

'PEEL' Approach to Improve Conceptual Essay Writing Skills among Form 4 Students

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Abstract

This study examined improvements in Form 4 Tamil language students' conceptual essay writing skills by using the PEEL approach. This study was conducted with two objectives: finding out the problems faced by Form 4 students in writing conceptual essays. The second objective is to improve the essay writing skills of Form 4 students through the PEEL approach. The researcher used fieldwork to conduct this study. The study was also designed using a qualitative approach. The researcher conducted the study at one of the Secondary schools in the Manjung district. The study participants were 25 Form 4 students. The researcher used the pre-test and post-test methods to collect data for the study. Furthermore, a questionnaire session was conducted to identify students' problems in writing a conceptual essay. The outcome of this study proves that the paragraph PEEL approach is an effective technique for helping students to improve their writing skills. Students indicated positive perceptions of the use of the PEEL approach technique in conceptual essay writing.

Keywords: PEEL Approach, Essay Writing Skills, Conceptual Essay Writing

Introduction

The six components of the Tamil language that secondary school pupils should be proficient in are speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, and literature. Writing is one of the hardest abilities to learn in Tamil since it requires pupils to think critically to produce ideas and to compose sentences and paragraphs simultaneously. Writing presents difficulties for the cognitive system in terms of memory and reasoning abilities, according to Abdul Hamid (2009). Aside from that, the Malaysian Ministry of Education looked into the idea that the writing portion of a test is the most crucial of all. Students should practice their writing skills more until they receive good grades in these areas as well. Moreover, the Malaysian Ministry of Education allocates the highest marks for essays in writing skills. Therefore, a good paragraph leads students to score highly in essay writing skills in their exams.

Writing is a fundamental language skill that reflects learners' ability to organise ideas, apply critical thinking, and communicate meaning effectively. In the context of Tamil language education at the secondary school level, writing particularly conceptual essay writing remains one of the most challenging components for students to master. Conceptual essays require learners not only to possess linguistic competence but also to demonstrate logical reasoning, coherence, and the ability to elaborate ideas systematically.

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education places significant emphasis on essay writing in language assessments, allocating the highest marks to this component in public examinations. As a result, students' overall academic performance in Tamil language subjects is heavily influenced by their ability to construct well-developed and structured essays. However, many Form 4 students struggle to organise ideas into meaningful paragraphs, provide relevant explanations, and support their points with appropriate examples. These difficulties often lead to poorly developed essays and low achievement scores.

Previous studies have highlighted that students face cognitive challenges in writing, particularly in generating ideas, maintaining coherence, and structuring paragraphs effectively (Abdul Hamid, 2009). Despite continuous exposure to essay writing tasks, students often lack explicit strategies that guide them in paragraph development. This gap indicates a strong need for an instructional approach that supports structured thinking and systematic writing.

The PEEL approach—Point, Evidence, Explanation, and Link—offers a clear and structured framework that guides students in constructing effective paragraphs. By explicitly teaching students how to introduce a point, support it with evidence, elaborate through explanation, and link ideas cohesively, the PEEL approach has the potential to enhance students' conceptual understanding and writing proficiency.

Therefore, this study is significant as it explores the effectiveness of the PEEL approach in improving Form 4 students' conceptual essay writing skills in Tamil language education. The findings of this study are beneficial to secondary school students, Tamil language teachers, curriculum planners, and education practitioners, as they provide practical insights into an effective instructional strategy that can enhance writing performance and student engagement in 21st-century classrooms.

Literature Review

In addition to having trouble honing their writing abilities, Form 4 students also had trouble thinking critically about challenging subjects. The potential of the PEEL approach to help these students write conceptual essays well on examined in this literature review.

