



Shifting Meanings of Art: A Narrative Analysis of Coloring Competitions as a Social Practice in Early Childhood

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the experiences of children, parents, and teachers in early childhood education coloring competitions, as well as the meanings constructed within these practices. The study used a qualitative approach based on narrative inquiry. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning across participants' narratives. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation conducted during a coloring competition event held in Surabaya. The participants consisted of six children aged 4-6 years, five parents, and three teachers or organizers selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six phases: familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing. The findings indicate that parents' motivations range from recreational to competitive orientations. Teachers and organizers tend to maintain coloring competitions for practical reasons, while children's responses range from enthusiasm to pressure. These findings suggest that coloring competitions serve as a social practice that shapes children's experiences within a competitive value framework. This study offers a critical perspective on art practices in early childhood education. In practice, it suggests reorienting art activities toward more appreciative formats, such as open-ended drawing festivals that allow children to express themselves without competitive pressure.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education crucially supports a child's diverse developmental abilities. Early childhood education institutions provide diverse learning experiences designed to optimize children's cognitive, social, emotional, and creative development. Santrock (2011) explains that early childhood is a period of rapid development that requires environments where children can freely explore, express themselves, and interact with their surroundings. Learning activities in early childhood education should be designed through direct experience.

Visual arts, such as drawing and coloring, are widely used by teachers and parents in early childhood education to support development. Cooke et al. (2004) state that drawing is a symbolic representation for children to convey their worldview. Children frequently use drawings to express ideas, imagination, and experiences that they cannot yet articulate verbally, making drawing both an aesthetic activity and a vital medium for communication. Drawing activities are also closely related to children's emotional development. As young children develop emotional regulation, they need experiences that help them recognize and express feelings appropriately (Gross & Ford, 2024). Creative activities such as drawing provide a symbolic medium for children to channel emotions through shapes, lines, and colors. Research by Drake (2021) reported that drawing improves mood by distracting children from negative experiences, indicating that art supports emotional regulation (Winner et al., 2013).

In addition to supporting emotional development, drawing significantly fosters creativity. Creativity develops when children freely explore ideas and produce their works based on their



imagination. Runco (2007) argues that children's creativity develops optimally when learning environments provide freedom to experiment with diverse ideas and expressions. Regarding artistic development, Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) explain that children in early developmental stages tend to draw spontaneously, ignoring adult standards. Therefore, art activities in early childhood education should emphasize exploratory processes and creative experiences rather than the evaluation of final products. In practice, art activities for young children are often more rigidly structured, such as coloring pre-drawn images provided by adults. While coloring can help develop fine motor coordination and pattern-following skills, overly structured coloring activities can restrict children's freedom to express ideas and imagination (McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002). Filling in predetermined patterns limits creative exploration far more than free drawing. In the observed competition, all participants used the same coloring sheet with predetermined image patterns provided by the organizers. Consequently, children focused on producing neat work that conformed to assessment criteria rather than exploring independent visual ideas. This condition indicates that competitive coloring prioritizes final outcomes and conformity over creative expression. These findings align with the study by Veryawan et al. (2020), which showed that free-drawing activities offer greater opportunities to independently express ideas, choose colors, and develop imagination compared to overly structured art activities.

Coloring competitions targeting young children are widespread, frequently organized by schools, shopping centers, and art supply brands for promotional or public events. Typically, children asked to color pre-drawn images were evaluated on neatness, color combination, and model conformity. This situation indicates that art activities shift from exploration and self-expression toward evaluation and competition. Coloring competitions often involve significant parental intervention in children's preparation. Parents may provide substantial guidance to meet the judging criteria. Hennessey and Amabile (2010) explain that external pressures, such as evaluation and rewards, can influence intrinsic motivation in creative activities. In early childhood contexts, pressure to produce the "best possible" outcome forces children to focus on results rather than the exploratory processes essential to creativity, ultimately changing how they perceive and value artistic activities.

