

# Integrating Drawing and Writing: Supporting Meaning-Making in Brunei Preschool Classrooms

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**Abstract**— This paper examines how drawing and writing interact in preschool classrooms in Brunei Darussalam and how classroom practices influence children's engagement with early writing. This qualitative exploratory study investigated how preschool children used drawing and writing together during classroom literacy activities in a Brunei government preschool. In Brunei preschools, writing is commonly introduced as part of school readiness and early academic preparation. However, young children often demonstrate greater engagement when drawing is incorporated into literacy activities as part of the meaning-making process. Drawing frequently serves as children's first mode of expressing ideas, telling stories, and communicating experiences, yet it is sometimes treated as separate from writing in classroom practice. Data were generated through classroom observations, field notes, and examples of children's drawing and writing. The findings indicate that children moved naturally between drawing and writing when they were encouraged to express ideas freely and participate in meaningful literacy activities. In contrast, highly structured writing tasks focused on copying, correctness, and worksheet completion often resulted in more compliance-oriented participation and reduced engagement. The study also highlights a pedagogical tension within the context of Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke-21 (SPN21), where teachers balance holistic, child-centred learning with school-readiness expectations. The paper argues that recognising drawing as a meaningful component of early writing can strengthen children's motivation, communication, creativity, and participation in literacy activities while supporting developmentally appropriate early literacy practices in preschool classrooms.

**Keywords:** *Brunei Darussalam, drawing and writing, early literacy, meaning-making, preschool classrooms*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Early literacy research increasingly recognises that young children communicate meaning through multiple modes, including drawing, gesture, talk, and writing. From a sociocultural perspective, literacy development is not simply the acquisition of technical skills such as letter formation or spelling, but a process through which children learn to use symbolic systems to express ideas and participate in social communication (Vygotsky, 1978; Dyson, 2003). Young children's early writing therefore often emerges through a combination of drawing and written marks, reflecting their attempts to represent meaning before conventional writing skills are fully developed. Scholars have described this process as emergent literacy, where drawing, scribbling, and invented spelling form part of children's developmental pathway toward conventional writing (Clay, 1991; Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

In Brunei Darussalam's preschool classrooms, writing is commonly introduced as an important skill linked to school readiness and future academic success. From an early age, children are expected to recognise letters, copy words, and complete simple writing tasks as part of their daily classroom routines. These practices reflect national educational priorities under the Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke-21 (SPN21), which emphasises literacy development, academic preparation, and holistic child development. Writing is therefore positioned as a key foundation for children's transition to primary school.

However, many preschool teachers in Brunei observe that young children do not always engage enthusiastically with formal writing tasks, particularly when writing activities are mainly worksheet-based or focused on copying. Some children complete writing tasks quickly with minimal effort, while others show reluctance or lose interest. These everyday classroom observations raise important questions about how young children experience writing and what motivates them to engage meaningfully in early literacy activities.

At the same time, preschool children naturally engage in drawing as a powerful way to express ideas, tell stories, and communicate meaning. Drawing is often the first mode through which children represent their experiences, imagination, and understanding of the world. In Brunei preschool classrooms, children can frequently be seen explaining their drawings, adding labels, writing their names, or using familiar letters and symbols to support their ideas. For children, drawing and writing are not separate activities but part of the same process of meaning-making.

Despite this, drawing is often treated differently from writing in classroom practice. Drawing may be viewed as play, enrichment, or a preliminary activity to be completed before “real writing” begins. Writing, in contrast, is more likely to be framed as formal academic work that must be completed correctly. This separation sends implicit messages to children about what types of expression are valued in the classroom. When drawing is positioned as less important than writing, children may begin to see writing as something that must be done to meet teacher expectations rather than as a meaningful way to communicate their ideas.

This distinction between drawing and writing has important implications for children’s engagement with early literacy. When writing is framed primarily as task completion, children’s focus may shift from expressing meaning to finishing work correctly. Conversely, when drawing and writing are allowed to work together, children often show greater confidence, engagement, and willingness to communicate through written marks. Understanding how children move between drawing and writing, and how classroom practices support or limit this movement, is therefore essential for strengthening early literacy pedagogy in Brunei. Although studies on emergent literacy and multimodal meaning-making have highlighted the importance of drawing in young children’s writing development (Dyson, 2003; Kress, 2010), much of this research has been conducted in Western educational contexts. Limited research has examined how drawing and writing are integrated within preschool literacy practices in Brunei Darussalam, particularly within classrooms shaped by school readiness expectations and the goals of the Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke-21 (SPN21). In Brunei preschool classrooms, writing is often associated with academic preparation and task completion, yet less attention has been given to how children use drawing and writing together as part of their meaning-making processes. Examining these classroom experiences can provide important insights into how early literacy practices may either support or constrain children’s engagement with writing.

