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## How Teachers' Teaching Experience Improves Preschoolers' Writing Skills: Approach and Assessment

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### Abstract

Writing skill is an important area of communication and fine motor development in kindergarten (Keifer, 2015). The purpose of this study is to identify the best approaches used by experienced teachers in improving preschoolers' writing skills. Previous studies on children's early writing skills were done the effectiveness of self-regulated learning strategies on early writing performance and it doesn't focus on the experience of anyone. Therefore, the current study is focused on how the experience of teachers helps preschoolers to improve their writing skills. Moreover, this research also identifies how teachers assess preschoolers' writing skills. Six experienced preschool teachers were interviewed in this research and an online observation was conducted. Few approaches used by experienced teachers in improving preschoolers writing skills were identified in this research including learning through play; verbal encouragement; parental guidance; and in-line writing. Two methods of assessment that were used by the teachers in assessing children's writing are via observation and using the checklist.

**Keywords:** Best Approaches, Assessment, Preschoolers, Writing Skills

### Introduction

Writing is categorized as one of the important aspects of language and literacy development for preschoolers. All the preschools in Malaysia are required to follow the National Preschool Curriculum set by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Writing has been listed as one of the skills under the communication strand in the National Preschool Curriculum or *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran Semakan 2017* (DSKP, 2017). Therefore, it is important for preschoolers to develop writing skills.

Writing skill is an essential language skill for preschoolers to express themselves. Writing provides the opportunity for preschoolers to assert themselves and their opinions to enhance their self-confidence. Thus, teachers play an important role in encouraging preschoolers to communicate their thoughts and record their ideas through writing (Byington

& Kim, 2017; Hall et al., 2015). According to Kini and Podolsky (2016), teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement. Teachers are able to do better as they gain experience. Research shows that teachers with two decades or more of experience are more effective compared to the teachers that are earlier in their careers. Therefore, it is important to understand and learn from teachers' experiences. Teachers could learn the best approach on how to help preschoolers in writing based on their experiences and how to assess the preschoolers' writing skills.

Different levels of experience of the teacher have different methods of improving the preschoolers' writing skill. In the present days, parents are concerned about the writing skills of their preschoolers, and teachers are required to improve preschoolers' writing skills in order to fulfil the requirements of the parents and the curriculum. Thus, this research is to determine the best approaches teachers use to improve preschoolers' writing skills and methods used to assess preschooler's writing skills based on teachers' experience.

### **Background of the Study**

This research is on how a teacher's teaching experience improves preschoolers' writing skills. Writing skill is an important area of communication and fine motor development in kindergarten (Keifer, 2015). According to Olsen and Knapton (2013), kindergarten is the crucial year to teach the good habits of handwriting to preschoolers (Keifer, 2015). Meanwhile, writing requires fine motor skills with the hands as well as hand-eye coordination (Grissmer et al., 2010; Keifer, 2015). Therefore, writing is significant for preschoolers because it is a basic skill that needs to be learned by preschoolers.

Most parents are expecting preschool teachers to train their preschoolers with neat handwriting. Preschool educators always receive feedback from the parents who require their preschoolers to have good writing skills. Datuk Seri Fatimah Abdullah mentioned that "there are parents who insisted that their preschoolers should be taught how to read and write at nursery and kindergarten levels" when she launched Taska Day 2017 (Bernama, 2017). Therefore, preschool teachers are required to educate preschoolers to master writing skills during preschool life upon parents' requests. No doubt, handwriting is a critical component of preschoolers' development. The lack of adequate fine motor and visual perceptual skills can impact the acquisition of handwriting skills as well as have far-reaching consequences in terms of academic success and self-esteem (Feder & Majnemer, 2007; Nye & Sood, 2018; Sharp & Titus, 2016).

According to Siew and Mariani (2019), early writing is a complex cognitive process besides mechanical or orthographical skills in the national preschool curriculum. Preschoolers need to choose the way to express their message, arrange and print their marks on the page, and the method to denote sounds within the message when preschoolers are engaging in early writing. However, the early writing opportunities are usually lacking due the proper instruction and focus on handwriting instead of scaffolding the function of writing (Gerde et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2015; Ng & Yeo, 2014; Pelatti et al., 2014; Puranik et al., 2014; Samah et al., 2015; Siew and Mariani, 2019). Thus, it has caused low achievement in writing skills.

Teachers' experiences play important roles in teaching preschoolers writing skills whereas the teachers with different teaching experiences will have different approaches in

teaching preschoolers writing. Preschool teachers who teach in preschool should make use of the curiosity of preschoolers and offer chances to develop their interest in writing (Andersson et al., 2019). Thus, preschool teachers are important in building preschoolers to master various skills. Preschool teachers will offer different approaches and assist preschoolers in mastering writing skills (Hudson, 2017). Studies show strategies for developing preschoolers writing skills are focused on technical abilities; forming letters of the alphabet and developing preschoolers' phonological awareness (Andersson et al., 2019). Previous studies on children's early writing skills were to study the effectiveness of self-regulated learning strategies on early writing performance and lacked focus on the experience of anyone. Therefore, the current study is to study how the experience of teachers helps preschoolers to improve writing skills.

### **Research Objective**

This study aims to determine the best approaches teachers use to improve preschoolers' writing skills. Besides this, this study also determines the method teachers use to assess the preschoolers' writing skills.

