

Writing in Arabic as a Foreign Language: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Writing Errors.

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Abstract

Although previous studies have largely explained errors in essay writing from linguistic and cognitive perspectives, relatively little attention has been given to the psychological factors that influence students' writing performance, particularly in the context of Arabic as a foreign language. This study addresses this gap by examining how psychological factors interact with linguistic challenges to contribute to writing errors among secondary school students. Using a qualitative approach, the study conducted in-depth interviews with five purposively selected participants. The findings revealed that, in addition to intralingual and interlingual factors, self-regulation and test anxiety play a significant role in shaping students' writing performance. The findings therefore suggest that writing errors should be viewed not solely as linguistic deficiencies but also as outcomes of learners' cognitive and emotional experiences when composing in a foreign language. Beyond identifying the causes of writing errors, this study proposes a practical framework for reducing errors through three interconnected stages of the writing process: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. Each stage incorporates strategies that address both linguistic development and psychological readiness, providing learners with structured support throughout the writing process. This integrated approach extends existing pedagogical practices, which have traditionally focused primarily on correcting linguistic errors without adequately considering the psychological processes underlying writing performance. The findings further demonstrate that effective instruction in Arabic writing requires a balanced emphasis on linguistic competence and learners' self-regulatory abilities. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on Arabic language education by offering empirical evidence that broadens the understanding of writing errors beyond purely linguistic explanations. It presents a theoretically grounded and practically applicable framework that can assist educators in developing more comprehensive writing instruction. Although the study is situated in the context of Arabic language learning, its findings also have broader implications for second language writing research by highlighting the importance of integrating psychological factors into both theory and classroom practice..

Keywords: Teaching Arabic as a Second Language, Error Analysis, Arabic Essay Writing, Foreign Language Learning, Quantitative Study.

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies consistently indicate that one of the primary causes of students' errors in Arabic essay writing is their inadequate mastery of Arabic grammar. Sulaiman Ismail et al. (2021) identified several recurring linguistic

errors, including inaccurate verb usage, confusion in the application of grammatical gender (masculine and feminine forms), and inappropriate selection of personal pronouns (*ḍamīr*). These grammatical inaccuracies significantly undermine both the structural accuracy of sentences and the clarity of the intended meaning, ultimately compromising the overall quality of students' written compositions. This finding is further supported by Shobehah Abd Karim et al. (2021) and Anuar Sopian (2019), who reported a continuous decline in students' performance in Arabic language courses, largely attributable to their inability to produce linguistically accurate and well-organised essays.

Another significant factor contributing to students' difficulties with Arabic essay writing is the substantial structural disparity between Malay, their first language, and Arabic, a foreign language. Arabic grammar is considerably more complex, requiring learners to acquire a comprehensive understanding of intricate grammatical rules and their appropriate application in authentic writing contexts. Studies conducted by Wan Rohani Wan Mokhtar et al. (2018), Nor Asree Mohd Noh and Ab Halim Mohamad (2018), and Mohd Uzaini Mahmood and Muhamad Azhar Zailaini (2017) emphasised that students require systematic, explicit, and sustained instructional approaches to facilitate the acquisition of Arabic grammatical structures. Without sufficient grammatical competence, students are likely to persistently produce linguistic errors, thereby negatively affecting both their writing proficiency and overall academic achievement in Arabic language examinations.

In addition, students' writing difficulties are frequently associated with their tendency to transfer linguistic structures and writing conventions from their native language into Arabic. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as “negative language transfer”, occurs when learners unconsciously apply the linguistic system of their first language while producing texts in a second or foreign language. Such transfer may manifest across multiple linguistic levels, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and discourse organisation. Empirical evidence reported by Sulaiman Ismail et al. (2021), Azlan Shaiful Baharum et al. (2021), and Fithriani et al. (2020) demonstrates that negative transfer is highly prevalent among learners of Arabic and constitutes one of the most influential factors contributing to writing errors. Consequently, addressing first-language interference should be regarded as a critical pedagogical priority in efforts to improve students' Arabic writing competence.

Therefore, the instructional strategies employed by teachers should be continuously reviewed and refined to ensure that they effectively address learners' writing difficulties. Grammar instruction should be integrated contextually into writing activities so that students can establish meaningful connections between grammatical knowledge and its practical application in authentic writing tasks. Rather than teaching grammatical rules in isolation, grammar should be embedded within the writing process to enable learners to apply linguistic knowledge in meaningful communicative contexts.

Furthermore, writing instruction should incorporate task-based learning, process-oriented writing, and the integration of educational technologies, such as automated writing feedback systems and interactive writing platforms. These instructional approaches can enhance learners' motivation, promote greater engagement, and improve their understanding of grammatical, lexical, and organisational aspects of Arabic writing. Equally important is the implementation of continuous formative assessment, which enables teachers to monitor learners' progress, identify recurring errors, and provide timely and constructive feedback that supports ongoing improvement.

Beyond teacher-led interventions, learners should also develop a greater awareness of the importance of mastering Arabic writing skills as an essential component of foreign language proficiency. They should be systematically exposed to high-quality writing models, genre-based writing instruction, and enrichment activities designed to strengthen vocabulary acquisition, grammatical competence, and sentence construction (Macías-Borrego, 2026). In addition, individualised guidance and small-group writing support should be provided for learners experiencing greater writing difficulties. Such differentiated instructional practices can facilitate learners' gradual adaptation to the linguistic and rhetorical demands of Arabic essay writing while fostering greater confidence and autonomy in writing.

