

From Sentence Anxiety to Paragraph Confidence: A Pedagogical Study of Arabic Writing Development

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Abstract

Writing anxiety remains a persistent challenge in Arabic language education, often hindering learners' engagement and development in maharah kitābah. This study investigates the effectiveness of paragraph-based writing instruction in transforming learners' writing experiences from sentence-level anxiety to paragraph-level confidence. Employing a qualitative pedagogical research design, the study was conducted with intermediate-level learners of Arabic and utilized classroom observations, learners' written paragraphs, and semi-structured interviews as primary data sources. The findings indicate that paragraph-focused instruction reduces writing anxiety by lowering cognitive load and providing a psychologically safe space for meaning construction. Learners reported increased confidence, greater willingness to write, and higher engagement during writing activities. Rather than emphasizing immediate grammatical accuracy, paragraph-based tasks encouraged sustained participation, revision, and linguistic experimentation. The study concludes that paragraph-by-paragraph instruction serves as an effective pedagogical strategy for addressing affective barriers in Arabic writing development. By integrating cognitive and emotional considerations into instructional design, this research contributes to the advancement of learner-centered Arabic writing pedagogy.

Keywords: Arabic Writing Pedagogy, Maharah Kitābah, Writing Anxiety, Paragraph-Based Instruction, Learner Confidence.

Introduction

Writing proficiency (*maharah kitābah*) is widely recognized as one of the most complex and demanding skills in Arabic language learning. Unlike receptive skills, writing requires learners to simultaneously manage linguistic accuracy, lexical selection, syntactic organization, and meaning construction (Baharun et al., 2025; Masnun, 2025; Solehudin, 2025; Solehudin & Arisandi, 2024). In many Arabic language classrooms, however, writing instruction is often introduced abruptly through sentence-level drills or extended composition tasks, with limited attention to learners' affective readiness (McCombie & Al Masaeed, 2025; Rabie-Ahmed & Mohamed, 2022). As a result, a considerable number of learners experience anxiety, hesitation, and a persistent sense of insecurity when engaging in Arabic writing tasks, even when they possess adequate grammatical knowledge (Huda et al., 2026; Syaheed & Salam, 2026).

This challenge is particularly evident among learners transitioning from controlled sentence production to more extended written expression. At this stage, students often report fear of making grammatical errors, discomfort with formal written Arabic, and low confidence in expressing ideas (Derakhshan, 2025; Gayed et al., 2022; Henderson & Ingram, 2018; Nur Hanifansyah et al., 2024; Spencer & Pierce, 2023). When writing is perceived as a high-risk activity, learners tend to avoid experimentation, limit output, or rely heavily on memorized structures, thereby constraining meaningful language development (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023).

Previous studies on Arabic writing pedagogy have predominantly focused on grammatical accuracy, error analysis, genre-based instruction, or product-oriented assessment. While these approaches contribute to linguistic precision, they often overlook the affective dimension of writing, particularly writing anxiety and learners' psychological readiness. Research in second and foreign language writing has demonstrated that anxiety and low self-efficacy can significantly impede learners' writing development, yet in Arabic language education, pedagogical strategies that explicitly address these affective barriers remain underexplored. Alzahrani (2025) investigated academic writing difficulties among EFL learners and found that students struggled primarily with vocabulary use, text organization, grammar, paraphrasing, and referencing. The study also identified limited writing practice and insufficient writing-focused instruction as key factors contributing to learners' writing challenges. Güvendir and Uzun (2023) demonstrated that L2 writing anxiety suppresses learners' working memory capacity, particularly under high cognitive load, resulting in reduced syntactic complexity in written production. Their findings confirm that writing anxiety operates not only as an emotional response but also as a cognitive constraint that directly affects writing performance. Li et al. (2023) expanded the affective perspective by showing that foreign language writing achievement is influenced by multiple emotions, including anxiety, enjoyment, and boredom. Notably, boredom was found to exert the strongest

negative effect on writing achievement, highlighting the importance of emotionally engaging instructional designs.

Rasool et al. (2023) investigated the prevalence and types of foreign language writing anxiety among pre-service EFL teachers and found that cognitive anxiety was the most dominant form, with a large proportion of learners experiencing moderate to high levels of writing anxiety. Huda et al. (2023) explored a pedagogical approach that bridges speaking and writing by transforming spoken Arabic dialogues into simple written texts. Their findings indicate improvements in writing fluency, accuracy, and learner confidence, emphasizing the value of skill integration in Arabic writing instruction. Seyri and Ghasvand (2025) examined teacher emotionality in AI-powered L2 speaking and writing instruction and revealed that both positive and negative emotions shape instructional practices. Their study underscores the growing recognition of emotional dynamics in productive language skills instruction.

