

The Impact of the VAW Method on Year 5 ESL Primary School Learners' Writing Performance: Insights from an Online Learning Context

Dg Nursazwani Daud¹, Wardatul Akmam Din²

¹Faculty of Education and Sport Studies, Universiti Malaysia Sabah

²Centre for Internationalisation & Global Engagement, Universiti Malaysia Sabah

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.907000191>

Received: 04 July 2025; Accepted: 10 July 2025; Published: 07 August 2025

ABSTRACT

Writing proficiency is a crucial skill for ESL learners, yet vocabulary learning and writing instruction in Malaysian primary schools often operate in isolation. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Vocabulary-Application and Practice-Writing (VAW) Method, an integrated instructional model administered online, to enhance writing performance among Year 5 ESL learners in a rural Malaysian school. A multi-methods, quasi-experimental design was used. Sixty Year 5 learners were divided equally into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received the VAW Method intervention through scaffolded vocabulary exercises and guided writing tasks. The control group followed standard ESL writing instruction. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-tests and repeated writing tasks, while qualitative insights were gathered from semi-structured interviews. Statistical analyses included ANOVA, t-tests, and essay progression tracking; qualitative data were thematically analyzed. Learners in the experimental group demonstrated statistically significant improvements in writing performance, including vocabulary use, text coherence, and structural organization ($F(1,58)=13.21$, $p<.001$, partial $\eta^2=.186$). Repeated measures ANOVA revealed sustained gains across four writing tasks ($F(3,116)=97.793$, $p<.001$). Qualitative findings revealed high levels of satisfaction, engagement, and appreciation for scaffolded feedback, despite challenges in online learning. The VAW Method constitutes a pedagogically robust and theoretically informed approach to ESL writing instruction. By bridging vocabulary learning with structured writing tasks via scaffolded cycles, it supports primary ESL learners in achieving meaningful and sustained writing gains, even in digitally mediated and resource-constrained environments. The study offers compelling evidence for embedding vocabulary-integrated writing cycles into digital and face-to-face ESL curricula, promoting learner-centered scaffolding and feedback-driven revision practices.

Keywords: VAW Method, ESL writing, primary education, online learning, scaffolded instruction, vocabulary-integrated writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a core component of language proficiency and a critical skill in English as a Second Language (ESL) education. For young learners, the ability to express ideas coherently is essential for academic success and broader communicative competence. However, ESL learners, particularly those in under-resourced rural contexts, face persistent challenges such as limited vocabulary and weak sentence construction. These difficulties are often compounded in online learning environments, where learners may lack the immediate scaffolding and interactive feedback available in traditional classrooms [6], [9], [11].

While research acknowledges the central role of vocabulary in effective writing [1], [14], instruction often treats vocabulary and writing as separate skills [4], [5]. This disconnect is especially problematic in Malaysian

rural primary schools, where research on integrated, vocabulary-based writing interventions for online settings remains limited [3], [5], [12]. In response to this gap, the present study introduces and evaluates the Online-administered Vocabulary-Application and Practice-Writing (VAW) Method, a structured pedagogical approach that integrates vocabulary acquisition with scaffolded writing practice. This study is significant because it provides much-needed empirical evidence on a unified, theoretically informed framework designed for digitally mediated and resource-constrained environments. It addresses an urgent need for flexible, learner-centered pedagogical approaches that can improve writing outcomes, thereby advancing both theory and practice in ESL literacy instruction.

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of the online-administered VAW Method on the writing performance of Year 5 ESL learners, examining key components such as vocabulary use, text coherence, and structural organization.
2. To investigate Year 5 ESL learners' perceptions of the VAW Method's effectiveness in supporting their engagement and writing development within a digitally mediated learning environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Effective writing is a complex skill in ESL education, demanding vocabulary breadth, syntactic control, and content development, particularly for primary learners [4], [8], [10]. Many learners exhibit underdeveloped writing due to limited lexical knowledge and insufficient instructional scaffolding—issues exacerbated in online settings [3], [5], [11]. Research confirms that robust vocabulary is a key determinant of writing performance, enhancing cohesion and syntactic variety [1], [14], [15]. Despite this, traditional curricula often treat vocabulary and writing as discrete components, leading to fragmented learning [4], [5]. These challenges are pronounced in rural Malaysian schools, where limited English exposure and digital inequities persist [5], [6], [12].