This paper therefore, aims to:

1. examine how preschool children use drawing and writing together as part of their meaning-making processes;
2. explore how classroom practices influence children’s engagement with writing; and
3. discuss how preschool teachers can support meaningful early writing through integrating drawing and writing activities.

This paper draws on findings from a qualitative study conducted in a Brunei government preschool as part of a doctoral research project on preschool children’s motives for writing. Focusing specifically on the relationship between drawing and writing, the paper examines how children use both modes together as part of their meaning-making processes. It explores how classroom practices shape children’s engagement with writing and highlights ways in which teachers can support early writing development by recognising drawing as a meaningful component of early literacy.

The paper aims to offer practical, classroom-relevant insights for Brunei preschool teachers on how to design writing activities that align with children's natural ways of expressing meaning while supporting the goals of SPN21. Research in early childhood literacy has shown that young children often use drawing and writing together as part of their meaning-making, yet classroom practices sometimes separate these modes in ways that limit children's engagement (Dyson, 2003; Kress, 1997).

## **II. METHODS**

### **II.1 Research Design**

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory design to examine how preschool children used drawing and writing together during classroom literacy activities in a Brunei government preschool. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study aimed to understand children's engagement with writing within natural classroom settings and to explore how meaning-making was shaped through everyday interactions, activities, and classroom practices. The study formed part of a broader doctoral research project exploring preschool children's motives for writing in Brunei Darussalam.

### **II.2 Research Setting and Participants**

The study was conducted in a government preschool classroom in Brunei Darussalam. Participants included preschool children aged five to six years and their classroom teacher. Purposive sampling was used to select the research site because the classroom provided regular opportunities for drawing and writing activities within daily literacy routines. The focus of the study was not on individual children's performance but on observing patterns of engagement and classroom interactions during writing-related activities.

### **II.3 Data Collection**

Data were generated through classroom observations, field notes, and documentation of children's drawings and writing samples. Observations focused on how children participated in literacy activities, how drawing and writing were used during classroom tasks, and how teachers introduced and supported writing activities. Informal conversations with children and teachers during classroom activities also informed the interpretation of the observations. Field notes were recorded after each observation session to capture children's interactions, behaviours, and responses during literacy activities.

### **II.4 Data Analysis**

Data were analysed thematically using an iterative process of reviewing observation notes, classroom interactions, and children's work samples. Initial coding focused on recurring patterns related to children's engagement with writing, the role of drawing during literacy activities, and differences in how classroom tasks were experienced by children. Through repeated analysis, broader themes were identified concerning drawing as meaning-making and writing as task completion. The analysis was informed by sociocultural perspectives on literacy and multimodality, which emphasise how children use multiple symbolic forms to communicate meaning within social contexts.

## II.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the broader doctoral study was obtained through the relevant institutional procedures. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the preschool and relevant educational authorities. Parental consent was obtained for children's participation, and pseudonyms were used where necessary to maintain confidentiality. Observations were conducted within normal classroom routines to minimise disruption to children's learning experiences.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Drawing plays a central role in young children's communication, learning, and early literacy development. Before children are able to form conventional letters or write recognisable words, they often rely on drawing to represent ideas, experiences, and stories. Through drawing, children make their thinking visible and share meaning with others. For many preschool children, drawing is not a separate or lesser activity but an important way of expressing what they know, feel, and imagine.

Drawing has long been recognised as an important component of early literacy development. Studies have shown that drawing supports children's ability to generate ideas, organise narratives, and communicate experiences before they are able to express these ideas through conventional writing (Dyson, 2013; Kress, 1997). Through drawing, children externalise their thinking and create visual representations that can later be translated into written language. Research in multimodal literacy further suggests that young children naturally move between different modes of expression, including drawing, writing, and oral storytelling, as they construct meaning (Kress, 2010). Rather than replacing drawing with writing as children grow older, these modes often continue to support each other in the development of early literacy.

In early childhood classrooms, drawing often acts as a bridge to writing. Children use drawings to plan ideas, tell stories, and organise their thoughts before adding written marks. For young children, drawing and writing are closely connected and often occur together as part of the same meaning-making process. Studies in early literacy have long highlighted that drawing plays a central role in children's early writing development, supporting idea generation, storytelling, and motivation to communicate (Dyson, 2013; Kress, 1997). Rather than moving in a fixed sequence from drawing to writing, children frequently move back and forth between the two, using whichever mode best helps them communicate their ideas.

