

Exploring Preschool Children's Development of Writing in Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract— This qualitative study explores the writing development of preschool children in Brunei Darussalam, a topic of growing interest given the nation's focus on literacy standards and the recognized importance of early literacy foundations. Six Bruneian preschool children aged five and six, categorized into three ability groups based on preschool literacy assessments, participated in the study. Data was collected using writing logs and semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate that all six children commenced their writing journeys at distinct developmental stages, irrespective of their assigned ability group. These diverse pathways in writing development were observed in high-ability children, middle-ability children, and low-ability children, revealing intriguing insights into their learning abilities and trajectories. This study contributes valuable insights to Brunei's focus on literacy standards, although it acknowledges the limitations of its small sample size and the potential benefits of future, larger-scale investigations, which would be able to draw more generalized conclusions.

Keywords: *children's writing, early writing, preschool literacy, writing development*

I. INTRODUCTION

In Brunei Darussalam, the 'National Education System for the 21st Century' abbreviated as SPN21, considers preschool as the reception or foundation stage. This stage emphasizes socio-emotional and personality development, as well as the development of literacy and numeracy skills, as preparation for primary education. Upon entering primary school, pupils are obligated to begin their education in the art of writing, encompassing the skills of drafting, spelling, composing, revising, and even editing. A significant amount of the primary school day is dedicated to writing, as emphasized in Brunei Darussalam's National Education System for the 21st Century framework, where the primary education stage emphasizes the mastery of the 3Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic. McHale & Cermak identified that children, by the age of eight, dedicate a significant portion of their day to writing tasks, with those who face difficulties in writing being at a major disadvantage (Liew, 1996) (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Mayes & Calhoun, 2006).

One of the main objectives of Bruneian preschool education in Brunei Darussalam is to enhance basic skills in reading, writing, counting, and thinking. According to the Brunei Preschool curriculum, by the end of preschool, children are expected to write and use word combinations to form short sentences. To further understand this developmental process, this study aims to answer the research question: How do Bruneian preschool children develop writing skills, and what distinct patterns emerge across different ability levels? The main objective of this study is to investigate the developmental stages of writing in Bruneian preschool children, identifying variations in progress based on individual writing abilities.

1. *Early literacy development*

Writing serves as a crucial method for humans to document stories, ideas, and findings, as well as to engage in communication with others. Writing is essential in a child's world of communication and expression (Love et al., 2007). Writing development requires the acquisition of specific language abilities, including an understanding of the concept of print, knowledge of letters, awareness of phonemes, and proficiency in oral language skills that can be expressed in written form. The development of literacy abilities, such as letter knowledge and phonological awareness, occurs simultaneously with writing. These skills are consistently incorporated into the comprehension of the alphabetic principle, which involves the representation of speech sounds by letters (Cabell et al., 2013). Research has demonstrated a strong association between drawing and early writing. (Calkins, 1986; Dyson, 1988, 1990; Caldwell & Moore, 1991; DuCharme, 1991; Kress, 1997; Oken-Wright, 1998; Dyson, 2001; Ring, 2006; Jalongo, 2007; Mayer, 2007; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Shagoury, 2009; Kress & Bezemer, 2009; Mackenzie, 2011). Similar psychomotor skills and cognitive abilities occur in both drawing and writing (Jalongo, 2007), and both drawing and writing can carry meaning. Studies have supported this theory by demonstrating that children acquire knowledge of graphic aspects through the act of drawing. Both the drawing process and understanding the conventions of written language demand fine motor hand motions (Stetsenko, 1995). Thomas and Silk (1990) also pointed out that the similarities between the two systems could be why some children face difficulties in both. However, research shows that preschool children recognize the distinctions between these two processes, leading them to approach writing and drawing differently. Although a child says she or he does not know how to write, they will be able to make markings on either linear or horizontal, indicating that they understand that writing is organized.

Although children can understand the difference between drawing and writing systems, research has shown that children up to the age of six frequently blend writing and drawing. According to Studies by Paine (1981), Goodnow (1977), Eng (1999) and Coates & Coates (2006), drawing has been recognized as a pre-writing skill, and recent research has revealed that children's drawing abilities are more extensive than previously understood. Drawing offers learning opportunities as it helps children express meaning differently (Pahl, 2001, 2002; Kress, 2000; Anning & Ring, 2004). According to Graves (1981), drawing is a preparatory exercise that precedes writing. Graves also observed a correlation between children's drawing and their writing patterns. He discovered that children's engagement in drawing frequently facilitates the development of writing skills, as children rely on the process of listening and visualising to comprehend and convey meaning. Subsequently, the act of drawing will follow the act of writing once youngsters have a clear understanding of their intended written content. Eventually, they will no longer need to draw. Clay (1986) discovered that when children are given empty pages, their first product is drawings. However, soon after, children will start drawing and writing. Research has considered drawing as the thinking up of ideas, which then takes place in sentences. Research also considers drawing as an aid in holding the ideas in their mind as children struggle to write the idea.

According to Vygotsky (1978), when children are scribbling, they are actually not trying to draw real objects. The scribbles may convey different meanings based on changes in the children's concepts and thoughts (Hayes & Cherrington, 1985). Vygotsky (1978) also stated that the development of children's scribbling to drawing objects is to represent speech. According to Hayes and Cherrington (1985), children who represent their own speech with a system of signs use second-order symbols. As for scribbling and drawing, they are first-order symbols. Children's matching written signs to spoken words indicates the development from first to second-order symbols. Permatasari and Susijati's (2022) study examines the significance of the scribbling stage as a fundamental writing phase in the development of early children writing skills. The findings suggest that the scribbling period is an important foundation for developing writing skills in early childhood.

During this period, children learn to use writing instruments, develop creativity, obtain a basic comprehension of writing principles, and improve their fine motor abilities. Scribbling exercises can help children communicate their thoughts, ideas, and emotions while improving coordination between the brain and hands. This study also emphasises the importance of the scribbling period in language development, visual perception, and problem-solving ability in youngsters. Support from parents and educators is critical during the scribbling stage to lay a solid basis for children's future writing development.