### **Research Question**

The research question of this study is

1. What are the best approaches used by experienced teachers in facilitating preschoolers' writing skills?
2. How do preschool teachers assess preschoolers on writing skills?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Cognitivism Theory**

Cognitive learning is focused on comprehension, abstraction, analysis, synthesis, generalization, evaluation, decision-making, problem-solving and creative thinking (Bates, 2015). It aims at teaching learners how to learn, developing more powerful or new thinking processes for future learning and a deeper understanding of concepts. Cognitive approach is emphasizing on the mental activities of learner that bring response and acknowledges the processes of mental planning, goal setting and organizational strategies (Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Shuell, 1986). The focus of cognitivism is to encourage students to use appropriate strategies in their learning (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Cognitivism is an approach to learning that focuses on the efficiency of processing strategies rather than the content of instruction (Ertmer & Newby, 2013).

#### **Jean Piaget**

Piaget (1936) was one of the first theorists to study cognitive development in young children. His theory focuses on preschoolers' development as they are born with a basic mental structure. These components include schemas, adaptation processes and stages of cognitive development (Alahmad, 2020). Piaget (1952) defined the term 'schema' as "a cohesive, repeatable action sequence possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning". Piaget has given an example where the infant has sucking reflex. This is triggered by something touching the baby lips such as nipple, comforter, or someone finger (McLeod, 2020). Adaptation process can be conducted through assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration. Assimilation refers to the use of the existing schema to deal with a new object or situation. Equilibration happens when new knowledge

cannot merge into existing schemas (McLeod, 2020; Siegler et al., 2003). Piaget has proposed four stages of cognitive development which are sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, concrete operational stage and formal operational stage. Every child will go through these stages however the development of preschoolers will be varied depending on the biological maturation and interaction with environment (McLeod, 2020).

### **Constructivism Theory**

Constructivism is “an approach to learning that holds people actively construct or make their own knowledge and that reality is determined by the experiences of the learner’ (Elliott et al., 2000, p. 256; McLeod, 2019). A constructivist view of learning is able to point to the different teaching practices in the classroom. It means encouraging students to use active strategies such as experiments, and problem-solving to build knowledge. Constructivist learning theory supports a variety of student-centered teaching methods and strategies (McLeod, 2019). Constructivist teachers act as a facilitator of learning. Constructivism transforms students from passive learners to active participants in the learning process. Constructivist teachers should provide problem solving and inquiry-based activities. Scaffolding is a key feature of teaching where teachers adjust their level of guidance continually towards students. In the classroom, scaffolding can include modelling a skill, providing hints or cues, and adapting material or activity (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; McLeod, 2019).

### **Teaching Knowledge and Experience in Early Childhood Education**

Teachers can help preschoolers develop their writing abilities by encouraging them to share their ideas and engage with other preschoolers. Studies show that teachers who obtain increased support (Alatalo et al., 2017; Andersson et al., 2019). Teachers’ experience plays crucial roles in teaching preschoolers writing skills. Preschool teachers need to make use of the preschoolers' curiosity and provide opportunities for preschoolers to develop interest in writing skills (Andersson, et al., 2019). Thus, preschool teachers play important roles in building preschoolers with various skills and offer various approaches to assist preschoolers in mastering writing skills (Hudson, 2017).

Teaching experiences can be seen as alternatives for knowledge and beliefs as these experiences may contribute directly or indirectly to the development (Schachter et al., 2016). Research shows that teaching experiences can improve instruction commonly (Berliner, 1986; National Institute of Child Health Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2000; Schachter et al., 2016; Rivkin et al., 2005). Researchers discovered that the planning of oral-language activities and additional instruction were connected to teaching experiences, indicating potential connections between teaching experiences and competency in reading and writing can present preschoolers with sufficient language and literacy education (Schachter et al., 2016). Research also shows that experience is one of the factors that influencing teaching quality (Brandenburg et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2020; Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Education and teaching experience can be seen as proxies for knowledge and beliefs as these experiences contribute directly or indirectly to the development of children's writing skills. For example, educators' procedural and conceptual knowledge about teaching language and literacy is higher when they have more years of experience in education.

Despite the potential role of education in contributing to the development of knowledge and beliefs, there are findings in the literature about the relationship between education and instruction. Results from a correlational study of early childhood educator degree achievement and experiences have both been associated with better overall classroom instructional effectiveness (Rachel et al, 2016).

As mentioned in their research, professional knowledge and experience are essential in understanding and enacting play as a context for teaching and learning; teacher knowledge; content knowledge; pedagogical knowledge; pedagogical content knowledge; knowledge of the curriculum; student knowledge and learning; knowledge of the educational context; and knowledge of educational philosophy, goals, and objectives. Teachers may need broad content knowledge and experience to respond to children's wide-ranging interests and abilities. In terms of daily curriculum engagement, the quality of teacher-child interactions can influence how children become more confident and capable, and how they build trust in teachers to support their learning (Hedges & Cooper, 2018).

Teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement. Teacher effectiveness continues to increase as they gain experience in the teaching profession. Teaching experience, on average, is positively associated with student achievement gained throughout a teacher's career. Teacher effectiveness increases at a greater rate when they teach supportively and collegial work environment, and when they accumulate experience in the same grade level, subject, or district. More experienced teachers provide better support to students' learning, colleagues and the school as a whole (Kini & Podolsky, 2016)

### **Assessing Writing Skills for Preschoolers**

Observing, documenting, and assessing preschoolers are essential processes for teachers to evaluate the experience provided for preschoolers (NAEYC, 2020). Assessment includes formal and informal assessments to monitor preschoolers progress based on the goals (NAEYC, 2020). Observation is the ongoing assessment. Teachers are able to observe and evaluate the preschoolers' performances on a daily basis and based on the assessing activities. Observation can be used to monitor the planning and implementation of daily curriculum. Checklists can be classified as formal and informal methods that are used to obtain information about preschoolers' development (Banerjee, 2016). Checklists can be used to assess preschoolers' development and record preschoolers' performance as well as serve as the evidence to show the parents.

