

Malaysian Teachers' Beliefs on the Integration of Arts into English Language

Learning in Early Childhood Education

A Thesis

**Presented to the Department of English Language Education as Partial
fulfilment of the requirements to obtain the *Sarjana Pendidikan* Degree in
English Language Education**



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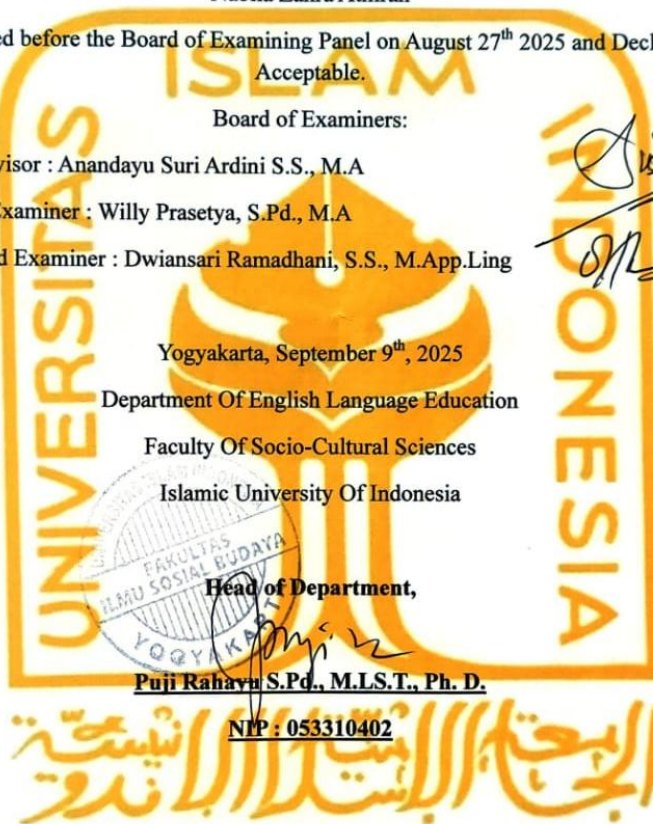
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STATEMENTS OF WORKS ORIGINALITY

I honestly declare that this thesis "Malaysian Teacher's Beliefs on Integration of Language and Art in Early Childhood Education", does not contain the work or parts of the work of other people, with the exception of those cited in the quotations and references, as a scientific paper should.

Yogyakarta, August 18, 2025

The Writer,



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MOTTO

“I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship.”

(Louisa May Alcott)

DEDICATIONS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Allah SWT, the source of all blessings, for granting me the strength, guidance, and countless opportunities that have brought me to this moment. I also wish to thank myself for refusing to give up, for enduring sleepless nights and endless deadlines. This undergraduate thesis is lovingly dedicated to my beloved parents, Yunirisna and Eddy and my little brother Nabil, for their unconditional love and endless prayers. And to all my dear friends: QA, Skatel, PBI 21, Perintis Pride, KK10, and every friends across the world whose names I cannot mention one by one, but whose presence has made my journey brighter. To all of you, this work carries pieces of your love, hope, and laughter.

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Malaysian Teachers' Beliefs on the Integration of Arts into English Language Learning in Early Childhood Education

ABSTRACT

The growing need to master English from an early age presents unique challenges, as young children learn differently from adults. Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) therefore requires creative strategies and varied methods that go beyond conventional adult oriented approaches. To overcome this, teacher can integrate the creative nature of art to English language learning. However, implementing such integration in classroom needs teachers' strong beliefs to ensure the success of this process. Therefore, this study seeks to explore Malaysian teachers' beliefs on the integration of art and language in early childhood education. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through interviews and class observation as secondary data. Afterwards, data are analysed through coding and thematic analysis. The findings revealed six key themes that reflect the teacher's beliefs on the benefits of integrating art into language instruction: scaffolding and instructional support, student engagement and creativity, higher order thinking skills, independent expression, language skills development, and cultural awareness. The findings of the research sheds light to how Malaysian Teacher's beliefs build her application of art integration in her teaching practice. The study also offers implications for teacher training and future research in early childhood language education, and beyond Malaysia, the findings provide insights for other countries with similar cultural and educational contexts, suggesting possibilities for adapting art integration practices in early childhood language classrooms.

Keywords: Teachers' Beliefs, Arts and English Language Integration Early Childhood Education

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Learning English as foreign language can be demanding, especially for young learners. The characteristic of traditional class where it lacks of interaction between teacher and learner can potentially lead to student's boredom and setbacks in class (Derakshan, et al., 2021). Moreover, learning English as foreign language can lead to anxiety for some learners due limited time, low confidence level and negative past experience such as being laughed or criticised by their peers when learners made mistakes in pronunciation or grammar usage (Hashiwaki, 2024). Therefore, it is essential for teachers to design fun and active learning activities for young learners, which can be effectively achieved through integrating arts into language learning. However, The integration of art in the classroom is often seen as challenging, not only because it requires significant financial resources and a high level of creativity, but also because many arts-based programs lack the time, materials, and teacher preparation needed to provide meaningful learning experiences (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004). Furthermore, educators may feel constrained by national or regional standards that impose artificial boundaries on more enriching and individualized learning experiences. These limitations can affect teachers'

willingness or ability to adopt integrated teaching approaches (Hartle, Pinciotti, & Gorton, 2015).

Integrating arts into English language learning in early childhood education is crucial, as it supports various aspects of child development such as creativity, imagination, language skills, and cognitive abilities. Prior research highlights that young learners acquire new vocabulary more effectively in interactive and engaging contexts that allow them to observe, respond, and communicate in real time (Roseberry, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2014). Arts-based activities, such as role-play, storytelling, music, and drawing, naturally create these interactive settings, making them valuable for language development.

Many researchers have explored the practice of integrating art and language in classroom settings. For instance, Hashiwaki (2024) examined how art integration can improve language acquisition for speakers of other languages. Similarly, Mengyun et al. (2024) investigated how drawing activities help five-year-old children enhance their oral language skills. Both studies focus on how art-integrated activities in language classrooms help learners to have better enhancement of language skills, yet neither addresses teachers' beliefs about these practices explicitly. In another study, Roothoof (2017) explored primary teachers' beliefs about teaching English to young learners (TEYL) in Spanish classroom settings. Additionally, Brouillette et al.

(2015) assessed the use of art integration to improve English language learners' performance in listening and speaking assessments. Lastly, Ingraham and Nuttall (2016) investigated how an art-integrated school in Southeast New Mexico holds strong potential to meet the needs of English language learners.

