Volume 8 Nomor 11, November 2025
ISSN: 27342488

# THE IMPORTANCE OF MANUAL WRITING IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' ENGLISH LITERACY SKILLS AT SMP KATOLIK ST. MARIA ASSUMPTA

**Desio De Amandio Nono Nule[1], Ubaldus Djonda[2]**
Email: dionule84@gmail.com[1], ubaldusdjonda@unwira.ac.id[2]
**Universitas Katolik Widya Mandira Kupang**

***ABSTRACT***

*This study investigates the importance of manual writing in developing English literacy skills among Grade 7 students at SMP Katolik St. Maria Assumpta. The research involved 24 students, equally divided between male and female participants, and was conducted using Classroom Action Research (CAR) to identify and address challenges in handwriting and reading comprehension. A pre-test revealed that students faced significant difficulties, including slow writing speed, poor legibility, motor coordination problems, and weak reading comprehension, particularly in making inferences and identifying main ideas. Structured manual writing activities, such as guided copying, vocabulary journaling, sentence construction, and short descriptive writing, were implemented as interventions. Classroom observations confirmed active student engagement and effective teacher guidance throughout the instructional process. Post-test results demonstrated significant improvements in handwriting speed, legibility, motor control, and reading comprehension, with most students achieving passing levels and showing better ability to extract details, make inferences, and identify main ideas. The findings indicate that manual writing serves as both a cognitive and physical tool, enhancing students' ability to organize thoughts, clarify ideas, and improve literacy skills. This study highlights the effectiveness of integrating manual writing into English instruction as a strategy to foster holistic literacy development in middle school students.*

***KeyWords****; Manual Writing, Handwriting, English Literacy, Reading Comprehension, Classroom Action Research, Grade 7 Students.*

## INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the essential skills in language learning because it allows students to express their ideas, knowledge and creativity in a structured way. Writing is the process of putting thoughts, feelings, and ideas into written form while paying close attention to using the language in the most appropriate way possible. (Lindsay, 2020) defines, writing is a thinking process; after going through the process, author's generate written work that is based on their thoughts. Harmer (2004:31) says that writing is a way to produce language and express idea, feeling and opinion.

Manual writing is not only a means of communication but also a fundamental part of literacy development.

Teacher may use writing skill (manual writing) to help students become confident writers who can adapt their writing to different purposes, whether telling a story, explaining a concept, or arguing a viewpoint. These skills also build a strong foundation for academic success and future professional communication.

Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2005) says that Manual writing, is a complex skill that involves fine motor control, visual-motor integration, and cognitive processes. It plays a foundational role in the development of written expression. According to Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu (2012), manual writing is the process of creating documents that provide clear and systematic instructions to help users understand, operate, or maintain a product, tool, or system. The purpose of manual writing is to convey information in an easily understandable and usable way, making it easier for users to perform tasks or solve problems. Manual writing presents several challenges for students, which can impact their academic performance. According to Kaur and Shukla (2015), handwriting skills play a crucial role in students' overall learning and academic success. When students struggle with handwriting, such as having poor legibility or slow writing speed, it can negatively affect their ability to complete written tasks effectively.

The importance of manual writing remains essential for junior high school students because it enhances cognitive development, improves memory retention, and supports fine motor skills necessary for academic success. Writing by hand encourages deeper processing of information compared to typing, which helps students better understand and remember lessons. Additionally, manual writing promotes creativity and allows students to organize their thoughts more carefully. It also ensures clear communication in exams and assignments, where legible manual writing can positively impact grading. Despite the rise of digital technology, maintaining strong manual writing skills helps students balance modern tools with fundamental abilities essential for both academic and everyday life. Manual writing is used for various important purposes, including taking notes during lessons, completing exams and assignments, drafting ideas or plans, and personal communication such as letters or journals. It helps students organize their thoughts, improve memory retention, and develop fine motor skills.

In addition, manual writing is often necessary when digital devices are unavailable or inappropriate, and it fosters creativity and focus by slowing down the thinking process. Manual writing in education enriches students' overall learning experience by integrating traditional skills with modern methods, ensuring they become well-rounded individuals capable of adapting to various communication demands. This method continues to play an important role in education, especially at the junior high school level. However, the increasing reliance on manual writing as the primary method of written communication may also present several challenges that hinder literacy development among students.