To address similar instructional challenges, researchers have advocated for structured pedagogical approaches. The process writing approach, with its stages of planning, drafting, and revising, has shown positive outcomes in online ESL contexts [2], [9]. Similarly, genre-based approaches use model texts as scaffolding tools to help learners internalize text structures [8]. However, a gap remains in studies focusing on younger learners in rural digital environments that explicitly integrate vocabulary instruction within these writing processes [3], [5].

To bridge this gap, a robust instructional model must be grounded in established learning theories. The design of such a model is informed by socio-constructivist theory, which posits that learning is a social process. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding is central [13], emphasizing guided support that enables learners to achieve tasks they could not complete independently. This is crucial for building writing competence, as learners receive tailored support through teacher guidance and peer interaction that is gradually reduced as they gain independence.

Complementing this social perspective, cognitive theories of writing explain the mental activities involved in composition. The model by Flower and Hayes (1981) frames writing as a recursive process of planning, translating (drafting), and reviewing [13]. An effective pedagogy must, therefore, provide a structured cycle that guides learners through these cognitive stages. Furthermore, since vocabulary is a core challenge, Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies provides a framework for ensuring that new words are acquired and retained strategically through methods like discovery, social collaboration, and repeated review [7].

The present study introduces the VAW Method, which synthesizes these theoretical principles to address the identified literature gap. The VAW Method integrates thematic vocabulary instruction and guided writing tasks within a cohesive pedagogical cycle. It operationalizes Vygotsky's scaffolding through peer discussions and teacher feedback [13]; applies the Flower and Hayes model via structured writing templates [13]; and embeds Schmitt's taxonomy through targeted vocabulary exercises [7]. By doing so, the VAW Method offers

a theory-driven solution tailored to the needs of young ESL learners in digitally mediated, rural educational contexts.