Developmentally, art activities such as drawing and coloring should allow children to express emotions, develop their imagination, and explore various forms and colors. According to Vygotsky (2004), imagination and creativity are fundamental developmental processes that emerge through symbolic expression, exploration, and the transformation of personal experiences into creative representations. Framing these activities as achievement-oriented competitions may shift their function, turning expressive and emotionally regulatory media into tools for evaluation and comparison among participants. This shift highlights the need for closer developmental examination of early childhood coloring competitions. Although some scholars argue that competitive activities can contribute positively to children's learning when designed in developmentally appropriate ways (Sheridan & Williams, 2006), concerns remain regarding how competition may influence creativity, autonomy, and children's experiences in artistic activities.

In Indonesia's educational policy, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes holistic competency and character development, with creativity as a core component of learning. This approach is reflected in the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile), particularly in the creative dimension, which emphasizes generating original ideas, self-expression, and flexible problem-solving. In practice, activities such as coloring competitions, which are often highly structured, pattern-based, and outcome-oriented, may limit opportunities for idea exploration and personal expression. This condition may lead children to conform to external standards rather than develop original ideas.

Although numerous studies have examined the role of art activities in early childhood development, research specifically addressing coloring competitions remains limited. Previous studies have largely focused on the benefits of drawing for creativity and emotional expression. Drake and Winner (2013) showed that drawing helps children regulate emotions through distraction and symbolic expression. Meanwhile, Zakaria et al. (2021) found that visual art activities support children's socio-emotional development by providing space for them to express their experiences, imagination, and feelings through visual expression. Similarly, Sudana et al. (2025) reported that drawing and storytelling foster preschoolers' socio-emotional skills by encouraging self-expression, communication, and social interaction. Regarding art competitions, Amabile (1982) found that competitive situations and reward-



oriented environments may influence children's artistic creativity. Children creating art in competitive settings tend to prioritize technical aspects and evaluation criteria over spontaneous creative exploration. These findings suggest that external evaluative pressure in art activities can influence children's intrinsic motivation in the creative process. Existing studies primarily examine art activities in educational or therapeutic settings and rarely address real-world competitive practices. Current critiques of coloring competitions tend to be normative, emphasizing their potential to constrain creativity while overlooking how children, parents, and educators actually experience and interpret these practices.

Unlike previous studies, this research does not solely critique coloring competitions; instead, it analyzes them as social practices in which interactions among children, parents, and teachers shape particular meanings of art activities. Through a narrative inquiry approach, this study explores how participants construct and negotiate experiences, motivations, and pressures within competitive contexts. Thus, this research offers novelty by reframing coloring competitions not simply as "beneficial" or "problematic," but as social phenomena that shift the meanings of art in early childhood education.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze early childhood coloring competitions and examine their implications for child development from a developmental perspective. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how coloring competitions contribute to shifting meanings of art activities, particularly as a medium for young children's self-expression and emotional regulation.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to explore how children, parents, and teachers interpret early childhood coloring competitions within their social and educational contexts (Caine et al., 2022). Narrative inquiry emphasizes the importance of stories as a primary means of understanding human experience (Riessman, 2008). Through this approach, the study sought to capture rich and in-depth accounts of participants' experiences, meanings, and social interactions related to the coloring competition. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022) to identify patterns of meaning (themes) within the narratives. This approach allows the researcher to take an active role in the interpretive process. The resulting themes are understood as analytical constructions developed through the interaction between the data, the research questions, and the researcher's reflexive engagement (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The study was conducted during a coloring competition held as part of the Joy Got Talent event in Surabaya on September 28, 2025. This research focused on a single competition event and did not involve longitudinal observations or repeated data collection across multiple years. This site was selected because coloring competitions are commonly organized in various early childhood education contexts in Indonesia. At the study site, coloring competitions are routinely held regardless of the event theme. In addition to being easy to organize and having relatively simple evaluation criteria, these competitions reflect a social practice involving multiple stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and event organizers. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the competition. The participants comprised three main groups: teachers and organizers, parents, and child participants. To ensure participants' confidentiality, codes were used in interview excerpts presented in the findings section. CWO for parents, CWG for teachers/organizers, and CWA for children. Interviews with the three teachers or organizers explored competition objectives and implementation. Interviews with five parents to understand their motivations and expectations for their children's participation. Additionally, six children aged 4-6 years served as key participants and provided firsthand narratives of their experiences and the meanings they constructed during the competition. The relatively small number of participants was intentionally selected to enable in-depth exploration, consistent with the characteristics of qualitative research, which emphasizes data richness. In narrative inquiry, the focus is not on sample size, but on the depth and richness of participants' lived experiences.

