

# Identifying Key Predictors of Arabic Writing Difficulties Among Malaysian Diploma Students

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## ABSTRACT

Arabic writing proficiency remains a critical skill for learners in Malaysian higher education, yet many diploma students continue to face persistent challenges despite years of formal study. This study investigates key internal (motivation, self-confidence) and external (teacher support, academic environment) factors influencing Arabic writing performance, with the aim of identifying the most dominant predictors. A quantitative survey was conducted among 140 diploma students from four institutions selected through stratified sampling. Data were collected via a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, ANOVA, and logistic regression. Results indicate that internal psychological factors, particularly motivation ( $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and self-confidence ( $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $p = .01$ ), are stronger predictors of writing proficiency than external factors. The findings highlight the need for learner-centred pedagogical strategies that foster motivation and self-confidence, while also leveraging targeted teacher support. Implications for curriculum design and recommendations for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Arabic writing proficiency, second language acquisition, motivation, self-confidence, higher education, Malaysian students

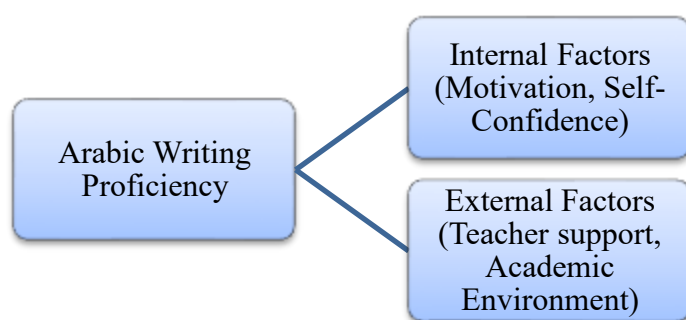
## INTRODUCTION

Writing proficiency in Arabic is essential for non-native learners, requiring mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and logical structuring of ideas. Despite years of instruction, many Malaysian diploma students struggle with producing accurate and coherent Arabic writing (Al-Khatib, 2020; Rahman et al., 2021). Weaknesses in writing can hinder academic and professional communication (Hassan & Ibrahim, 2019) and are linked to limited exposure to effective methodologies and insufficient instructional support (Ismail et al., 2020). While external factors such as teacher strategies and learning environments play a role (Khalid & Ahmad, 2021), recent research suggests internal factors like motivation and self-confidence have a greater influence (Mokhtar & Yusuf, 2022). This study investigates both internal (motivation, self-confidence) and external (teacher support, academic environment) factors, comparing their influence to determine the dominant predictors of Arabic writing

proficiency. Findings will offer insights for targeted pedagogical strategies that strengthen learners' intrinsic capacities and inform institutional language policies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of Arabic writing skills among non-native speakers is shaped by cognitive, affective, and environmental factors. Second Language Acquisition theory (Krashen, 1982) emphasizes the importance of affective variables such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence, while Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2020) explains the mental demands posed by Arabic's unique orthography and grammar. Vocabulary breadth (Nation, 2022), adherence to writing processes (Flower & Hayes, 2021), and targeted feedback (Kroll, 2022) have also been identified as critical. Motivation and self-confidence, as shown by Dörnyei (2019) and MacIntyre et al. (2021), strongly influence persistence and risk-taking in writing tasks, whereas teacher support and a positive academic environment (Khalid & Ahmad, 2021) can reinforce these gains. However, existing studies often examine internal or external factors in isolation. Few have directly compared their relative influence within the same model. This study addresses this gap by examining both sets of factors simultaneously, aiming to determine which exerts the stronger impact on Arabic writing proficiency among Malaysian diploma students.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Referring to Figure 1, the development of Arabic writing skills among non-native speakers is shaped by cognitive, affective, and environmental factors. Drawing on Second Language Acquisition Theory (Krashen, 1982) and Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2020), the model includes variables such as vocabulary breadth, writing processes, targeted feedback, motivation, self-confidence, teacher support, and the academic environment. While previous studies often examined internal or external factors in isolation, few have compared their relative influence within a single framework. This study addresses that gap by investigating both domains simultaneously to determine which factors have the strongest impact on Arabic writing proficiency among Malaysian diploma students.

