

# The VAW–Scaffolding approach to improve essay writing skills in Form I students

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**Abstract:** This study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the VAW (Vocabulary, Application, and Written) scaffolding approach in improving essay writing skills among Form 1 students. The study adopted a quantitative approach and took place in SMK Methodist ACS Kampar with 20 students identified as needing improvement in writing. A quasi-experimental design was implemented over eight weeks, focusing on three phases of the VAW approach: vocabulary enhancement, application of words in context, and structured writing. In the pre-test, students' scores in vocabulary usage and essay structure ranged from 30% to 55%. Following the VAW intervention, post-test scores showed a significant increase, with students achieving 60% to 85% in vocabulary retention, contextual application, and overall essay coherence. The findings indicate that the VAW scaffolding approach effectively supports students in developing critical writing skills, enhancing their confidence and proficiency in essay composition. These findings suggest that the VAW approach can serve as a practical framework for educators aiming to enhance students' academic writing abilities, particularly among those with foundational challenges.

**Keywords:** VAW (Vocabulary, Application, and Written), Essay writing, Form 1 students

## INTRODUCTION

Writing is a fundamental skill, yet many students, particularly those in their early years of secondary school, struggle with essay writing. For Form 1 students, mastering this skill is challenging due to limited vocabulary, difficulties in applying words in context, and a lack of structure in written expression. These hurdles can discourage students from expressing themselves effectively, thereby affecting their academic performance and confidence in language skills.

The VAW (Vocabulary, Application, and Written) scaffolding approach, designed as a targeted support system, aims to address these issues by helping students enhance their vocabulary, learn to apply words in meaningful contexts, and develop well-organized essays. Scaffolding in education involves providing structured support at different stages of learning, which is gradually removed as students gain independence. By breaking down writing into manageable parts, the VAW approach supports students through each phase of skill acquisition. This study examines the impact of the VAW scaffolding approach on a group of weaker Form 1 students, measuring improvements in vocabulary, application, and writing skills.

## **Background of the study**

Writing proficiency is a crucial component of academic success, particularly in secondary education, where students are expected to communicate complex ideas clearly and coherently. However, many Form 1 students struggle with essay writing, a challenge exacerbated by limited vocabulary, lack of application skills, and difficulties in organizing thoughts into structured essays. These challenges often result in low confidence and hinder students' overall academic performance.

The VAW (Vocabulary, Application, and Written) scaffolding approach was developed to address these specific challenges by breaking down the writing process into manageable phases that provide structured support. Grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, the scaffolding method enables students to develop skills incrementally. In this context, vocabulary serves as the foundation for expressive language, application encourages contextual usage, and structured writing ensures coherence in essay development. By implementing a sequential teaching method, the VAW approach allows students to build competence gradually, eventually gaining confidence and independence in their writing.

## **Problem Statement**

Many Form 1 students struggle to produce well-structured essays due to limited vocabulary, difficulties in applying vocabulary within context, and a lack of coherence in writing. Students often have a basic understanding of vocabulary from primary school, but without reinforcement and expansion, their vocabulary remains limited. This results in repetitive and simplistic language that hinders the richness of their expression. Additionally, students are not sufficiently taught how to apply vocabulary effectively within sentences and paragraphs, leading to disjointed ideas and poor sentence flow.

Without a structured approach to learning vocabulary and practicing its application, students' essays lack clarity and logical progression. This limits their ability to communicate ideas effectively and diminishes the quality of their written work. Consequently, students lose confidence in their writing abilities, and their overall engagement in language learning decreases. The need for a targeted, scaffolded approach, like the VAW (Vocabulary, Application, and Written) method, is evident, as it enables students to build essential writing skills incrementally. By integrating vocabulary building, contextual application, and organized writing practices, this method can address students' specific weaknesses and foster improved writing outcomes.