1.2 Background Of Study

Writing proficiency is widely recognised as a fundamental component of language competence, particularly in the learning of a second or foreign language. However, errors in essay writing remain a persistent challenge among secondary school students (Abdul Malik Aluwi & Mohammad Taufiq Abdul Ghani, 2023). Previous studies have consistently highlighted the need for systematic error analysis to improve the quality of students' writing and enhance their ability to produce linguistically accurate and coherent texts. Such analyses not only provide valuable insights into learners' linguistic development but also serve as an important foundation for designing effective instructional interventions. Although researchers have increasingly acknowledged the importance of developing pedagogical strategies to reduce writing errors, much of the existing research has focused on non-language subjects, with comparatively limited attention to foreign-language writing, particularly Arabic essay writing. This

gap underscores the need for further investigation into context-specific instructional approaches to effectively address the linguistic challenges faced by learners of Arabic as a foreign language.

A review of the literature on Arabic language teaching and learning indicates that greater emphasis should be placed on strategic approaches to addressing students' writing errors, particularly at the secondary school level. Existing instructional practices have predominantly focused on linguistic aspects of writing, such as morphological, syntactic, and semantic errors, with comparatively little attention devoted to learning strategies that can be systematically implemented to help students reduce writing errors and improve their overall writing performance (A. Rahman et al., 2024; Ahmad Fuad Che Daud et al., 2022; Asnola et al., 2022). Consequently, although linguistic error analysis plays a crucial role in identifying and categorising the types of errors produced by learners, it remains insufficient as a standalone approach for informing practical and effective pedagogical interventions in classroom settings. There is therefore a pressing need to complement linguistic analysis with strategy-based instructional approaches that not only diagnose learners' errors but also equip them with effective techniques to minimise recurring errors and enhance their Arabic writing proficiency. This study bridges this critical gap by investigating not merely what errors students produce, but why psychological variables such as self-regulation and test anxiety precipitate these errors, thereby advancing both theoretical understanding and practical intervention strategies. This study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To identify the factors contributing to errors in Arabic essay writing among secondary school students.
2. To explore the writing strategies employed by students to reduce errors in Arabic essay writing.

1.3 Method

A qualitative case study design was adopted to explore the psychological dimensions associated with Arabic writing errors among secondary school learners. This research design was selected because it facilitates an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and writing practices, thereby providing rich contextual insights that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods (Yin, 2018). To gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to writing errors and the strategies employed to reduce them, five students with varying levels of writing proficiency were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews. The purposive sampling technique ensured that the participants could provide detailed, information-rich accounts relevant to the research objectives.

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews that encouraged participants to reflect on the linguistic and psychological factors influencing their writing performance, as well as the strategies they employed to overcome writing difficulties. All interviews were conducted with participants' informed consent, audio-recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and accuracy of the data for analysis. The interview data were analysed using an iterative thematic analysis approach. An inductive coding process was employed to identify recurring patterns in psychological influences and learning experiences related to Arabic writing. Data management, coding, and theme development were facilitated by ATLAS.ti Version 25, which enabled the systematic organisation of codes into categories and broader thematic constructs.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, several measures were implemented throughout the research process. Member checking was undertaken by inviting participants to review the interview transcripts and confirm the accuracy of the interpretations (Miles et al., 2014). In addition, peer debriefing sessions with research supervisors were conducted to strengthen the credibility, consistency, and dependability of the coding and thematic analysis. A comprehensive audit trail documenting all stages of data collection, coding, and analytical decisions was also maintained to ensure transparency and methodological rigour.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authorities before the commencement of data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and written informed consent was secured from all participants prior to the interviews. To safeguard confidentiality and protect participants' identities, pseudonyms and coded identifiers were used throughout the data analysis and reporting of the findings.

1.4 Results And Discussion

1.4.1 Factors Contributing To Errors In Arabic Essay Writing

The first research question addressed in this study sought to identify the factors contributing to errors in Arabic essay writing. The findings revealed that these errors could be categorised into four major themes: intralingual factors, interlingual factors, self-regulation, and test anxiety. Among these, intralingual factors emerged as one of the most significant sources of writing errors, reflecting learners' insufficient mastery of Arabic's internal linguistic system.

Analysis of the interview data revealed several recurring intralingual difficulties experienced by the participants. These included the omission of letters, inaccurate letter selection, confusion in transforming singular nouns (*mufrad*) into plural forms (*jam'*), incorrect spelling of words containing *al-madd* letters, inappropriate verb usage, incorrect word order within sentences, and inaccurate use of nouns. These findings suggest that students encounter

considerable challenges in internalising the grammatical and orthographic conventions of Arabic, which subsequently affect the accuracy and coherence of their written essays.

i. Intralingual Factors

The findings further indicate that these linguistic errors are primarily associated with learners' limited understanding of Arabic grammar and vocabulary. Many participants demonstrated difficulty selecting appropriate lexical items, particularly nouns, and could not construct grammatically accurate and semantically coherent sentences. Such weaknesses appear to stem from incomplete acquisition of the Arabic linguistic system, causing learners to rely on partial or inaccurate grammatical knowledge during the writing process. Consequently, their written production frequently contains lexical, morphological, and syntactic inaccuracies that reduce both linguistic accuracy and communicative effectiveness.

Firstly, carelessness in letter selection and sentence construction emerged as a significant contributor to writing errors. Several participants reported uncertainty about the use of al-madd letters and had difficulty modifying nouns to agree with grammatical gender and number. These findings indicate that students have not yet fully mastered the morphological and orthographic rules governing Arabic writing. Such deficiencies highlight the need for explicit instruction, systematic practice, and continuous corrective feedback to strengthen learners' grammatical awareness and orthographic competence. In addition, inaccurate verb selection was consistently identified as one of the most critical factors undermining the overall quality and accuracy of students' essays, particularly in expressing tense, agreement, and contextual meaning.

