

# Factors That Influence Efficiency of Writing Essays in Arabic

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## Abstract

Writing skill is a conspicuous language-related skill but many regard it as the most difficult skill to be practiced due to the involvement of complex and complicated thought processes. The success or failure of a student to write is often associated with a number of factors. This study has been conducted to evaluate the level of writing skill among students of Islamic Secondary Schools, to measure the difference of writing skills between SMKA and SMAN, to identify the most dominant factor that determine the mastery of writing, and to evaluate such factors' interaction with student achievement. 184 form-three students were chosen to participate for the purpose of this study. This study used writing efficiency level test and Attitude Questionnaire instruments that contained 25 perception items to represent the five factors studied. Application of mean scale and t-test showed that there was no significant difference in the efficiency of writing between students from both types of school. Other than that, there was no link found between the studied factors except for the teacher factor. This study found that teacher factor is the most dominant one in determining the level of students' efficiency in writing Arabic.

## Keywords

Writing Essay, Learning Arabic, Learning Skills

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## 1. Introduction

The Malaysian Ministry of Education (2008) has identified that essay-writing is the major obstacle for students to acquiring decent marks in examination. According to Jalaluddin, Yunus, & Yamat (2011), this is due to the 60 percent of marks being allocated in Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR) for writing while 85 percent are allocated for Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM). PMR Performance Report, Examination Board, Minis-

try of Education Malaysia (2002) and SPM Answer Quality Evaluation Report for Higher Arabic Language (Examination Board, 2007) notes that the writing level of forms three and form five students in this subject are at an average level. Studies by Jaafar (2011) and Ahmad (2003) claim that students' weak efficiency in writing in Arabic results from not completely learning the method to construct sentences. In addition, studies find that writing essays is not an easy task and cannot be merely mastered without any formal practices due to being a complex cognitive activity that requires five attention levels—thematic, paragraph, sentence, grammar, and lexical (Lavelle, Smith, & O'Ryan, 2002). Hidi & Boscolo (2008) note that there is a difference between a writer and a reader, as writers compose texts within a limited environment and time, and not just simply use them.

Due to such complications, it is no wonder that students face many writing skills-related problems and are often disappointed (Scott & Vitale, 2003). They identify that these problems stem from issues ranging from more basic mechanical issues such as spelling, idea, and punctuations to higher cognitive and metacognitive problems. Due to this alarming matter, it is therefore important for the affecting factors to be studied and to be learned by language teachers and language curriculum planners. There are various factors that affect students' efficiency in reading and writing as suggested by many literatures. Yusof (1999) investigates factors that affect efficiency of writing in Malay Language among form four students. They find that environment, reading frequency, support activities, students' intelligence, and socio-economy status are among the key factors. Additionally, Yusoff & Ghani (1999) find that students' knowledge background plays the most important role in affecting students' skill efficiency in reading Arabic among some other factors.

With reference to these findings, teacher, psychology, intellect, and reading materials are the important factors that need to be studied in the present study. Boud (2001) emphasizes the importance of a teacher as a facilitator in various student-centered writing activities, while Witte, Daly, Faigley, & Koch (1983) claim that students themselves want to be taught various kinds of essays effectively. It is claimed that the best writing teacher is one who is good, superior, and has high intellectual level. Previous researchers found that teachers' behaviors could cause students to have intrinsic motivation (Baba, 2007; Senin, 1997). Additionally, motivation factor is also regarded as the key factor to success for language learning (Dörnyei, 1990; Gardner, 1985). It serves as a source of energy and momentum factor to students in enabling them to study more actively and effectively. Studies by Teh (2009), and Crow & Crow (1983) find a positive relationship between students' interest and motivation with their achievements. Besides that, Schonell (1981) argues that environmental factors such as living residential area and family socioeconomic status affect children's second language mastery. Furthermore, Khalid (1993) claimed that Arabic mastery is weak in Malaysia due to the lack of language environment that could encourage it, and Zawawi (2001) found that there is indeed, a positive relationship between environment and Arabic speaking skill. On the other hand, Gardner (1985) claimed that individuals, in general, are intelligent and their type of intelligence differentiates them to one another that affect their achievements. Indeed, a study from Zin (2007) and Zin (2006) found that intellectual factor has strong relationship between verbal-linguistic and interpersonal domain. Studies from Mohamad (2009) and Haron (1982) found that the frequency of reading additional materials has significant relationship with students' language achievement and this claim is supported by Jalil (1993) who said that lacking in reading materials affect students' writing ability.