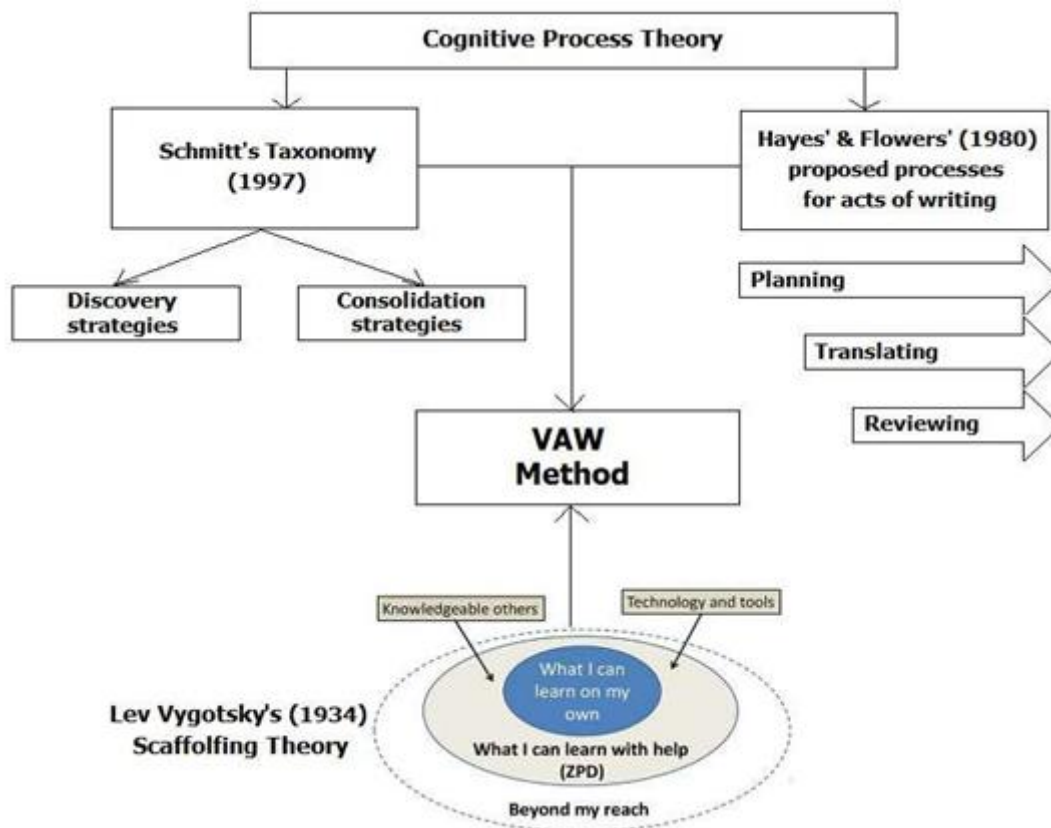


Fig. 1 Theoretical framework of the VAW Method.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive foundation for the instructional design of the VAW Method (Fig. 1). Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding supports socially mediated learning through guided practice and peer collaboration, fostering interaction within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development [13]. Flower and Hayes' (1981) cognitive process model informs the structured, recursive writing cycles that form the backbone of the method [13]. Complementing these, Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies ensures that vocabulary acquisition is intentional, strategic, and meaningfully embedded within the writing process [7]. By integrating social interaction, cognitive engagement, and systematic vocabulary development, the VAW Method promotes deeper language processing, improved vocabulary retention, and enhanced writing proficiency among ESL learners.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Participants

This study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design within a Design and Development Research (DDR) framework. Participants comprised 60 Year 5 ESL learners from a rural primary school in Penampang, Sabah. Based on matched English proficiency levels determined through diagnostic assessments and school academic records where learners were assigned to either an experimental group ($n = 30$) or a control group ($n = 30$).

Intervention Procedure

The experimental group engaged in a ten-week online intervention using the VAW Method Module, which integrated vocabulary instruction, model text analysis, and scaffolded writing tasks. The intervention

comprised 40 instructional hours (20 synchronous, 20 asynchronous), designed to accommodate rural learners' limited internet connectivity.

- **Weeks 1–3:** Focused on vocabulary acquisition using thematic clusters related to upcoming writing tasks. Instruction was guided by Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis to ensure exposure to comprehensible input.
- **Weeks 4–10:** Implemented a process writing cycle encompassing pre-writing, drafting, revision, and editing, informed by Flower and Hayes' (1981) cognitive model. Learners produced four essays using structured VAW Templates as scaffolding tools.
- **Post-task reflection:** After each writing task, serial semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore learners' evolving strategies, vocabulary application, and perceptions of the writing process.

The control group followed regular instruction aligned with the national Year 5 ESL syllabus, without exposure to the VAW Method.

Instruments

Data were collected using three primary instruments:

- **Writing Tests:** Pre- and post-tests assessed learners' writing performance using CEFR-aligned analytic rubrics. Inter-rater reliability was high (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.86$), confirming scoring consistency.
- **Questionnaire:** Developed based on initial needs analysis, the questionnaire measured engagement, vocabulary learning, and writing confidence using a 5-point Likert scale. Content validity was ensured through expert review, and internal consistency was confirmed (Cronbach's $\alpha > .70$).
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Conducted with ten purposively selected learners from the experimental group, interviews explored learner motivation, vocabulary usage, and writing strategies. Audio recordings were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from writing tests and questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequencies) were computed, and one-way ANOVA was used to compare group differences in writing performance and engagement. Prior to analysis, assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were tested using Shapiro-Wilk and Levene's tests, respectively.

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis following an inductive coding approach. Emergent themes were identified to capture patterns in learner experience and perception. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data strengthened the validity and interpretability of findings [6], [11].