2. *Writing development*

According to Clay (1975), children's early written productions include scribble, mock linear writing and mock letters. Early scribbling is considered as children's first attempt to explore different writing strategies. It was observed that certain children employed vertical and horizontal strokes for writing, and circular markings for drawing, while other children exhibited the reverse behaviour. Writing helps children understand notions of directionality, sequencing, and spacing, as well as to evaluate sounds and letters and experiment with words (Pearce, 1987; Clay, 2002). Moreover, Clay (2002) highlighted that a writer will automatically act analytically on print, letter by letter, whereas a reader might ignore information and depend primarily on previously acquired skills. According to Tolchinsky (2006), the conventions of letter-sound correspondence can only be learned in the written system. Writing represents children's knowledge of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principles, and word recognition.

Chomsky (1971) emphasized that young children commence writing before receiving formal instruction in writing skills. Meanwhile, Graves (1983) suggested that children utilize scribbles as a means of expressing their ideas and using marks to symbolize the initial stages of writing. These goods are visible on many surfaces such as walls, sidewalks, drawers, papers, and even whiteboards. Writing enables children to effectively organize and express their thoughts and ideas, thus supporting their development. Graves (1983), Clay (1975), and Calkins (1994) argue that the development of writing skills in young children occurs as they advance through several stages of the writing process, engage in experiments, and various experiences. Clay (1975) states that children naturally advance through many stages of the writing process, and they may not always follow an ordered sequence. Meanwhile, scholars in the field of writing, such as Teale & Sulzby (1986) and Gentry (2005), have emphasized that the stages of writing are often predictable and follow a developmental pattern. These categories are meant to facilitate discussion among researchers and educators regarding the characteristics of the developmental stages associated with learning to write; they are not meant to be interpreted as taking place in a specific sequence (Sulzby, 1985).

There are typically four stages of writing development in children: pre-literate, emergent, transitional, and fluent. Determining the developmental stage of a child, whether they are in the preliterate stage where they scribble or in the fluent stage where they use advanced spelling similar to that found in a dictionary. During the pre-literate stage, children develop an awareness that their actions of handling a writing tool led to the creation of lines or scribbles on paper. The lines or scribbles are produced as a result of the motion generated by the shoulder when a writing tool is grasped in the child's hand. During this developmental stage, children primarily acquire knowledge from sensory input, such as exploring the tactile sensations of holding a marker or crayon or experiencing both the smell and feel aspects of using paint. As they acquire greater mastery, they start to transform the lines into drawings of large circles. These circles are drawn in various orientations, including diagonal, horizontal, vertical, and even as curved lines.

In emergent stage, children begin to understand that writing carries meaning. They start by using scribbles, drawing, and letter-like forms to convey messages. In the transitional stage, children refine their writing skills, focusing on spelling, punctuation, and grammar. They begin to write more complex sentences and stories. Meanwhile in the fluent stage, children develop the ability to write

with increasing fluency, coherence, and sophistication. They can express ideas clearly, use a variety of sentence structures, and demonstrate a growing awareness of audience and purpose in their writing.

In the transitional stage, children develop an understanding that words are composed of individual sounds and that letters correspond to these sounds, they stop using random letters in their writing. Instead, children begin attempting to make connections between the sounds of the word with the letters they are familiar with. A child may write "My cat is happy" as "mi kat z hpe." The term used to describe this form of spelling is "invented spelling." Research indicates that attempts to align specific phonetic elements inside words is indicative of the enhancement of a child's literacy abilities in both writing and reading. During this phase, children frequently exhibit letter reversals or mixed-up letters. While it may be tempting to correct the child's errors, it is more beneficial to prioritize enjoyment and amusement. Errors of this nature are frequently encountered throughout this stage of development and are a crucial part of the learning process.

During the fluent stage, children transition from using "invented" spelling to using "dictionary" spelling. Although the spelling may not be entirely correct, children now possess the understanding that various spellings can convey distinct meanings. They will even start memorize certain words, particularly challenging yet frequently used terms (such as "was," "and," "the"), in order to spell them accurately. Attempting to rush children's progress to this level early might hinder their development, as they experience pressure to achieve perfect spelling.

The development of writing skills in preschool children is a foundational aspect of early literacy (Hall et al., 2015). Emergent writing which encompasses the skills, knowledge, and attitudes children develop before conventional writing, plays a crucial role in preparing them for formal literacy instruction (Mat, 2022). This literature review explores the key stages of writing development in preschool children, examining the progression from scribbling to more conventional forms of writing. It will also address factors influencing this development, such as fine motor skills, phonological awareness, and exposure to literacy-rich environments.

Preschool children progress through several identifiable stages in their writing development. Initially, they enter the Emergent writing stage, characterized by scribbling, drawing, and mock handwriting (Mat, 2022). During this phase, children begin to grasp the concept that writing conveys meaning, even if they don't yet form recognizable letters. Exposure to environmental print, such as signs and labels, and regular interaction with books significantly contributes to their understanding of written language (Septiani & Syaodih, 2021). As they develop, children move into the Pre-phonetic Stage, where they begin to use letter-like forms and random letters. While these early attempts may not be accurate, they demonstrate a growing awareness of the alphabetic principle – the understanding that letters represent sounds. Later, in the Phonetic Stage, children start to represent sounds with letters, often using invented spelling. This stage highlights the importance of phonetic awareness, as children attempt to match sounds they hear with the letters they know. Finally, in the Transitional Stage, children increasingly use conventional spelling, integrating sight words and improving their reading skills, which further refines their writing abilities.

Several key factors influence a preschooler's progression through these stages. Fine motor skills are essential for handwriting, enabling children to form letters and control their writing tools. Activities that promote fine motor development, such as drawing, coloring, and playing with small objects, can significantly enhance writing readiness. Phonological awareness, the ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds in spoken language, is also crucial. Activities like rhyming games and segmenting words into individual sounds help children connect letters with their corresponding sounds, thereby improving their writing skills. Furthermore, consistent exposure to literacy plays a vital role (Mat, 2022). Children who are regularly read to, have access to writing materials, and are immersed in print-rich environments tend to develop stronger writing skills. The active involvement of parents and teachers in providing these experiences is paramount (Mat, 2022).

A study by Rowe et al. (2024) explored how preschool children develop an understanding of the symbolic nature of writing by looking at their own attempts at writing. The research used qualitative methods and a cross-sectional design to follow the learning path from when children first connect speech and writing, to when they understand that written English represents sounds and letters. The study examined how children's methods of connecting speech and writing change, revealing their growing understanding of how writing works as a representational system.

