

A comprehensive review on pre-university student essay writing: Issues and recommendations

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To cite this article (APA): Abdullah, Z. F., Osman, Z., Sarudin, A., Mohamed Redzwan, H. F., & Dyah Werdiningsih. (2022). A comprehensive review on pre-university student essay writing: Issues and recommendations. *Journal of Research, Policy & Practice of Teachers and Teacher Education*, 12(1), 117–130. <https://doi.org/10.37134/jrppte.vol12.1.8.2022>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.37134/jrppte.vol12.1.8.2022>

Published: 28 June 2022

Abstract

The purpose of this comprehensive review is to discuss the issues that pre-university students often face when writing essays and to propose an alternative approach to implementing the teaching of essay writing such as the use of thinking maps. The focus of this study is to look at the writing status of pre-university in Malaysia as well as the suggestions proposed by researchers through the articles highlighted. Highlights of the study found that one of the key issues that hindered pre-university students from writing essays was the failure of students to master the writing skills and the choice of teacher teaching strategies. In addition, it also indicated that both of these issues have caused students failure to perform well in essay writing. The study also suggests the use of thinking maps in the teaching and learning process of writing essays. Thinking maps are also effective in helping and enhancing students' achievement in essay writing. The implications of the study indicate that pre-university students are facing difficulty in producing high-quality essays and that the use of thinking maps can be used as support materials to help students write good essays.

Keywords: Essay writing, issues in writing, pre-university, thinking maps

Introduction

Writing skill is a complex skill that students need to master after Listening, Speaking and Reading skills. It is a complex process and needs to be systematically implemented. This skill can be related to the ability of a student to write grammatical correct words or sentences and adhere to the rules of writing (Hall, 2016). According to Mahamod (2014), writing activities are closely related to speaking and reading skills. Something spoken and read cannot be translated into writing unless one has mastered writing skills. Ali and Othman (2017) and Osman (2016) pointed out that learning writing skills is a challenge for students as it involves meta-cognition abilities. Writing skills involve complex literacy processes and high cognition which makes it difficult for students to acquire (Osman et al., 2019b).

The use of writing strategies not only improves the quality of writing but can also produce students who are independent and able to seek their own information and knowledge (Osman et al., 2019a). This is because students will be involved in the process of collecting and data analyzing and thinking of how to complete the assigned task. In addition, some researchers (see Mahamod, 2014; Hushaini et al. 2020, Al Muhsin et al., 2020; Sarudin et al., 2019 Sarudin et al., 2019b; Mohamed Redzwan, 2020) found that appropriate learning strategies are also related to students' achievement in the examinations.

In the Malaysian context, writing skills are taught at all levels of schooling as it is clearly in the school syllabus. The Malaysian secondary schools curriculum in Malay Language issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE) clearly states that there are four language skills that should be taught, the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing skill is of the highest order in ranking and it must be acquired by all students.

The details for the Malay Language Secondary Schools syllabus (2013) states writing skills as the ability of a student to write words and sentences, as well as produce ideas through a variety of creative writing related to science and personal experience with the use of grammatically correct sentences, correct punctuation and spelling,

as well as clear and neat writing. Students are also encouraged to use their creativity to produce creative and imaginative written materials. Writing skills is an intellectual culture that complements reading and writing skills. The writing ability is a process of transmitting information that is mechanically and systematically transmitted, taking into account goals, language usage, audience, and writing style. In this regard, reading and writing ability are the basic skills required for effective teaching and learning in various disciplines at the school level.

At the primary/ elementary school level, writing essay is easier. Most essays taught to primary school students are narratives and autobiographies. This is because at this stage students are only asked to present ideas in a simple form of storytelling. These skills are taught until they are at the lower middle school level. However, the degree of difficulty is increased by the number of words required. At the UPSR level, the required number of words is 80, at PT3 the required number of words is 150 while at SPM level, the essay length needs to be 350 words. At the pre-university level, the students have to write essays within the range of 600 to 650 words. The essays are factual in nature and this type of essay have been taught since middle school until at the pre-university level whereby greater emphasis is given to such essays.

Being competent in reading and writing skills will definitely improve students learning ability in Malay language and other subjects. In addition, mastering writing skills will equip students with the knowledge of how to produce effective essays through systematic and effective writing style. According to Jalil (2016a), writing skills can be taught, nurtured and trained to produce great writers. In the study by Jalil (2016b), they concluded that essay writing skills are interrelated to a variety of key language skills.

At the pre-university level, the Malay language syllabus (2013) emphasizes two aspects that need to be acquired by the pre-university students, namely formatted and non-formatted essay writing. Non-formatted essay writing is included in the Malay Language Paper 1 (910/1), Malaysian Higher School Certificate (MHSC) or Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM), while the formatted essay writing is in the Malay Language Paper 4 (910/4) STPM. The non-formative essay writing is assessed in the written examinations in Semester 1 while the formatted essay writing is evaluated on the basis of on-going coursework. Essay writing at the pre-university level are considered to be very challenging because the students are considered to have reached a specific level of maturity. Therefore, the questions posed during the examinations include current issues related to economics, education, sports and recreation, language, art and culture, literature, science and technology, humanities and society.

As such, this article will discuss aspects of writing skills that pre-university students must possess in order to produce high-quality writing and the issues and challenges faced by students in mastering the essay writing skills. Generally, pre-university students are between 18 and 20 years old. They were selected to continue their studies in pre-university after obtaining a minimum of 3 subjects with credit scores of not more than 12 units in the Malaysian Certificate of Education. Therefore, the quality of their writing should be in line with the various shifts presented in the PIPPM 2013 – 2025 or the Malaysian National Education Blueprint (2013-2025), which outlines 11 shifts required to transform the national education system to be on par with and comparable to that of developed nations. Hence, students essay writing quality need to be aligned with Aspiration 5 (system aspirations), Aspiration 6 (student aspirations), and Aspiration 11 sequencing and transformation of the education system). Students should acquire the skills of writing which is important in the learning of Malay language as the students' ability to write effective essays demonstrate their language proficiency and show how they think using the Malay language. Therefore, the objective of this study is to study the issues and challenges that students face when they are required to produce essays.