Data collection involved participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations during the competition captured the overall atmosphere, interactions among children, parents, and teachers, and children's emotional responses throughout the activity. Semi-structured



interviews were conducted with teachers, parents, and children to explore their experiences, motivations, and interpretations of the activity. To ensure a comfortable environment for free expression, interviews with children utilized child-friendly approaches, including storytelling, play-based interactions, and the draw-and-talk technique. Supplementary data included documentation such as children's artwork, field notes, and photographs. All documentation procedures ensured that children's identities remained unidentifiable. Data analysis followed the six-phase reflexive thematic analysis framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022): (1) data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts and observation notes, (2) initial coding to identify relevant meaning units, (3) generation of preliminary themes based on emerging patterns, (4) reviewing and refining themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) report writing. The resulting themes reflect patterns of meaning related to parental motivations, teachers' perspectives on the competition, and children's responses. Rather than treating themes as passively emerging from the data, this process actively constructed them through iterative, reflexive interpretation.

Acknowledging subjectivity as integral to the analytical process, the researcher maintained continuous reflexivity to examine how their background, experiences, and perspectives influenced data interpretation. Trustworthiness was enhanced through source triangulation, comparing data from children, parents, and teachers to achieve a comprehensive understanding. This study adhered to ethical principles for research involving children. Informed consent was obtained from the event organizers and parents. Participants' identities were kept confidential using pseudonyms. All research procedures were conducted using a child-friendly approach that fully respected children's rights to decline or withdraw at any stage.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Parental Motivations for Enrolling Children in Coloring Competitions

The interview findings revealed that parents have diverse reasons for enrolling their children in coloring competitions. Among the five parents interviewed, two parents viewed competitions as opportunities to develop a competitive mindset and prepare children to cope with pressure from an early age. Two other parents emphasized children's autonomy and highlighted the importance of ensuring participation remains enjoyable rather than forced. Meanwhile, one parent reflected on the emotional impact of competition after observing their child's disappointment following a loss. As one parent explained, "*As long as I can afford it, I try to let my child join many competitions. My main goal is for them to get used to stage fright and the pressure to compete. Winning is just a bonus*" (CWO3). The findings show that parental motivations are not solely related to children's enjoyment of art activities. Parents viewed participation in coloring competitions as an opportunity to support broader developmental goals, such as building confidence, resilience, and competitive readiness. At the same time, concerns about children's emotional well-being and autonomy remained important factors in parents' decisions about whether their children would participate. These differences in parental motivations highlight how coloring competitions are variably interpreted and positioned within early childhood development.

Parental involvement in early childhood education is influenced by developmental expectations and performance-oriented aspirations (Rahma et al., 2023). These findings suggest that parental involvement in coloring competitions extends beyond participation, reflecting values related to achievement, competition, and desired outcomes. In this context, children's motivation may be influenced by external factors originating from their social environment. Hennessey and Amabile (2010) argue that the dominance of extrinsic motivation, such as rewards and competition, can shape how individuals engage in an activity. Self-Determination Theory explains that controlling social environments tends to reduce intrinsic motivation and increase performance-oriented behavior in children (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This condition indicates that parental emphasis on achievement and competition may reinforce extrinsic motivation in children's experiences.

External pressures, such as competition and evaluation, also influence children's engagement in creative activities. The data show that some parents explicitly emphasize winning or competitive readiness. Others adopted a more flexible approach by allowing children to decide whether they wanted



to participate, reflecting different parental perspectives on interpreting competitions in early childhood development.