The following are statements from interviews describing how insufficient grammatical awareness and carelessness contribute to students' writing errors.

"I wrote (أكل) instead of (أنا أكلت). I chose the wrong verb. I intended to express a past action, but I automatically wrote (أكل) because I am more familiar with that form. I did not realise that I should write (أنا أكلت). I was rushing and became careless, especially regarding the verb form and the spelling of the letters." (Source: KSO/FYMK/FD/CuKH)

Furthermore, carelessness in selecting the correct Arabic letters emerged as one of the recurring causes of errors in students' essay writing. Such errors were primarily attributed to learners' confusion in distinguishing between letters with similar phonological characteristics or visual forms. This confusion adversely affected both the orthographic accuracy and semantic precision of the words produced, thereby reducing the overall quality and comprehensibility of students' written essays. The following interview findings illustrate evidence that these errors were frequently associated with hurried writing and insufficient attention to orthographic accuracy.

"The plural form of 'flower' should be (الأزهار). I confused the letter (ظ) with (ز). I accidentally substituted it because I was writing too quickly. It was simply carelessness."

(Source: PKIF/FYMK/FDCuPH)

Another prominent intralingual factor identified in this study was students' confusion about transforming singular nouns (mufrad) into their plural forms (jamc) to meet the sentence's grammatical requirements. Analysis of the interview data revealed that participants frequently experienced difficulty applying Arabic morphological rules governing noun inflexion and plural formation. For example, participant PFMI acknowledged persistent uncertainty in determining the appropriate plural forms of nouns across different writing contexts. Such confusion frequently resulted in grammatically inaccurate sentence construction and inappropriate noun usage.

According to the participants, the complexity of the Arabic plural system poses a major learning challenge and hinders accurate application of Arabic grammar. Participants reported that the existence of multiple plural categories of *Jamc*, namely *Jamc mudhakkar*, *Jamc Mu'annath*, and *Jamc Taksir* substantially increases the difficulty of producing grammatically accurate written texts. Each plural category is governed by distinct morphological rules that require learners to modify noun forms according to grammatical gender, number, and context. The following are statements from interviews describing how students' confusion in transforming singular nouns contributes to students' writing errors:

"Sometimes we have Jamc Taksir, while at other times we use Jamc Mu'annath Sālim, Jamc mudhakkar."

The participant further added:

"Sometimes we become confused because some Malay words have been borrowed into Arabic."

(Source: PKMI/FYMK/FDKelTMJ)

Another intralingual factor contributing to students' errors in Arabic essay writing is confusion in spelling words containing *al-madd* (long vowel letters). Based on the interview findings, participant PKZU reported that words involving the long-vowel letters alif, wāw, and yā' frequently caused uncertainty during the writing process. According to the participant, these errors primarily arose from the inconsistency between the pronunciation of words and their orthographic representation in Arabic. The interview findings suggest that students often rely on phonological cues when spelling Arabic words, assuming that the written form directly corresponds to the way a word is pronounced.

However, the Arabic writing system contains numerous orthographic conventions governing the use of *hurūf al-madd* that cannot always be inferred solely from pronunciation. As a result, learners frequently omit, substitute,

or incorrectly insert long vowel letters, producing orthographic errors that compromise the accuracy of their written texts.

One participant explained:

"I usually thought there was an alif. I misread the word because I assumed there was an alif after the letter sīn, but there wasn't. I became confused because I had always believed that the word contained an alif. For example, the word السليم is confusing." (Source: PKZU/FYMK/FD/KelTHM)

The interview demonstrates that the participant's error resulted from an incorrect mental representation of the word's orthographic form rather than from a simple spelling mistake. The participant relied on prior assumptions about the presence of an *alif*, leading to the insertion of a long vowel letter that does not occur in the correct spelling. This finding suggests that learners often depend on memory and phonological perception when writing Arabic words, rather than on a secure understanding of Arabic orthographic conventions.

Analysis of the interview data further indicated that participants showed a clear preference for using the present tense (*muḍāriʿ*) rather than the past tense (*māḍī*) or the imperative form (*amr*) even when they recognised that these choices were inconsistent with the intended context. For example, participants frequently used present-tense verbs to describe events that had already occurred, despite the narrative clearly requiring past-tense forms. Such findings suggest that learners prioritised familiarity and ease of retrieval over grammatical appropriateness during the writing process. This tendency may be attributed to learners' limited confidence in selecting the appropriate Arabic verb forms and their habitual reliance on verb patterns that they perceive as simpler or more familiar.

The following are statements from interviews that indicate participants showed a clear preference for using the present tense (*muḍāriʿ*), one participant reflected on the need to be more attentive when selecting verbs according to the subject and contextual meaning:

"After this, I need to be more careful. For example, when writing sentences such as أنا وعائشة (I and Aishah), I need to remember the correct form. When referring to one person or more than one person, I have to remember which form to use, such as using the letter nūn (ن) for نحن (we)."

"In the future, before writing an essay, I need to think first about the sequence of events, whether I am writing about something that happened last week or another time. I need to plan the story and determine the appropriate tense before writing."

(Source: PKZU/FYMK/FD/LTKK)

Confusion in organising word order within sentence structures was also identified as a significant factor contributing to errors in students' Arabic essay writing. Based on the interview findings, participant PKTI acknowledged difficulty determining the appropriate word position and sequence in Arabic syntax. Specifically, the participant expressed uncertainty about which words should appear first and how sentence elements should be arranged in line with Arabic sentence patterns, particularly the Verb–Subject–Object (VSO) structure, which is one of the fundamental syntactic patterns in Arabic.