## **Research Purpose**

This study aims to:

1. Identify the challenges Form 1 students face in essay writing.
2. Reasons for the challenges encountered by Form 1 students in essay writing skills.
3. Enhance essay writing skills among students through the VAW (Vocabulary, Application, and Written) scaffolding approach.

## **Literature Review**

The concept of scaffolding in education originates from Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, which emphasizes the importance of providing students with just enough assistance to help them move beyond their current capabilities. In writing education, scaffolding allows students to develop complex skills gradually, with support adjusted based on their proficiency levels. Vocabulary development is often cited as foundational for effective writing, as it enables students to articulate thoughts precisely and confidently. Studies have shown that vocabulary enhancement not only improves students' expressive abilities but also increases their reading comprehension and general communication skills.

The application of vocabulary within a meaningful context is the next stage of learning, where students must practice incorporating new words accurately in sentences and paragraphs. Vocabulary learning is most effective when it is used in context, as students are more likely to retain words they can actively apply.

The final stage structured essay writing allows students to develop a coherent flow in their writing, from introduction to conclusion. A structured approach to writing is crucial for clarity, logical flow, and reader engagement. Writing without structure often leads to disorganized thoughts and undermines the strength of the argument or message being conveyed. These stages of learning vocabulary acquisition, contextual application, and structured writing are therefore critical to achieving proficiency in essay writing. The VAW scaffolding approach combines these stages, enabling students to overcome their initial struggles and gradually build confidence and competence in writing.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a quantitative approach to measure the impact of the VAW (Vocabulary, Application, and Written) scaffolding approach on the essay writing skills of Form 1 students.

### **Research Design**

Pre- and post-tests were used to evaluate students' proficiency in vocabulary usage, contextual application, and coherence in essay structure. A total of 20 Form 1 students from a public secondary school participated in the study. These students were chosen based on their initial struggles with writing skills and were assessed to determine their improvement before and after implementing the VAW approach.

## **Participants**

Pre- and post-tests were used to evaluate students' proficiency in vocabulary usage, contextual application, and coherence in essay structure. A total of 20 Form 1 students from a public secondary school participated in the study.

## **Materials**

These students were chosen based on their initial struggles with writing skills and were assessed to determine their improvement before and after implementing the VAW approach.

## **Procedure**

The pre-test involved a 50-minute timed essay on a general topic, such as "The Importance of Healthy Living." Students were evaluated on their vocabulary range, sentence structure, and overall essay organization. The initial scores ranged from 30% to 55%, indicating areas of need in vocabulary and coherence. The pre-test data established a baseline for each student's writing ability.

Following the pre-test, the VAW approach was introduced over an eight-week period, with one 60-minute session conducted per week. Each session was divided into three phases. During the first two weeks, students were introduced to essential vocabulary lists, practicing word meanings, synonyms, and sentence usage. In weeks three to five, students focused on using vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Exercises included sentence construction and paragraph writing using the new vocabulary. In the final three weeks, students were guided in essay structure, focusing on organization and coherence. Each session included practice with introduction, body, and conclusion structures, allowing students to build a complete essay by the end of the phase.

## **Data Analysis**

For the post-test, students were given another 50-minute timed essay on a similar topic. This essay was evaluated for vocabulary use, context application, and overall essay coherence, similar to the pre-test criteria. By comparing the pre- and post-test results, the study assessed the progress in students' writing proficiency, particularly in their ability to use a richer vocabulary, apply words contextually, and organize ideas cohesively.

The quantitative data collected from pre- and post-tests provided insight into the effectiveness of the VAW scaffolding approach. This data allowed the researcher to determine if students' writing skills had improved after completing the structured VAW phases, thus addressing the primary objectives of the study.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to determine how the VAW (Vocabulary, Application, and Written) scaffolding approach could improve the essay writing skills of Form 1 students. The approach was structured to address three main challenges faced by students: limited vocabulary, difficulty in applying vocabulary meaningfully within sentences, and lack of coherence in essay organization. The findings, based on pre- and post-test results, illustrate the positive impact of the VAW approach on student performance. The Vocabulary phase introduced students to new words systematically, allowing them to expand their linguistic repertoire. During the Application phase, students collaborated to apply vocabulary contextually, bridging the gap

between word recognition and usage. The Written phase provided opportunities for structured essay drafting with iterative teacher feedback, refining their skills over time.