The writing concept

Writing is one of the language skills that students must master when learning any language. In this regard, Purba (2018) states that writing is a deliberate act which it has to make up one's mind to do it. According to Purba (2018) and Osman at al., (2019a), writing activities can encourage students to convey their knowledge to readers. In short, writing is a process of communication that conveys ideas and opinions in written form done by the student (Purba, 2018). Nunan (2003: 88) states that writing is the physical act of committing words or ideas to some medium, whether it is hieroglyphics linked onto parchment or an email message typed into a computer. On the other hand, writing is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader. Therefore, these skills need to be taught effectively. However, the process of teaching writing skills is a major challenge for teachers (Harmer, 2004: 11) because teachers must be creative in choosing good approaches. This is because according to Harmer (2004: 11), many traditional approaches have failed to apply the concept of process writing in the teaching of writing skills. For many years the teaching of writing focused on the written product rather than on the writing process. In other words, the students' attention was not directed to the how of text construction.

In relation to this, teachers should encourage and guide the students to explore and develop their creativity in writing Werdiningsih (2018). A teacher needs to also provide the students the freedom to express their ideas and provide them with enough language and information to allow them to complete writing tasks or paragraphs successfully. When choosing the teaching materials, teachers must also ensure the proper and accurate

instructions are given. Writing instruction include real-life and interactive tasks (Purba, 2018). Hence, this study presents a literature review presenting the issues that pre-university students often face when writing essays and to propose an alternative approaches to implementing the teaching of essay writing.

Writing skills refer to students' ability to write words and express ideas through a variety of writing related to their own knowledge and experience. Emphasis should be placed on the use of grammatical sentences, proper punctuation and spelling, as well as clear and concise writing (MOE, 2016). Sardila (2015) states that writing skills are a true language skill. In the division hierarchy of language skills, writing skills are always placed as the last and most difficult skill to be acquired after listening, speaking, and reading skills. However, that doesn't mean writing skills aren't important. This is because a person's ability to master the language skills can influence one's concentration well when writing. Abu Samah, Mohd Majzub and Mohamad (2014) found that student achievement in writing can be enhanced if teacher teaching skills are diverse. This is because quality teaching with the use of variety of teaching approached can produce effective learning outcomes.

Essay writing skills are an important language skill in the hierarchy of other language skills. Through writing, information and knowledge can be disseminated from one generation to the next generation, and the precise meaning can be fully conveyed through effective and quality writing. Therefore, it is important for students to acquire and master essay writing skills because a compulsory pass in Malay Language at the SPM level is required before they are entitled to obtain a certificate. Effective writing skills will not only improve students' achievement in Malay language but also help the student to write essays and reports in other subjects as well. Nowadays, essay writing skills are no longer solely focused on the result of the essay but more importantly, the focus is on the process of essay writing so that students know the purpose of writing and can produce better quality writing.

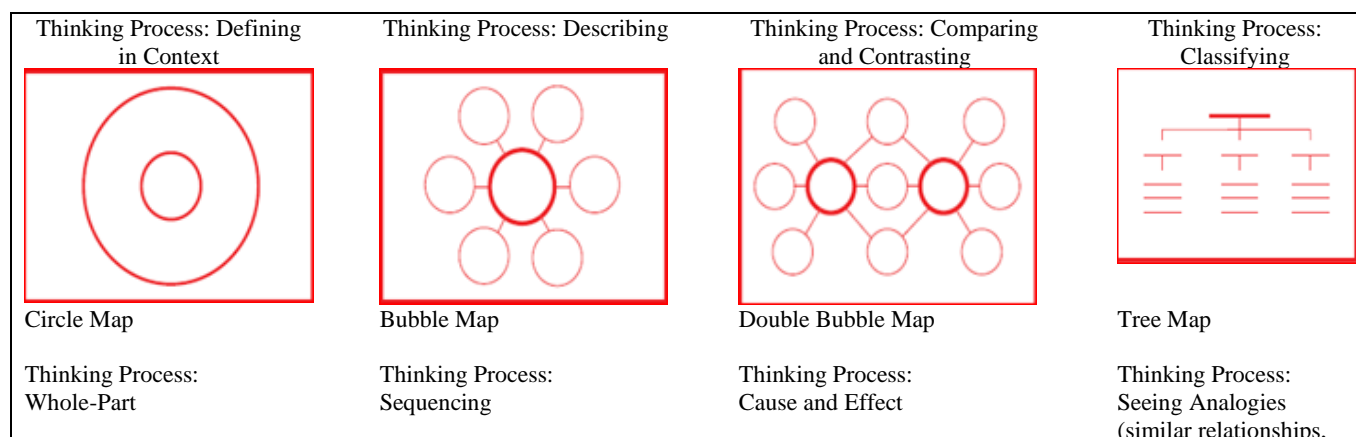
In the process of writing essays, there are four motor skills learning skills that need attention, namely planning motor, logic motor, memory motor and action motor (Levine, 2003). The early stages of the essay writing process are the stages of preparation for writing essays that require students to use the motor design efficiently which is one of the components found in the human brain. The design motors should be well controlled by each student to meet the requirements of the essay writing task by setting the writing goals and providing the essay framework before the essay writing process. The *Standard Curriculum and Assessment for Malaysian Secondary School* (MOE,2013) also outlines the preparation of the outline before writing the essay made by the student.

Malaysian Pre-University students' writing skills

Writing skills content

In schools, the syllabus description document provides major guidance for teachers in designing essay writing lessons. However, teachers are allowed to make adaptations based on different student needs. Teachers need to integrate student knowledge and experience in the process of teaching and learning of essay writing. Teachers will use discussion and storytelling techniques to relate what is happening around the students or current issues for the essay topics. Teachers can also use different techniques to teach essay writing to suit different levels of student mastery. Teachers are also required to provide examples when clarifying content.

Akup and Othman (2017) state that majority of the teaching and learning of essay writing in secondary schools uses Thinking Maps, which is in line with the emphasis on Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). In another study by Mohd Zikri Ihsan et al., (2019; 2020) shows that the use of Thinking Maps are often used in schools in teaching essay writing as it enhances students' achievement. This classroom tasks are in line with the 21st century learning concept (PAK21). Figure 1 shows some of the types of Thinking Maps promoted in teaching essay writing skills at secondary school level.