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the university's ethics committee and the relevant educational authorities. Informed consent was secured from the learners' parents or guardians prior to participation. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and pseudonyms were used in reporting qualitative data. Special accommodations, including asynchronous learning options and simplified digital access, were provided to support learners facing challenges with internet connectivity and device availability [5], [12].

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

This section addresses the first research objective, which aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the online-administered VAW Method on the writing performance of Year 5 ESL learners, with a focus on vocabulary

use, text coherence, and structural organization. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were employed to assess the impact of the intervention.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the pre- and post-test mean scores and standard deviations for both the experimental and control groups.

TABLE I Descriptive Statistics of Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Group	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)
Experimental	62.3 (8.4)	78.5 (7.2)
Control	61.7 (9.1)	65.2 (8.9)

The descriptive results indicate a substantial improvement in the experimental group's writing performance following the VAW Method intervention, compared to more modest gains in the control group.

Inferential Statistics

1. One-Way ANOVA on Post-Test Scores

A one-way ANOVA comparing post-test scores revealed a statistically significant difference between groups, $F(1, 58) = 13.21$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .186$, indicating a large effect size. This suggests that the VAW Method had a meaningful and positive impact on learners' writing outcomes compared to conventional instruction.

2. Paired Samples t-Test

A paired samples t-test was conducted to assess within-group improvement in the experimental group. The analysis showed a statistically significant increase in writing performance from pre- to post-test, supporting the effectiveness of the intervention.

3. Independent Samples t-Test on Essay Scores

Further analysis using an independent samples t-test examined post-test essay scores between groups. The results are presented in Table II.

TABLE II Independent Samples T-test Results

Group	N	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	30	-8.00	3.11	0.57
Control	30	-4.07	2.13	0.39

The experimental group demonstrated significantly greater gains in essay writing than the control group ($p < .01$), further reinforcing the method's instructional value.

4. Repeated Measures ANOVA: Progression Across Four Essays

To measure longitudinal development, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted on the four essays (E1 to E4) written by the experimental group over the course of the intervention.

TABLE III Descriptive Statistics for Essay Scores (Experimental Group)

Essay	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
E1	30	9.97	2.43	6.0	15.0
E2	30	12.17	2.04	9.0	17.0
E3	30	15.27	1.76	13.0	19.0
E4	30	19.53	2.83	16.0	24.0

A significant main effect of time was observed:

- $F(3, 116) = 97.793, p < .001$
- Welch's $F(3, 63.586) = 77.609, p < .001$

The progressive improvement in essay scores across the intervention period indicates consistent development in writing proficiency attributable to the VAW Method.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

The combined results from the ANOVA, paired samples t-test, independent samples t-test, and repeated measures analysis offer robust statistical support for the effectiveness of the VAW Method. Learners in the experimental group exhibited significant and sustained improvement in writing competencies, including vocabulary use, sentence structure, and content elaboration. These findings directly address Objective i, affirming that the VAW Method is a pedagogically sound and statistically effective approach for enhancing the writing skills of upper primary ESL learners, particularly within digitally mediated and resource-limited contexts.

Qualitative Findings

This section addresses the second research objective: To explore learners' perceptions of the VAW Method during online learning. Data were derived from semi-structured interviews with learners in the experimental group who participated in the intervention. The guiding interview prompt "Are you happy with the VAW Method and how it helped you write?" was designed to elicit authentic learner reflections on their experiences with the method and its perceived impact on their writing development.

Across all interviews, learners expressed consistently positive sentiments toward the VAW Method. In Interview 1, responses included brief but affirming remarks such as "Yes" (A5_1, A9_1, A17_1), "Satisfied" (A4_1, A19_1), and "I like this program" (A23_1). One learner elaborated further, stating, "We felt satisfied with the program and it was very helpful in our writing" (A1_1). These comments suggest a generally high level of satisfaction with the intervention, despite the inherent challenges of online learning in a rural context.

