

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL
SCAFFOLDING DURING DRAWING ACTIVITIES
FOR 5-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN'S ORAL
LANGUAGE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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LANGUAGE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

by

XIAO MENGYUN

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LIST OF SYMBOLS

- + The domains of the oral language skills assessment
- * Standardised test

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

OLSs	Oral Language Skills
ECE	Early Childhood Education
MOE of PRC	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China
DA	Drawing Activity
IS	Instructional Scaffolding
PLC	Pre-school Language Curriculum
ELDG	Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children 3–6 years of Age
SST	Social Semiotic Theory
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development
SES	Socio-economic Status
IRE	Initiation-Response-Evaluation
SVO	Subject-Verb-Object
EDC	Human Ethics Committee
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
JEPeM	Jawatankuasa Etika Penyelidikan Manusia

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**PELAKSANAAN PERANCAH PENGAJARAN SEMASA AKTIVITI
MELUKIS UNTUK PEMBANGUNAN KEMAHIRAN BAHASA LISAN
KANAK-KANAK BERUSIA 5 TAHUN**

ABSTRAK

Kajian kes kualitatif ini menyelidik bagaimana pelaksanaan perancah pengajaran dalam aktiviti melukis menyokong perkembangan kemahiran lisan kanak-kanak berusia 5 tahun (sebutan, kosa kata dan tatabahasa), serta menyiasat cabaran yang dihadapi oleh guru semasa proses pelaksanaannya, dan mencadangkan garis panduan berdasarkan penemuan tersebut. Kajian ini berasaskan kepada tiga kerangka teori utama, iaitu Teori Perancah, Teori Semiotik Sosial, dan Strategi Perancah Linguistik oleh Otts. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah persampelan bertujuan dengan memilih 6 kanak-kanak dan 2 guru sebagai subjek kajian. Data dikumpulkan melalui pemerhatian tanpa penyertaan (rakaman video dan catatan lapangan), temu bual separa berstruktur (guru), dan dokumen (hasil seni kanak-kanak dan jurnal refleksi guru), yang dianalisis menggunakan kaedah analisis tema. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelaksanaan perancah pengajaran dalam aktiviti melukis dapat meningkatkan kemahiran lisan kanak-kanak. Ini termasuk kemahiran sebutan (kejelasan, kelancaran, dan ketepatan), kemahiran kosa kata (kepelbagaian, kebolehsesuaian, dan ketepatan), serta kemahiran tatabahasa (struktur ayat, ketepatan, dan koherensi). Selain itu, kajian ini mendapati bahawa guru menghadapi pelbagai cabaran dalam melaksanakan perancah pengajaran, yang tertumpu pada tiga bidang utama: sebutan, kosa kata, dan tatabahasa. Untuk menangani cabaran ini, kajian ini mencadangkan garis panduan yang merangkumi strategi untuk meningkatkan kemahiran lisan, mengoptimumkan keberkesanan pelaksanaan sokongan pengajaran, serta mengintegrasikan aktiviti

melukis dengan perkembangan bahasa. Penemuan ini menyediakan rujukan penting untuk guru dan pembangun kurikulum pada masa depan. Selain itu, hasil kajian ini menyumbang kepada kesan praktikal, dasar, dan teori. Kajian ini bukan sahaja memberikan bukti empirikal untuk meningkatkan kualiti pendidikan prasekolah tetapi juga menunjukkan hala tuju kajian masa depan tentang penerapan strategi sokongan pengajaran dalam pelbagai konteks pendidi.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study investigates how instructional scaffolding implemented during drawing activities supports the development of oral language skills (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) in 5-year-olds, as well as to examines the problems teachers faced with the implementation process, and to propose guidelines accordingly. Scaffolding Theory, Social Semiotic Theory, and Otts' Linguistic Scaffolding Strategies as theoretical frameworks. Six children and two teachers were selected for the study using purposive sampling method. Data was collected through non-participant observation, (video recordings, field notes), semi-structured interviews (teachers) and documents (children's artworks, teachers' reflective journals) and data was analysed using thematic analysis. The results of the study showed that children's oral language skills improved. Implementing instructional scaffolding in drawing activities improved 5-year-old children's pronunciation skills (clarity, fluency, and accuracy), and vocabulary skills (richness, appropriateness, and accuracy), as well as grammar skills (sentence structure, accuracy, and sentence coherence). The study also identified a variety of problems faced by teachers in implementing scaffolding, which centred on three areas: pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar skills. To address these problems, this study proposed guidelines including oral language skills enhancement, enhancing the effectiveness of scaffolding implementation, and promoting the integration of drawing activities with language development. This provided a reference for teachers and future curriculum

