

Enhancing Malay essay writing through scaffolding: a pedagogical approach

Nur Atikah Mohd Noor¹, Zamri Mahamod², Nurfaradilla Mohamad Nasri³

¹Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia

²Center for Learning and Teaching Innovation Research, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia

³Center for Leadership and Educational Policy Studies, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia

Article Info

Article history:

Received Jul 18, 2024

Revised Feb 15, 2025

Accepted Mar 19, 2025

Keywords:

Pedagogical methods
Quasi-experimental design
Scaffolding approach
Vocabulary development
Writing skills

ABSTRACT

Essay writing is crucial for students as it fosters effective communication and improves critical and analytical thinking. This study investigates the impact of scaffolding techniques on Malay language essay writing proficiency among year 5 students in Malaysia. Based on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, scaffolding offers structured support that gradually disappears as students gain proficiency. A quasi-experimental design was employed, comparing an experimental group using scaffolding methods with a control group following traditional teaching. Results revealed that scaffolding significantly improved students' essay length, coherence, and overall content quality. The experimental group demonstrated higher scores and greater independence in writing. These findings support the integration of scaffolding in essay instruction to enhance student performance and autonomy in writing. Further research should explore its applicability across diverse age groups and contexts.

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Corresponding Author:

Zamri Mahamod

Center for Teaching and Learning Innovation, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: d-zam@ukm.edu.my

1. INTRODUCTION

Essay writing is vital for students because it promotes communication, critical thinking, and analytical skills. In Malay language education, essay writing plays a critical role in assessing students' linguistic competence and cognitive development. However, many students face difficulties in generating ideas, organizing content, ensuring coherence, and maintaining linguistic accuracy. Addressing these challenges requires effective pedagogical strategies. One such strategy that has shown considerable promise is scaffolding. Rooted in Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, scaffolding provides structured support to learners to help them accomplish tasks that they would not be able to complete independently [1]. This support is gradually withdrawn as learners become more proficient, fostering autonomy and confidence [2], [3]. The scaffolding process aligns with the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between what a learner can do alone and what they can achieve with guided help [4], [5]. The ZPD, as articulated by Vygotsky, posits that learning is most efficacious when students undertake tasks that marginally exceed their autonomous capabilities but may be accomplished with suitable assistance. By leveraging scaffolding techniques, educators can bridge the gap between students' current abilities and their potential, enhancing their overall learning experience [6].

While previous research has extensively explored the benefits of scaffolding in various language learning contexts, particularly in English language learning, these studies have primarily focused on English as a second language (ESL) or other foreign languages [7]–[10]. Studies have shown that scaffolding

improves writing fluency, accuracy, and complexity [11], [12]. However, they have not sufficiently explored scaffolding's influence in the context of Malay language essay writing. Moreover, while scaffolding has been shown to enhance the content and structure of essays, few studies have examined how it can improve essay length and coherence two persistent challenges faced by language learners [13]. In particular, research on scaffolding techniques in Malay language education remains limited. Existing studies have not fully addressed how scaffolding might be adapted to meet the unique linguistic and cultural challenges that Malay language students experience, particularly in creating articles that meet length and coherence standards. Despite participating in prior class discussions on a topic, many Malay language students struggle to write cohesive essays that fully address instructions for the question. Their essays often lack sufficient word count, and their sentences remain simple, indicating underdeveloped ideas and structure. This study addresses in these gaps by investigating into the impact of scaffolding on Malay language essay proficiency among Malaysian primary school students.

Unlike previous research, this study focuses specifically on how scaffolding can help students improve idea generation, coherence, and sentence structure elements that are critical for producing comprehensive and well-organized essay [14]–[16]. Prior to this study, students typically produced short, basic essays that failed to meet the minimum word count required for higher grades. Through the introduction of scaffolding techniques such as guided writing sessions, writing frameworks, and peer support, this study aims to significantly enhance students' ability to produce longer, more cohesive essays [17]. The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of how scaffolding can be effectively implemented to improve essay writing skills in the Malay language. In addition to contributing to the broader academic discourse on scaffolding and language education, this research offers practical recommendations for educators seeking to enhance their instructional practices and support student success in essay writing.