The participant's difficulty indicates that arranging words in Arabic sentences requires not only vocabulary knowledge but also an understanding of the underlying syntactic rules governing sentence formation. When learners fail to internalise these structural patterns, they tend to construct Arabic sentences based on familiar patterns from their first language, resulting in syntactic inaccuracies and unnatural sentence constructions. The following interview statement illustrates the participant's confusion regarding Arabic word order:

"Sometimes my sentence structure is incorrect. For example, if I want to write 'We play at the field', such as playing football, Ustazah explained that the correct structure is 'we play football, then at the field'. However, my sentence structure was incorrect because I arranged the words in the wrong order."

"The incorrect sentences follow the Malay language structure because I imitate the structure of Malay." (Source: PKTI/FYMK/FD/KelSAP)

Another factor contributing to errors in Arabic essay writing concerns the inappropriate use of nouns, particularly the inaccurate selection of vocabulary during the writing process. These errors primarily involve the use of lexical items that do not accurately convey the intended meaning within a given context. Such findings suggest that limited lexical competence not only affects semantic precision but also contributes to grammatical inaccuracies and reduces the overall quality of students' written compositions.

Based on the interview findings, participant PKSO emphasised that selecting appropriate vocabulary is essential for producing accurate and meaningful Arabic texts. The participant acknowledged that precise lexical choice enhances the quality of writing and minimises grammatical errors, indicating that a broad and well-developed vocabulary is fundamental to effective Arabic writing. This observation highlights the close relationship between lexical knowledge and writing proficiency, as learners with limited vocabulary are more likely to experience difficulty expressing ideas accurately and selecting contextually appropriate lexical items. The following interview excerpt illustrates the participant's difficulty in selecting the appropriate noun:

"For the phrase 'in the morning', it should be في الصباح. My mistake was omitting the alif. The word الصباح has a long vowel. Sometimes people pronounce الصباح, while others say الصبح, which actually refers to the dawn (Fajr) prayer time." (Source: PKSO/FYMK/FD/KKTT).

The interview statements demonstrate that the participant experienced confusion between two semantically related lexical items, الصباح (*al-ṣabāḥ*, morning) and الصبح (*al-ṣubḥ*, dawn). Although the words share a common lexical root, they differ in orthographic form, pronunciation, and contextual meaning. The omission of the long vowel (*alif*) resulted in the selection of a different lexical item, thereby altering the intended meaning of the sentence.

ii. Interlingual Factors

Analysis of the interview revealed that interlingual factors, particularly the influence of learners' first language (L1), constitute a primary source of errors in Arabic essay writing. Participants consistently indicated that Malay, as their native language, frequently served as an implicit linguistic reference when constructing Arabic sentences. Consequently, learners often transferred Malay grammatical patterns and writing conventions into Arabic, resulting in systematic linguistic inaccuracies in their written compositions.

These findings demonstrate interlingual errors, in which learners unconsciously apply the linguistic system of their first language when producing texts in a foreign language. Such cross-linguistic transfer is evident in the adoption of Malay syntactic structures, lexical choices, and rhetorical patterns that are incompatible with Arabic grammatical conventions. Rather than representing isolated mistakes, these errors reflect learners' reliance on previously acquired linguistic knowledge to compensate for their limited proficiency in the target language.

One of the prominent interlingual factors identified in this study concerns learners' confusion arising from loanwords, particularly their tendency to spell Arabic words according to Malay pronunciation and the conventions of the Jawi writing system. This type of error occurs when learners rely on familiar Malay orthographic and phonological patterns to produce Arabic words, rather than adhering to the orthographic and phonological rules of Standard Arabic. Consequently, students transfer features of their first-language writing system into Arabic, resulting in systematic spelling inaccuracies.

Analysis of the interview data revealed that this confusion frequently occurred when participants encountered Arabic words that closely resembled Malay words written in Jawi. Participants reported often assuming that words with similar pronunciation or visual appearance followed identical spelling conventions across both writing systems. As a result, they inadvertently applied Jawi spelling rules when writing Arabic, despite important orthographic differences between the two systems. The interview findings further illustrate learners' confusion regarding loanwords shared between Malay and Arabic. One participant explained:

"Sometimes we get confused because some Malay words are borrowed from Arabic. At times, it is difficult to determine whether a word is originally Arabic or simply a Malay word. That is why we sometimes make mistakes."
(Source: PKMI/FYMK/FL/EBAJ)

The syntactic structure of Arabic differs considerably from that of many other languages, including Malay. These structural differences often become a major source of writing errors, particularly among learners who acquire Arabic as a foreign language. The interview findings revealed that participants tended to formulate ideas using Malay sentence patterns and subsequently translate them directly into Arabic. Although this direct translation strategy may provide initial support for learners during the writing process, it often leads to substantial syntactic errors because the underlying grammatical structures of the two languages are not equivalent. The following interview statement illustrates the participant's reliance on Malay sentence structures when composing Arabic essays:

"After that, I write the ideas first, like making points. I write the points in Malay first. Once I have completed the Malay version, I translate it into Arabic and then erase the original outline. In other words, I develop my ideas in Malay first and then convert them into Arabic. I prefer using Jumlah Ismiyyah (nominal sentences) because the structure is similar to the Malay language."

