



## An Analysis of Early Writing Skills among Grade I Students

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### ABSTRACT

Writing ability is one of the fundamental skills that students at the elementary education level must acquire, as it serves as an essential foundation for academic success at higher stages of education. This study aims to analyze the level of early writing skills and to identify the factors influencing early writing ability among Grade I students at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili, Sorong Regency. A descriptive qualitative research method was employed, with Grade I students and the Grade I classroom teacher as research informants. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model comprising data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data credibility was verified through source, technique, and time triangulation. The findings indicate that the early writing ability of Grade I students at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili has developed well overall. Most students were able to read and write upon entering Grade I, having already acquired foundational literacy skills at kindergarten, facilitated by additional private tutoring in some cases. Students are generally able to write letters, words, and their own names with reasonable fluency, although individual guidance is still needed to improve neatness, letter-size consistency, and writing independence. Two

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Interacting categories of factors influence early writing development: internal factors, including fine motor readiness and learning motivation; and external factors, encompassing the teacher's role in individual guidance, parental support at home, and the availability of learning media such as letter cards and picture media. The combination and synergy of these factors is decisive in determining the optimal development of students' early writing competence.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a conscious and deliberate endeavor carried out by families, communities, and governments through diverse lifelong activities, both formal and non-formal, to prepare individuals to face future challenges by developing knowledge, skills, and values (Tilaar, 2009). In Indonesia, the National Education System Act No. 20 of 2003 establishes that education aims to develop individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, healthy, creative, independent, and responsible as democratic citizens. Within this framework, writing is recognized as one of the most essential foundational skills to be acquired in primary education, serving not only as an academic tool but also as a medium for expressing ideas, communicating information, and developing creativity (Tarigan, 2008).

Early writing, or beginning writing (*menulis permulaan*), encompasses the initial competencies that first-grade students must develop, including the recognition and production of letters, the construction of simple words, and the formation of basic sentences. Suparno and Yunus (2006) emphasize that early writing instruction requires a systematic, contextual, and continuous approach. Research on early writing development across international contexts corroborates this view: Jimenez et al. (2022), in a Scopus-indexed meta-analysis published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, demonstrated that handwriting fluency in preschool and elementary-age children is positively influenced by structured

instructional support targeting both fine motor skills and letter formation. Bigozzi et al. (2023), in a *Frontiers in Psychology* longitudinal study, further showed that the quality of the home literacy environment in preschool is a significant mediational predictor of children's reading and writing skills in primary school, highlighting the interplay between family context and early writing outcomes.

At the national level, studies on early writing difficulties in Indonesian primary schools consistently identify two categories of influencing factors: internal factors, including fine motor readiness, memory, interest, and motivation; and external factors, encompassing parental attention, family environment, school conditions, and the quality of instructional media and teaching strategies (Hulwah & Ahmad, 2022; Lestari & Rahmawati, 2022; Susbandiyah & Miftahudin, 2022). Despite a growing body of research on early writing strategies and media, empirical studies that simultaneously analyze both the current level of early writing skills and the range of factors influencing their development in the context of eastern Indonesia, particularly Sorong Regency in West Papua, remain scarce. This study addresses that gap by providing a contextually grounded empirical account of early writing development at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili.

The research objectives are (1) to analyze the level of early writing skills among Grade I students at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili, Sorong Regency; and (2) to identify the internal and external factors influencing the development of those skills.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research approach. Qualitative research, as defined by Moleong (2017), is intended to understand phenomena as experienced by research subjects, including behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions, in a holistic and contextual manner. Sugiyono (2019) further emphasises that qualitative research is conducted in natural conditions

with the researcher as the primary instrument, and that data collection is carried out through triangulation techniques, with analysis conducted inductively. The descriptive qualitative design was selected because the study sought to describe, interpret, and understand the natural conditions of early writing development in the Grade I classroom without experimental manipulation of variables.

