

Cursive handwriting skills of primary school pre service teachers

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ABSTRACT

Normally, a pre service teacher will get an education in order to prepare themselves in cognitive knowledge, positive attitudes and skills. Moreover, what will be faced by them is educating children who are actually going through the initial stages of learning, namely reading, writing, and counting. Writing, especially cursive handwriting, helps children train their motor skills. To teach cursive handwriting, the pre service teacher should have good cursive handwriting skills. It would be nice if during their study, pre service teachers get cursive handwriting training. This article will describe the learning activities of primary teacher education program related to cursive handwriting. Qualitative studies were conducted on 39 students in the same class. The result shows that learning activities which implement planning, implementation and evaluation stages can support students' skills in cursive handwriting. This process is being implemented in order to prepare pre service teachers to have good cursive handwriting skill.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is an important skill that must be mastered by someone who is involved in the academic world. At each level of education someone will learn how to write well adjusted to their portions. Thus, at the higher education level, each student will write a paper as the end result of ideas as well as inventions in his/her scientific field. Paper writing has a variety of objectives, one of those is to prove that knowledge has been found so that it has benefits for audiences [1].

Practicing writing skills at the primary school level is important [2]. In teaching writing to students, the teacher should be a role model so that it can provide concrete examples [3]. This certainly requires the teacher's writing skills. Thus, during the education, pre service teachers must be trained to have excellent writing skills.

The learning of writing skill is taught at the elementary school level. Even so, children begin experimenting handwriting since the age of two [4]. Handwriting is the production of symbols which, if arranged together, form a word. Handwriting requires coordination of cognitive, motor and neuromotor abilities [5]. There are two forms of handwriting that should be taught to students namely manuscripts or printing letters and cursive handwriting [6]. In cursive handwriting, letters are joined together to form a word. Writing cursive letters is included in the category of beautiful writing. Besides considered in terms of its beauty, cursive handwriting can also be assessed in terms of neatness, as the letters are joined together.

Cursive handwriting has great benefits for the cognitive development of early grade students. In the early process where the students being introduced to writing activities, they will be influenced by several factors namely physical, mental, and emotional [6]. Cursive handwriting are joined together with the

letters to form a word with continuous movement [7]. In short, cursive handwriting means to join letters together to form words with continuous hand movements. The separation in cursive handwriting is based on the word, so if it is still in one word, the writing is continued.

Cursive handwriting has a variety of purposes. One of which is to help students developing written communication that is carried out through writing activities. Two important things in cursive handwriting are readability and fluency. Readability is related to the writing that is easy to write and read. While fluency is related to the ease and speed in writing [7, 4].

Teaching cursive handwriting is indeed not easy, it takes patience for a teacher to teach students. In order to do so, explicit and direct, teaching of letter shapes and frequent practice are essential elements [8]. According to Tompkins [7] cursive handwriting can be taught through three stages, including: (a) handwriting before first grade, (b) handwriting in the elementary grade, and (c) handwriting in the middle and upper grades.

Several things are done to help students writing using cursive letters properly and correctly. There are criteria for writing cursive letters, including alignment, letter formation, line quality, slant of letters, sizing, and spacing [6]. However, the cursive handwriting in elementary school emphasize more on the shape and distance of letters. It should also be noted that cursive handwriting in Indonesia is different from that in other countries. The letters are written in italics in other countries, while in Indonesia the letters are written upright and only the connecting lines between letters are italicized.

Knowing the benefit and application of cursive handwriting to students, it is necessary for a teacher to have competent skills in cursive handwriting. pre service teachers should be prepared in such a way to be able to become professional teachers as well as role models for students. Included in writing activities that will be attached to learning activities every day. A study conducted by Karadag in Turkey said that it is important for pre service teachers to master cursive handwriting ability. There are Turkish language courses and basic education that have been taken for three years. The study discuss about the attitude formation of pre service teachers towards cursive handwriting [9]. It is different from that in Indonesia where there are no courses on cursive handwriting for pre service teachers.