This study was carried out to identify the factors that influence the writing of writing in Arabic among Islamic Secondary School students in Terengganu.

The objectives are as follows:

- 1) To measure the level of efficiency of writing in Arabic among Islamic Secondary School students and the difference in the levels of students in National Islamic Secondary School (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama, SMKA) and Sekolah Menengah Agama Negeri;
- 2) To identify the most dominant factor in determining efficiency of writing among students;
- 3) To identify the relationship between intellect, psychology, environment, teachers, and reading materials factors in Arabic essay writing.

## 2. Methodology

This study used a questionnaire and writing efficiency assessment to gather data. The questionnaire contains two parts. Part A contains respondent backgrounds, including as gender, age, address, and type of school. Part B consists of 25 perception items that represent the five factors studied. Items in the questionnaire are modified version of the Attitude Questionnaire (Skurnik & Jeffs, 1970). The writing efficiency assessment contains four questions employed in previous PMR questions and samples were instructed to choose only one.

Respondents were 184 form three students from two Islamic Secondary Schools in Terengganu. Respondents were chosen from groups with good, average, and weak achievement. For the purpose of this study, respondents were gathered in a hall and were asked to fill in the questionnaires. They were then given language efficiency assessment question sets, answer sheets, and assessment instruction. 45 minutes were allocated for them to answer one of the four questions given with word count not exceeding than a hundred.

Data was then analyzed by using percentage min and t-test. According to Malaysian Board of Examination, marks are categorized as follows – 60 - 100 marks (good), 40 - 59 (average), and 0 - 39 (weak). T-test was used to analyze writing efficiency level between students in SMKA and SMAN. Correlation coefficient,  $r$ , was used to evaluate the relationships between the factors studied. Descriptive test was used to get respondents' writing efficiency level. This study also used a scale from Baba (1997) that is denoted as follows—mean = 1.00 to mean = 2.00 (very low), mean = 2.01 to mean = 3.00 (low), mean = 3.01 to mean = 4.00 (average), and mean = 4.01 to mean = 5.00 (high). As for the correlation coefficient, this study used relationship scale from Konting (2005) as follows— $r = 0.01$  to  $r = 0.09$  (very low),  $r = 0.10$  to  $r = 0.29$  (low),  $r = 0.30$  to  $r = 0.49$  (average),  $r = 0.50$  to  $r = 0.69$  (high), and  $r = 0.70$  to  $r = 1.00$  (very high).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Demographic Respondents

A total of 184 students from two schools were selected as respondents. Respondents consisted of boys and girls, aged 14 and 15 years. 59.2 percent lived in urban areas. However, the number of respondents in both schools is the same. Details of the demographic respondents are shown in Table 1.

#### 3.2. Writing Efficiency Achievement Level

The result from writing efficiency assessment with 184 form three respondents yielded good writing level. Table 2 shows that SMKA and SMAN students' achievement are at mean = 64.22 which is at "good" level of between 60 to 100.

#### 3.3. Difference in Writing Efficiency between Smka and Sman

T-test result (Table 3) shows that there was no significant difference in the scores of writing efficiency for SMKA ( $M = 65.77$ ,  $SD = 19.81$ ) and SMAN ( $M = 62.55$ ,  $SD = 24.81$ ),  $p > 0.05$ .