In conclusion, as the educational landscape evolves, it is imperative to adopt teaching methodologies that not only address students' immediate learning needs but also equip them with the skills necessary for lifelong learning. Scaffolding, with its focus on guided support and gradual independence, represents a promising approach to improving essay writing skills in the Malay language. This article highlights the potential of scaffolding, providing a foundation for further research and pedagogical innovation in Malay language education. Through a detailed understanding of scaffolding and its application, educators can better support their students in achieving academic excellence and linguistic proficiency. To address these challenges, this study employs a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the impact of scaffolding on Malay essay writing proficiency.

2. METHOD

The study employed a quasi-experimental design with purposive sampling [18]. This design allows for the selection of respondents who meet specific criteria, which is suitable for educational research. The respondents consisted of year 5 students from two schools with comparable abilities. School A served as the experimental group, where the scaffolding method was applied, and School B was the control group, which followed traditional teaching methods. In determining the selection of 30 participants for both the control and treatment groups, the sample size was chosen based on power analysis methods that considered educational research designs. This number was selected to detect a medium to large effect size with sufficient statistical power, ensuring that meaningful differences could be identified between the intervention and control conditions. A recent review on sample size determination for quasi-experimental designs indicated that sample sizes of around 30 per group were commonly utilized in educational research, aligning with established guidelines to balance statistical power and practical constraints [19]. For this study, 30 participants per group were considered adequate to detect significant educational outcomes while maintaining the study's feasibility and reliability.

Pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted to evaluate the students' essay writing progress, particularly in terms of word count. The experimental group received scaffolding instruction, while the control group continued with conventional teaching. Scaffolding involved providing a framework and keywords for essay writing, which were gradually reduced as students became more proficient. After an 8-week instructional period, both groups took a post-test to measure the change in their essay writing abilities. These steps were designed to ensure that students progressively moved from guided writing to independent essay composition, as emphasized in Vygotsky's ZPD. The data were analysed by comparing the word count before and after the intervention. Table 1 outlines the data collection procedure between the treatment and control groups.

The study utilized pre-tests and post-tests to assess essay writing abilities, with essay questions aligned with the standard curriculum and assessment document. During the pre-test, respondents from both the control and treatment groups were given 60 minutes to write an essay on the topic "the benefits of gardening". After the 8-week treatment period, respondents were given the post-test, which also involved

writing an essay on “the benefits of gardening”. Both the pre-test and post-test were conducted to observe differences in scores as well as the number of words produced in the essays during the pre- and post-tests. The questions were reviewed by experienced Malay language teachers, which helps establish content validity, ensuring the test measures what it is supposed to. Reliability was maintained by using two assessors the head of the language department and an experienced teacher who followed the marking scheme issued by the state department of education. To further ensure reliability, inter-rater reliability could have been evaluated by comparing the consistency of the scores assigned by different assessors.

Table 1. Table of study implementation design for the use of scaffolding method in teaching essay writing

Test group	Treatment group	Control group
O1	X1	O2
O1	X2	O2

Explanation:

O1: observation before the treatment

X1: treatment applied to the treatment group

X2: treatment applied to the control group

O2: observation after the treatment

Confounding variables in this study were carefully controlled to ensure the reliability of the results. The two selected schools had students with comparable abilities, allowing both the experimental and control groups to be given the same pre-test and post-test. This ensured that the results obtained were not influenced by significant differences in the students’ academic backgrounds. The main confounding variable, namely the variability in teaching methods, was controlled by applying the scaffolding technique exclusively to the experimental group. The control group, on the other hand, received traditional teaching methods. The pre-test assessments served to establish a baseline for measuring any changes in the post-test, which could be directly attributed to the scaffolding intervention, rather than to other uncontrolled factors.