developers. In addition, it contributes to many practical, policy and theoretical implications. The findings not only provided an empirical basis for improving the quality of preschool education, but also pointed the way for future research on the application of instructional scaffolding strategies in different educational contexts.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The development of oral language skills (OLSs) is a key focus of early childhood education (ECE), as well as conceived as a tool for knowledge acquisition and social engagement (Alexander, 2013). This is particularly the case at kindergarten level, as most children have not yet learnt to read fluently and therefore cannot rely on reading for learning. Instead, they must rely on oral language to obtain information and communicate with their peers and teachers. Generally, OLSs usually include semantic skills, such as the understanding of word meanings and phrases, as well as vocabulary; phonological skills, awareness of the structure, distribution, and sequencing of speech sounds and the shape of syllables; syntax, the grammatical rules of a language; morphological skills of understanding the meaning of word forms; and pragmatics, that is, the set of rules governing language use according to audience, purpose, and context (Owens, 2004; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

Nowadays, OLSs are considered to be a learning and developmental core experience for Chinese pre-schoolers, as well as an essential element in developing comprehensive literacy (J. Wang, 2018). Researchers have agreed that young children's OLSs in pre-school are highly predictive of their later literacy skills (Cutting et al., 2009; Noe et al., 2014; Uchikoshi et al., 2016; Zanchi et al., 2020) , while West et al. (2024) argued that OLSs are the foundation for formal education. Given many children enter primary school with weak OLSs, they argued that pre-school oral enrichment improves children's language skills and encourages the pre-school implementation of intervention programmes.

The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE of PRC) has made progress in improving ECE services, particularly for 5-year-old children (Su et al., 2021). Pre-school education in China is typically delivered in kindergartens or pre-primary classes located within primary schools to children ages 3 to 6. Kindergarten is the predominant type that provides 3- to 6-year-olds with three years of education preparatory to primary school. Pre-primary classes are academically-focused, one-year programmes designed to prepare 5- to 6-/7-year-olds for elementary school (MOE of PRC, 2016).

The design of pre-school curriculums (PC) reflects a high level of concern for the holistic development of the child, with Chinese kindergarten curriculums covering all aspects from maths to science, from social behaviour to physical health, with the arts, especially drawing, occupying an important position (MOE of PRC, 2012; W. Yang et al., 2022). These curriculums are designed to develop foundational skills in young children that provide a strong foundation for lifelong learning and personal growth (W. Yang & Li, 2022). Among the many PC, drawing activity (DA) is given special significance in its own unique way. It not only stimulates children's creativity and imagination, but also shows great potential in developing their language skills (Sunday & Conley, 2020). Despite the existing PC's focus on children's diverse development, there is, however, still a lack of clear guidance and adequate research on the use of drawing as an art form to support the development of children's OLSs (Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019). This gap means that in practice, educators may not have sufficient resources to optimise DA to meet each child's OLSs development needs.

Instructional scaffolding (IS), grounded in the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), has been widely recognised as an effective strategy for promoting children's language development (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2022). This strategy emphasises the provision of timely and appropriate support by teachers based on children's current abilities and linguistic responses, aiming to gradually enhance their level of oral expression. Recent studies have indicated that embedding linguistic scaffolding into DAs, which are inherently expressive and creative, can stimulate children's desire to communicate and support the development of their language (Forte, 2024; Xiao et al., 2023). However, research on the effective implementation of IS during DAs remains limited, particularly within the Chinese educational context.

The aim of this case study is to examine how teachers implement IS during DAs to support the development of 5-year-old children's OLSs in Mandarin. By highlighting the role of DAs in children's language development, this study not only provides educators with new perspectives, but also offers policy makers practical experience in effectively integrating art and language development into pre-school education. These findings are expected to have a positive impact on children's cognitive and social skills, while promoting a more comprehensive and balanced design of preschool curricula to meet children's diverse learning needs.

This chapter describes the background of the study, problem statement and purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, research assumptions, limitations of the study and definitions of terms related to the study. Chapter 2 details the relevant literature to provide a theoretical foundation for this study. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, including data collection and analysis strategies. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study and analysed the data in

detail. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study, exploring their implications for practice and theory, as well as pointing out potential directions for future research.

1.2 Background of the Study

OLSs including pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, form the foundation for young children's social interaction, cognitive expression, and school readiness. Early childhood is widely recognized as a critical period for oral language acquisition, as it is during this time that children rapidly develop the ability to express themselves and understand others through spoken language (Hadley et al., 2022). In the context of Chinese early childhood education, the Ministry of Education has emphasized the importance of developing communication abilities among children aged 3–6 (MOE of PRC, 2012). However, despite these official guidelines, recent research has identified that oral language development in Chinese kindergartens is often overshadowed by an academic emphasis on character recognition and reading preparation (Guo & Zhang, 2019; Shi, 2022). This shift has limited opportunities for individualized oral practice, particularly among 5-year-olds who are on the cusp of entering formal education.