These findings indicate that coloring competitions are not interpreted solely as recreational activities for children, but also as social spaces where values of achievement, discipline, and competitiveness are gradually introduced through parental expectations and involvement. Research on parenting and children's participation in tournaments also suggests that parental decision-making is influenced by parenting styles, achievement beliefs, and perceptions of developmental benefits (Chen et al., 2024). Sheridan and Williams (2006) argue that competition in preschool settings may serve constructive purposes when developmentally appropriate and supported by positive social interactions. However, the present findings reveal considerable variation in parental interpretation, ranging from a purely recreational experience to early preparation for future achievement-oriented environments.

In early childhood contexts, parents often serve as primary decision makers in determining children's participation in competitive activities. This condition may position children not only as participants in recreational activities, but also as individuals whose participation is shaped by parental expectations regarding achievement and developmental success. Previous studies have reported positive outcomes from coloring competitions, including increased self-confidence, enjoyment, and opportunities for children to express their creativity (Nasiha et al., 2024). However, the present study's findings revealed that children's experiences in competitive art activities are not uniform. Some children experience enjoyment and pride, whereas others encounter evaluative pressure and external expectations related to achievement. This suggests that the developmental impact of coloring competitions is strongly influenced by how competition is structured, interpreted, and mediated by adults within the learning environment.

Teachers' Perspectives and the Practice of Coloring Competitions

The interview findings revealed that the implementation of coloring competitions is shaped by both pedagogical and practical considerations. All three teachers acknowledged that coloring competitions are commonly conducted and have become recurring activities within institutional programs. Two teachers emphasized practical reasons for maintaining coloring competitions, including the simplicity of implementation, the ease of assessment procedures, and the possibility of involving non-specialist judges. At the same time, teachers recognized that drawing activities may provide greater opportunities for children's creativity and self-expression, although they were considered more difficult to evaluate. One teacher explained: *"Actually, if the goal is to assess creativity, a drawing competition would be more appropriate. Children can express their ideas. But drawing is more difficult. It requires judges with an art background, and art assessment is highly subjective"* (CWG1). The findings revealed that teachers are aware of the educational value of more open-ended art activities, but often prioritize practical considerations when organizing competitions. Institutional traditions, assessment procedures, and organizational efficiency appeared to play important roles in shaping the continued use of coloring competitions in early childhood settings. These findings highlight the influence of practical considerations and institutional routines on teachers' decisions about selecting and implementing art activities in early childhood education.

Teacher practices in early childhood education are often shaped by classroom constraints such as workload, time limitations, and assessment practicality (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). Previous research indicates that coloring is frequently chosen due to its relatively simple evaluation criteria, such as neatness and color conformity (Malchiodi, 1998). Other studies suggest that art practices in early childhood education tend to be directed toward activities that are easier to assess and standardize (McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002). This condition is also related to the varying levels of visual art competence among early childhood education teachers. This finding is consistent with Prayitno et al. (2023), who reported that not all early childhood teachers demonstrate adequate simple drawing skills, leading teachers to prefer more structured, easier-to-evaluate art activities in classroom practice. In this context, coloring activities are considered easier to implement because they involve relatively clear visual indicators, such as neatness, color coverage, and conformity to predetermined image patterns. This tendency indicates that technical considerations and efficiency in implementing and assessing activities are often prioritized over pedagogical considerations oriented toward children's exploration and self-



expression.