Although these studies provide valuable insights, there is still limited research that specifically examines teachers' beliefs about art integration in early childhood language education, particularly within the Malaysian context. Since teachers' beliefs strongly influence their pedagogical decisions and classroom practices, investigating these beliefs is essential for understanding how and why teachers adopt or resist certain approaches. This is especially important in early childhood education, where the foundational experiences provided by teachers shape children's development across multiple domains.

By investigating these beliefs, we gain valuable insight into why certain strategies are selected and how educators conceptualize the role of art in language development. Therefore, this study aims to explore Malaysian teachers' beliefs on the integration of art into language learning in early childhood education.

1.2 Formulation of the problem

What are Malaysian teacher's beliefs of integrating art into language learning for young learners?

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to explore Malaysian teachers' beliefs of integrating art into language learning.

1.4 Significance of the study

Exploring Malaysian teachers' beliefs offers perspectives that could inform future discussions on integration strategies in early childhood education. Although Malaysia is not the researcher's home country, this study is believed to serve as a mirror and reflection for future teaching practices.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Teacher's Beliefs

The term teacher's beliefs usually refers to a teacher's educational beliefs or those that are relevant to their instruction. Clark & Peterson (1984) defines teachers' beliefs as personally held systems of beliefs, values, and principles that guide their cognitive and behavioural action in the classroom. Teacher beliefs play a vital role in shaping classroom practices, especially when it comes to adopting new or alternative instructional approaches. In the context of integrating art into language learning, teachers' acceptance and understanding of the approach significantly influence its successful implementation.

Borg (2001) states that beliefs are significant in both life and several aspects of teaching. They assist people in making sense of the world by affecting how and whether new information is viewed and accepted. Without teachers' strong beliefs, even well-intentioned or innovative teaching approaches may never be fully discovered in the classroom. This is especially relevant when it comes to working with young learners. Therefore, investigating teachers' beliefs becomes crucial to understanding how they perceive and approach the integration of art in actual classroom environments.

Teachers' own experiences tend to become internalized beliefs that guide their teaching approaches. Specifically, Borg S. (2003) explains how teacher beliefs are usually strong and hard to change, and they can strongly influence how teachers make decisions in the classroom. For instance, teachers who had negative experiences with error correction may become wary of using this technique. On the other hand, those who enjoyed cultural aspects of learning may include a lot of cultural topics in their teaching. Therefore, they prevent their prior negative experiences from happening again in their future career and that is what builds their belief or cognition as a teacher.

In a research by Roofthoof (2017), teachers expressed a preference for using interactive activities such as storytelling when teaching young learners, as these methods aligned with their belief in active and communicative classroom environments. This illustrates the dynamic relationship between beliefs and teaching practice: beliefs influence how teachers teach, and experiences in the classroom can, in turn, reinforce or reshape those beliefs.

Teaching English for young learners (TEYL) is a complex practice. Different from teaching English for adults, they present significant challenges in the practice where the teacher needs to make variations and creativity that fits students' characteristics. According to Krashen (1982) Adult learners are better monitor users than children as they have more developed metalinguistic awareness. By its means, teachers can use a traditional teaching approach such

as writing-intensive instruction, to be more effective with adults. However, such methods need to be adapted when teaching young learners, who benefit more from interactive and experiential learning.

An approach similar to content based learning where language is not the main focus or attention rather than used as a means of communication is a great approach to ensure students' success in understanding the language itself (Kersten & Rohde, 2013). With similar approaches, students acquire language more naturally by engaging with content that interests them and reflects their real-life experiences. Therefore, integrating arts into language learning might be a better solution.

2.2 Integration of Art in Language Learning

Art is a multidimensional element, making it difficult to be explained by a single fixed definition. According to Herbert Read, art can be understood as something that contains a certain form which is considered pleasing to the eye or beautiful (Meeson, 1974). In the context of education, however, the meaning of art extends beyond aesthetic appreciation. It has been widely applied as a pedagogical tool to support development of creativity, self-expression, and critical thinking through various forms such as music, drama, and drawing (Munro, T. 2023). Children learn best if there are any visual based and kinaesthetic activities involved. Through art practice, children not only expose

themselves to the language through communicating with the art practice, but students can also develop fine and gross motor skills (Veliou, Argiri, & Kontogeorgou, 2022). Art practice offers hands-on, creative experiences that align with how children learn best through play, movement, imagination, and expression. Art practice stimulates creativity in the language learning process and provides diverse ways for children to express themselves, thus contributing to language development. Rucinski-Hatch (1996) argued that teachers may structure learning, build on students' existing knowledge, and establish strong connections between spoken and written language by implementing art-integrated instruction. Additionally, integrating arts encourages the growth of higher-order thinking abilities like problem-solving, analysis, and interpretation as well as decision making skills and creativity. (Yang & Heong, 2024; Saud, et al., 2024). Because of these advantages, art integration is not only a useful teaching approach but also an effective educational tool, particularly for English language learners (ELLs), who can find it difficult to communicate just through traditional language platforms.

Art in early childhood education is crucial, offering a powerful platform for self-expression, and learn how to articulate their thoughts and emotions (Saud, et al., 2024). The accessible nature of art are beneficial for all children with differing abilities, with arts enable children to experience success in their learning (Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole, 2009).

The integration of language and arts in early childhood education is very important because it helps develop various aspects of child development, such as creativity, imagination, language skills, and thinking skills (De Jesus, 2016). Children acquire new words most effectively through face-to-face interactions, where they can observe, respond, and engage with others in real-time (Roseberry, Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2014).

Despite these benefits, the successful implementation of art-integrated approaches often depends on teachers' understanding and belief in the value of such methods. Without a strong belief system that supports creative, student-centered learning, teachers may hesitate to adopt or fully commit to this integration, even when it aligns with best practices in language education.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

In teaching English to young learners, there is an increasing urgency for teachers to come up with new ideas to deliver lessons in creative and enjoyable ways. Rather than focusing solely on teaching English structures and vocabulary, it is equally important to design learning experiences that can foster multiple skills in students, such as higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), creativity, and imagination. This has led to the idea of integrating art and language as a unique approach to English language instruction.

In practice, however, it is essential to explore the underlying teacher beliefs that shape and motivate the adoption of such an approach. Considering that teacher beliefs are hardly change and tend to influence their instructional decisions made in the classroom. Understanding these beliefs provides valuable insight into why teachers choose certain teaching strategies and how they implement them.