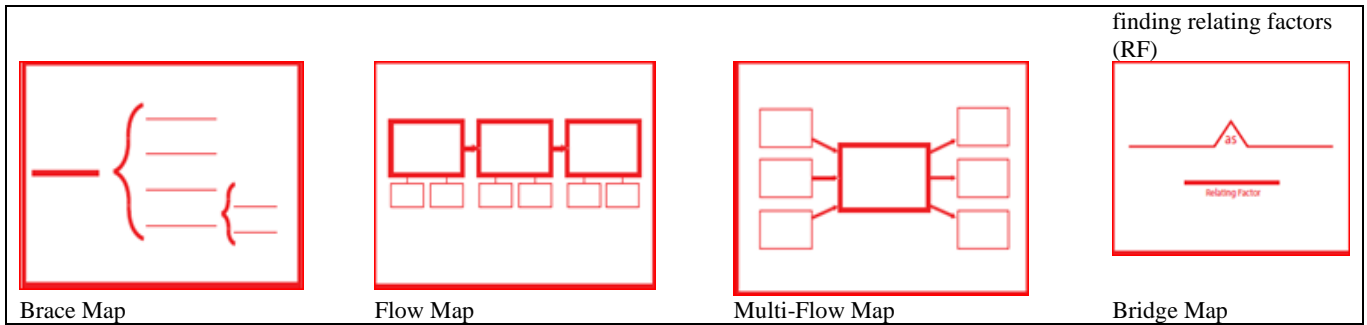


Figure 1. i-Think Thinking Maps by David Hyerle, Chris Yeager (2007) *Thinking Maps*. (in MOE, 2013)

Within the Malaysian context, the pre-university 910 Malay Language syllabus was first introduced in the 2013/2014 school session with the purpose to train students who can utilize the Malay language efficiently and thus be able to continue their studies to a higher level. In addition, the syllabus also aims to produce Malay language graduates who are competitive and can meet the requirements of the open job market as well as instill the feeling of pride and honor when using the language for communicative purposes. The objective of this syllabus focused on writing skills is that students are able to express themselves using correct, good, and effective language, both verbally and in writing. In addition, students can also develop ideas that are organized, concise, and convincing, either verbally or in writing as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-university essay writing format.

Semester/ Duration	Essay Format	Essay Type	Assessment Format
Semester 1 5 months (June – November)	Non formatted	Factual	Written examinations
Semester 2 5 months (January – May)	Formatted essay	Report Talk Lecture Speech text Memorandum Minutes of meetings Proposal Official letters	Coursework

The Malay Language Paper 1 (910/1) taught during semester 1 requires students to write a non-formatted essay during the Semester 1 STPM Examinations. This paper is divided into three parts, namely Part A, B, and C. Part A consists of multiple choice questions which carries a weightage of 20%, section B covers critical and analytical thinking with 30% weightage, and section C is essay writing with a weightage of 50%. The marks allocated for essay writing is half or 50% of the total marks provided for this paper. If students fail to produce a well-written essay, then their chances of obtaining high marks is very limited. Therefore, students must learn appropriate techniques on how to write effective essays so that they can excel in the examinations. Writing essays at the pre-university level requires the students to think about the relevant content and detailed descriptions. They are required to write essays within the range of 600 to 650 words. Figure 2 shows the learning outcomes of the pre-university non-formatted essay writing.

The Malay Language Paper 4 (910/4) taught during semester 2 focus on the formatted essays as shown in Table 1 above. The coursework assessments will be conducted during the 5 months of the semester 2. Students will be taught on how to write the various essay formats prior to the assessments. The students work will be assessed individually. They are allowed to discuss with their classmates and the teacher and refer to various sources and references. They are allowed to redo and revise their course works until they are satisfied with the grades given.