In China, most kindergartens attempt to enhance children's OLSs through traditional language-based approaches such as story retelling, worded and wordless picture books, brief conversations, and interactive reading interventions (Grolig et al., 2020; Ralli et al., 2021; Veneziano et al., 2020). However, such approaches often lack individualized support and rarely leverage other expressive domains like drawing, which naturally engage children in verbal expression and meaning-making.

Against this backdrop, DAs have been increasingly investigated as an alternative and creative approach to foster OLSs. As a form of visual expression, drawing not only facilitates cognitive and emotional development but also offers children a natural context for spoken language use (Coates & Coates, 2006). Through drawing, children are prompted to describe, narrate, and discuss their ideas, thereby engaging in authentic oral exchanges. Research suggests that DAs engage children in multimodal experiences that simultaneously support thinking, communication, and meaning-making (Yildiz Cicekler & Aral, 2020). However, despite their pedagogical potential, DAs remain underutilized in language instruction, and the language-rich nature of these tasks is often not fully realized in kindergarten classrooms (Salas-Pilco, 2021).

Central to unlocking the language potential of DAs is the concept of IS, a teaching strategy in which educators provide timely, adaptive support to children's learning within their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). IS strategies such as modelling, questioning, expansion, and contingent feedback have been proven to effectively support oral language development, especially when embedded in meaningful interactions (Pentimonti & Justice, 2010; Tilbe & Gai, 2022). In drawing contexts, scaffolding enables teachers to prompt children's verbal elaboration, guide descriptive storytelling, and respond dynamically to children's language needs. Yet, limited research in China has investigated how IS can be effectively enacted during drawing-based tasks to support OLSs development in preschool settings.

Moreover, existing studies point to notable challenges in applying IS in ECE. These include an overreliance on whole-group instruction, insufficient teacher training in dynamic scaffolding techniques, and a lack of individualized language support in

activity-based learning (Chen & Adams, 2023; Pentimonti et al., 2017). Teachers often struggle to select appropriate strategies or to adjust support in real time, resulting in missed opportunities to foster language-rich interactions. These gaps are particularly evident in DAs, which are typically regarded as expressive or artistic tasks, rather than as valuable moments for oral language development. As such, there is a need to reconceptualize DAs as contexts for both creative expression and scaffolded language learning.

Therefore, this study positions IS as the core pedagogical support strategy, with DAs serving as the interactive and creative medium through which IS is enacted. Specifically, this research investigates how teachers use IS during DAs to support 5-year-old children's oral language development. By investigating this integration, the study helps to bridge a gap in the literature on how drawing-based tasks, guided by scaffolded teacher support, can contribute to children's oral language acquisition. The findings offer practical insights for ECE into how drawing can serve not just as an artistic outlet, but also as a scaffolded context for language-rich interaction and cognitive growth.

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite a large body of research focusing on the development of children's early language skills, little attention has been paid to the deficits in OLSs demonstrated by Chinese 5-year-olds. Yin and Liu (2020) argued that Chinese 5-year-olds are weaker in OLSs, compared to development in pre-reading skills and story comprehension. Similarly, Fong and Ho (2019) claimed that Chinese children have weaknesses in OLSs as early as 5 years of pre-school age.

Recent studies have shown that Chinese 5-year-olds are relatively weak in OLSs, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. For example, Ren and Wang (2020) investigated children's language development in terms of self-perceived expression, pronunciation, vocabulary, picture finding, and oral comprehension and expression and found that the children were found to have a moderate level of overall language proficiency, with the poorest development in the areas of vocabulary acquisition, language use, and pronunciation. W. Chen, (2016) identified the main problems with 5-year-olds' oral skills as unclear speech and poor expressive content. Shi and Wang (2018) investigated the language readiness of children in the older kindergarten classes (5-6 years old) and found that children scored highest in the area of "character nuance recognition" and lowest in the area of "oral language skills". In addition, in a small study of children in a medium-sized urban school in China, teachers commented that some children were starting school with relatively small vocabularies and some children used substandard oral language (Hu, 2023).

Previous research has identified shortcomings in the development of OLS in Chinese 5-year-olds, one of the main reasons for this is the trend towards "schoolification" in terms of content and organisation of teaching (Cheng, 2022; Guo & Li, 2022; J. Shi, 2022; N. Wang, 2021; Yu, 2022). This trend has led to an over-emphasis on word memorisation and reading at the expense of the development of OLSs. On the one hand, in terms of the content of current language teaching activities, teachers tend to focus on character memorization (Chinese character recognition and Pinyin) and reading, while neglecting the development of OLSs for 5 years old (Guo & Zhang, 2019). And on the other, in terms of the form in which language teaching activities are organised, teachers using a collective approach to teaching, and ignoring the needs of individual children in developing their OLSs (Long & Yang, 2020; Ma,

2021). This teaching approach has resulted in an uneven and inadequate development of children's OLSs, which is a significant gap between children's growing need for oral skills development. Voltmer et al. (2021) claimed that applying language IS strategies to large group settings such as those common in pre-schools or kindergartens was a major challenge.

