Integrating English Language and History Learning Through Visual Arts at Primary School

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Learning world history in English using an international curriculum (Pearson Edexcel) poses difficulties for elementary school students. At Makassar Independent School (MIS), innovative learning methods are needed to help students understand complex historical material while keeping it engaging and accessible. This study intends to describe the role of creative arts, particularly drawing, as a pedagogical approach in teaching history in English. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The subjects involved students in grades 2, 4, and 5 in history at Makassar Independent School. Data was collected through classroom observations to see how arts integration was carried out in the learning process. The research findings indicate that teachers have implemented a combination of learning methods, such as inquiry-based learning, discussion, and interactive learning. Drawing served as the final medium of articulation through which students visually expressed their profound understanding of historical topics. Through drawing activities, students were more enthusiastic and able to absorb the subject matter more effectively even though the medium of instruction was English. This study contributes to interdisciplinary learning strategies (arts and history). The results confirm that fine arts can be used as a cognitive tool to validate students' understanding in collaborative schools while also serving as a reference for educators in creating more inclusive and creative history classes. **

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century's globalization, the paradigm of elementary education has shifted from silo-based teaching to an interdisciplinary approach (Songer & Breitkreuz, 2022). Integration between subjects is no longer merely an option but a necessity to equip students with holistic thinking skills (Drake & Reid, 2018). English, as a global lingua franca, and history, as a foundation for identity and critical awareness, are often taught as separate entities (Efendi et al., 2022; Hult, 2017). However, language literacy requires substantial context to be meaningful, while historical events require an effective

communication medium for understanding and reflection (Hanauer, 2012; Kianinezhad, 2023).

At the elementary school level, the main challenge in teaching English is low motivation due to monotonous vocabulary memorization methods (Chen, 2025; Elmahdi & Hezam, 2020). On the other hand, history is often considered a boring subject, dominated by lengthy narrative texts and the memorization of years and figures. For students at the concrete operational age (7–11 years old), the abstraction of history and the complexity of English grammar require a visual "bridge" to effectively understand the material (Kurniawati et al., 2025).

Visual arts (drawings, paintings, infographics, and even digital dioramas) offer a universal language that transcends linguistic barriers. In the context of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), visual arts act as scaffolding, helping students learn difficult historical ideas while also practicing their English vocabulary (Dinham, 2024; Mahan, 2022; Yakaeva et al., 2017). The use of visual elements enables "double learning": students not only learn about art but also learn through art to master both language and history (Bacaicoa & Llull, 2023).

Although the theory of curriculum integration has been widely discussed (Garcia-Huidobro, 2018; Vergel et al., 2017), practical implementations that combine the three domains—English, history, and visual arts—remain very rare in elementary school curricula, especially in countries where English is a foreign language (EFL). Most teachers remain fixated on linear textbooks that separate the cognitive domain (history) from the affective-creative domain (art).

This research offers several novel aspects that distinguish it from previous studies on curriculum integration. While previous research generally focused solely on bilateral relationships (English through Art, or History through Art) (Gandhioke & Singh, 2024; Zeybek, 2019), this article proposes a Triadic Synthesis model. Its novelty lies in how visual art becomes more than just an illustration but also the primary medium through which historical narratives are constructed using English language structures. Students view historical images and create artwork that represents their historical understanding and then present it in English. This article introduces a multimodal literacy approach specifically for early childhood. Its novelty lies in the shift in focus from the "final artwork" to the "process of negotiating meaning." A child's choice of colors to depict the Industrial Revolution or shapes to describe historical figures is a form of cognitive expression that is then translated into English syntax.

Furthermore, the use of local historical content discussed in English through the medium of art creates a unique dynamic in which students explore their national identity (history) yet communicate within a global context (English). Visual arts here serve as a neutralizer of the distortion of meaning that often occurs when translating cultural/historical terms into foreign languages. This research also develops a new framework called Creative-Historical Inquiry. This model provides practical steps for teachers to integrate visual elements into lesson plans that address both linguistic (grammar/vocabulary) and historical (chronology/causality) targets.

Overall, this article argues that integrating English and history through visual arts is not simply a "fun" classroom strategy but rather an epistemological transformation. It changes the way students process information: from passive recipients to critical content creators. This integration strengthens long-term memory through visualization (dual-coding theory) and increases communication confidence. Therefore, the primary objective of this study was to explore and describe the various functions and uses of drawing as a teaching tool in the context of history instruction delivered in English.

2. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This descriptive study aims to observe and describe the subject's behavior, preferences, attitudes, practices, and interests of a specific group without providing special treatment or manipulating variables. In this context, a descriptive design was used to capture how the integration of English and history is implemented through visual arts (drawing) in elementary schools.

The study was conducted at Makassar Independent School (MIS). Participants were selected through purposive sampling and consisted of (1) one history teacher: an Indonesian citizen with a degree in English education. This teacher's selection is unique because he teaches history using English as the medium of instruction, a solution adopted by the school due to the scarcity of history teachers fluent in English. (2) Students: Consisting of three grade levels with diverse national backgrounds: Year 2: 1 student (Indonesian), Year 4: 1 student (Australian), and Year 5: 4 students (3 Indonesian, 1 Australian). Year 5 students have excellent English proficiency and strong drawing skills due to the school's curriculum integrating art and design technology subjects. The data was collected using two main techniques to ensure data validity through triangulation.

a. Classroom Observation: The researcher acted as a non-participant observer to watch teaching and learning interactions, how visual art was implemented in history materials, and the use of English during the process.
b. Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted with students after the learning session. The semi-structured format was chosen to allow the researcher to explore in more depth the impact of the drawing activity on their learning experience, their perceptions of the history materials, and their comfort in using English.

The data obtained were analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques (Miles & Huberman), which included (1) Data Reduction: Distilling important information from observations and interviews. (2) Data Presentation: Organizing information into a descriptive narrative. (3) Conclusion Drawing: Determining the final findings regarding the effectiveness of visual art integration in interdisciplinary learning.
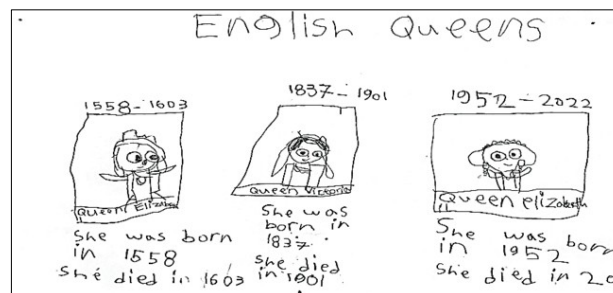
3. **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Results

Using multiple teaching methods, drawings functioned as a learning tool

Tools should be used by good teachers and pupils. However, teachers and students may prefer different tools. Makassar Independent School uses art to assist students in conveying their comprehension of subjects. Observations show that history, science, English, PSHE, and Bahasa Indonesia teachers use drawing in various lesson elements throughout classes. In grade two history class, the instructor used art to educate about English queens. Year 4 covers the Bronze and Iron Ages, while year 5 covers Maya civilization and transport history through sketching.
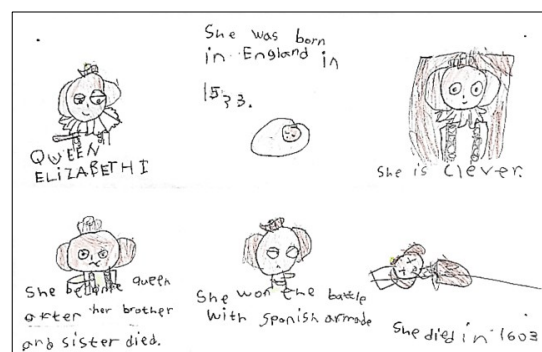
In year two, the instructor reads from "Oxford International Primary History Year 2" to teach about Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Victoria, and Queen Elizabeth II. Students discussed the three queens' reigns and the definition of a queen. Student sketches of the three queens were then arranged chronologically. Figure 1 shows the drawing.

Figure 1. English Queens (Student Drawing Results)

The student identified and arranged England's queens by reign period based on the image. She even wrote the birth and death dates of England's three queens. Her drawing of each crowned person shows that she knows they are queens.

After introducing the three queens and their reigns in England, the teacher taught each queen's story separately. Teachers start with Queen Elizabeth I and have students read "Oxford International Primary History Year 2." After a conversation to verify comprehension, the student watched a Queen Elizabeth I video. Teachers assigned students to write mini books on the queen. Mini-book results are below at Figure 2.

Figure 2. Mini-Book

The learner read and watched videos based on the image. She accurately represented Queen Elizabeth I's personality, accomplishments, and life story using this material. As requested by the teacher, the pupil explained the meaning of her sketched picture.