Drawing, however, plays a crucial role as a medium for children's self-expression. Sudana et al. (2025) found that drawing and storytelling activities support preschool children's social-emotional development by encouraging emotional expression, communication, and reflection on personal experiences. These findings support the view that art activities can contribute to broader developmental outcomes when they prioritize expression and interaction rather than performance and evaluation. Children use drawings as symbolic representations to communicate experiences, ideas, and emotions that they are not yet able to express verbally (Malchiodi, 1998). Open-ended art activities support children's creativity and meaning-making processes in early childhood development (Veryawan et al., 2020). From an art education perspective, artistic experiences provide a space for children to construct personal meaning (Eisner, 2003). Thus, art activities are not only related to technical skills but also contribute to cognitive and emotional development. Previous studies have also shown that coloring activities can support children's creativity, confidence, and flexibility in expressing ideas when implemented as part of regular learning activities (Inara et al., 2025). Children engaged in coloring activities showed greater variation in color combinations and originality in artistic expression. However, the present study found that the developmental potential of coloring activities may shift when they are situated in competitive and evaluative contexts. In coloring competitions, children may become more focused on conformity to assessment criteria and expected outcomes rather than on exploration and spontaneous creative expression.

Teachers face challenges in assessing children's artwork, as art evaluation is often subjective and requires specialized expertise. Art learning in early childhood involves process-based observation and requires structured assessment approaches to ensure consistency in evaluation (McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002). Suharto (2009) explains that artworks can be evaluated from multiple perspectives, including themes, conceptual foundations, aesthetics, historical context, creative processes, and social, political, and economic dimensions. However, art assessment does not necessarily encompass all aspects simultaneously, as assessment outcomes often depend on the evaluator's perspective and agreement. This complexity makes the assessment of art difficult to standardize in formal educational settings (McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002). Consequently, teachers may favor more structured activities, such as coloring, which are perceived as simpler to implement and evaluate.

The practice of coloring competitions also reflects the strong influence of long-standing institutional habits in early childhood education. These activities are repeated annually and have become embedded within institutional routines (McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002). As a result, pedagogical decisions are shaped not only by children's developmental needs but also by considerations related to practicality, ease of implementation, and the continuity of established systems. This condition suggests that coloring competitions continue not only because of their perceived educational value, but also because they align with institutional routines, practical assessment systems, and socially accepted standards of children's artistic performance in early childhood education. This tendency is also consistent with findings by Kamilin and Afandi (2024), who reported that coloring activities in early childhood settings are often implemented in highly structured ways that may limit opportunities for children's originality and creative exploration. Within competitive contexts, children's artistic experiences may become increasingly focused on meeting evaluation standards rather than engaging in personal meaning-making and creative experimentation.

Overall, the practice of coloring competitions reveals a tension between pedagogical ideals and practical realities. While art activities are expected to provide spaces for exploration and free expression, demands for efficiency and ease of assessment encourage more structured and outcome-oriented practices. This condition may limit children's creative experiences in art activities (Drake, 2021). This condition aligns with Kohn's perspective on competition, which suggests that highly competitive environments can stifle creativity and encourage conformity over exploration and originality (Shields & Bredemeier, 2010). In the context of coloring competitions, children may become more focused on meeting expected standards and evaluation criteria than on developing personal artistic expression. By comparison, Rahma et al. (2023) found that collaborative art activities can support children's social interaction through processes of sharing ideas, communication, cooperation, and collective exploration. These findings suggest that art activities in early childhood education have broader developmental



potential when prioritizing creative experiences and interactive processes rather than final competitive outcomes.

Children's Experiences in Participating in Coloring Competitions

Observational and interview data revealed diverse responses among children during coloring competitions. Among the four children interviewed, one child described coloring as an enjoyable activity, while another emphasized the importance of neatness and winning. One child reported participating due to parental encouragement, whereas another appeared more interested in completing the activity quickly to pursue other activities. These varied responses suggest that children experience coloring competitions in different ways, ranging from enjoyment and personal interest to performance-oriented participation and adult-directed involvement. One child explained: *"I join competitions often, and I also take lessons at home. It has to be neat to win"* (CWA2). The findings indicate that children do not interpret coloring competitions in the same way. While some children appeared to engage in the activity for enjoyment, others showed a stronger focus on achievement, evaluation, or external expectations. Documentation of children's artwork revealed variations in color use, neatness, and coloring techniques.



