

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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## CRITICAL READING AS AN APPROACH TO ENHANCE ESSAY WRITING IN TAMIL AMONG FORM 2 STUDENTS

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### Abstract

This study was conducted to evaluate respondents' writing ability through the Bloom's Taxonomy 1956 theory using a critical reading approach. This study was based on three objectives: assessing respondents' essay writing quality before introducing critical reading, assessing respondents' writing quality after critical reading exposure, and examining the perspective of exposing the critical reading approach. There were 10 form 2 students from an intermediate school located in Negeri Sembilan who were enrolled in the study. All data was collected and analysed from a test sheet, questionnaire and essay marking scheme. There are four reading passages used from form one and two textbooks. The respondents were evaluated by a post test to determine the effectiveness of the teaching of learning about critical reading applications in essay writing. This teaching process has been conducted for four weeks and the respondents have improved their essay writing skills with a critical reading approach. At the end of this study it was realized that critical reading approach can improve essay writing.

**Keywords:** Critical reading, essay writing

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## **Introduction**

In 2017 the Ministry of Education introduced the ‘Document Standard Curriculum and Assessment (DSKP) for secondary schools to enhance student’s main four language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing in Tamil Language (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2017)<sup>1</sup> Document Standard Curriculum and Assessment (DSKP) also emphasizes that writing skill should be mastered by all language learners including Tamil language to create a quality writing (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2018)<sup>2</sup>. Writing is also the most difficult skill to acquire as it involves students to think critically to generate ideas and construct sentences and make paragraphs at the same time. Writing is one of the skills which we use in our daily lives. Writing is also an act of delivering our ideas from our mind into words. Writing can foster student’s creative ideas in essay writing in schools. Moreover, according to Rajendran (2008)<sup>3</sup>, students can use their skills, ideas and concept, experiences and knowledge in writing to strengthen their essays. Through this, students can create various forms of writing to improve their writing skill especially in essay writing.

In order to achieve high scores in examinations, students need to learn the techniques of essay writing in order to score higher marks in their examinations. This study has focused on improving students' ability to write essays through critical reading. This is because reading is an important tool to improve writing ability. Critical reading needs the students to translate, analyse and evaluate the part they have read. Critical reading allows students to read a text and absorb the ideas. Critical reading supports students incorporating new terminology, language, new general information and paragraphing into their essays. Critical reading helps students to absorb the ideas they read and express them in their own language in the form of essays (Mohathir Jamaludin, 2000)<sup>4</sup>. Through this critical reading there are opportunities to assess the level of students’ essay writing ability.

## **Tamil Essay Writing in Secondary School**

There are many researchers conducted using various approaches as a technique in improving students’ writing skill. Kamalesh Sella (2016)<sup>5</sup> carried out a study on explaining writing skills for students. According to the study an essay is the writing of a concept into a language that is relevant to the cause. Thoughts that naturally arise in the mind can be divided into two types based on language. They are spoken language and written language. Thoughts expressed by spoken language are unlikely to persist if they are not written. Improving writing skills is the first step to gaining the ability to think. A person’s knowledge is passed on to others through writing. For example, a writer and a journalist can create the best literature he or she can think of. A student raises his or her academic standards through writing skills.

In the research carried out by Vanitha Paranjothi (2016)<sup>6</sup>, it was found that students are able to write an essay with visualisation techniques. The purpose of this study is to improve the ability of essay writing by using visualisation technique. The study was conducted to eliminate the problem faced by the students in writing the essay and to enable the students to expand the concept by exposing the information in the picture. At the end of the study the researcher found that students write better prefaces, use of descriptive words, programming ideas, beautiful language, use of grammars, and writing unexpected results.

Another research conducted by Sakinah Bt Hamat (2003)<sup>7</sup> entitled Improving Students' Essay Writing Skills through Flat Pictures Approach for Form 1 students. Since these flat images are images that can give visual effects, students were able to draw scenes of their real experiences with the help of these images. Students got a lot of new information by looking at the pictures and used it to write quality essays. Students who scored only 18% in the pre-test scored 50% in the post test by mastering their imagination skill through these films.

