The Effectiveness of a Structured Arabic Essay Writing Module in Improving University Students' Arabic Writing Performance: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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ABSTRACT

Arabic writing remains a challenging skill among university students, particularly in organizing ideas and producing coherent essays. This study investigates the effectiveness of a structured Arabic essay writing module in improving students' writing performance. A quantitative quasi-experimental study was conducted among 60 undergraduate students, comprising 30 students in a treatment group and 30 in a control group. The treatment group received the module over seven weeks, while the control group received conventional instruction. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test writing assessments covering introduction, body, conclusion, and cohesion and coherence, and analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples *t*-tests, and Cohen's *d*. Results showed greater improvement in the treatment group, with overall writing performance increasing by 1.35 points compared with 0.81 points in the control group. A significant post-test difference was found between groups ($t = 4.59$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.19$), with significant differences across all four writing components. The findings highlight the potential of structured instruction in improving Arabic writing performance and supporting essay organization among university students.

Keywords: Arabic writing, essay writing, writing module, quasi-experimental study, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Arabic writing proficiency is an important component of Arabic language learning, requiring learners to develop linguistic accuracy, effective organization, and coherent expression of ideas. Despite formal instruction, university students in Malaysia continue to experience difficulties in producing Arabic essays, with previous research reporting moderate writing performance and weaknesses in orthography, syntax, morphology, sentence construction, vocabulary, and writing strategies (Ismail et al., 2018; Sulaiman et al., 2018). These difficulties highlight the need for systematic instructional support, particularly approaches that guide learners in developing and organizing ideas within an essay. In Malaysia, a needs-analysis study also identified the need for a structured Arabic essay writing module and recommended the integration of various teaching methods to support its implementation (Ismail & Daoh, 2021). More recent experimental evidence further suggests that structured approaches to Arabic writing instruction can produce significant differences in students' writing performance (Setiyadi et al., 2025). However, empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of a structured Arabic essay writing module across specific components of essay writing remains limited. This study therefore examines the effectiveness of a structured Arabic essay writing module by comparing the writing performance of university students receiving module-based instruction with those receiving conventional instruction. The study focuses on overall writing performance and four components: introduction, body, conclusion, and cohesion and coherence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Arabic writing is a complex productive skill that requires learners to coordinate linguistic accuracy, vocabulary, sentence construction, organization, and the coherent development of ideas. Recent research continues to identify substantial challenges in Arabic writing among learners in higher education. In the Malaysian context, Ismail and Che Mat (2026), involving 140 second-year students from four universities, found a discrepancy between students' perceived and actual writing proficiency. Although students perceived their ability as moderate, diagnostic results indicated a low level of actual writing proficiency, particularly in syntax, idea cohesion, and paragraph development. Similar concerns have been reported in recent literature, which identifies vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, and the organization of ideas as persistent challenges among non-native learners of Arabic (Awang et al., 2024; Fkhururazi et al., 2025). These findings indicate that difficulties in Arabic writing extend beyond isolated linguistic errors and involve learners' ability to generate, organize, develop, and connect ideas into coherent written texts.

The difficulties experienced by Arabic learners are also closely related to the way they approach the writing process. Fkhururazi et al. (2025), in a study involving 109 respondents, found that students experienced moderate difficulties in Arabic writing and reported weaknesses in several stages of the writing process. Some students tended to write without planning or outlining, while others submitted their work without reviewing it. The study consequently highlighted the contribution of unstructured writing practices to students' difficulties in Arabic essay writing. Similarly, Mustapha and Zawawi (2023) found that systematic support throughout five writing stages—pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—produced significant improvements in students' overall Arabic essay performance as well as vocabulary, grammar, language style, and text organization. These findings suggest that explicit guidance across the writing process may help learners manage the cognitive and linguistic demands involved in producing Arabic essays.