Classroom observations from Brunei preschools show that children commonly begin writing activities by drawing pictures. Once their ideas are represented visually, they often add letters, names, or familiar words to explain what they have drawn. When asked to talk about their work, children usually refer first to their drawings and then point to the written marks they have added. This pattern suggests that drawing provides a strong foundation for writing by supporting idea generation, storytelling, and motivation to communicate.

From teachers' perspectives, this is often visible during open-ended activities. Children appear more confident and engaged when they are allowed to draw freely and explain their work. Writing emerges naturally in these situations, not as a forced task but as a way to clarify or extend meaning. In contrast, when children are asked to write without opportunities to draw or talk about their ideas, some struggle to know what to write or show less interest in the activity.

However, classroom routines sometimes treat drawing as an optional or preliminary activity that must be completed quickly before writing begins. In such situations, children may receive the message that drawing is less important than writing. Some children rush through their drawings in order to start

writing, while others disengage from writing altogether if they feel their ideas are better expressed through drawing. This can unintentionally limit children's confidence and motivation, especially for those who are still developing fine-motor skills or letter knowledge.

Recognising drawing as an integral part of early writing allows teachers to build on children's existing strengths rather than viewing drawing as a barrier to writing development. When drawing is valued as part of literacy, children are more likely to see writing as meaningful and connected to their ideas. This approach supports children's confidence, encourages sustained engagement, and helps create a smoother transition from drawing to writing in preschool classrooms.

For Brunei preschool teachers, valuing drawing as part of early writing aligns with SPN21's emphasis on holistic development, communication skills, and active learning. By allowing children to use drawing as a starting point for writing, teachers can support early literacy development in ways that respect children's natural meaning-making processes while preparing them for more formal writing tasks in later years.

Findings from the study indicate that children's engagement with writing changes noticeably depending on how drawing and writing are framed within classroom activities. Observations from a Brunei government preschool show that children respond differently when writing is presented as a meaning-making activity compared to when it is framed mainly as a task to be completed. Two contrasting patterns were consistently observed: drawing as meaning-making and writing as task completion. These patterns became visible through children's behaviour during classroom activities, including the amount of time they spent on tasks, their willingness to explain their work, and their overall enthusiasm when participating in writing-related activities.

These classroom observations reflect broader findings from research on children's motives for writing. Young children are more likely to engage in writing activities when they perceive writing as meaningful and connected to their own experiences. When writing tasks allow children to communicate ideas, tell stories, or represent personal experiences, children demonstrate greater persistence and interest. In such situations, writing becomes part of a broader process of expression in which children combine drawing, talking, and written marks to communicate their ideas.

Conversely, writing activities that emphasise correctness or task completion may limit opportunities for children to develop a sense of authorship or ownership over their writing. When the primary goal becomes finishing a worksheet or copying words accurately, children may focus more on meeting teacher expectations than on expressing meaning. This can reduce opportunities for children to experiment with writing or to view themselves as active communicators through written symbols. Previous studies have similarly shown that children's motivation to write is closely linked to opportunities for creative expression and meaningful communication (Dyson, 2003; Rowe, 2013).

These observations highlight the importance of examining not only what writing activities are introduced in preschool classrooms, but also how these activities are framed and experienced by children. Small differences in instructional approach can significantly influence whether writing is perceived as an engaging form of communication or simply as a routine classroom task.

### **III.1 Drawing As Meaning-Making**

When children were given opportunities to draw freely and talk about their drawings, they showed high levels of engagement, confidence, and enthusiasm. Many children used drawing to tell stories, describe family experiences, or represent imaginative ideas such as favourite animals, events, or daily routines. For example, during one classroom activity, a child drew a picture of her family eating together and explained, "This is my mother cooking and we are eating rice." After discussing the drawing with the teacher, the child added labels such as "mama" and attempted to write the word

“rice.” The child remained engaged with the activity for an extended period, returning several times to add details to both the drawing and the written marks. Drawing appeared to function as an accessible starting point for expression, allowing children to represent ideas even when their conventional writing skills were still developing. In these situations, children were eager to explain their drawings to teachers and peers, often using rich oral language to describe what was happening in their pictures and why they chose particular elements in their drawings.