(Source: PKIF/FYMK/FL/AGBM)

The interview excerpt demonstrates that the participant relied heavily on the first language (Malay) as a cognitive framework for organising ideas before producing Arabic sentences. This writing behaviour reflects a process of interlingual syntactic transfer, whereby learners unconsciously apply familiar first language sentence patterns to the target language. The participant's preference for *jumlah ismiyyah* (nominal sentences) appears to be influenced by the perceived similarity between Arabic and Malay nominal sentence structures, leading learners to favour structures that require less cognitive adjustment.

iii. Self-Regulation

Lack of Attention During Sentence Construction

Analysis of the interview data revealed that self-regulation constitutes another important factor contributing to errors in Arabic essay writing. Participants indicated that many of their writing errors stemmed from difficulties in effectively regulating their own writing behaviour, particularly in maintaining careful attention to grammatical accuracy and sentence construction. The findings suggest that these errors were not solely attributable to insufficient linguistic knowledge but also reflected learners' limited ability to monitor, evaluate, and control their writing processes. Such deficiencies in self-regulation are likely to increase the occurrence of avoidable errors, especially when learners fail to maintain sustained concentration throughout the writing task.

Producing a well-structured and linguistically accurate essay requires sustained attention, careful monitoring, and deliberate cognitive effort, particularly in examination settings where time constraints and performance demands are considerable. Based on the interview findings, participants acknowledged that many of the errors in their essays were unintentional during the writing process rather than the result of deliberate misuse of grammatical rules. They explained that mistakes frequently arose while constructing sentences and spelling words, often because they paid insufficient attention to linguistic details during writing essays.

The interview findings illustrate how limitations in self-regulation contribute to grammatical errors in Arabic essay writing. One participant explained:

"Sometimes there are expressions such as في نهاية الأسبوع الماضي. When I try to use them in a new essay, I sometimes use them incorrectly because I misunderstand what the teacher has taught us. I assume that all of those expressions can be applied in any essay. That is why I sometimes mix fi'il Muḍāri' with fi'il Māḍī (past tense)." (Source: PKMI/FYMK/FRK/KTBA)

These findings underscore the importance of developing learners' metacognitive awareness alongside their grammatical competence. Instruction should therefore encourage students to plan the communicative purpose of their writing, monitor the consistency of tense usage throughout the composition, and critically evaluate the contextual appropriateness of memorised language forms before incorporating them into new writing tasks. Such self-regulatory strategies are likely to reduce preventable grammatical errors and improve the coherence and linguistic accuracy of Arabic essay writing. The interview findings further illustrate how a lack of careful attention during sentence construction contributed to errors in students' Arabic essay writing. One participant reflected:

"While I was writing, I actually knew that some parts were incorrect, but I did not go back and reread or check my work. The mistakes happened because I was careless. I continued writing without reviewing what I had written, so I did not realise that I had used the wrong word until afterwards." "I feel more comfortable using fi'il Muḍāri' (the present-tense verb)." (Source: PKTI/FYMK/FRK/KTBA)

iv. Test Anxiety.

Another significant factor contributing to errors in Arabic essay writing is test anxiety, particularly the psychological pressure learners experience in examination settings. Analysis of the interview data revealed that participants frequently reported feelings of nervousness, anxiety, and time pressure when responding to essay-writing tasks. These emotional responses were perceived as difficult to avoid and substantially affected their writing performance. Participants explained that heightened anxiety reduced their ability to concentrate on sentence construction, grammatical accuracy, and the organisation of ideas, while also increasing their tendency to write hastily to complete the essay within the allocated time.

The findings further indicate that test anxiety not only undermines learners' confidence but also interferes with the cognitive processes required for effective writing. Under examination pressure, participants reported experiencing difficulty maintaining attention to linguistic accuracy and coherence, resulting in a higher frequency of grammatical, lexical, and organisational errors. These findings suggest that emotional factors play a critical role in shaping the quality of students' written performance, particularly when writing tasks require the simultaneous coordination of linguistic knowledge, idea generation, and time management.

Anxiety During Sentence Construction

The interview findings revealed that time-related anxiety was among the most significant factors contributing to errors in Arabic essay writing. Participants consistently reported feeling anxious about the limited time allocated to complete essay questions in examination settings. This pressure often compelled them to write hastily to finish their essays within the prescribed time, leading to unintentional errors. The following interview data illustrate how examination time pressure influenced participants' writing behaviour:

"Yes, I did check my work, but I was rushing because I wanted to finish quickly."

"The mistakes happened because I was rushing. I also followed the Malay language structure. I became confused, especially with the word معًا. I wasn't sure whether it should end with tanwīn or the letter nūn (ن). I did check my work, but I was in a hurry."

"Most of my mistakes happen because I am rushing and trying to beat the time limit." (Source: PKIF/FYMK/KBU/BBA)

1.5 Strategies for Minimising Errors in Arabic Essay Writing

1.5.1 Repetition-Based Practice.

Analysis of the interview data revealed that repetition-based practice is one of the instructional strategies that participants perceived as effective in reducing errors in Arabic essay writing. Participants consistently reported that repeatedly practising words, sentence patterns, and previously learned texts helped reinforce their memory and improve the accuracy of their written production. According to the participants, repeated exposure to linguistic forms, particularly when combined with regular writing practice, enabled them to retain grammatical structures and vocabulary more effectively over time.

The findings further suggest that repetition serves as an important mechanism for strengthening learners' long-term retention of linguistic knowledge. Participants explained that repeatedly writing and revisiting previously learned words and sentence structures facilitated the consolidation of grammatical rules, orthographic conventions, and appropriate vocabulary usage. This continuous reinforcement not only enhanced recall during writing tasks but also increased learners' confidence in applying Arabic language structures accurately in new contexts.

i. Practising New Arabic Vocabulary through Repetition

The interview findings revealed that repetition-based practice, particularly by practising writing new Arabic vocabulary, was perceived as an effective strategy for reducing writing errors. Participants explained that one of the most beneficial approaches for strengthening memory retention and improving writing proficiency was repeatedly practising newly learned Arabic words. This practice involved repeatedly pronouncing the target words and rewriting them several times using the vocabulary introduced by the teacher.