Analysis of children's writing samples revealed that teachers followed the curriculum strictly; therefore, the linguistic features of writing based on vocabulary development, text structure, and organizational features are at the center of the teaching of writing without any independent writing activities occurring during observation.

### **Writing Skills for Preschoolers**

In the DSKP 2017, there are six strands which are communication; science and technology; spirituality, attitudes and values; humanities; personal competence and physical development and aesthetics. Language subjects fall under the strands of communication. Communication strands are organized under four skills which are listening, speaking, reading

and writing. These skills are the basic skills to help preschoolers develop in language and literacy (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017).

Before preschoolers are able to write on their own, it is important for teachers to develop their pre-writing skills. Pre-writing skills can help preschoolers to hold and use pencil as well as the ability to draw, write, copy, and color. It is important to develop the ability to hold and move pencil fluently and produce legible writing. Poor self-esteem and academic performance might happen if the pre-writing skills are underdeveloped thus would lead to frustration among preschoolers. There are several things to improve pre-writing skills which includes enhancing their hand and finger strength activities, provide sensory play, praising preschoolers, allow preschoolers to experiment different objects (Writing Readiness (Pre-Writing Skills), 2016).

According to Hall (2019), handwriting development has been neglected during early childhood literature due to the focus on the emergent literacy and the use of technology increasingly. Current literature finds that fine motor skills are the key variables in handwriting readiness (Hall, 2019). Fine motor skills involve the use of small muscle to enable preschoolers in lacing, stacking and writing activities. Preschoolers also need to develop enough strength and dexterity in their fine motor experiences such as rolling playdough. Preschoolers need to learn to control their arms, hands and wrists before they are introduced to hold and grip pencils (Hall, 2019).

### **Parental Guidance**

Preschoolers develop early writing concepts, including an interest in print and the ability to make marks. Children learn that print conveys meaning through interactions with their environment (Vygotsky, 1978) and begin to play with their own representations of letters and words at this time. Pretend writing, naming, invented spelling, and environmental print copying are just some of the many writing activities children engage in (Neumann & Neumann, 2010). Young children in the twenty-first century use both digital (laptop, touch-screen tablet) and traditional (paper, pencils, crayons) means of expression when writing. Both can impact how young children engage with reading and writing (Neumann et al., 2017).

According to studies conducted by Puranik et al. (2018), children whose mothers assisted them in comprehending the graph-phonemic process and who were subjected to strict demands for accuracy while writing performed better on standardized tests. Parents, especially mothers, can have a significant impact on their young children's literacy development, but it appears that they must exercise adequate dimension in their role as mediators.

Early literacy is influenced not only by the materials used to write but also by the presence of an adult (Gerde et al., 2015). Every time a parent and child engage in a literacy-related activity, the parent can act as a guide to help the child move within his or her zone of proximal development, which is the area of development between the child's level of mastery with and without scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). Writing with lines to represent letters and words (Neumann & Neumann, 2010) is one strategy that has been shown to scaffold writing for preschoolers, bringing the activity closer to the children's zone of proximal development.

Parents can help their children write within their zone of proximal development by providing a framework for them to use. Children's word writing and recognition, and phonological awareness improved when their mothers used higher levels of scaffolding (e.g., word segmenting, retrieval of letter shapes) during joint-writing activities with them when they were in kindergarten, according to research by (Aram & Levin, 2002).

### **Methodology**

This research aims to explore the best approaches that teachers use to improve preschoolers' writing skills. Besides, this research also explores the method teachers use to assess preschoolers' writing skills. This chapter will discuss the research design, setting descriptions, data collection procedures, data analysis processes, and legality and trust data.

This study has chosen qualitative case study research as the researcher wants to gain concrete and in-depth knowledge about the writing skills of preschoolers. Qualitative research provides a deep picture of the real-life experiences of teachers in improving preschoolers writing skills. The implemented approach is case study research. A case study is a broad phrase for the investigation of a person, group, or phenomena. Thus, a case study is a comprehensive description of an individual case and its' analysis.

The research methodology emphasizes case studies that are focused on in-depth analysis of people, groups, or activities that are directly related to the participants of this study. As a result, this case study uses qualitative research techniques to gather the necessary information in accordance with the research questions.

### **Participants**

Six preschool teachers with teaching experience have been chosen to participate in this research. These chosen preschool teachers have more than two years of teaching experience and are female preschool teachers. Preschool teachers chosen in this research are those who are teaching in different private preschools within Klang Valley.

Teacher A (P1) has a qualification in Diploma in Early Childhood Education and PERMATA course. She also has five years of teaching experience in educating preschoolers.

Teacher B (P2) graduated with a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and is pursuing her study in master's degree specialising Early Childhood Education and has eight years of experience in Early Childhood Education.

Teacher C (P3) has been running her own preschool since 2009 and teaching preschoolers since 1996. She graduated with a master's degree in Early Childhood Education and enrolled in a diploma in Special Needs under College of Allied Educators (CAE).

Teacher D (P4) has been teaching in the preschool centre for 4 years and graduated with a bachelor's degree In Early Childhood Education. Throughout her teaching experience, she was handling with the 5 years old preschoolers.

Teacher E (P5) worked as a preschool teacher for almost 3 years and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. Currently, she is pursuing a master's degree in Education Management and handling the six-year-old preschoolers in her classroom.



