



**ASSESSMENT OF STARTERS WRITING: CASE STUDY ON  
FIRST GRADE DEAF STUDENTS AT STATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN OF KENDALREJO,  
EAST JAVA, INDONESIA**

**Mahura Mayangsari<sup>i</sup>, Munawir Yusuf**

Special Education Department, University of Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

**Abstract:**

Starters writing assessment is a systematic process by using appropriate instruments in order to determine learning behavior, placement, and learning in starters writing. Therefore, certain difficulties could be detected early. This study aims to conduct initial assessment to find deaf students with barriers in starters writing at State Elementary School for Exceptional Children of Kendalrejo, Talun, Blitar. The study is qualitative descriptive with 6 deaf students of 1st grade as samples. Data collection procedures of the study are in-depth interview with teacher by using structured interview guide, classroom observation, individual assessment analysis and documentation. The data are then verified and analyzed through theoretical interpretation to identify the barriers, needs, and recommendations in treating each student based on the writing process. Study results of the starters assessment show that there is a deaf student who has problem in eye-hand coordination and fine motoric. At last, the study offers solutions of needs and recommendations on writing skills through the fine motoric practice needs, training the students to continue writing, involving the students gradually, choosing the strategies that fit their difficulty level in the writing tasks, building confidence of the students, and arranging parenting class by the school.

**Keywords:** starters writing assessment, deaf students, barriers in starters writing, needs and recommendations in starters writing

---

<sup>i</sup> Corresponding author: [mahuramayang@gmail.com](mailto:mahuramayang@gmail.com)

## **Introduction**

According to Tarigan (2008), writing is an activity to send down or depict graphic symbols that describe a language which is understood by a person so that the others can read directly the graphic symbols if they can understand the language and graphic depiction. It is also defined as a multisensory activity which combines seeing, listening, feeling, and experiencing activities (Ann Logsdon, 2007:23). It is divided into two stages, which are starters and advanced writings. Our discussion is focused in the starters writing that is also called as handwriting. According to Sunardi (1997), teaching (handwriting) focuses on two main components, which are: readable and fluency in reading. Both can be improved by the following ways: the correct posture, the right way of holding a pencil, and the exact position of paper.

Difficulty in learning writing is generally a form of the wrong writing skills process. According to Yusuf et al (2003:11), *“There are four writing skills developments and the construction strategies, which are readiness to write, block letters writing, transition phase, and cursive writing”*. Therefore, begin from the readiness of children to write should be noted in the teaching writing. Cause of difficulties in learning writing is often related to how the children hold a pencil (stationery). According to Hornsby in Abdurrahman (2003), there are four kinds of the children’s ways of holding pencil that could be used as a hint that they experience learning writing disability, which are (1) the angle of the pencil is too large, (2) the angle of the pencil is too small, (3) gripping the pencil (like going to punch), (4) hooking the pencil in hand or dragging.

Based on the various techniques or ways of holding a pencil that could be used as a hint that the children experience learning writing disability, it shows that most cases of writing disability children cause by their incorrect ways of holding the pencil. To help the writing disability children, particularly those who experience difficulties in writing by hand or handwriting, it is attempted that they are able to hold and use the pencil properly.

According to Lerner in Abdurrahman (2003), there are numerous activities, such as for children who are less able to hold pencil properly, may be with the must-hold pencil part bordered with tape, might be with the help of triangular assistance or trigonal pencil or using stationary which is larger (markers and the others). Triangular assistance or called as Trigonal pencil is one of alternative media to strive for and assist the children in holding the pencil properly. By changing the correct ways of writing, it is expected that the writing skills could be maximized from the outset. Trigonal pencil is a modified form of pencil by providing triangular shape in the pencil grip. Thus, finger

patterns will be formed into the correct way of writing, with proper angle and finger position.

Difficulty in writing by hand could lead students to hardly follow the next writing session. Therefore, teaching writing should be given early, after that, it is developed in formal education stages at school. Lovitt in Abdurrahman (2003) suggests that teaching writing includes: writing by hand or handwriting, spelling and expressive writing.

Implementation of writing activities in education begins at primary or elementary school. In the early stages of elementary school, it is generally introduced to the basic concepts of writing or pre-writing. Many previous studies result findings that most of 1<sup>st</sup> grade students experience barriers in the starters writing. Considering that it is the basic for further development of writing and reading skills in all subjects. Writing concepts should be embedded early, so that when there is a delay or inadequacy in one of the writing skills aspects, the treatment would be detected early through assessment.