Mohathir Jamaludin (2000)<sup>4</sup> conducted a study on improving the writing ability of Form 1 students using the 'SQ3R' reading method. This technique is designed to explain the cycle of how to expand the pages and then bring them into article form. In this study students improved their writing skills by asking questions and evaluating the concept. Two evaluation tools were used in this study. They used the quiz and the students' essay. The way students use this technique is to test the content of words, themes, and terminology found in their essays. This strategy featured a brainstorming session.

## **Methodology**

This study aimed to evaluate participant's writing ability using a critical reading approach which comprises Bloom's Taxonomy 1956 theory. This study was based on three objectives:

- a) Assessing participant's essay writing ability before the teaching of critical reading.
- b) Assessing participant's writing ability after the teaching of critical reading.
- c) Examining the perspective on critical reading approach among the participants.

Critical reading approach has been taught to participants for four weeks. Participants were taught about the exposure of critical reading approaches in writing essay. They explained the meaning of critical reading, usage of critical reading and the method of implementation of critical reading in essays. In the four weeks, participants learned to identify grammatical errors, use of new vocabularies and use of proverbs in the reading paragraph using critical reading approach. There are six steps in Bloom's Taxonomy Learning Hierarchy. This teaching was carried out using application level of Bloom Taxonomy. Application method used to generate new ideas in new different situations. Participants used the keywords of application level such as calculate, determine, create, present, use, demonstrate and illustrate to implement critical reading approach in essays.

## **Participants of the study**

This study has been carried out by using a quantitative approach. The study was conducted at a secondary school which was located in the Seremban area. There were 10 participants who were studying Tamil language in their school and also have registered Tamil language among a subject in their PT3 examination. Participants were labelled as Student 1 until Student 10 in this study. The title of the essay which was used in pre-test and post-test was 'pollution' because it was one of the topics in the form 2 syllabus. Pre-test and post-test were used to evaluate participant's essay writing ability before and after exposing critical reading approach to the participants based on a step by step application of Bloom's Taxonomy theory. Quality of the participant's essay was explained in the terms of elements such as the use of linguistics, grammatical errors, the use of terminology and the paragraphing method. Participant's essays were evaluated by post-test to

measure the improvement of writing ability among the participants. Finally, an overview of critical reading exposures was collected through a questionnaire.

## Findings

The findings of the study were concluded with pre-test, post-test and questionnaire. Respondent's problems in essay writing was identified by the pre-test. After four weeks, respondent's essays were evaluated by post-test. The results of the pre-test and the post-test were compared and explained below.

Table 1  
Comparison of pre-test and post-test results

Student	Pre-test results (%)	Post-test results (%)
1	43	83
2	20	63
3	40	73
4	60	87
5	30	60
6	43	77
7	47	83
8	17	67
9	53	83
10	20	67

As to sum, it was found that the respondents had some difficulties in writing the pre-test. Most of the respondents were found using non-formal language in their essays. Moreover, respondents were found that didn't use more new vocabularies and proverbs in their essays. It also was found that there were a lot of grammatical errors and paragraphing errors in their essays. In addition to this, terminology and proverbs were also less used in the respondents' pre-test. Respondents also do not give proper explanation for the content they wrote and it leads to paragraphing errors. There were some examples of respondent's essays from the pre-test and the post-tests.

Table 2  
Example paragraph from grade 'C' essay:

Usage of proverbs	'அணைகடந்த வெள்ளம் அழுதாலும் வராது' (there is no point regretting later)
Use of vocabularies	'நச்சுத்தன்மை' (botulism)
Grammatical errors	காரனம் (ண), பொடாமல் (போ) (spelling mistake)
Paragraph breaking	- காற்றுத் தூய்மைக்கேடு ஏற்படுவதன் காரணம் தொழிற்சாலையிலிருந்து புகை வெளியேறுகிறது.