The teacher used a similar strategy in following lessons. The teacher keeps pupils engaged with subject-related creative assignments. This teacher assigns a comic strip about Queen Elizabeth II. The resulting comic strip follows in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Comic Strip

The student described the queen's birth date, then her life and pastimes, based on the photograph. The student depicts the English watching the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on TV in the 6th strip, underlining its significance. As seen, the teacher encourages autonomous learning by integrating reading and sketching activities and promoting conversation. Teachers use communicative language teaching. Based on second-year student observations, the teacher successfully taught grade 2 students.
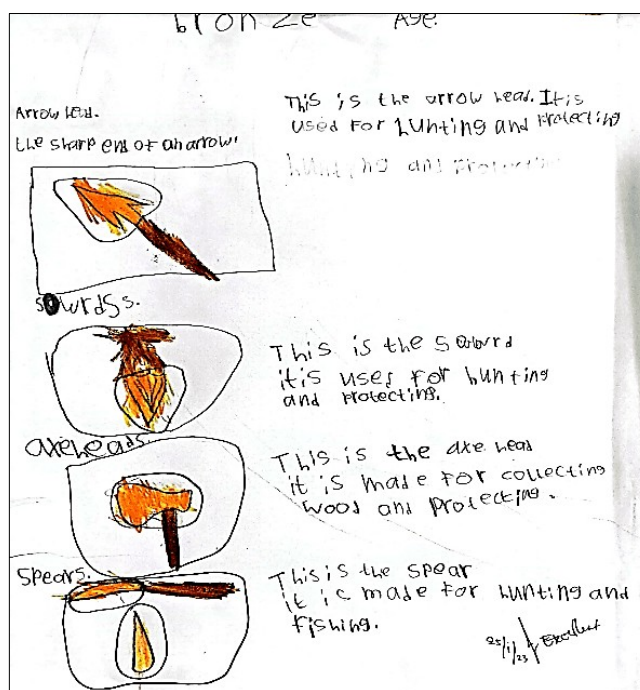
A Bronze Age lesson began in year 4, with the teacher explaining bronze tools and their production. While talking to the pupil, the teacher showed a bronze tool-making video. The teacher directed pupils to create a sequential strip of bronze tool manufacture phases after the video. Below is Figure 4 of the drawing.

Figure 4. The Resulting Student Drawing

The figure shows that the pupil understood bronze-making. Despite the modest pictures, the pupils' written explanations showed comprehension. The sketches reveal that the student accurately depicts copper and tin, the key ingredients for bronze. The student showed that bronze is made by melting and mixing these two minerals. The student also understood that the process involves substantial heat and other phases, as seen above.

Another class meeting covered Bronze Age tools and weapons with an interactive approach. The teacher asks students to predict the differences between Bronze Age and Stone Age items and weaponry at the start of the lecture. The teacher then asks the student to investigate Bronze Age items and weaponry online and create a poster. The poster is shown in Figure 5.
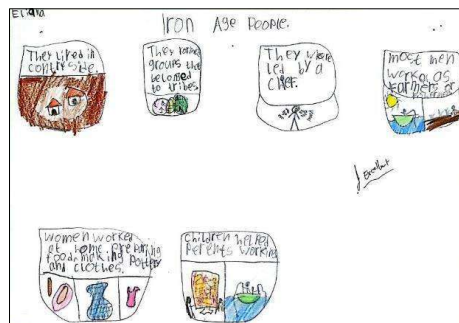

Figure 5. Resulting Poster

The figure above shows that the student clearly presents her conclusions after Internet research and teacher conversations. The student preferred sketching over PowerPoint to explain Bronze Age tools for this job. She also wrote her own explanations for her drawings. A student went above and beyond by coloring Bronze Age tools orange and adding brown handles to show her awareness of the producing process and that they were produced from copper and tin. This shows she understood the bronze-making lesson from the prior meeting.

In the next class, the teacher discussed Iron Age people. The teacher helped students learn via drawing. Students were required to draw Iron Age culture, including the tribal chief, common jobs, and daily life. The drawing below refers to this artwork.
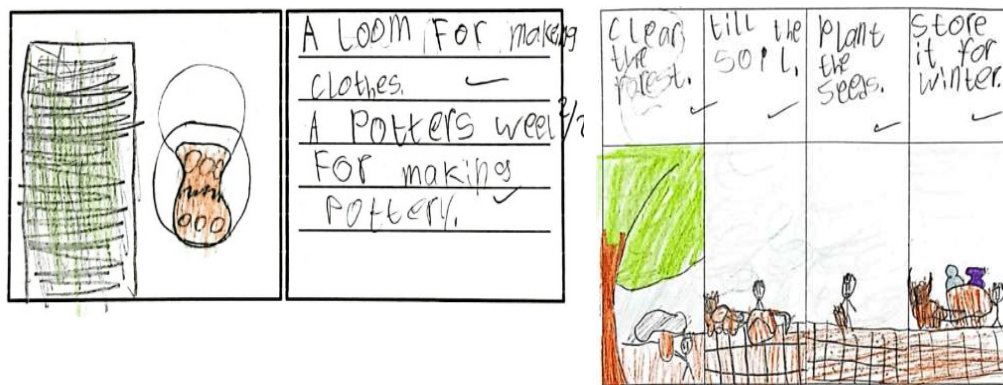
Figure 6. Iron Aged People