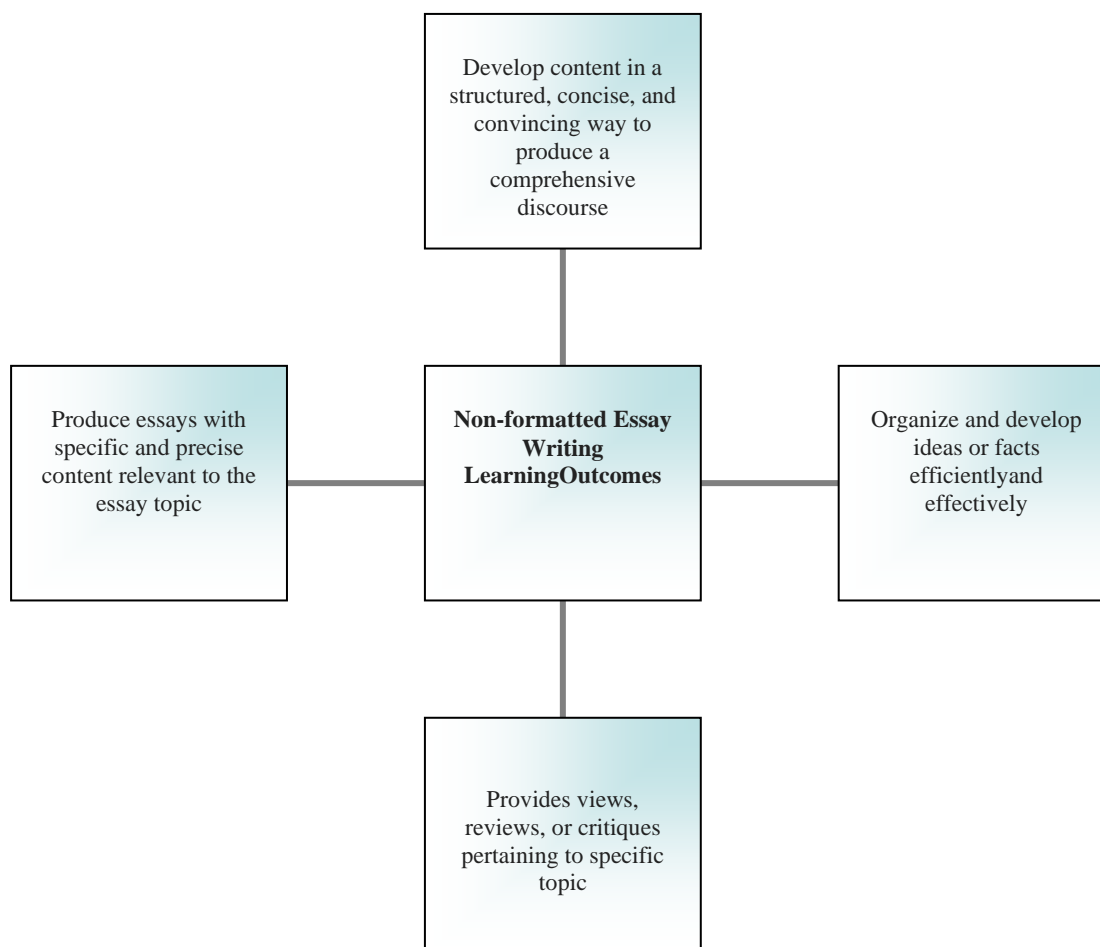


Figure 2. Non-formatted essay writing learning outcomes in BM 910/1STPM Paper

Issues related to the teaching of pre-university essay writing

Students' failure to master writing skills

At the higher level, the issues and challenges often encountered are students' failure to understand the theme and the use of appropriate writing techniques in communicating ideas. This is in line with a study conducted by Khuzaemah and Herawati (2017) who found that writing ability among students has improved in terms of theme choices, topic summarisation, expressing ideas, analysing, and mastering writing techniques after they have implemented the Cooperative Model Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC). Their study was conducted with the Year 2 students of the Indonesian Language Arts (ILA) for the 2015/2016 academic year.

Issues related to the application of motor writing skills also exist with students when writing essays at higher levels of education. Based on the application of motor writing skills introduced by Levine (2003), Abd Samad and Wan Mohammad (2019) discovered that the ability to write essays varied among form four secondary school students. They concluded that students who are well-versed in essay writing are also those who can optimize and apply their motor writing skills.

A study by Jalil (2016a) also shows that low-performing students do not accurately read and understand the essay topic concerned before initiating the essay write-up. They also do not make an accurate choice of the topic based on their personal experience and prior knowledge. The students only identified the keywords in the question before writing the essay and did not come up with the essay outline or framework before starting to compose the essay. They would also use most of the sentences in the rubrics to write their essays. Therefore, students could not express their creative thoughts in their essays. It also concluded that their understandings were at the moderate level based on their responses towards the understanding of the topic, the instructions, and the stimulus given. The students confessed that they felt exhausted during the essay writing process.

Previous studies have also shown that the level of mastery of writing skills for most students have not reached a satisfactory/good category as reported in many studies (Mat Awal, Abu Bakar, and Jalaluddin, 2012; Rahmana, Metussin, Tatasat, Madind and Jaidi, 2014; Jalil, 2016b). Jusoh and Jamian (2014) also found that students with poor writing ability were due to their personal weaknesses in acquiring the basic writing skills and also due to the inefficient approaches used in the teaching and learning of writing skills. This finding is reinforced by the statistics presented by the Examination Syndicate Board (MOE, 2013) which found that in 2010, there is a major gap in grade achievements in the SPM Malay Language based on ethnicity.

Teacher's teaching strategies selection

Teacher's teaching strategies is also an issue in the teaching of writing skills. In this case, Ali and Othman (2017) found that there was a significant difference between the use of teaching strategies and the achievements of writing skills among Melanau students. This indicated that the correct choice of teaching writing skills strategies can improve students' writing skills.

Previous studies have also shown that focus of teaching strategies emphasize cognitive skills such as those carried by Flower and Hayes (1981), Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), and Surat (2013). However, researchers in Malaysia are less focused on cognitive skills in the essay writing learning process. Their researches are more focused on strategies to improve essay writing achievement through a variety of approaches (such as Saleh, 2016; Ramakrishnan, 2014; Yien & Halili, 2015; Glenn & Ian, 2016; Akup & Othman, 2017). These researchers also concluded that majority of teachers do not understand brain function and how the human brain works which is important in assisting students to reach their full academic potential. When a teacher is able to understand the functions of the brain during the learning process, the teacher will be able to assist the students improve their memory while also recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, thus improving how they can control their brain functions.

Students are less exposed to higher order thinking skills

The teaching and learning of essays in Form Six still uses conventional methods. This is contrary to the concept of teaching and learning based on Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Teachers do not try to encourage students to think using thinking tools such as the I-Think Mind Map. This is because many teachers are not given adequate exposure to the I-Think Thinking Map. Therefore, they failed to implement it in the teaching and learning of essays. As a result, while answering the assignments presented in the essay questions, the students failed to provide the correct content and description. They always provide repetitive content. Although they give five contents but the contents of the essay are the same. Students also provide content and descriptions that are irrelevant or factual. This is the main reason students fail to produce quality essay writing. Abdul Rahman's (2015) study found that there are students who are not able to write. The problems faced by some students were identified in the study that students do not meet the requirements of the question or not in line with the title and do not meet the requirements of the question or not in line with the title and no meaningful content. This problem has resulted in students not only not describing the important content related to the title of the essay but also students writing essays that do not follow the format or guidelines for an essay.

Form Six students also often face problems in the aspect of essay processing. Good essay writing should have the right interweaving between one paragraph and one paragraph. Each paragraph should describe a different content. However, the contents described should answer the question assignment. For example, a question assignment requires the candidate to describe the causes of students skipping school. Candidates need to provide five important contents related to the causes of students skipping school. So, this content should be written in a different paragraph. However, many candidates make mistakes while writing so that there is repetition of content in different paragraphs. This is because they do not have special tools to think while writing. In implementing a quality teaching and learning process, elements in high-level thinking skills should be applied in accordance with the cognitive level of students.

Therefore, in implementing a quality teaching and learning process, elements in high-level thinking skills should be applied in accordance with the cognitive level of students. Pedagogical aspects like these can help create meaningful learning opportunities for students as they are more receptive to something new and innovative. Based on the study of Samsiah and Khalip (2018) teachers should look seriously because thinking tools can be a mediator of effectiveness in teaching and learning. Therefore, they need to use mind maps to produce quality essay writing.