These conversations often extended the meaning of the drawings and provided opportunities for children to elaborate on their ideas. Teachers’ questions and responses encouraged children to reflect on their work and explain their intentions. Through these interactions, drawing became not only a visual representation but also a social and communicative activity in which children shared their experiences and perspectives with others.

Writing emerged naturally within these activities. After completing their drawings, children frequently added written marks to support their ideas. This included writing their names, labelling parts of the drawing, or attempting simple words they were familiar with. Some children experimented with invented spellings or used familiar letters and symbols to represent sounds or words they wanted to communicate. Writing was not forced or separate from the activity; instead, it became part of the child’s effort to communicate meaning more clearly and to make their ideas understandable to others.

Classroom observations showed that children spent longer periods engaged in these activities compared to more structured writing tasks. They were more willing to persist, revisit their work, and add more details to both their drawings and written marks. Some children returned to their drawings multiple times, adding new elements or expanding their explanations. Importantly, children appeared proud of their work and confident when explaining what they had drawn and written. In these contexts, writing was experienced as meaningful because it was directly connected to children’s own ideas, experiences, and interests. Drawing therefore functioned as a supportive bridge that enabled children to move gradually from visual representation to written communication. These findings are consistent with previous research on emergent literacy and multimodal meaning-making. Dyson (2003) argued that young children naturally use multiple symbolic systems, including drawing, talk, and writing, to communicate ideas and participate in literacy practices. Similarly, Kress (2010) emphasised that drawing and writing should not be understood as separate developmental stages but as interconnected modes through which children construct meaning. In the present study, drawing appeared to support children’s engagement with writing by providing a visual and accessible starting point for organising ideas before attempting written expression. Children’s willingness to revisit drawings, explain their ideas, and add written labels further suggests that literacy development was closely connected to opportunities for personal expression and social interaction within the classroom environment.

### **III.2 Writing As Task Completion**

In contrast, when writing activities focused mainly on copying words, tracing letters, or completing worksheets, children’s engagement shifted noticeably. Writing was often framed as a task that needed to be finished within a given time, with the emphasis placed on completing the activity correctly. Instructions were usually specific, with clear expectations about what children should write and how the work should look. Teachers typically directed children to follow a model on the worksheet or copy words written on the board, reinforcing the idea that the primary goal was accuracy and task completion.

During these activities, some children completed the tasks quickly with minimal writing, appearing more focused on finishing than on expressing meaning. Their attention was directed toward completing the worksheet as efficiently as possible rather than developing or communicating ideas.

Other children showed signs of reluctance or uncertainty. For example, some delayed beginning the task, asked for repeated assistance, or frequently looked around the classroom instead of concentrating on the activity. A few children appeared hesitant to write independently and relied on teachers for confirmation before continuing. These behaviours suggested that writing was experienced as a requirement to be fulfilled rather than as an opportunity for expression. During worksheet-based writing activities, some children appeared primarily concerned with finishing the task quickly. In one observation, a child copied words from the board with minimal interaction and stopped working immediately after completing the required lines. When asked about the writing, the child gave only a brief response and did not attempt to add further details or drawings beyond the worksheet instructions.

In these contexts, writing was often treated as “work” rather than as a form of communication. Children rarely attempted to extend the activity beyond the instructions given, and opportunities for storytelling or personal expression were limited. Because the tasks were predetermined, children had little opportunity to introduce their own ideas or experiences into the activity.

When drawing was included in worksheet-based activities, it was often treated as separate or less important than writing. In some cases, drawing appeared to function merely as an additional step to complete before or after the writing component. Children sometimes rushed through their drawings so they could begin writing, or they stopped drawing once they felt the writing task was complete. As a result, drawing did not function as a tool for thinking or planning ideas but instead became a brief activity with limited connection to the writing task.

This separation reduced opportunities for children to use drawing as a support for idea development and meaning-making. Without the opportunity to explore ideas visually first, some children appeared unsure about what to write or produced only short responses. These patterns suggest that when writing activities prioritise completion and correctness, children may participate in a more compliance-driven manner, with less opportunity to experience writing as a meaningful form of communication. These observations may reflect broader institutional expectations surrounding school readiness within Brunei preschool education. Although SPN21 emphasises holistic development, communication skills, and active learning, classroom literacy practices may still be strongly influenced by expectations associated with preparing children for formal primary schooling. As a result, writing activities can become focused on correctness, neatness, and task completion, with greater emphasis placed on producing visible academic outcomes. While these practices are intended to support children’s literacy development, they may unintentionally reduce opportunities for creativity, experimentation, and child-led meaning-making during writing activities.

