



Using Canva for Magazine Preparation: A Case Study on Students' Experiences in Enhancing Writing Skills

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Abstract

Some Arabic language lovers at the New College, University of Madras, Chennai, India, have expressed concerns about their writing skills in Arabic. To address this, they spent their vacation time engaging in writing exercises. This study aims to describe the steps involved in these writing skill exercises and the production of a magazine as a result of these activities. The researcher employed a qualitative research method to gain a comprehensive understanding of the writing exercises. Data was collected through personal interviews with five students, focusing on the task division process, selection of tools used, and other related aspects. The data analysis followed the three steps of the Miles and Huberman model: data display, data reduction, and drawing conclusions. The results indicated that the writing exercises involved dividing the writing topics among five individuals. The topics included university events, daily activities, prominent figures, archives, and photo collections. To facilitate their work, they used *Canva* for design purposes. Ultimately, they submitted their work to a supervisor for corrections and suggestions. It was found that the students still struggled with certain methods, particularly with paying attention to writing "hamza." Consequently, they published their work via WhatsApp and Instagram.

Keywords: Canva; writing skills; magazine; testing strategies; instructional activities.

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Introduction

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for language learners, particularly in Arabic due to its complex script, grammatical structures, and orthographic rules. Despite its difficulty, proficiency in writing is essential for effective communication and academic success. However, many Arabic learners struggle with structuring their thoughts, applying grammatical rules, and mastering orthographic nuances such as the correct usage of "hamza." In the modern digital landscape, various technological tools have been integrated into language learning to enhance students' engagement and proficiency. While previous studies have explored the use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Google Docs for writing exercises, limited research has been conducted on the application of Canva in Arabic writing instruction. Canva, a widely used graphic design tool, offers an interactive platform for students to visually organize and present their writing. Its accessibility on both computers and mobile devices makes it a practical option for students to engage in writing tasks outside the classroom. At The New College, University of Madras, a group of Arabic language enthusiasts sought to improve their writing skills beyond their formal coursework. With in-person group activities restricted due to the pandemic, students explored alternative methods of collaborative writing. Under the guidance of their research supervisor, they embarked on a project to create a departmental magazine-cum-newsletter in Arabic and English using Canva. This initiative aimed to provide students with a structured yet flexible platform to practice writing while also incorporating digital design elements. This study, therefore, investigates the entire process of planning, executing, and publishing the magazine. By documenting students' experiences, challenges, and learning outcomes, the study contributes valuable insights into the integration of digital tools in Arabic writing instruction.

It is well-known among those interested in teaching the Arabic language that learning it involves four crucial skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Wahyuningsih et al., 2021). Writing is considered the most challenging skill for students to master. Arabic language learners need perseverance in writing exercises, even at the university level (Munajat, 2018). Given this challenge, it is essential for teachers to guide and support students in practicing this skill. Many teachers have made significant efforts to help students improve their writing skills, including using modern teaching tools in this digital age. Contemporary technological tools facilitate the teaching and learning process for both teachers and students. It is noteworthy that education in the digital age is inseparable from technology. This advancement is irreversible (Maturedy, 2020) and has provided numerous benefits to educators, university professors, students, and even their parents. This phenomenon presents an opportunity to enhance the quality of education. One of the primary benefits is that education can be conducted online at various educational levels using different applications, enabling teachers to teach students remotely. Consequently, anyone involved in education must adapt to this advancement and contribute innovative solutions, particularly in teaching the Arabic language. The technological advancements benefit both present and future educational processes.

Undoubtedly, every teacher aims for an effective teaching process, allowing students to listen and focus easily during lessons. The presence of educational technology facilitates the transfer of information from teachers to students because teaching media are integral to the educational process (Putri & Billah, 2019). Teachers must consider the materials and the conditions of the students to select appropriate tools for them (Wahyuni, 2020). Using suitable tools according to students' conditions can lead to better understanding of the study materials (Suaibah & Rahman, 2020). Hence, if a teacher effectively utilizes educational media, it can significantly enhance students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning (Anwar et al., 2023). This positive impact ultimately improves the quality of education. It is well-known that most teachers, whether in schools or universities, have relied on

technological educational tools. Technological advancements in education significantly assist teachers in designing and developing new teaching tools, especially in foreign language education. Therefore, teachers in schools and universities should utilize technology whenever possible. This applies to Arabic language teachers as well, many of whom have not fully leveraged technological tools in their teaching, relying solely on traditional methods. This misguided approach may contribute to students' lack of enthusiasm for Arabic lessons.