Participants included 134 English-speaking children aged 2 to 5 years old, from childcare classrooms where writing was encouraged and valued. The children wrote a caption for a photo and read it to an adult. Researchers identified six main ways children connect speech and writing: making marks that aren't read, speaking conversationally without pointing, speaking conversationally while pointing to the writing, speaking in segments while pointing to the writing, matching speech segments to specific marks, and matching phonemes (sounds) to graphemes (letters). A growth curve model supported this order of approaches. The findings suggest that early writing experiences can help build basic literacy skills, like understanding the alphabetic principle. Practices where adults make the connection between speech and writing clear may be especially helpful for this learning.

3. Shift of online learning

The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread school closures and a rapid shift to online learning, impacting education systems globally, including Brunei Darussalam (Haidi & Hamdan, 2022). Preschool education, crucial for children's early development, faced unique challenges and opportunities in this new environment. This review examines the effects of this shift on the writing development of preschool children in Brunei. Preschool classes are a mandatory part of primary schools in Brunei's education system (Kitson, 2004).

The COVID-19 epidemic has profoundly affected writing development in preschool children, highlighting gaps in educational assistance and outcomes. Research demonstrates that writing skills were deprioritized during remote learning, and the epidemic intensified existing difficulties, especially for vulnerable groups, including children with special needs and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. The study by Prashanti & Hafidah (Prashanti & Hafidah, 2021) investigated the development of early childhood writing during the COVID-19 pandemic at TK Darussalam 02. The research aimed to understand how online learning impacted writing skills in class A. The study highlighted both the advantages and disadvantages of online learning, noting that teachers implemented home visits as a learning strategy to support children's development. According to the study, teachers visited eight children weekly, leading to an average development level "developing as expected" based on predetermined indicators (Prashanti & Hafidah, 2021).

A study by Ignacio et al. (2024) examined the impact of a technology-enhanced tutoring program on young students' writing and self-regulation skills during the pandemic, finding growth in metacognitive skills and self-regulation despite no significant improvements in writing performance. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted educational disparities, particularly affecting vulnerable student populations, including those with special needs and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. These groups faced significant learning losses, especially in writing skills, which were often overlooked during remote learning. Findings revealed that while the intervention did not yield statistically significant improvements in students' writing performance, qualitative analysis indicated growth in metacognitive skills and self-regulation, particularly in goal setting and self-reflection. The study highlights the complex nature of learning recovery post-pandemic and the critical role of mediated feedback in supporting skill development, emphasizing the need for inclusive, adaptive educational interventions to address the diverse needs of students.

II. METHODS

This study is part of a larger research project investigating preschool children's writing. This study employed a qualitative approach to track the writing development process of Bruneian preschool children, addressing the research question: How does the writing development of Bruneian preschool children progress, and what distinct patterns emerge across different ability levels? and aligned with the objective to chart the developmental trajectories of writing skills in Bruneian preschool children, identifying variations in progress based on individual writing abilities. Six preschool children aged five and six years old were selected as participants, representing a range of writing abilities. Data was collected through two primary methods: writing logbooks and semi-structured interviews. The writing logbooks were where preschool children regularly engaged in writing activities and their work was documented in logbooks to provide a record of their developing writing skills over time. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each child to gain insights into their writing processes, perceptions, and challenges. These interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of their writing development and the factors influencing their progress. For this research, an analysis of the preschool children's developmental stages of writing will be based on Table 1 below.

Table 1: Development stages of writing




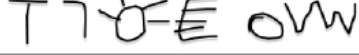

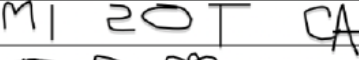
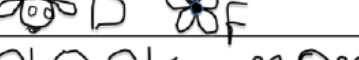

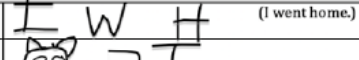
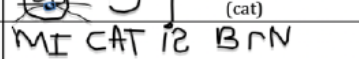
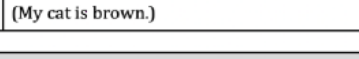
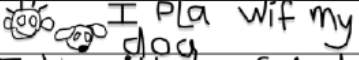
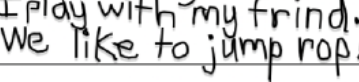
Pre-Literate	
Stage Description	Sample
Scribble Stage - starting point any place on page, resembles drawing large circular strokes and random marks that do not resemble print or communicate a message	
Symbolic Stage - starting point any place on page, pictures or random strokes/marks with an intended message	
Directional Scribble - scribble left to right direction, linear, intended as writing that communicates a meaningful message/idea	
Symbolic/Mock Letters - letter-like formations, may resemble letters but it isn't intentional, interspersed w/ numbers, spacing rarely present	
Emergent	
Strings of Letters - long strings of various letters in random order, may go left to right, uses letter sequence perhaps from name, usually uses capital letters, may write same letters in many ways	
Groups of letters -groupings of letters with spaces in between to resemble words	
Labeling pictures - matching beginning sounds with the letter to label a picture	
Environmental Print - copies letters/words from environmental/classroom print, reversals common, uses a variety of resources to facilitate writing	
Transitional	
Letter/Word Representation -uses first letter sound of word to represent entire word, uses letter sound relationships	
First/Last Letter Representation - word represented by first and last letter sound	
Medial Letter Sounds - words spelled phonetically using BME sounds, attempts medial vowels, uses some known words, more conventionally spelled words, one letter may represent one syllable, attempts to use word spacing, writing is readable	
Fluent	
Beginning Phrase Writing - using all of the above skills to construct phrases that convey a message connected to their illustration	
Sentence Writing - Construction of words into sentence formation, maybe multiple sentences, writing is readable, may use punctuation, known words spelled correctly, topic focused, BME with detail	
Six Traits of Writing - Students use Six Traits of Writing (Conventions, Organization, Voice, Ideas, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency)	

Table sourced from:

https://www.whps.org/uploaded/Offices/Curriculum_Instruction_and_Assessment/Families_-_Academics/Stages_of_Writing_Development.pdf.

This table is chosen due to its primary emphasis on the child's development rather than the child's age. Gaining insight into the child's current position and developmental stage is beneficial. The process of writing is categorised into four distinct stages, each of which consists of sub-stages. The initial phase is the Pre-Literate stage, encompassing the scribbling stage, symbolic stage, directional scrawl, and symbolic/mock letters. The Emergent stage, the second level, encompasses strings of letters, clusters of letters, labelling pictures, and environmental print. The Transitional stage encompasses the representation of letters and words, as well as the recognition of initial and last letter sounds and medial letter sounds. The last phase is Fluent and encompasses the initiation of phrase composition, sentence composition, and the six attributes of writing.

