

Mirroring Social Constructivism in Academic Writing

Zarina Razlan^{1*}, Noor Hanim Rahmat², Mohd Safirin Karis³

^{1,2}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA

³Faculty Technology and Electronic and Computer Engineering (FTKEK), Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM), Malaysia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100601115>

Received: 01 June 2026; Accepted: 06 June 2026; Published: 13 July 2026

ABSTRACT

This study explores how social constructivism influences academic writing through scaffolding, peer comments, and peer evaluation. Grounded in Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory (1978), the study examines the relationship between scaffold, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) in academic writing practices. A quantitative research design was employed using a 5-point Likert-scale survey distributed to 61 respondents. The instrument consisted of three main variables: scaffold, measured through step-by-step instruction and colour-coding; ZPD, measured through peer comments; and MKO, measured through evaluative review. Reliability analysis showed high internal consistency with Cronbach alpha values of .934 for scaffold, .877 for ZPD, and .907 for MKO, with an overall reliability score of .955. The findings revealed that respondents had positive perceptions of scaffolding, peer comments, and peer evaluation in improving academic writing skills. Students agreed that step-by-step guidance and colour-coding helped them understand essay structures more effectively, while peer comments and evaluative reviews enhanced clarity, organization, and understanding of mistakes in essay writing. Correlation analysis further indicated strong positive relationships between scaffold and ZPD ($r=.735$), ZPD and MKO ($r=.815$), and MKO and scaffold ($r=.768$), with all relationships being statistically significant at $p<.001$. The study highlights the importance of collaborative learning, guided support, and peer interaction in academic writing development. The findings suggest that integrating scaffolding and peer-based strategies into writing instruction can improve learners' confidence, engagement, and writing performance while promoting more interactive and meaningful academic learning experiences.

Keywords: social constructivism, academic writing, scaffolding, , zone of proximal development (ZPD), more knowledgeable other (MKO).

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is an essential component of higher education because it enables students to communicate ideas, construct arguments, and engage critically with knowledge. However, many learners continue to experience difficulties in organizing ideas, developing coherent arguments, and applying effective writing strategies (Nhung, 2024; Subandowo et al., 2025)). Social constructivism emphasizes that learning occurs through interaction, collaboration, and shared experiences with others. In academic writing, this perspective is reflected through peer discussions, feedback, and collaborative learning activities that support students throughout the writing process. Studies by (Yang & Ompok, 2025) and (Liu, 2023) revealed that positive peer relationships significantly enhance classroom engagement and academic performance, highlighting the importance of supportive peer interaction in educational settings.

Furthermore, peer feedback has been recognized as an effective strategy for improving academic writing skills. (Wei & Liu, 2024) found that peer feedback provides cognitive, affective, behavioral, social, and metacognitive benefits that contribute to writing development. Similarly, (Nhung, 2024) showed that high-proficiency students frequently discussed writing ideas with peers and teachers before, during, and after writing tasks. Despite the growing body of research on writing strategies and peer interaction, there remains a research gap in

understanding how social constructivist principles can be systematically mirrored in academic writing practices through structured peer comments, peer evaluation, and collaborative support. Therefore, further exploration is needed to examine how social interaction can strengthen students' academic writing development and engagement.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore how social constructivism influences academic writing. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How do learners perceive scaffolding in academic writing?
- How do learners perceive the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in academic writing?
- How do learners perceive a more knowledgeable other (MKO) in academic writing?
- Is there a significant relationship between scaffold and ZPD?

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between scaffold and ZPD

- Is there a significant relationship between ZPD and MKO?

H₀2: There is no significant relationship between ZPD and MKO.

- Is there a significant relationship between MKO and scaffold?

H₀3: There is no significant relationship between MKO and scaffold

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Cognitive Theory of Writing

The Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, developed by (Flower & Hayes, 1981) explains writing as a recursive cognitive process involving planning, translating ideas into text, and revising. According to the theory, writers continuously move between these stages as they develop and refine their ideas. In academic writing, this theory highlights the importance of step-by-step guidance to help students manage complex writing tasks more effectively. Structured writing support enables learners to organize ideas, develop coherent arguments, and revise their work systematically. The theory also emphasizes the value of peer interaction during the writing process. Through peer feedback, discussions, and collaborative review, students can reflect on their writing, identify weaknesses, and improve clarity and organization. Therefore, peer interaction and step-by-step writing guidance support the cognitive processes involved in effective academic writing and help learners become more confident and skilled writers.