Based on this reasoning, this research aims to investigate teachers' beliefs specifically regarding the integration of art and language in the context of teaching English to young learners (TEYL). The analysis is guided by the integration of art components proposed by Rucinski-Hatch (1996), which provide a theoretical framework for understanding how artistic elements can be embedded into language learning to support linguistic, cognitive, and affective development in young learners.

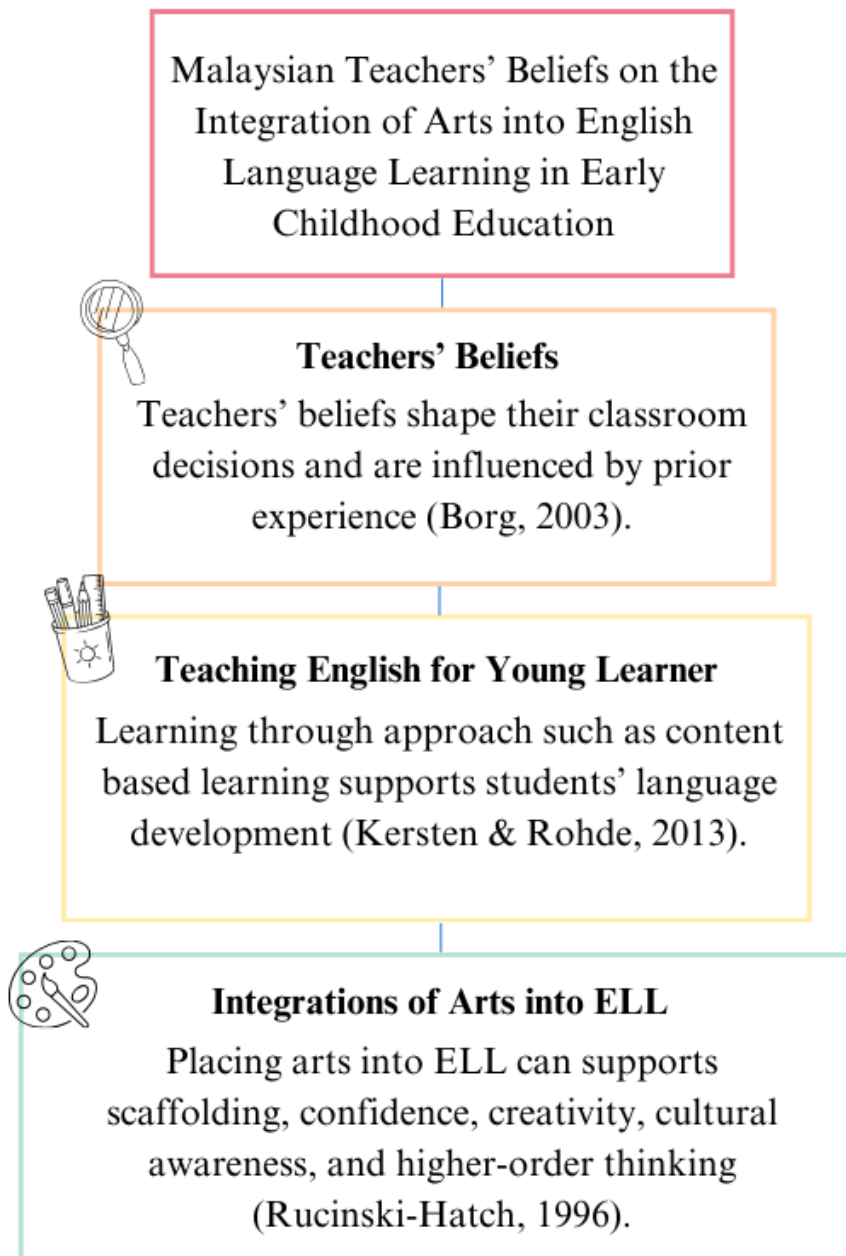


Figure 2. 1 Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design, using interview to explore teachers' beliefs about the integration of art in language teaching. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain deeper insight into the abstract and complex nature of teachers' beliefs, something that cannot be simply captured through simple yes-or-no questions. As Denzin and Lincoln (2013) note, qualitative research seeks to interpret, or make sense of, cases by considering the interpretations that individuals give them. The aim of this study is to explore teachers' beliefs of integrating art and language in the classroom.

3.2 Data Preparation

This study recruited a Malaysian preschool teacher as the primary source of data. To collect the data, the researcher employed interviews as the main data collection technique. Several aspects were considered during the data collection process, including setting & participants, and obtaining informed consent.

3.2.1 Setting & Participants

The participant in this study, referred to as Teacher DN, is a preschool teacher with three years of teaching experience at a preschool located in Muar, Johor, Malaysia. Teacher DN was chosen because she

is someone the researcher had previously observed in another research, and who actively integrates art and language in her classroom practice. In her teaching context, lessons are designed around monthly themes that are applied across subjects, including language class. For example, during a theme on animals, all subjects incorporate related activities. Students engage in creative tasks such as drawing, singing, or dramatizing animal characters while simultaneously using English language as the communication tool. This consistent and systematic use of arts as part of her classroom practice demonstrates her relevance and significance as a participant in this study.

3.2.2 Consent Form

Prior to the data collection, the researcher contacted the participant via WhatsApp to seek her voluntary consent to participate in the study. Upon receiving consent, the researcher initially scheduled an interview to be conducted through a WhatsApp call. Nevertheless, due to personal circumstances, the participant was unable to attend the call and, instead, provided her responses to the interview questions through WhatsApp text messages. To obtain further clarification and depth of responses, the researcher subsequently conducted a follow-up interaction, during which the participant shared additional information via WhatsApp voice notes with a total duration of approximately 10 minutes.

3.2.3 Research Instrument

The interview guide consisted of 13 open-ended questions designed to elicit teachers' perspectives, teaching strategies, and perceived impacts of integrating art into language learning. The questions were developed based on relevant literature and aligned with the research objectives.