#### 3.4. The Most Dominant Factor Affecting Writing Efficiency

Results from analysis of factors that affect secondary students writing efficiency are shown in Table 4. Teachers factor recorded the highest (mean = 4.15) as compared to psychology (mean = 3.73), followed by environment (mean = 3.44), intellect (mean = 3.31) and reading materials (mean = 3.06). Teachers factor is at high level according to the scale of 4.01 to 5.00. This shows that teachers factor is the most dominant factor affecting Islamic

**Table 1.** Demographic respondents.

Demographic	Factor	Number	Percent
Gender	Male	87	47.3
	Female	97	52.7
Age	14 years old	8	4.3
	15 years old	176	95.7
Address	Urban areas	109	59.2
	Un urban areas	75	40.8
Type of School	SMKA	92	50.0
	SMAN	92	50.0

**Table 2.** Writing efficiency level mean in Islamic Secondary School.

Achievement	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
SMKA & SMAN	184	64.22	21.90

**Table 3.** T-test result of writing efficiency level between school categories.

School Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
SMKA	92	65.77	19.81	-0.98	0.06
SMAN	92	62.55	24.81		

Significant at 0.05 level.

**Table 4.** Efficiency factors mean.

Factor	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Intellect	184	3.31	0.56
Psychology	184	3.73	0.85
Environment	184	3.44	0.59
Teachers	184	4.15	0.69
Reading materials	184	3.06	0.61

Secondary School students' Arabic writing efficiency level.

### 3.5. Relationship between Factors and Students' Achievements

**Table 5** shows the result of the Pearson correlation test between the studied factors with students' achievements in Arabic writing efficiency. It shows that there is a significant result between teachers' factor with students' achievements ( $p < 0.01$ ). In contrast, there are no significant relationships between other factors with students' achievements. This draws to the conclusion that the teacher factor has the most significant relationship as compared to the other ones.

## 4. Discussion and Suggestion

The result of this study shows that students' efficiency to write in Arabic is of good level. There is no difference of writing efficiency level between students of both schools. There is no significant relationship between the factors to students' Arabic writing achievements except for teachers' factor.

This study also found that Arabic writing efficiency level among Islamic Secondary School in Terengganu is at good level even though performance level report of PMR (2002) and SPM (2007) recorded average levels nationwide. Our finding is that only the teacher factor has significant relationship with students' achievements, which is congruent to findings from previous literatures (Baba, 2007; Boud, 2001; Senin, 1997). However, our finding is inconsistent to the one by Yusoff & Ghani (1999) who found that students' knowledge background serves as the most dominant factor in Arabic comprehension.

Therefore, we propose the implications of this study to the teaching and learning process of writing in Arabic. Our finding is parallel with previous studies in that the teacher factor plays a vital role in affecting students' writing level. Students are depended mostly on teachers and their roles are utterly important in improving students' performance as indicated in White (1983). Johari (1994) emphasized that teachers' methodology in conveying lessons towards writing processes need to be considered by language educator. Generally, there are two types of writing approach—product (traditional) and process (Long, 2010). Product approach took the stance that regards writing process as simple for only focusing on the writing (Jamaluddin et al. 1993). In contrast, approach process is rather delicate and can only be mastered via practices and formal learning (Long & Jauyah, 1995). It focuses on the writing activities that are considered able to encourage students into being an effective writer. Therefore, process-oriented teaching from writing teachers is anticipated to produce students who are able to write impeccable yet understandable Arabic essays as set forth in 2009 Secondary Schools' Arab

**Table 5.** Correlation between factors affecting writing efficiency with students' achievements.

Factor	Pearson Correlation $r$	Significance Value $p$
Intellect	0.049	0.505
Psychology	0.088	0.237
Environment	-0.017	0.817
Teachers	0.149	0.044
Reading materials	-0.063	0.399

language syllabus.