The primary school teacher education program in Yogyakarta State University is one of the colleges that graduates primary school teacher candidates. In Bahasa Indonesia subject, the learning process also involves the learning of cursive handwriting skills. This is a positive step and initiative of lecturers in supporting students' cursive writing skills. This article will contain an overview of learning activities by involving students' cursive handwriting skills. To find out more, the following questions are obtained: the extent to which the use of cursive handwriting in learning activities and the students' participation in practicing cursive handwriting.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research aims to know how the learning process in term of supporting the students' cursive handwriting skills. The research method used is a qualitative method using a case study. Qualitative research is a type of research aimed at describing and analyzing phenomena, social activities, perceptions, and thoughts of people or groups [10]. Case study is an approach in research which studies a case intensively, deeply, detailed, and comprehensively [11]. Qualitative design of case study can explain the phenomena in detailed analysis [12] as qualitative research involves field work where researchers get their own experience [13]. Case study is an ideal research design which has clear scope ranging from the type of conclusion, discussion, homogeneity of samples and populations, type of insights, research strategies, and types of empirical evidence available [14].

This study aims to describe the learning process especially in the implementation of cursive handwriting skills, through observing the students during the learning process, conducting interviews, and documenting the study. This study involved 39 students in their 2nd semester in the same class. This aims to find out the learning process experienced directly by students. The implications of case study will be more clear if it is carried out on one scope [14].

The instrument in this study is the researcher herself (human instrument). Thus, a researcher should have a broad range of insights and sufficient theory to obtain information in the field. Data collection used in this study are interviews, observation sheets, and documentation of study. Data collection is a step taken in research aimed at obtaining data [15].

- a. Does every learning activity always involve writing skills?
- b. Do you find it difficult when writing in cursive letters?
- c. Are you helped by the instructions given by the lecturer regarding cursive handwriting?

The above questions are preliminary study conducted by the researcher to know the class condition. Questions are given in a form and then filled in by all students. Of the several questions given, three questions were chosen to be used to support this research.

Qualitative data analysis is carried out interactively and continuously until the data found has reached a saturation point [15]. After obtaining saturated data, descriptive data are then displayed. Triangulation technique is also significant to use, including in case study research [14]. A researcher must present the valid data in a research. Not to mention in qualitative research that has validity criteria, namely the degree of trust, transfer-ability, dependence, and certainty [10].

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

From the initial findings, it is found that in each meeting of Bahasa Indonesia subject, the learning process must involve cursive handwriting learning activity. When students were asked questions about cursive handwriting activities, 59% of students still find it difficult to write, and 41% do not feel any difficulty. Finally, all students answered that the learning activities helped their writing skills.

3.1. The use of cursive letters

The results of interviews that have been conducted to students are then transcribed in the finding section. Some interview results are presented in the following findings.

"As long as I attend this course, the lecturer always ask students to write or summarize the material presented by the presenter..." (M6)

"I usually write using serial letters only in Bahasa Indonesia subject..." (M15)

"Every week, there must be cursive handwriting task..." (M7)

"Lecture often asks students to come forward in the classroom to answer questions, and write on the board, such as making sentences and so on ..." (M11)

"During explaining the material, the lecturer asks the students to make a sentence, so we must be prepared to write and really pay attention to the lecturer ..." (M20)

"At the end of the lesson, the lecture always gives an assignment, either being submitted that day or being done later as a homework..." (M21)

"The assignment must be written in special notebooks for cursive handwriting, all students must have the book..." (M23)

"Yes, there is always an evaluation task, if the task is already finished, it will be submitted during the class and the lecture directly assess it ..." (30)

"We are given assignments and immediately given an assessment, the assignments are written in cursive letters in our notebooks especially for cursive handwriting. As we get the assignment quite often, a book is not enough, we have already had some books for cursive handwriting tasks..." (33)

"in every meeting of the lesson, the lecturer gives an assignment in the form of some evaluation questions that we have to finish them using cursive letters ..." (M9)

Furthermore, several students answered about the media that are used in cursive handwriting.

"I have already used 2 notebooks and this is the third, so I bound them using book clip ..." (M19)

"We always bring our note books to write assignment in every meeting ..." (M11)

"The assignment should be written in a note book especially for cursive handwriting, thus all the students must have and must bring the book ..." (M23)

"As usual, we write the assignments using ballpoint and notebook ..." (M5)

As shown in Figure 1, the following is a picture of one of the student's assignments written in a special notebook for cursive handwriting, where all students must have it as a taskbook