Recent studies have therefore increasingly emphasized structured and guided approaches to Arabic writing instruction. Hussain and Abdul Ghani (2024), based on the perspectives of Arabic language teachers in Malaysia, identified several teaching practices that can support the development of Arabic writing, including guidance, meaningful assessment, and learner-centred instructional practices. In a different context, Ashari et al. (2024) reported that a Genre-Based Approach implemented through a Teaching Learning Cycle provided students with gradual learning experiences involving concept introduction, modelling, and guided practice. The study reported an increase in students' learning mastery following the intervention. More recently, Setiyadi et al. (2025) employed a true experimental design among higher education learners and found that students receiving genre-based Arabic writing instruction achieved significantly different writing outcomes from those receiving conventional instruction. Together, these studies provide empirical support for instructional approaches that make writing processes, models, and expectations more explicit.

The development of appropriate instructional materials is another important consideration in strengthening Arabic writing instruction. Needs-analysis research by Rustamaji et al. (2024) found variations in Arabic writing materials at a higher education institution and reported differences in how students understood the materials. The authors consequently highlighted the need to develop more appropriate materials to support Arabic writing instruction. Similarly, Yasmar et al. (2025) examined the need for Arabic writing materials from a Genre-Based Pedagogy perspective and highlighted the importance of materials that move beyond grammar-focused instruction towards the development of coherent and meaningful texts. These findings are consistent with earlier Malaysian evidence from Ismail and Daoh (2021), who identified a need for a structured Arabic essay-writing module and recommended the integration of multiple instructional approaches in its implementation.

Although recent studies have provided evidence concerning Arabic writing difficulties, writing-process support, instructional materials, and structured or genre-based approaches, several gaps remain. First, many studies have focused on particular instructional strategies or learning contexts rather than evaluating a structured Arabic essay-writing module as an integrated instructional intervention.

Second, recent studies have examined general writing performance, writing processes, or specific linguistic difficulties, while relatively limited empirical evidence has examined changes across distinct components of

essay organization. Third, evidence from Malaysian higher education remains comparatively limited regarding the effectiveness of a structured Arabic essay-writing module through a quasi-experimental comparison with conventional instruction. The present study addresses these gaps by examining the effectiveness of a structured Arabic essay-writing module in improving university students' Arabic writing performance.

Specifically, the study compares module-based instruction with conventional instruction in terms of overall writing performance and four components of essay writing: introduction, body, conclusion, and cohesion and coherence.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Participants

This study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control-group design to examine the effectiveness of structured Arabic essay-writing instruction. The participants were 60 undergraduate students learning Arabic, comprising 30 students in the treatment group and 30 in the control group. The study involved existing student groups rather than random assignment to instructional conditions.

Both groups completed a writing pre-test before the seven-week instructional period and a post-test upon its completion. The treatment group received instruction using the *Kemahiran Menulis Karangan Bahasa Arab* (KMKBA) module, while the control group received conventional Arabic writing instruction. The analysis focused on overall writing performance and four components: introduction, body, conclusion, and cohesion and coherence.

Instructional Intervention

The KMKBA module provided structured support for Arabic essay writing, focusing on essay organisation and the development of introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions, and connections between ideas. The intervention lasted seven weeks and was evaluated against conventional Arabic writing instruction.

Writing Assessment

Arabic essay-writing performance was assessed using a 20-item rubric covering four components: introduction, body, conclusion, and cohesion and coherence. The same assessment framework was used for the pre-test and post-test to examine changes in students' writing performance.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise pre-test and post-test scores. Mean changes were calculated by subtracting pre-test means from post-test means for each group. Independent-samples t-tests were reported for between-group comparisons at post-test, while Cohen's *d* was used to indicate the magnitude of the reported differences.

The post-test comparisons and descriptive mean changes were interpreted separately. Mean changes describe the observed differences between measurement points but do not establish whether the differences in improvement between groups were statistically significant. The findings were therefore interpreted with consideration of the quasi-experimental design and the observed differences in baseline scores.