Table 3. 1 Interview Questions

Construct	Component	Interview Question
Rucinski-Hatch, C. J. (1996). <i>Grandma Moses meets ESL: Art for speaking and writing activities. Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning and Teaching</i> , 3.	General Belief	<i>How do you view the importance of integrating art and language in learning?</i>
	Scaffolding and Instructional Support	<i>Do you apply scaffolding in your classroom ? To what extent did you apply scaffolded instruction when integrating art into language teaching?</i>
	Student Engagement	<i>To what extent does integrating art and language in your classroom make learning more meaningful?</i>
	Emotional Expression	<i>Have you found that this approach helps students expressing their emotions? Can you elaborate?</i>
	Creativity and Imagination	<i>In your opinion, does this approach foster students' creativity?</i> <i>In your experience, how does this approach support or stimulate students' creative thinking?</i>

Higher Order Thinking Skills	<p><i>Can you share how integrating art and language encourages students to engage in higher order thinking, such as analysis or evaluation?</i></p> <p><i>How do you facilitate deep analysis, reasoning, or questioning in your classroom through the integration of art and language?</i></p> <p><i>Have you used integrated art-language tasks to model problem-solving skills for your students? Can you give an example?</i></p>
Language Skills Development	<p><i>Can this approach serve as a bridge for students in learning both writing and spoken language?</i></p>
Cultural Awareness	<p><i>How did this approach encourage student's awareness of diversity?</i></p>
Interpretation and Communication	<p><i>How do you guide students in interpreting and communicating their ideas when working with art and language together?</i></p>
Observation and Perspective	<p><i>How does this approach help students observe their surroundings more deeply or express their perspectives more meaningfully?</i></p>

All interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and Malay Language, depending on the participants' language preference. This bilingual approach allowed participants to express themselves more comfortably and authentically.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

The interview was conducted via WhatsApp to facilitate audio and text recording, ensuring accurate documentation of the data. With the participation of a Malaysian preschool teacher, this study aims to explore teacher beliefs on Integration of arts into English language learning in early childhood education. Secondary data were also utilised, consisting of classroom observation photographs collected during researcher's previous assignment in Malaysia. The photographs taken during this observation were found to be relevant to Teacher DN's explanations and were therefore included as supporting secondary data.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected from the interview were analysed through thematic analysis, following the framework established by Braun and Clarke (2006). After transcribing the interviews, the researcher reviewed the transcript several times to gain a thorough understanding of the data. The next step involved initial coding, where significant segments of text were identified and labelled with descriptive codes. These codes were then organized into broader themes that align with the components identified by Rucinski-Hatch (1996), including creativity, scaffolding, language development, and cultural awareness.

3.4.1 Coding and Thematizing

The process of coding involves dividing data into smaller pieces and then reassembling them to examine each relationship and find new connections. In order to provide a more thorough examination of the data, researchers utilise this technique to broaden, adjust, and reinterpret the data (Cope, 2009).

The coding system in this study followed a structured format. For instance, by the code I/TD/SIS/VS/1, I refer to Interview, which indicates that the data was obtained through interviews. TD refers to Teacher DN, who was the participant. SIS is the abbreviation for the theme Scaffolding and Instructional Support, while VS represents the sub-theme Vocabulary Scaffolding. Finally, the number 1 refers to the line number in the interview transcript where the statement appears.

To make sense of diverse data, a process of thematizing is required. According to Farias et al. (2021), the process of thematizing involves finding, classifying, and formalising themes from qualitative data in this case, interview transcript. This procedure facilitates in converting unorganised data into ideas and theories that may contribute to deepen our understanding of the subject. Thematizing codes are presented as follows:

- (1) General Beliefs (GB)
- (2) Scaffolding and Instructional Support (SIS)
 - a. Instructional Scaffolding (IS)
 - b. Vocabulary Scaffolding (VS)
 - c. Independent Expression (IE)
- (3) Student Engagement (SE)
- (4) Emotional Expression (EX)
- (5) Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)
 - a. Storytelling (ST)
 - b. Analytical Comparison (ANC)
 - c. Reflective Thinking (RT)
- (6) Creativity and Imagination (CI)
- (7) Language Skills Development (LSD)
 - a. Bridge to Written and Spoken (BTW)
- (8) Cultural Awareness (CA)

(9) Interpretation and Communication (IC)

a. Visual Interpretation (VI)

(10) Observation and Perspective (OP)

a. Contextual Awareness (CONAW)

Each finding identified from the data is assigned a code using the system OP01. "OP" is an abbreviation of the relevant aspect identified, while the number "01" indicates the sequence of data found within the OP category.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness ensures that this research is reliable, credible, and ethically sound. According to Nowell et al. (2017), there are several key criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research, including credibility, confirmability, and dependability.

Credibility itself serves the purpose to deal with the findings and the extent to which the data accurately reflect respondents' experiences. In this study, credibility was maintained by ensuring that the selected participant had relevant experience with the integration of art and language in early childhood education. The researcher also used direct quotes from the participant to represent her views authentically, minimizing researcher bias. Confirmability focuses on the objectivity of the findings, ensuring that the results are shaped by the participant's responses and not by researcher bias or interest. Confirmability was enhanced through the involvement of this research

supervisor throughout the research process, including during the selection of participants, development of the interview instruments, and data analysis. This collaborative process helped ensure researcher's liability on the data and refrained the researcher's personal assumptions. The last key criteria, dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the research process over time. To support dependability, all interviews were recorded, transcribed, and distinctly documented. A clear audit trail was maintained, including notes on interview transcripts and any photos involved, so that the study could be replicated or reviewed in the future.

CHAPTER IV

Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Findings

This section explains the findings of the research which are the Malaysian teacher's beliefs on Integration of language and art in early childhood education. The data of this research are collected through an interview with a Malaysian teacher to understand deeply on her perspectives and beliefs on the approach.

The interview was conducted using the framework by Rucinski-Hatch (1996), to explore Teacher DN's beliefs regarding the integration of language and art. As a result, a large amount of data was collected. After going through the analysis process, nine themes were identified that aligned with the framework used and reflected the teacher's beliefs. Initially, nine coding themes emerged were 1) Scaffolding and Instructional Support, 2) Student Engagement, 3) Emotional Expression, 4) Higher Order Thinking Skills, 5) Creativity and Imagination, 6) Language Skills Development, 7) Cultural Awareness, 8) Interpretation and Communication, and 9) Observation and Perspective.

However, after going through a re-coding process, researchers found some overlapping and redundant codes, which led us to merge certain theme. As a result, the final coding categories were established as follows.

4.1.1 Scaffolding and Instructional Support

The concept of scaffolding is connected with Vygotsky's theory of how language development can occur through interaction. Stone (1993) believed that scaffolding can be viewed as a fluid, interpersonal interaction where both children and the teacher are actively engaged in. In Teacher DN's practice, she applied the art as a scaffolding tool or supporting tool in the learning process to enhance students' language development, to be more fun and relevant to children's characteristics. Based on the interview, the researcher found several themes of scaffolding that Teacher DN's utilize, divided as Instructional Scaffolding (IS), Vocabulary Scaffolding (VS), and Independent Expression (IE).