Teacher F (P6) holds qualifications for both a diploma in early childhood education and a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. She has 4 years of teaching experience in a preschool centre.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

#### **Interview**

There are several types of interviews in qualitative research. This is to gather the in-depth opinions of the teachers and to determine the new issues. This research was conducted with a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview is the common type of interview used in qualitative research and this type of interview allows the researchers to gather the opinions of the teachers during the interview discussion. Basically, the open-ended questions will be asked throughout the interview and allow the teachers to express their idea based on the identified question. The questions asked are to share and discuss the topic of the research rather than follow the guide given by the researchers. Due to the pandemic of covid-19 and movement control order from the Malaysian government, the interviews could not be conducted face-to-face. Therefore, the interviews in this research were conducted as phone interviews. Besides that, the conversation of the interview was recorded to be transcribed.

#### **Observation**

Observation in this research has been conducted through an online platform. The online class has been conducted through the Zoom application. Zoom application has become one of the most famous applications since the beginning of online learning due to the pandemic of Covid-19. Zoom is the tool that is used by the teacher in conducting online class.

The reason for conducting the online observation is due to the pandemic of covid-19, preschool is closed and only allow to conduct online classes. According to the Standard of Procedure (SOP) published by *Majlis Keselamatan Negara (2021)*, the outsider is not allowed to enter the preschool at any stage even after preschool resumed the physical class. The stages that have been gone through are Movement Control Order (MCO), Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), Total Lockdown (FMCO), and Enhanced Movement Control Order (EMCO).

#### **Document Analysis**

Documents collected for this research refer to the pictures collected from the preschool teachers. These pictures show children's writing for different periods. The researchers will have a conversation with the teachers before they conduct the interview sessions. Thus, the researcher will ask permission to get the pictures that show children's writing. The teachers will share the pictures with the researchers through the WhatsApp platform before the interview. The researchers viewed the pictures before the interview sessions and asked some questions related to the picture during the interview sessions.

#### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Data analysis is to identify, examine, and interpret the patterns and themes found from the data. Based on the data found, the researchers determined its pattern and themes and how this helps to answer the research question.

Qualitative data can be in different forms such as texts, photos, videos and audio. Hence, transcript texts, observation notes and protocol have been used in this research. There are a few steps in analysing data for qualitative research. The first step is preparing and organising data. The researchers will transcribe all the interviews into text and type out the observation notes. The researchers have translated the interview session into transcripts and typed out the observation notes in this research.

Then, the researchers reviewed and explored the data. The researchers examined the data collected through interviews and observation. The researchers have investigated the patterns through the data collected. The next step would be developing the data coding system and assigning codes to the data. Researchers build a coding system to apply in categorizing the data (Bhandari, 2020). Researchers have analyzed the dialogues of interview into a table according to each related research question through Microsoft Word. Then, researchers have analysed each of the interviewee responses and the data with codes. The following steps are to identify the recurring themes. Researchers has linked the codes together into an organised and identified the primary themes (Bhandari, 2020). The researcher has identified the main themes through the coding system. It has been reviewed by the next person before continuing to the next step. After reviewing, the researchers analysed the data in the next part. Findings have been analysed using thematic analysis to identify and interpret the patterns and themes in the research (Bhandari, 2020).

## Findings

### ***What are the best approaches that have been used by experienced teachers in facilitating preschoolers' writing skills?***

#### **i) Learning through Play**

Learning through play is one of the approaches that allows preschoolers to gain knowledge while they are playing. Learning through play is where the play becomes the type of learning in which preschoolers will explore, discover, and solve the problem during their play. They also found out that learning through play is able to help preschoolers to enhance their writing skills.

*" So, approaches I would say play-based approach... So, these are the common approaches that I will use in facilitating the preschoolers in their writing skills " - P1*

P2 has found that preschoolers would be able to enhance their concentration by playing. Preschoolers would be able to strengthen multiple skills such as language skills, and motor skills indirectly when they are playing with toys. Besides that, P2 also expressed that providing the tools for preschoolers during their free play also allows them to enhance their writing skills because preschoolers are allowed to draw and write.

*"... usually, preschoolers can play, right? They have a playground where they can play by the same times, we provide tools for writing. We put drawing blocks. We put pencil, colors by sorted so they can choose by themselves. They can either paint, or they can either draw something or write something..."-P2*

*"... They can increase concentration times because play is one of the most important things for the child. So, when they play, their development is also indirectly ... Their motor skill, their language skill, their cognitive skill, effective*

*skills, their emotional skill, and so it's like. That's the way that we choose how to rehabilitate the children"-P2*

Most of the participants expressed that preschoolers are able to learn well through play. P3 and P4 provided the play dough for preschoolers to play with and allowing them to learn the pattern of the letter form. Learning through play is not just bringing the preschoolers to the classroom, playing in the classroom also allows preschoolers to learn writing as mentioned by P4 where she lets the preschoolers learn about their friend's name and write it out. P6 prepared a lot of hands-on activities for her preschoolers in each of the lessons as she thinks that hands-on activities allow preschoolers to play and explore their skills.

*"... I give them lot of this Play-doh. I give them a lot to practice their fingers, you know, muscle their fingers ... So mostly play-Doh larh, it is easier. I will give them clay or anything you know they foam so they can play with it. They can shape or the handwriting. Best thing is they learn. How's the curving of the each letter, the pattern of the each letter. So when we give them play, they can... We can form and teach them. If "a" house the formation looks alike. So when it comes to handwriting this child easily can capture..."-P3*

*"...learning through play is not only when we bring the kids outside to play on the playground, but it also means in the classroom... So how do we learn grip...a lot of things even in writing. Also, we can do a lot of things by playing with them. I mean like, for example, we give them a topic and let them draw something. Might make his love to play when they have to write other... other kids names...They always tell me to tell a name of the classmate and they will try. They will try to write and when they get it right. They will be so happy...one of the way is by playing the playdough. That one actually helps a lot and my kids love it so much. Maybe the Play-dough... They will know how the shapes are and they remember the shapes, how the shapes are so that helps a lot in their writing"- P4*

*"... always learn through play. We are very emphasized on that. So, every lesson, I need to prepare hands-on activity on each lesson..."-P6*

Motivation in learning through play for preschoolers refers to the drive or desire that compels young children to engage in educational activities that are designed as play. Play-based learning activities are often structured to promote exploration, creativity, problem-solving, and social interaction, all of which can be highly motivating for preschoolers. Thus, this shows that learning through play has become one of the approaches implemented by most teachers in helping preschoolers to improvise their writing skills. Allowing preschoolers to play helps them to learn about the formation of letters and indirectly know how to write letters and strengthen their writing skills.