The new STPM system still concerns examinations

Learning at the form six level has not changed despite the change in the syllabus. Exams are still a priority. The education system that still prioritizes examinations has become a constraint for teachers and students. Teachers fail to implement a variety of effective teaching techniques due to extremely limited time. The application of high-level thinking skills using I-Think mind maps takes a long time to ensure that students are properly proficient in

using them in essay writing. According to Rohaida Yusuf and Zamri Mahamod (2015), the main focus on examinations cause's efforts to produce students who are balanced in terms of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical as contained in the Philosophy of National Education (FPK) cannot be fully implemented. The emphasis on examinations has caused teachers to pay less attention to thinking skills among students. Teachers are more focused on efforts to complete the syllabus as well as mastery of the technique of answering exam questions.

Teachers need to change the way they teach, which is the culture of only teachers speaking while students listen. Students are not encouraged to interact with teachers. They need to focus one hundred percent on the teacher's description. Teachers think this conventional technique is the best teaching technique. They managed to achieve the target of producing students who obtained Grade A in the examination. The fact is, such a notion is wrong. In fact, teaching techniques using i-think mind maps is one of the efforts in strengthening teacher pedagogy. This technique can create a teaching environment that is fun for students, easy, informative as well as time and materials are also saved. Through the emphasis on I-Think mind map, student-centered activities can be implemented and encourage collaboration among students other than teachers who tend to be facilitators in the classroom can create a closer relationship between teachers and students (Mohd Syaubari & Ahmad Yunus, 2016).

Students always think negatively about using i-think mind maps

I have interacted directly with 40 students related to the use of i-Think mind maps in essay writing at the STPM level. A total of 32 students (80%) reported that they did not need any thinking tools while writing an essay because the idea would appear spontaneously. Students think that the time to write an essay for 1 hour is very short. They don't have time to formulate answers using the I-Think mind map. They also told when teachers introduced the I-Think mind map they did not try to use it properly. Therefore, they do not benefit. In fact, the students' assumption is wrong. The I-Think Mind Map is very useful to speed up their efforts to get the right idea and a coherent description of the content of the essay while writing. Since they do not seriously use it then they think negatively so.

Students who used mind maps when writing essays found that mind maps helped them structure ideas to produce quality writing. The results of my interviews with 8 students who used the I-Think Mind Map in essay writing have proven this fact. Students told the time they wrote essays became shorter. They are able to write an essay that is 650 words long. Before this, they always had trouble thinking until they failed to write 650 words. They also don't have enough time because they stop writing in a long time because they have no idea. Their opinion is in line with the findings of Noor Hidayu (2016) also stated that the use of mind maps (circle maps) is effective to help Chinese students who are weak in Malay subjects to produce cohesive and coherent sentences in their essay writing. Through the circle map, students can plan the contents and relate each content in the writing of the paragraph better. Another study that proves that Mind Map helps students write essays well is a study conducted by Freddy Xavier (2010) who studied the effectiveness of the use of mind maps can not only help improve the processing of important content in students' essay writing, but also strengthen teachers' skills in teaching descriptive type essays.

Recommendations

The use of thinking maps in teaching essay writing

Pre-university essay writing is challenging because students have to adhere to the requirements of an analytical scoring system and a large number of words requirement, ranging from 600 to 650 words. The required essays are factual in nature that requires students to provide relevant content and each point needs to be explained and clarified in detail. At the same time, the time allocated for the Malay Language Paper 1 (910/1) is 2 hours only. If students are not able to think effectively, they will spend a lot of the allocated time writing up the essay. As a result, many are unable to complete the essay. Therefore, Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) is very important in the teaching and learning of writing skills in pre-university. The most suitable tool for this essay writing is the Thinking Maps. This is because the Thinking Maps can assist students to generate ideas about the topic of the essay questions in the examinations. Mohd Zikri Ihsan et al., (2019; 2020) and Abdullah, et al., (2021) showed that the use of Thinking Maps can improve writing skills as well as mastery of the literature component skills among secondary school students. Students can think of the content focus related to the essay topic chosen. Thinking Maps let students plan and outline their essays and make the writing process easier. Students can use Thinking Maps to brainstorm topic ideas by organising their points better before composing their essays. They can plan the early stages of an essay by visualising all the aspects of an essay question. Following this, students are able to generate ideas to elaborate on the main points of the content. As a result they are able to build a comprehensive and effective essay. Table 2 shows the use of Thinking Maps in the teaching and learning of essay writing in the pre-university classes.

Table 2. The use of thinking maps in essay writing

No	Essay Components	Type of Thinking Map Used
1	Introduction	Circle Map
2	Content	Bubble Map Double Bubble Map Flow Map Multi-Flow Map
3	Closure	Circle Map

Proposed activities in using thinking maps on essay writing teaching in classroom

There are five phases to carry out this activity:

Phase 1: Select the appropriate topic for the the essay.

Online business, also known as e-commerce is a growing business concept in this country. Explain the benefits of the business.

Phase 2: Using Circle Map for the introduction.

Based on Figure 3, the smallest circle is the main issue in the topic. The second circle is the definition provided based student’s prior knowledge other sources of references while the information outside the circle is student reference. These references are used by the student to obtain information about online business. The Brainstorming technique can also be used to generate ideas while using this circle map. Based on Figure 3 above, the smallest circle is the main issue in the topic. The second circle is the definition provided based student’s prior knowledge other sources of references while the information outside the circle is student reference. These references are used by the student to obtain information about online business. The Brainstorming technique can also be used to generate ideas while using the circle map.