Although the provided text does not explicitly discuss the benefits of role play, its importance can be inferred through the themes of writing and communication development presented by various scholars. Writing, as Lindsay (2020) and Harmer (2004) explain, is a

crucial skill that allows learners to express ideas, feelings, and creativity in a structured manner. In this context, role play serves as an effective interactive tool that encourages students to verbalize and enact their thoughts, thus enhancing their ability to organize ideas before transferring them into written form. Furthermore, Graham and Harris (2005) highlight that manual writing builds confidence in students as communicators who can adapt their writing for diverse purposes. Similarly, role play helps students gain confidence in expressing opinions and practicing language in authentic situations, promoting fluency and adaptability. Additionally, since writing involves complex cognitive and language processes (Lindsay, 2020; Graham & Harris, 2005), role play stimulates these skills by requiring quick thinking, planning, and appropriate language use during interactions. Lastly, Kaur and Shukla (2015) emphasize the critical role of handwriting and writing skills in academic success, which role play can indirectly support by fostering language proficiency and comprehension foundational to writing development. Therefore, role play can be seen as a complementary activity that enriches students' overall language learning experience and writing competence.

Several previous studies have examined the effectiveness of writing manual as one of the essential skills in language learning because it enables students to express their ideas, knowledge, and creativity in a structured manner. Lindsay (2020) defines writing as a thinking process where authors generate written work based on their thoughts. Similarly, Harmer (2004:31) explains that writing is a means to produce language and to express ideas, feelings, and opinions. Manual writing, beyond being a simple communication tool, is a fundamental aspect of literacy development. Teachers often use manual writing skills to help students become confident communicators who can adapt their writing for various purposes, such as storytelling, explaining concepts, or arguing viewpoints. These skills lay a strong foundation for academic achievement and future professional communication. According to Graham and Harris (2005), manual writing is a complex skill involving fine motor control, visual-motor integration, and cognitive processes, all of which are crucial for developing written expression. Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu (2012) further explain that manual writing is the process of creating clear and systematic documents aimed at helping users understand, operate, or maintain products or systems. The primary goal of manual writing is to convey information in an understandable and usable format, facilitating task completion and problem-solving. However, manual writing also presents challenges that can affect students' academic performance. Kaur and Shukla (2015) emphasize the importance of handwriting skills in overall learning and academic success, noting that difficulties such as poor legibility or slow writing speed can negatively impact students' ability to complete written assignments effectively.

The existing body of research provides a solid foundation on the importance of writing and manual writing in language learning and literacy development. Scholars such as Lindsay (2020) and Harmer (2004) highlight the cognitive and expressive nature of writing, framing it as both a thinking process and a means of language production. Graham and Harris (2005) further emphasize the complexity of manual writing by detailing its reliance on fine motor skills, visual-motor integration, and cognitive processes. Meanwhile, Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu (2012) expand the scope of manual writing by discussing its practical application in creating clear, functional documents like manuals. Kaur and Shukla (2015) draw attention to the challenges students face with handwriting, demonstrating its critical role in academic success and overall learning.

The novelty of the current discussion lies in several areas. First, it integrates cognitive, motor, and educational perspectives to present a holistic understanding of manual writing's role in language learning and academic achievement. Second, it emphasizes the continuing importance of manual writing skills in the digital age, highlighting benefits such as enhanced information processing, memory retention, and creativity—areas less explored in prior

research that often focuses on traditional literacy outcomes. Third, this discussion applies these insights specifically to junior high school students, an age group navigating the balance between traditional and digital learning methods, underscoring manual writing's ongoing role in exams, note-taking, and personal expression. Fourth, it introduces an innovative connection between role play and writing development, suggesting that role play can complement manual writing by boosting language proficiency, confidence, and cognitive engagement. Finally, this analysis acknowledges the challenges manual writing presents while advocating for a balanced educational approach that integrates traditional skills with modern technology and interactive methods such as role play. This comprehensive perspective offers new insights into how manual writing and related activities contribute to effective language learning and communication.

The author underscores that manual writing is a vital, multifaceted skill crucial for effective communication, literacy development, and academic success, but it also requires overcoming certain challenges to maximize its benefits..

## RESEARCH METHODS

Classroom Action Research is a method of finding out what works best in your own classroom so that you can improve student learning. We know a great deal about good teaching in general (e.g. McKeachie, 1999; Chickering and Gamson, 1987; Weimer, 1996), but every teaching situation is unique in terms of content, level, student skills and learning styles, teacher skills and teaching styles, and many other factors. To maximize student learning, a teacher must find out what works best in a particular situation. There are many ways to improve knowledge about teaching. Many teachers practice personal reflection on teaching; that is, they look back at what has worked and has not worked in the classroom and think about how they can change their teaching strategies to enhance learning. (Hole and McEntee (1999) provide useful steps for enhancing such reflection. A few teachers (most notably Education professors) conduct formal empirical studies on teaching and learning, adding to our knowledge base.