### **III.3 What These Observations Suggest**

These contrasting classroom patterns suggest that children’s motivation to write is closely linked to how writing activities are framed and experienced in the classroom. When writing is connected to children’s ideas and allows them to communicate meaning, engagement tends to be higher and more sustained. In such contexts, writing becomes part of a broader process of expression in which children combine drawing, talking, and written marks to share their thoughts and experiences. Children appear more willing to invest time and effort in writing when they see it as a way to communicate ideas that are meaningful to them.

In contrast, when writing is framed mainly as task completion, engagement tends to be more compliance-driven and limited. Children may complete the required activity but show less enthusiasm or personal involvement in the process. The focus shifts from expressing ideas to meeting expectations about correct answers, neat handwriting, or finishing a worksheet within a set time. As a result, opportunities for creativity, experimentation, and ownership of writing may be reduced. For

young children who are still developing their confidence as writers, such experiences may shape how they perceive writing as a classroom activity.

For Brunei preschool teachers, these observations highlight the importance of considering not only what writing activities are planned, but also how they are introduced, structured, and valued in the classroom environment. The way teachers frame writing activities can influence whether children view writing as a meaningful form of communication or simply as a task to be completed. Small changes in classroom practice, such as allowing children to begin with drawing, encouraging them to explain their ideas, or integrating writing into storytelling activities, can have a significant impact on children's willingness to engage with early writing.

The findings also highlight an important pedagogical tension within Brunei preschool classrooms. While SPN21 promotes child-centred learning, communication, and holistic development, preschool teachers are also expected to prepare children for the academic demands of primary school. This tension may contribute to the continued use of highly structured writing activities that prioritise accuracy and task completion. Consequently, children may experience writing less as a process of communication and more as a classroom requirement to be completed correctly. The findings therefore suggest the importance of balancing academic preparation with developmentally appropriate opportunities for children to engage in drawing, storytelling, and emergent writing as part of meaningful literacy experiences.

These findings also suggest that drawing can play an important role in supporting children's movement toward writing by providing a visual starting point for thinking and idea development. When drawing is recognised as part of the writing process, children are able to build on their existing strengths in visual expression while gradually incorporating written marks. Similar patterns have been observed in other early childhood contexts, where children's engagement with writing increases when literacy activities support meaning-making rather than task completion (Dyson, 2003). The observations revealed clear differences in how children responded to writing activities depending on whether writing was framed as meaning-making or task completion. These patterns are summarised in Table 1.

| <b>Classroom Framing of Writing</b>                 | <b>Children's Responses</b>                   | <b>Writing Behaviours Observed</b>                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Drawing integrated with storytelling and discussion | High engagement and enthusiasm                | Added labels, invented spelling, extended explanations |
| Worksheet copying and tracing activities            | Reduced engagement and limited interaction    | Minimal written responses, focus on task completion    |
| Opportunities to explain drawings                   | Increased confidence and participation        | Greater willingness to attempt writing                 |
| Writing focused mainly on correctness               | Hesitation and reliance on teacher assistance | Limited experimentation with writing                   |

These patterns suggest that children's engagement with writing is strongly influenced by how literacy activities are structured and experienced within the classroom environment.

#### IV. SUPPORTING MEANINGFUL WRITING THROUGH CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Findings from the study suggest that children's engagement with writing can be strengthened when classroom practices recognise the close relationship between drawing and writing. Rather than treating drawing and writing as separate or sequential activities, preschool teachers can support children's meaning-making by integrating the two in ways that reflect how children naturally express their ideas. Young children often move fluidly between visual representation, oral explanation, and written marks as they communicate their thoughts. Recognising this process allows teachers to create literacy experiences that build on children's existing strengths and developmental pathways.

The following practices, drawn from classroom observations and children's responses, offer practical strategies for supporting early writing in Brunei preschool classrooms. These strategies emphasise creating opportunities for children to explore ideas, communicate meaning, and develop confidence in expressing themselves through both drawing and writing. When classroom environments encourage children to represent their ideas in multiple ways, writing becomes less intimidating and more closely connected to children's everyday experiences and interests.

Encouraging drawing as part of writing activities reflects broader approaches in early childhood pedagogy that emphasise play-based and meaning-centred learning. Studies have shown that when teachers allow children to combine drawing and writing, children are more likely to sustain engagement in literacy activities and demonstrate greater willingness to experiment with written language (Mackenzie, 2011; Rowe, 2013). These approaches recognise that early writing development does not occur in isolation but emerges through children's attempts to communicate ideas using multiple symbolic forms.