In her lessons, Teacher DN uses art not only as a classroom activity but as a scaffold to guide students step-by-step through the learning process. In painting and storytelling sessions, the artwork itself becomes the medium for interaction between teacher and students. In painting and storytelling activities, the teacher doesn't just give them a theme and let them draw whatever they want, she believes that the role of a teacher goes beyond that. She believes that scaffolding is a key process in helping young learners acquire language, especially when integrated with arts. For example, she begins by introducing simple example sentences or prompting questions such as "Who is in this

picture?” or “What is happening?”, directly linking these questions to the students’ own drawings. In this sense, the artwork acts as a visual aid to assist students in making the connection between words and meaning.

Arts also provides a supportive environment for students with lower self-confidence. When some children hesitate to share, Teacher DN uses their artwork as a safe medium through which they can communicate ideas indirectly before speaking. She helps them formulate sentences by referring to what they have drawn, which reduces the pressure of abstract language use and makes sharing less intimidating. As she explained: *“I also help them construct sentences based on those ideas and give encouragement so they feel confident to share.”* (I/TD/SIS/IS/02).

From these practices, it can be seen that Teacher DN views scaffolding not only as supporting tools but also as the strategic use of art to mediate language learning. By guiding vocabulary and sentences uses in children’s drawings, art functions as both a communicative bridge and a confidence-building tool in the classroom.

Art-based activities are also used as a tool to build and reinforce vocabulary. When students create visual works such as drawings, they are encouraged to present their outcomes in front of their classmates. Prior to the presentation, Teacher DN introduces related words and phrases contextually,

aligned with what the students intend to express. As she explained, *“I also help the students become familiar with certain vocabulary before they construct their own sentences.”* (I/TD/SIS/VS/01). This practice reflects Teacher DN's beliefs that language is best learned in context, and drawing as the art medium provides a meaningful context to introduce and reinforce vocabulary.

As students become more confident to express their ideas, she reduces the support and gives them space to express their ideas freely, as in her practice, she no longer guiding students with starter questions or give them new English vocabulary related with their artworks when they are already felt the confidents to produce the language on their own. Her practice of reducing the support given shows that she believes in a progressive shift from teacher-led to student-led learning, trusting students to take more ownership over time.

4.1.2 Students Engagement and Creativity

Teacher DN strongly believes that the integration of art and language opens up broad opportunities for creativity. Students can create unique stories based on their drawings, choose colours that reflect specific emotions, or invent their own characters and imaginative worlds. Art can be the medium for students to think beyond reality. For instance, through art activities, students can portray animals who can talk or how the wind wants to be a tree's best

friend. “They are free to express themselves without fear of making mistakes, because in art, there is no right or wrong answer” (I/TD/CI/02)

This reflect on her beliefs that art can create a harmless environment for kids to learn without fear of being judged. Giving children the freedom to express their emotion and ideas can solidly help them to develop communication skills. Through art-based activities, students may perceive the experience as play rather than formal instruction, which can create a more relaxed and supportive learning environment.

In Teacher DN’s practice, she mentions that students’ participation increases whenever the art class includes activities that are playful and creative, this is a positive impact since Teacher DN believes that students learn best when they are actively engaged. Not as passive recipients who only listen to teacher’s talk in front of class, but as participants who enjoy the process of language learning. In one class, art activity allows students to create unique stories based on their drawings, choose colours that reflect certain emotions, or invent their own characters and imaginary worlds. “They not only draw with great imagination, but also create engaging narratives.” (I/TD/SE/06) These interactions provide authentic language practice in a low-pressure context, reinforcing both communication skills and classroom cohesion.

4.1.3 Higher Order Thinking Skills

The integration of art and language not only enhances basic communication skills but also supports the development of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). This belief was strongly emphasized by Teacher DN throughout the interview. Her commitment to this integration is demonstrated through four main strategies: storytelling (ST), analytical comparison (ANC), reflective thinking (RT), and contextual awareness (CONAW)

According to Teacher DN, children who work on creative projects are learning complicated thought processes in addition to expressing their views. To nurture these skills, she used storytelling as one of the strategies to stimulate higher-order thinking. Thus, the teacher will present a case such as “It suddenly rained on a picnic”. From that small case, Students then create drawings to illustrate possible solutions, such as finding shelter or playing games inside a tent, and later narrate the story they visualized. *“This activity integrates art, language, and problem-solving skills into one enjoyable exercise.”* (I/TD/HOTS/ST/04).

Teacher DN considers that language learning should also cultivate reasoning, creativity, and decision-making, not just vocabulary or grammar. In this way, storytelling becomes an activity that not only enhances students’

language skills but also fosters their creativity and supports the development of their decision-making skills.

In one session, the teacher used an open ended questioning approach and small group discussion activities to spark students' analytical comparison skills. Teacher DN provided two contrasting pictures with one portraying hot weather and another showing a rainy day, she then encouraged students to observe and compare these artworks, discussing the differences and the impact on the characters in their stories. *"This (art) helps them think critically, support their opinions with reasons, and respect the views of others."* (I/TD/HOTS/ANC/07). Her statement portrays how she use the comparing activities became the starting point for students to think deeper. They had to explain why certain things could happen in one picture but not in the other, which made them give reasons and think beyond just describing the drawings.



Figure 4. 1 Small groups activity

Teacher DN believes that the integration of art and language makes learning more meaningful because it closely relates to students' daily experiences and interests. For example, when they draw their family members and tell stories about them, they are not only learning about sentence structure but also about relationships and emotions. *“This activity makes learning more personal and relevant to their real life”* (I/TD/HOTS/RT/06)

Teacher DN's practice shows her belief that reflective thinking is a vital component of meaningful language learning. By encouraging students to tell stories about their personal lives, she supports the development of not only language skills but also emotional awareness and moral reflection. This integration of art and storytelling enables students to explore who they are while learning how to communicate it effectively.

Teacher DN points out how art stimulates students' observation and perspective-taking skills. Through tasks like drawing from real-life scenes or storytelling with pictures, students learn to notice details, describe what they see, and consider viewpoints beyond their own. In her practice, she asked her students to draw about a playground, from which they begin to observe who is playing in the playground, the colours of equipment, the weather, or how they feel at the moment. Then, they express all of their observations through a story. *"This approach encourages students to become more aware of what is happening around them."* (I/TD/OP/CONAW/01). From this statement, it is clear that she believes such activities help children build the awareness of their surroundings, examine various perspectives and encouraging them to think beyond only what they see.