Social Constructivism

Social Constructivism Theory, developed by (Vygotsky, 1978), emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction, collaboration, and communication with others. According to this theory, knowledge is constructed through shared experiences and guidance from more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers, peers, or mentors. In academic writing, social constructivism highlights the importance of collaborative learning activities, including peer review, group discussions, and feedback sessions, which help students improve their writing skills. Through peer comments and peer evaluation, learners are able to identify weaknesses in their essays, gain new perspectives, and refine their ideas and arguments. This interaction also encourages critical thinking, reflection, and confidence in writing. Furthermore, collaborative writing environments support students in understanding academic conventions, organizing ideas more effectively, and developing clearer and more

coherent essays. Therefore, Social Constructivism Theory provides a strong foundation for integrating peer review and collaborative support into academic writing instruction. According to (Vygotsky, 1978), components such as Scaffolding and More Knowledgeable (MKO) make up social constructivism.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding in academic writing refers to the guided support provided to learners as they develop their writing skills. Based on (Vygotsky, 1978) Vygotsky's (1978) theory of learning, scaffolding helps students complete complex writing tasks by breaking them into smaller and more manageable steps. In academic writing, scaffolding may include step-by-step instructions, essay outlines, models, feedback, and guided practice to help students organize ideas and construct coherent arguments. This support gradually builds learners' confidence and independence, enabling them to improve their grammar, structure, and critical thinking skills while producing clearer and more effective academic essays.

MKO

In academic writing, a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) refers to a person who has greater knowledge, experience, or skills and helps learners improve their understanding and writing abilities. Based on Lev Vygotsky's theory, the MKO can be a teacher, lecturer, peer, or mentor who provides guidance and support during the writing process. In academic writing, the MKO assists students through feedback, peer review, and step-by-step instruction to help them organize ideas, improve essay structure, and develop clearer arguments. This guidance enhances learners' confidence, critical thinking, and overall academic writing skills.

Past Studies

Strategies in Academic Writing

Past studies on strategies in academic writing have emphasized the importance of structured guidance and collaborative learning in helping students improve their writing skills. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding can be seen in the step-by-step writing processes discussed by (Subandowo et al., 2025) where students moved through pre-writing, writing, and post-writing stages while using multiple writing strategies to complete academic essays. Similarly, (Nhung, 2024) found that high-proficiency students actively used before, during, and after writing strategies, such as planning ideas, revising drafts, and reflecting on errors. These findings suggest that structured writing stages and guided support can help learners organize ideas, improve coherence, and overcome academic writing challenges.

In addition, peer interaction and peer evaluation reflect Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners improve through collaboration with more knowledgeable peers or teachers. (Nhung, 2024) revealed that high-proficiency students frequently discussed writing ideas with classmates and teachers before beginning their essays, showing the importance of social interaction in the writing process. (Subandowo et al., 2025) also highlighted consultation with lecturers and the use of collaborative support strategies during writing. These studies indicate that peer feedback, discussion, and evaluation help students identify weaknesses, refine arguments, and strengthen academic writing skills through guided interaction and shared learning experiences.

Relationship between Guidance and Peer Interaction

Peer interaction plays an important role in improving academic writing by encouraging collaboration, feedback, and active engagement among students. Studies have shown that positive peer relationships significantly influence classroom engagement and academic success by creating supportive learning environments (Liu, 2023). In academic writing, peer comments help students identify weaknesses in grammar, organization, coherence, and argument development while also providing suggestions for improvement. Peer evaluation further enhances critical thinking and reflection, as students learn to assess the quality of writing based on academic standards. Through constructive feedback and collaborative discussion, learners become more aware of their writing strengths and areas that require revision. In addition, peer interaction promotes confidence,

motivation, and a deeper understanding of academic writing conventions, making the writing process more interactive and meaningful for students.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework for the study is presented in Figure 1 below. This framework is grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivism Theory, which emphasizes that learning takes place through social interaction, collaboration, and guided support. The framework highlights scaffolding as an important component in academic writing, where learners receive structured assistance through step-by-step guidance during the writing process. This support helps students organize ideas, develop coherent arguments, and gradually improve their writing skills. Through scaffolding, complex writing tasks become more manageable, allowing learners to build confidence and achieve greater independence in academic writing.

The framework also incorporates the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guidance from others. In academic writing, peer comments function within the ZPD by providing constructive feedback that helps students recognize weaknesses, refine ideas, and improve essay structure. Interaction with peers encourages collaboration, reflection, and critical thinking, enabling students to learn from shared experiences and perspectives. Through peer comments, learners are guided toward higher levels of writing performance and understanding.