Despite growing evidence that writing anxiety, cognitive load, and emotional factors significantly affect L2 writing performance, existing studies remain largely diagnostic rather than pedagogical. Much of the literature focuses on measuring anxiety levels, identifying emotional variables, or examining their cognitive consequences, without offering concrete instructional designs that address these challenges. Furthermore, paragraph-level writing has rarely been conceptualized as a central pedagogical unit for reducing task complexity and fostering emotional safety, particularly in Arabic language education. As a result, the role of gradual, paragraph-based instruction in transforming learners' writing anxiety into confidence remains underexplored.

Current research on L2 writing increasingly acknowledges that writing development is shaped by an interaction between cognitive capacity, emotional states, and task demands. Recent psycholinguistic studies highlight how anxiety constrains working memory under complex writing conditions, while affective research emphasizes the roles of enjoyment and boredom in writing achievement. At the pedagogical level, however, instructional responses to these findings are still limited, especially in Arabic language contexts. The state of the art thus calls for pedagogically grounded studies that translate insights from cognitive and affective research into practical classroom strategies that reduce writing anxiety and support learner confidence.

The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How does paragraph-based writing instruction affect learners' confidence in Arabic writing? (2) In what ways does focusing on paragraph construction influence learners' engagement and willingness to write in Arabic?

This research is limited to learners at the intermediate level of Arabic language study and focuses specifically on paragraph-level writing tasks implemented within a classroom instructional setting. It does not aim to measure

long-term writing proficiency development across multiple genres, nor does it examine advanced academic writing skills. Instead, the scope is confined to exploring affective and pedagogical changes during the instructional process.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to Arabic language pedagogy by foregrounding the affective dimension of writing development. By positioning the paragraph as a core instructional unit, this research offers an alternative pedagogical model that prioritizes learner confidence alongside linguistic accuracy. The findings are expected to benefit Arabic language teachers by providing practical insights into designing writing instruction that reduces anxiety and encourages sustained engagement. Additionally, the study contributes to the broader discourse on foreign language writing by highlighting the importance of psychologically informed instructional design in fostering effective writing development.

Method

This study employed a qualitative pedagogical research design with an interpretive orientation to explore how paragraph-based writing instruction influences learners' confidence and writing development in Arabic (Creswell et al., 2007). The research was grounded in affective theories of second language learning, particularly concepts related to writing anxiety, learner self-efficacy, and gradual skill development. From a pedagogical perspective, the study also drew on process-oriented writing instruction, which emphasizes incremental learning, reflection, and meaning construction rather than product-based evaluation alone.

The qualitative design was selected to capture learners' experiences, perceptions, and behavioral changes during the writing process, aspects that cannot be adequately explained through purely quantitative measures. This approach enabled an in-depth examination of how instructional practices mediate both linguistic and psychological dimensions of Arabic writing development.

The paragraph-based writing instruction was implemented over a period of six instructional weeks, consisting of twelve classroom sessions (two sessions per week). Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes and followed a gradual instructional sequence. In the initial sessions, learners were guided to construct short paragraphs based on structured prompts with a single central idea. Subsequent sessions emphasized paragraph coherence, idea expansion, and voluntary revision, while minimizing immediate grammatical correction. This sustained instructional duration allowed learners to gradually acclimate to paragraph-level writing and provided sufficient time to observe changes in confidence, engagement, and writing behavior.

The research was conducted in an Arabic language instructional setting at the intermediate level, where learners had already acquired basic grammatical knowledge but continued to experience difficulty and insecurity in writing. This

context was intentionally chosen because writing anxiety is particularly salient at this stage, as learners are expected to move beyond isolated sentence construction toward more extended forms of written expression.

The instructional site was selected based on three considerations: (1) the presence of regular Arabic writing activities within the curriculum, (2) observable learner hesitation and anxiety during writing tasks, and (3) institutional support for pedagogical experimentation. These conditions provided an appropriate context for implementing and observing paragraph-based writing instruction as a focused pedagogical intervention.