### *Pre-Test Results*

The pre-test was conducted to assess students' initial essay writing skills without any additional support or structured guidance. Students were tasked with writing an essay, and their scores were categorized based on their performance. The results revealed that most students had limited proficiency in organizing ideas, vocabulary usage, and maintaining coherence in their essays.

**Table 1:** Pre-Test Result

<b>RESPONDENT</b>	<b>Pre-Test Score</b>	<b>Proficiency Level</b>
Student 1	60	Pass
Student 2	32	Low
Student 3	43	Moderate
Student 5	52	Pass
Student 6	50	Pass
Student 7	28	Very Low
Student 8	43	Moderate
Student 9	30	Low
Student 10	55	Pass
Student 11	34	Low
Student 12	57	Pass
Student 13	36	Low
Student 14	60	Excellent
Student 15	45	Moderate
Student 16	43	Moderate
Student 17	58	Pass
Student 18	39	Low
Student 19	54	Pass
Student 20	40	Moderate
Average	25	Very Low

### *Post-Test Results*

After applying the VAW scaffolding approach over several weeks, a post-test was conducted to evaluate the improvement in students' writing skills. The results showed a substantial increase in scores, with more students achieving higher proficiency levels in vocabulary, sentence construction, and overall essay coherence.

**Table 2:** Post-Test Results

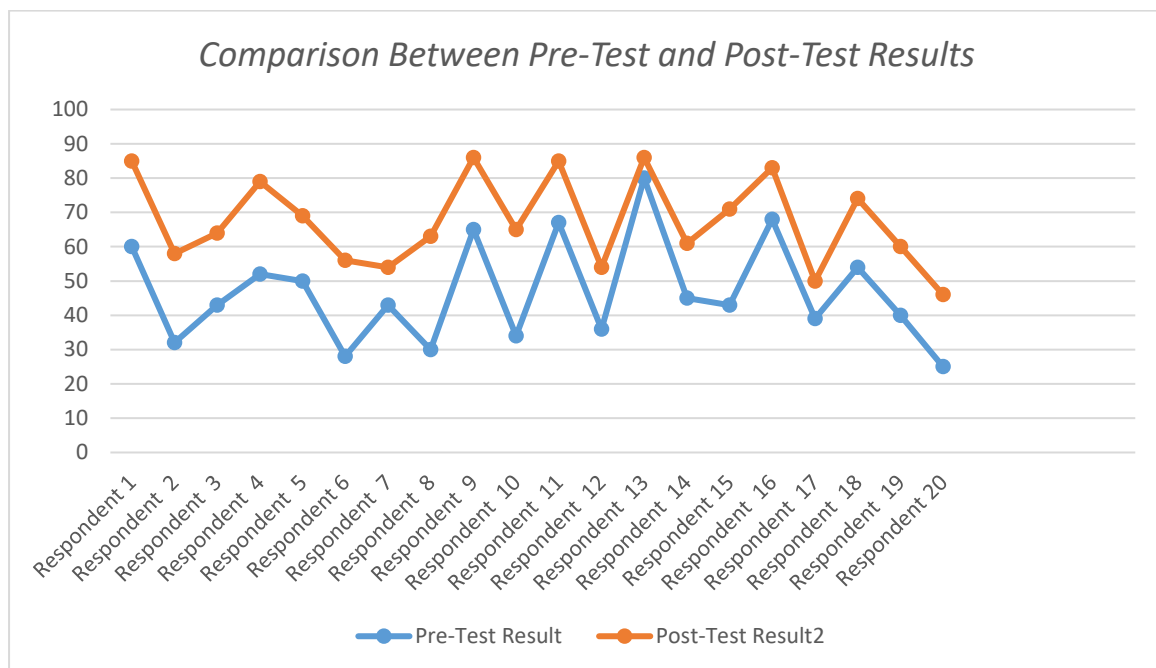
<b>RESPONDENT</b>	<b>Post-Test Score</b>	<b>Proficiency Level</b>
Student 1	61	Excellent
Student 2	53	Pass
Student 3	64	Pass
Student 4	61	Good
Student 5	67	Pass
Student 6	55	Pass
Student 7	50	Pass
Student 8	61	Pass
Student 9	58	Excellent
Student 10	58	Pass
Student 11	62	Excellent
Student 12	58	Pass
Student 13	61	Excellent
Student 14	61	Pass
Student 15	53	Good
Student 16	64	Excellent
Student 17	61	Pass
Student 18	67	Good
Student 19	55	Pass
Student 20	50	Moderate

