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**To what extent is the ‘Framed Writing’ strategy effective in improving Grade 11 students’ argumentation skills in writing?
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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the ‘Framed Writing’ paragraph strategy in enhancing argumentation skills of Grade 11 students, chosen due to low results in a prior external summative assessment. Students had prior experience with argumentative writing, however, they experienced difficulties in logical organisation and writing counterarguments. Therefore, the aim of the study was to examine the effectiveness of the chosen tool in improving the systematic construction of arguments and the use of evidence in written assignments. Based on Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, ‘Framed Writing’ served as a scaffolding tool in the students’ zones of proximal development. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, collecting qualitative feedback and quantitative data on student performance post-intervention. Using a structured rubric and differentiated frames, students demonstrated notable improvements in systematically constructing arguments. The findings indicate that structured support enables students to justify claims effectively, with 81.8% achieving competent (4th) and excellent (5th) levels on the assessment rubric of 5 levels. The pre-intervention performance test mean score was 3.36 out of 5 (SD = 0.92), while the post-test mean score increased by 0.55 to 3.91 (SD = 0.70), which corresponds to a moderate-to-large effect size (Cohen’s $d = 0.67$). These results affirm the potential of the strategy as a scaffold for developing argumentation in writing.

Relevance and rationale

Last year’s external summative assessment (writing component) revealed a significant gap in Grade 11 students’ argumentation skills. Students could express their ideas but struggled to sufficiently justify claims with evidence, resulting in an average score of 15.5 out of 30. Recognising this as a key area for development, this study implements the ‘Framed writing’ strategy, since this method is a structured writing tool that helps students develop their thoughts by providing specific frames for expressing sentences and ideas (Graff & Birkenstein, 2010). According to Vygotsky’s concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD), learning occurs when students perform tasks with structured support that they could not yet complete on their own (Flair, 2024). In addition, the ‘Framed writing’ strategy was closely aligned with Toulmin’s model of argumentation, which suggests that arguments consist of a claim, evidence, justification/ reasoning, and rebuttal (Long et al., 2022).

Purpose and research questions

This study seeks to enhance Grade 11 students’ argumentation skills through using structured scaffolding strategy “Framed writing”. The main purpose is to explore the efficiency of the selected tool in improving systematic argument construction and evidence use, and ultimately in achieving higher writing scores. It was expected that students who use the ‘Framed Writing’ strategy would demonstrate more cohesive, structured arguments and improved scores in writing assessments. Therefore, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the ‘Framed writing’ strategy affect students’ ability to structure their arguments clearly and logically?
2. In what ways does the ‘Framed writing’ strategy influence students’ use of evidence and reasoning to support their claims?

Theoretical basis

Writing frames have been proven effective in scaffolding argumentation by providing structured prompts that guide students in constructing logical, evidence-supported arguments. Research by Salehpour and others (2014) suggests that frames allow students to focus on content over structure. Numerous researchers support the idea that structured writing strategy – framing also helps students clarify their reasoning and develop more cohesive arguments (Bitchener & Knipe, 2020; Fisher & Frey, 2021). Scaffolding strategies in writing instruction are widely recognized to help bridge the gap between basic writing skills and more complex argumentative writing, especially for students with lower language proficiency (Yang & Lin, 2018). Similarly, Wray and Lewis (1997) highlighted writing frames as effective tools for developing argumentation by simplifying complex writing processes. In their examination of sentence frames for English language learners, Ferlazzo (2019) and Zwiers (2008) pointed out that providing linguistic structures for constructing arguments helps non-native speakers better engage in complex writing tasks. This identifies the ‘framed writing’ strategy as a valuable tool for developing an argument.

Moreover, Ellis (2018) describes how writing frames provide a stable platform for students to explore complex ideas, which helps in maintaining focus and direction in their writing. It is argued that the systematic use of writing frames allows students to focus more on higher-order thinking, such as analysis and evaluation, rather than merely focusing on sentence construction (Zhang et al., 2022). In the context of high-stakes assessments, Perin and Graham (2018) emphasize the need for instructional techniques that help students produce well-structured responses under time constraints. This all shows the significance of using writing frames in facilitating students’ argumentation skills.

Methodology

For data collection in this study, a mixed-method approach was adopted, combining quantitative survey with qualitative feedback. A document analysis was chosen to examine students’ written assignments, using their initial essays, classroom practice writings and term papers as data sources. In addition, a quantitative analysis of students’ results was carried out and students’ qualitative feedback was collected.

The study employed a purposeful non-probability sampling method to select eleven students of Grade 11 whose previous assessments showed low levels of argumentation skills. To ensure ethical compliance, participants signed an informed consent form, outlining the study’s purpose, significance, and ethical measures. Students were assured of anonymity and confidentiality regarding their personal data and responses.