Figure 1. Coloring Competition Sheet (Uncolored)
(Source: researcher's documentation, 2025)

Figure 1 illustrates the coloring sheet used in the competition, which required children to color within predetermined outlines. The format offered limited opportunities to modify the original image and directs children to complete a structured task based on an existing visual model.



Figure 2. Children's Coloring Outcomes with Typical Quality
(Source: researcher's documentation, 2025)

Figure 2 presents examples of children's coloring outcomes showing differences in color selection, neatness, and coloring approaches. Some works appear more spontaneous and expressive, whereas others demonstrate greater attention to precision, conformity to expected standards, and technical



execution. The interview and documentation data consistently revealed that children did not experience coloring competitions in the same way. The findings indicated variations in enjoyment, engagement, and orientation toward outcomes, reflecting different ways in which children interpret and respond to the competitive context.

Children's responses in this study show considerable variation, ranging from enthusiasm to a sense of compulsion. Children's engagement in early learning activities is strongly influenced by the extent to which the learning environment supports autonomy and emotional comfort (Zakaria et al., 2021). Some children enjoy the coloring activity, others focus more on outcomes, or participate only because of parental encouragement. These findings are consistent with studies indicating that drawing and coloring can enhance children's mood when conducted in enjoyable and low-pressure environments (Drake, 2021). Under such conditions, children are more likely to engage fully in the creative process and express emotions more freely. However, these benefits may be diminished when art activities take place in competitive contexts. External pressure has been shown to constrain creative processes and reduce the emotional benefits of artistic engagement (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Competitive environments may reduce intrinsic motivation and shift children's focus toward external evaluation rather than creative exploration (Amabile, 1982). Tsiakara and Digelidis (2021) reported that competitive activities may enhance children's engagement and performance when competition is perceived as enjoyable and developmentally appropriate. In addition, young children may experience complex emotional responses to competition, including social pressure.

The variation in children's responses can be understood through the framework of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to Hennessey and Amabile (2010), intrinsic motivation arises when individuals engage in an activity for personal interest and enjoyment, whereas extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors such as rewards or social pressure. Children's emotional and behavioral engagement in early childhood is shaped by the quality of the social and learning environments in which activities occur (Zakaria et al., 2021). Children who enjoy the coloring process reflect intrinsic motivation, while those who focus on outcomes or feel compelled to participate tend to exhibit extrinsic motivation. In competitive contexts, an increased emphasis on evaluation and comparison may reinforce extrinsic motivation, ultimately reducing children's emotional engagement and interest in the activity. These findings demonstrate that children's participation in coloring competitions is shaped not only by personal enjoyment but also by social expectations and evaluative pressures constructed within adult-centered competition environments. At the same time, previous studies suggest that children may interpret competition in diverse ways depending on their social and cultural contexts. These findings indicate that competitive experiences in early childhood do not necessarily result in the same responses in all children. Liu et al. (2025), for example, found that preschool children may value competition not only for winning, but also for enjoyment, friendship, and the experience of participation itself. This indicates that children's responses to competitive activities are shaped by the meanings constructed in their environments and through interactions with adults.

Coloring Competitions as a Social Practice in Early Childhood Education

The findings indicate that participation in coloring competitions is shaped not only by personal decisions but also by their social environment. Several parents reported that their children joined the competition because their friends were also participating. One parent explained: "*If they want to join because their friends are joining, I allow it*" (CWO4). From the organizers' perspective, coloring competitions have become a routine part of annual programs. Teachers stated these competitions have become a recurring practice implemented each year (CWG2). This suggests that the continuity of these activities is influenced not only by educational objectives but also by institutional traditions and habitual practices. In addition, coloring competitions remain the most commonly selected format because they are easy to organize and evaluate. This pattern indicates that decisions about competition activities are often shaped by established practices within early childhood education settings.

Documentation of the event further revealed recurring patterns in the organization of the competition, as well as visual standards associated with competition outcomes.