Assessment is a strategy of collecting and analyzing information which is used as a basis of decision making regarding all aspects of learning (Cole & Chan, 1994). Wallace and Longlin (1979) states that it is a systematic process by using appropriate instruments to identify the learning behavior, placement, and learning (Wadhah, 2013). Similar opinion is expressed by Rosenberg (1982), that the assessment is a process of collecting information to be used for judgments and decisions making related to the children (Soendari, 2013). Based on the opinions, it could be concluded that assessment is a process of collecting information about a child that will be used to create judgments and decisions related to the child. The objective is to obtain information that is employed as judgments in planning the learning program of children.

According to Robb, Benardoni, and Johnson (1972) (in Robert M. Smith, 1982), assessment aims to (1) refine and identify the children, (2) make decision of placement of the children, (3) design the individualized education, (4) monitor the progress of the children individually, and (5) evaluate the effectiveness of the program. In addition to the above objectives, assessment results could encounter a lot of purposes; three of them are placement, instruction, and communication. While the benefits of assessment, according to National Early Childhood Assessment Resource Group (2000), are: (1) Supporting the children's learning, (2) Identifying the children whether they develop normally or have special needs, (3) Evaluating the program and monitor the children's needs, and (4) As a form of responsibility.

Assessment of starters writing is a systematic process by using appropriate instruments to identify the learning behavior, placement, and learning in starters writing. Therefore, if there are certain difficulties, they could be detected earlier.

However, initial assessment is needed to identify students, especially deaf children who experience barriers in the starters writing. Through the preparation process, structured implementation and analysis obtain a valid instrument with a clear assessment; hence, it could be applied in the assessment of students with barriers in writing.

## **Method**

This study is a descriptive qualitative research. It aims to describe, summarize a variety of conditions, situations, and phenomena of social reality that exist in the society as the research object, and/ disclose the reality into surface as a trait, character, nature, model, sign, and picture of the conditions, situations, or certain phenomena (Burgan Bungin, 2009:68).

According to Marshall & Gretcher, in a qualitative research, data collection is done in natural setting, primary data source, and data collection technique is more on participant observation, in-depth interview, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2012:309). This study focuses on doing the initial assessment to identify the deaf students who experience barriers in the starters writing at State Elementary School for Exceptional Children of Kendalrejo, Talun, Blitar. Data collection procedures of the study are in-depth interview with teacher by using structured interview guide, classroom observation, individual assessment analysis and documentation. Main instrument of the study is the researcher. Data analysis of the study is Interactive Analysis which is data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions or verification (conclusions). The validity of the data used in the study is by using triangulation.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **A. Description of Interview Results**

#### **1. Interview with teacher**

According to the teacher, the teaching and learning activities is quite conducive. A strategy used by the teacher in learning is that the teacher always tries to get into the world of children in which the world of 1<sup>st</sup> graders is still in the world of playing. Therefore, the children can be easily directed. If there are children who do not complete a task in a specified time, the teachers provide additional time and give motivation to get it done. No matter how small their progress is, the teacher will appreciate and provide feedback to improve the result of the given task further.

Unfavorable condition in the classroom, which is the task assessment, there are some students who have completed the task interrupt the other students who have not

finished it. Thus, the classroom atmosphere becomes not conducive for them who have not completed the task. The teacher's strategy in conducting the classroom atmosphere is by reminding the finished students to not interrupt the others. If they do it, the teacher will give consequence by not assessing their works.

Basic competency that has been implemented is upright cursive writing. The students are able to trace, thicken, and write detached letters. There are some of them who still need to be reminded in writing. A student who has not achieved is CN, who has not been able to read fluently.

In the reading competency, CN is not able to read fluently. This is because the students begin to recognize the letters in this 1<sup>st</sup> grade, so that it needs time and good coordination between parents and teachers in order to help CN. CN experiences difficulties in the upright cursive writing, writing neatness, and rashness of finishing task.

Such barriers do not affect the grade of the students. Middle test result in term of writing is not given special assessment. If there are students who experience difficulties in reading, the teacher will read the questions and dictate the answers. If the students are not able to write, the teacher helps dictating each word/ syllable/ letter to them according to their ability. If they are still not be able to write the letter, then the teacher will write it.

## **2. Classroom Observation**

Classroom observation is conducted by observing and following the teaching and learning process to see the further result of teacher's interview toward the condition of students in the classroom directly. Results of the classroom observation show that teacher's readiness in starting the lesson is quite good. The teacher writes the questions at white/blackboard and has prepared task sheets to each student.