Given the emphasis on OLSs for 5-year-olds, it seems sensible to look for other activities in the kindergarten where teachers can continue to support OLD. Chow et al. (2008) used a dialogue reading intervention that led to greater vocabulary gains in pre-schoolers. L. Wang et al. (2023) conducted a three-year longitudinal evaluation of 120 kindergarten children in China and found benefits of reading experiences on the development of OLSs. W. Wang and Black Delfin (2023) found that children who used socio-dramatic play expanded their language use, expanded storylines, developed new characters and practised new vocabulary and ways of speaking.

It is worth noting that even though IS has been recognised as an effective strategy for supporting children's oral development, previous studies have noted that its implementation in early childhood classrooms remains challenging due to time constraints, group-based instruction, and teachers' limited training in adapting scaffolding to diverse language needs (Pentimonti et al., 2010; Deshmukh et al., 2022; Koyuncu, 2021). Therefore, given the prevalence of group teaching methods that fail to address the needs of individual children in the development of OLSs, this study will individualise teaching through the practice of IS during DAs.

Moreover, drawing is widely recognised as a form of "visual language" that enables young children to communicate and express meaning (Profice et al., 2021). Research has shown that drawing supports children with speech and language

disorders in developing their OLSs, and provides insight into their inner thoughts and emotional states (Sali et al., 2014). In ECE, drawing is often viewed as a process of visual problem-solving (Gilad-Gutnick et al., 2022), during which children develop both cognitive and linguistic abilities through art-making practices such as drawing, collage, and sculpture (Brooks, 2009).

Importantly, studies have found that art-based curricula, particularly drawing can positively influence the development of children's OLSs (Hamilton et al., 2019; Heath & Wolf, 2005; Papandreou, 2014; Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019). Podobnik et al. (2024) emphasise that understanding and interpreting children's drawings is only possible through interactive dialogue, suggesting that drawing activities naturally foster teacher-child language exchanges. Monteiro et al. (2022) further demonstrate that scaffolding strategies used during drawing can enhance children's autonomy in language expression and increase their willingness and ability to speak. DAs provide rich opportunities for teachers to implement instructional scaffolding by prompting children to describe what they are drawing, ask clarifying questions, extend vocabulary, or model complete sentences.

In the Chinese preschool context, where "schoolification" often prioritises rote memorisation and de-emphasises expressive language (Guo & Zhang, 2019; Long & Yang, 2020), drawing offers a flexible, child-led environment for authentic and meaningful oral interaction. While dialogic reading and socio-dramatic play have been proposed as effective methods to support children's OLS development, the potential of DAs remains underexplored, particularly in relation to how IS can be practically applied during DAs to support 5-year-old children's pronunciation, vocabulary, and

grammar. Furthermore, there is a notable lack of research-based instructional guidelines to inform such practice.

The limited research and absence of guidelines hinder educators' comprehension of the role of IS during DAs in children's OLSs and their optimal utilisation for promoting language development. Therefore, this study investigates how IS during DAs can help 5-year-old children develop their OLSs, and proposes IS based guidelines for DAs. The results of the study will contribute to the understanding of teachers, administrators and parents as to the value of DA in cognitive skill development, especially the oral skills of 5-year-olds. Figure 1.1 illustrates the problem statement of this study.