Figure 3. Example of a Coloring Outcome Using the Gradient Technique Reflecting Competition Assessment Standards
(Source: researcher's documentation, 2025)

Figure 3 shows similarities in the use of gradient techniques and color combinations across different artworks. These similarities suggest the presence of certain visual standards that may implicitly function as references in the assessment process.



Figure 4. Children's Activity During the Coloring Competition
(Source: researcher's documentation, 2025)

Figure 4 illustrates children concentrating on the coloring task, with their attention directed toward the work surface. This documentation indicates that the activity was conducted in a structured setting where children were expected to complete a designated task. The interview and documentation data consistently revealed that coloring competitions were embedded within broader social and institutional contexts rather than functioning solely as individual artistic activities. The findings also indicated that children's participation was influenced by interactions among peers, parents, teachers, and institutional practices, which collectively shaped how the competition was experienced and interpreted.

Overall, coloring competitions should be understood as social practices involving multiple actors, relationships, and interests rather than merely as individual activities. Children's development and learning are shaped by interactions among individuals, social contexts, and cultural environments (Santrock, 2019). Research suggests that values related to competition and achievement in children's activities are often socially constructed through interactions with adults and educational environments (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Accordingly, children's experiences in coloring competitions are shaped through the interaction of parental motivations, educational practices, and their own responses to the activity. In this context, coloring competitions serve as social practices that gradually introduce children to culturally valued ideas of achievement, evaluation, and performance from an early age. As a result, art activities that ideally provide opportunities for exploration and self-expression may gradually shift toward more structured, outcome-oriented, and evaluative experiences shaped by adult expectations and institutional practices. This condition indicates that coloring competitions in early childhood education are not neutral activities, but socio-cultural practices that shape children's learning experiences, artistic expression, and understandings of achievement from an early age.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that coloring competitions in early childhood education are embedded with



multiple meanings and interests that extend beyond simple recreational activities. **Coloring competitions** function as socio-cultural practices through which values related to competition, achievement, and evaluation are gradually introduced to children from an early age. Parents' motivations for enrolling their children vary, ranging from providing enjoyable experiences to fostering readiness for competition. Teachers and organizers maintain coloring competitions for practical reasons, such as ease of implementation and assessment. Children's responses are also diverse. While some children enjoy the coloring process as a pleasurable activity, others focus more on the outcome or participate only with external encouragement. This indicates that children's experiences in coloring competitions are shaped not only by the activity itself but also by the broader social context in which it occurs.

An important finding of this study is that children's experiences in coloring competitions are strongly influenced by adult perspectives and institutional expectations. Parents, teachers, and organizers collectively influence how competitions are interpreted and experienced by children. Overall, coloring competitions in this study reflect a social practice in early childhood education, in which values of competition and achievement are introduced through interactions among children, parents, and educational environments. In this process, the function of art activities may shift from a medium of exploration and self-expression toward more outcome-oriented practices shaped by adult expectations and institutional routines.

These findings highlight the importance of re-evaluating the forms of art activities provided for young children to ensure they continue to support exploration, creativity, social interaction, and personal expression in accordance with children's developmental characteristics. The findings have several implications for early childhood education. For teachers and schools, the study highlights the importance of designing art activities that emphasize creative processes, emotional comfort, exploration, and children's autonomy rather than emphasizing evaluation and final outcomes. For educational institutions and policymakers, the findings suggest the need to reconsider highly competitive practices in early childhood programs and to promote approaches to art learning that align with children's developmental needs and characteristics. Therefore, art activities in early childhood education can be oriented toward more appreciative and process-based formats, such as open-ended drawing festivals or collaborative art activities that provide space for exploration, social interaction, and children's personal expression without placing them under excessive competitive pressure. These approaches also allow institutional promotional goals to be achieved without placing children under restrictive competitive constraints while maintaining developmentally appropriate learning experiences. However, this study has limitations, particularly in the relatively small number of participants and the focus on a single competition event, which limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research is encouraged to examine a wider range of non-competitive activities and to examine their influence on children's creativity, emotional experiences, and social development in greater depth.

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