Integrating drawing within writing activities also supports children who are still developing fine motor control and familiarity with letter formation. For many preschool children, drawing provides a comfortable entry point into literacy activities because it allows them to express ideas without the pressure of producing correct spelling or neat handwriting. As children become more confident in representing ideas visually, they often begin to incorporate written elements such as letters, labels, or simple words into their drawings. In this way, drawing can act as a bridge that gradually supports children's transition toward more conventional forms of writing.

In the context of Brunei preschool classrooms, recognising the role of drawing in early writing can help teachers design literacy activities that balance academic preparation with children's developmental needs. By creating opportunities for children to express ideas through drawing and writing together, teachers can foster a more supportive literacy environment that encourages creativity, communication, and sustained engagement with writing.

One effective way to support meaningful writing is to encourage children to draw and write as part of the same activity. Instead of asking children to complete a drawing and then move on to writing as a separate task, teachers can invite children to use writing to explain, label, or extend their drawings. For example, children can draw a picture and then add their names, labels for objects, or short sentences to describe what is happening in the picture. In some cases, teachers may encourage children to talk about their drawings first before attempting to write, allowing oral language to support the transition into written expression.

Integrating drawing and writing in this way allows children to develop ideas visually before attempting to represent them through written marks. Drawing provides a concrete representation of children's thoughts, which can help them organise their ideas and clarify what they want to communicate.

Once their ideas are visible through drawing, children often find it easier to add written elements that explain or extend the meaning of their work. This process supports the gradual development of early writing by allowing children to move between drawing, talking, and writing as they construct meaning.

When drawing and writing are integrated, children are more likely to view writing as a natural extension of their ideas rather than as a separate academic task. This approach allows children at different developmental stages to participate meaningfully, as they can contribute through drawing, emergent writing, or a combination of both. For example, children who are still developing letter knowledge may begin by drawing detailed pictures and adding simple labels or their names, while more confident writers may attempt short sentences or descriptions. In this way, integrated activities create opportunities for all children to engage with writing at a level that reflects their current abilities.

For teachers, this approach also provides valuable insight into children's thinking and understanding. Children's drawings often reveal ideas, experiences, and interests that may not yet be fully expressed through writing. When teachers observe and discuss children's drawings with them, they gain a deeper understanding of how children interpret events, organise stories, and represent meaning. These insights can help teachers design further literacy activities that build on children's interests and encourage continued development in writing.

From a sociocultural perspective, literacy development occurs through participation in meaningful social practices rather than through isolated skill instruction (Vygotsky, 1978; Pahl & Rowsell, 2012). When children engage in drawing and writing to communicate ideas with teachers and peers, they are participating in authentic literacy practices that involve interaction, interpretation, and shared meaning-making. These experiences allow children to understand writing as a tool for communication and expression rather than merely a school task to be completed correctly. Over time, such experiences contribute to the development of positive attitudes toward writing and support children's growing confidence as emerging writers.

At the preschool level, it is important to prioritise children's ideas and communication over technical accuracy. Young children are still developing their understanding of written language, including letter formation, spelling patterns, and conventions of writing. When the emphasis is placed too early on correct spelling, neat handwriting, or precise letter formation, some children may become hesitant or disengaged from writing activities. They may worry about making mistakes or feel that their writing is "wrong," which can reduce their willingness to experiment with written marks. Valuing children's attempts to express meaning supports confidence and encourages experimentation with writing, allowing children to explore how written symbols can represent their ideas.

Focusing on meaning also recognises that early writing often develops through experimentation and approximation. Young children may use invented spelling, partial words, or familiar letters to represent what they want to say. These early attempts are an important part of the writing development process because they show that children are beginning to understand the relationship between spoken language and written symbols. When teachers acknowledge these attempts positively, children are more likely to continue experimenting with writing and gradually refine their skills over time.

Teachers can respond positively to children's writing by focusing on what the child is trying to communicate rather than on what is incorrect. For example, acknowledging a child's story or explanation before correcting letter formation helps children see writing as a meaningful activity. A teacher might first comment on the child's idea, such as the story being told in the drawing or the message the child is trying to convey, before gently guiding the child toward clearer writing. This approach reinforces the idea that writing is primarily about communicating meaning rather than simply producing correct forms.