The primary focus of this study was the instructional process of paragraph-by-paragraph Arabic writing development. The unit of analysis consisted of learners' written paragraphs, classroom interactions during writing activities, and learners' reflective responses regarding their writing experiences. Rather than evaluating writing accuracy alone, the analysis emphasized changes in confidence, engagement, and willingness to write.

This study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from classroom observations, learners' written paragraph drafts, and semi-structured interviews with selected learners. These data sources provided direct insight into instructional dynamics and learner responses. Secondary data included relevant pedagogical documents, instructional materials, and scholarly literature on Arabic writing pedagogy and writing anxiety, which supported theoretical interpretation and contextualization of the findings.

Participants in this study were intermediate-level learners of Arabic who were actively engaged in paragraph-based writing instruction. Informants were selected purposively to represent varying levels of writing confidence and participation. This selection allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how different learners experienced and responded to the instructional approach.

Data collection was conducted over a series of instructional sessions. Classroom observations focused on learners' participation, hesitation, and interaction patterns during writing activities. Learners were guided to produce short paragraphs based on structured prompts, with an emphasis on idea development rather than immediate error correction. Written paragraphs were collected progressively to trace development across sessions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit learners' reflections on their writing experiences, perceived challenges, and changes in confidence.

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach. Observation notes, interview transcripts, and written texts were examined to identify recurring patterns related to writing anxiety, confidence, and engagement. The analysis involved data reduction, categorization, and interpretation to construct meaningful themes. Written paragraphs were analyzed qualitatively to observe coherence development and learner experimentation with language, rather than to quantify

grammatical accuracy. To enhance credibility, data triangulation was employed by comparing findings across observations, written texts, and interview data (Abdulloh et al., 2022; Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Campbell et al., 2020).

Result and Discussion

From Sentence Anxiety to Paragraph Confidence

The findings indicate a noticeable shift in learners' emotional responses to Arabic writing after the implementation of paragraph-by-paragraph instruction. Prior to the instructional intervention, learners commonly associated Arabic writing with fear of grammatical errors and negative evaluation. Writing tasks that required sentence-level accuracy often triggered hesitation and avoidance behaviors, such as excessive erasing, prolonged silence, or reliance on memorized structures.

Following sustained engagement with paragraph-focused writing activities, learners demonstrated increased confidence and reduced anxiety. Paragraphs were perceived as manageable units that allowed learners to express complete ideas without the pressure of producing extended texts. Several learners reported that writing a paragraph felt "possible" and "less risky" compared to composing multiple isolated sentences or full compositions.

This shift is reflected in learners' verbal accounts. One participant stated: "When I was asked to write sentences, I was always afraid of making mistakes. But when I write a paragraph, I feel more relaxed because I can explain my idea, not just focus on one sentence." (Student 3)

Another learner emphasized the psychological impact of paragraph-based instruction: "Writing paragraph by paragraph makes me feel that Arabic writing is not something scary. I can finish one paragraph and feel satisfied before moving to the next." (Student 7)

These responses suggest that paragraph-focused instruction functioned as an affective buffer, reducing writing anxiety and fostering a sense of accomplishment. Confidence emerged not from immediate linguistic accuracy, but from learners' ability to convey meaning coherently within a limited and structured space.

Engagement and Willingness to Write through Paragraph Construction

Increased confidence was accompanied by higher levels of learner engagement during writing activities. Classroom observations revealed that learners became more willing to initiate writing tasks, participate in peer discussion, and revise their work voluntarily. Unlike earlier writing sessions, where learners waited for explicit instructions or correction, paragraph-based sessions encouraged experimentation with vocabulary and sentence variation.

Learners described the paragraph as a space for idea development rather than error avoidance. This shift altered their orientation toward writing from performance-focused to meaning-focused engagement. One learner noted: "Before,

I only thought about whether my sentence was correct or not. Now, I think about how to connect my ideas in one paragraph.” (Student 5)

Another interview excerpt highlights increased motivation: “Writing paragraph by paragraph gives me confidence to continue. Even if my Arabic is not perfect, I want to try because I know the paragraph has a clear focus.” (Student 1)

These findings indicate that paragraph-based instruction encouraged sustained engagement by lowering the affective threshold for participation. Learners were more inclined to write regularly, revise content, and take linguistic risks, which are essential conditions for writing development.