## **ii) Verbal Encouragement**

Verbal encouragement is able to motivate preschoolers to enhance their writing skills. Encouragement words are able to motivate preschoolers to write. Preschoolers will feel happy and valued when they are guided by adults. P2 expressed that motivating preschoolers by praising them is another way to help preschoolers in enhancing their skills. Praising the

preschoolers and appreciating their effort is important to help preschoolers progress in their learning.

*"... We told them that they can do this. We motivate them by saying you can do this ... it's like they're motivated to do that after... After we keep on praising them for their efforts to do it step by step because we cannot force them..." - P2*

According to P4, preschoolers would feel discouraged when they do not do well. However, she kept encouraging and motivating the preschoolers. This is to give the preschoolers emotional support and let them know that it is fine for them to make mistakes, but they should learn from the mistakes and reattempt.

*"...when they did not write well, sometimes they feel discouraged...we give them emotional support as well and encouragement and love and encouragement or emotion support, mental support in a way that we keep on telling them it's OK to make mistakes. You just have to try again."-P4*

P6 found that when verbal encouragement occurs in the lesson, it would help the preschoolers to feel confident in writing. Preschoolers are likely to keep trying to write and get comfortable when the motivation is given verbally.

*"...they will like "teacher, I can do this, I can write this letter" and every time I was like "good job! Good job! Now we going to learn the new one. Can you try to do the next letter?" They will do the tracing all over the same thing." – P6*

This shows that verbal encouragement is another approach implemented by a few of the teachers in improving preschoolers' writing skills. Preschoolers enjoy being motivated by their teachers and tend to learn well when they get compliments from their teachers.

### **iii) Parental Guidance**

Parents play important roles in educating preschoolers. Therefore, some participants have shared that preschoolers need guidance from their parents, as well. P2 shared that her school will have collaboration with the parents by having parents' teacher meetings and conducting free parenting talks and motivational talks. This is to instill the knowledge in the parents on how to educate their preschoolers. Teachers' meetings with parents, purposefully for parents to understand how their preschoolers are performing. Sometimes, the parents do not like the teachers telling them what to do to their preschool children to help them. Therefore, the preschools take another initiative by conducting talk and motivation camps with the hope that parents would realise the importance of parental involvement in educating preschoolers and be involved in guiding their preschoolers in writing activities.

*" ...in the preschool, we always have the parent teacher meeting. Or maybe a parenting, parenting motivation camp that we do for the parents. ... This way is by kindly reminding and implicating by saying things indirectly so that they can find the solution by themselves. we have to use this soft way to the parents, because if*

*not, they're going to take their child away. That's one of the ways that we use to remedy the problems and parent involvement in preschoolers writing."- P2*

P4 states parents play important roles in helping the preschoolers gain their language and literacy skills including writing. We should not only rely upon the teachers in teaching preschoolers. Language and literacy skills involve listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. All these skills are very important for young children. Therefore, parents also need to take on the responsibility to help preschoolers by teaching the preschoolers to hold a pencil or allow preschoolers to scribble the paper. This is to expose them to kinds of writing and ease them to pick up the skills of writing when teachers teach in the preschool.

*" early encouragement...It's not only applied for the teachers, but also apply for the parents. I think in my opinion...I mean like not really writing letters, but just have just do an activity with them to... just give them a big pencil so they can scribble over paper that actually gives some experience for them and know how to write because those kids who know how to hold a pencil can help a lot for teachers to teach them how to write."- P4*

P5 expressed that parents also can help children improve their writing skills. It does not need to be a very difficult activity. A simple activity is able to help preschoolers improve their writing skills. P2 communicates with the parents and advises the parents to give freedom to their preschool children to practice their writing skills.

*" ... I will try to talk with the parents I will, I will just. That will tell the parents of what the children's having, having the problem, what kind of problem. So, by then I will ask the parents to help also larh. What the parents help from home what they can do at home. Uh, maybe a simple, simple larh. I give my suggestion also larh. I will give my suggestion on doing the practice, writing practices at home."- P5*

According to P6, she said that parents need to guide the preschoolers in writing. A very simple activity can be used to teach preschoolers to write where this point is similar to the opinions of P5. Both of them said that a simple activity can help preschoolers to learn writing. Such as, tracing using flour and salt and teaching the proper way to write will nurture children's writing skills.

*" Well, parent can guide them what is the... what is the way to write or as simple as like...Uh... teaching them by using the material they have in home. Like I say we do as in school which with flour, with salt. They can also do that at home. They can Ah... like the older age children, parent can teach them what is the proper ways to write."- P6*

Parents play a role in teaching writing skills to preschoolers. Good communication and collaboration between teachers and parents are necessary to teach children writing. Teachers need to communicate with the parents and let them know the progress of the preschoolers and discuss the strategies for enhancing preschoolers writing. Parental guidance is important as it is able to provide chances for preschoolers to practice their writing skills.