The students' drawings and written description demonstrate their understanding. The pupil clearly understands tribal dynamics in the second drawing. She understands the chief's duty of providing orders by depicting him. Using drawings, the student accurately described farmer and fisherman jobs. Finally, the student's choice to sketch herself as a girl shows her grasp of girls' roles at the time, such as helping their moms weave garments.

The teacher asked final exam questions that involved drawing and writing. The teacher requested students to draw and explain Bronze Age home and farm items for the written exam. The learner must write about the sketching items' functions. The exam also required students to draw on Iron Age farming practices. The final assignment was to draw, label, and describe three Iron Age jobs. Student replies include drawings.

Figure 7. Student Drawing Results

The drawings above show that the students answered all questions well. The student described facts easily and accurately. The paper exam's drawing assessment helped the teacher measure student understanding.

According to the information supplied, the teacher uses task-based learning and stresses communication skills. This approach is like a grade 4 kid who reads the material, discusses it with the teacher, independently drew the content, and presented it to the class.

The fifth-grade teacher utilized diagrams to engage kids. Students were told to study the textbook before discussing it. The teacher then explained diagram models and their uses. The subject seemed difficult, yet pupils understood at least one visual model. They had to draw a mind map about the fall of the Roman Empire. Students also had to write graphic explanations. The images show assignment results.
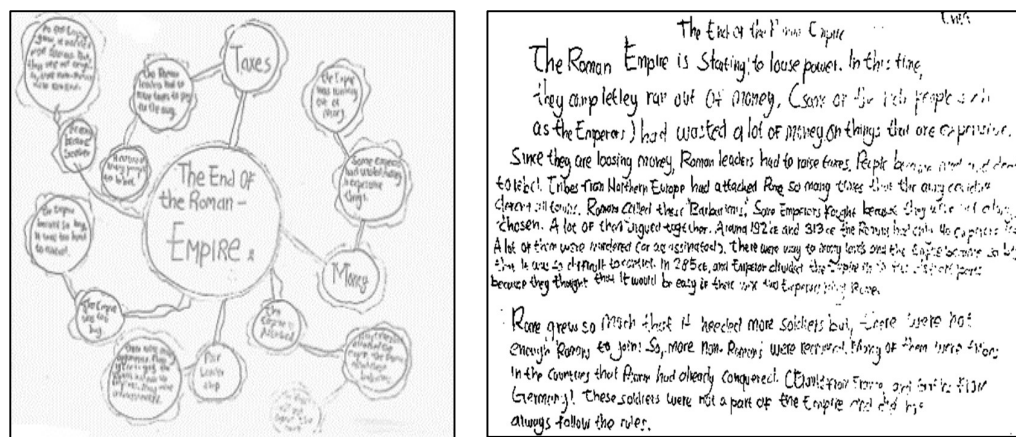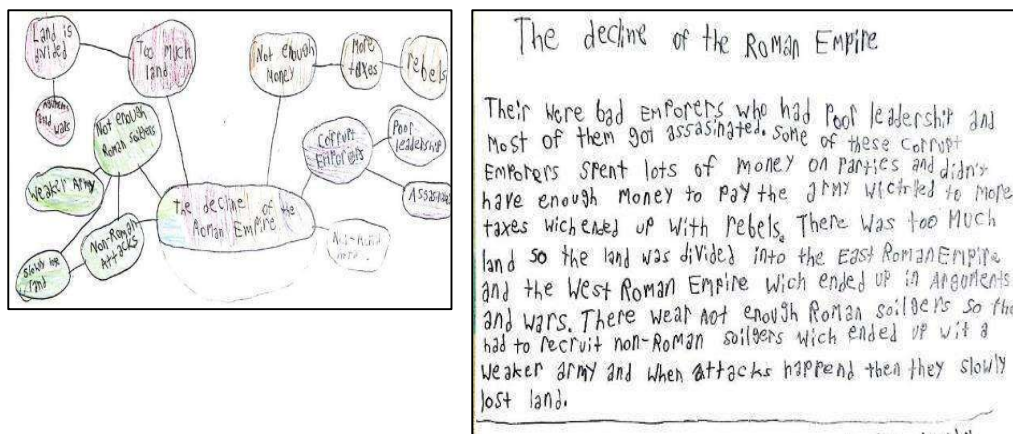