According to the participants, this approach was a fundamental learning activity that teachers strongly emphasised, particularly during the initial stages of Arabic language instruction. Through continuous exposure and repeated written practice, learners reinforced their understanding of new vocabulary, improved spelling accuracy, and developed greater confidence in producing Arabic texts. The findings suggest that repetition-based vocabulary practice serves not only as a memorisation technique but also as a means of strengthening learners' orthographic awareness and lexical competence.

The following interview excerpts illustrate participants' experiences regarding the practice of writing new Arabic vocabulary as a strategy for improving writing accuracy:

"When I encounter a new word, I write it down in my notebook so that I can remember it. I usually make notes of new vocabulary."

"The teacher frequently provides essay-writing exercises and sentence construction activities. We write the words, then the teacher checks and marks them. This exercise is called imlā' (Arabic spelling dictation practice)."

"After the teacher introduces new vocabulary, I immediately write it in a small notebook."

(Source: PKIF/SKK/LP/LTPBA)

1.5.2 Sentence Structure Transformation Practice

The interview findings further revealed that participants perceived sentence structure transformation practice as an effective strategy for minimising errors in Arabic essay writing. Participants explained that improving writing accuracy requires learners to modify and restructure various elements of their writing rather than relying on a single sentence pattern throughout the essay. Such modifications include planning the main ideas before writing, selecting appropriate synonyms, varying verb forms, adjusting pronoun usage, and transforming sentence structures and patterns according to the intended meaning and context.

i. Planning Main Ideas Before Writing

The interview findings revealed that participants perceived planning main ideas before initiating the writing process as an essential strategy for developing effective Arabic essay writing. Participants explained that organising preliminary ideas before writing helped establish a clearer direction and provided greater momentum throughout the composition process. This strategy involved first outlining their ideas in Malay, then translating them into Arabic using a direct translation approach.

The following interview excerpts illustrate participants' experiences in planning ideas before writing:

"Before writing the essay, I think first about what I want to write, for example, whether it is about an event from the previous week or something else. I need to plan the story first."

"That is why we outline what needs to be included and what should be added. By writing the outline first, we know what to do, and only then can we start writing."

(Source: PKZU/SKK/LMSA/RIUT).

Participants also reported using Malay as an initial medium for organising their ideas before converting them into Arabic:

"When I want to write sentences, I need to think about them first. I construct them in Malay, and then I adjust them accordingly." (Source: PKSO/SKK/LMSA/RIUT)

ii. Using Synonymous Words

The use of appropriate vocabulary plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of Arabic essay writing and minimising lexical errors. The interview findings revealed that some participants were able to avoid writing errors despite having a limited vocabulary repertoire. This was achieved through the strategic use of alternative lexical items with similar meanings or synonymous expressions in Arabic. Rather than relying on unfamiliar or complex vocabulary, participants employed familiar words that conveyed comparable meanings and enabled them to express their intended ideas accurately. The following interview excerpt illustrates participants' perspectives on selecting synonymous words during Arabic essay writing:

"Previously, we had read words such as fuqarā' (the poor), but during the examination, we became confused about whether the word fakir was originally from Arabic or had already become part of Malay vocabulary. That

is why sometimes we mistakenly used it. Similarly, in this question, the word الأيتام (orphans) was provided, but we used النسيم instead. It has a similar meaning."

(Source: PKMI/SKK/LMSA/TPSE)

iii. Systematic Error-Checking Practices

The interview findings revealed that systematic error-checking practices play an important role in minimising errors in Arabic essay writing. Participants indicated that carefully reviewing their written work after completing the essay enabled them to identify and correct unnoticed errors in grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. This checking process was considered essential for improving the accuracy and clarity of their written compositions, particularly in ensuring that the intended meaning was conveyed appropriately to readers. The following interview excerpts demonstrate participants' approaches to systematic error checking:

"If I find a mistake, I circle it first, and then I identify why it is wrong. For example, I check the *ḍamīr* (pronoun). If the pronoun is نحن (*naḥnu*), then the verb should use the letter *nūn* (ن) in the verb form."

"After completing the essay, I check every single word. Each time I read a word, I look at the word before it and then check whether the verb used is correct or not." (Source: PKZU/SKK/LMSA/SKIP)

iv. Practice in Transforming Pronouns (*ḍamīr*)

The interview findings revealed that participants employed various strategies to minimise errors in Arabic essay writing, particularly in the use of pronouns (*ḍamīr*). One frequently adopted strategy was practising sentence construction using only the first-person pronouns (*ḍamīr al-mutakallim*), such as أنا (*anā*, "I") and نحن (*naḥnu*, "we"). Participants explained that limiting their use of pronouns to familiar forms helped them develop greater confidence and accuracy when constructing Arabic sentences. The following interview excerpts illustrate participants' practice of transforming and selecting appropriate pronouns (*ḍamīr*) as a strategy to improve grammatical accuracy in Arabic essay writing:

"I usually construct simple sentences first and use the appropriate (*ḍamīr*). In terms of grammar, I need to determine which verb form to use. I check the (*ḍamīr*). For example, if the pronoun is نحن (*naḥnu*), then the verb should begin with the letter *nūn* (ن). Another strategy is to use only one (*ḍamīr*). Using نحن is easier, for example when writing about myself and Aisyah. Using a single pronoun makes it easier to construct the essay."