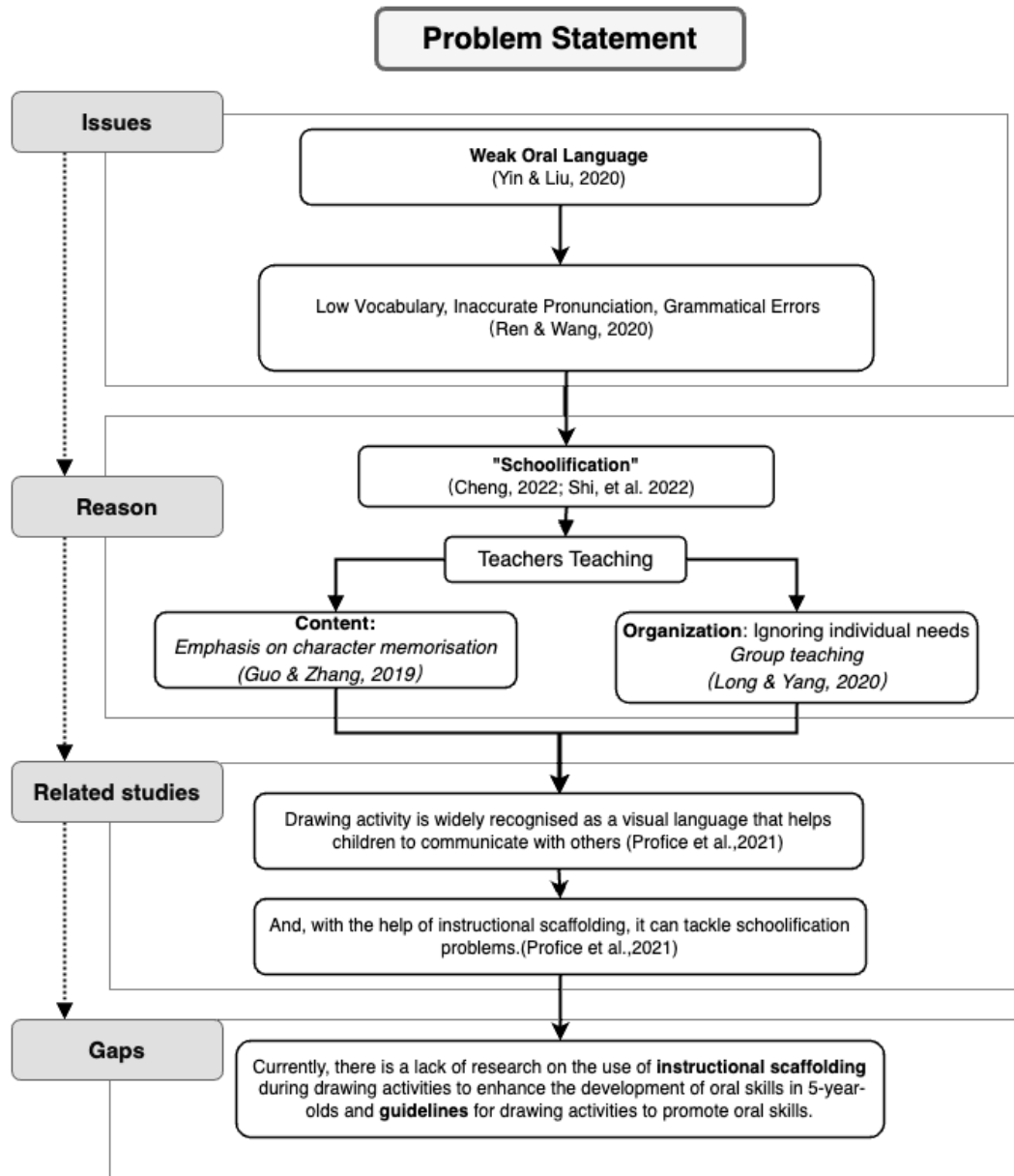


Figure 1.1 Problem Statement

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate how IS is implemented by early childhood teachers during DAs to support the development of OLSs (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) among 5-year-old children. Conducted as a qualitative case study in a university-affiliated kindergarten in eastern China, the research involved both children and teachers in a natural classroom context. The study also examining challenges

encountered by teachers during implementation and seeks to propose context-specific guidelines.

The detailed research objectives are as follows:

RO1: To investigate the implementation of instructional scaffolding by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of pronunciation skills in 5-year-old children.

RO2: To investigate the implementation of instructional scaffolding by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of vocabulary skills in 5-year-old children.

RO3: To investigate the implementation of instructional scaffolding by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of grammar skills in 5-year-old children.

RO4: To examine problems faced by teachers in implementing the instructional scaffolding during drawing activities for 5-year-olds.

RO5: To propose guidelines of instructional scaffolding during drawing activities to enhance oral language skills for 5-year-olds.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, this study aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How is instructional scaffolding implemented by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of pronunciation skills in 5-year-old children?

RQ2: How is instructional scaffolding implemented by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of vocabulary skills in 5-year-old children?

RQ3: How is instructional scaffolding implemented by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of grammar skills in 5-year-old children?

RQ4: What are the problems faced by teachers when implementing instructional scaffolding during drawing activities for 5-year-olds?

RQ5: What are the guidelines for instructional scaffolding during drawing activities to enhance the oral language skills of 5-year-olds?