A total of six preschool children aged 5 to 6 years old participated in this research. They are divided into three abilities based on their first preschool literacy assessment done in March 2021. The six preschool children will be grouped into high ability, medium ability and low ability. This research assessed six preschool children of different abilities in their writing development. Table 2 shows the details of the six preschool children.

Table 2. Bruneian Preschool Children's details

Name	Age	Gender	Ability
Aisyah(HA)	6	Female	High Ability
Kasyifah(HA)	5	Female	High Ability
Malik (MA)	5	Male	Middle Ability
Saarah (MA)	6	Female	Middle Ability
Balqis (LA)	5	Female	Low Ability
Najwan (LA)	6	Male	Low Ability

Data was collected through two methods: preschool children's writing logbooks and interviews. Using two methods helps ensure the data is reliable and trustworthy, a process known as data triangulation. The writing logs were based on themes taught in Brunei Darussalam's preschool curriculum. From January to July, the logbooks reflected these themes. However, due to school closures during the second wave of COVID-19, online lessons began in August 2021, and children engaged in free writing for August, September, October, and November. After completing activities related to each preschool theme, the children used their writing logbooks to record their work. Subsequently, the researcher interviewed them about their logbook entries. These interviews were initially conducted face-to-face each month. However, from August to November, interviews were conducted online via Zoom, with parents present to assist their children.

Table 3: Monthly themes for writing log

Month	Theme
Pre Covid-19 (Physical Learning)	
January	My School
February	Myself
March	My Family
April	My House
May	Food & Drinks
June	My Clothing
July	My Vehicles
Second Wave of Covid-19 (Online Learning)	
August	
September	
October	Free writing
November	

In Brunei Darussalam, preschool is mandatory for all children once they turn five years old (Kitson, 2004). The writing logs were designed around the themes typically taught in the Brunei Darussalam preschool curriculum. For the free writing activities, children were given the freedom to write about any topic that interested them.

Brunei Darussalam, like many other countries, experienced school closures and a move to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ang et al., 2023). This shift impacted not only students but also teachers and the overall educational system (Ibrahim et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the study due to disruptions in traditional learning environments. The shift from face-to-face to online learning presented both challenges and opportunities (Haidi & Hamdan, 2022). The closure of schools necessitated a transition to online platforms (Yusof et al., 2023), potentially affecting the children's engagement and learning experiences. This change in modality also required adjustments to the research methodology, as interviews were conducted online with parental supervision (Haidi & Hamdan, 2022). While parental involvement may have provided support and comfort to the children, it also introduces the possibility of bias or influence on their responses. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted considering the unique context of the pandemic and its influence on both the children's learning and the data collection process.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows a comparison between two high abilities of Bruneian preschool children. Kasyifah(HA) and Aisyah(HA) are high abilities students.

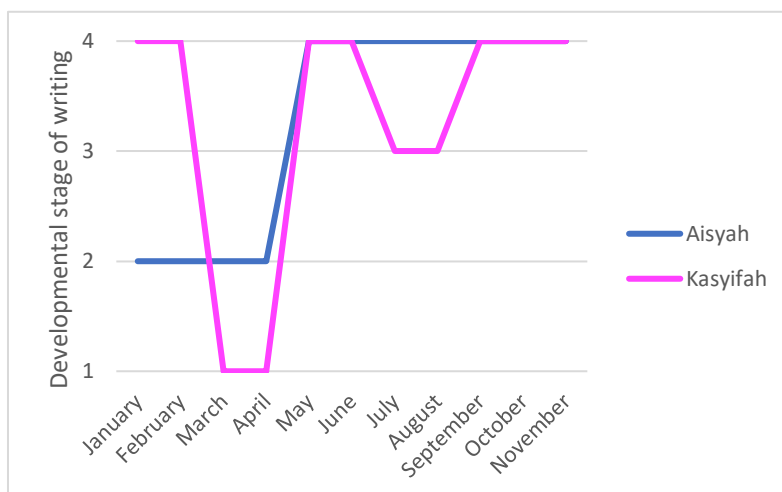


Figure 1: Comparison between two high abilities preschool children

In January, Kasyifah (HA) started at the Fluent stage for the developmental stages of writing. Meanwhile, Aisyah(HA) began her writing log at the Emergent stage and continues to be in the stage from January to April. Table 4 below compares Kasyifah's (HA) and Aisyah's (HA) writing logs in January.

Table 4: Comparison of Aisyah(HA) and Kasyifah(HA) January writing log

Aisyah	Kasyifah
	

Aisyah(HA) was able to spell her name correctly. She can write her name in full using uppercase, and lowercase letters are written from left to right. However, both the uppercase and lowercase letters were the same size. On the other hand, Kasyifah(HA) drew pictures and wrote her name. She could draw and write captions inside speech bubbles indicating a conversation. Kasyifah(HA) was able to spell her name correctly. She can write her name in full using uppercase and lowercase letters were written from left to right.

However, in March and April, Kasyifah(HA) regressed to the Pre-Literate stage. Kasyifah(HA) only drew pictures and did not write anything in her writing log. They were asked in the interview, why they only drew pictures and no writing took place.

"I like to draw. Drawing is fun. I don't know what to write. Drawing is easier because I just make pictures of what's in my head."(Kasyifah)

The interview with Kasyifah revealed a clear preference for drawing over writing. Kasyifah explicitly states, *"I like to draw. Drawing is fun."* This indicates a positive emotional connection to drawing, likely stemming from the creative freedom it provides. She elaborates, *"Drawing is easier because I just make pictures of what's in my head,"* highlighting the directness and ease of translating thoughts into visual form. In contrast, she admits, *"I don't know what to write,"* suggesting a lack of ideas or perhaps difficulty in formulating them into words. The act of writing, with its focus on letter formation and word choice, may feel restrictive compared to the free-flowing nature of drawing. Drawing allows her to express her imagination without the constraints of literacy skills.