Writing Skills

Several research works have demonstrated how PEEL can improve a variety of writing-related features. For example, Muthukumar (2017) emphasises that the students encountered numerous difficulties when writing essays. The purpose of this study was to apply the writing ability technique to enhance writing an essay. It would have been preferable if the researcher had adopted a fresh methodology suitable for teaching and learning in the 21st-century as opposed to the one deployed in this study. By using the essay writing knowledge unit strategy,

a study was done to increase sixth grade students' interest in and proficiency with writing conceptual essays (Epin, 2021). Numerous studies aimed at enhancing writing abilities been carried out on elementary school pupils. Specifically, there are currently few studies on conceptual essays.

PEEL Approach

The PEEL model's fundamental idea is to write a structural paragraph correctly. Donald (2010) claims that the PEEL model only made use of three components. Following that, four components had been updated and given a suitable paragraph structure. It is similar to peeling bananas one at a time, and that's how the paragraph is organised (Andrew B. Artis, 2012). The scholar Saeful Efficendi Muh (2017). Lia Maretnowati (2019) and Ratin Laily Nurjanah (2018) have conducted research on the PEEL model approach. According to Muh Saeful Efficendi (2017), the study's methodology indicates that utilising the PEEL model aids in the development of students' writing abilities. According to Ratin Laily Nurjanah (2018), pupils can think more thoroughly when they write an appropriate paragraph because of its structure. Based on her study's findings, the researcher said that students can also use the PEEL model to compose an appropriate essay. Furthermore, Lia Maretnowati (2019) came to the conclusion that students' writing abilities are most significantly impacted by the PEEL model. As a result, the PEEL model was considered beneficial and the ideal approach to producing an appropriate paragraph was accepted in the 21st-century.

Methodology

The design of this study is qualitative in nature. In a secondary school in Manjung district, Form 4 students was used to test the methods. In addition, this study involved 25 students. For this study, the researcher used pre-test and post-test data collection techniques. The essays written by the students served as the sole basis for this study. The pre-test assisted in determining the difficulties students had faced and their degree of proficiency when writing conceptual essays. The purpose of the post-test was to assess how much the students' conceptual essay writing abilities had improved. The both pre-test and post-test deployed the identical conceptual essay topic. The researcher then compared the students' pre-test and post-test results to see if the 'Peel' approach improved their achievement levels.

Findings and Discussion

This study had two objectives based on this research. The first objective was to identify the problems faced by Form 4 students in writing conceptual essays. The second objective was to investigate is to improve the conceptual essay writing skills of Form 4 students through the PEEL approach. Pre-test and post-test result shows that the PEEL approach can significantly improve students' scores on essays, including conceptual essays.

Pre-test result

This study analysed pre-test data to determine the problems that students experience when writing conceptual essays. As a result, during the pre-test, students were only provided a brief description of the form of a conceptual essay. The explanation served to remind them that they had previously produced a conceptual essay. The pupils were then given answers to their structure-related concerns and worries. The pupils were assigned the topic "Reading" as homework and instructed to produce a conceptual essay. All students' essays were gathered, corrected, and graded.

Table 1

Pre-test result

STUDENTS	MARKS	GRADE
STUDENT 1	19	B
STUDENT 2	8	D
STUDENT 3	9	D
STUDENT 4	10	D
STUDENT 5	16	C
STUDENT 6	11	D
STUDENT 7	14	C
STUDENT 8	18	C
STUDENT 9	12	D
STUDENT 10	20	B

The table above shows the data results of the pre-test conducted on the writing skills of Form 4 students. The researcher found that the lowest score in the pre-test was 8 marks and the highest score was 20 marks. It can be seen that most of the students get 8-12 marks, which means very low marks out of 30 marks. Only 2 students got 19-20 marks, which means students are in the grade B level. Furthermore, it can be seen that Student 1 (19), Student 2 (8), Student 3 (9), Student 4 (10), Student 5 (16), Student 6 (11), Student 7 (14), Student 8 (18), Student 9 (12) and Student 10 (20) all scored less than 30 marks. All 25 students scored below 30 marks in the pre-test.