CAR fits in the center of a continum ranging from personal reflection at one end to formal educational research at the other. CAR is more systematic and data-based than personal reflection, but it is more informal and personal than formal educational research. In CAR, a teacher focuses attention on a problem or question about his or her own classroom.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Handwriting and Copying Performance

| Indicator | Result |
|---|---|
| Students unable to finish copying task on time | 16 students (67%) |
| Students with poor legibility (uneven spacing, unclear letters) | 14 students (58%) |
| Students showing motor difficulty (incorrect grip, hand fatigue) | 10 students (42%) |

Students struggled to express ideas clearly due to difficulties in handwriting, limited vocabulary, and poor writing fluency.

### Reading Comprehension Performance

| Reading Indicator | Result |
|---|---|
| Students scoring above passing level | 7 students (29%) |
| Students able to answer detail-based questions correctly | 9 students (38%) |
| Students able to answer inference questions | 4 students (17%) |
| Students struggling to extract main ideas | 15 students (62%) |

Reading comprehension was generally weak, with students struggling especially in inference and main idea identification. Many students noted difficulty rereading unclear handwritten notes, which affected comprehension.

**B. Teaching Writing English Using Manual Writing**

In this study, teaching writing in English using manual writing serves as a central instructional approach designed to strengthen students' literacy skills by engaging them in focused handwriting and written expression activities. Manual writing is used to guide students in constructing sentences, organizing ideas, and producing coherent paragraphs while reinforcing fine motor control, handwriting legibility, and writing fluency—areas in which the pre-test results revealed significant challenges, such as slow copying speed, unclear letter formation, and difficulty expressing ideas. Through structured tasks such as guided copying, vocabulary journaling, sentence construction exercises, and short descriptive writing, the teacher supports students in developing deeper cognitive processing, clearer thought organization, and improved language accuracy, reflecting Lindsay's (2020) and Harmer's (2004) views of writing as both a thinking process and a means of language production. Manual writing activities also help students reread, review, and clarify their work, which is important because many students initially struggled with reading comprehension due to illegible handwritten notes. By integrating manual writing into daily instruction, the teaching process aims to enhance students' confidence, creativity, and communication skills while gradually reducing the handwriting difficulties identified in the pre-test. Within the context of Classroom Action Research (CAR), manual writing functions not only as a teaching method but also as a targeted intervention to improve both reading and writing proficiency among Grade 7 students at SMP Katolik Santa Maria Assumpta

**C. Observation Results**

Classroom observations were conducted using an observation checklist designed to assess the teacher's instructional practices related to manual writing activities and students' engagement during handwriting, copying, and writing tasks. The observations provided deeper insight into how manual writing limitations influenced students' literacy performance.

**1. Teacher's Performance Observation**

| No | Observation Focus | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Teacher opens the class with greetings and prepares students for writing activities | ✔ | |
| 2. | Teacher clearly explains the purpose of manual writing tasks | ✔ | |
| 3. | Teacher demonstrates correct handwriting techniques (grip, posture, spacing) | ✔ | |
| 4. | Teacher models how to copy text neatly and accurately | ✔ | |
| 5. | Teacher provides guided practice for handwriting and sentence construction | ✔ | |
| 6. | Teacher assists students who struggle with motor coordination | ✔ | |
| 7. | Teacher gives clear step-by-step instructions for writing tasks | ✔ | |
| 8. | Teacher monitors students' writing progress regularly | ✔ | |
| 9. | Teacher gives corrective feedback on legibility, spelling, and spacing | ✔ | |
| 10. | Teacher reviews students' written work and conducts reflection at the end of the lesson | ✔ | |

The teacher consistently implemented manual writing instructions, provided demonstrations, monitored student difficulties, and offered feedback to improve handwriting speed and legibility.

**2. Students' Engagement Observation**

| No | Observation Focus | Very Active | Active | Passive |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Students participate in handwriting warm-up exercises | | ✔ | |
| 2. | Students attempt to copy text neatly and on time | | ✔ | |
| 3. | Students follow instructions on proper pencil grip and posture | | ✔ | |
| 4. | Students ask for help when experiencing writing difficulty | | ✔ | |
| 5. | Students complete short writing tasks (sentences/paragraphs) | | ✔ | |
| 6. | Students show effort in improving spelling and letter formation | | ✔ | |
| 7. | Students reread their handwritten notes for clarity | | ✔ | |
| 8. | Students collaborate to check each other's handwriting | | ✔ | |
| 9. | Students show signs of fatigue or slow performance during writing | | | ✔ |
| 10. | Students express difficulty or frustration with manual writing tasks | | | ✔ |

Most students actively participated in writing tasks, followed the teacher's guidance, and attempted to improve their handwriting. However, several students remained passive due to hand fatigue, slow writing speed, unclear letter formation, and lack of confidence—consistent with the pre-test findings.