Table 1.1 Matrix of RP, RQs, ROs, Research Methods, and Expected Findings

Research Purpose: To investigate the implementation of IS during DAs on the development of OLSs (pronunciation skills, vocabulary skills and grammar skills) in 5-year-olds. Also, to investigate the problems faced by teachers in the implementation of IS. Finally, to propose DA guidelines for enhancing 5-year-old children's OLSs based on IS.				
Research Questions	Research Objectives	Research Methods & Techniques		Expected Findings
RQ1: How is instructional scaffolding implemented by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of pronunciation skills in 5-year-old children?	RO1: To investigate the implementation of instructional scaffolding by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of pronunciation skills in 5-year-old children.	Qualitative -Case Study -Purposive sampling	i. Non-participant observation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video recordings • Field notes ii. Document analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's artwork 	Observed use of scaffolding strategies that support pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar development.
RQ2: How is instructional scaffolding implemented by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of vocabulary skills in 5-year-old children?	RO2: To investigate the implementation of instructional scaffolding by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of vocabulary skills in 5-year-old children.			
RQ3: How is instructional scaffolding implemented by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of grammar skills in 5-year-old children?	RO3: To investigate the implementation of instructional scaffolding by teachers during drawing activities to support the development of grammar skills in 5-year-old children.			
RQ4: What are the problems faced by teachers when implementing instructional scaffolding during drawing activities for 5-year-olds?	RO4: To examine problems faced by teachers in implementing the instructional scaffolding during drawing activities for 5-year-olds.		i. Semi-structured interviews (teachers) ii. Document analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' reflective journals 	Insight into practical challenges teachers encounter when applying scaffolding strategies during DAs.
RQ5: What are the guidelines for instructional scaffolding during drawing activities to enhance the oral language skills of 5-year-olds?	RO5: To propose guidelines for instructional scaffolding during drawing activities to enhance oral language skills for 5-year-olds.		i. Semi-structured interviews (teachers) ii. Document analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' reflective journals • Children's artwork 	Suggested guidelines derived from teacher's interview, teacher reflections, and children's artwork.

1.6 Assumptions

The researcher assumed that IS provides a valid theoretical basis for enhancing the development of OLSs in 5-year-old children. Further, it is assumed that DAs, as a multimodal learning process, can support and enhance young children's OLSs. Meanwhile, this study argues that the scaffolding guidance provided by the teacher during the DA is crucial, and 5-year-olds have the potential to develop their OLSs by engaging in DAs. In addition, the application of IS allows for individualisation to support the development of OLSs for different children. Finally, the researcher assumed that the participating teachers would be able to provide honest and fair feedback.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Halliday (1975) pointed out that the process of children learning language is the process of learning ideation, and that function and meaning play a dominant role in children's language. This study combines language and DAs for 5-year-olds and has significant implications for those directly involved in the field of education, particularly teachers, young children, curriculum developers, educational researchers, and policy developers. Many studies have linked the arts to children's language development (Blaisdell et al., 2019; Heath & Wolf, 2005). In China, teachers need an effective teaching activity to enhance children's opportunities for oral language practice as a way as to meet the increasing needs of children. This study proposes a new model of scaffolding process by analysing young children's use of DAs to enhance OLS. This helps children to develop deeper connections with the community and promotes the integrated development of their social and language skills.

The findings of this study can be used to demonstrate that it is time for teachers in China to actively change and think outside the box. Through this study, teachers could be encouraged to change their role from authoritative knowledge transmitters to facilitators who promote active learning in young children, especially when incorporating IS into DAs to stimulate children's OLSs.

OLSs are among the most important skills of learning and acquiring information (Lemke, 1989). This study further investigates the reinforcement of this skill through the scaffolding process of DAs. This provides an effective way for teachers to increase children's language practice in natural contexts and to meet their growing learning needs. The findings help curriculum developers to plan systematic and appropriate language learning pathways for children, while encouraging cross-curricular integration, combining the arts with language learning. This not only enhances children's literacy and OLSs, but also enriches their other knowledge.

This study extends the knowledge of educational researchers on the application of IS in early language education. Through in-depth analyses of the relationship between DAs and the development of OLSs, researchers can establish a closer link between theory and practice. These findings enrich the academic dialogue in the field of education and provide new directions and perspectives for subsequent research.

At the level of educational policy making, the findings of this study emphasise the potential of arts education in promoting language development. This provides data support for policymakers as they consider strategies for integrating arts and language learning. In conclusion, as the demand for quality in early education increases, this research provides a basis for evidence-based policy development and the provision of educational resources for the full development of the child.

1.8 Scope and Limitation of Study

The focus of this study to investigate the role of IS during DAs in enhancing the development of 5-year-old children's OLSs. Scientific research methods require clarification of the validity of research procedures (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The study was conducted in a kindergarten affiliated with a public university in China, which provides a pool of information for collecting rich data, but also delineates the scope of the study so that it does not become too large. Participants started at kindergarten 3 (K3), which is the final year of kindergarten.