Ethical clearance was a crucial element in this study to ensure the rights and welfare of the participants. The study received ethical approval from the policy research division in the education department. Before the study commenced, informed consent was obtained from all participants and their guardians, as the study involved underage students. Additionally, participants’ data confidentiality was guaranteed, and all information obtained would be used solely for the purposes of this study. Participants were also given the freedom to withdraw at any time without facing any negative consequences. These procedures adhered to ethical research guidelines, ensuring that the study was conducted in compliance with strict ethical standards. To ensure the validity of the data obtained, standardized test conditions were maintained throughout the pre-tests and post-tests. The essay writing tasks given to the students were designed to reflect real examination questions, thus enhancing the validity of the study’s findings. This means that the results of this study are highly likely to be applicable in real-world settings, rather than being limited to the study context. Furthermore, the scaffolding process was carefully structured, with support provided gradually and systematically reduced. This ensured that the improvements observed in the experimental group could be directly linked to the scaffolding intervention, rather than external factors.

– Implementation of scaffolding

The scaffolding approach used in this study was implemented in several progressive stages, with the goal of gradually reducing support as students became more proficient in essay writing. This method allowed students to internalize the writing framework and develop their own strategies for constructing well-organized and coherent essays over time [20], [21]. The process began with the introduction of the essay writing framework. In this stage, students were provided with a structured outline that guided them in organizing their essays. The teacher introduced a topic, such as “the advantages of a healthy lifestyle,” and presented a clear framework that students were required to follow. This framework included an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Each section of the essay had specific components that students needed to include, such as the main idea, supporting details, and examples [22]. For instance, students were instructed to define the concept of a healthy lifestyle in the introduction, discuss specific advantages such as physical and mental health in the body paragraphs, and summarize their points in the conclusion.

The teacher also modelled the essay writing process by writing a sample essay in front of the students, giving them a concrete example to follow [23]. Following the introduction of the framework, students entered the guided writing phase, where they received substantial support from the teacher. During this phase, the teacher provided students with keywords related to the essay topic to help them construct their sentences. The teacher then worked closely with the students, guiding them through the process of writing

their essays by offering sentence construction assistance and helping them link their ideas together. At this stage, students were also encouraged to collaborate with their peers, engaging in group discussions where they could share ideas and receive feedback from one another [24]. As students became more familiar with the essay writing framework and gained confidence in their writing abilities, the teacher began to gradually reduce the level of support.

In subsequent writing exercises, the teacher provided fewer keywords and phrases, encouraging students to come up with their own ideas and organize their essays independently [25]. At this stage, students were required to construct sentences and paragraphs on their own, with the teacher offering minimal guidance [26]. In the final stage of the scaffolding process, students were tasked with writing essays independently on topics similar to those they had practiced before [27]. However, this time, no structured support was provided by the teacher. The students were required to choose their own keywords, organize their essays using the framework they had internalized, and write without any teacher input. The teacher's role in this stage was primarily observational, stepping in only when a student encountered significant challenges. The aim was to ensure that students could confidently write a complete essay on their own, demonstrating their ability to generate ideas, structure their thoughts, and express themselves clearly.

In summary, the scaffolding method used in this study involved a gradual reduction of support as students progressed from dependent writers to independent essayists. Initially, students were provided with a detailed framework and significant guidance, but over time, the level of assistance was reduced, encouraging students to take ownership of their writing. By the end of the intervention, students were able to write essays independently, demonstrating marked improvements in essay length, coherence, and content quality.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The pre-test revealed that the experimental group produced 540 words across 30 respondents, averaging 18 words per essay. The control group produced 690 words, averaging 23 words per essay. After the 8-week instructional period, the post-test showed a significant improvement in the experimental group, which produced 2,160 words with an average of 72 words per essay. The control group also improved, with a total of 1,410 words and an average of 47 words per essay. The average score obtained on the post-test also increased to 22/25 compared to only 9/25 on the pre-test. The control group also increased from 8 points to 18 points. The full score on this section is 25. Recent observations from the post-test results suggest that the scaffolding method leads to significant improvements in both essay length and content quality. Our findings provide conclusive evidence that the scaffolding approach is associated with a marked improvement in students' essay writing proficiency, particularly in terms of organization and coherence. This improvement is not merely due to increased word count but reflects a deeper understanding and more structured writing process among students. We found that the scaffolding method correlates with a significant increase in both essay length and quality. The experimental group which used scaffolding, demonstrated higher post-test and greater independence in writing, supporting and the proposed learning method. Table 2 shows the comparison of the number of words produced in essay writing.