Teaching and learning atmosphere in the classroom can be called as conducive, although there are some students approach the teacher back and forth because they want to check the answers, whether it is correct or not. There are some of them who ask for help to the teacher, hence, the teacher approach the students who need help. In providing assistance, the teacher does not directly show the correct answer, but giving instructions for the students to find the answer by their own, so that they understand more, because they experience finding their own answer. Indeed, the needed time for finding the answer is varied, there are students who can immediately find the answer, and there are some others who need a long time to find the answer.

In the observation process, the classroom is including conducive. The strategy used is that the teacher tries to enter the students' world, which is play world.

Therefore, the students can be directed and follow the atmosphere created by the teacher. In addition, the teacher always gives motivation to the students who have not finished the task.

The classroom atmosphere becomes crowded because the students cannot wait for their turns to ask the teachers and want to quickly finish the given task immediately. The strategy used by the teacher is that giving explanation to the students and providing other activities/ asking them to find the answers before the teacher approach them.

The basic competency that has been implemented is upright cursive writing. The students are able to trace, thicken, and write detached letters. There are some of them who still need to be reminded in writing the letters correctly and neatly. Some students are not able to write correctly because they want to quickly finish and interfere each other.

At the time of observation, the student who experiences the barriers in writing is CN. CN has difficulties in term of writing neatness and concentration; she looks listless in writing, position of paper is consistently aslant from the beginning until the end of the writing test, and position of body is more often attached to the table. Those barriers are not affected the grade of the students.

## **B. Analysis of Barriers, Needs, and Recommendations of Treatment Based on the Writing Process**

Writing process is one of important aspects in writing that could affect someone's writing result. Therefore, the writing process of students also needs to be assessed. These are the following criteria in the writing process: (1) The correct way of holding the pencil; (2) The fine motor skills in writing; (3) The position of the paper/book; (4) The sitting position of the students; and (5) The distance of the eye and the paper/book.

The assessment process is conducted toward the 6 deaf students of 1<sup>st</sup> grade at State Elementary School for Exceptional Children of Kendalrejo, Blitar, East Java. In the process, a student with initial name CN is identified experiencing barriers in the starters writing. The descriptions of individual assessment results as well as explanation about barriers, needs, and recommendations in treating the students who experience barriers in the starters writing based on the writing process are as follow:

### **1. Analysis of Process**

Based on the observation process, CN looks experiencing barriers. In individual stage, the same errors appear in the writing process. Considering the first point of assessment, which is the way of holding a pencil, writing position is with middle finger pressed too

much. The correct hand position is the pencil placed between thumb and forefinger. Tips of the thumb, forefinger, and middle finger press the pencil flexibly, not rigid.

Furthermore, the assessment of paper/book position (The right hand is used to write, the left hand is for pressing the book so that it cannot easily slide). It is also visible in the picture that the paper position is slanted approximately  $45^{\circ}$  to the left. The left hand is in accordance with its function that is to press the paper so that it does not shift. The slant position of the paper is consistent until the end of writing test completion.

The third assessment is the seat position of the students (the position of the body when sitting should be upright, chest does not stick to the table). The seat position of CN is slightly bent, and the chest occasionally sticks to the table. Distance between the eyes and paper/ book should be approximately 25-30 cm, while CN writes in a distance of  $\pm 15$ cm.

## **2. Analysis of Barriers Cause**

### *a. Hand position aspect*

This is because students tend to press the pencil, so that their middle finger is bent. It happens because they are used to write by pressing a pencil strongly, therefore, they unconsciously bend their fingers/ less flexible in holding the pencil. The writing result is also not good enough. Based on the teacher's interview, information obtained is that CN shows less appropriate way of writing from the beginning she entered the classroom. It is possible that the way of writing is in the former education before elementary school, which is kindergarten.

### *b. Sitting position aspect*

In writing, chests of the students sometimes stick on the tables, so that they get score of 2. This is because their bodies and the tables are not proportional. Therefore, in order to adjust, their chests often stick on the tables. The provided tables are contributed by the Department. Thus, the manufacture process cannot be identified the appropriateness between the size of the tables and the portion of their bodies. Considering the forms of the tables and chairs, they are also less supportive. The tables are too high and less suitable with the posture of 1<sup>st</sup> grade students who are averagely small. This affects the distance of the students' eyes and the paper to be much closer. It should be 30 cm, while CN is  $\pm 15$ cm.