In May, Kasyifah(HA) and Aisyah(HA) progressed to Fluent. Aisyah(HA) was maintained in the fluent stage up to November. As for Kasyifah(HA), it dropped to the Transitional stage in July and August but later progressed back to the Fluent stage in September and November. Table 5 shows a comparison of Aisyah's (HA) writing log in September and Kasyifah's (HA) writing log in October. They both were able to write multiple sentences with correct spelling. Both use correct punctuation, and their writing is related to their drawing. An interview was done at the end of October asking the two preschool children on writing.

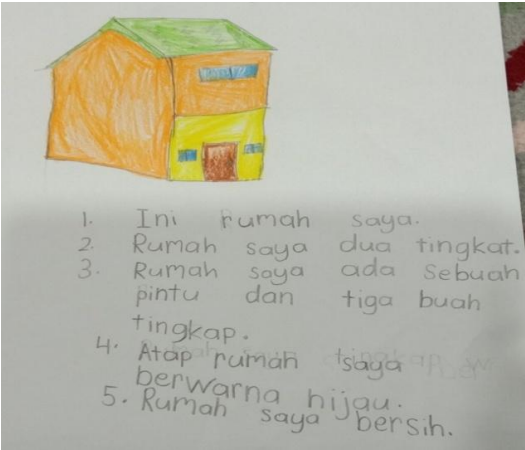
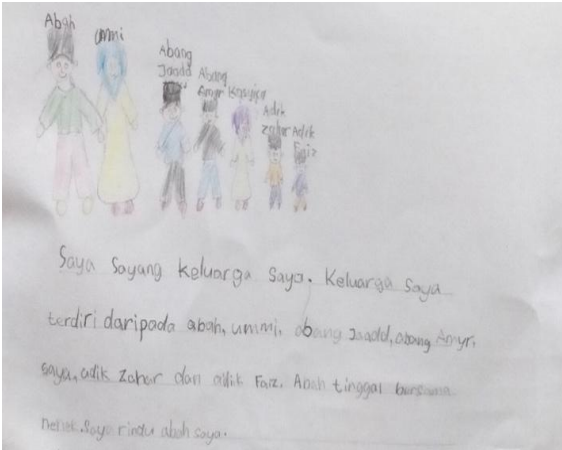
"I like writing for my parents. I like reading my stories to my family. I like when my mother praise me for being able to write."(Kasyifah)

"I like writing stories better than drawing, because then I can make the people in my stories talk! I can also write about my drawing like making stories about it."(Aisyah)

The interviews with Kasyifah and Aisyah reveal different, but equally compelling, motivations for enjoying writing. Kasyifah expresses a strong desire for positive reinforcement and connection with her family, stating, *"I like writing for my parents. I like reading my stories to my family. I like when my mother praise me for being able to write."* This highlights the importance of social interaction and encouragement in her writing development. Sharing her work and receiving praise fosters a positive association with writing, motivating her to continue practicing and improving.

Aisyah, on the other hand, enjoys writing for the creative control and storytelling possibilities it offers. She states, *"I like writing stories better than drawing, because then I can make the people in my stories talk! I can also write about my drawing like making stories about it."* This indicates an understanding of writing as a tool for expanding on visual ideas and creating narratives. Aisyah's interest in making characters "talk" suggests an emerging awareness of dialogue and character development, key elements in storytelling.

Table 5: Comparison of Aisyah(HA) September writing log and Kasyifah(HA) October writing log

Aisyah	Kasyifah
 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ini rumah saya. 2. Rumah saya dua tingkat. 3. Rumah saya ada sebuah pintu dan tiga buah tingkap. 4. Atap rumah saya berwarna hijau. 5. Rumah saya bersih. 	 <p>Saya sayang keluarga saya. Keluarga saya terdiri daripada abah, umi, abang Daud, abang Adik, adik Zahir dan adik Aziz. Abah tinggal bersama. Nanti saya rindu abah saya.</p>

This shows that Aisyah(HA) remained consistent from January to November when she progressed from the Emergent stage to the Fluent stage. Aisyah(HA) did not go through the other two stages, which are the Pre-Literate and Transitional stages. On the other hand, Kasyifah(HA) went through three developmental stages of writing. She started in the Fluent stage and then regressed to the Pre-Literate stage. She then progressed towards the fluent stage and reverted to the transitional stage, which later ended with the fluent stage. Graph 1 shows that the two high-ability preschool children went through different developmental stages of writing.

Meanwhile, Figure 2 compares two middle-ability Bruneian preschool children, Malik(MA) and Saarah(MA).

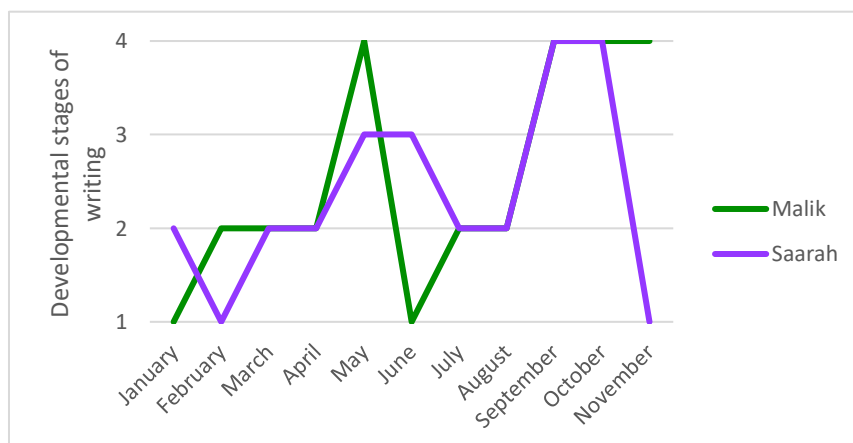


Figure 2: Comparison between two middle abilities preschool children

In January, Malik(MA) started in the Pre-Literate stage and Saarah(MA) started in the Emergent stage. Table 6 shows a comparison of Malik's (MA) and Saarah's (MA) writing logs in January. Malik(MA) is at the Pre-literate stage, where he is able to draw pictures and scribble. He even scribbles inside speech bubbles, which indicates a conversation. As for Saarah(MA), she started at the Emergent stage, where she could draw herself and write her name correctly.

Table 6: Comparison of Malik(MA) and Saarah(MA) January writing log

Malik(MA)	Saarah(MA)
	

In February, Malik(MA) progressed to the emergent stage and was maintained in that stage until April. Saarah (MA) dropped to the Pre-literate stage and progressed back to the Emergent stage in March and April.