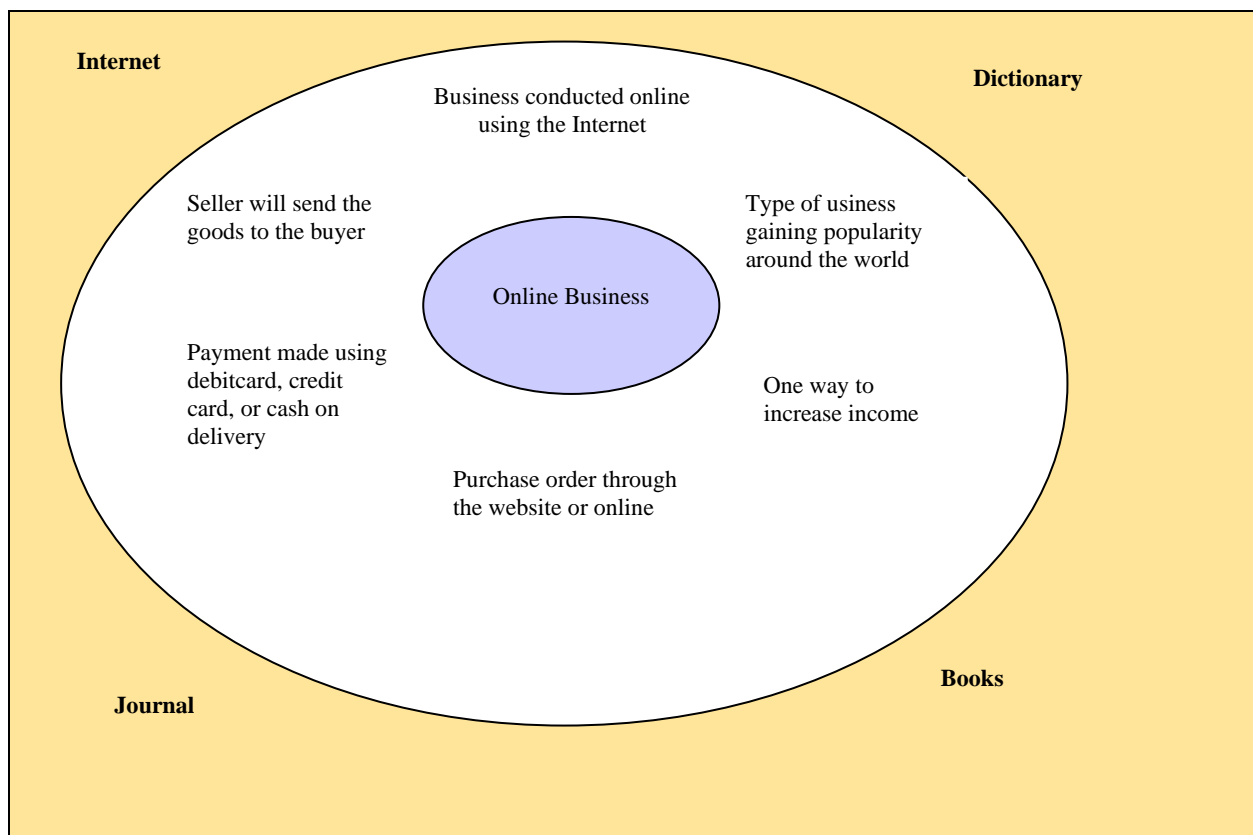


Figure 3. Using circle map for the essay introduction

Phase 3: Using bubble map for the essay content

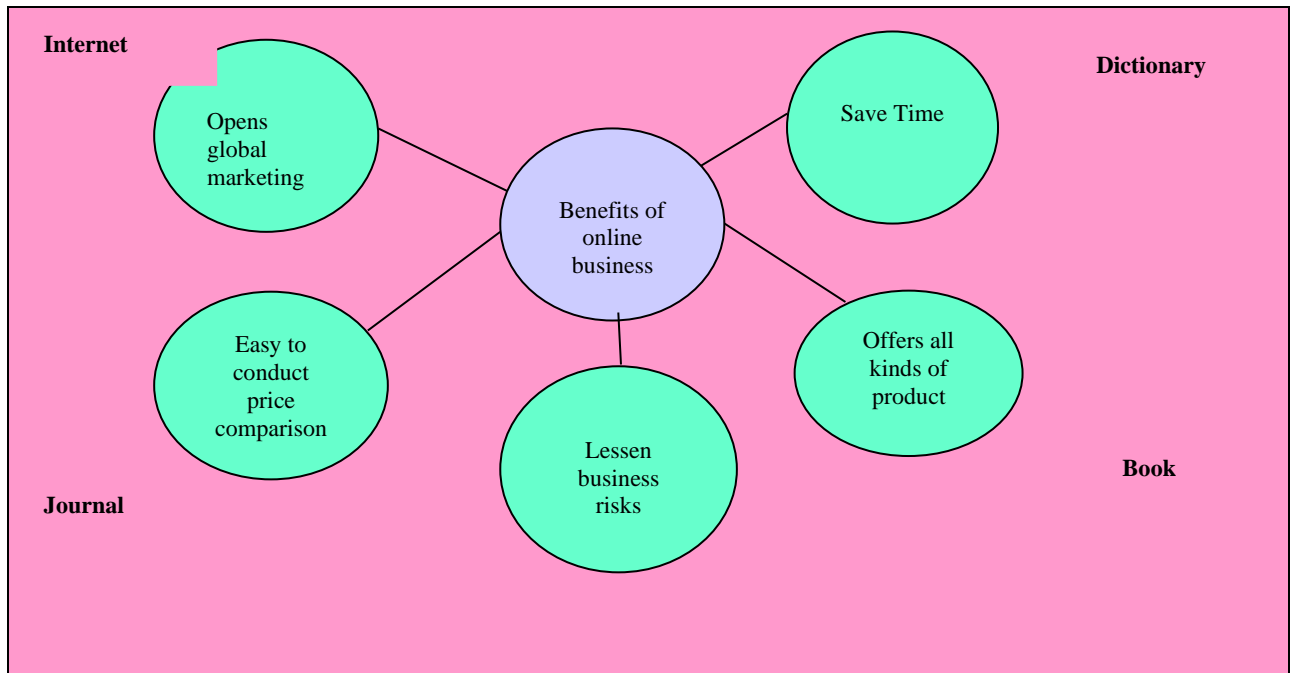


Figure 4. Using bubble map for the essay content

Bubble Maps can be used to build the content of the essay which requires detail descriptions and explanations. The content of the essay is crucial because unreasonable content and explanations will result in lower scores (MOE, 2013). By using the Bubble Map, students can think of specific and accurate content which fulfill the topic requirements. According to Akup and Othman (2017) they can also identify overlapping content or repetitive content by using through the use of Bubble Maps.