RESULTS

This section presents the reported descriptive and inferential findings concerning students' Arabic essay-writing performance before and after the seven-week instructional period. The results cover overall writing performance and four components of essay writing. Because participant-level data and complete component-level descriptive statistics were not available for reanalysis, the reported inferential results are presented as originally documented and are not treated as independently recalculated estimates.

Overall Writing Performance

Table 1: Overall writing performance

Group	n	Pre-test M	Pre-test SD	Post-test M	Post-test SD	Mean change
Treatment	30	2.08	0.419	3.43	0.651	1.35
Control	30	1.98	0.439	2.79	0.396	0.81

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Mean change was calculated as post-test mean minus pre-test mean.

Table 1 shows that both groups recorded higher mean writing scores at post-test than at pre-test. The treatment group's mean increased by 1.35 points, from 2.08 to 3.43, whereas the control group's mean increased by 0.81 points, from 1.98 to 2.79. The difference between these descriptive changes was 0.54 points. This difference represents a comparison of group mean changes only; its statistical significance was not established by the descriptive figures in Table 1.

Overall Post-test Comparison

Table 2: Reported comparison of overall post-test writing performance

Measure	Treatment (n = 30)	Control (n = 30)	*t*	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Overall writing performance	3.43 (0.651)	2.79 (0.396)	4.59	< .001	1.19

The reported post-test comparison indicates that the treatment group obtained a higher mean score than the control group, with a mean difference of 0.64 points. The manuscript reports a statistically significant between-group difference, t = 4.59, p < .001, and a Cohen's d of 1.19. This reported effect size indicates a large standardized difference under conventional interpretation. However, because the original analysis output and participant-level data were not available for independent verification, the reported test statistic and effect size should be interpreted in light of the methodological limitations described above.

Writing Components

Table 3: Pre-test and post-test means, descriptive changes, and reported post-test comparisons

Component	T-Pre	T-Post	T-Gain	C-Pre	C-Post	C-Gain	Gain Diff.	t	p	Cohen's d
Introduction	2.39	3.61	1.22	2.37	3.14	0.77	0.45	2.894	.005	0.75
Body	2.06	3.39	1.33	2.01	2.93	0.92	0.41	3.218	.002	0.83
Conclusion	1.73	3.52	1.79	1.78	2.64	0.86	0.93	4.460	< .001	1.15
Cohesion and coherence	2.12	3.20	1.08	1.77	2.45	0.68	0.40	5.147	< .001	1.33

Note. T = Treatment; C = Control; Pre = Pre-test; Post = Post-test; Gain = Post − Pre; Gain Diff. = T-Gain − C-Gain.

Table 3 shows positive descriptive changes in all four writing components in both groups. In the treatment group, the largest mean increase occurred in the conclusion component (1.79 points), followed by body (1.33), introduction (1.22), and cohesion and coherence (1.08). In the control group, the corresponding changes were 0.86, 0.92, 0.77, and 0.68 points, respectively.

The difference between the groups' descriptive mean changes was largest for conclusion writing (0.93 points), followed by introduction (0.45), body (0.41), and cohesion and coherence (0.40). These figures describe the relative changes in the reported group means; they do not establish whether the differences in change were statistically significant.

The manuscript reports statistically significant post-test differences for all four components. Nevertheless, the treatment group's cohesion and coherence mean was already higher at pre-test (2.12) than the control group's

mean (1.77). This initial difference is relevant to the interpretation of the post-test result and prevents the largest reported standardized post-test difference from being interpreted, on its own, as evidence that cohesion and coherence benefited most from the intervention.

DISCUSSION

The findings provide a descriptive and comparative account of Arabic essay-writing performance following structured module-based instruction and conventional instruction. Both groups recorded higher post-test mean scores, but the treatment group showed a larger increase in overall writing performance. The reported post-test comparison also favoured the treatment group. These findings suggest that structured Arabic essay-writing instruction may be associated with more favourable writing outcomes in the context examined. Nevertheless, the quasi-experimental design and the limitations of the available statistical evidence require caution when attributing the observed differences exclusively to the KMKBA module.