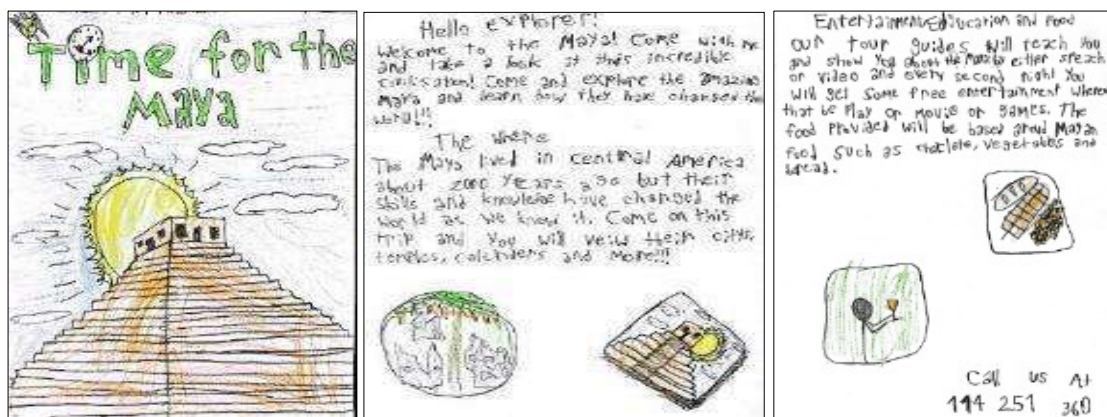**Figure 8.** The Outcomes of the Students' Assignments

The following are additional images from the fifth-grade students:

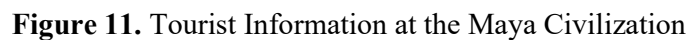**Figure 9.** Additional Images from the Fifth-Grade Students

The images from two fifth-grade kids demonstrate their strong comprehension and proficiency in conveying knowledge using diagrammatic representations. Furthermore, they exhibited competence in composing paragraphs derived from the mental maps they developed.

In a separate lecture, the instructor utilized a drawing activity to engage students in learning and evaluate their understanding of Mayan towns. The lesson commenced with students reading the text and participating in discussion. The teacher directed the pupils to incorporate details regarding the geographical location of the Mayan civilization, and the architectural edifices present in their urban centers for the tourist information guide. The accompanying photos illustrate the explanations given for the task.
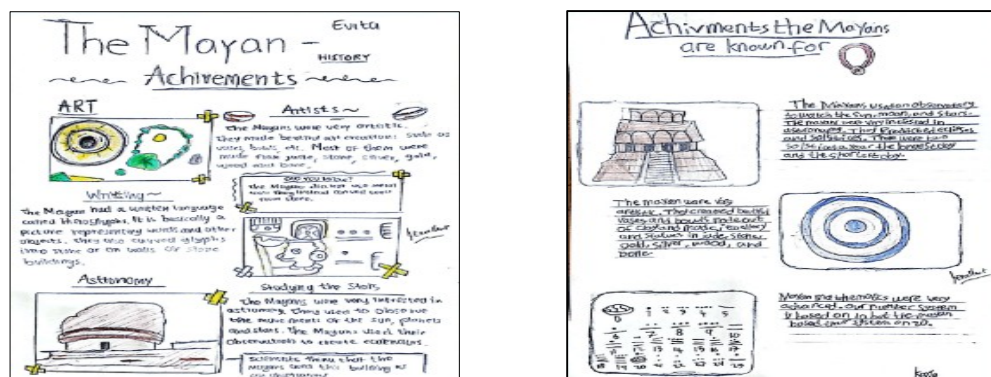

Figure 10. Images and Explanations from Students

Here is the work of another student regarding Tourist Information for visiting the Maya civilization.

Figure 11. Tourist Information at the Maya Civilization

The figures clearly demonstrate that the students employed drawings to enhance and visually represent the written explanations in the booklet. The illustrations effectively communicated pupils' comprehension of the specified elements, notably concerning the Mayan temple. The temple illustration precisely represents the architectural design of Mayan temples, demonstrating pupils' understanding of the topic.