Table 2. Word count results for pre-test and post-test in control and treatment groups

Group	Total number of words (30 respondent each group)	The average number of words per essay	Avarage mark per essay (/25)
Pre-control	690	23	8
Post-control	1,410	47	18
Pre-treatment	540	18	9
Post treatment	2,160	72	22

The data clearly indicate that scaffolding had a significant impact on the essay writing performance of the experimental group. Figure 1 illustrates the comparison of pre-test and post-test results between the control and experimental groups. The scaffolding approach allowed students in the treatment group to improve not only the length of their essays but also the quality of their content.

Students taught using the scaffolding method showed significant improvements in essay length, organization, and coherence. Our result indicate that scaffolding method correlates with significant improvement in both essay length and quality, which is consistent with the finding of Chang *et al.* [13], who observed similar improvements in essay coherence and structure through scaffolding. The gradual reduction of aid allows students to understand the essay writing process, which leads to improved essay writing skills on their own without the need for assistance. The scaffolding technique used in this study also improved the quality of students' essays, as students were better able to express their ideas, organize ideas, and ensure the appropriateness of the content of the essay with the given essay title. This is in line with Vygotsky's theory of

ZPD, in which students gradually move from needing assistance to being able to write independently [28]. Students who initially had difficulties in organizing essays and producing content showed remarkable improvement towards the end of the intervention. Before the scaffolding intervention, only 40% of students were able to produce an essay that met the assignment requirements. However, after receiving structured guidance, 85% of students were able to meet this standard, demonstrating a significant improvement in their writing skills.

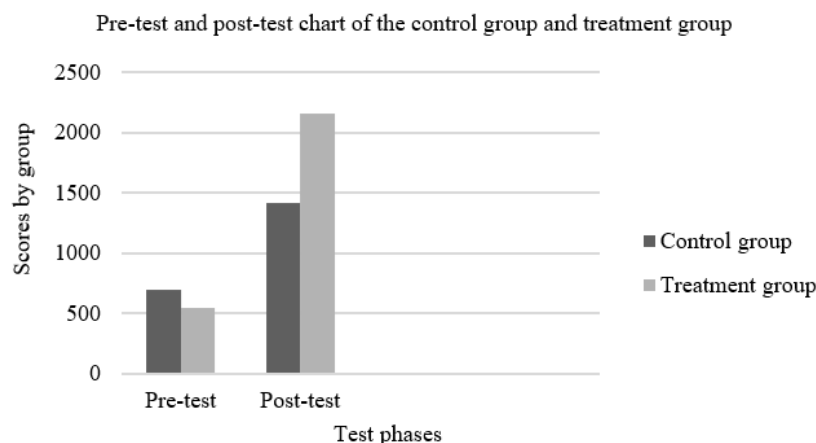


Figure 1. Graph chart for pre-test and post-test for control and treatment groups

The quality of students' writing has also improved significantly. Essays produced after receiving guidance showed improvement in aspects of language use, broad vocabulary, and correct use of grammar [29], [30]. This shows that scaffolding coaching helps students to write more accurately and effectively. The students in the experimental group managed to get good scores in essay writing, with an average of 22/25 points, which showed a clear change compared to the pre-test, which averaged only 9 marks. We found that this using scaffolding in essay writing improve a lot and it correlates with the study conduct by Razali *et al.* [31] explaining that scaffolding, especially the guided-discovery technique, provides advantages in teaching essay writing. These techniques effectively guide students towards educational objectives and allow them to fully participate in their learning process.