**iv) In Line Writing**

Participant has expressed that one of the best approaches in teaching writing to a preschooler is guiding them to write in line. Participated teachers have shared that some of the preschoolers are facing difficulties to write within the line given. Therefore, according to the participants, one of the best approaches is guiding children to write within the line given appropriately. Besides that, participants also expressed that preschoolers should be guided to write in a correct way by following the steps of writing such as writing from top to bottom.

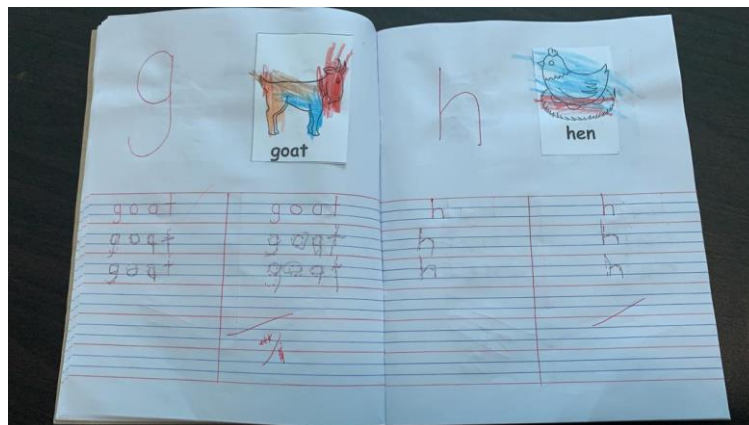
P2 mentioned that educators need to teach children to write in the correct way. Usually, the letter should be written from the top to bottom, however, preschoolers tend to write it in a different way maybe from the bottom to the top. Therefore, it is needed to teach preschoolers to write in the correct way.

*"So, most of the days. Uh, if the same topic for BM or, English or Bahasa Melayu, then we're going to use that time to, to teach them again that they supposed to write from up to bottom." -P2*

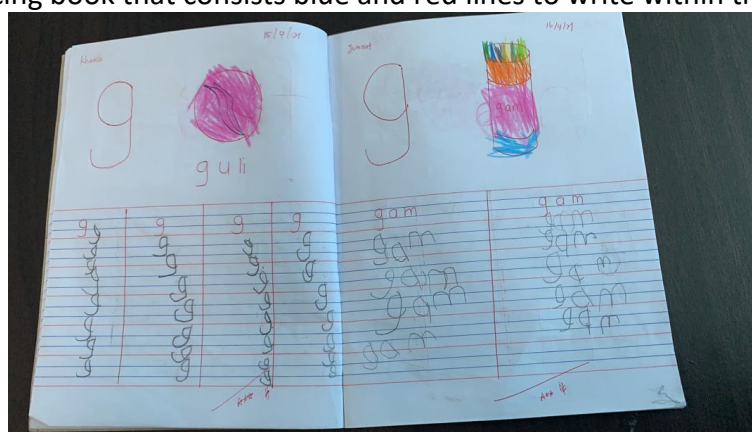
Based on the online observations that were conducted, the researchers have observed that the teachers are teaching the preschoolers to write in a correct way by telling them the writing steps of the alphabet for a short story or situation. This was shared by the participant during the interview session where she found that teaching in this way is able to guide preschoolers to write in a correct way as preschoolers found that it is interesting and fun.

*"That is the easiest answer is because children like stories. It will be boring if you just keep on writing. OK, keep on writing, but you didn't tell them how to do it so when we told it by like, it's a story. OK, you have to go down. You have to put a straight line go up the mountain, go down the mountain up the mountain and go down the mountain so they feel like OK this is one they can imagine the scene inside their mind and when they find it interesting then they will do it by themselves, so it is incorporated stories to make writing more fun."-P2*

P4 is likely to teach the preschoolers the steps in writing first and guide the preschoolers to write in the line as in the book, after. There is one type of practising book that is used commonly in preschool. This book consists of blue and red lines usually used to write the letter (Refer to Picture 1). Preschoolers should not exceed the red line when they are writing. Picture 2 shows an example of how preschoolers' writing exceeds the line.



Picture 1: Practicing book that consists blue and red lines to write within the line



Picture 2: Preschoolers did not write within the line given

*"So what I did is we go step by step where first, they just need to know how to write and second, we need to help them to write better. How? For example, we have different kind of paper such as the one with the lines. You know the book with the blue and red line... so that one we actually help a lot with my children at the moment and they are getting better at it whereby we teach them how to write according to the lines on that... so we encourage them to write inside the line so that they know where to write and how to write and how to write better "-P4*

P5 also tends to use the same type of book as P4 in teaching preschoolers to write. She would conduct a one-on-one session with the preschoolers and teach them to write in the correct way. According to P5, the practising book or what she called a triple line book is very effective when used to teach preschoolers to begin writing. By using this, preschoolers would be able to learn how to write within the line and they would know when to start with a capital letter. Besides, when the preschoolers are provided with the book with lines, they would be able to write within the lines.

*"OK, one of the strategies did you use I? ... I will call them in one to one. OK, I will teach the right way to to write. Uh, in a in a line. ... the triple line book is a very effective way to teach the children's starting to write. OK, writing skills is there. OK, when using the triple line we can just mark from the blue line through the Sorry... the red line to the blue line where the children start with a capital letter*

*and come up with a small letter. So that's one of the ways. Use my triple, triple line book to do, uh, to improve my children's... The big writing hand skill." -P5*

This result shows that in-line writing can help to develop fine motor skills needed for writing. These activities such as writing using crayons, markers, and colour pencils develop readable handwriting by preschoolers at such young age.