This study selected the setting of a familiar kindergarten because it was located at the researcher's workplace. The selection of a familiar setting in a study can bring bias to the observations (Patton, 2014). To prevent this potential bias, the researcher disclosed the purpose of the study to teachers and parents. Using triangulation to collect data help to avoid the bias introduced by the site (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher aims to ensure that the observations and interviews are thorough, complete, and not the result of invalid assumptions. In analysing the data, the researcher invited another professional to assist in analysing the results, with the aim of limiting potential bias and ensuring the credibility of the study. This pre-school provides a Mandarin-mediated environment for the children. As such, it is influenced by different cultural environments, and the results of the study may not be generalised to other countries or regions.

Time is the main limitation of this study. The research program was scheduled to be completed within 10 weeks. With children aged 5 years facing the transition to primary school and a very intense daily curriculum, the study time is constrained. The development of children's OLSs does not occur overnight, and it is challenging to

measure children's progress in OLSs over a 10-week period. In addition to the IS, other variables such as the child's home environment, parents' level of education, and parenting styles may also have an impact on outcomes.

1.9 Operational Definition

1.9.1 Drawing activity

Drawing activity refers to a meaning-making activity that takes place in a specific socio-cultural context (Papandreou, 2014). In this study, the DA refers to activities to draw animals. By providing drawing materials and guidance, children aged 5 are encouraged to use their imagination and creativity to draw pictures with animal themes.

1.9.2 Oral language skills

Oral language skills refer to a condition of learning and are conceptualised as a tool for acquiring knowledge and participating in society (Massonnié et al., 2022; Robin John, 2013). These include phonological skills, syntax, morphological skills, pragmatics, and vocabulary skills (Owens, 2004; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). In this study, OLSs refer to learning through listening, speaking, describing, and interacting with others in DAs. It includes pronunciation skills, vocabulary skills, and grammar skills.

1.9.3 Pronunciation skills

Pronunciation skills are the ability of a speaker to use the sounds of a language accurately, fluently and naturally (Bybee, 2001). In this study, pronunciation skills refer to the ability of 5-year-olds to master the basic rules of phonetics and accurately pronounce various sounds in DAs.

1.9.4 Oral vocabulary skills

Children's vocabulary is made up of both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. Receptive vocabulary is words children can understand. Productive vocabulary is word that children can use to express themselves (Hiebert, 2020). Vocabulary in this study is defined as words that children can understand, pronounce correctly, and use constructively in speech.

1.9.5 Grammar skills

Grammar skills refers to the formation of sentences and the associated grammatical rules (Freeman, 2014). The grammar rules differ for different languages. In Chinese, nouns have no change in the possessive case, and verbs are not divided into persons or tenses. This study, grammar skills are defined as children's understanding of basic Chinese sentence structure and being able to use correct grammar rules to convey meaning.

1.9.6 Instruction scaffolding

IS is a temporary support structure provided by a more knowledgeable individual to help learners perform tasks they cannot accomplish independently (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). This concept builds on Vygotsky's ZPD, where learning occurs through guided interaction with others. Scaffolding involves breaking tasks into manageable steps, offering cues or feedback, and gradually reducing assistance as competence increases.

In this study, IS refers to the planned verbal and interactive strategies employed by preschool teachers during drawing activities to support 5-year-old children's oral language development, specifically pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar use through prompts, modeling, questioning, and feedback.

1.10 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, the background to the current study is explored, the importance of proficiency in OLSs for 5-year-olds is discussed, and factors that hinder the development of children's OLSs are described. Later, the research aims, and research questions of this study are outlined. The significance, scope, and limitations of this study are analysed in depth. The study defines related terms such as DA, OLSs, development of OLSs, etc.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature relevant to this study. The combination of social development theory, semiotic theory and recent research supports the value of the DA, and the OLSs developed during the drawing process, they are key elements of the literature review.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to this study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the process of OLSs development in 5-year-old children during DAs guided by IS. There are very few studies of IS during DA as a developmental OLS for 5-year-olds. Previous research has indicated the need for additional research as discussed in the literature review. This study may influence educators' and researchers' understanding of how DA can be implemented in pre-school settings to enhance the OLSs of 5-year-old children. This chapter aims to establish a solid theoretical foundation. A comprehensive literature review provides insightful context for the research questions and lays the cornerstone for the case study methodology and data analysis strategy proposed in this study.

2.2 Oral Language Skill

OLSs associated with young children typically include semantic skills, vocabulary skills, phonological skills, syntax, morphological skills and pragmatics (Owens, 2004; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Children's early oral language experiences not only encourage the development of cognitive skills, but also play a crucial role in the development of literacy. OLSs provide children with a means of communicating and interacting with others as a way of exploring and making sense of the world around them. As children interact and dialogue with adults or peers, their language skills continue to grow, which helps them to shape their perceptions and better understand complex concepts (Rohde, 2015). It is clear from this that fully developed oral skills are essential in the learning process, as they enable children to construct their thinking more

finely, to grasp new knowledge, and to deepen their understanding in a sea of knowledge.

