

TWIST BAND NEAT HANDWRITING

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Abstract

This project entitled “Low Neatness Level of Handwriting among the preschool Special Needs learners of learning difficulties at Raja Melewar Teacher Education Institute” is a project under the Creative and Innovative Programme. It is developed with the intention to solve the problem of low neatness level in handwriting among preschool learners with learning difficulties. 3 research questions which are addressed in this project are, what factors may cause low neatness level of handwriting, can the Twist-Band-NeatHandwriting(TBNH) method increase the level of handwriting neatness and how effective is the TBNH method. This project sees the involvement of 8 lecturers and 5 preschool learners with learning difficulties and qualitative research methods are adopted. Methods which are used in this project are, the first being the Ishikawa Graphic to find root causes of low neatness level of handwriting, next, the systematic Plan, Do, Check and Act flow(PDCA) and pro-contra table to develop the innovative product of TBNH and the third method is observation during field research in order to gauge the effectiveness of TBNH. 4 preschools are involved in the field research and observation. Based on the analysis and observation done, it has been identified that the 3 main causes of low neatness level of handwriting are incorrect way of holding pencil, not being focused during writing session and non-systematic training in writing. Through brainstorming and PDCA sessions and pro-contra table, the TBNH pencil and manual are

developed. By using various types of elastic bands and guided by the TBNH manual, the 5 subjects are able to acquire the correct technique of holding a pencil and control the formation of handwriting with an increase of 93.8% in neatness. The use of TBNH has also shortened the time spent in learning to acquire neat handwriting. TBNH also has been proven to be an effective technique to increase handwriting neatness level as 23 out of the 25 preschool learners in the field research observation are able to correct and improve their handwriting neatness. Preschool teachers also agree that TBNH has also changed the learners' perception toward writing. Learners like writing activity more after the exposure to TBNH. As a conclusion, TBNH is an effective innovation that can be used to increase handwriting quality level and which then assures effective communication. It is hoped that this innovation can be broadcast for the purpose of knowledge sharing.

Keyword: low neatness handwriting level, twist band, effective communication, Preschool Special Needs for learning difficulties

Introduction

Parents of children with learning difficulties in Special Needs preschools always hope that their children would at least be able to write their own name. In Special Needs preschools for children with learning difficulties, the children are given exposure for writing, reading and counting. Teachers use varied techniques to train children with Special Needs the right way of writing and how to write neatly. These children are given early intervention practices in writing. They are given practices to strengthen their fine motor skills as preparation for holding writing tools. Practices are in the form of pre-writing activities like kneading dough, followed by using rubber bands which are twisted around their fingers for finger exercise. The bands are pulled upwards and downwards and made into circles to lessen the stiffness of their fingers.

Statement of problems

Researchers embarked on this research based on their observation on five preschool learners with learning difficulties in a preschool in Seremban. The subjects seemed excited to write but their writing product has low level of neatness to the extent that it hinders reading.

It has been observed that there are five writing problems that cause low level of neatness in preschool learners with learning difficulties handwriting. The first is where alphabets are written too close as if on top of one another, The second writing problem is the incorrect formation of alphabets shape. Writing alphabets above the line is the next problem and the fourth is the unsystematic use of lowercase and uppercase letters. Last but not least is the spacing problem between letters and words.

Thus in order to overcome these writing problems, a technique named 'Twist Band Neat Handwriting' has been developed. Researchers try to use this technique on subjects to see whether it is an effective technique in improving writing neatness.

Research objectives

Thus the objectives of this research is to find the causes of the above writing problems and whether the Twist Band Neat Handwriting technique is effective in improving the preschool learners' handwriting.

Literature Review

Rosenblum, Weiss & Parush (2003) defined handwriting which is not neat as handwriting which is difficult to read, has many errors which makes reading difficult and comprehending the intended message seem almost impossible. These handwriting problems may be something very basic like formation of letters to a more advanced like spacing and placement of letters and words on a page.

Sutherland, Jane (2014) in her book 'Dysgraphia', states that someone who has problems in writing, usually has word coherence problem too. This is common among children who have dysgraphia, a writing problem. This is true especially for Special needs learners where mechanical ability is sometimes a challenge and what is more with processing ability like placement of letters in spaces.

Learners who struggles with letter forms and spacing need a lot of word processing activities and before they can do this, practice needs to be given to strengthen their fine motor skills. Activities involving picking, twisting, pegging and kneading are a few examples of activities that can strengthen fine motor.