In addition, the method used has also been effective in helping students overcome constraints in writing essays. Through systematic guidance, students are helped to understand the intent of the questions, develop ideas, and structure the essay better. This is in line with Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes the importance of guidance in the ZPD [25], [32]. In addition, the findings of the study show that scaffolding coaching not only improves the quality of writing, but also increases students' confidence in writing essays. Students who initially find it difficult to write, begin to show greater interest and confidence after receiving guidance. This is because they are able to express their thoughts in writing and are ready to convey their views. Yu and Liu [33], who state that the use of scaffolding helps in improving understanding in learning. Therefore, teachers need to integrate the scaffolding approach in the teaching of essay writing to help students reach their full potential. This approach can be implemented through individual or group coaching sessions, the use of structured worksheets, and the provision of constructive feedback throughout the classroom teaching and learning sessions.

However, although the results of this study focused on year 5 students in Malaysia, these findings may not be generalized to students from different age groups or in other educational contexts. This is in line with a study by Ruiz *et al.* [34] which found that the scaffolding method needs to be adapted according to the age of the students. This is because younger students are more in need of assistance, such as structured support than older students. Future studies can be further expanded by conducting scaffolding teaching studies on other age groups either at the pre-school level or at the secondary school level. In addition, this study can also be extended by exploring how scaffolding can be integrated into essay writing using qualitative methods to explore more deeply the effects that can be seen after using scaffolding methods in teaching. Future researchers can extend the study by considering the teacher's views or the impact felt by students who have used the scaffolding method in teaching.

4. CONCLUSION

This review presents empirical evidence that the scaffolding approach significantly improves essay writing skills among primary school students. Students in the experimental group showed a greater improvement in both the length and coherence of their essays compared to the control group. These findings are in line with existing research on scaffolding, suggesting that structured support can improve student performance in writing assignments. By gradually reducing the level of support, students can follow the essay writing process and develop the autonomy necessary to write independently. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of integrating scaffolding techniques into the teaching of essay writing in primary schools. Scaffolding not only improves students' ability to write longer and more organized essays, but it also increases their confidence and motivation. Teachers should consider incorporating scaffolding techniques into their teaching practices to help students achieve greater proficiency in writing.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This research was supported by the Ministry Education Malaysia through a scholarship awarded to the principal author under contract number [KPM.BBP.700-30/21/24(3)]. The financial support provided under this scheme enabled the completion of this study as part of the author's doctoral research at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The funding body had no involvement in the design of study, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or the decision to submit the article for publication.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Nur Atikah Mohd Noor	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Zamri Mahamod	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Nurfaradilla Mohamad Nasri	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

The Informed consent was obtained from all student participants and their legal guardians prior to data collection. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequence.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study received ethical approval from the Policy Research Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia. All research procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical standards involving research on human subjects.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [ZM], upon reasonable request. As the study involves school-aged minors, data sharing is limited to non-identifiable information in compliance with ethical and privacy guidelines.




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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS






Nur Atikah Mohd Noor    is a PhD student at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia. She earned her bachelor's degree in Malay language education from the IPG Tengku Ampuan Afzan, Pahang. She then obtained her master's degree in Malay language education from Sultan Idris Education University, Tanjung Malim, Perak. Her research focuses on Malay language education, specifically in the area of teaching and learning aspects of writing. She can be contacted at email: p112619@siswa.ukm.edu.my.



Zamri Mahamod    is a professor in the field of Malay language education at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia. As an academic, he has produced numerous journals and scholarly books, as well as conference proceedings articles. His expertise is sought after by Malaysian Examinations Council (MPM), Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), and Institute of Teacher Education (IPG) concerning Malay language education. His areas of specialization include Malay language education, Malay literature education, language learning strategies, and teacher education. He can be contacted at email: d-zam@ukm.edu.my.



Nurfaradilla Mohamad Nasri    successfully completed her PhD in curriculum pedagogy at the University of Edinburgh, UK, in 2016. She also obtained her master's degree in curriculum and pedagogy from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 2011 and her bachelor's degree from the same university in 2009. Currently, she is a senior lecturer specializing in curriculum and pedagogy at the Centre of Educational Leadership and Policy, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Her research interests include the development of culturally responsive curricula and instruction, teachers' professional development, self-directed learning, and sustainable learning. She can be contacted at email: nurfaradilla@ukm.edu.my.