4.1.4 Independent Expression

From the interview, Teacher DN mentioned how she often creates art activities that give children the opportunity to express themselves freely. According to Teacher DN, she believes on how children should be given freedom to express their inner thoughts, feelings, and ideas, as this encourages them and makes learning personally meaningful. For example, during painting activities, Teacher DN doesn't just let the children paint according to a theme, but also allows them to visualize their emotions by explaining what they have

painted. Additionally, during the art-making process, Teacher DN helps the students interpret their paintings by asking questions such as “What does this line mean?”, “Why did you draw this person crying?”, or “Can you tell me what’s happening in this picture?”. She does this with the intention of allowing children learn to express their emotions through their artwork, reflect on their choices and make decisions based on their own logic or emotions. *“This helps them develop visual and emotional awareness, as well as the ability to express their thoughts clearly and meaningfully.”* (I/TD/EX/04)

She believed art provides students with the opportunity to express their ideas and emotions visually, while language allows them to convey meaning through words. She acknowledges art as a tool for emotional awareness and analytical thinking, not just a creative outlet.

Beyond the emotional dimension, Teacher DN also highlighted the importance of giving children independence to express their ideas in front of others. After arts involved activity, students are often asked to present their artworks in front of their classmates. Teacher DN let them talk about the meaning behind their artwork, why they chose such colours, and anything they had in mind while doing the project. She understands that the more students are given a safe place to express their thoughts, the more they can convey their ideas confidently to build up their independent expression.

“When students are given the opportunity to share their artwork and talk about it in front of their peers, they feel valued and confident that their perspectives matter.” (I/TD/SIS/IE/03)

By combining both emotional and independent aspects, Teacher DN’s practice reflects her belief that art is not solely a creative outlet but also a platform for children to explore their feelings, develop reflective thinking, and communicate their ideas with confidence.

4.1.5 Language Skills Development

Children’s minds are limitless, yet, some of them have difficulty expressing their ideas. To overcome this struggle, art is used as the tool for students to help them interpret ideas and communicate their understanding. Teacher DN uses this opportunity to reinforce students to explain their artwork which also supports the development of students’ visual interpretation (VI) and bridge to written and spoken (BTW) skills.

"I help students interpret the meaning of their artwork by asking questions such as 'What does this line mean?', 'Why did you draw this person crying?', or 'Can you tell me what is happening in this picture?'" (I/TD/IC/VI/01)

Students are driven by these questions to consider their choices in art critically and explain meanings behind their artwork. By doing this, they develop the ability to link language and imagery, which improves their communication and interpretive thinking skills.

Teacher DN has designed a range of activities that serve to bridge students' written and spoken language skills through the integration of art and language. *"When students draw something, it (art) helps them to visualize their ideas."* (I/TD/IC/BTW/01)

As previously explained, Teacher DN incorporates a variety of art-based activities, such as drawing family members, illustrating certain situations, and other forms of visual expression. Thereafter, with the teacher's guidance, students are then encouraged to describe their artwork orally, and later, express those ideas in written form, either through individual sentences or short narratives.

4.1.6 Cultural Awareness

Teacher DN holds the view that the integration of art and language encourages students' awareness of cultural diversity, backgrounds, and perspectives on life. In a multicultural setting like Malaysia, where students come from various cultural roots, such integration becomes particularly meaningful. For example, she once asked her students to draw their family's favorite food and talk about it. Through this activity, they discovered that their

classmates might eat different types of food, speak different languages, or celebrate different festivals. *“This activity teaches students a greater sense of respect and appreciation for individual and cultural differences.”* (I/TD/CA/02)

In another session, one of the activities used in integrating art and language is drawing a family tree. Through this activity, students learn how their families and those of their friends may differ, and this opens up space for them to understand the concept of diversity in social life.

4.2 Discussion

Integrating art into language teaching, especially in early childhood education, is perceived by Teacher DN as a valuable approach for supporting children’s language development. Through art activities such as painting, music, and drawing, children are encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas through art while also expanding their imaginations. Their ability to think creatively and improve their language abilities is supported when they describe their artwork, tell stories, or explain their creative choices. Moreover, arts practices facilitate structured yet meaningful language experiences that promote ownership and personal connection to new vocabulary and language functions (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2017).

Language learning is not solely about grammar and vocabulary, but it is also about students’ emotional expression. Her choice of approach is aligned to

many researches that highlighted the importance of art based activities to children's development. According to Choi & Kim (2021), children who participated in arts-based activities that encouraged them to express their feelings verbally showed improved emotional awareness and regulation. Moreover, kids who were encouraged to share their artwork or tell stories showed more mature emotional expression and a stronger command of emotional terminology. Reflecting on this practice, it is evident that Teacher DN believes in integrating art into language learning in active and expressive learning. She constantly encouraged her children to develop their ideas into artwork and then articulate what they have illustrated using words. This process not only fosters self-expression, but also allows students to apply language in meaningful, real-life contexts. Her belief in students' potential to develop meaningful content when given creative freedom. Her strong view in this potential leads her to design learning activities that are not only enjoyable but also adaptable to students' interests and learning styles.

Beyond emotional development, Teacher DN's practice also reflects a strong belief in the role of art in enhancing children's cognitive growth, where higher-order thinking skills and creativity are fostered as interconnected outcomes. A study by Rusu (2017) uncovers that art can help children develop a unique psychological state called general receptivity, which is the capacity to play creatively, be aware of everything around them, and comprehend the various facets of reality by integrating art activity in school. In line with this,

Teacher DN consistently designs art-based language activities that do not simply require students to recall or repeat information, but instead spark children's original and imaginative thinking. Furthermore, Teacher DN strongly believes that art has the power to cultivate students' creativity due to its naturally diverse and flexible traits, as many believe that the most authentic or fundamental form of creation is through art activities (Glăveanu, 2018).

While creativity allows students to explore ideas freely, it also serves as a pathway for language development, interpretation and observation. It can be seen from the findings that Teacher DN cultivates a non-threatening atmosphere where students can express themselves. Allowing them to present and explain their artwork supports meaningful language use and boosts their confidence. Becker and Roos (2016) emphasize that self-presentation helps children practice language patterns and develop communicative competence. Teacher DN uses art as a medium for students to apply language directly and heightened awareness of the surrounding environment. As students observe carefully at their surroundings to do their artwork, they begin to find words that capture textures, shapes, actions, and emotions which expand both their expressive range and their ability to communicate effectively.