Research methodology

Methods which are used in this project are, the first being the Ishikawa Graphic to find root causes of low neatness level of handwriting, next, the systematic Plan, Do, Check and Act flow(PDCA) and pro-contra table to develop the innovative product of TBNH and the third method is observation during field research in order to gauge the effectiveness of TBNH. 4 preschools are involved in the field research and observation.

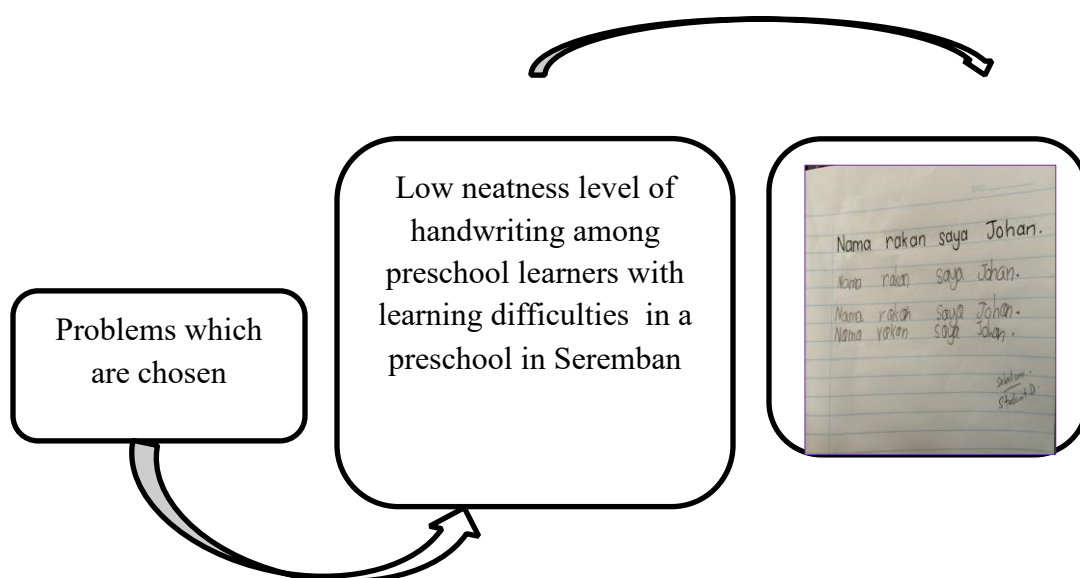


Figure 1 - Research focused which are carried out

During the research, the researchers' team used of elastic bands has attracted the subjects and it has also encouraged them to write neatly. Mastery in alphabet recognition is not the

main focus here as all the subjects chosen for this research know the alphabets. The only problem is, their handwriting which has low level of neatness that causes difficulty in comprehending and reading what has been written.

Writing is an important non-verbal communication for conveying messages from one person to another. While carrying out the research, researchers have observed other observations and findings concerning individual's needs in mastering neat handwriting. A good example is Brunei, which has taken the initiative to overcome the problem of low level of writing neatness by conducting a neat handwriting competition. This competition has received very positive feedback from many quarters of the public, from preschool learners to adults.

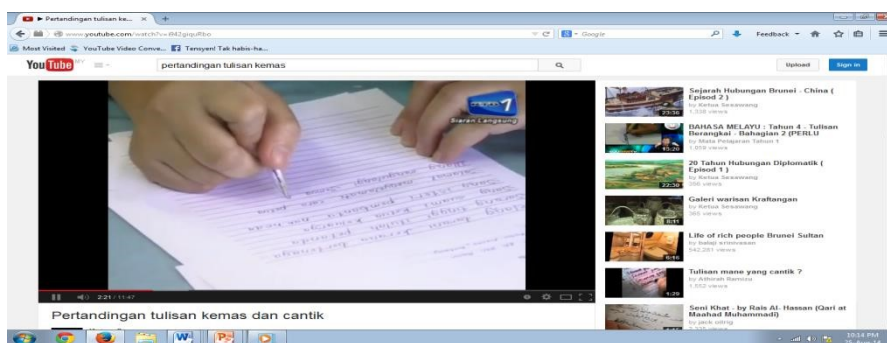


Figure 2 - Blogs of the writing competition in Brunei

Using the 5W+1H method further explains the research processes and findings. W (*What*) is what is meant by untidy handwriting or low neatness level handwriting? The first is where letters are written on top of one another, secondly is incorrect formation of letters, third, letters are written above the lines and fourthly, lowercase and uppercase letters are used unsystematically. The fifth and the last, is spacing of letters and words.