## METHODOLOGY

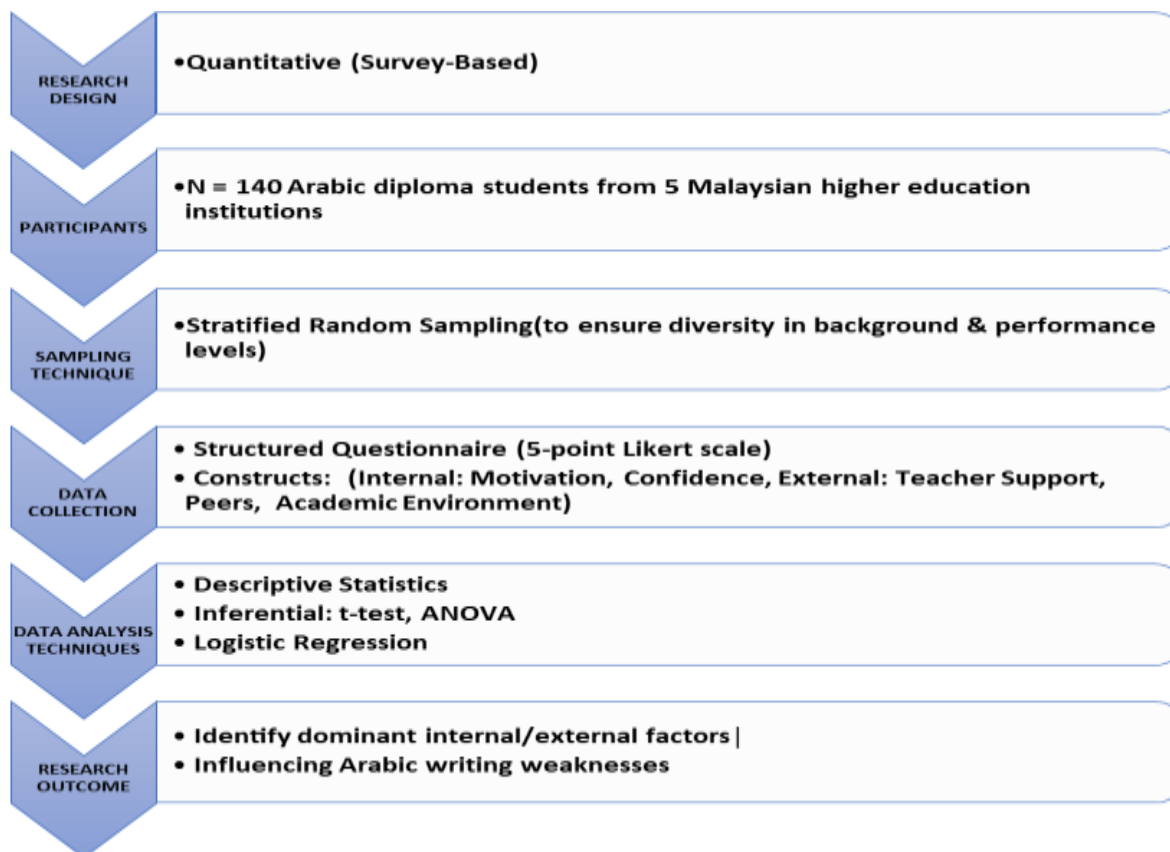
This study adopted a quantitative survey-based design to investigate factors contributing to students' weaknesses in Arabic writing skills. This approach enabled systematic measurement of variables and supported generalization of findings to a broader population (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Numerical data collection facilitated objective analysis of both internal and external factors affecting writing proficiency.