In addition, the framework includes the concept of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), which refers to individuals who possess greater knowledge or experience and provide support to learners. In this study, peer evaluation represents the role of the MKO, where students assess each other's writing and provide suggestions for improvement. Through peer evaluation, learners gain insight into academic writing conventions, argument development, and organization while also developing evaluative and analytical skills. Therefore, the interaction between scaffolding, ZPD, and MKO creates a collaborative academic writing environment that mirrors the principles of social constructivism and supports students in becoming more effective and independent writers.

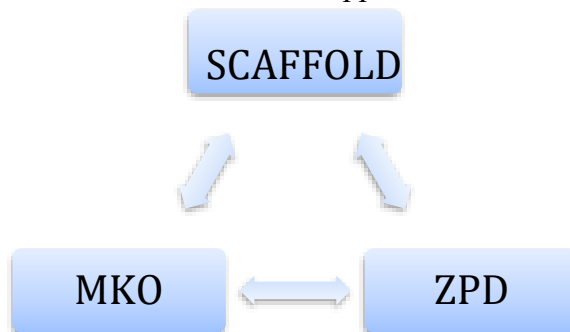


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to explore the relationship of factors in social constructivism in academic writing. A convenient sample of 61 participants responded to the survey. The instrument is inspired by the components of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), revealing three main variables: scaffold, zone of proximal development (ZPD), and more knowledgeable others (MKO). The instrument used is a 5-point Likert-scale survey to reveal the variables in Table 3 below. Table 1 below shows the categories used for the Likert scale: 1 is for Never, 2 is for Rarely, 3 is for Sometimes, 4 is for Very Often, and 5 is for Always.

Table 1: Likert Scale Use

1	Never
2	Rarely
3	Sometimes

4	Very Often
5	Always

Table 2: Distribution of Items in the Survey

	VARIABLE (KEYWORD)		CONSTRUCT/ SUB-HEADING		TO ITEM	Cronbach Alpha
B	SCAFFOLD	(a)	Step-by-step instructions	3	6	.934
		(b)	Colour-coding	3		
C	ZPD	(a)	Peer Comments	3		.877
D	MKO	(b)	Evaluative Review	3		.907
					12	.955

Table 2 shows the distribution of items in the survey. Reference/citation for the survey chosen. Explain in detail each section- how many items, total number of items.

Table 3: Reliability Levels, Cronbach's Alpha Ranges, and Their Interpretations

Reliability Level	Cronbach's Alpha range	Interpretation
Excellent	0.9 and above	Indicates very high internal consistency
Good	0.80-0.89	Reflects strong internal consistency
Acceptable	0.70-0.79	Indicates acceptable internal consistency
Questionable	0.60-0.69	Reflects questionable internal consistency
Poor	Below 0.6	Indicates poor internal consistency

In order to determine the internal reliability of the instrument, reliability analysis is conducted. Table 3 above shows the distribution and interpretation of the Cronbach Alpha range. According to (Ahmad et al., 2024), Cronbach Alpha scores between 0.7 and 0.9 are considered acceptable to excellent.

Table 2 also shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .934 for Scaffold, .877 for ZPD, and .907 for MKO. The overall Cronbach's alpha for all items is .955, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

FINDINGS

Demographic Analysis

According to Ziegenfuss et al., 2021), researchers report demographic data in percentages to establish sample representatives and allow for generalizability to a larger population. The reporting also provides an overview of participants' characteristics. Percentages offer a clear and understandable picture of the sample makeup.

Table 4: Percentage for Demographic Profile

Question	Demographic Profile	Categories	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	30%
		Female	70%
2	English Proficiency	Competent	12%
		Average	85%
		Weak	3%

Table 4 shows the percentage for the demographic profile of the respondents. 30% are male, while 70% are female participants. Next, when it comes to self-reported English proficiency, 12% reported they were competent, 85% reported average, and 3% reported weak.

Descriptive Statistics

Why is there a need to report the mean and standard deviation? According to (Vetter, 2017), Mean (M) represents the average, or centre of a data set. Standard deviation (SD) indicates the typical distance of individual observations from the mean, which shows the data's variability or spread. A low SD means the data points are clustered close to the mean, whereas a high SD indicates they are more spread out. It is good to have a high SD.

Findings For Scaffold

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How do learners perceive the learning of essay structure? In the context of this study, this is measured by (a) step-by-step instruction and (b) colour-coding.