Overall Writing Performance and Structured Instruction

The treatment group's overall mean increased by 1.35 points, compared with 0.81 points in the control group. The descriptive difference in mean changes was therefore 0.54 points. This pattern is consistent with the possibility that structured instructional support helped students manage the demands of Arabic essay writing. However, the descriptive comparison does not establish that the difference in improvement was statistically significant. The reported independent-samples t-test concerns the post-test difference and should not be interpreted as an inferential test of differential change over time.

The reported post-test effect size (Cohen's d = 1.19) indicates a large standardized difference between the groups according to the original analysis. Its interpretation must, however, take account of the non-randomized design, the absence of a documented adjusted analysis, and the limited information available concerning assessment reliability and potential confounding factors. The findings are therefore best understood as evidence of a favourable association between participation in the KMKBA-based instructional condition and post-test writing performance, rather than definitive proof that the module alone caused the observed advantage.

The pattern is broadly consistent with research emphasizing structured support throughout the writing process. Mustapha and Zawawi (2023), as identified in the current reference list, examined a supportive approach to teaching Arabic writing. The present study adds a component-level perspective by reporting results for introduction, body, conclusion, and cohesion and coherence. Nevertheless, differences in instructional design and research methodology mean that the findings should be compared in terms of their general instructional relevance rather than assumed to demonstrate identical mechanisms.

Differences Across Writing Components

The descriptive results indicate that the largest increase in the treatment group occurred in conclusion writing, followed by body writing, introduction writing, and cohesion and coherence. This pattern suggests that the reported improvement was not uniform across the four components. In particular, the relatively large descriptive increase in conclusion writing may indicate that this aspect of essay construction warrants further investigation in structured Arabic writing instruction. The available evidence does not, however, identify the specific instructional activities responsible for this pattern.

Cohesion and coherence require particular caution. Although the manuscript reports the largest post-test Cohen's d for this component (d = 1.33), the treatment group began with a higher mean than the control group. The initial means were 2.12 and 1.77, respectively. The post-test comparison therefore does not isolate the extent to which the final difference reflects the intervention, pre-existing group differences, or other influences during instruction.

Furthermore, the descriptive difference in mean changes for cohesion and coherence was 0.40 points, whereas that for conclusion writing was 0.93 points. These comparisons illustrate why the magnitude of a post-test

difference and the magnitude of a change over time should not be treated as equivalent. Without a valid inferential comparison of change or an appropriately adjusted analysis, it is not possible to conclude that cohesion and coherence benefited most from the intervention.

Relationship to Previous Research and Instructional Implications

Previous research has highlighted the importance of structured guidance, appropriate learning materials, modelling, and support for the development of Arabic writing skills. Ashari et al. (2024) examined a genre-based approach involving concept development, modelling, and guided practice, while Setiyadi et al. (2025) investigated genre-based Arabic writing instruction among higher education learners. These studies provide a relevant context for considering the potential value of explicit and organized writing instruction.

The present findings are compatible with the broader proposition that Arabic writing instruction should address the organization and development of ideas in addition to linguistic accuracy. However, the available manuscript does not provide sufficient detail about the weekly delivery of KMKBA, the feedback procedures, or the instructional materials used in each group to determine which specific features were associated with the observed differences. Accordingly, the practical implications should remain at the level of structured essay-writing support rather than attributing the results to undocumented teaching techniques.

For higher education practice, the findings highlight the value of evaluating writing performance at both overall and component levels. Separate consideration of introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions, and cohesion and coherence can help identify areas in which students' writing performance may differ. Future evaluations should combine this component-based perspective with transparent documentation of instructional procedures, a clearly specified scoring rubric, and statistical analyses that account for baseline performance.

