

# The Effectiveness of the Mastery Approach in Writing Tamil Language Debate Essays among Secondary School Students Using the PEELER Technique

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## Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the Mastery Approach in enhancing students' ability to develop ideas in Tamil debate essays, using the PEELER technique as a structured paragraph-writing tool. Conducted with 15 Form Five students from a secondary school in Penang. Thus, main objective this study is Identifying the effects of Mastery Approach on Writing Tamil Language Debate Essays before and after intervention. Pre-test and post-test essay scripts were evaluated using the *SPM Tamil Language Marking Scheme* issued by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate. Over an eight-week intervention, mean scores improved from 56.40 (SD = 7.90) to 67.07 (SD = 9.04), with noticeable gains across median, mode, and score range. The findings suggest that the integration of the Mastery Approach with the PEELER technique provides a clear, systematic pathway for improving content development in debate essays. This has implications for Tamil language pedagogy and supports the adoption of mastery-based writing strategies in secondary schools.

**Keywords:** Mastery Approach, PEELER Technique, Debate Essays, Tamil Language, Secondary School, Essay Writing Skills

## Introduction

Language plays a pivotal role in developing communication competence, which forms the foundation of modern education (Liu, 2020). In Malaysia's multilingual education system, Bahasa Melayu is the national language and is given prominence from the early stages of schooling. English, as the second language, is also a compulsory subject at both primary and secondary levels (DSKP, KPM, 2018). Beyond these, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM) emphasizes the teaching and learning of mother tongue languages for various ethnic groups, including Chinese, Tamil, Arabic, and Punjabi. This study focuses specifically on the teaching and learning of Tamil Language Debate Essays in secondary schools.

Tamil language education in secondary schools begins from the transition class (kelas peralihan) through Form 5, covering the four fundamental skills: listening and speaking, reading, and writing. While lower secondary Tamil curricula emphasize foundational skills, upper secondary students are expected to refine these abilities in preparation for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination. At the SPM level, Tamil is assessed through three papers: Paper 1 (writing skills), Paper 2 (reading, grammar, and literature), and Paper 3 (speaking skills). Within Paper 1, Section B requires students to produce an open-response essay, with the debate essay (karangan perbahasan) being one of the tested types.

Essay writing is a core component of language proficiency, reflecting a learner's ability to organize ideas, use appropriate grammar, and convey meaning effectively (Graham & Perin, 2020). In the context of Tamil language education, many secondary school students struggle to meet the expected standards for coherent and persuasive writing, especially in formal essay genres. These challenges are often linked to insufficient scaffolding, limited practice opportunities, and a lack of targeted feedback (Rajendran & Saraswathi, 2021). Writing, particularly in the debate format, demands not only linguistic accuracy but also critical thinking, logical structuring, and persuasive argumentation. However, students often struggle to elaborate their points effectively, leading to underdeveloped arguments and reduced scores. This challenge is critical as debate essays are a popular yet demanding choice in the Tamil Paper 1 examination.

To address these difficulties, the mastery approach—first introduced by Bloom (1968)—offers a structured, student-centered strategy ensuring that learners master one skill before progressing to the next. This approach aligns with modern educational principles emphasizing formative assessment, corrective feedback, and differentiated instruction (Guskey, 2010; Salleh & Zuraidah, 2018). In the context of writing Tamil debate essays, mastery learning can be paired with targeted techniques such as PEELER (Point, Evidence, Explain, Link, Evaluate, and Reflect), which scaffolds students' thinking processes and promotes deeper engagement with content.

The Mastery Approach, first popularized by Bloom (1968), emphasizes that all students can achieve high levels of understanding if provided with sufficient time, quality instruction, and corrective feedback. In writing instruction, this approach focuses on breaking down the writing process into manageable steps, with continuous assessment and reinforcement until mastery is achieved (Guskey, 2021).

Despite evidence supporting the Mastery Approach in subjects such as mathematics and science, its application to Tamil language essay writing remains underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the impact of mastery-based instruction on the essay writing performance of secondary school students in Malaysia.

### **Objective and Significance**

So, this survey study focused on identified answers for objectives and research questions as mentioned in table 1.

Table 1

*Research Objective with Its Significance*

| Research Objective                                                                                                 | Research Questions                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Identifying the effects of Mastery Approach on Writing Tamil Language Debate Essays before and after intervention. | Is there a significant difference in students' achievement in writing Tamil language debate essays before and after the implementation of the Mastery Approach? |

**Material and Method***Design of Study*

This study used a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test method but without a control group. In this approach, the same group of students was tested before the teaching intervention (pre-test) and after the intervention (post-test). The difference in their scores shows the impact of the teaching method used—in this case, the Mastery Approach. This method is often used in educational research when it is not possible to have random assignment or a control group, but still allows researchers to see learning gains (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

*Sampling Method*

The participants in this study were 15 Form Five students from a secondary school in Penang, (N=15). They were chosen through purposive sampling, which means the researcher intentionally selected students who were most relevant to the study's objectives—in this case, those learning to write Tamil language debate essays. Purposive sampling is common in educational research when the goal is to focus on a specific group that can provide rich and relevant data (Etikan, 2024).

*Research Instrument*

An essay writing test, aligned with the Malaysian Tamil Language curriculum, was used for both the pre-test and post-test. The scoring rubric assessed content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary.