In Year five, the concluding topic examined through drawing exercises focused on the achievements of the Mayans. Students were tasked with developing a poster that included both illustrations and written material. Students acquire information via reading pertinent literature and performing internet research, followed by conversations with the teacher. The pupils were granted autonomy to select any content that captured their interest in inclusion in their posters. The images below display illustrations produced by the students for this assignment.
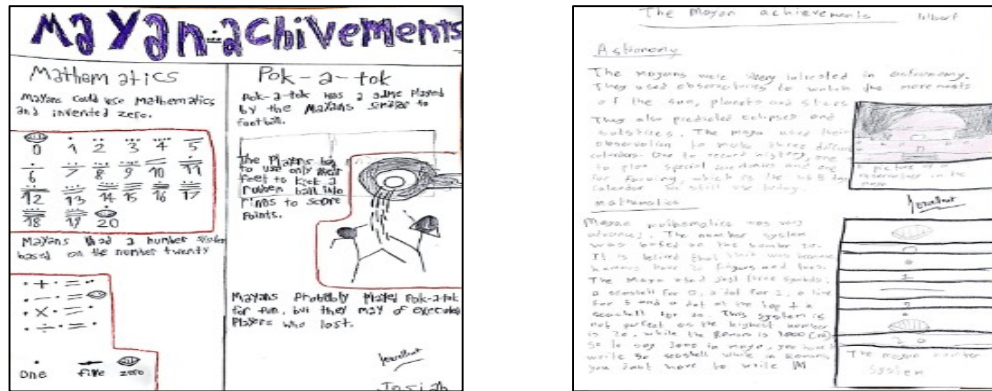
Figure 12. Drawings Created by the Students

Based on the students' drawings depicting the Mayan Achievements, it is evident that they tried to comprehend the lesson and accurately represent it through detailed drawings. These drawings play a crucial role in assessing students' understanding, as the terms and concepts used can be subject to varying interpretations based on individual perspectives. Not everyone may have prior knowledge or learning experiences regarding the achievements of the Maya civilization. Therefore, the inclusion of drawings provides a visual medium that enhances understanding and ensures a more accurate measurement of student comprehension.

During the final exam in Year 5, students were required to utilize drawing to showcase their understanding of specific topics, including Mayan farming techniques and crops cultivated by the Maya civilization. The following images portray the students' visual representations of their comprehension:
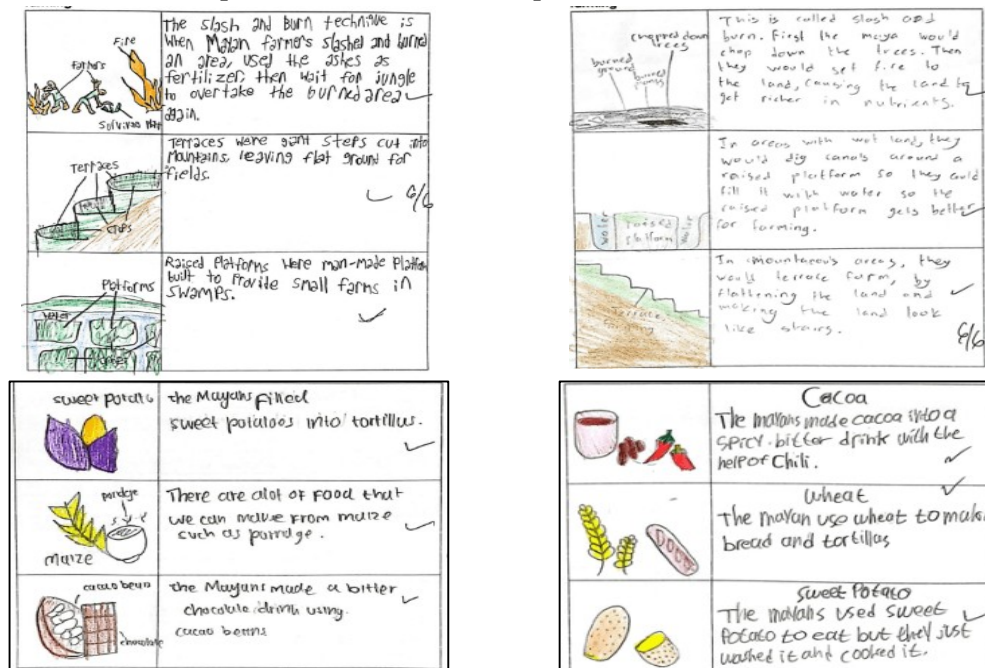

Figure 13. Students' Visual Representations of their Comprehension

The drawings submitted by the four fifth-grade children demonstrate a thorough comprehension of the subject, as their illustrations correspond accurately with the details articulated in their written comments. The instructor acknowledged their outstanding effort by granting flawless points for their responses. Moreover, it is evident that students exert substantial effort in their paper examinations, reflecting their commitment to academic success. The descriptors indicate that the teacher employed inquiry-based learning.