Finally, this study had limitations. It was conducted among Islamic Secondary School students at SMKA and SMAN, which limits its generalizability. Findings suggest that teaching styles in Arabic essay writing need to be changed among Arabic teachers. This is one of the challenges that Arabic teachers will have to confront and acknowledge, especially to prepare students to write better.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has been a success in determining the most important factor that effects Islamic Secondary School students' writing efficiency. Our findings are important, especially for teachers to practice positive attitudes and employ a process approach method in conveying writing lessons. This is parallel to the targets, objectives, and needs of Arabic syllabus in the Malaysian Secondary School Integrated Curriculum that calls for teachers to utilize such approach in teaching writing skill. Through this approach, activities will not only encourage students to work collaboratively, but also embolden them to be effective and skillful writers.

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## Appendix A

### DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

Attention:

Please tick (√) in the appropriate compartments respect yourself

1. Gender:            Male            ( )            Female            ( )
2. Age:                14 years old    ( )            15 years old    ( )
3. Address:           Urban areas    ( )            Un urban areas ( )
4. Type of School: SMKA            ( )            SMAN            ( )

## Appendix B

### FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EFFICIENCY OF WRITING ESSAYS IN ARABIC

Please circle your response:

B.1) Intellect		strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I always excellent in essay writing in every test	1	2	3	4	5
2	I am somewhat weak in Arabic essay writing	1	2	3	4	5
3	My proficiency in Arabic essay writing is at an average level	1	2	3	4	5
4	I am able to write strong sentences and ideas when writing an Arabic essay	1	2	3	4	5
5	My efficiency in Arabic vocabulary helps me to write an essay well	1	2	3	4	5
B.2) Psychology		strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	Strongly disagree
6	I enjoy learning Arabic essay writing	1	2	3	4	5
7	Arabic essay writing is a necessary skill taught at SMKA and SMAN	1	2	3	4	5
8	I think the subject of Arabic essay writing is important for my life	1	2	3	4	5
9	I feel happy to come to school for the subject of Arabic essay writing	1	2	3	4	5
10	I prefer to learn Arabic essay writing compared with other parts of Arabic	1	2	3	4	5
B.3) Environment		strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	Strongly disagree
11	I was born into a family that knows Arabic	1	2	3	4	5
12	The school environment helps me in Arabic essay writing	1	2	3	4	5
13	I was able to write Arabic essays well through guidance from family and teachers	1	2	3	4	5
14	My friends always help me to write better Arabic essays	1	2	3	4	5
15	Factors outside the school environment helped me to improve Arabic essay writing	1	2	3	4	5
B.4) Teachers		strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	Strongly disagree
16	My Arabic teacher(s) have deep knowledge of teaching Arabic essay writing	1	2	3	4	5
17	My Arabic teacher(s) are fair while giving marks	1	2	3	4	5
18	My Arabic teacher(s) succeed in improving my attention in subject Arabic essay writing	1	2	3	4	5
19	My Arabic teacher(s) always usenew methods for teaching Arabic essay writing	1	2	3	4	5
20	I like my Arabic teacher(s)	1	2	3	4	5

**Continued**

	B.5) Reading Materials	strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	Strongly disagree
16	I like to read Arabic books and newspapers	1	2	3	4	5
17	Watching Arabic films on television helps me in Arabic essay writing	1	2	3	4	5
18	The textbook is the main reference I need to write an Arabic essay	1	2	3	4	5
19	I always buy Arabic books, magazines, and/or newspapers	1	2	3	4	5
20	I always memorize good essays given by teachers to improve the quality of my Arabic essay writing	1	2	3	4	5

**Appendix C****WRITING EFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT**

Please choose a topic below and write an Arabic essay not less than 100 words.

1. A cooperative shop in my school.
2. Letter for asking money from your father to join a school excursion during the upcoming holidays.
3. The benefits of transport equipment.
4. Accident at one of the main roads nearby.