Phase 4: Content elaboration

According to Othman, Mohamed, Aris, and Mohd Zaid (2014), the use of a Bubble Map in describing the contents of an essay will help students to develop a more mature and continuous description. The content of their essays will be more focused and as they write, it will assist them to recall prior experiences related to the content of the essay described. They are more likely to provide examples to further enhance the content of the essay (Akup & Othman, 2017). During the teaching and learning session, students will describe the content using the Bubble Map. In writing the essay at pre-university level, students are required to provide 5 main ideas in the content section. They need to describe each main point of the content in a comprehensive, concise, and effective manner (STPM Exam Report 2018, Malay Language 910).

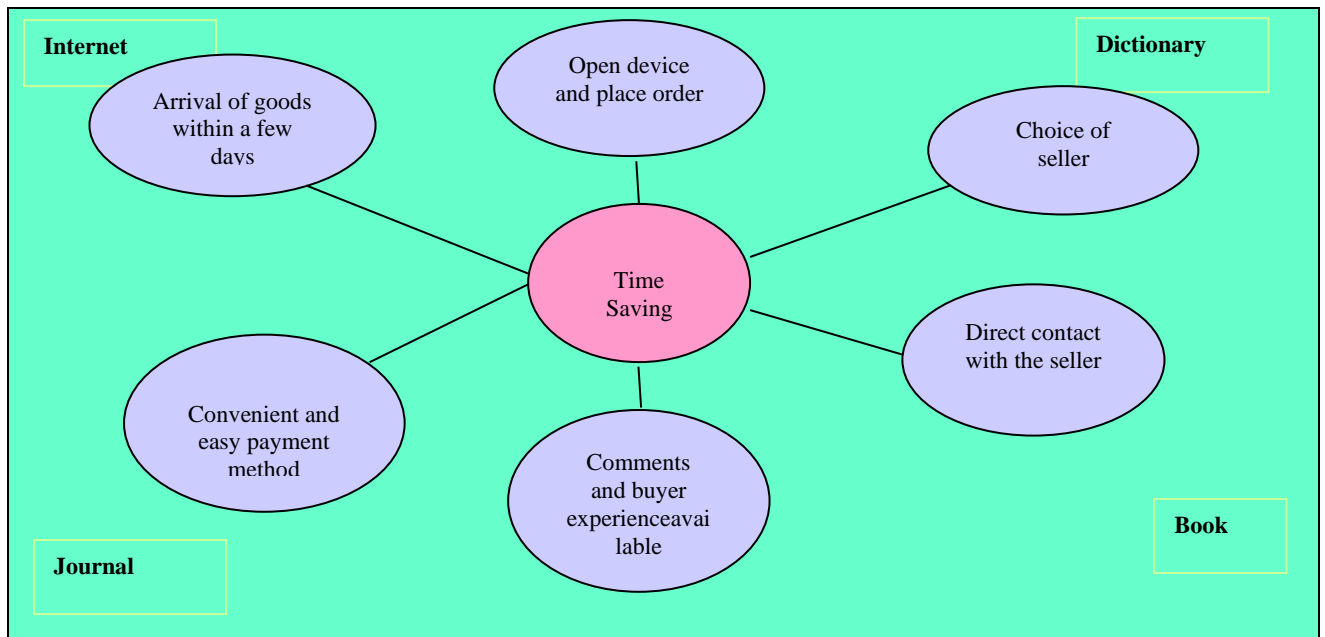


Figure 5. Using bubble map for the content elaboration

Phase 5: Essay closure

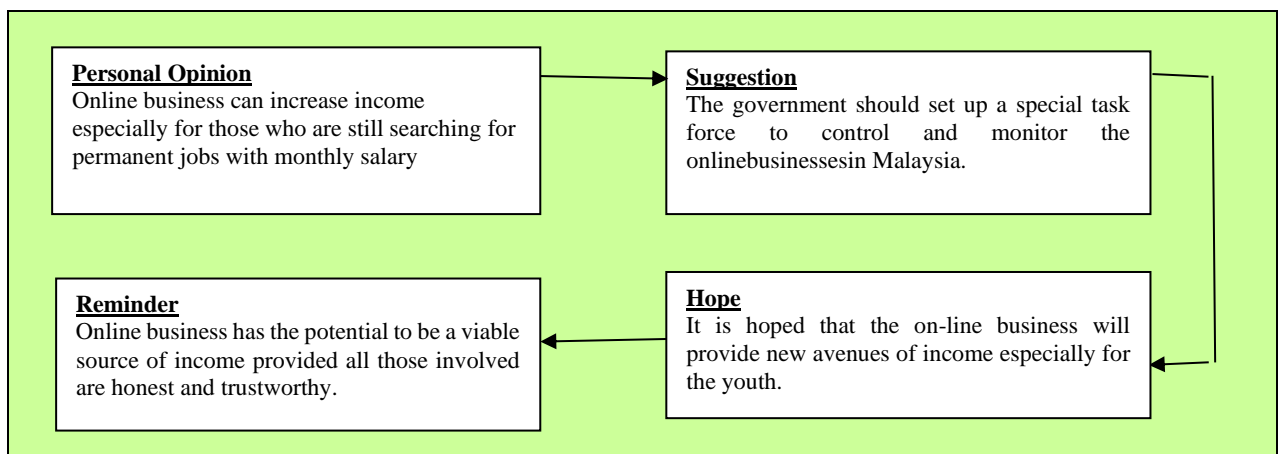


Figure 6. Using bubble map for the closure

Figure 6 shows the use of the Bubble Map in writing the essay closure. The majority of students often fail to write an effective closure they often think that it is enough to simply re-write the content that has been discussed in relation to the main issue of the essay (STPM Exam Report 2018, Malay Language 910). By using Bubble Map they will know what to include and thus, a meaningful and effective closure will be presented.