In the educational process, the instructor assigns pupils diverse queries or subjects for research utilizing the internet. The students subsequently integrated their discoveries into their drawings, which were exhibited before the class. The students' conclusions were validated through discussions with peers and the teacher. The research findings indicate that the teacher utilizes various instructional approaches to teach history through sketching. In this setting, drawings function as educational instruments that can improve students' capacity to articulate their comprehension.

Drawings aid the students in effectively demonstrating their comprehension towards the lessons

Due to students' shyness and inability to explain their learning process, studying how sketching helps pupils demonstrate their understanding proved difficult. Four children enthusiastically engaged in the interviews, and we meticulously recorded their statements. J, the first student, said he drew in art, design and technology, science, and history. J enjoyed learning with drawing. Interestingly, he said he grasped the material before drawing. J believed the teacher encouraged drawing in lessons because he thought pupils would enjoy it. E and J both said drawing was part of learning in art, design and technology, science, and history. She mentioned her love of drawing. She wondered why the teacher assigned sketching projects. He noted that the teacher clearly explained the subject and gave pupils clear instructions to complete their duties. She also found that painting helped her remember lessons.

F, the third student, disliked the drawing. However, teachers in most subjects, excluding music, seni tari, theater, and math, often required him to draw. F said professors will explain textbook knowledge while searching and reading. F said they sometimes showed the students their drawings. F noted that the painting about the Anglo-Saxons helped him understand the lessons. Additionally, K, the last pupil, liked drawing. K loved drawing art and history. The teacher requested her to draw to assess her knowledge of the subject, she thought. K said the teacher usually explained, asked questions, and answered before assigning drawing chores. For instance, she had to portray Mayan farming. K said painting helped her understand and remember the lecture. She added that she always colored and showed her pictures in class.

Drawing helped students learn, according to teacher observations and student interviews. The teacher admitted that not all kids liked drawing. She continually encourages pupils to draw their understanding to test comprehension. Smaller class sizes allow students to connect and communicate during sketching, making this need crucial. Students share their drawings with classmates, creating a fun and stimulating

environment. Drawings, paper crafts, PowerPoint presentations, essays, and imaginative stories inspired by historical topics are the main ways students demonstrate their understanding. The teacher stressed that Year 2 and Year 4 pupils enjoy and easily draw, even during final exams, with correct answers as measurable outcomes, proving that drawing helps kids recall lesson content. In conclusion, the teacher highlighted that while student may not enjoy sketching, it helps him arrange and organize his work. A comic strip poster drawing with teacher assistance emphasizes chronological or sequential principles. According to the teacher and pupils, drawings help students learn language and express themselves.

Discussion

Drawing as a Learning Tool

Research at Makassar Independent School indicates that drawing activities serve as a useful pedagogical tool for pupils to articulate their comprehension of intricate historical concepts. In Year 2, pupils employed drawings to precisely arrange the chronological order of the reigns of the Queen of England, illustrating that visual representation aids in the comprehension of temporal concepts. This corresponds with Hope's theory, which posits that sketching is a process of creating significant marks that depict concepts and convey explanations (Hope, 2009; Kelley & Sung, 2017). By sketching, students reproduce knowledge and offer insight into their unique interpretations of historical events (Jee et al., 2014).

Integration of Teaching Methods: CLT, TBL, and Inquiry-Based Learning

History teachers at MIS implement a variety of complementary methods to integrate language and historical content:
- Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): By combining reading and drawing activities followed by discussion sessions, teachers encourage independent learning and active student engagement in meaningful communication.
- Task-Based Learning (TBL): For Year 4 students, the use of structured tasks such as creating sequential strips of bronze-making processes or posters of internet research demonstrates the effective implementation of TBL. These tasks enable students to achieve learning outcomes through hands-on projects.
- Inquiry-Based Learning: In Year 5, students are placed at the center of learning through independent research activities on the Mayan civilization. The use of diagrams and mind maps helps students organize the information they find online into a format that is more easily understood visually.

Cognitive and Affective Impact on Students

Cognitively, drawing activities help students retain or remember the lesson material. Teachers noted that drawing significantly helps students remember the lesson content, as evidenced by the results of the final exam, where students were able to correctly answer questions using a combination of drawing and writing.

Effectively, despite variations in interest—with some students strongly enjoying drawing and others (such as Student F) feeling less so—this activity remains beneficial. For students who are less interested in art, drawing activities still help them structure and organize their thoughts before putting them into writing.