Table 5: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation for Step-by-Step Instruction

ITEM	M	SD
CESQ1 The step-by-step instructions in the EssayMadeEasy template are easy to follow.	4.20	0.68
CESQ2 The EssayMadeEasy template helps me understand the essay writing process step by step.	4.28	0.80
CESQ3 I can complete my essay more easily by following the instructions in the EssayMadeEasy template.	4.26	0.63

Table 5 presents respondents' perceptions of scaffolding in academic writing using coded items. The findings indicate that students generally agreed that scaffolding strategies positively support their essay writing process. Among the items, S2 recorded the highest mean score, showing that respondents strongly believed that step-by-step guidance helped them understand essay writing more effectively. This was followed by S1 and S3, which also reflected positive responses toward the role of scaffolding in improving organization, structure, and confidence in writing. Overall, the results suggest that scaffolding plays an important role in helping students manage academic writing tasks more effectively and systematically.

Table 6: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation for Colour-coding

ITEM	M	SD
CCCQ4 The colour coding in the EssayMadeEasy template helps me identify different parts of the essay easily.	4.43	0.78
CCCQ 5T he colour coding makes the essay structure clearer for me to understand.	4.41	0.76
CCCQ 6 The different colours in the EssayMadeEasy template help me organize my ideas better.	4.33	0.79

Table 6 presents respondents' perceptions of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in academic writing using coded items. The findings show that students generally agreed that collaborative learning and guidance from peers supported their writing development. Among the items, ZPD2 recorded the highest mean score, indicating that respondents strongly believed peer interaction helped them improve their understanding and writing skills. This was followed by ZPD1 and ZPD3, which also reflected positive perceptions toward collaborative learning in essay writing. Overall, the results suggest that ZPD-related support positively contributes to students' confidence, understanding, and effectiveness in academic writing tasks.

Findings For ZPD

This section presents data to answer research question 2: How do learners perceive the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in academic writing?

In the context of this study, this is measured by peer comments.

Table 7: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation for Peer Comments

ITEM	M	SD
DPRQ1 Peer comments help me improve my essay writing.	4.18	0.76
DPRQ2 I can understand my mistakes better through peer comments.	4.25	0.67
DPRQ3 Receiving peer comments helps me write my essay more clearly.	4.11	0.78

Table 7 presents respondents' perceptions of peer comments in academic writing using coded items. Among the statements, PC2 had the highest mean score ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.67$), indicating that respondents strongly agreed that peer comments helped them better understand their mistakes. This was followed by PC1 ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.76$) and PC3 ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.78$), which also showed positive perceptions toward the role of peer comments in improving essay writing and clarity. Overall, the findings suggest that peer comments positively influence students' academic writing development and understanding.

Findings for MKO

This section presents data to answer research question 3: How do learners perceive a more knowledgeable other (MKO) in academic writing? In the context of this study, this is measured by Evaluative Review

Findings For MKO

Table 8: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation for Evaluative Review

ITEM	M	SD
DPRQ4 The evaluative review in the EssayMadeEasy template helps me identify my weaknesses in essay writing.	4.30	0.72
DPRQ5 The evaluative review helps me improve the quality of my essay.	4.28	0.66
DPRQ6 The evaluative review gives useful feedback on my essay writing.	4.23	0.67

Table 8 presents respondents' perceptions of peer evaluation in academic writing using coded items. The findings indicate that respondents generally had positive views toward peer evaluation, as shown by the high mean scores across all items. Among the statements, PE2 recorded the highest mean score, suggesting that students strongly agreed that peer evaluation helped them improve their writing quality and understanding. This was followed by PE1 and PE3, which also reflected positive responses regarding the usefulness of peer evaluation in enhancing essay organization, clarity, and revision. Overall, the results suggest that peer evaluation contributes positively to students' academic writing development and learning process.

Exploratory Statistics

According to He (2024), correlation is a statistical technique that shows how strongly two variables are related to each other or the degree of association between the two. It's a common tool for describing simple relationships without making a statement about cause and effect. This section presents data to answer the research question on correlation. To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between Scaffold, ZPD and MKO, data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented by making reference to Table 9 below. According to He (2024), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0.

Table 9: Correlation between Scaffold, ZPD, and MKO

Correlations				
		SCAFFOLD	ZPD	MKO
SCAFFOLD	Pearson Correlation	1	.735**	.768**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		≤.001	≤.001

	N	61	61	61
ZPD	Pearson Correlation	.735**	1	.815**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	61	61	61
MKO	Pearson Correlation	.768**	.815**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	61	61	61
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Findings for the Relationship between scaffold and ZPD

This section presents data to answer research question 4: Is there a significant relationship between scaffold and ZPD?

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between scaffold and ZPD

From Table 9, correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between scaffold and ZPD ($r=.735^{**}$) and ($<.001$). This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between scaffold and ZPD. The null hypothesis is rejected for H₀₁.