Lastly, Teacher DN believes in how language learning can be used to encourage children on cultural awareness. Particularly in Teacher DN's context, she teaches in Malaysia, a country known for its rich cultural diversity. It is essential for teachers to introduce students to the cultural differences among

their classmates in order to arouse cultural sensitivity. Based on Teacher DN's beliefs, integrating art and language can provide a meaningful platform to bridge children's cultural understanding in an engaging way. Children can develop a greater awareness of diverse cultural heritages through art activities, which also promote tolerance, empathy, and a sense of identity (Fatimah et al., 2016). One of her practices includes encouraging students to draw their favorite foods from their own cultures, which serves as a starting point for peer discussions about how culture shapes their identities while also emphasizing the use of appropriate language throughout the activity.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to uncover Malaysian early childhood education teachers' beliefs on the integration of art and language in early childhood education, with a particular focus on how these beliefs are reflected in their teaching practices. Data are collected through an in depth interview with Teacher DN which emerged seven key themes that reveal how her beliefs can influence her classroom strategies.

The findings suggest that Teacher DN views art not limited to an engaging activity for children, but it can also be beneficial to support their language learning journey. Teacher DN believes the versatile nature of art can be used as a tool for scaffold learning, reinforce emotional expression, maintain students' engagement and boost their confidence in language usage. Beyond that, she perceives the integration of art and language can help her to provide a low pressure learning environment to encourage students' independent expression.

In Teacher DN's perspective, art can broaden the scope of language learning to foster higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and imagination. She makes language learning more engaging by designing entertaining activities

while still maintaining clear objectives to support students' skills such as problem-solving, reflective thinking, and analysis.

This research also highlights how Teacher DN believes that integrating art through language can stimulate students' sense of cultural awareness. Through art activities, students are not only encouraged to understand language structure and use language appropriately, but are also guided to develop empathy towards those who are culturally different, and to recognize that understanding diversity is an essential part of effective communication and mutual respect.

This research was undertaken in the setting of Malaysian education, showing positive results with strong potential for adaptation in the Indonesian context. Considering that the Indonesian government is currently promoting cultural awareness, higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and deep learning in local classrooms, the integration of art and language can serve as a valuable tool to enrich the implementation of foreign language learning. It is hoped that this research can encourage the Indonesian government to take action in adapting such methods and socializing them to local teachers, enabling them to experiment with these approaches.

5.2 Suggestion

This research provides additional insights for other researchers who are interested in conducting further studies in related fields, particularly on EFL teachers' beliefs. However, since the findings are based on only one participant, her beliefs may not fully represent the range of beliefs held by Malaysian early childhood teachers. Future studies could therefore involve multiple teachers from diverse backgrounds to compare teachers' beliefs and examine how these influence their practices across different contexts. In addition, future research could be conducted in different cultural contexts or educational levels to provide a more comprehensive and varied understanding of teachers' beliefs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Coding Transcript

No	Codes	Data
1.	GB01	Sangat penting untuk mengintegrasikan seni dan bahasa dalam pembelajaran awal kanak-kanak kerana kedua-dua bidang ini saling melengkapi. Seni memberi peluang kepada murid untuk meluahkan idea dan emosi mereka secara visual, manakala bahasa membolehkan mereka menyampaikan maksud dengan kata-kata. Apabila kedua-duanya digabungkan, ia membantu perkembangan menyeluruh kanak-kanak – dari segi kognitif, sosial, emosi dan juga bahasa. Selain itu, pembelajaran menjadi lebih menyeronokkan, bersifat kontekstual, dan mudah diingati.
2.	IS01	Saya akan mulakan dengan memberi contoh ayat mudah atau soalan pemandu seperti “Siapa dalam gambar ini?” atau “Apa yang sedang berlaku?”.
3.	IS02	Saya juga bantu mereka membina ayat berdasarkan idea tersebut dan beri dorongan agar mereka yakin berkongsi.
4.	VS01	Saya juga bantu murid mengenal kosa kata tertentu sebelum mereka membina ayat sendiri.
5.	VS02	Saya juga bantu mereka membina ayat berdasarkan idea tersebut
6.	IE01	Seni memberi peluang kepada murid untuk meluahkan idea dan emosi mereka secara visual, manakala bahasa membolehkan mereka menyampaikan maksud dengan kata-kata.
7.	IE02	Apabila mereka semakin yakin, saya kurangkan bantuan dan beri mereka ruang untuk mengekspresikan idea secara bebas.
8.	IE03	Apabila murid diberi peluang untuk berkongsi hasil seni mereka dan menceritakannya di hadapan rakan-rakan, mereka berasa dihargai dan yakin bahawa pandangan mereka penting.

9.	SE01	Contohnya, apabila mereka melukis ahli keluarga dan bercerita mengenainya, mereka tidak hanya belajar tentang struktur ayat, tetapi juga tentang hubungan, emosi dan nilai murni.
10.	SE02	Murid boleh mencipta cerita yang unik berdasarkan lukisan mereka, memilih warna yang menggambarkan emosi tertentu, atau mencipta watak dan dunia imaginasi sendiri.
11.	SE03	Apabila murid melukis sesuatu, ia membantu mereka memvisualkan idea. Kemudian, dengan bimbingan, mereka boleh menceritakan tentang lukisan itu (bahasa lisan) dan seterusnya menulisnya dalam bentuk ayat atau cerita ringkas (bahasa tulisan).
12.	SE04	Sebagai contoh, saya pernah minta murid melukis makanan kegemaran keluarga masing-masing dan bercerita mengenainya
13.	SE05	Dalam satu sesi, saya minta murid bandingkan dua lukisan – contohnya, satu tentang cuaca panas dan satu lagi tentang hari hujan. Saya ajak mereka berbincang perbezaan dan kesan terhadap watak dalam cerita mereka.
14.	SE06	Mereka bukan sahaja melukis dengan penuh imaginasi, tetapi juga mencipta naratif yang menarik, seperti watak haiwan yang boleh bercakap atau cerita tentang angin yang ‘berkawan’ dengan pokok
15.	SE07	Murid diminta melukis satu situasi bermasalah seperti “Hari berkelah tiba-tiba hujan.” Mereka kemudian perlu fikirkan penyelesaian seperti mencari tempat berteduh atau bermain permainan dalam khemah.
16.	SE08	Apabila saya minta mereka melukis tentang taman permainan, mereka mula perhati siapa yang bermain, warna permainan, cuaca, atau perasaan mereka ketika itu. Kemudian mereka akan luahkan semua itu melalui cerita.
17.	EX01	Seni memberi peluang kepada murid untuk meluahkan idea dan emosi mereka secara visual, manakala bahasa membolehkan mereka menyampaikan maksud dengan kata-kata.
18.	EX02	Contohnya, apabila mereka melukis ahli keluarga dan bercerita mengenainya, mereka tidak hanya belajar tentang struktur ayat, tetapi juga tentang hubungan, emosi dan nilai murni