Technological tools for teaching Arabic include various types such as PowerPoint slides, Google Slides, and *Canva* (Novita & Munawir, 2022). Teachers' role is to choose tools that match the students' conditions and the material they aim to present (Aisyah & Muhammad Alif Kurniawan, 2021). For instance, if the material is related to writing skills, teachers should select tools that encourage students to practice writing extensively, making learning Arabic enjoyable and engaging. The college and university students' interest in Arabic language learning involves both formal study and group study sessions focused on language skills. At The New College, University of Madras, Chennai, a special group of Arabic language lovers meet under the supervision of the Research Supervisor- Dr K M A Ahamed Zubair, Associate Professor of Arabic, primarily focusing on improving speaking skills. Some members have approached the researcher, complaining about their weak writing skills, especially since group meetings are prohibited due to the pandemic. Hence, the researcher suggested they practice writing skills by creating a departmental magazine cum newsletter in Arabic and English using *Canva*. *Canva* was chosen for its ease of use on both mobile phones and computers, and because this activity is conducted during their free time, making them more motivated to participate.

Numerous studies have addressed the use of teaching tools for writing skills at the university level. For example, Teaching writing skills to university students in the Arabic language department via the internet. They found that online writing instruction improved students' writing skills and emphasized that this educational model could be implemented post-pandemic, using WhatsApp. Additionally, (Sa'diyah, 2020) conducted a study on using WhatsApp to enhance writing skills at the university level. That teaching writing skills using WhatsApp encourages students to express themselves. *Canva* to teach writing skills to middle school students, noting that this tool helps teachers make writing materials more attractive, though it was not directly used for skill. Based on these previous studies, it is clear that there has been no research on using *Canva* for university students' writing practice. Therefore, this study will describe the writing exercises using *Canva*, from planning the steps to implementing them and producing a departmental magazine cum newsletter published online.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method. This approach aims to gather data related to the research field, including location, participants, and all activities involved (Ilmiani et al., 2020). The data in this study consist of words interpreted according to the researcher's understanding. The researcher focused on writing skill exercises using *Canva*, including task division, correction processes, and departmental magazine cum newsletter production. The data were collected through observation, where the researcher supervised the activity. Additionally, personal interviews were conducted to confirm the data and understand the students' responses to writing skill exercises outside regular school hours. The observation lasted for a period during which the researcher noted how each participant completed their tasks. The informants were the participants in the writing skill exercise. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed them using data triangulation, which yielded significant results for this study.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the researchers present data related to the writing skill exercise activity. The observation was conducted in participation with the participants' activities, which consisted of three steps: planning, implementation, and production. Each of these steps is detailed below.

Planning: Consultation, Selection of Tools, and Task Division

Before starting any project, it is beneficial to consult with those knowledgeable about the task, especially when the work requires collaboration among participants. Initially, the participants in this activity gathered together. The discussion included identifying who would supervise the project, deciding which tools to use, and dividing tasks among the participants. The group, consisting of five members, agreed to appoint a supervisor skilled in Arabic writing and design. They discussed and decided to use the "Canva" application due to its user-friendliness, compatibility with mobile devices, and the availability of attractive newspaper templates. Canva also offers various Arabic fonts, allowing them to select the most suitable ones for their content. They then deliberated on the departmental magazine topics and assigned writing responsibilities. The journal was to include four main topics: the main news, departmental news, profile of the prominent figure, and motivational news. These preliminary activities highlight the importance of planning before undertaking any task. Regardless of the task's size, without planning, it can become disorganized. (Rahayu et al., 2021), emphasized that planning involves thinking about the activities a group will undertake to achieve a specific goal. From this definition, five essential elements of planning were identified:

1. The Desired Goal: In this case, the goal was to produce an electronic departmental magazine.
2. Activities Leading to the Goal: This involved dividing tasks and topics among the participants.
3. Tools Used to Achieve the Goal: They chose Canva for designing the electronic journal.
5. Participants in the Activity: The group members who agreed to produce the electronic magazine.
6. Appointment of a Supervisor: They selected an Associate Professor "Z" as their supervisor. He has been serving in the Department of Arabic and has published many articles.

Selecting an Appropriate Newspaper Template in Canva.

This process began with choosing a suitable newspaper template in the Canva application.