### **How the preschool teachers assess preschoolers on writing skills?**

#### **i) Observation**

Observation takes place in assessing preschoolers' writing skills. Most of the participants viewed that they are using observation in accessing preschoolers' writing. They will observe the way preschoolers write and the most important thing is understanding. P3 stated that she is using the observation to assess the preschoolers' writing skills.

#### **"Observation... yes... observation."-P3**

P1 would evaluate the preschoolers writing skills by observing how preschoolers write to identify if the way of writing letters follows the correct steps. For example, for the letter A, it should be written starting from the top. Certain preschoolers might start from the bottom. Besides, in order to evaluate preschoolers writing skills, P1 will observe if the letter is written within the lines or out of the lines. Good writing should be written within the lines.

*"So how to evaluate their writing skills, since when they can write the writing skills in the correct formation? For example, like a "A" always start from the top...So some children will write, you know the other way round... So that is how I justify the children. So, call writing skills another way is when we have lines that they have to write within the red and blue line..." -P1*

In the P2 view, she mentioned that teachers should observe the preschoolers from far, so, the preschooler would build confidence to write. On the contrary, if the teachers were watching the preschoolers closely, they would feel insecure, uncomfortable and pressured to write.

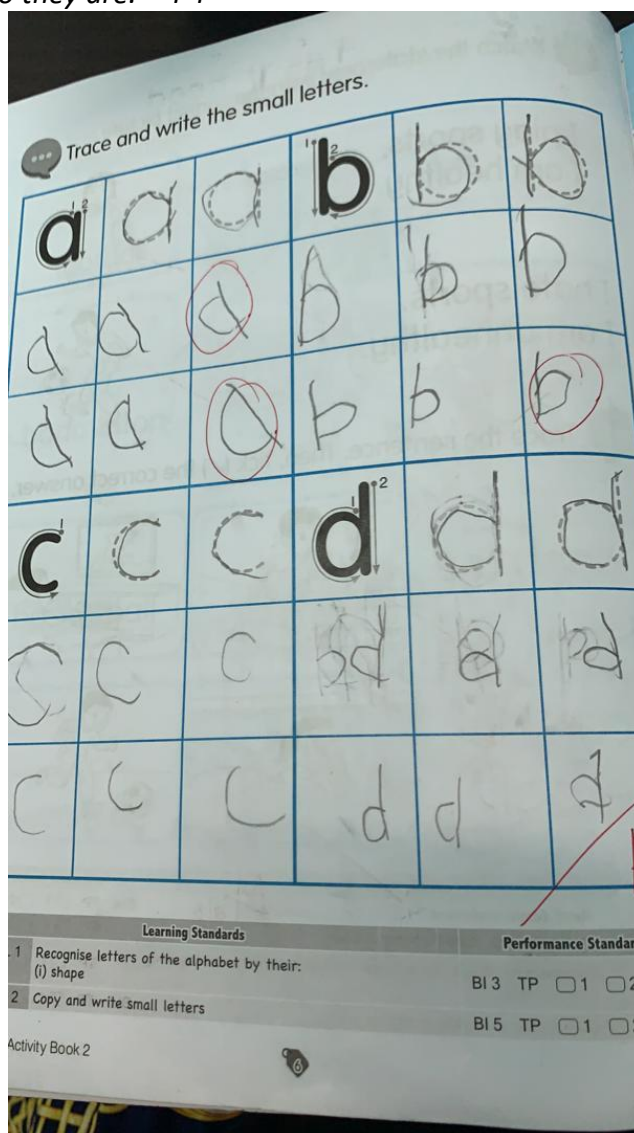
*"They can have the confidence to use the pencil without the teacher watching them closely, because we just need a kind of like observation, observing them from far so that they feel like confidence to do things because something when they feel like we are watching them too closely. They feel insecure, and they feel." -P2*

P4 also observes preschoolers' writing to assess their writing skills. P4 like P1 will ensure that the preschoolers in writing within the lines. Meanwhile, P4 also would like to walk around her preschoolers and observe how they are writing when she has given work to them. P4 would observe if the preschoolers are writing in the correct way. When P4 is evaluating the preschoolers, she will observe if the letter written is how it should be. For example, the letter "a" should be written like the "a" (Refer to Picture 4). This is how P4 would evaluate preschoolers' writing. If the preschoolers could not write according to the requirement, then, P4 would request the preschoolers to write it again.

*"... I evaluate based on my observation whereby if I think the letter "a" doesn't look like the letter "a", then it's not like the "a" so they have to do it again. So, and also the writing, if they go out of the line, or maybe they don't really follow the line, then I will say, oh, you have to do this again and you have to follow the line so. I*



*just observe on how they are doing it. That's very important as well on how they are doing it. So whenever is writing time, I will go walk around and see how they write each letter and how they right so we know that there are writing the correct way and also they are." –P4*



Picture 4: Some of the letters written by preschoolers are slightly different or unlike.

## ii) Checklist

Besides observation, the checklist also is another way used by participating teachers in assessing preschoolers' writing. They use the checklist after their observation. The checklist is used to record the preschoolers' writing development. The preschool where P3 works is preparing a checklist for the teachers and the teachers' need to justify whether the preschoolers are able to achieve the required skills listed. If the preschoolers could not achieve the skills, the teachers will have a session with the preschoolers to discuss why this happens and how to improve.

*" So, we write to achieve, achieving, still not achieve for this is how they are used. If the chart still cannot be achieved, we will sit and discuss with the teachers and ask the teacher why the chart is like that." –P3*

Basically, P3 and P5 use similar checklists in addition, P5's checklist need justification if the preschoolers achieve their goals. If there is improvement needed, teachers need to suggest how to do so.

