

# Teachers' Knowledge and Perceptions Regarding The Use of I-Think Maps in Teaching Essay Writing Skills

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to identify the level of knowledge and perception of teachers towards the use of i-Think maps in Malay essay writing skills. The research design employed was quantitative, using a survey research method with a questionnaire. The study sample consisted of 165 Malay language teachers in Tamil and Chinese National Type Schools in the Segamat district of Johor state. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics, involving minimum score analysis and standard deviation. The findings indicated that the level of knowledge and perception of teachers towards the use of i-Think maps in Malay essay writing skills was high (minimum score of 4.13). The results suggest that this study had a positive impact on teachers' mastery of Malay essay writing skills using i-Think maps. Additionally, the study found a significant relationship between teachers' knowledge and perception of using i-Think maps in teaching essay writing.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Perceptions, Vernacular Schools, I-Think

## Introduction

The educational landscape in Malaysia has highlighted concerns regarding the proficiency of students, particularly those from Chinese and Indian vernacular schools, in the Malay language. According to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2020), students from these schools struggle with Bahasa Melayu. A study by Chew & Amir (2023) further corroborates this, revealing that the academic performance of students in writing skills, particularly Malay essay writing, is moderate, with over 20% exhibiting weakness in their command of the language.

Various studies have pinpointed factors contributing to this issue. Nawi & Quan (2022) found that only 40.6% of Chinese students demonstrate accuracy in spoken Malay. Additionally, Chew (2023) identified a lack of exposure to and opportunities for using Malay outside the classroom for non-Malay students, particularly those from Chinese vernacular schools. Similarly, Sivaratanam (2019) observed that Indian students in vernacular schools are less motivated to speak Malay due to insufficient proficiency and limited interaction with Malay-speaking peers.

Language proficiency issues extend to writing skills as well. Study revealed that 84.5% of secondary school students lack lexical knowledge, hindering their ability to write in Malay. Moreover, 79.7% of students admitted to struggling with vocabulary recall during writing (Mahamod et al., 2021). These difficulties are exacerbated by environmental factors such as limited social interaction with native speakers and continuous use of informal language in daily life

Consequently, students' inability to master writing skills adversely affects their overall Malay language proficiency. Jamian (2021) highlighted that when students lack fundamental language skills, particularly in writing, they struggle to convey meaning effectively, leading to weak sentence structure and thoughts during composition.

The significance of motivation in language learning is indisputable, yet its connection to Malay language proficiency remains a subject of debate. Research has uncovered feeble associations between integrative motivation and academic achievement in Malay language among students. Moreover, a notable observation is that numerous students primarily engage with the Malay language solely to fulfill examination requirements, potentially contributing to underwhelming performance levels (Sapian et al., 2021).

In response to these challenges Bakthaselvan et al (2022) demonstrated the effectiveness of i-Think mind mapping, known as PAK21, in enhancing Malay essay writing among students in vernacular schools. The study recommends further investigation into Malay language teachers' perceptions of i-Think implementation.

Thus, research is needed to identify the relationship between Malay writing proficiency among vernacular school students and the implementation of i-Think in essay writing. Despite numerous studies on Malay essay writing proficiency, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the overall effectiveness of i-Think mind mapping in improving student compositions. Therefore, this study primarily focuses on teachers' perceptions of using i-Think in teaching essay writing skills.

### **Objective and Significance**

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

Table 1

#### *Research Objective with Its Significance*

<b>Research Objective</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
Identifying teachers' knowledge of using i-Think maps in teaching essay writing.	What is the level of teachers' knowledge in using i-Think maps in teaching essay writing.
Identifying teachers' perceptions of using i-Think maps in essay writing.	What is the level of teachers' perceptions of using i-Think maps in essay writing.