Interview 2 reinforced these perceptions. Learners articulated tangible improvements in their writing skills as a result of the program. One noted, "The VAW Method program has helped us write sentences until they become essays" (A4_2), highlighting the progressive structure of the intervention. Another learner emphasized the value of feedback, stating, "Yes, I like the part when we are checking our essays while discussing the answers. I could understand my lack point when you explain to us with reasoning and advises" (A28_2). Such reflections suggest that the program's feedback component played a significant role in enhancing learners' metacognitive awareness and writing competence.

These interview findings directly address the second research objective, which was to explore learners' perceptions of the VAW Method during online learning. Thematic analysis revealed that learners perceived improvement in multiple areas of writing, including vocabulary use, sentence construction, grammar accuracy, and idea development. Furthermore, they expressed appreciation for the method's structured, interactive, and

supportive design. Several learners also expressed a desire for continued implementation of the method, underscoring its relevance and effectiveness in supporting ESL learning needs at the upper primary level.

Overall, the qualitative findings affirm the VAW Method's impact not only on writing outcomes but also on learner engagement and confidence. These learner voices provide critical contextual insight, supporting the method as a responsive and adaptable instructional approach particularly valuable in remote and resource-constrained educational settings.

Emergent Themes from Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts yielded four prominent themes that captured learners' perceptions of the VAW Method during the online intervention. The analysis followed an inductive coding process, in which key phrases and learner responses were grouped into categories and synthesized into overarching themes.

TABLE IV Key Themes Identified from Learner Interviews on the VAW Method

Theme	Description	Example Quote(s)
General Satisfaction	Learners expressed strong emotional acceptance of the VAW Method.	"Yes." / "Satisfied." / "I like this program."
Improved Writing Skills	The method supported learners' progression from sentence writing to full essays.	"The VAW Method program has helped us write sentences until they become essays." (A4_2)
Effective Feedback and Reflection	Learners valued constructive, explanatory feedback that guided improvement.	"I could understand my lack point when you explain to us with reasoning and advises." (A28_2)
Enjoyment and Engagement	The method was described as enjoyable, contributing to learner motivation.	"I like this program." / "Absolutely."

These themes collectively demonstrate that the VAW Method addressed learners' cognitive, affective, and metacognitive needs during the online intervention. The theme of General Satisfaction highlights overall learner comfort and positive attitudes toward the method's design. Improved Writing Skills points to tangible academic progress as perceived by the learners themselves. Effective Feedback and Reflection emphasizes the role of teacher guidance in helping learners understand their mistakes and revise thoughtfully [9], [10]. Lastly, Enjoyment and Engagement underscores the method's success in maintaining attention and motivation as key factors in sustaining learning among young ESL learners, particularly in an online context [6], [11].

Overall, the qualitative findings indicate that the VAW Method was positively received by all participants. It was perceived as beneficial not only for improving writing skills but also for boosting learner confidence and active participation in digital learning environments [5], [11]. The structured yet interactive nature of the method, along with opportunities for guided reflection and individualized feedback, contributed to its perceived effectiveness. These insights serve as qualitative validation of the VAW Method as a pedagogically sound, context-sensitive, and learner-centered instructional approach. Its relevance is particularly notable for ESL settings where face-to-face interaction is constrained, such as rural or remote schools adapting to online or hybrid instruction [5], [12].

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that the VAW Method significantly enhanced the writing performance of Year Five ESL learners in key areas such as vocabulary usage, text organization, and coherence. This success is attributable to the method's strong theoretical foundation. Drawing from Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding, the method provided learners with explicit instruction and collaborative feedback, enabling them

to move from guided practice to independent essay composition [14]. Despite being implemented in an online environment with technological barriers like unstable connectivity, the method's blend of synchronous and asynchronous activities fostered sustained engagement, suggesting that thoughtful pedagogical design is more critical than technological sophistication alone [5], [6], [12]. These outcomes align with prior research showing that structured frameworks can facilitate successful online learning in rural Malaysian schools [3], [5], [11], [12].