## **3. Needs and Recommendations**

Based on the barriers experienced by the students in the writing process, the students need some following matters:

- a) Habituation program in term of how to hold pencil, by way of placing a pencil between thumb and index finger, and tapping the pencil with the tips of the thumb, forefinger, and middle finger flexibly, not rigid.
- b) Availability of a seat or modified table that fits the body shape of young children. The modified table with slanted form will help them to sit more upright; hence, they do not bend their necks too much. And when working on a task, the slanted table will automatically extent their wrists so that they can write.
- c) Habituation of a proper posture during the writing process, which is the upright body and the eye-book distance approximately 25-30 cm.

### **C. Analysis of Barriers, Needs, and Recommendations of Treatment Based on the Writing Result**

Writing result is the most important aspect in the assessment of writing. Therefore, it has a great value in the assessment criteria. The result of assessment criteria consists of each different value of questions. The assessment criteria included in this assessment test are: (1) Match/ unmatched with the sample line, (2) space and line appropriate/ inappropriate, (3) consistency of space or spacing between words in the sentence, (4) consistency of letters spacing in the words, (5) consistency of font size, (6) appropriateness of font size, (7) upright or not tilted writing, and (8) letter shape in accordance with its formation.

In the following subchapters, the assessment results of CN and the explanation of barriers, needs, and recommendations in treating CN who experiences barriers in the starters writing based on the writing result are presented.

#### **1. Analysis of Process and Test Result**

In the whole process, CN does not have significant obstacles; CN could hold the pencil correctly. The paper/ book position is not correct but the left hand pressing is correct. The sitting position of CN is often attached to the table. Although the distance between eyes and book is > 25 cm, it is not too close to the eyes. At the time of the test, CN completes the task in more than 25 minutes with the given time of 30 minutes.

Based on the written test result, in indicators of copying pictures and letters, CN makes many errors in straight and curved lines. The formation of lines is in a hurry and sometimes out of basis. In the formation of straight line, there are many bent and disconnected lines found. Whereas, when making curved line, rigid lines are found. Meanwhile, in indicators of copying letters, many lines are out of the sample and the formation is sometimes not finished until the end. This is visible in letters "d" and "m",



the formation process is directly created from the top end to the bottom straightly circular, the shape of stomach part is sometimes still too small or large. Therefore, all the forms of letters are incorrect. In the formation of letters "m", many of them are not complete until the bottom. Overall, the letters "a" and "b" are already better.

In the indicators of thickening pictures, there are errors in which the lines are formed in a hurry so that many curved and straight lines are out of the indicators that have been determined. There are also some curved disconnected lines.

In the indicators of copying letters, there are some errors in the font size consistency, font size suitability, italics and fonts which are compatible with the formation or not. The suitability and consistency of letters formation in the provided boxes are still inconsistent; the letters are sometimes too large and too small.

In the indicators of copying simple sentences, there are lacks of spacing consistency between the letters in a sentence, font size suitability, fonts which are not in accordance with the formation, font size consistency. CN makes some errors in the formation of letters "a", "m", "l". The font size of the words is too large and the formation process is in a hurry.

## **2. Analysis of Barriers Cause**

This analysis stage tries to discover the possibility of the barriers cause experienced by CN. To support the cause of the barriers, interview with teacher is also conducted. From the interview results, the data obtained are as follows:

### *a. Description of learning writing of the students when in a dormitory*

The students spend their daily activities in a dormitory. There, they learn with their dorm friends. The parents of CN are less concerned about the development of their child. Therefore, it can be concluded that the learning patterns of the students at the dorm and house is not supported by the parents and relevant parties.

### *b. Response of the students during the learning process*

When the students are reminded in the learning, they want to accept suggestions of the teachers and improve their works, although sometimes they also do not want to listen to the suggestions of the classroom teacher.

### *c. Achievement of learning results of writing*

In the aspect of reading and storytelling, CN is included as the students who progress rapidly compared to the others. When the teacher asks to tell her daily life, CN is able to tell the story in some detail. In contrast to the others, they might be able to write neatly and the process is also correct, but CN has the ability in term of storytelling.

### 3. Needs and Recommendations

CN experiences barriers in eye-hand coordination, and fine motoric. Based on the barriers in writing of CN, it can be formulated the needs and recommendation for improving the writing skills.