*" there's a three or four aspect in the checklist evaluation form...After that, there is a suggestion part also, what the teacher do to improve the children's. If the children is lacking some...lacking point over there. What the teachers suggestion to overcome it?" –P5*

### **Discussions and Conclusion**

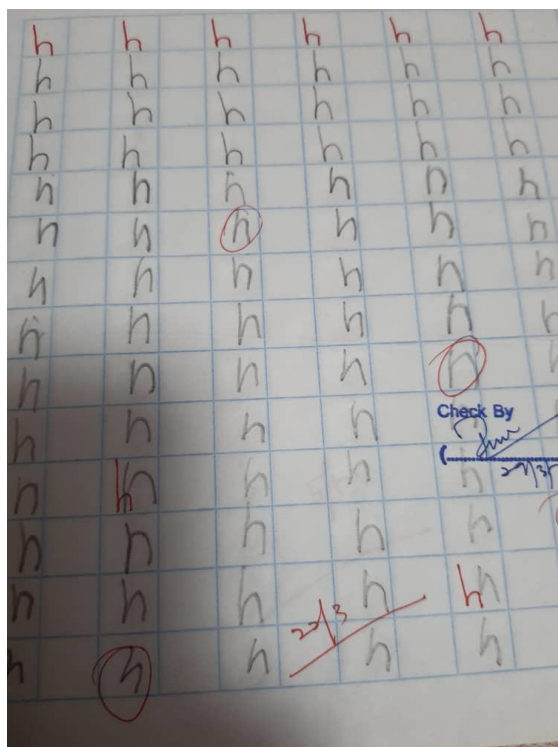
A few approaches have been identified as the best approaches in facilitating preschoolers' writing skills. One of the approaches is learning through play. As the finding of this study, preschoolers should be introduced to some scaffolding and hands-on activities as teachers are trying to facilitate their writing skills. This is also consistent with the constructivist theory as the teachers should ensure the preschoolers have basic knowledge of the concept and conduct activities to build preschoolers with knowledge (McLeod, 2019). Besides that, scaffolding also happens in these approaches where teachers adjust their guidance towards preschoolers to assist in learning writing skills.

Verbal encouragement used by the preschool teachers was able to motivate the preschooler to develop their writing skills. Preschoolers feel happy and motivated when they are being praised by the teacher. Preschoolers' thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and values influence preschooler's learning (Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Winne, 1985). Therefore, encouragement by the teachers influences preschoolers' learning and helps preschoolers to believe in their own capabilities.

It is important for parental guidance in the early literacy development of preschoolers. Parents need to be aware of the essentials in developing writing skills among preschoolers (Stutzel, 2019). According to Stutzel (2019), past research shows that parental involvement at home enhances literacy skills among preschoolers. In past research it is affirmed that providing training for the parents is crucial to educate preschoolers at home (Stutzel, 2019). This is aligned with what was done by preschool of P2 via implementing discussion sessions with parents. Preschoolers are more likely to succeed throughout their performance in school when they are building their literacy skills at home (Stutzel, 2019; Swick, 2009).

Another approach used by the teacher is teaching preschoolers to write in a correct way. This refers to guiding preschoolers to write appropriately within the lines provided. Besides that, participants also shared that it is necessary to guide children to write in a correct way. For example, usually writing starts from the top to the bottom and teachers need to guide preschoolers to write based on the correct direction. This is aligned with the cognitivism theory where the teachers focus on teaching preschoolers how to write. P2 attempted to help preschoolers in memorizing the way of writing and helped preschoolers organise information obtain. This shows where teachers assist preschoolers to relate the information on how to write letters and connect with existing knowledge by using going up and down the mountain as an example in writing the letter "N" according to the observation conducted via zoom learning.

Generally, participants use observation to assess preschoolers' writing. The most important thing is to understand how to write. For example, the letter "A" looks like "A" and does not look like a "B". Another example that we can get from this study is that the letter "h" should be written as "h" and not as "n" (refer to Picture 5). Observation can be used in either formative or summative assessments for teachers to evaluate preschoolers' performance on writing skills (NAEYC, 2020). Therefore, based on this study, it is proven that observation is important and can be used either in a formative or summative assessment to assess preschoolers as stated in NAEYC.



Picture 5: Circled letters look like "n" instead of "h"

The checklist is another way used by participating teachers in assessing preschoolers' writing skills. Generally, teachers will use the checklist after they have observed the writing of preschoolers. Participating teachers will be observed whether preschoolers achieve the criteria based on the checklist given by their preschool, or not. Checklists can be classified as formal and informal methods that are used to obtain information about preschoolers' development (Banerjee, 2016). The checklist can be used to record the achievement of preschoolers in writing skills and serve as evidence to show the parents about the performance of preschoolers.

Further study in the future, could explore how teachers teach writing skills through online learning. The sample size could be increased to gather more information related to teachers' experience with preschoolers' writing skills.

Results from this study have shown the importance of teachers' experience in educating writing skills to preschoolers. Teachers with different years of experience have different strategies for educating preschoolers. Thus, teaching experience does influence preschoolers

writing skills since experienced teachers are able to plan the learning activities based on the preschooler's development.

Thus, this study could assist preschool teachers to educate writing skills to preschoolers using learning through play, verbal encouragement, parental guidance, and in-line writing. Learning through play proposed by preschool teachers helps preschoolers to enhance their fine motor skills before developing their writing skills. This also helps preschoolers to be motivated to learn writing in a fun way. By incorporating playful elements into educational activities, preschool teachers can help to increase children's motivation to learn. Enjoyable and engaging activities are found to be helpful in developing positive association with writing among preschoolers and fosters lifelong love of writing.

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