Alternative Explanations

Several factors other than the module may have contributed to the observed differences. Since students were not randomly assigned to the two conditions, selection effects and pre-existing differences may have influenced post-test performance. Differences in teacher practices, instructional time, feedback, learning materials, student motivation, and familiarity with the assessment tasks are also possible alternative explanations. The available study documentation does not establish the extent to which these factors were controlled.

These possibilities do not invalidate the reported descriptive findings, but they limit the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn from them. Future research should document the instructional conditions of both groups, assess baseline comparability, and use an analysis appropriate to the pre-test–post-test design. Such measures would provide a stronger basis for determining whether the observed differences can be attributed to the instructional intervention rather than to alternative explanations.

LIMITATION

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved 60 undergraduate students divided into two existing groups. The absence of random assignment limits the comparability of the groups and introduces the possibility of selection bias. Although the overall pre-test means were relatively close, the component-level results show that the groups did not have identical starting means for every aspect of Arabic essay writing. In particular, the treatment group recorded a higher pre-test mean for cohesion and coherence. The reported post-test comparisons should therefore not be interpreted as fully adjusted estimates of the intervention effect.

Second, the intervention lasted seven weeks and the study did not include a longer-term follow-up assessment. The available findings consequently do not establish whether the observed performance differences were maintained over time or transferred to other writing tasks and learning contexts.

Third, the description of the KMKBA intervention in the manuscript is insufficient to enable full replication. Details about the week-by-week instructional sequence, session duration, teaching procedures, feedback practices, and differences between the treatment and control conditions are not adequately documented. This limitation restricts the interpretation of the specific instructional features that may have contributed to the observed outcomes.

Fourth, the writing assessment procedure requires more complete documentation. Although the manuscript identifies a 20-item rubric covering four components, information about the scoring scale, performance descriptors, expert validation, assessor arrangements, and reliability evidence is insufficient. Consequently, the potential influence of measurement error or assessor-related bias cannot be fully evaluated.

Fifth, the statistical reporting is limited by the absence of complete component-level standard deviations, confidence intervals, assumption-testing results, and an inferential comparison of changes between groups. The reported independent samples t-tests concern post-test differences and do not establish whether the treatment group improved significantly more than the control group. The four component-level tests also raise a multiple-comparisons issue that was not addressed in the reported analysis. Because participant-level data were unavailable for reanalysis, adjusted estimates and additional inferential tests could not be independently produced for this revision.

Finally, the study did not establish the extent to which other factors, including teacher effects, instructional time, feedback frequency, student motivation, or differences in learning materials, may have influenced the results. Future research should use more comprehensive intervention documentation, transparent instrument validation and reliability procedures, and an analysis that appropriately accounts for baseline scores and the longitudinal structure of the data. Larger samples and longer follow-up periods would also help to establish the generalizability and durability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Arabic essay-writing performance among 60 undergraduate students receiving either structured KMKBA-based instruction or conventional instruction over seven weeks. Both groups recorded higher mean scores at post-test, with a larger descriptive increase in the treatment group. The manuscript also reported a statistically significant post-test difference favouring the treatment group, together with significant differences across four writing components.

These findings suggest a favourable association between structured Arabic essay-writing instruction and students' writing performance within the study context. However, the non-randomized design, the initial difference in cohesion and coherence scores, and the absence of an independently verified adjusted analysis limit the extent to which the observed differences can be attributed exclusively to the module. The reported post-test comparisons should also be distinguished from inferential evidence of differences in improvement over time.

The study contributes a component-level perspective to the evaluation of Arabic essay-writing instruction by considering introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions, and cohesion and coherence separately. Its practical value lies in highlighting the importance of examining the organization of written texts rather than relying solely on an overall writing score. Nevertheless, the available evidence does not establish which specific features of KMKBA were responsible for the observed pattern of results.

Future evaluations should provide a reproducible account of the module's instructional sequence, document the validity and reliability of the writing assessment, and use an appropriate analysis of pre-test and post-test performance. With these methodological improvements, further research can establish more clearly the extent to which structured module-based instruction contributes to Arabic writing development among university students.

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