Figure 2 shows that Malik(MA) progressed to the Fluent stage in May but dropped to the Pre-Literate stage in June. Table 6 compares Malik's (MA) writing log in May and June. Malik(MA) 's May writing log progressed to the Fluent stage where he started to phonetically spell words. He wrote most of the words correctly and showed an attempt to use spaces between each word. At the same time, Malik(MA) used both uppercase and lowercase letters in his writing, although all letters are of the same size. Malik(MA) attempted to write the Malay word 'beli,' but instead, he wrote the Brunei Malay word, which is 'bali'. Even though both spellings represent the same meaning, in Bruneian preschools, standard Malay is used in lessons.

Malik(MA) also attempted to spell the Malay word 'epal'. However, he spells it in English 'Apple'. He wrote the letter 'e' into the uppercase letter 'H'. He also wrote numbers inside his drawing. He wrote the numbers correctly, yet they were written from right to left with the correct arrangement. On the other hand, in June, Malik(MA) regressed to the Pre-literate stage, where he just drew. There is no attempt to scribble nor write in his writing log.

Malik(MA) then progressed to the Emergent stage in July. Malik(MA) maintained the Emergent stage in August and then progressed to the Fluent stage from September to November.

Table 6: Comparison of Malik(MA)'s May and June writing log




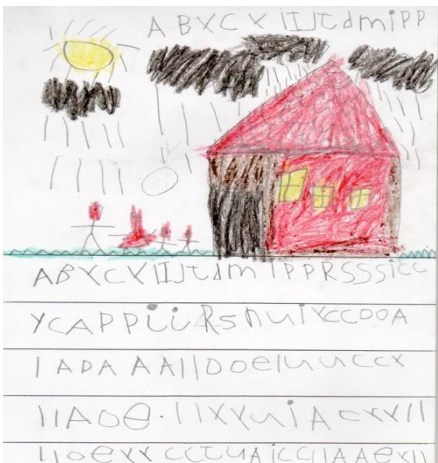
May	June
	

Table 7 below shows Saarah(MA) progressing to the Transitional stage in May and maintaining this stage until June. Saarah (MA) could relate her drawing to her writing. Although the words written are missing some letters, but it is still readable. She used a mixture of both uppercase and lowercase letters in her writing. Saarah (MA) also used the Brunei Malay spelling for the word 'Bali' instead of using the standard Malay spelling, which is 'beli'. Saarah(MA) also attempted to spell the Malay word 'piza'. She drew a picture of a pizza and wrote the middle and last letter sound of the word. Saarah(MA) also attempted to spell her best friend's name Balqis. She was able to write the first and last letter sounds correctly yet missing the letter 'q'.

However, Saarah (MA) dropped to the Emergent stage in July and August. Saarah(MA) wrote various letters in random orders. Some of the letters were written repeatedly, and most were written in uppercase letters. The letters were unreadable, yet they were written correctly from left to right.

Table 7: Comparison of Saarah(MA)'s May and August writing log

May	August
	

Then in September and October, Saarah(MA) went to the Fluent stage but drastically dropped to the Pre-Literate stage in November. As seen in Table 8, Saarah(MA) was at the Fluent stage where she began constructing simple sentences connected to her drawing. She used the correct spelling and spacing. In contrast to her writing log in November, she regressed to the Pre-Literate stage, where she only drew and chose not to write anything. In an interview with Saarah, she explained the reason why she chose not to write and prefer drawing.

"Writing takes a long time to make all the letters. Drawing is just... drawing! I can make anything I want. And it's faster than writing." (Saraah).

Saraah expresses a preference for drawing over writing due to the perceived speed and creative freedom associated with drawing. She finds writing to be a time-consuming process of letter formation, whereas drawing allows for quicker and more unrestricted expression. This suggests that Saarah values efficiency and the ability to readily translate her imagination onto paper. This finding aligns with the idea that visual data and artwork can be engaging forms of expression.

Table 8: Comparison of Saarah(MA)'s October and November writing log

October	November
	

Figure 2 shows a pattern of minor rises and falls in their developmental stages of writing. Malik(MA) has a minor drop in his developmental stages of writing in the month of June while Saarah drastically dropped in November. This shows that regardless of their middle abilities, their developmental stages of writing differ by the end of the school term.

Meanwhile, Figure 3 compares two Low ability Bruneian preschool children, Balqis(LA) and Najwan(LA).

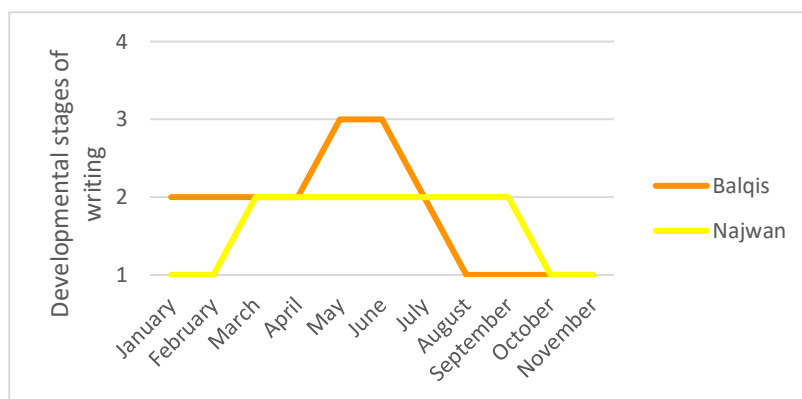


Figure 3: Comparison between two low Abilities preschool children

Table 9 below shows a comparison between Balqis(LA) writing log in January and May. In January, Balqis(LA) started at the Emergent stage where she could draw and write her name. However, she wrote the letter 'q' in her name into the letter 'a'. This also occurred in February when she wrote her name incorrectly. This pattern of writing continues to April. In May, Balqis(LA) jumped to the Transitional stage and maintained at this stage until June. Balqis(LA) was able to spell some of the words phonetically. She was also able to relate her drawing with her writing. Balqis(LA) drawing and writing look like Saarah(MA)'s May writing log when observed. As seen in Picture 7 of B Balqis(LA)'s May writing log, Balqis misspelled her name into 'Balis,' similar to Saarah(MA)'s spelling.