The study targeted students enrolled in Arabic language diploma programs at selected Malaysian higher education institutions. A total of 140 respondents were drawn from four institutions: University Sultan Zainal Abidin (n=90), university Islam Selangor (n=25), University Islam Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah (n=9), and Kolej university Islam Antarabangsa Sultan Ismail Petra (n=16). It is important to note that this study was limited to 140 students across four institutions. These four institutions represent the only universities offering Arabic diploma programs in Malaysia. While this covers the entire population of such programs, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings to other higher education contexts. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation based on institutional affiliation, program enrolment, and academic performance, thus reducing sampling bias and enhancing generalizability (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). Items measured internal factors (motivation, self-confidence) and external factors (teacher support, peer influence, academic environment). The instrument underwent expert validation and a pilot test to ensure clarity, content validity, and internal consistency (Joshi et al., 2015). Following ethical protocols, the final questionnaire was distributed both in person and via institutional channels, with informed consent and anonymity maintained.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 20. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) summarized the data, while inferential analyses examined group differences and relationships. Independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA assessed differences by gender and academic performance, and logistic regression identified dominant factors influencing Arabic writing weaknesses (Field, 2020).

This rigorous methodological framework ensured reliability, validity, and reproducibility. By combining representative sampling, validated instruments, and robust statistical analyses, the study offers a strong empirical basis for understanding the interplay of cognitive, affective, and environmental factors shaping Arabic writing proficiency in Malaysian higher education.



**Figure 2: Summary of Research Methodology**

By following this methodology, the study ensured a systematic investigation of both internal and external factors affecting Arabic writing proficiency. The structured design, representative sampling, and robust statistical analyses enhanced the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the findings.

## RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study based on both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics were employed to examine the mean and standard deviation for internal and external factors among Arabic diploma students. Inferential analysis, using independent t-tests and logistic regression, was conducted to determine gender-based differences in writing performance and to identify the most dominant factors influencing Arabic writing proficiency. The results are presented in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3.

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Internal and External Factors**

Factor	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Motivation	3.85	0.75
Self-confidence	3.72	0.81
Teacher Support	3.55	0.88
Peer Support	3.49	0.92
Academic Environment	3.60	0.85

**Table 2: Gender Differences in Writing Proficiency (Independent t-test)**

Gender	Mean (M)	t	p-value
Male	3.50	2.45	0.015*
Female	3.78	—	—

Note. p-values marked with \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* denote significance at the 5%, 1%, and 0.1% levels, respectively.

**Table 3: Logistic Regression Analysis: Dominant Factors Influencing Writing Proficiency**

Factor	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value
Motivation	0.52	<0.001***
Self-confidence	0.47	0.01**
Teacher Support	0.28	0.05*

Note. p-values marked with \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* denote significance at the 5%, 1%, and 0.1% levels, respectively.

## DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, motivation recorded the highest mean ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ), followed by self-confidence ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ). These results suggest that internal factors play a more prominent role in students' writing performance compared to external factors. In contrast, teacher support, peer support, and academic environment had lower mean scores, indicating a comparatively lesser impact on students' writing difficulties.

Table 2 presents the results of an independent t-test, indicating a statistically significant difference in writing proficiency based on gender,  $t(138) = 2.45$ ,  $p = 0.015$ . Female students ( $M = 3.78$ ) outperformed male students ( $M = 3.50$ ), suggesting that females are more likely to exhibit higher proficiency in Arabic writing. This may be attributed to differences in learning strategies, engagement levels, or practice consistency between genders.

Logistic regression results (Table 3) revealed that motivation was the most dominant predictor of writing proficiency ( $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), followed by self-confidence ( $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). Teacher support also showed a significant, though smaller, effect ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). These findings highlight the critical role of internal factors in shaping students' writing competence, emphasizing the need for interventions that strengthen intrinsic motivation and confidence among learners.

This study provides empirical evidence that internal psychological factors, particularly motivation, play a pivotal role in explaining students' weaknesses in writing proficiency. Logistic regression analysis revealed that motivation emerged as a significant predictor of writing difficulties ( $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding is consistent with Dörnyei's (2020) assertion that highly motivated learners are more disciplined and self-regulated in improving their writing competence. However, the present study extends the current understanding by

positioning motivation as the most influential factor compared to other variables, underscoring the necessity for learner-centered pedagogical interventions that enhance intrinsic engagement.