The findings of this study corroborate and extend previous research on the affective and cognitive dimensions of second and foreign language writing. The reduction of learners’ anxiety observed after the implementation of paragraph-based writing instruction is consistent with the psycholinguistic evidence reported by Emre Güvendir and Kutay Uzun (2023), who demonstrated that L2 writing anxiety suppresses learners’ working memory capacity under high cognitive load, leading to reduced syntactic complexity in written production. By shifting instructional focus from sentence-level accuracy to paragraph-level meaning construction, the present study appears to reduce task complexity and cognitive burden, allowing learners to allocate attentional resources more effectively.

The prominence of cognitive anxiety identified in this study also aligns with the findings of Ushba Rasool et al. (2023), who reported that cognitive anxiety is the most dominant form of writing anxiety among pre-service EFL teachers. Learners’ interview responses suggest that paragraph-based instruction alleviated excessive self-monitoring and fear of negative evaluation, which Rasool et al. identified as key sources of writing anxiety. This indicates that pedagogical design can play a decisive role in moderating anxiety-driven cognitive overload.

Furthermore, the increased engagement and willingness to write observed in this study resonate with affective research conducted by Chengchen Li, Li Wei, and Xiaojun Lu (2023). Their study demonstrated that writing achievement is shaped not only by anxiety but also by enjoyment and boredom, with boredom exerting the strongest negative effect on writing performance. The present findings suggest that paragraph-focused instruction fosters a more engaging and enjoyable writing experience by providing learners with achievable goals and a clear sense of progress, thereby reducing emotional disengagement.

In terms of pedagogical comparison, the findings of this study complement the work of Samsul Huda, Muhammad Khoirul Umam, Rifqi Muzaki Husni, and Fadhel Mubarak (year), who showed that transforming spoken Arabic dialogues into written texts can enhance writing fluency and learner confidence. While Huda et al. emphasized skill integration between speaking and writing, the present study contributes a distinct perspective by foregrounding paragraph construction as a

psychologically safe unit that directly addresses writing anxiety and confidence building.

Descriptive research on academic writing difficulties, such as the study by Ghaida Ali S. Alzahrani (2025), has documented learners' struggles with organization, vocabulary, grammar, and limited writing practice. The paragraph-based approach examined in this study directly responds to these challenges by scaffolding organizational skills within a manageable unit of writing, supporting the argument that many writing difficulties are pedagogical rather than purely linguistic.

Finally, although the present study focuses on learners rather than teachers, its emphasis on emotional safety in writing instruction echoes recent findings by Haniye Seyri and Farhad Ghiasvand (2025), who highlighted the central role of emotionality in L2 speaking and writing instruction, particularly in technology-mediated contexts. Together, these findings reinforce the view that emotions whether experienced by teachers or learners are integral to effective writing pedagogy.

Overall, by integrating insights from Güvendir and Uzun, Li et al., Rasool et al., Huda et al., Alzahrani, and Seyri and Ghiasvand, this study advances Arabic language pedagogy by translating established cognitive and affective theories into a concrete instructional design. The findings demonstrate that paragraph-based writing instruction functions not merely as a structural technique, but as a psychologically informed pedagogical strategy capable of transforming writing anxiety into confidence in *maharah kitābah* development.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that paragraph-based writing instruction plays a significant role in transforming learners' experiences of Arabic writing from anxiety-driven avoidance to confidence-oriented engagement. The findings reveal that learners' writing insecurity is not merely a consequence of limited linguistic competence, but is closely related to cognitive overload and affective pressure generated by sentence-level accuracy demands and premature exposure to extended writing tasks. By positioning the paragraph as a core pedagogical unit, this study shows that writing tasks can be cognitively manageable and psychologically safe, allowing learners to focus on meaning construction rather than error monitoring.

The implementation of paragraph-by-paragraph instruction reduced writing anxiety, increased learner engagement, and encouraged sustained participation in writing activities. Learners demonstrated greater willingness to initiate writing, revise their texts, and experiment linguistically, indicating the development of writing self-efficacy. These findings extend previous research on L2 writing anxiety and emotional factors by translating theoretical insights into a concrete instructional design within Arabic language education.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited to intermediate-level learners and focuses on short-term instructional effects within a single classroom context. Future research may explore longitudinal impacts of paragraph-based writing pedagogy, its application across different proficiency levels, and its integration with digital or AI-assisted writing tools. Overall, this study contributes to Arabic language pedagogy by offering a psychologically informed approach to maharah kitābah that balances linguistic development with learners' emotional well-being.

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