**iii. Material and Method****A) Design of Study**

The design of this study is quantitative and utilizes the survey research method. This method is employed to measure knowledge, perceptions, and relationship between teachers' knowledge and perceptions of using i-Think mind maps in teaching essay writing in vernacular schools. The researcher distributes google survey questionnaires to respondents and conducts descriptive and correlational analysis of the survey items. After collecting data from the random sample, it will be analyzed and presented using descriptive statistics.

**B) Sampling Method**

This study involves teachers from Tamil and Chinese National Type Schools in the Segamat district, Johor. Overall, the Segamat district has 12 Tamil National Type Schools and 20 Chinese National Type Schools. The population of Malay language teachers in these 32 schools is 290. However, only 165 were randomly selected as respondents. Administrative staff such as principals, senior assistant curriculum, student affairs officers, and senior assistant co-curricular activities are not included in this respondent group.

**C) Research Instrument**

This research program consists of a questionnaire in the form of an electronic form accessible through Google Forms. The instrument comprises various constructs that depict how teachers perceive the use of i-Think maps in education. Respondents' demographic information is included in Section A. Gender, age, academic qualifications, years of teaching experience, and position in the educational institution are demographic information of the respondents. The construct of teachers' knowledge regarding i-Think mind maps is discussed in Section B. This section contains six items. Section C of the questionnaire covers items related to the construct of teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of using i-Think mind maps. There are 8 items in this section. Section D of the questionnaire, on the other hand, comprises items related to the construct of teachers' perceptions regarding the use of i-Think as a teaching aid that facilitates the teaching and learning process. There are a total of 10 items in this section aimed at identifying teachers' perceptions regarding i-Think maps as a tool that facilitates the teaching and learning process.

**D) Research Findings**

A total of 165 teachers were involved in this study. Data analysis related to the gender of respondents indicates that 81.8% of participants in this study are female educators, while the remaining 18.2% are male teachers. Meanwhile 52.1% of respondents having a bachelor's degree, 47.3% with masters in education and only one teacher with diploma in education with 0.6%. The tenure as teachers reveals that 54.5% have experience ranging from 10 to 15 years, while 37.6% of them have experience between 5 to 10 years. Finally, findings also indicate that 7.9% of them have experience of 15 years or more. Meanwhile, the positions held by respondents in the study. 55.2% of the respondents are regular academic teachers, while 32.7% of them are subject coordinators. It can also be stated that 12.1% of the respondents in this study are head coordinators.

This study conducted to identify the level of teacher's knowledge and perceptions of using i-Think mind maps in teaching essay writing. Data showed mean score of knowledge is 3.83 (SD=0.43) and mean score perceptions is 4.13 (SD=1.15).

Table 2

*The level of teachers in knowledge, skills and Readiness*

Variables	Min	Sisihan Piawai	Levels
1. Knowledge	3.83	0.43	High
2. Perceptions	4.13	0.37	High

**Discussion**

This discussion delves into the data analysis findings from a study aimed at identifying teachers' levels of knowledge and perceptions regarding the use of i-Think mind maps in teaching essay writing. The mean scores for knowledge and perceptions, along with their standard deviations, provide valuable insights into teachers' attitudes and readiness for integrating this instructional approach.

The mean score for teachers' knowledge of i-Think mind maps was 3.83, with a standard deviation of 0.43. This indicates a relatively high level of knowledge among participants regarding the conceptual understanding and practical application of i-Think mind maps in the context of teaching essay writing. The consistency in scores, as reflected by the low standard deviation, suggests a certain degree of uniformity in understanding across the sample. However, further analysis may be warranted to explore variations in knowledge levels based on factors such as educational background, teaching experience, and familiarity with similar instructional tools. Teachers' perceptions of i-Think mind maps yielded a mean score of 4.13, with a standard deviation of 1.15. This indicates generally positive attitudes and perceptions towards the effectiveness and utility of i-Think mind maps as a pedagogical tool for enhancing essay writing instruction. The higher standard deviation in perceptions compared to knowledge suggests greater variability in attitudes among participants. This variability may stem from individual differences in teaching philosophies, prior experiences with instructional innovations, and personal preferences regarding teaching methodologies.