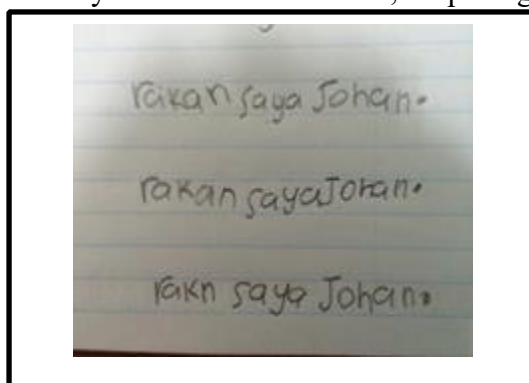


Figure 3 - Sample of untidy handwriting produced by one of the research subjects where lower and uppercase letters are not used correctly.

W (*Why*)? Based on observation and interview, this problem occurs among preschool learners with learning difficulties where there are lack of proper guidance which focuses on neat writing technique and importance is not given for neat writing practices. Parents, teachers and learners have different views on the importance of writing neatly.

W (*Where*) ? Researchers saw this problematic situation very prevalent in a preschool in Seremban district among learners with learning difficulties.

W (*When*)? Researchers observed untidy preschool learners ‘ handwriting when they carry out writing activities in class. W (*Who*) are the research subjects? Research subjects are Special needs preschool learners with learning difficulties.

H (*How*) ? This situation happens among research subjects due to their inability to decide the focal point that they have to put or position their fingers on their writing tools when writing.

Research findings

Based on the Ishikawa Graphic, it has been found that there are three factors or areas which these handwriting problems may occur that are prevalent among the Special Needs preschool learners with learning difficulties. Under the environment factor, the lack of systematic practice has been observed as the cause and under method, the wrong way of holding writing tools have been seen as the contributor of these handwriting problems. The third factor which is the human factor sees not being focused as the reason which triggers untidy handwriting. These can be shown in the diagrams below.

Table 1 - Causes of untidy handwriting among preschool learners with learning difficulties

FACTOR	ROOT CAUSE	SOURCE	FINDINGS
Human	Not focused	Observation Document analysis	Careless in writing
Method	Incorrect way of holding writing tools	Observation Video recording/Photo	Technique and position of holding pencil is rather incorrect
Environment	No systematic training	Observation	Learners are exposed to writing activities but lack guidance in writing with the correct

Through observation and pro-contra method it is found that Twist Band Neat Handwriting technique is effective and practical in improving the five subjects’ handwriting. The verification result of this is shown in the pro-contra Table 2, 3 and 4. This technique deals with the problem of not being focused, incorrect way of holding writing tools and no systematic practice.

Table 2 - Shows Cause 1: Not focused

NO.	SUGGESTED TECHNIQUE	PRO	CONTRA	ASSESSMENT
1	Fun learning activity	Enjoyable	Time, teachers, cost	Less practical
2	Drill work	Immediate feedback	Longer time	Less practical
3	Support material on writing tools	Attract learners' attention	Support material needs to be created	Practical

Table 3 - Shows Cause 2: Incorrect way of holding writing tools

NO	SUGGESTED TECHNIQUE	PRO	CONTRA	ASSESSMENT
1	Writing tools with support found in stationery shop	Hold pencil firmly	High cost	Not practical
2	Writing tools with support made of plastic	Hold pencil firmly	Slippery and hard	Not practical
3	Writing tools with rubber band as support	Cheap and hold pencil firmly	Support material needs to be created	Practical

Table 4 - Shows Cause 3 : No Systematic Practice

NO	SUGGESTED TECHNIQUE	PRO	CONTRA	ASSESSMENT
1	Expert course	Enjoyable	High cost for facilitators/experts	Less practical
2	Support material and User's Manual	More systematic	Complete manual needs to be produced	Practical
3	Module and training by teachers	Practice for learners	Teacher needs longer time to digest module	Less practical

Conclusion

Support material as in rubber band/elastic band on writing tools is practical to be used and it can attract learners' attention and interests to write neatly. Using writing tools with elastic band is cheaper and can overcome the problem of holding writing tools firmly. Researchers plan to continue using elastic band on Special needs preschool learners with learning difficulties' writing tools in schools.

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