Drawing as an Accurate Assessment Tool

This research illustrates that sketching functions as an evaluative instrument that can reduce bias in language interpretation. Visual elements in resources like "Mayan Achievements" can more accurately convey concepts that elementary school pupils may struggle to articulate with restricted vocabulary. The students' achievement in correlating visual representations with written descriptions on the final examination, culminating in perfect scores, illustrates that drawing serves as a legitimate measure of proficiency in English-centric historical education.

The incorporation of visual arts in history education is not merely an enjoyable activity but a cognitive strategy that transcends the limitations of language (English) and subject matter (history) (Ampartzaki, 2023). Drawing enables students to comprehend the subject matter and articulate their ideas more expansively than through text alone (Fiorella & Kuhlmann, 2020).

This study illustrates that visual arts, especially drawing, significantly facilitate the comprehension of historical knowledge and enhance English language ability among primary school children. We can juxtapose these data with various extant literature and hypotheses. Students accurately depict details such as bronze implements and Mayan social structures, a skill they then validate through their written explanations. This supports Allen's assertion that students' drawings demonstrate their authentic understanding of the topic under discussion (Allen, 2017). This study utilizes drawings as tangible evidence of students' cognitive development prior to their ability to articulate it fluently in English, either vocally or in writing.

Students employed illustrations for several objectives, ranging from constructing a history of English monarchs to devising a mind-map representation of the fall of Rome. These findings correspond with Hope's perspective that drawing constitutes a process of producing significant marks for several reasons, including the illustration of ideas, the creation of diagrams, and the communication of explanations (Hammer et al., 2023; Kelley & Sung, 2017). This research illustrates that sketches offer educators insight into pupils' distinct perspectives on comprehending history. Moreover, the results reveal that educators incorporate reading, debate, and sketching activities to promote autonomous learning. This technique corresponds with Aswad et al. (2024), which posits that including students in significant communicative actions enhances their participation in the learning process. Drawing functions as a "significant endeavor."

Year 4 students utilize poster-making and sequential strip assignments to attain the specified learning outcomes, wherein they visually exhibit the findings of their internet research. This method aligns by Anggoro et al. (2023) Task-Based Learning model, wherein student-expressed tasks or activities through discussion and practical engagement are employed to meet educational objectives. Additionally, pupils at

Makassar Independent School are afforded the autonomy to select facts of interest for inclusion in posters or comic strips. Green et al. (2024) posits that creativity is a cognitive process including thought, learning, perception, and environmental analysis. This research illustrates that creative autonomy in drawing enables pupils to freely apply their comprehension.

This research corroborates prior studies indicating that sketching functions not merely as an artistic endeavor but as a highly efficacious cognitive instrument within a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) framework (Dinham, 2024). This research is distinctive due to its location within an international school in Makassar, demonstrating that sketching remains advantageous for kids who claim to dislike art, as it aids in organizing their writing.

4. CONCLUSION

Research findings indicate that drawing is not just an artistic activity but an effective learning tool to help students understand abstract historical concepts. This is particularly helpful for students in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) environments, where they must understand the content (history) while mastering the language of instruction (English). Research demonstrates that drawing activities enhance students' retention of the subject matter. Through visual representations such as timelines of English queens, Bronze Age comic strips, and Mayan posters, students are able to organize information chronologically and logically. Although each student has varying levels of interest in art, drawing still benefits all students. For advanced students, it provides a creative outlet, while for less artistic students, drawing serves as a scaffolding to help them better structure their writing. Moreover, the incorporation of images in exams enables teachers to assess the depth of students' understanding, unimpeded by their limited English vocabulary. Synchronization of images and text demonstrates comprehensive mastery of the material.

As a recommendation, teachers of non-language subjects (such as history or science) that use English as the medium of instruction are advised to continue integrating visual arts to reduce students' cognitive load. Teachers need to provide structured guidance (such as ordered guidance or templates) when asking students to draw so that students' focus remains on the historical content, not just the aesthetics of the image. It is hoped that future researchers can examine the impact of this visual arts integration on students' speaking skills, for example, through presentations of their drawings. Furthermore, further research can be conducted with a larger participant scale or by comparing the effectiveness of this method in national schools that have recently implemented bilingual programs.

for not only facilitating access to students' work but also for creating a conducive environment for conducting the research. Additionally, heartfelt appreciation goes to the students at Makassar Independent School, with mention of the 2nd, 4th, and 5th graders, for their valuable participation in interviews and their willingness to showcase their work to the public.

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