**D. Post Test**

After implementing the manual writing activities and instructional strategies throughout the Classroom Action Research (CAR) cycles, a post-test was administered to the same 24 Grade 7 students of SMP Katolik Santa Maria Assumpta. The post-test aimed to measure the extent to which students' writing and reading proficiency improved and to determine whether the identified limitations in manual writing—such as legibility, writing speed, and motor coordination—had decreased. The results of the post-test showed a notable improvement in students' handwriting performance and reading comprehension when compared to the pre-test outcomes.

**1. Handwriting and Copying Performance (Post-Test)**

| Indicator | Pre-Test Result | Post-Test Result |
|---|---|---|
| Students unable to finish copying tasks on time | 16 students (67%) | 6 students (25%) |
| Students with poor legibility (spacing, clarity) | 14 students (58%) | 5 students (21%) |
| Students showing motor difficulty (grip, hand fatigue) | 10 students (42%) | 4 students (17%) |

The post-test findings indicate that most students made significant progress in handwriting speed, clarity, and motor control. Only 25% of the class continued to struggle with finishing writing tasks on time, a substantial improvement from the initial 67%. Legibility also improved, with the number of students showing unclear writing decreasing from 14 to just 5. Motor difficulties, such as incorrect pencil grip or hand fatigue, reduced from 42% to 17%, showing that continuous guided practice positively influenced students' fine motor skills. These improvements demonstrate that the manual writing activities were effective in addressing the specific limitations identified in the pre-test.

**2. Reading Comprehension Performance (Post-Test)**

| Reading Indicator | Pre-Test Result | Post-Test Result |
|---|---|---|
| Students scoring above passing level | 7 students (29%) | 16 students (67%) |
| Students able to answer detail-based questions correctly | 9 students (38%) | 18 students (75%) |
| Students able to answer inference questions | 4 students (17%) | 12 students (50%) |
| Students struggling to identify main ideas | 15 students (62%) | 6 students (25%) |

The post-test results show a clear improvement in students' reading comprehension abilities. The number of students achieving the passing standard more than doubled—from 29% to 67%. Students became more capable of identifying details and making inferences, with the percentage of successful inference responses increasing from 17% to 50%. Most importantly, the number of students who struggled to identify main ideas dropped sharply from 62% to 25%. Students reported that improved handwriting clarity helped them reread and understand their notes more effectively, leading to better comprehension.

**E. Comparison Of Pre-Test And Post-Test Scores**

The comparison of the pre-test and post-test results in this study demonstrates a significant improvement in both handwriting and reading comprehension among the 24 Grade 7 students of SMP Katolik Santa Maria Assumpta. In handwriting and copying performance, the number of students unable to finish tasks on time decreased from 16 (67%) in the pre-test to 6 (25%) in the post-test, while students with poor legibility dropped from 14 (58%) to 5 (21%), and those showing motor difficulties reduced from 10 (42%) to 4 (17%). Similarly, reading comprehension performance improved markedly: students scoring above the passing level increased from 7 (29%) to 16 (67%), those able to answer detail-based questions correctly rose from 9 (38%) to 18 (75%), and students able to make inferences grew from 4 (17%) to 12 (50%). Additionally, the number of students struggling to identify main ideas declined sharply from 15 (62%) to 6 (25%). Overall, the post-test results indicate that the manual writing activities and intervention strategies effectively enhanced students' handwriting speed, legibility, motor control, and reading comprehension, highlighting the positive impact of structured, guided manual writing instruction on literacy development**.**

The findings of this Classroom Action Research (CAR) highlight the effectiveness of manual writing activities in improving both writing and reading skills among Grade 7 students of SMP Katolik Santa Maria Assumpta. The pre-test revealed that students faced substantial challenges in handwriting and reading comprehension. Specifically, a majority of students (67%) were unable to finish copying tasks on time, 58% showed poor legibility, and 42% exhibited motor difficulties such as incorrect pencil grip or hand fatigue. Similarly, reading comprehension was weak, with only 29% achieving a passing score, 38% answering detail-based questions correctly, and a mere 17% able to answer inference questions. Furthermore, 62% of students struggled to identify main ideas, often due to difficulty rereading their own unclear handwritten notes. These results indicate that the students' literacy development was significantly hindered by manual writing difficulties, limited vocabulary, and low writing fluency.