Findings for the Relationship between ZPD and MKO

This section presents data to answer research question 5: Is there a significant relationship between ZPD and MKO?

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between ZPD and MKO.

Next, correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between ZPD and MKO ($r=.815^{**}$) and ($<.001$). This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between ZPD and MKO. The null hypothesis is rejected for H₀₂.

Findings for the Relationship between MKO and scaffold

This section presents data to answer research question 6: Is there a significant relationship between MKO and scaffold?

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between MKO and scaffold

Next, correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between MKO and scaffold ($r=.768^{**}$) and ($<.001$). This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between MKO and scaffold. The null hypothesis is rejected for H₀₃.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings and Discussions

The findings of this study reveal that social constructivism plays an important role in supporting academic writing through scaffolding, peer comments, and peer evaluation. The results showed that respondents had positive perceptions toward scaffolding, particularly in step-by-step guidance and colour-coding, which helped them organize ideas and understand essay structures more effectively. These findings support the studies by Nhung (2024) and Subandowo et al. (2025), who emphasized that structured writing stages and guided support improve coherence, organization, and writing performance. In addition, respondents also viewed peer comments positively, especially in helping them identify mistakes and improve essay clarity. This supports Wei and Liu (2024), who found that peer feedback provides cognitive, affective, and metacognitive benefits in academic writing. Furthermore, peer evaluation was also perceived positively, indicating that collaborative review and

evaluative feedback helped students improve the quality of their essays and strengthen their understanding of academic writing conventions. Correlation analysis further revealed strong positive relationships between scaffold and ZPD ($r=.735$), ZPD and MKO ($r=.815$), and MKO and scaffold ($r=.768$), showing that guided support and peer interaction are closely connected in enhancing academic writing development.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The implications of this study suggest that integrating social constructivist elements into academic writing instruction can improve students' engagement, confidence, and writing performance. Educators are encouraged to incorporate scaffolding techniques, peer comments, and peer evaluation into classroom writing activities to create more collaborative and supportive learning environments. The use of structured guidance and peer interaction can help learners become more independent and reflective writers. In addition, this study contributes to the understanding of how Vygotsky's (1978) theory can be applied in academic writing practices through collaborative learning approaches.

For future research, studies may explore the effectiveness of social constructivist strategies in different educational contexts, proficiency levels, or disciplines. Researchers may also investigate the long-term impact of peer interaction and scaffolding on writing achievement using larger samples and mixed-method approaches. Further studies could additionally examine the integration of digital tools and online peer feedback platforms in supporting academic writing development.

REFERENCES

1. Ahmad, N., Alias, F. A., Hamat, M., & Mohamed, S. A. (2024). Reliability Analysis: Application of Cronbach's Alpha in Research Instruments. In *Pioneering the Future: Delving into e-Learning's Landscape* (pp. 114–119).
2. Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32, 365–387.
3. He, L. (2024). The Application of SPSS Correlation Analysis in the Study of Precision Teaching of English in Universities. *Applied Mathematics and Nonlinear Sciences*, 9(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.2478/amns-2024-1371>
4. Liu, J. (2023). The Effect of Peer Relationships on Academic Performance in High School Students. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 13(1), 136–144. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/13/20230870>
5. Nhung, N. H. (2024). Scaffolding Techniques in Teaching Writing to First-Year University Students: An Empirical Study at a University in Hanoi. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 7195–7206.
6. Subandowo, D., Sárdi, C., & Thresia, F. (2025). An investigation of English academic writing strategies employed by Indonesian graduate students in an English medium instruction (EMI) context. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-025-00345-w>
7. Vetter, T. R. (2017). Descriptive Statistics: Reporting the Answers to the 5 Basic Questions of Who, What, Why, When, Where, and a Sixth, so What? *Anaesthesia and Analgesia*, 125(5), 1797–1802. <https://doi.org/10.1213/ANE.0000000000002471>
8. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
9. Wei, Y., & Liu, D. (2024). Incorporating peer feedback in academic writing: a systematic review of benefits and challenges. In *Frontiers in Psychology* (Vol. 15). Frontiers Media SA. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1506725>
10. Yang, Z., & Ompok, C. S. C. C. (2025). The Relationship Between Peer Relationships and Classroom Engagement Among Undergraduate Private College Students. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 10(4), e003271. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v10i4.3271>
11. Ziegenfuss, J. Y., Easterday, C. A., Dinh, J. M., JaKa, M. M., Kottke, T. E., & Canterbury, M. (2021). Impact of demographic survey questions on response rate and measurement: A randomized experiment. *Survey Practice*, 14(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.29115/SP-2021-0010>