In the post-test, there was a marked improvement, with multiple students reaching the "Excellent" level (80–100), indicating that the VAW scaffolding approach positively impacted their writing skills. After implementing the VAW scaffolding approach, the post-test results revealed notable improvement in student performance across all categories of assessment. A significant number of students achieved "Pass" and "Excellent" scores, with multiple students moving into higher proficiency levels. Specifically, several students achieved scores within the "Good" and "Excellent" ranges, reflecting increased competence in vocabulary usage and essay organization. Students demonstrated enhanced vocabulary usage, with a greater variety of words used accurately in context.

### *Comparison Between Pre-Test and Post-Test Results*

Every student exhibited an increase in scores, with improvements ranging from 6 to 33 points. This increase reflects growth in all aspects of writing, particularly in vocabulary retention and application, as well as in the coherence and organization of ideas. In the pre-test, only one student reached the "Excellent" proficiency level, while in the post-test, several students achieved this status. This shift in proficiency distribution shows that the VAW approach effectively elevated students' writing abilities, especially for those who initially scored in the lower ranges.

**Figure 1.** Comparison Between Pre-Test and Post-Test Results



Based on the above graph, it is evident that the VAW (Vocabulary, Application and Practice, and Written) scaffolding approach effectively improved the essay writing skills of Form I students. When comparing pre-test and post-test results, the data shows that five students scored 10 or more points higher in the post-test than in the pre-test, three students scored 8 points higher, and two students scored 7 points more. This significant improvement in scores suggests that the VAW scaffolding approach successfully enhanced students' vocabulary, application skills, and written expression, thereby boosting their overall performance in essay writing. These results affirm the effectiveness of this approach in supporting students' development of strong, structured essay writing skills. In addition, by offering step-by-step guidance and gradually reducing teacher support, the method encouraged students to become independent writers. This structured and collaborative approach not only enhanced their writing abilities but also boosted their confidence, illustrating the transformative potential of scaffolding in educational settings.

## CONCLUSION

The VAW (Vocabulary, Application, and Written) scaffolding approach is a promising method for improving essay writing skills among Form 1 students. By focusing on foundational elements—vocabulary building, contextual application, and structured writing—this approach addresses the challenges that weaker students commonly face in essay writing. The structured and supportive nature of scaffolding enables students to progressively build on their skills, eventually achieving independence in their writing.

The success of this study suggests that the VAW approach could be integrated into the language curriculum for early secondary students, particularly those struggling with writing. By providing targeted support in vocabulary, application, and organization, educators can help students gain the confidence and skills necessary for effective written communication. Future research could expand on this study by exploring the VAW approach's impact on students with varying proficiency levels or adapting it for other language skills, such as reading comprehension. Overall, the VAW scaffolding model offers a structured, supportive, and effective pathway to achieving writing proficiency among students.

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