Utilizing Canva for Creating an Arabic Language Magazine

The group used the Canva application to create the magazine in Arabic and English, primarily because Canva can be easily accessed via mobile phones, which are more convenient and easier to use. Canva offers significant benefits, such as creating newsletters and designs (Wijaya et al., 2022). It can be used on both mobile phones and computers, provided there is an internet. The students opted to use their mobile phones for this task, allowing them to work on the journal anywhere they wanted.

Task Division and Image Selection

Tasks were distributed among group members, who then selected images related to Arabic language learning activities at the al-Nadi al-Jadeed club. The presence of these images helped the students generate ideas, making the writing exercise more comfortable and reducing confusion about what to write. They could express whatever they wanted based on the images, aligning with Purwaningsih's research that confirmed images facilitate student expression.

Gathering News and Ensuring Accuracy

Participants collected news and prepared images to corroborate their writing. They approached students responsible for various activities at the al-Nadi al-Jadeed club. Some went to the Arabic department, some conducted personal interviews with club members to gather data, and others took new photos to verify previous information. This process indirectly trained them in scientific research methods, including observation, personal interviews, and documentation, which will be

beneficial for future research endeavors. Additionally, they practiced critical thinking by ensuring the accuracy of the news before recording it in a format accessible to everyone.

Writing and Supervisory Review

The participants took great care in this activity, writing sentences and phrases accurately since writing combines grammar and vocabulary skills. For university students, writing skills are crucial as they must conduct scientific research before graduation. This skill is a benchmark for academic success. The more extensive a person's vocabulary, the easier it is to express thoughts and ideas in sentences and phrases. Notably, they wrote only one or two paragraphs. Ultimately, they submitted their work to the supervisor for review and feedback.

Suggestions and Feedback

The final step of the project, seeking suggestions and feedback, is crucial as it involves correcting various aspects such as grammar, word choice, and the use of modern styles. Feedback from a more experienced individual helps enhance participants' competencies, particularly in the academic field (Saeed et al., 2021).

The Challenge of Writing Accuracy

Achieving accuracy in writing is challenging, and the solution lies in regular practice. Writing in a foreign language is considered the most difficult among the four language skills. It combines all other language competencies, requiring learners to grasp the rules, contemporary styles, and current terminology of Arabic. This is not an easy task, and many Arabic language instructors, especially those teaching writing at the university level, have reported students' weaknesses in writing, particularly for academic purposes.

Importance of a Knowledgeable Supervisor

In this context, the supervisor must be well-versed in the participants' work. It is preferable for the supervisor to be experienced in expression and have a keen interest in Arabic writing, focusing on spelling, stylistic, and grammatical aspects. During this exercise, the researcher noted that participants often neglected the correct use of the hamza (ء). They struggled to distinguish between the hamza of joining (همزة الوصل) and the hamza of cutting (همزة القطع). It is crucial to note the initial hamza in any word: if it is a cutting hamza, it must be written, whereas a joining hamza should be omitted. Adhering to this rule, participants must ensure correct hamza usage in their writing (Pimada et al., 2020).

Canva as an Educational Tool: Advantages and Disadvantages

It is well known that educational tools have their pros and cons, and Canva is no exception, especially after the final production of a magazine. Among its advantages, *Canva* includes attractive design elements that enhance teachers' ability to create educational tools. The design process does not take long as it can be done on mobile devices. It allows collaborative work with a single function through multiple links, which helps participants make their magazines appealing to readers. (Collins et al., 2021); (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020) (Finn & Wylie, 2021) confirmed that university-level students find it easy to use Canva for creating materials for assignments. However, there are some disadvantages. One significant drawback is that using this tool depends on internet connectivity. Specifically, anyone who wants to benefit from it must have access to the internet (Hartawan, 2021). Some participants in this exercise experienced frequent typing errors due to the smaller keyboard on mobile devices compared to a computer keyboard (Jiang et al., 2022). They were accustomed to designing on a computer. Another disadvantage is that some elements on Canva require payment to download, such as images and icons.

Conclusion

This study explored the efforts of Arabic language students at The New College, University of Madras, to enhance their writing skills by creating a departmental magazine using *Canva*. Through qualitative research involving interviews and observations, the study detailed the process from planning to production. The exercise revealed that dividing tasks among group members and utilizing user-friendly tools like *Canva* significantly facilitated the writing process. However, students struggled with certain aspects of Arabic writing, such as correct hamza usage. Despite these challenges, the magazine was successfully published online, demonstrating the effectiveness of integrating modern digital tools into language learning. The study underscores the importance of technological proficiency in contemporary education and the benefits of collaborative, supervised projects in improving writing skills.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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