The use of the I-Think Mind Map in teaching form six students is actually more effective. A total of 4 teachers and 40 students were involved in this study. After using the I-Think mind map they began to realize that the teaching and learning atmosphere in the classroom became more lively and fun. Teachers found their students easier to generate ideas and elaborate on ideas in a sequential, coherent and cohesive manner. Previously, they were always faced with poor writing. Teachers found that their students had demonstrated the ability to write essays that reached the writing standards at the STPM level. The proof is, after using the I-Think mind map, students' interest is increasing and the quality of essay writing is increasing. The number of students who write repetitive content and descriptions has decreased. Students easily understand the themes and assignments of the essay questions stated. The findings of this study are also supported by the study of Norfarahin Mohd Zamri and Mohd Isa Hamzah (2019) who found that the use of mind maps is used as a tool that helps study participants understand, solve problems, and generate ideas creatively and subsequently can follow learning meaningfully.

Not only that, Form Six students who often face problems in the aspect of essay processing were successfully overcome after using the I-Think mind map. Teachers told that the essays written by their students had the correct interweaving between one paragraph and one paragraph. Students have submitted the correct

content, description, and examples while answering the essay question assignment. This is something that teachers are very proud of. This is because quality essay writing reflects students' ability to think maturely and rationally. Indeed, if we think in the right way, we easily generate ideas to present thoughtful opinions. In addition, students' mastery in aspects of syntax, morphology and diction also showed a significant improvement. This is because, good ideas and descriptions make it easier for students to use proper grammar and lexical markers in writing. In conclusion, the use of I-Think mind maps does help students in writing excellent essays.

The use of the I-Think Mind Map makes teachers more enthusiastic and fun to teach. Teachers have a desire to change the way they teach from conventional to collaborative in the classroom. This opinion is in line with the findings of a study conducted by Normah Zakaria, et al. (2018) that the application of the use of i-Think mind map allows teachers to take the opportunity to implement collaborative learning in the classroom. The use of the I-Think Mind Map makes teachers more enthusiastic and fun to teach. Teachers have a desire to change the way they teach from conventional to collaborative in the classroom. This method is used to allow teachers and students to interact bilaterally during the teaching and learning process. With this, the use of I-Think Mind Map can create teamwork among students and can strengthen communication skills among students. The essential job of a teacher is to ensure that the objectives of teaching and learning can be achieved on that day. Accordingly, teachers should be proficient in using these thinking tools to be applied in teaching and learning in accordance with the needs and time. Therefore, the use of i-Think mind map is part of the technique to improve high-level thinking skills among students.

The practice of a handful of teachers who want to finish the syllabus too quickly as the exams get closer is found to be starting to decline. The use of the I-Think Mind Map will simplify the work and reduce teacher stress because the ability of this tool to enable students to think has been proven. The task of preparing students for exams will be more effective. This is because students' negative attitudes towards essay writing can be overcome. They will make the I-Think mind map a very useful tool to help them think. The fact is, from six students are students who will enter university. They need to be trained to give accurate and mature opinions. Writing quality essays using Mind Maps can help us produce Form Six students who are knowledgeable and able to think well. A study conducted by Roselizam Daud & Roslan Ab Rahman (2020) stated that learning changes through the use of i-Think mind maps should be passed and implemented as well as possible to create 21st century learning that is centered on students and teachers as facilitators. The use of i-Think mind maps should be emphasized to produce students who are creative, critical in their thinking. This is because, they need to face the development of technology and the currents of globalization in their lives.

Discussion

The discussion section presents the importance of using Thinking Maps in the teaching and learning of essay writing skills at the pre-university level. By using Thinking Maps students will be more guided when writing their essays. This is because they are able to generate more mature, accurate, and thoughtful ideas in explaining the essay content. Thus, the problem of content and description of the essay is in fact doubtful, the examples and facts are inconsistent, repetitive content, and there exist coherence and unity in each paragraph (STPM Exam Report 2018, Malay Language 910). This study clearly shows that the essay writing problem at pre-university level can be overcome through the use of Thinking Maps and the application of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in essay writing. This finding is in line with the findings of a study by Akup and Othman (2017) which states that students who have been taught using the Thinking Maps have produced improved non-formatted essays as compared to those who were taught using the conventional method. This finding is also in line with a study conducted by Yusop and Mahamod (2015) who found that the use of Thinking Maps have shown positive effects in improving student skills in essay writing. Similarly, the results is in accordance with the study by Che Azahari and Mahamod (2016), who found that the use of Thinking Map have improved student achievements in Malay language. It is undeniable that current and interesting teaching aids are also essential in enhancing student creativity in the production of effective essays. This finding is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by the Mingan and Mahamod (2016) which concluded that the use of Thinking Maps improved students' performance in Malay language.

This study also proves that the issue of students' poor performance in essay writing can be resolved through the use of Thinking Maps. The findings confirms that the use of Thinking Maps has helped students to produce better introductions, identify the content more accurately and draw concise conclusions in their essays. This clearly shows that the use of Thinking Maps has helped students to better understand the contents of their essays and more relevant descriptions as compared to conventional methods. This finding is in line with the findings of Nordin (2013) who also found that the use of graphic and visual materials stimulates thinking, facilitates understanding and strengthens students' memory. This clearly shows that the use of Thinking Maps has helped students to better understand the contents of their essays and produce better and detailed descriptions.

From this study it can also be concluded that the use of Thinking Map among students actually allows them to be more focused and more interested in the subjects concerned. The culture of thinking is advocated

through the use of this Thinking Maps as the essays developed were more organized, projects unity and coherence and thus produce more effective essays. With this in mind, the use of Thinking Maps is one of the most effective teaching methods that will attract students' interest and help create more creative and critical students. This is also in line with Jamian and Ismail's study (2013) which stated that the use of various teaching aids should be used by teachers as an effort to attract and enhance student creativity. Teacher readiness to act is an important factor in ensuring success in changing practices and the classroom teaching and learning culture. Accordingly, the study reinforces the use of Thinking Maps as a suitable method to be used by teachers in enhancing students' thinking culture.

Conclusion

Overall, this paper has shown that the use of Thinking Maps in the teaching and learning activities have successfully enhanced students creative and critical skills though effective thinking skills. Being trained in the culture of thinking and being reflective, teachers were able to ignite interest within the students in any subject being taught. Thus, current teaching methods such as the use of Thinking Maps need to be introduced in order to produce students with first class minds. This is because quality teaching with the use of variety of teaching approaches can produce effective learning outcomes. However, a more comprehensive study of the use of Thinking Maps in enhancing students' thinking culture is needed for future research.

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