- a. Fine motoric practice needs
  - 1) Control of muscle. Developed through manipulative activities. For example: cutting with scissors, drawing with the fingertips, tracing, and coloring.
  - 2) The basic skills can be developed through manipulation activities, such as: cutting, drawing with the fingertips, finding differences and similarities of shapes, colors, positions, etc. furthermore, it can be developed through other exercises like the following; (a) hand movements in various directions; up, down, left, right, front, behind; (b) tracing the geometric forms and the dotted line; (c) connecting the dots; (d) making a horizontal line from left to right; (e) creating circle line to the outside and inside ; (f) eye-hand coordination. Drawing circle and other geometric shapes; and (g) visual discrimination practicing distinguishing the shapes, sizes, and colors.
- b. Train the students to continue writing, involve them gradually, and choose the appropriate strategies that fit the difficulty level to work on the writing task. Give an attractive and interesting task, such as writing letters to friends, writing on a postcard, writing message for friends, and so on.
- c. Build the confidence of the students. Give a fair praise to every effort they made. Do not ever underestimate or exploit them because that would make them feel inferior and frustrated. Patience of the parents and teachers will make them feel calm and patient against themselves and their own efforts.
- d. The school and teachers should arrange a parenting class so that the parents can be better care for their children and their learning patterns.

### Conclusions

Starters writing assessment is a systematic process by using appropriate instruments in order to determine the learning behavior, placement, and learning in the starters

writing. Therefore, certain difficulties could be detected early. The process of starters writing assessment is conducted on the 6 deaf students of 1<sup>st</sup> grade at State Elementary School for Exceptional Children of Kendalrejo, Blitar, East Java. In the assessment process, it can be identified that a student with initial name CN experiences the barriers in the starters writing. Based on the starters writing assessment results, it can be determined that CN has problems in the eye-hand coordination and fine motoric. Based on the barriers, the needs and recommendations to improve the writing skills are formulated as follow: (1) Fine motoric practice needs; (2) Training the students to continue writing, involving them gradually, choosing the appropriate strategies that fit their difficulty level to work on the writing task; (3) Building the confidence of the students; and (4) Arranging parenting class by the school and teachers.

The starters writing assessment must be optimal and sustainable. Participation of all the school parties, families, and society is expected to optimize the learning behavior, placement, and learning of the starters writing. It is suggested for further and whole case study of the starters writing assessment for the entire children with special need. Thus, agreement of the starters writing assessment can be obtained for each type of the exceptional children.

## References

- [1] Abdurahman, Mulyono. (2003). Pendidikan Bagi Anak Berkesulitan Belajar. Jakarta: Depdikbud RI.
- [2] Burhan Bungin. (2011). Penelitian Kualitatif Komunikasi, Ekonomi, Kebijakan Publik dan Ilmu Sosial Lainnya. Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media Group.
- [3] Cole & Chan. (1994). Teaching Principles and Practice. Second Edition. New York: Practice Hall.
- [4] Hallahan, Daniel P. Dkk. (2005). Learning Disability. USA: Pearson Education.
- [5] Logsdon, A. (2007). Reading Fluency. Retrieved November, 25, 2007.
- [6] National Early Childhood Assessment Resource Group. (2000). Principles And Recommendations For Early Childhood Assessments. USA: The National Education Goals Panel.
- [7] Smith, R. M. (1982). How to learn: Applied theory for adults. Chicago: Follet Publishing Company Styles (PILS). Am. J. Pharm. Educ, 68(2), 37.
- [8] Soendari, T. (2016). Asesmen Keterampilan Menulis dalam Pendidikan Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus. JASSI ANAKKU, 9(1), 97-106.

- [9] Sugiyono. (2012). *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- [10] Sunardi. (1997). *Mengenal Siswa Berkesulitan Belajar*. Surakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan UNS.
- [11] Tarigan. Henry Guntur (2008). *Menulis: Sebagai Suatu Ketrampilan Berbahasa*. Bandung: Angkasa.
- [12] Yusuf, Munawir, Sunardi, Mulyono Abdurahman. (2003). *Pendidikan Bagi Anak Dengan Problema Belajar*. Solo: PT. Tiga Serangkai Pustaka Mandiri.
- [13] Wadhah, K. (2013). *Pengaruh permainan tradisional congklak terhadap kemampuan memahami kosa kata baru anak tunalaras kelas iv slb e bhina putera surakarta tahun ajaran 2012/2013* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Sebelas Maret).

Creative Commons licensing terms

Authors will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Special Education Research shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflict of interests, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated on the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).