Table 9: Comparison of Balqis(LA)'s January and May writing log

January	May

Table 10 below shows a comparison of Balqis's (LA) writing log in July and November. In July, Balqis(LA) regressed to the Emergent stage instead of progressing to writing sentences, she wrote long strings of various letters in random order. Meanwhile, from August to November, Balqis(LA) regressed to the pre-literate stage where she only drew pictures and did not attempt to do any writing or scribbling. Balqis stated in her interview that she has lost interest in writing.

"The teacher wants us to do writing at home but I can't show it to my friends at school. When we were at school, I would write a story and then show it to my friends. But now(online learning), it is hard to see my friends in the computer, it's better when I see them in real life. Writing is no fun anymore. I miss being able to share my stories to my friends. (Balqis)

Based on Balqis's interview, a possible finding is that Balqis has lost interest in writing due to the shift to online learning and the lack of opportunity to share her stories with friends in person. The inability to share her work and receive immediate feedback from peers, which was a key motivator for her, has diminished her enjoyment of writing. This aligns with research suggesting that social interaction and collaboration positively impact student engagement and learning performance. The disruption of the traditional school environment and the challenges of online interaction may contribute to a sense of isolation and decreased motivation.

Table 10: Comparison of Balqis(LA)'s July and November writing log



July	November
	

Table 11 below shows comparison of Najwan's writing log in January, March and November. Najwan(LA) started at the Pre-Literate stage in January and February. Najwan(LA). He started in the Pre-Literate, where he was able to draw pictures. He drew based on the theme and could explain his drawing during the interview. In March, he progressed to the Emergent stage and remained at the same stage until September. He wrote various letters in random order. Some letters were written repeatedly, and primarily uppercase letters were used. Najwan(LA) writing was done from left to right. However, Najwan(LA) went down to the Pre-Literate stage in October and November. He only drew pictures and did not attempt to do any writing or scribbling.

Table 11: Comparison of Najwan(LA)'s January, March and November writing log

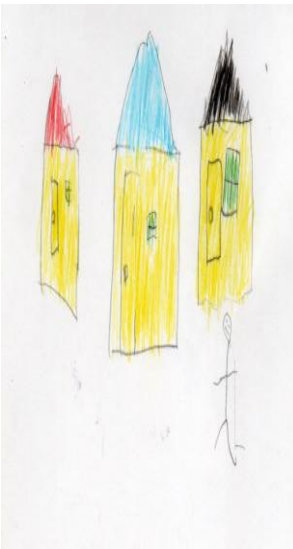
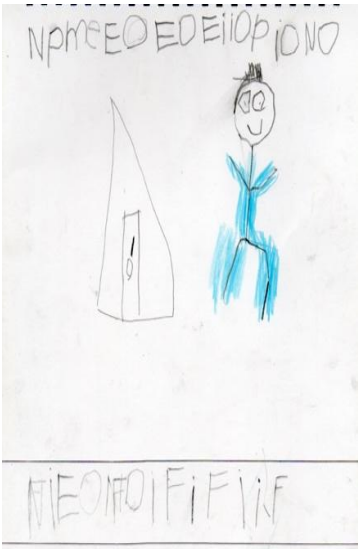

January	March	November
		

Figure 3 shows that Balqis(LA) and Najwan(LA) started at different stages, but by the end of the school term, they ended at the Pre-Literate stage. However, both Balqis(LA) and Najwan(LA) did not achieve the Fluent stage. The line graph shown in Figure 4 compares the developmental stages of writing between three different abilities of six Bruneian preschool children between January to November 2021. This indicates that preschool children go through different developmental stages of writing regardless of their abilities.

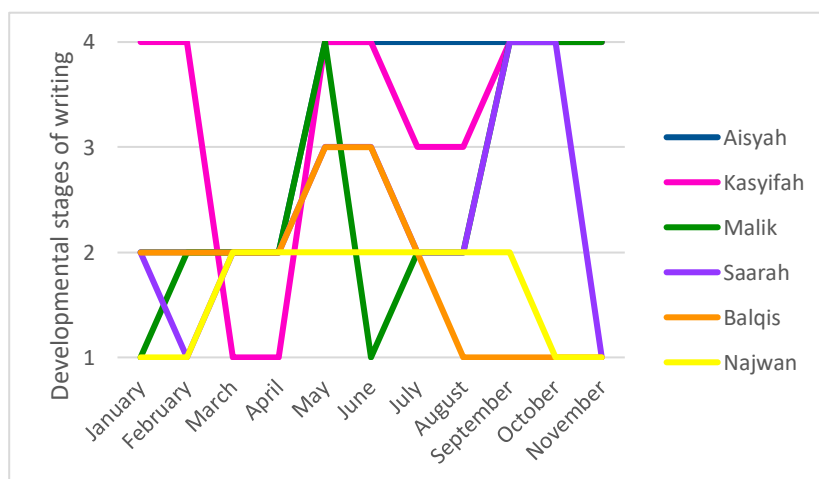


Figure 4: Six Bruneian preschool children of different abilities developmental stages of writing

All six Bruneian preschool children started at different developmental stages regardless of their abilities. In January, Kasyifah(HA) started at the Fluent stage. Aisyah(HA), Saarah(MA), and Balqis(LA) started at the Emergent stage, while Malik(MA) and Najwan(LA) started at the Pre-Literate stage.

In May, there was a rapid increase in three Bruneian preschool children's developmental stages of writing who were Kasyifah(HA), Aisyah(HA) and Malik(MA), where it went to the Fluent stage. While Balqis(LA) steadily went from the Emergent stage to the Transitional stage.

Kasyifah(HA) dropped significantly from the Fluent stage to the Pre-Literate stage in March. This also occurred with Malik(MA), who dropped from the fluent stage to the pre-literate stage in June, and Saarah(MA) in November. In November, Aisyah(HA), Kasyifah(HA) and Malik(MA) ended at the Fluent stage. On the other hand, Saarah(MA), Balqis(LA) and Najwan(LA) ended at the Pre-Literate stage. Graph 10 shows that although all six Bruneian preschool children have different abilities but their abilities did not determine their developmental stages of writing.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

All children begin somewhere in the developmental stage of writing during their preschool years and progress individually through the school year. This research shows that all six Bruneian preschool children began writing at different developmental stages, regardless of their abilities. The developmental stages of writing in all six Bruneian preschool children reveal intriguing insights into their learning abilities and trajectories. The observations of high-ability children, Kasyifah(HA) and Aisyah(HA), as well as middle-ability children, Malik(MA) and Saarah(MA), and low-ability children, Balqis(LA) and Najwan(LA), demonstrate diverse pathways in writing development.