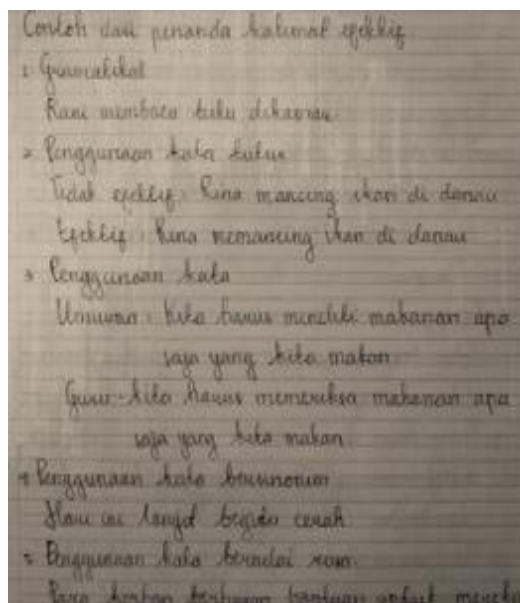


Figure 1. The student's cursive handwriting assignment

Furthermore, Figure 2 shows a picture of the students' activity when working on the assignment. It was seen that all students were serious in doing the cursive handwriting assignments.



Figure 2. Evaluation activity

Finally, Figure 3 illustrates when the students have the opportunity to answer the lecturer's questions. Students are asked to come forward and write their answers on the board using upright letters.



Figure 3. Answering question activity

From the observation conducted during the learning process, it is found that students were paying attention to the lecturer's explanation and the group's presentation. When given writing assignments both written in books and on the board, the students write them using cursive letters. All students also brought their notebooks as their assignment book for cursive handwriting. It is also found that one student brought three notebooks which are bound together. Then it was known that the bounded books were assignment book for Bahasa Indonesia subject since the first semester.

3.2. Student participation

The interview related to the involvement of students while attending Bahasa Indonesia class was conducted to obtain the data. The results shows that most of the students were able to follow the learning activities. The learning method that requires students to actively involve in the learning process results in the effectiveness of the lesson and the effectiveness of the students' attention toward the materials. Regarding how the assignments were given, several students responded as the following.

"All students work on assignments, then submit them. The lecturer also immediately gave scores to our assignments ..." (M16)

"Because the lecturer always assigns assignments every week, I get used to it ..." (M10)

"The assignments must be written in our assignment book, all students must have the book ..." (M22)

"Sometimes we do the assignment in groups if we find it difficult, our classmates are quite cooperative ..." (M18)

"As far as I know, all students always do the assignments. If a student is absent, he/she gives the notebook to his/her classmates to be submitted during the class, or it also can be submitted by the week after. Although we are not able to attend the class, we must finish the assignment ..." (M35)

When given questions related to learning activities that help their fluency in cursive writing, some students answered as follows.

"Inevitably they have to learn and have to be able to write using cursive letters, so it's quite helpful even though at the beginning they felt troubled ..." (M16)

"Some students who were not able to write well have become accustomed to and have been better than before ..." (M13)

"In addition to help in cursive handwriting, I also learned that some of the letters were revised so the writing must be different ..." (M32)

"I think it is important to be able to write cursive letters because later we will become elementary school teachers who teach cursive handwriting, so we need to master it ..." (28)

"The learning activity is quite helpful, because it requires us to master cursive handwriting and be used to it ..." (M7)

From the observations, it is known that all students participate the learning activities well. Students submitted the assignments at each meeting. When the results of the assessment being informed, the students are enthusiastic to find out the results of their work. So often that the students ask the lecturer about their assignment if the score is far from what they have been expected. Some students are able to write cursive letters neatly.

Before practicing the teaching and learning process for students, a teacher should have a linear education. This is related to pedagogic and knowledge skills which then become the basis for applying the teaching and learning process in the classroom. The learning process in the early grades generally focuses in reading, writing, and counting. In teaching the early graders of elementary school, the teacher should participate and facilitate the students in writing activities and introduce many kinds of text as well as give the examples of how to write correctly [16]. In writing activity, there must be some problems arise during the lesson. Teachers find cursive writing frightening, challenging and aggravating [17]. Therefore, teachers must apply their learning experiences during their prior educational process to overcome the existing problems [16].

Cursive handwriting contributes to students at the beginning of their writing period. Cursive handwriting helps them to develop their reading, communication, and fine motor skills [18]. Perceptive, motor and cognitive activities all contribute to advances in the development of handwriting skills [19]. Practicing cursive handwriting improve the letter formation and the letter parallelism and also the handwriting since it trains the students' fine motor skill [20]. In Indonesia, cursive handwriting is taught since the first grade. In contrast to the United States which teaches cursive handwriting in second and third

grade of primary school [18]. Thus, students should have good cursive handwriting skills. Otherwise, students will find difficulties when facing some previous documents such as the declaration of independence [18]. This kind of thing can have a negative impact on history.