(Source: PKZU/SKK/LMSA/LTKGN)

v. Practice in Transforming Verb Forms

The interview findings revealed that one of the strategies adopted by participants to minimise errors in Arabic essay writing was to use a single verb form (*fi'l*) consistently throughout their compositions. Participants explained that this strategy was intended to reduce confusion arising from the complex morphological variations of Arabic verb conjugation, particularly the changes associated with different tense forms, pronouns, and grammatical contexts. The following interview excerpt illustrates participants' preference for using *fi'l al-muḍāri'* (present/future tense verb):

"In essay writing, I usually use the *Muḍāri'* verb because using the *fi'l al-amr* (imperative verb) is more difficult as I am not accustomed to using it. I prefer using the *fi'l al-muḍāri'* because it is easier. When using the *amr* and *māḍī* (past tense verb) forms, I find it difficult to change the verb forms. I am not very familiar with those forms, so transforming them becomes challenging."

(Source: PKTI/SKK/LMSA/LTKK)

vi. Practice in Using Nominal and Verbal Sentences

The interview findings revealed that one of the main strategies adopted by participants to minimise errors in Arabic essay writing was to transform sentence structures into "*jumlah ismiyyah*" (nominal sentences). This strategy involved constructing sentences by beginning with the subject rather than the verb, which differs from the conventional Arabic sentence pattern, which typically follows a verb–subject–object (VSO) structure. The following interview excerpts illustrate participants' experiences regarding the use of nominal and verbal sentence structures:

"For me, I prefer to construct "*jumlah ismiyyah*" because it is similar to the sentence structure in Malay." (Source: PKZU/SKK/LMSA/LANAK)

"I like using "*jumlah ismiyyah*" because its structure is similar to Malay."

(Source: PKIF/SKK/LMSA/LANAK).

The substantial differences between learners' first language and the Arabic language being acquired have contributed to errors not only in oral communication but also in essay writing. The errors produced by participants should not be interpreted as an indication of absolute failure; rather, they represent evidence of learners' ongoing developmental process in acquiring a foreign language. From this perspective, errors serve as valuable indicators of learners' current linguistic competence and provide insights into the challenges they encounter throughout the learning process.

To provide a comprehensive explanation of the underlying causes of these writing errors, this study identified four main factors contributing to errors in Arabic essay writing. Based on Corder's (1981) framework, intralingual and interlingual factors are recognised as two major sources of error in second-language learning. Intralingual errors

occur due to learners' incomplete understanding of the target language system. In contrast, interlingual errors arise from the influence and transfer of learners' first language structures into the target language.

In addition to these two linguistic factors, the study's findings revealed two further factors that contributed to learners' writing errors: self-regulation and test anxiety. These factors are closely associated with psychological dimensions, particularly learners' motivation, self-confidence, and their emotional responses during the writing process, especially in examination contexts. Such psychological factors may influence learners' ability to concentrate, monitor their language production, and apply their linguistic knowledge effectively when composing Arabic essays. The findings related to self-regulation and test anxiety are consistent with the study conducted by Nasir et al., (2024), which highlighted the relationship between students' achievement in written examinations and their levels of motivation and self-confidence when facing assessment situations. Therefore, the occurrence of writing errors should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced not only by linguistic limitations but also by learners' cognitive and affective states during the writing process in a foreign language.

In general, the study's findings identified several strategies to minimise errors in Arabic essay writing. Two main strategies were identified, namely (1) repetition-based practice and (2) sentence structure transformation practice. Repetition-based practice refers to writing activities that involve continuous drills and repeated exposure to linguistic forms with the primary aim of reducing language errors. This strategy emphasises reinforcing newly acquired vocabulary and relevant phrases to enhance learners' retention and facilitate consistent application in their written compositions. Through repeated practice, learners have opportunities to internalise lexical items, strengthen their orthographic awareness, and improve their accuracy in producing Arabic texts (Chen, 2026).

Meanwhile, sentence-structure transformation practice involves modifying and restructuring sentences from essays to use simpler, more manageable, and contextually appropriate patterns according to learners' proficiency levels. This strategy enables learners to develop greater control over sentence construction by adapting linguistic structures that correspond with their existing language competence. According to Sulaiman et al. (2018), research on strategies to strengthen writing skills and reduce errors remains relatively limited, particularly because the writing process involves complex cognitive activities and requires integrating various technical linguistic components.

A detailed explanation of these two strategies, repetition-based practice and sentence structure transformation practice, is further discussed according to three major stages of the writing process: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. The discussion of these strategies is reorganised around principles of language teaching and learning to ensure their relevance and applicability in school-based Arabic instruction. This approach allows teachers to understand better how these strategies can be incorporated systematically into classroom practices to support learners' writing development.

This perspective is consistent with the findings of Mohamed Noh Daipi and Fadilah Isnin (2020), who reported that the gradual implementation of writing instruction according to learners' developmental levels enables students to cultivate greater interest, confidence, and competence in writing. Therefore, integrating structured writing strategies that address different stages of the writing process may significantly improve Arabic writing proficiency and reduce persistent linguistic errors among learners.

The pre-writing stage represents a critical executive phase that structures the overall process of text production in a systematic, organised, and purposeful manner. From a cognitive perspective, this stage functions as an initial regulatory mechanism that enables writers to plan, select, and organise ideas schematically before transforming them into written language. Such proactive planning helps reduce cognitive overload during the writing process, which is often associated with difficulties in maintaining discourse organisation and controlling linguistic accuracy in second language writing. By separating idea generation from the immediate demands of linguistic production, learners can establish a stronger conceptual foundation before engaging in the actual writing process. This approach allows students to focus initially on developing content and organising their thoughts, thereby facilitating a smoother transition from conceptual planning to linguistic expression. Furthermore, pre-writing strategies enable learners to consider the intended audience, writing objectives, and contextual requirements, which contribute to more effective and meaningful written communication. The findings of this study revealed that two main strategies were employed during the pre-writing stage to minimise errors in Arabic essay writing: planning main ideas before writing and practising new Arabic vocabulary.