### **Research Setting, Participants, and Informants**

The research was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili, Sorong Regency, West Papua Province. The primary research participants were Grade I students, who were directly observed during writing activities in the natural classroom setting. The Grade I classroom teacher served as the key informant, providing explanatory context and feedback regarding the observed conditions. The selection of informants followed the purposive principle articulated by Bungin (2010), whereby informants are selected based on their possession of relevant and in-depth knowledge of the research problem. Primary data were obtained through interviews with the teacher and students and observation of classroom writing activities. Secondary data were obtained from school documents, including organizational records, school vision and mission statements, and school facility documentation.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Data collection was carried out through three complementary techniques: (1) unstructured observation, in which the researcher engaged in students' daily classroom activities to observe writing practices naturalistically; (2) interviews conducted both directly and through intermediaries, as appropriate to the research context (Arifin, 2019); and (3) documentation comprising photographs, school records, and other relevant archival materials (Sugiyono, 2018). The researcher served as the primary research instrument (key instrument), supported by a writing test, interview guide, audio recorder, and camera phone as supplementary instruments.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (as cited in Siyoto, 2018; Sugiyono, 2018), comprising three continuous stages: (1) data reduction, involving summarizing, coding, and simplifying the collected data; (2) data presentation, in the form of descriptive narrative accounts that reveal the interrelations among categories and provide a comprehensive portrayal of the phenomenon; and (3) conclusion drawing, conducted progressively from preliminary conclusions to verified final findings. To ensure data credibility, triangulation of sources, techniques, and time was applied in accordance with the qualitative validity principles set out by Sugiyono (2019).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Early Writing Skills of Grade I Students at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili

Based on observation and interview data collected at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili, Sorong Regency, the early writing skills of Grade I students show a positive and developing pattern overall. Most students entered Grade I with prior literacy experience from kindergarten and, in some cases, supplemented by private tutoring, which has facilitated their adaptation to formal writing instruction in primary school. The results across eight dimensions of early writing skills are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of Early Writing Skill Dimensions: Strengths and Areas for Development

Writing Skill Dimension	Strengths Observed	Areas Requiring Further Development
Letter formation	Most students form legible letters with recognizable shapes.	Variation in neatness and proportionality across students; some inconsistency in letter size.
Sound-letter correspondence	Most students understand the relationship between letters and their phonemic representations.	Some errors in writing specific letters; phonetic and visual reinforcement still needed.
Writing one's own name	Nearly all students can write their name independently.	In formal contexts (tests), some students need visual cues or models.
Copying words/sentences	Students copy from the board adequately.	Some students copy letter-by-letter rather than word-by-word; speed and

Line adherence	Many students write within the lines.	fluency varies. Some have difficulty maintaining consistent letter alignment and position.
Meaningful marks	Students produce recognizable letters rather than random marks; symbolic understanding is emerging.	Letter forms not yet fully consistent or independent.
Simple word writing	Students can write simple words if modeled on the board.	Dictation-based writing (without visual cues) remains challenging.
Pencil use	All students hold and use pencils without major difficulty.	A small number of tires, quickly, is indicative of developing fine motor stamina.

As shown in Table 1, students demonstrate foundational competence across all eight dimensions assessed, with particular strengths in pencil use, letter-sound correspondence, and name writing. However, dimensions such as line adherence, dictation-based writing, and copying speed reveal areas where guided practice and further developmental support are needed. The teacher plays an active role in scaffolding these processes through individual guidance, enlarged writing models at the chalkboard, and patient one-on-one accompaniment for students who require additional support.

These findings are consistent with comparable studies in Indonesian primary school contexts. Hulwah and Ahmad (2022) and Lestari and Rahmawati (2022) found that early writing ability in Grade I and II students at Indonesian elementary schools is generally categorized as developing adequately, with prior TK literacy experience identified as a key enabling factor. The current findings also align with the international literature: Coradinho et al. (2023), in a Scopus-indexed study, found that handwriting quality and speed in second-grade children are significantly related to fine motor process characteristics, including pencil pressure, vertical and horizontal letter size, and velocity, underscoring the developmental nature of early writing competence. Similarly, Bigozzi et al. (2023) confirmed that children who enter primary school with stronger emergent literacy skills, including those nurtured through home literacy environments, demonstrate more rapid and stable writing development

in the early grades.