This section explores the key role in the early development of children's OLSs. Firstly, the different stages in the development of OLSs from birth to the age of six are examined (Sub-Section 2.2.1). Secondly, the dimensions of children's OLSs are analysed, focusing on research related to children's pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar skills (Sub-Section 2.2.2). By establishing both the developmental stage and the constituent dimensions of OLS, this section lays the groundwork for designing and implementing targeted scaffolding in drawing contexts.

2.2.1 Development of oral language skill

This sub-section briefly outlines the progression of oral language from birth to early childhood before narrowing its focus to the competencies typical of five-year-olds. During Piaget's (2010) sensorimotor (0-2 years), children begin to form internal representations of the external world in their minds, and words such as "Baba" and "Ma" not only serve as an internal mapping of external objects for infants, but also as a sign of their budding OLSs (Ingram, 1974). At 18 months of age, children begin to use language to communicate their thoughts, an important milestone in the transition from cries and gestures to the use of words and sentences (McCarthy, 1943). At this stage, imitation and simple sound play lay the foundation for later language development.

In the subsequent pre-operational stage (2-7 years), children's cognitive and linguistic abilities grow rapidly, and they begin to develop their own unique view of the world. Research has found that by the age of 4½, children have become little experts at socialising and are able to use language to meet their needs, which include both physical and cognitive needs. During this period, they can use complex sentence forms and

express themselves in adult dialogue, showing rapid language skill development. However, the rate of language development declines significantly from age 3 and up (McCarthy, 1943). Furthermore, this stage covers the target group of this study, i.e., 5-year-olds. According to Vygotsky's stages of language development, 5-year-olds are in the "egocentric speech" stage (Vygotsky, 1962). At this stage, children use speech to help them think and solve problems. Children's oral experiences encourage cognitive skills and facilitate language development (Machado, 2015; Whorrall & Cabell, 2016). This self-centred speech manifests itself in repetitions, monologues and group monologues (Piaget, 2010), highlighting the importance of scaffolding during the critical period of language development. For example, teachers can internalise words and syllables from simple imitation to meaningful language use by guiding children to repeat vocabulary.

Previous research has revealed that children's OLS development is a continuous process of gradual mastery of different language domains, with temporal coherence and intensity of interaction between these domains (Rollins, 2003). Large-scale longitudinal studies further support the continuity of OLSs. For example, Dale et al.'s (1995) study confirmed strong continuity between early and later measures of children's vocabulary and grammar. Similarly, Huttenlocher et al. (2010) found that children's vocabulary and grammar skills showed stability over a period of up to 20 months, emphasising the long-term stability of OLSs.

From the above literature, it can be seen that the development of children's OLSs is a complex process that spans multiple stages, each of which plays a key role in children's cognitive and social competence. From early sound imitation to language explosion in the pre-school years, the development of language skills is closely linked to children's cognitive maturity and social environment. The final year of pre-school is

a key developmental stage in school readiness (Dicataldo et al., 2020), which is particularly important for children aged 5. If a child has weak OLSs, this can affect their readiness to learn and widen the gap in their negative cycle once they enter primary school (Dicataldo et al., 2020). However, whilst gains in language skills are evident in the pre-school years, research has also demonstrated a significant need for IS.

2.2.2 Domains of oral language skills

Having understood the developmental trajectory of OLSs development, this subsection explores the basic elements that make up this process. A comprehension of the key elements of oral language is essential to support children who struggle with oral language and enables to create effective language learning environments that eventually promote literacy and learning (Massonnié et al., 2022). According to linguists, language is a communication system with three independent but interrelated domains: content (knowledge of word meanings), form (knowledge of how sounds, words, and sentences are ordered to produce meaning), and use (capacity to use language for various reasons) (Bloom & Lahey, 1978), As shown in Figure 2.1. each linguistic domain has its own components (Owens, 2014; Pence & Justice, 2015).

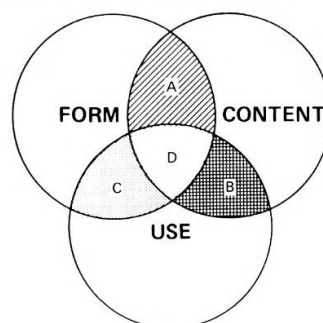


Figure 2.1 The Intersection of Content, Form, and Use in Language

Source: (Bloom & Lahey, 1978)

Many studies point out that the OLSs of English-speaking pre-schoolers typically include phonological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, syntax, morphology