Over time, accuracy can be supported through gentle guidance, modelling, and shared writing experiences without discouraging children's motivation to write. Teachers can demonstrate how words are written, encourage children to listen for sounds in words, or provide opportunities to practise letter formation during meaningful activities. By gradually introducing these skills within authentic writing contexts, children can develop greater accuracy while maintaining a positive and confident attitude toward writing. This balance between meaning and accuracy helps create a supportive environment where children view writing as both purposeful and achievable.

Writing becomes more engaging for children when it has a clear and meaningful purpose. When children understand that writing can be used to communicate ideas, share messages, or represent their experiences, they are more likely to participate actively in writing activities. Activities that involve real audiences and authentic communication help children understand why writing matters beyond simply completing classroom tasks. In preschool classrooms, these opportunities allow children to see writing as a practical tool for expressing thoughts and interacting with others.

Examples of meaningful writing activities include writing simple messages to teachers or classmates, creating labels for classroom displays, or writing short stories to share during group time. Teachers may also invite children to write invitations for class events, make signs for learning areas, or contribute written messages to classroom projects. In these situations, writing becomes connected to everyday classroom experiences and social interactions. Children begin to understand that writing can serve different purposes, such as informing others, telling stories, or organising shared activities.

In these situations, writing is no longer just an exercise but a tool for communication. Children are often more motivated to write when they know their writing will be read or used by others. The presence of a real audience encourages children to think more carefully about what they want to say and how they want to represent their ideas. Even simple attempts at writing become meaningful because they serve a communicative purpose.

Drawing can support these activities by helping children plan what they want to say before writing. When children begin by drawing, they are able to organise their thoughts visually and represent the main ideas they wish to communicate. This visual representation can then guide their writing as they add labels, words, or short sentences to explain their drawings. In this way, drawing acts as a supportive bridge that helps children move from visual expression to written communication while maintaining a strong focus on meaning.

Children are more motivated to engage in writing when activities are connected to topics they care about. Young children often express their interests, experiences, and ideas through drawing before they are able to articulate them fully through writing. Drawing therefore provides an effective way for teachers to observe children's interests, such as family members, animals, favourite activities, or imaginative themes. By paying attention to what children frequently choose to draw and talk about, teachers can gain valuable insight into the topics that are meaningful and engaging for them.

These observations can help teachers design writing activities that are relevant and meaningful to children. When writing activities are linked to children's interests, children are more likely to participate actively and sustain their engagement. Rather than viewing writing as an assigned task, children begin to see it as a way to express ideas that matter to them. Teachers can build on children's drawings by inviting them to describe what they have drawn, encouraging them to add labels, names, or simple sentences that explain their ideas.

For example, if children frequently draw pictures of family members, teachers can encourage them to add names or simple descriptions such as "my mother" or "my brother." These simple additions help children see how writing can be used to clarify and extend the meaning of their drawings. Similarly, if children enjoy drawing animals, vehicles, or favourite places, these themes can become

starting points for storytelling and writing activities. Teachers may invite children to create stories about their drawings, describe what the animals are doing, or explain where the vehicles are going.

Building on children's interests helps writing feel purposeful and enjoyable rather than imposed. When children feel that their ideas are valued and recognised in classroom activities, they are more likely to participate confidently and experiment with writing. This approach also supports a more child-centred learning environment, where literacy activities emerge from children's experiences and curiosity rather than being strictly predetermined by worksheets or structured tasks. Over time, such experiences can help children develop more positive attitudes toward writing and see it as a meaningful tool for expressing their thoughts and experiences.

Supporting children's movement from drawing to writing aligns closely with SPN21's emphasis on holistic development, communication skills, and active learning. In Brunei preschool classrooms, teachers play an important role in creating learning environments that nurture children's emerging literacy while also respecting their developmental needs and interests. Recognising drawing as an essential part of early writing allows teachers to support children's natural ways of expressing ideas while gradually guiding them toward more conventional forms of written communication. By integrating drawing and writing in classroom activities, teachers can provide children with opportunities to explore ideas, represent experiences, and communicate meaning in ways that feel accessible and meaningful.

Rather than viewing drawing as something children must outgrow, teachers can use drawing as a bridge to writing. Drawing enables children to organise their thoughts visually and provides a starting point for developing written expression. When children are encouraged to explain their drawings and add written elements such as labels, names, or simple sentences, writing becomes a natural extension of their ideas. This process allows children to develop confidence as emerging writers because they are able to build on skills they already possess in visual expression and storytelling.