High-ability children like Aisyah(HA) showed consistent progress from the Emergent to the Fluent stage without significant regressions. In contrast, Kasyifah(HA) exhibited fluctuations, moving through multiple stages before eventually returning to the Fluent stage. This variability underscores the individualized nature of children's writing development, influenced by factors such as learning environment, support, and cognitive processes. Middle-ability children, Malik(MA) and Saarah(MA), also displayed distinct trajectories. Malik(MA) experienced fluctuations, with periods of regression but ultimately reaching the Fluent stage by November. Saarah(MA) demonstrated progression to the Transitional stage before facing setbacks, highlighting the importance of sustained support and intervention to maintain progress. Low-ability children, Balqis(LA) and Najwan(LA), encountered challenges in advancing to higher stages, ending the term at the Pre-Literate stage.

Their journeys emphasize the need for targeted interventions and differentiated instruction to support children with varying learning abilities in developing writing skills. The findings suggest that children's writing development is influenced by a combination of inherent abilities, learning experiences, and environmental factors. The non-linear progression seen across all ability levels underscores the dynamic nature of literacy acquisition in young learners. The study by Prashanti & Hafidah (Prashanti & Hafidah, 2021) supports this by demonstrating the positive influence of home visits on children's writing development during online learning. Furthermore, research suggests that various literacy-related skills and environmental factors all play a crucial role in shaping a child's writing abilities.

Okay, here's a draft of a discussion section based on your findings about Bruneian preschool children's writing development:

1. Discussion

The observation that all six Bruneian preschool children, regardless of their abilities, started at different developmental stages of writing highlights the individual nature of early literacy acquisition. This finding aligns with the understanding that children progress through stages of writing development at their own pace, influenced by a myriad of factors including their unique learning styles, prior experiences, and individual strengths (Bradford & Wyse, 2020). The diverse pathways observed in high-ability children, middle-ability children, and low-ability children underscore the importance of recognizing and catering to these individual differences in educational settings.

These findings may reflect the impact of varying levels of exposure to literacy-rich environments both at home and in preschool. Children with more exposure to books, writing materials, and literacy activities may enter preschool with a more advanced understanding of writing concepts compared to their peers. Additionally, differences in fine motor skills, phonological awareness, and language development could contribute to the variability observed in their starting points.

How the Bruneian curriculum is structured and implemented could influence the starting points and progression of these children. Furthermore, the sociocultural context of Brunei, with its unique linguistic landscape and emphasis on both Malay and English, might also influence how children approach early writing tasks. The study by Septiani & Syaodih (2021) highlighted the importance of environmental print and early exposure to literacy. This directly relates to your observation that the Bruneian children entered preschool at different stages, potentially due to varied access to literacy-rich environments. Furthermore, the study emphasized recognizing individual differences, which underscores the necessity of tailoring instruction to meet the unique needs and developmental trajectories of each child. This suggests that effective preschool programs should assess children's emergent literacy skills upon entry and provide differentiated support to foster their individual growth in writing.

It is important for educators and parents to recognize these individual trajectories and provide tailored support to meet each child's specific needs. Rather than adhering to a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach, early literacy instruction should be flexible and responsive to the diverse learning profiles of preschool children. Further research could explore the specific factors that contribute to these individual differences in writing development, such as the quality of home literacy environments, the effectiveness of different instructional approaches, and the role of language and cultural background.

The research on Bruneian preschool children's writing development yields important discussions and implications for both educators and researchers in the field of early childhood education. The study highlights the significant individual variation in children's writing development, evident across high, middle, and low-ability groups. This variability underscores the need for personalized approaches to support each child's unique learning journey. Next is the non-linear progression observed in children's writing development emphasizes the dynamic nature of literacy acquisition. Children may experience regressions, plateaus, or rapid advancements, emphasizing the importance of flexible and responsive instructional strategies. Children who have been exposed to and have seen examples of writing at home may already be able to write conventional letters when they start preschool, while others may still be in the early stages of learning to read and write.

These are believed to be suitable for children in the preschool age range, considering their developmental needs and abilities. These highlights that despite differences in abilities among the six Bruneian preschool children, their developmental stages of writing did not strictly align with their initial skill levels. The result aligns with the literature's focus on the non-linear and individualized development of writing skills in young children. Children learn to write by scribbling, imagining, practicing their skills, and then applying them to daily life. Children follow different patterns to achieve a goal or see a particular writing outcome. Children will learn and practice these stages when

given space, tools, and opportunities to strengthen hand muscles. These writing stages may happen in different ways depending on temperament and abilities. Before fluency is achieved, various skills and muscles need to be developed. When a child cannot master one stage before moving on to the next, the children will progress and then regress between the stages. There is no surprise to see their skills and understanding fluctuate. Therefore, moving forward to a more challenging stage or backward to a previous one can sharpen and solidify their fundamentals.

Educators and practitioners can use these insights to tailor instruction, provide targeted support, and create inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of preschool children. By recognizing and accommodating individual differences in writing development, educators can effectively nurture and enhance children's literacy skills, fostering growth and progress across various ability levels.

In conclusion, the study underscores the complexity and diversity of Bruneian preschool children's writing development and underscores the importance of personalized support, early intervention, and collaborative efforts among educators, researchers, and families to nurture children's literacy skills effectively. To further enhance the understanding of writing development in Bruneian preschool children, future research should consider employing longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches. A longitudinal study, following the same children over an extended period, would provide valuable insights into the long-term trajectories of their writing development and the impact of various interventions. This approach could track the progression of children like Kasyifah, Aisyah, Malik, Saarah, Balqis, and Najwan through the different stages of writing, offering a more nuanced understanding of their individual learning pathways.

Furthermore, a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative measures of writing skills with qualitative data such as classroom observations and teacher interviews, would provide a richer and more comprehensive picture of the factors influencing writing development in this context. Such research could explore how the Bruneian curriculum, cultural practices, and home literacy environments intersect to shape children's emergent writing skills. This approach could also investigate the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies in supporting diverse learners and address the challenges encountered by children at different developmental stages, contributing to more effective early literacy interventions.

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