### Factors Influencing Early Writing Skills

The analysis of observation and interview data identifies two interacting categories of factors that shape early writing development at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili. Table 2 provides a structured overview of these factors.

**Table 2.** Internal and External Factors Influencing Early Writing Development

Factor Category	Supporting Sub-factors	Constraining or Developmental Sub-factors
Internal	Fine motor readiness: most students demonstrate adequate pencil grip and control for age; some fatigue quickly, suggesting fine motor development is still ongoing.	Learning motivation: Students show intrinsic motivation when personalizing writing tasks (e.g., writing their own names); formal test contexts reveal lower motivation without visual cues.
External	Teacher role: consistent individual guidance at the chalkboard; enlarged writing models provided; patient one-on-one accompaniment for students with difficulty.	Parental support: most students have been guided in writing at home since early childhood; some attended private tutoring before school entry. Letter cards and picture media effectively support letter recognition and word formation.

The internal factors of fine motor readiness and learning motivation are particularly prominent in the present data. Regarding fine motor readiness, while most students are able to hold and use pencils without major difficulty, a minority experience fatigue that reflects the ongoing development of fine motor stamina, consistent with findings by Jimenez et al. (2022), who noted that handwriting fluency is contingent on both lower-level motor skills and higher-order cognitive processes and that instructional support must target both dimensions. Suggate et al. (2023), in a Scopus-indexed longitudinal study, further confirmed that fine motor skills significantly predict early academic performance, including writing outcomes, particularly in the early primary grades.

Regarding motivation, students demonstrate heightened intrinsic

engagement when writing tasks relate to personally meaningful content, such as writing their own names or displaying their writing to peers. This observation is aligned with self-determination theory, which posits that tasks affording autonomy and personal relevance elicit stronger intrinsic motivation and, consequently, higher levels of effort and persistence in skill development (Ryan & Deci, 2000; as cited in Rusli et al., 2025).

The external factors identified in this study converge on a central theme: the synergistic role of the teacher, parents, and simple learning media in supporting early writing development. The classroom teacher's consistent practice of individual guidance, use of enlarged written models, and adaptive pacing of instruction reflects the pedagogical responsiveness that international research identifies as critical for early writing support (Bingham et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2020, as cited in Jimenez et al., 2022). Parental support, particularly in the form of pre-school writing practice at home and private tutoring, is a decisive external enabler: Bigozzi et al. (2023) established that the home literacy environment and parental engagement in early literacy activities serve as significant mediators of writing skill development in the primary grades.

The availability and use of letter card and picture media in the classroom provides concrete visual scaffolding for letter recognition and word formation, which aligns with research demonstrating that concrete, visually supported instructional materials reduce cognitive load and support early writers in bridging the gap between oral language and written symbol systems (Sadiman, 2010; Susbandiyah & Miftahudin, 2022). The present findings contribute an important empirical dimension to this body of research by demonstrating, in the specific context of a primary school in Sorong Regency, West Papua, that the combination and synergy of these three external support structures, rather than any single factor in isolation, is what determines the quality and pace of early writing development.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the early writing skills of Grade I students at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili, Sorong Regency, are at a well-developing stage. Most students entered Grade I with foundational literacy competencies acquired at kindergarten, enabling them to adapt readily to formal writing instruction. Students demonstrate adequate ability to write letters, words, and their own names, although individual guidance remains necessary to improve neatness, letter-size consistency, and the capacity for writing without visual models. The development of early writing skills is shaped by the interplay of internal factors, specifically fine motor readiness and learning motivation, and external factors, comprising the classroom teacher's individual guidance, parental support at home, and the availability of concrete learning media.

These factors do not operate in isolation; rather, their synergistic combination constitutes the primary driver of early writing development. This study contributes empirical evidence from an underrepresented educational context in eastern Indonesia and affirms the importance of collaborative, multi-factor approaches to early writing instruction. Future research should examine the longitudinal development of early writing skills across the early primary grades, investigate the potential of structured fine motor training programs in similar contexts, and explore the role of technology-based learning media in supporting writing development in resource-constrained schools.

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## Declarations

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