These findings are consistent with the study by Rohaida Idris (2024), which emphasised that effective essay writing is an iterative and developmental process involving several stages, beginning with planning, drafting, reviewing, and refining the written product until completion. This perspective highlights that writing should not be viewed as a linear activity but rather as a recursive process in which writers continuously monitor and improve their ideas, language use, and overall text quality. Similarly, Zhang (2023) supported this view by explaining that preparing an initial writing framework, including outlining, elaborating ideas, and refining content in the first language, can be an effective strategy in the early stage of essay composition. The use of the first language as a planning tool enables learners to organise their thoughts, develop relevant ideas, and establish a clearer conceptual structure before transferring them into the target language.

While-writing strategies play a fundamental role as active cognitive monitoring mechanisms that ensure clarity of discourse, semantic coherence, and effective communication of ideas throughout the writing process. Unlike the pre-writing stage, which primarily focuses on initial planning and idea organisation, the while-writing stage requires writers to simultaneously activate executive cognitive functions to transform conceptual thoughts into structured linguistic representations, particularly within the context of formal academic writing. During this stage, writers are required to continuously regulate and evaluate their language production through the systematic organisation of ideas, the careful selection of appropriate vocabulary, and the accurate application of syntactic structures. These strategic processes enable learners to construct texts with greater unity, logical progression, and clearer meaning, thereby enhancing the overall quality and comprehensibility of their writing. The findings of this study identified several while-writing strategies employed by participants to reduce Arabic writing errors, including using synonymous words, practising pronoun transformation (*damīr*), practising verb transformation (*fi'l*), and applying nominal and verbal sentence structures (*jumlah ismiyyah* and *jumlah fi'liyyah*).

Post-writing strategies, or the self-reflective stage of writing, play a fundamental role in ensuring that the final written product achieves optimal discourse quality through systematic revision, editing, and evaluation. From a psycholinguistic perspective, this stage represents an internal feedback mechanism in which writers shift their role from text producers to critical evaluators of their own texts. Through this self-regulatory process, writers activate metacognitive awareness to identify, analyse, and modify linguistic deviations that may occur either unintentionally or as a result of persistent language difficulties. During the post-writing stage, learners critically examine various aspects of their written production, including grammatical accuracy, orthographic features, sentence structure, and vocabulary appropriateness. This reflective process enables learners to detect and correct errors that may affect the precision of meaning, coherence of ideas, and overall semantic integrity of the essay. Rather than merely a final proofreading activity, post-writing revision is an essential learning process that promotes a deeper understanding of linguistic patterns and enhances learners' ability to monitor their own language use.

1.6 Conclusion And Recommendation

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to errors in Arabic essay writing among secondary school learners and explores the strategies students adopt to minimise such errors. The findings demonstrate that writing errors are not solely attributable to linguistic deficiencies but rather emerge from the complex interaction of linguistic and psychological factors during the writing process. In addition to the well-established intralingual and interlingual sources of error proposed by Corder (1981), this study identifies self-regulation and test anxiety as two significant psychological factors that influence learners' writing performance. These findings broaden the scope of error analysis by demonstrating that students' ability to regulate their learning, sustain attention, and manage examination-related pressure substantially affects the accuracy and quality of their written production.

The study also extends current knowledge by documenting the practical strategies learners use to reduce writing errors. Two broad categories of strategies emerged from the data: repetition practice and sentence restructuring strategies. These strategies encompass a sequence of activities implemented before, during, and after writing, including vocabulary rehearsal, sentence planning, self-monitoring, systematic proofreading, and the simplification of grammatical structures. Collectively, these findings suggest that successful Arabic writing depends not only on linguistic competence but also on learners' strategic behaviour and their capacity to regulate cognitive and emotional processes throughout the writing task.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of research on Arabic as a foreign language by extending the traditional Error Analysis framework beyond linguistic explanations. While previous studies have largely focused on identifying and classifying language errors, the present study demonstrates that a more comprehensive understanding of writing performance requires integrating psychological dimensions into the analysis of learner errors. This integrated perspective provides a richer explanation of why errors occur and offers a stronger foundation for developing effective instructional interventions.

The pedagogical implications of the findings are equally significant. Arabic writing instruction should move beyond an exclusive emphasis on grammatical accuracy and incorporate explicit instruction in writing strategies, self-regulated learning, and anxiety management. Grammar should be taught within meaningful writing contexts, supported by continuous formative feedback and process-oriented writing activities that encourage planning, monitoring, and revision. Such an instructional approach is expected to foster greater learner autonomy, improve writing confidence, and reduce recurring linguistic errors.

Although this study was conducted in Malaysian secondary schools, its findings have broader implications for second- and foreign-language writing instruction. The interaction between linguistic competence and psychological readiness is likely to influence writing performance across different language learning contexts. Consequently, future research should examine the applicability of the proposed framework across diverse educational settings, larger populations, and different foreign-language classrooms. Quantitative and mixed-

methods studies are also recommended to validate the relationships identified in this study and to evaluate the effectiveness of strategy-based interventions in improving learners' writing proficiency.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that understanding writing errors requires a holistic perspective that recognises the interconnected roles of language knowledge, learner psychology, and strategic writing behaviour. By integrating linguistic analysis with psychological insights, the study offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding and improving Arabic essay writing. It is anticipated that these findings will contribute to the advancement of Arabic language education by informing evidence-based pedagogical practices and supporting the development of more effective, learner-centred approaches to writing instruction..

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