*Procedure*

The intervention spanned eight weeks. The pre-test required students to complete a debate essay under examination conditions. The teaching phase applied the Mastery Approach, focusing on gradual mastery of each essay component with the PEELER technique guiding paragraph construction. Lessons included model analysis, targeted drills, peer collaboration, and teacher-led feedback sessions. A post-test essay was administered at the end.

**Research Findings**

Table 2 presents the full analysis of descriptive statistics were computed for both pre-test and post-test scores. The results indicate a notable improvement in students' essay-writing performance. The mean score rose by 10.67 points from pre-test to post-test, with the median increasing from 58.00 to 66.00. The mode shifted from 50.00 to 66.00, reflecting a general upward movement in the most frequently achieved scores. The range also widened slightly, from 22.00 to 26.00, suggesting that while overall performance improved, variability between students' scores remained.

Meanwhile, Table 3 shows mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for both pre-test and post-test results to determine the improvement in writing performance. The mean score increased by 10.67 points from pre-test to post-test, indicating an improvement in students' ability to develop and elaborate ideas in Tamil debate essays after the intervention.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics Pre-Test And Post-Test Scores.*

| Statistic          | Pre-Test | Post-Test |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|
| N                  | 15       | 15        |
| Mean               | 56.40    | 67.07     |
| Median             | 58.00    | 66.00     |
| Mode               | 50.00    | 66.00     |
| Standard Deviation | 7.90     | 9.04      |
| Minimum            | 46.00    | 55.00     |
| Maximum            | 68.00    | 81.00     |
| Range              | 22.00    | 26.00     |

Table 3

*Mean Scores And Standard Deviations*

| Test Phase | Mean Score | Standard Deviation |
|------------|------------|--------------------|
| Pre-Test   | 56.40      | 7.90               |
| Post-Test  | 67.07      | 9.04               |

## Discussion

This study set out to examine the effects of the Mastery Approach integrated with the PEELER technique on Form Five students' ability to write Tamil debate essays. The specific research question addressed was: *What is the difference in students' writing performance before and after the intervention?* The corresponding research objective was to identify the effect of the intervention on students' essay writing skills.

Analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores revealed a clear improvement in students' performance. The mean score increased from 56.40 (SD = 7.90) before the intervention to 67.07 (SD = 9.04) afterwards. This 10.67-point gain suggests that the targeted instructional approach had a positive impact on students' ability to structure, develop, and present arguments effectively in Tamil debate essays.

The results align with the principles of mastery learning, where students progress towards competence through clear learning objectives, guided practice, and immediate feedback (Bloom, 1971; Guskey, 2021). The use of the PEELER technique—focusing on Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link, Evaluation, and Review—appears to have provided students with a systematic framework to organise their ideas, strengthen their argumentation, and improve linguistic accuracy.

These findings are consistent with recent studies in writing pedagogy, which emphasise that explicit scaffolding and iterative feedback enhance both content and language development in argumentative writing (Padmadewi & Artini, 2019; Nordin & Mohammad, 2017). The improvement seen in this study suggests that the combination of mastery learning

and a structured writing framework can be particularly beneficial for second-language learners who require clear models and repeated practice to internalise effective writing strategies.

In directly answering the research question, the evidence indicates that the Mastery Approach integrated with the PEELER technique significantly improved students' writing performance. The statistical gains observed are not only numerically meaningful but also pedagogically significant, as they reflect improved clarity, coherence, and persuasiveness in students' debate essays.

Overall, the findings suggest that such an instructional approach could be adopted more widely in Tamil language classrooms to strengthen students' argumentative writing skills. Future research could extend this study by including a control group, increasing the sample size, and examining long-term retention of skills.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated the effect of the Mastery Approach integrated with the PEELER technique on Form Five students' Tamil debate essay writing skills. Using a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design without a control group, data were collected from 15 purposively selected students in a secondary school in Penang. The analysis showed a notable improvement in students' performance, with mean scores increasing by 10.67 points after the intervention.

These findings demonstrate that combining mastery learning principles with the PEELER writing framework can significantly enhance students' ability to organise ideas, support arguments with evidence, and present coherent debate essays. The results are in line with recent research indicating that structured, scaffolded instruction, coupled with targeted feedback, leads to measurable gains in argumentative writing proficiency.

In light of these positive outcomes, educators teaching Tamil as a second language may consider integrating similar strategies into their classroom practice. While the absence of a control group limits the ability to make causal claims, the evidence suggests strong potential for broader application. Future studies could employ larger samples, control conditions, and longitudinal tracking to better understand the sustained impact of such interventions.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

While this study demonstrates the effectiveness of integrating the Mastery Approach with the PEELER technique in improving Tamil debate essay writing, several areas warrant further exploration. Future research should consider incorporating a control group to allow for more robust comparisons and strengthen the validity of causal inferences (Campbell & Stanley, 2015). Expanding the sample size and including participants from diverse socio-linguistic backgrounds could enhance the generalizability of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine the sustainability of skill retention and whether the improvements observed persist beyond the intervention period (Hattie, 2023). It would also be valuable to investigate the impact of digital and blended learning tools in

delivering the Mastery Approach, as technology-assisted scaffolding has shown promising outcomes in writing instruction (Li & Zhang, 2020).

Finally, future studies could explore the integration of the PEELER technique with other genre-specific writing tasks beyond debate essays, to evaluate whether the combined approach supports broader academic writing competencies. Mixed-methods designs, incorporating qualitative feedback from students and teachers, may also provide richer insights into learner experiences and instructional refinement (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009).

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