when describing paintings. In addition, from G2's description, the researcher was also able to see how she skilfully combined line form and colour with the actual meaning of what was being drawn.

Indeed, the teacher's reflective journal also supported this observation, as quoted below.

*“The theme of this drawing activity was something of interest to G2, whose parents had taken her to the Marine Environmental Showcase the previous week. I could clearly see the children’s progress in their OLS. Particularly, her sentences became more coherent when she described and explained her work. In addition, G2 responded well to other children’s questions” (Teacher’s Reflective Journal, 8 September 2023).*

Children frequently use the phrase “look, I put it here” to draw attention to their drawings and to get ready to share information (Hopperstad, 2008), and G2 used this tactic in Sample Talk 4. Through observation, the researcher learnt that drawing activities provided children with a visual and intuitive platform to express their ideas, which inadvertently helped them to better organise their language and thus improve sentence coherence.

During the study, the researcher discovered that the observed drawing activities were the result of the teacher initiating them through the observation of children’s vocabulary richness and sentence coherence. Interaction between children, the teacher and peers were made easier through the teacher’s support strategies. Also, talking to children has been found to yield more information about attitudes towards what is being drawn (Damianov, 2022). However, while children engaged in talk for all the drawing activities, and their vocabulary increased, there were differences in the children’s participation in the interactions between the different drawing themes, and their vocabulary as well as the coherence of their sentences differed significantly. In addition to the children’s drawings analysed in this paper, additional works were collected to provide a more comprehensive perspective. These additional pieces of work have been included in **Appendix 5** and, although not analysed in detail, they further substantiate the findings of the study and demonstrate the diversity of children’s OLS in drawing.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study successfully reveals how classroom drawing activities can effectively influence 5-year-old children’s OLS development. The findings suggest that drawing activities are indeed effective in promoting the development of OLS in 5-year-old children, especially in terms of vocabulary richness and sentence coherence. Furthermore, drawing activities provide a creative speaking space for children to organise and use language more freely. In this process, the role and strategies of the teacher become crucial. Teachers need to choose attractive subjects for drawing, guide children to show their thinking and feelings through drawing and teach them how to describe and explain their work in words. Although teachers see and recognise the effectiveness of this approach, they still face challenges in how to sustainably advance children’s OLS, especially the lack of a systematic set of instructional guidelines. This also means that early childhood teachers need more support and professional training to better realise the potential of this teaching strategy. This study not only highlights the value of drawing activities in promoting children’s OLS, but also points to their importance in a wider educational and developmental context. Drawing activities could help children better perceive and interpret their environments,

and could improve their social interaction skills, thus laying the foundation for their future academic and social success. Considering that growth in OLS is an ongoing process that requires long-term commitment, future research could focus on expanding the sample size and extending the duration of the study to investigate the sustained effects of different drawing activities on children's OLS in the long run. In addition, it is recommended that teachers incorporate goal-oriented language development support strategies in drawing activities as well as increased collaboration with parents to enhance the language learning effects of these activities.

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## Appendix 1

Name	Genders	Nationality	Parental education level	Socio-economic Status (SES)
B1	Boy	Han Chinese	Master	Middle class
B2	Boy	Han Chinese	PhD	Middle class
G1	Girl	Han Chinese	Master	Middle class
G2	Girl	Manchu	Master	Middle class

## Appendix 2




家长同意书  
**Parental consent form**

亲爱的家长、监护人：  
Dear Parent or Guardian:

我写信是想告诉你我们要做的一个令人兴奋的项目。本次调查的题目为“Enhancing Oral Language Skills in 5-Year-Old Children Through Drawing Activities in The Classroom”，这是博士研究题目“The exploration of drawing activity based on scaffolding theory on oral language skills development in 5-year-olds”的一部分。此表格是一个称为“知情同意”的过程的一部分，以便您在决定是否参加之前了解本研究。  
I am writing to tell you about an exciting project we are going to be doing. The title of this research is “Enhancing Oral Language Skills in 5-Year-Old Children Through Drawing Activities in The Classroom”, which is part of a PhD study entitled “The exploration of drawing activity based on scaffolding theory on oral language skills development in 5-year-olds”. This form is part of a process called “Informed Consent” so that you can find out about the study before deciding whether to take part.

**程序 (Procedures):**

- 允许你的孩子在幼儿园参加教师设计的绘画活动。
- 让你的孩子在幼儿园绘画活动时被录像。
- 允许研究人员在观察时间内收集您的孩子在幼儿园绘画时产生的任何绘画作品。
- Allows your child to participate in teacher-designed drawing activities in kindergarten.
- Allow your child to be videotaped during the kindergarten drawing activity.
- Allow the researcher to collect any drawings your child produces while drawing in kindergarten during observation time.

**研究的自愿性质 (Voluntary nature of research):**

本研究是自愿参与的。每个人都会尊重你是否选择让你的孩子参加研究的决定。如果你不同意您的孩子参加这项研究，任何人都不会对你另眼相看。如果你现在决定您的孩子参加这项研究，你以后仍然可以改变主意。你可以要求让你的孩子随时停下来，不会造成任何后果。  
Participation in this study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision your

decision on whether you choose to allow your child to participate in the study. No one will look at you differently if you do not agree to your child taking part in this study. If you decide now that your child will take part in the study, you can still change your mind later. You can ask for your child to stop at any time without any consequences.

**隐私 (Privacy):**

您提供的任何信息都将保密。研究人员不会将您孩子的个人信息用于本研究项目之外的任何目的。此外，研究人员不会在研究报告中呈现孩子或任何其他可能识别孩子的信息。

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your child's personal information for any purpose outside of this research study. In addition, the researcher will not present the child or any other information that may identify the child in the research report.

**疑问(Questions):**

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact the researcher at [mengyun@student.usm.my](mailto:mengyun@student.usm.my), and the researcher will be happy to answer them.

非常感谢您!

Sincerely,

获得您的同意,

Obtaining Your Consent,

签字 (Signature): \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3

Respondent Teacher Information	
Name	T
Gender	Female
Teaching experience	5 years
Education	Bachelor's degree.
Honours	Kindergarten star teacher title
Drawing Skills	Expertise in teaching drawing
Interest in research	Willing to participate in research and answer researcher's questions sincerely.

## Appendix 4

Theme	Name of drawing subject	Process of activity design	Date
		Crayons or watercolours, A5 (148mm x 210mm) blank paper	
Theme 1 (Character)	"Little Environmental Heroes"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to the activity (5 minutes)</li> <li>• Children's drawing activity scenarios. Teachers provide scaffolding strategies, and interaction with teachers and peers (20 minutes)</li> <li>• Children share their artwork (5 minutes)</li> </ul>	4 September 2023
	"Me now versus me grown up"		6 September 2023
	"Me and my family"		8 September 2023
Theme 2 (Animals)	"Animal Party"		11 September 2023
	"Chicken's Holiday Life"		12 September 2023
	"Underwater World"		13 September 2023

## Appendix 5