	<p>- வாகனங்களை நிறைய பேர் பயன்படுத்துவதால் நிறைய புகை வெளியேறும். அணை கடந்த வெள்ளம் அழுதாலும் வராது என்பதற்கேற்ப குப்பையைக் குப்பைத்தொட்டியில் பொடாமல் எறிப்பதால் அதிலிருந்து வெளியேறும் நச்சுத் தன்மை கொண்ட புகை காற்றுத் தூய்மைக்கேட்டை ஏற்படுத்துகின்றது’.</p> <p>- உதாரணத்திற்கு, இவ்வகையான காற்று நாம் சுவாசிக்கும் காற்றைத் தடுக்கும்.</p> <p>‘There are a lot of smokes released from factories. Most of the people are using vehicles which released black smoke. We should throw rubbish in the dustbin but there are some people who are burning the rubbish openly. It will create more smoke and will lead to air pollution. For example, the air pollution will affect our breathing system’.</p>
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This essay was graded as C because the respondent used only one proverb in the whole essay and it’s related to the content. Secondly, there was a lack of new vocabulary in the essay. The explanation for the content was okay and related to the content. Moreover, there are some grammatical errors and spelling mistakes which lead to score grade C as a result. The above paragraph is an example from the essay which graded as C.

Table 3

Example paragraph from grade ‘E’ essay

Usage of proverbs	நோய் நொடி (illness)
Use of vocabularies	கலைச்சொற்கள் பயன்பாடு இல்லை (no new vocabularies)
Grammatical errors	உலகத்தை (த்) சிறியவர்முதல் (சிறியவர் முதல்) (spelling mistakes)
Paragraph breaking	<p>கருத்து</p> <p>- எழுதவில்லை விளக்கம்</p> <p>- எழுதவில்லை உதாரணம்</p> <p>- எழுதவில்லை</p> <p>‘There was no content wrote there. So that, there was no good paragraph breaking’</p>

This essay was graded as E because the student does not use any proverb in the whole essay. Secondly, respondent did not use any new vocabularies in the essay. The essay was written in simple language with a lot of mistakes. The explanations were not related to the contents. Moreover, there were a lot of grammatical errors and spelling mistakes which lead to score grade E as a result. The above paragraph is an example from the essay which graded as E.

After four weeks of learning with a critical reading respondent learned the importance of using new vocabularies and proverbs in essay writing. Post-test results showed that the respondents have scored better grades in post-tests that are from D to C and B to A grades. Participants followed the correct format of paragraph breaking and wrote the suitable explanation for their contents.

Table 4

Example paragraph from grade 'B' essay

Usage of proverbs	நோய் நொடி (illness) ஆரப்போடுதல் (delaying)
Use of vocabularies	மானிடர்கள், பிராணவாயு, கரிமிளவாயு (human being, oxygen, carbon dioxide)
Grammatical errors	நோய்களை (பி) (spelling mistakes)
Paragraph breaking	<p>- காற்றுத் தூய்மைக்கேடு என்றால் புகையினால் ஏற்படும் விளைவுகள் ஆகும்.</p> <p>- இதனால் மானிடர்கள் நோய் நொடியுடன் சிரமப்படுகிறார்கள்.</p> <p>- இன்றைய கால மக்களின் அலட்சிய போக்கினால் பிராணவாயுவாக இருந்த காற்றுகள் கரிமிளவாயுவாக மாறிவிட்டன.</p> <p>- உதாரணத்திற்கு, வாகனங்களிலிருந்து ஏற்படும், தொழிற்சாலையிலிருந்து வெளியாகும் புகை, மற்றும் இன்னும் பல இடங்களிலிருந்து வெளியேறும் புகைகள் ஆகும்.</p> <p>- கடந்த மாதம் சீனாவில் 'Duolin' என்ற தொழிற்சாலையிலிருந்து வெளியேறிய புகை மக்களிடையே நோய்களைப் பரப்பியது</p> <p>Air pollution is the effect of smoke. People are suffering from illness which is affected by the black smoke. Human's careless mistakes makes a huge effect on them. Their illegal activities change the oxygen to carbon dioxide. Smokes from vehicles and factories are more dangerous. For example, last month smoke from the factories which are located in Duolin, China affected thousands of citizens there.</p>