Post-test result

The PEEL approach was implemented with the students as planned, with one activity, which is 21st-century learning activities, each week. First week, a travelling file activity was conducted, second week, a paraphrase passport activity was conducted, third week, a gallery walk activity was conducted, and last week, a roam the room activity was conducted. A post-test was conducted to investigate whether these activities improved the problems students faced in writing conceptual essays. In this, all the students were asked to write an essay on the same topic as the pre-test. This time, the students wrote the essay in class. The students' essays were then corrected and marked.

Table 2

Post-test result

STUDENTS	MARKS	GRADE
STUDENT 1	26	A
STUDENT 2	18	C
STUDENT 3	19	B
STUDENT 4	20	B
STUDENT 5	26	A
STUDENT 6	21	B
STUDENT 7	24	A
STUDENT 8	26	A
STUDENT 9	22	A
STUDENT 10	27	A

The above table shows the scores obtained by the students in the post-test. The researcher found that the lowest score in the post-test was 18 marks and the highest score was 27 marks. Further, only one student scored 18 marks. In addition, 3 students scored between 19 and 24 marks. Further, 6 students scored between 25 and 30 marks. Thus, it can be seen that the students' scores in the post-test are higher than in the pre-test.

Comparison between pre-test and post-test results

Table 3

Comparison between pre-test and post-test results

STUDENTS	PRE-TEST MARKS	POST-TEST MARKS	DIFFERENCE
STUDENT 1	19	26	7
STUDENT 2	8	18	10
STUDENT 3	9	19	10
STUDENT 4	10	20	10
STUDENT 5	16	26	10
STUDENT 6	11	21	10
STUDENT 7	14	24	10
STUDENT 8	18	26	8
STUDENT 9	12	22	10
STUDENT 10	20	27	7

Based on the above table, it can be seen that the students have improved their ability to write conceptual essays when comparing the pre-test results with the post-test results. The achievement level of the students in the post-test increased from 7 to 10 marks. When comparing the pre-test and post-test, 7 students scored 10 more marks. Further, 1 student scored 8 more marks than the pre-test marks, and 2 students scored 7 more marks in the post-test. Thus, it is proven that the PEEL approach can improve the ability to write conceptual essays among Form 4 students.

Conclusion

This study was designed by the researcher with two objectives in mind. First, the difficulties encountered by Form 4 students when writing conceptual essays were discovered. This study investigated the effectiveness of the PEEL approach in improving Form 4 students' conceptual essay writing skills. The results showed that the PEEL approach successfully solved the stated problems and had an advantageous effect on students' conceptual essay writing skills. By using such ways in teaching, it is possible to improve students' accomplishment and comprehension of conceptual essays. When 21st-century teaching and learning approaches are implemented in the classroom, students become actively involved. If teachers always use the same strategy, students will be unable to fully participate in the learning process. As a result, teachers should practice such methods in their classroom instruction.

This study contributes to both theoretical and contextual dimensions of language education research. From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the effectiveness of structured writing frameworks, particularly the PEEL approach, in enhancing students' conceptual essay writing skills. The study supports existing writing pedagogy theories that emphasise explicit instruction, cognitive scaffolding, and paragraph-level organisation as essential elements in developing higher-order writing skills.

Contextually, this research contributes to the limited body of studies focusing on conceptual essay writing in Tamil language education at the secondary school level in Malaysia. While previous research has largely concentrated on primary school writing or general essay writing skills, this study addresses a critical gap by focusing specifically on Form 4 students and conceptual essays. The findings demonstrate that the PEEL approach is not only effective but also suitable for integration into 21st-century teaching and learning practices through student-centred activities.

Furthermore, this study provides practical implications for Tamil language teachers by offering an instructional model that can be implemented in classroom settings to improve students' writing outcomes. It also serves as a reference for future researchers who wish to explore structured writing strategies in different educational contexts, subjects, or student populations.

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