Considering the importance of cursive handwriting for students, a teacher should teach it correctly and effectively. In the former education process, pre service teachers should be given separate training to improve their writing skills especially in cursive handwriting. From the research carried out to the teachers regarding their cursive writing skills, there are still many things that need to be improved in terms of pitch [21]. This is due to the lack of skills they have developed during their former education and the lack of training related to cursive writing [9]. Thus, it is necessary to analyze pre service teachers who will later be responsible for teaching writing to students. So that, later the teacher will have readiness in teaching.

Pre service teachers should develop the three main functions of education, namely intelligence, values, and skills [22]. Referring to this, it is a must for primary school teacher education institution to apply cursive handwriting skill as a skill that must be mastered by their students. Based on the study, it is found that cursive handwriting skills are being developed as a part of the learning process. This skill does not stand as a single subject, however it is embedded in Bahasa Indonesia subject. From the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, it can be seen that at each meeting, the lecturer always provides learning activities that involve cursive handwriting activity.

The cursive handwriting activities were carried out by students as assignments that were written in a special notebook for cursive handwriting. The notebook has lines as base for writing the cursive letters. This aims to make the cursive handwriting beautiful, neat and readable. In addition, it also aims to meet the criteria of good cursive handwriting such as font, alignment, letter and inter-word spacing, parallelism, word formation, and the enefits of writing [23].

Through interviews, documentation, and observations it is also known that all students in the class participate the learning process given by the lecturer well. Students participate actively during the learning activities and and also in doing the assignments. The flow of task collection has become routine at each meeting and students also immediately get feedback.

Learning activities carried out by the lecturer applied elements of improvement and habituation to cursive handwriting. From the planning stage, for instance, the lecturer asked students to prepare notebook as a medium for writing during learning activities. Likewise in the implementation stage, the lecturer involved students' cursive handwriting skills by writing the lecturing materials, answering the lecture's questions by writing on the board, and also writing the assignments on the notebook. Finally, at the end of the lesson, the lecturer gave evaluation tasks to the students. The lecturer also gave assessment to the students' writing. Overall, it can be seen that the learning process always involves activities to improve the students' cursive handwriting skill.

From the learning method used, students admitted that they were really helped related to their cursive handwriting skills. In fact, students rarely write using cursive letters other than those in this Bahasa Indonesia class. Thus, almost all students forget when the last time they wrote cursive letters. It has to be noted that the cursive handwriting has significant effects, one of which results in better spelling of writing [24].

Through the results of the preliminary study, it is also known that more than half of students found it difficult when writing using cursive letters. Cursive handwriting is considered to be the desired skill to have but difficult to master. Even so, cursive handwriting is easier to remember rather than typing [25].

Nowadays, handwriting is indeed rarely being used in this era of technological innovation. However, as pre service teachers, they need to adapt with the innovation as well as prepare themselves to educate their future students, not to mention by teaching handwriting skill [16]. The early stage of learning writing is carried out by elementary school teachers and also other educational components. Thus, the curriculum includes cursive handwriting skills to improve the students' fluency in writing [26].

Through the habituation of cursive handwriting, it can support the students' writing skill that later can be applied when teaching. The writing training for pre service teacher will affect the ability to teach cursive handwriting [9]. Generally, cursive handwriting is started to be taught to children aged 7-8 years [24]. A high intensity, handwriting training can have a positive impact on handwriting legibility [27]. At the initial age of writing, the teacher should convey it correctly. So, it is a must that the teacher must have good writing skills.

4. CONCLUSION

From the results of the discussion, it can be seen that the learning activities implemented by the lecturer are associated with the students' writing skills, especially cursive handwriting. This can be found in some activities such as evaluation process, answering question activity, and presenting activity. In addition,

students also actively participated in learning activities, especially in writing activities. Learning activities that involved writing skills will be used by students by using cursive handwriting. The learning scenario implemented by the lecturer that started from planning, implementation, and evaluation can be an effort in improving the writing skills of PGSD students (primary school pre service teacher education). This process is being implemented in order to prepare pre service teachers to have good cursive handwriting skill.

The researcher hopes this research can help pre service teachers elementary school and primary school teacher education providers to give attention cursive writing skills. Because writing skills have been given in early class learning which is the first step in learning to write. Some steps and efforts that are realized must be prepared by pre service teacher. This study has limitations in the place of research, different results can be considered in different places of research.

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