19.	EX03	Murid boleh mencipta cerita yang unik berdasarkan lukisan mereka, memilih warna yang menggambarkan emosi tertentu, atau mencipta watak dan dunia imaginasi sendiri
20.	EX04	Ini membantu mereka membina kesedaran visual dan emosi serta keupayaan untuk menyampaikan pandangan dengan jelas dan bermakna.
21.	HOTS1	Murid boleh mencipta cerita yang unik berdasarkan lukisan mereka, memilih warna yang menggambarkan emosi tertentu, atau mencipta watak dan dunia imaginasi sendiri.
22.	HOTS2	Kemudian, dengan bimbingan, mereka boleh menceritakan tentang lukisan itu (bahasa lisan) dan seterusnya menulisnya dalam bentuk ayat atau cerita ringkas (bahasa tulisan).
23.	HOTS3	Mereka bukan sahaja melukis dengan penuh imaginasi, tetapi juga mencipta naratif yang menarik, seperti watak haiwan yang boleh bercakap atau cerita tentang angin yang 'berkawan' dengan pokok.
24.	HOTS4	Mereka lukiskan jalan cerita dan kemudian bercerita mengenainya. Aktiviti ini menggabungkan seni, bahasa dan kemahiran menyelesaikan masalah dalam satu aktiviti yang menyeronokkan
25.	HOTS5	Kemudian mereka akan luahkan semua itu melalui cerita. Ini membantu mereka membina kesedaran visual dan emosi serta keupayaan untuk menyampaikan pandangan dengan jelas dan bermakna.
26.	HOTS6	Contohnya, apabila mereka melukis ahli keluarga dan bercerita mengenainya, mereka tidak hanya belajar tentang struktur ayat, tetapi juga tentang hubungan, emosi dan nilai murni. Aktiviti ini menjadikan pembelajaran lebih peribadi dan relevan kepada dunia sebenar mereka.
27.	HOTS7	Dalam satu sesi, saya minta murid bandingkan dua lukisan – contohnya, satu tentang cuaca panas dan satu lagi tentang hari hujan. Saya ajak mereka berbincang perbezaan dan kesan terhadap watak dalam cerita mereka.

28.	HOTS8	Sebagai contoh, saya pernah minta murid melukis makanan kegemaran keluarga masing-masing dan bercerita mengenainya. Dari situ, mereka belajar bahawa rakan mereka mungkin makan makanan berbeza, bercakap dalam bahasa lain atau menyambut perayaan yang berlainan
29.	CI01	Integrasi seni dan bahasa membuka peluang yang luas untuk kreativiti. Murid boleh mencipta cerita yang unik berdasarkan lukisan mereka, memilih warna yang menggambarkan emosi tertentu, atau mencipta watak dan dunia imaginasi sendiri.
30.	CI02	Mereka bebas berekspresi tanpa takut melakukan kesilapan kerana dalam seni, tiada jawapan yang betul atau salah.
31.	CI03	Seni memberi peluang kepada murid untuk meluahkan idea dan emosi mereka secara visual, manakala bahasa membolehkan mereka menyampaikan maksud dengan kata-kata.
32.	CI04	Dalam pengalaman saya, pendekatan ini sangat berkesan dalam merangsang pemikiran kreatif murid. Mereka bukan sahaja melukis dengan penuh imaginasi, tetapi juga mencipta naratif yang menarik, seperti watak haiwan yang boleh bercakap atau cerita tentang angin yang 'berkawan' dengan pokok
33.	BTW01	Apabila murid melukis sesuatu, ia membantu mereka memvisualkan idea. Kemudian, dengan bimbingan, mereka boleh menceritakan tentang lukisan itu (bahasa lisan) dan seterusnya menulisnya dalam bentuk ayat atau cerita ringkas (bahasa tulisan).
34.	BTW02	Mereka lukiskan jalan cerita dan kemudian bercerita mengenainya.
35.	BTW04	Murid boleh mencipta cerita yang unik berdasarkan lukisan mereka,
36.	BTW05	Sebagai contoh, saya pernah minta murid melukis makanan kegemaran keluarga masing-masing dan bercerita mengenainya
37.	BTW06	Mereka bukan sahaja melukis dengan penuh imaginasi, tetapi juga mencipta naratif yang menarik, seperti watak haiwan yang boleh bercakap atau cerita tentang angin yang 'berkawan' dengan pokok
38.	BTW07	Saya akan bantu murid menafsir maksud karya mereka dengan bertanya soalan-soalan seperti "Apa maksud garisan

		ini?”, “Kenapa kamu lukis orang ini menangis?” atau “Boleh kamu ceritakan apa berlaku dalam gambar ini?”
39.	CA01	Pendekatan ini menggalakkan kesedaran murid tentang kepelbagaian budaya, latar belakang dan pandangan hidup
40.	CA02	Sebagai contoh, saya pernah minta murid melukis makanan kegemaran keluarga masing-masing dan bercerita mengenainya. Dari situ, mereka belajar bahawa rakan mereka mungkin makan makanan berbeza, bercakap dalam bahasa lain atau menyambut perayaan yang berlainan. Ini mendidik mereka untuk lebih menghargai dan menghormati perbezaan.
41.	VI01	Saya akan bantu murid menafsir maksud karya mereka dengan bertanya soalan-soalan seperti “Apa maksud garisan ini?”, “Kenapa kamu lukis orang ini menangis?” atau “Boleh kamu ceritakan apa berlaku dalam gambar ini?”
42.	VI02	Sebagai contoh, selepas mereka melukis sesuatu, saya akan tanya: “Mengapa kamu guna warna ini?” atau “Apa yang berlaku sebelum dan selepas dalam cerita kamu?”
43.	VI03	Apabila murid melukis sesuatu, ia membantu mereka memvisualkan idea.
44.	VI04	Mereka lukiskan jalan cerita dan kemudian bercerita mengenainya.
45.	VI05	Mereka bukan sahaja melukis dengan penuh imaginasi, tetapi juga mencipta naratif yang menarik, seperti watak haiwan yang boleh bercakap atau cerita tentang angin yang ‘berkawan’ dengan pokok
46.	CONAW01	Pendekatan ini mendorong murid untuk lebih peka dengan apa yang berlaku di sekeliling mereka.
47.	CONAW02	Apabila saya minta mereka melukis tentang taman permainan, mereka mula perhati siapa yang bermain, warna permainan, cuaca, atau perasaan mereka ketika itu.
48.	CONAW03	Ini membantu mereka membina kesedaran visual dan emosi serta keupayaan untuk menyampaikan pandangan dengan jelas dan bermakna.

Appendix 2. Documentation of Classroom Observation