The study offers significant implications for practice. Pedagogically, the VAW Method provides teachers with a replicable framework for integrating vocabulary acquisition with process-based writing, which is effective even in digital classrooms [2], [8]. For curriculum planners, the findings support embedding vocabulary-focused, writing-integrated strategies into national curricula like Malaysia's KSSR to bridge the common input-output gap in ESL performance [4], [5]. This highlights a need for policy that supports systematic professional development for teachers in these integrated techniques, particularly for online delivery [5], [12].

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The intervention was conducted at a single rural school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to urban settings or learners with different proficiency levels. The moderate duration of the study, while showing clear gains, may not capture the full extent of long-term writing development or skill transferability to other genres. Furthermore, the fidelity of implementation was not systematically evaluated, which could influence the consistency of the method's impact. Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for contextualizing the results.

CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence that a structured, theory-driven pedagogical approach can successfully improve ESL writing proficiency, even within a resource-constrained online learning context. The VAW Method, which integrates vocabulary instruction with scaffolded writing tasks, led to statistically significant improvements in learners' writing performance and fostered strong engagement and motivation. Rooted in socio-constructivist and cognitive theories, the method's success underscores that instructional design, rather than technology alone, plays the decisive role in learning outcomes. The VAW Method therefore stands as a scalable and responsive model for enhancing ESL writing instruction.

Future research should build upon these findings by investigating the method's scalability across more varied contexts, including urban schools and different proficiency levels. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term sustainability of writing gains and vocabulary retention. Finally, comparative studies contrasting the VAW Method with other established approaches would further validate its pedagogical value and help refine ESL curriculum development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to express sincere gratitude to the participants of this study for their valuable time and commitment. Special appreciation is extended to the author's supervisor, who also serves as the corresponding author of this article, for her invaluable guidance and constructive feedback throughout the development of this research. This study would not have been possible without the support, encouragement, and cooperation of all those involved.

REFERENCES

1. Hashim, H., Yunus, M. M., & Embi, M. A. (2022). Innovative strategies for vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners: A review. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 11(3), 101–112. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n3p101>
2. Irawan, R., & Mahmud, M. (2023). Integrating vocabulary instruction into writing tasks: An experimental study with ESL learners. *TESOL International Journal*, 18(1), 45–60.

3. Jerry, M., & Yunus, M. Md. (2021). Blended learning in rural primary ESL classroom: Do or Don't. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 20(2), 152–173. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.2.9>
4. Lee, C. H. (2022). Fragmentation in ESL vocabulary and writing instruction: Issues and recommendations. *Asian EFL Journal*, 24(6), 76–89.
5. Lim, L. H., & Samad, A. A. (2023). English language challenges in Malaysian rural schools: A case for pedagogical reform. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 19(2), 22–38.
6. Mustafa, M. A., Yasin, M. S., & Latif, H. A. (2022). ESL learners' engagement in online classes: Barriers and solutions. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, 22(4), 97–115.
7. Nation, I. S. P. (2022). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
8. Nordin, N., & Yunus, M. M. (2023). Using genre-based approaches in ESL writing: Effects on text structure and learner confidence. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 12(1), 1–15.
9. Rahman, N. A., & Jalal, N. F. (2023). Digital process writing for primary ESL learners: A quasi-experimental study. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 20(1), 77–93.
10. Santos, M. A., & Aguilar, K. P. (2023). Vocabulary as a predictor of writing quality in English learners. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 63, 101905. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2023.101905>
11. Tan, K. L., & Ahmad, N. (2023). Learner engagement in online ESL instruction: A qualitative inquiry. *Language and Literacy Education Journal*, 15(2), 35–52.
12. Tham, J., Ferdous Azam, S. M., & Albattat, A. (2021). Critical online learning implementation and determinants in rural areas in Malaysia. In *Higher Education Challenges in South-East Asia* (pp. –). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-4489-1.ch012>
13. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
14. Yan, H., & Chen, L. (2022). The relationship between vocabulary knowledge and second language writing: A meta-analysis. *System*, 106, 102786. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2022.102786>
15. Yan, X., & Chen, Q. (2022). The role of vocabulary knowledge in second language writing: A meta-analysis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 44(1), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263121000300>