Research procedure

The intervention lasted eight weeks. During this period, the ‘Framed Writing’ strategy was implemented systematically and the instructional approach aligned with Toulmin’s argumentation model. Writing frames provided structured paragraph templates, sentence starters, logical connectors, and scaffolding for claims, evidence, reasoning, and counterarguments. Correction codes and Think-Talk-Write (TTW) feedback strategies were utilised to support students’ writing skills because it is believed that error coding increases students’ awareness of problem areas and engages them in a long-term process of self-monitoring recurring errors, which has been shown to improve writing quality over time (Graham & Perin, 2007). Meanwhile, TTW has been shown to deepen students’ comprehension and critical thinking, which in writing contexts, can lead to more structured, well-reasoned arguments (Novitaningrum & Agustin, 2024). A five-tier rubric APES – Argumentative Paragraph Evaluation Rubric was used to assess students’ written work. This rubric has been designed to measure argumentation criteria such as systematic development, evidence use,

viewpoint presentation, and overall argument effectiveness, ranging from an ‘inadequate’ to the ‘excellent’ level of achievement (Figure 1).

Figure 1
APES rubric for marking essays

Rubric	Inadequate	Limited	Satisfactory	Competent	Excellent
Argument Development	Lacks a clear argument structure and does not effectively support the chosen perspective.	Presents an argument with major structural issues, lacking clarity and effectiveness.	Presents an argument that lacks some structure, clarity, or effectiveness.	Offers a well-structured and clear argument that effectively supports the chosen perspective. Provides strong analysis and consideration of opposing viewpoints.	Presents a well-structured and clear argument that effectively supports the chosen perspective, demonstrating insightful analysis and consideration of opposing viewpoints.
Supporting Evidence	Minimal use of evidence and its relevance to the argument is unclear.	Limited use of evidence and the connections to the argument are weak.	Adequate use of evidence, but it could be more elaborated or directly linked to the argument.	Effective use of factual/ scientific evidence, with clear connections to the argument.	Exceptional use of relevant and well-elaborated factual/ scientific evidence that well supports the argument.
Language Use	Language use is entirely ineffective and makes the argument incomprehensible. Contains severe grammatical, punctuation, or mechanical errors.	Employs language that is often ineffective and detracts from the efficiency of the argument. Major grammatical, punctuation, or mechanical errors impede comprehension.	Uses somewhat effective language but with noticeable issues that may affect efficiency. Contains multiple grammatical, punctuation, or mechanical errors.	Utilizes precise and effective language, enhancing the efficiency of the argument. Contains minor grammatical, punctuation, or mechanical errors that do not impede comprehension.	Employs precise, varied, and highly effective language, enhancing the efficiency of the argument. Demonstrates impeccable grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.
Overall effectiveness	The work is entirely ineffective, lacking a clear structure, clarity, or effective. It displays no understanding of the content.	The work is minimally effective due to major structural issues, lack of clarity, or effective power. It has a limited understanding of the content.	The work is somewhat effective, but it may lack in structure, clarity, or effective power. It exhibits a basic understanding of the content.	The work is highly effective in presenting a well-structured and clear argument. It demonstrates a solid understanding of the content.	The work is exceptionally effective in presenting a well-structured, clear, and effective argument. It thoroughly demonstrates a profound understanding of the content.

During the first two weeks, students were provided sentence starters and paragraph templates. When assigning differentiated writing frames, students’ learning profiles were considered. Students with lower English language proficiency levels were also provided with a vocabulary bank and additional support from the teacher. After the two-week period, qualitative feedback from students were collected to address their challenges and consider students’ suggestions for further work. Based on student feedback, logical connectors were added to differentiated frames and sentence starters over the next two weeks of the intervention. Interim assessment data were collected four weeks after the intervention began by analysing student papers and surveying students on their self-perceived argumentation skills, understanding of structure, and level of confidence.

During Weeks 5 and 6, students were instructed to incorporate counterarguments into their argument while gradually reducing their reliance on the frames they used. Throughout the final two weeks of the intervention, writing frames were completely removed. Less able students received additional support from the teacher whenever needed. Throughout the study, students practiced with differentiated paragraph frames and completed numerous writing assignments.

To obtain the final results and conclusions, student assignments, qualitative feedback and student reflections, as well as quantitative survey data were collected and analysed.

Results and discussion

The findings from this study align closely with established research on using structured writing frames to support students' argumentation skills. After the intervention, the students demonstrated a notable improvement in their argumentation skills. The average post-intervention score of students' writing assignment was 4.28 points out of 6 (71,3%) compared to 51,7% performance on the external summative assessment, indicating a considerable increase in proficiency.