This essay was graded as B because the student used more than one proverb in the whole essay which related to the topic. Secondly, the usage of new vocabularies in the essay was good. The explanation for the content was good and related to the topic. Moreover, there was only one spelling mistake in the whole essay. The respondent also wrote a general knowledge content which related to the topic. The above paragraph is an example from the essay which graded as B.

Table 5

Example paragraph from grade 'A' essay

Usage of proverbs	<p>அழகுக்கு அழகு சேர்ப்பது போல (adding beauty to the beauty)</p> <p>வெள்ளம் வருமுன் அணைபோட வேண்டும் (must do the preparation before get into something)</p> <p>மனமிருந்தால் மார்க்கம் உண்டு (nothing is impossible)</p>
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	கிணற்றுத் தவளை(don't have general knowledge)
Use of vocabularies	அயராது, எழிலை (charmer)
Grammatical errors	இலக்கணப் பிழைகள் இல்லை (no grammatical errors)
Paragraph breaking	<p>- தூய்மையான சுற்றுச்சூழலால் நாட்டின் வருமானமும் பெருக வாய்ப்பிருக்கின்றது.</p> <p>- அழகுக்கு அழகு சேர்ப்பது போல நம் நாட்டில் தூய்மையாகவும் அழகாகவும் இருக்கும் சுற்றுச்சூழல்தான் வெளிநாட்டவரின் கவனத்தை ஈர்க்கும்.</p> <p>- சுற்றுச்சூழலைப் அயராது பாதுகாத்து இயற்கை எழிலை நிலைநாட்டினால் நாட்டிற்கு வரும் சுற்றுப் பயணிகளின் எண்ணிக்கை அதிகரிக்கும்.</p> <p>- இதனால், நம் நாட்டின் பொருளாதாரம் மட்டுமின்றி வேலை வாய்ப்பும் பெருகும்.</p> <p>The beauty of nature will make our country reach a higher level in economics. The beauty and the cleanness of our country will attract more tourists to our country. Every citizen of this nation has the responsibility to make sure the pride of our country and the number of tourists always remain at a high level. So that, there will be a lot of job opportunities for others and the economic level of our country will increase.</p>

This essay was graded as A because the respondent used more than 2 proverbs in the whole essay which related to the topic. Secondly, the usage of new vocabularies in the essay was excellent. The explanation for the content was excellent and related to the topic. All the explanations were supported with more examples. Moreover, there was no spelling mistake in the whole essay. The respondent also wrote a general knowledge content which related to the topic. The above paragraph is an example from the essay which graded as A.

## Conclusion

Post-test results showed that critical reading approach helped respondents to write an essay which made students an easier way to overcome their problem in essay writing. Other than that, based on the questionnaire, student's overview with critical reading approach were analysed. Most of the student's overview was similar with other students. They agreed with most of the statements in the questionnaire which explained that critical reading was much beneficial to the students in essay writing. They had a clear focus on what to write when they used a critical reading approach. They also agreed that they are able to compose one-word essays in ease using critical s reading approach. It enables them to generate new ideas and organize their writings. Moreover, the students also agreed that they had confidence to start their text as they have some clear picture of what to write in the text. Overall, all the ten students who had answered the questionnaire agreed that a critical reading approach is helpful in composing creative essays.

Based on this study, it was found that the critical reading approach helped the respondents to compose better essays with appropriate use of proverbs, grammatical errors, the use of terminology and the paragraphing method. This is because the participants had difficulties in using new vocabularies, proverbs, correct grammars and paragraphing methods in their pre-test. Following the critical reading teaching, it was found that the respondents' essay improved in post-test.

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