**Implication**

The findings regarding teachers' knowledge and perceptions of i-Think mind maps have several implications for instructional practice and professional development. Firstly, the relatively high mean score for knowledge suggests that teachers possess a solid foundational understanding of i-Think mind maps, indicating readiness for implementation in instructional practice. However, targeted training and support may still be beneficial to address any gaps in knowledge and ensure effective utilization of the tool.

Secondly, the positive perceptions towards i-Think mind maps underscore their potential as a valuable instructional strategy for teaching essay writing. Educators perceive these mind maps as beneficial tools for promoting critical thinking, organizing ideas, and facilitating the writing process. This positive perception aligns with existing research highlighting the efficacy of mind mapping techniques in enhancing student engagement and achievement in writing tasks.

Furthermore, the variability in perceptions among teachers underscores the importance of ongoing professional development and collaborative inquiry to foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement within educational contexts. Encouraging dialogue, sharing best practices, and providing opportunities for peer observation and feedback can help

address concerns, build confidence, and promote collective efficacy in implementing i-Think mind maps effectively. relevant methods, students can develop positive attitudes towards learning, potentially leading to increased participation and deeper understanding of the subject matter. Ultimately, the implications extend to long-term educational outcomes for students. Improving Malay language reading skills not only contributes to academic success but also equips students with essential literacy skills fundamental for lifelong learning. This research can serve as a catalyst for educational reform prioritizing student-centered teaching methods, fostering a positive learning environment that benefits students beyond their immediate academic endeavors.

### **Conclusion**

The present study sought to investigate the level of knowledge and perception among Malay language teachers regarding the utilization of i-Think maps in enhancing Malay essay writing skills. The positive outcomes observed in this study underscore the potential efficacy of i-Think maps as a pedagogical tool for enhancing Malay essay writing skills among teachers. The high level of knowledge and perception among participants suggests a favorable reception and understanding of the utility of i-Think maps in facilitating the teaching and learning process. These findings align with previous research highlighting the benefits of mind mapping techniques in promoting critical thinking, organizing ideas, and enhancing writing proficiency (D'Antoni & Zipp, 2019; Novak & Cañas, 2006).

The significant relationship identified between teachers' knowledge and perception further emphasizes the importance of educators' attitudes and beliefs in shaping instructional practices and outcomes. Educators who possess a deeper understanding and positive perceptions of instructional strategies are more likely to effectively integrate them into their teaching practices, leading to improved student outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Thus, the positive correlation found in this study suggests that efforts to enhance teachers' knowledge and perception of i-Think maps could potentially yield positive impacts on instructional practices and student achievement in Malay essay writing.

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The implications of this study extend beyond the immediate context of Malay language teaching to broader considerations within educational research and practice. The findings underscore the importance of providing teachers with opportunities for professional development and training in innovative instructional approaches such as i-Think maps. By equipping educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively utilize these tools, educational institutions can foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in teaching and learning.

Moreover, the study highlights the significance of considering cultural and linguistic factors in educational research and practice. By focusing specifically on Malay language teachers in Tamil and Chinese National Type Schools, the study acknowledges the diversity of linguistic and cultural contexts within Malaysia's educational landscape. This recognition of cultural diversity underscores the importance of tailoring instructional approaches to meet the specific needs and preferences of diverse student populations.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the knowledge and perception of Malay language teachers regarding the use of i-Think maps in teaching essay writing skills. The high level of knowledge and perception observed among participants, coupled with the significant relationship between these factors, suggests the potential efficacy of i-Think maps as a pedagogical tool for enhancing Malay essay writing instruction. Moving forward, further research and efforts to support teacher professional development in this area are warranted to maximize the benefits of i-Think maps in educational practice.

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