Results indicated a statistically significant improvement in students' ability to structure their arguments clearly and logically following the implementation of the Framed Writing strategy. The mean score increased from $M = 3.36$ out of 5 ($SD = 0.92$) to $M = 3.91$ ($SD = 0.70$) in the post-intervention survey. Effect size was moderate-to-large with Cohen's $d = 0.67$. For a small classroom intervention ($N=11$), this can be considered a strong educational impact. Rubric-based assessment supported these findings. Specifically, 81.8% of students achieved "competent" or "excellent" levels at the final assessment in this research, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Student performance on APES rubric pre- and post-intervention

Performance level	Pre-test	Post-test
	N. of students/ Percentage (%)	N. of students/ Percentage (%)
Excellent	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)
Competent	4 (36.35%)	7 (63.6%)
Satisfactory	4 (36.35%)	1 (9.1%)
Limited	2 (18.2%)	1 (9.1%)
Inadequate	0	0

This result suggests that the majority of students successfully adopted the structured approach provided by the frames, enabling them to articulate and substantiate their arguments more effectively. The results are consistent with the broader body of research on writing scaffolds. Wray and Lewis (1997) found that writing frames act as effective scaffolds, helping students organize their thoughts in a logical sequence, which directly supports the observed improvements in this study. Additionally, writing frames are proven particularly effective in promoting evidence-based writing, as they guide students in making logical connections between their claims and supporting evidence (Yuan et al., 2020). This was directly observed in the study, where students were able to move beyond vague claims to substantiate their arguments with concrete examples and evidence.

Furthermore, Harris and others (2020) discuss how writing frames provide students with clear guidelines that reduce cognitive load, enabling them to focus on content development rather than organizing ideas. This aligns with the study's results, where students demonstrated significant improvement in their ability to construct coherent, evidence-supported arguments. The framed writing strategy provided specific prompts that encouraged systematic development, evidence use, and logical conclusions. This structured support appears crucial for students who struggle with abstract writing tasks, as it provides them with a roadmap for developing their ideas.

Student feedback highlighted the framed writing structure's clarity, aiding in the systematic development of arguments. Many students reported that the sentence frames simplified the writing process, breaking down the complexity of argumentation into manageable steps. Comments like "the frames helped me know what to write next especially when I didn't know how to explain my ideas" (Participant 4) and "I felt more confident putting my ideas into clear sentences" (Participant 7) indicated an increased efficiency of the 'Framed writing' strategy in developing structured arguments. Furthermore, the feedback highlighted

how the structured approach made it easier to incorporate evidence, which was a significant challenge previously (Participant 1). Students also felt more comfortable drawing conclusions based on their claims, a key component of the argumentative structure taught in the intervention. These findings align with the work of Salehpour and others (2014), who reported that scaffolding strategies like writing frames aid in building argument coherence and clarity. Similarly, Graham and Perin (2007) emphasized the importance of structured support for adolescents, asserting that breaking down complex tasks can facilitate skill acquisition in writing. The present study confirms these findings, showing that frames can simplify complex thought processes and guide students through structured argumentation.

Overall, the results of this study indicated that the 'Framed writing' strategy contributed to the improvement of the students' argumentation skill in writing as it provided a clear structure to follow and allowed them to approach argumentative writing in a step-by-step manner, reflecting high efficiency of the chosen strategy and the overall positive results of the study.

Practical implications

The success of the 'Framed Writing' strategy in this study suggests its value as a scaffold for other writing-intensive tasks, especially for students with limited argumentation skills. Educators might adapt this approach with varied frames to accommodate different learning needs. This study's findings provide strong evidence for the practical benefits of structured writing frames in improving students' argumentation skills. By implementing this scaffold approach, educators can effectively address gaps in students' ability to support and develop arguments, making the writing process less daunting.

The positive response from students indicates that structured writing support not only improves performance but also increases students' confidence and engagement with writing tasks. Given these promising results, educators and curriculum developers should consider incorporating structured writing frames into instruction for argumentative writing, particularly for students who need additional support in organising their thoughts and justifying their claims.

Conclusion

The study found that the 'Framed writing' strategy effectively enhances argumentation skills, as demonstrated by improved rubric scores and student feedback. The results of the current study align with the understanding that structured scaffolding enhances students' writing abilities to a great extent. Its systematic, structured approach allows students to develop arguments clearly and coherently, offering a valuable improvement to students' writing proficiency. Writing frames have been reported to enhance student organisation and coherence in argumentative writing. This study supports the idea that carefully designed scaffolds can have a meaningful impact on student writing and serve as valuable tools in addressing specific writing challenges.

While the results indicate a positive impact, this study has some limitations. First, the sample size was limited to a single Grade 11 class, which restricts the generalisability of findings. Future studies could expand the sample to multiple classes to validate these findings further. Future research could explore the long-term effects of such strategies once scaffolds are completely removed. Another potential area of research is exploring variations of the framing strategy across other genres of writing, such as persuasive or narrative, to assess whether similar improvements are seen.

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