In addition, self-confidence was also found to exert a statistically significant effect ( $\beta = 0.47, p = 0.01$ ). Learners with low self-confidence tend to avoid cognitively demanding writing tasks and rely instead on rote memorization as a compensatory strategy (MacIntyre et al., 2021). This underscores the critical need for instructional approaches that foster learners' self-efficacy, such as constructive formative feedback and collaborative writing activities. The current findings thus contribute to the literature by emphasizing that enhancing self-confidence is not merely beneficial but essential in addressing persistent weaknesses in students' writing skills.

Conversely, teacher support demonstrated a relatively lower effect size ( $\beta = 0.28, p = 0.05$ ), suggesting that while teacher involvement remains relevant, its impact is comparatively limited when juxtaposed with internal psychological factors. This result contrasts with Alrabai's (2022) findings, which highlighted teacher guidance as a major determinant of writing competence. Such divergence may be attributed to contextual differences, including the degree of learner autonomy promoted within the instructional environment. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its empirical reaffirmation of the primacy of internal learner factors motivation and self-confidence over external support mechanisms in shaping writing proficiency. These insights warrant a re-evaluation of pedagogical strategies that heavily prioritize teacher intervention, advocating instead for approaches that empower learners through intrinsic and self-directed frameworks.

This study was limited to 140 students across four institutions, representing the only universities offering Arabic diploma programs in Malaysia. While this covers the entire population of such programs, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings to other higher education contexts.

### Limitation

This study was limited to 140 students from four institutions, which represent the only universities in Malaysia offering diploma programs in Arabic. While this provides comprehensive coverage of the target population, the relatively small sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings to other higher education contexts. In addition, the study employed a purely quantitative design. Although statistical analyses identified clear predictors of writing proficiency, the absence of qualitative data limits the understanding of the nuanced reasons behind students' lack of motivation and confidence. Future studies should therefore consider mixed-methods approaches to capture deeper insights. Finally, while gender-based differences were observed, this study did not directly examine the learning strategies underlying these differences, and such interpretations remain speculative.

### CONCLUSION

This study provides robust empirical support for the significant role of internal psychological factors particularly motivation and self-confidence in shaping students' Arabic writing proficiency at the tertiary level. Logistic regression analysis revealed that intrinsic motivation emerged as the strongest predictor of writing performance, followed closely by self-confidence. These findings align with the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2020), which emphasizes the enduring impact of intrinsic motivation on academic achievement, surpassing the influence of external factors such as teacher support or academic environment.

The results also indicate gender-based differences in writing performance, with female students outperforming male students. This trend, supported by Tannen (2021), suggests that female learners' systematic and organized approaches to information processing may contribute positively to their writing proficiency. While external variables such as teacher support remain relevant, their impact was found to be less pronounced than that of internal variables, challenging earlier assumptions (e.g., Alrabai, 2022) that position teacher intervention as the primary determinant of writing competence.

Theoretically, this study advances the understanding of Arabic writing in second language contexts by foregrounding internal psychological constructs as central to performance outcomes. It fills a notable gap in the

literature, particularly in the Malaysian higher education context where empirical data on Arabic writing challenges remain limited. The study's novelty lies in its identification of intrinsic motivation and learner confidence as the dominant predictors of writing weaknesses, an area often overlooked in Arabic language research.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings have several implications. Educators and institutions must prioritize the development of learner motivation and confidence through interactive, student-centered strategies. These may include reflective writing, collaborative learning, gamified instruction, and targeted feedback. Although teacher influence was found to be less dominant, its strategic use particularly in providing formative and individualized feedback can still play a supportive role in addressing students' writing deficiencies.

Future research should explore intervention-based models aimed at enhancing internal motivation and self-efficacy, as well as employ qualitative or mixed-method approaches to capture the complexity of learners' writing experiences. Expanding the study to include a broader and more diverse student population would further enrich the understanding of factors influencing Arabic writing proficiency.

In conclusion, this study contributes meaningfully to the field of Arabic language education by offering empirical insights into the underlying psychological factors associated with writing difficulties. The findings advocate for a paradigm shift in pedagogical practices from externally driven instruction to one that empowers learners intrinsically thus paving the way for more sustainable, relevant, and responsive approaches to Arabic writing instruction in higher education settings.

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