The implementation of structured manual writing activities, including guided copying, vocabulary journaling, sentence construction exercises, and short descriptive writing, provided a systematic approach to addressing these challenges. Classroom observations indicated that the teacher effectively modeled handwriting techniques, gave step-by-step instructions, monitored student progress, and provided corrective feedback. Students were generally engaged in the activities, actively participating in warm-ups, practicing proper grip and posture, and collaborating to improve their writing. However, a few students remained passive due to hand fatigue, slow writing speed, and low confidence, reflecting persistent but reduced challenges compared to the pre-test stage.

Post-test results demonstrate significant improvement across all measured indicators. In handwriting performance, students unable to finish copying tasks decreased from 67% to 25%, those with poor legibility reduced from 58% to 21%, and motor difficulties declined from 42% to 17%. These changes suggest that consistent, guided practice positively impacted students' fine motor skills, writing speed, and legibility. Similarly, reading comprehension improved notably: students scoring above the passing level increased from 29% to 67%, those able to answer detail-based questions rose from 38% to 75%, and inference skills

improved from 17% to 50%. Additionally, students struggling to identify main ideas dropped from 62% to 25%, indicating that improved handwriting clarity allowed them to reread and better comprehend texts.

The data collectively suggest that manual writing is not only a physical skill but also a cognitive tool that supports the development of higher-order literacy skills. As Lindsay (2020) and Harmer (2004) emphasize, writing serves as both a thinking process and a language production mechanism. By engaging in manual writing, students were able to organize thoughts, construct coherent sentences, and clarify ideas in writing, which directly contributed to better reading comprehension. The integration of manual writing into daily instruction also appears to have enhanced students' confidence, creativity, and motivation to engage in written expression.

Overally, this study confirms that structured manual writing interventions can serve as an effective instructional strategy to address both mechanical and cognitive challenges in literacy development. The clear improvements in handwriting speed, legibility, motor coordination, and reading comprehension illustrate the interconnected nature of writing and reading skills, highlighting the value of hands-on, scaffolded writing activities in fostering holistic literacy among middle school.

## CONCLUSSION

Based on the findings of this Classroom Action Research, it can be concluded that the implementation of structured manual writing activities significantly improved both handwriting and reading comprehension skills among Grade 7 students of SMP Katolik Santa Maria Assumpta. The pre-test results revealed that students faced substantial challenges in completing writing tasks on time, producing legible text, and demonstrating motor coordination, which negatively affected their reading comprehension. Through guided copying, vocabulary journaling, sentence construction, and short descriptive writing exercises, the students developed better handwriting speed, clarity, and motor control, while simultaneously enhancing their ability to organize ideas and comprehend texts. Post-test results showed marked improvement in all indicators, including increased reading comprehension, higher accuracy in answering detail and inference questions, and reduced difficulty in identifying main ideas. The study demonstrates that manual writing functions not only as a physical skill but also as a cognitive tool that supports literacy development, highlighting its effectiveness as an instructional strategy to strengthen both the mechanical and cognitive aspects of writing and reading in middle school students.

## DAFTAR PUSTAKA

(Used in: definition of manual writing as creating instructional documents)
(Used in: definition of writing as a thinking process)
(Used in: handwriting skills affecting academic performance)
(Used in: manual writing as a complex cognitive–motor skill)
(Used in: writing as a way to produce language and express feelings)
Alred, G. J., Brusaw, C. T. & Oliu, W. E. (2012). The Handbook of Technical Writing (10th ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.
Chickering, A. W., & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. AAHE Bulletin, 39(7), 3–7.
Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2005). Improving the Writing Performance of Young Struggling Writers: Theoretical and Programmatic Research from the Center on Accelerating Student Learning. The Journal of Special Education, 39(1), 19–33.
Harmer, J. (2004). How to Teach Writing. Pearson Education.
Hole, S., & McEntee, G. H. (1999). Reflection is at the Heart of Practice. Educational

Leadership, 56(8), 34–37.
Kaur, G., & Shukla, P. (2015). The Role of Handwriting in Students' Academic Achievement. Journal of Educational Research, 3(2), 45–52.
Lindsay, C. (2020). Teaching Writing Skills in the Language Classroom. Cambridge University Press.
McKeachie, W. J. (1999). McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers (10th ed.). Houghton Mifflin.
Weimer, M. (1996). Improving Your Classroom Teaching. Sage Publications.