This approach supports children's confidence, agency, and motivation, helping them develop positive attitudes toward writing that will benefit them as they progress to primary school. When children feel that their ideas are valued and that writing helps them communicate meaningful messages, they are more likely to engage willingly in writing activities. Such experiences can contribute to the development of stronger literacy foundations, as children begin to understand writing not only as a school requirement but also as a useful tool for sharing thoughts, experiences, and information. However, this does not suggest that structured writing instruction should be removed entirely from preschool classrooms. Rather, the findings indicate the importance of balancing formal writing preparation with opportunities for child-led meaning-making and multimodal expression. Within the context of Brunei preschool education, teachers are required to support children's readiness for primary schooling while also responding to children's developmental needs and interests. Integrating drawing within writing activities may therefore provide a practical way to support both academic preparation and meaningful engagement with literacy.

For teachers, implementing this approach does not necessarily require major changes to existing classroom routines. Small adjustments in classroom practice can make a meaningful difference in how children experience writing. For example, teachers can allow time for children to draw before writing, invite children to explain their drawings during group discussions, or encourage them to add written labels and simple descriptions to their work. Teachers can also design activities that combine drawing, storytelling, and writing so that children experience literacy as a connected and meaningful process.

These practices align with the principles of the Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke-21 (SPN21), which emphasises holistic development, communication skills, and active learning in early childhood education (Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam, 2013). By creating classroom environments

that support children's natural meaning-making processes, Brunei preschool teachers can foster more engaging and developmentally appropriate literacy experiences. In doing so, they contribute not only to children's early writing development but also to the cultivation of positive attitudes toward learning that will support children's continued educational journeys.

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the importance of recognising drawing as a meaningful early writing practice in Brunei preschool classrooms. Findings from the study show that children naturally use drawing to communicate ideas, tell stories, and make sense of their everyday experiences. For young children, drawing and writing are closely connected and often work together as part of the same meaning-making process. Drawing provides children with a visual and accessible way to represent their thoughts, which can then be extended through written marks. When classroom practices support this relationship, children are more confident, engaged, and motivated to express themselves through writing. This study was limited to observations within a single preschool classroom context and therefore does not aim to generalise findings across all Brunei preschool settings. Future research could explore how drawing and writing practices vary across different preschool environments or examine how teachers balance school-readiness expectations with child-centred literacy approaches over time.

The observations discussed in this paper suggest that children's engagement with writing is shaped not only by their individual abilities, but also by how writing activities are framed and experienced in the classroom. When writing is presented mainly as a task to be completed, children's focus may shift toward compliance rather than communication. In such situations, writing can become associated with completing worksheets or copying words rather than expressing ideas. In contrast, when drawing and writing are integrated and valued together, writing becomes a natural extension of children's ideas and experiences. This creates opportunities for children to view writing as meaningful and purposeful, rather than simply as a requirement to be fulfilled.

For Brunei preschool teachers, embracing the relationship between drawing and writing offers a practical and achievable way to support early literacy development while remaining aligned with national educational goals under SPN21. Valuing drawing as part of early writing does not mean lowering expectations for writing development. Instead, it involves recognising children's developmental pathways and building on their existing strengths in visual representation and storytelling. By allowing children to begin with drawing and gradually incorporate written elements, teachers can create more supportive learning environments that encourage children to experiment with writing and develop confidence as emerging writers.

The findings suggest that early writing development cannot be understood solely as the acquisition of technical writing skills. Rather, children's engagement with writing is shaped by the social and pedagogical conditions through which literacy activities are introduced and experienced in preschool classrooms. When opportunities for drawing, storytelling, and child-led expression are limited in favour of highly structured writing tasks, children may participate in writing in more compliance-oriented ways. Recognising drawing as part of literacy practice therefore requires broader reflection on how early writing is conceptualised within preschool education and how classroom practices influence children's experiences of communication and meaning-making. Ultimately, supporting children's movement from drawing to writing requires reflection on everyday classroom practices and the ways in which literacy activities are designed and implemented.

Small changes, such as allowing time for drawing, encouraging children to explain their work, and using writing for real purposes, can make a meaningful difference in how children experience writing. These practices help position writing as a meaningful tool for communication rather than merely a technical skill to be mastered.

Recognising drawing as a legitimate part of early writing also reflects sociocultural perspectives that view literacy as a meaningful social practice rather than a purely technical process (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012). When children are given opportunities to communicate ideas through drawing, talk, and writing, they participate in authentic literacy experiences that support both learning and expression. In this way, integrating drawing and writing in preschool classrooms may help create literacy environments that support both academic development and children's meaningful participation in communication, creativity, and early literacy practices within the Brunei educational context.

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