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Identifying the Use of Writing Strategies among the ESL & EFL Learners

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the writing strategy use among the ESL and EFL learners and differentiate the strategy use among them. This study brings out the importance of strategy training to the students by their teachers, the study believes in what earlier studies have stated that to become a proficient writer and to be able to write proficiently in a second language is a tough task, therefore the proficiency of one's writing can be judged through the proficiency of his strategy use in writing. The present study works on the same issue, it takes into describing all the above issues. Petric and Czarl's questionnaire (2003) was used to quantitatively analyze the use and differences in the strategy use among the ESL and EFL learners at the under-graduation and post-graduation level. The questionnaire has validated all the possible writing strategies into three categories of pre-writing strategies, while writing strategies, and revising strategies. The study incorporated the SPSS software and Ms excel for the data analysis.

Keywords: Writing, ESL & EFL learners, writing strategies.

1. Introduction

Social constructionist writing teachers assert that writing constitutes a mode of communication in an academic or discourse community, the focus is on how such a community defines writers and writing. Social constructionists believe that learning to write within the zone of proximal development occurs when students engage in a task that is too difficult for them to perform independently, forcing them to seek support from an adult or from capable peers for their writing operation and writing performance. In social-constructionist writing classes, the acquisition and the development of writing skill also takes place through the acculturation model of the social and psychological integration of the learner into the target language group (Schumann, 1978). The social/affective strategies are defined as strategies that writers use to interact with the target discourse community for the support and to regulate their emotions, motivation, and attitude in the process of writing (Carson and Longhini, 2002).

2. Literature Review

Previous Classifications of ESL Writing Strategies in Arndt's (1987) investigation of the composing activities of EFL students as they produced academic written texts in both their first and foreign

languages. She adopted eight categories to code the strategies the students used in their writing. It was found that students revise for word-choice more in the ESL task than in the L1 task, but rehearse for word-choice more in L1 than ESL.

Wenden (1991) studied how the students used metacognitive strategies in their writing and discussed what task knowledge they searched for before and while writing. Metacognitive strategies are mental operations or procedures that learners use to regulate their learning. They are directly responsible for the execution of a writing task and include three main kinds: planning, evaluating and monitoring. Cognitive strategies are mental operations or steps used by learners to learn new information and apply it to specific learning tasks. They are used to deal with the obstacles encountered along the way. In contrast to the metacognitive strategies, the function of cognitive strategies is narrower in scope. Planning strategies are strategies by which the writer plans and talks out what ideas will come next, and explicitly states his or her objectives for organization and procedures. Monitoring strategies are strategies the writers use when checking and verifying their process in the composing process and when identifying oncoming problems. Evaluating strategies are strategies undertaken when reconsidering the written text, previous goals, planned thoughts, as well as changes undertaken to the text.

Riazi (2007) presented a distinction between cognitive, metacognitive, social strategies and search strategies. These strategies helped to form mental representations of academic writing tasks as well as social activities for accomplishing them. Cognitive strategies led to work with, think about, and manipulate materials required for task completion. The meta-cognitive strategies such as self-regulatory strategies help to exercise control over the performance of the writing tasks, thus reducing the anxiety over not knowing what to do. The social strategies included those practices and activities in which learners interacted with their professors and other members of their academic community to clarify a task, consult on a problem related to a task, or to discuss comments they had received about their learning to write in their discipline.

Sasaki (2000) investigated EFL learners' writing processes and found that before starting to write, the experts spent a longer time planning a detailed overall organization, whereas the novices spent a shorter time, making a less global plan. Once the experts had made their global plan, they did not stop and think as frequently as the novices. ESL proficiency appeared to explain part of the difference in strategy use between the experts and novices and after 6 months of instruction, novices had begun to use some of the expert writers' strategies. Some terms in ESL writing strategies are rather ambiguous. For example, is revising a strategy similar to editing or they are different? Arndt (1987) made a difference between them but Wenden (1991) did not. Despite the abundance of L2 writing research, however, many areas still remain open to further investigation. One such area is writing strategies used by second language writers. There is still a need for "the fullest range possible of strategies employed, that is, a catalogue" (Leki, 1995). Petric and Czarl (2003) created a questionnaire in order to obtain a research instrument which makes it possible to survey the self-reported writing strategies of a large number of non-native advanced speakers of English who write in English for academic purposes. Such an instrument would enable researchers to compare findings in different contexts. At the same time, it could also have pedagogical applications in two ways: as a need analysis or diagnostic tool for teachers and an awareness-raising tool for learners. The instrument was validated using a qualitative and a quantitative method with two groups of

participants from the target population. Petric and Czarl's questionnaire makes it easy to validate the learners' strategy use and the main objective of the present study is to find out the rate of strategy use among ESL and EFL learners.

3. Aims and objectives

- To study the use of writing strategies among ESL and EFL learners.
- To differentiate among the ESL and EFL learners' strategy use.
- To find out the rate of strategy use among the L2 learners and to know how far they are making use of the writing strategies and what particular strategies they are adopting while writing.
- To do a diagnosis of learners' strategy use i.e., how far they are aware of writing strategies and if they are the average users, below average users or good users of the writing strategies.

4. Methodology
4.1 Participants
Both male and female students were included in the survey in an equal distribution. They were all aged between 20 and 25 years with Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, Thai, and Indonesian as their first language. The procedure used to choose the sample was a convenience sampling approach as the participants were students whom we were able to access. The data collection was performed in their educational setting, mostly in AMU library. In this research, the subjects are sophomores from different majors including Commerce, English, medical, Law, Psychology, Engineering, Economics, Botany and Computer science. The subjects are made up of 10 female students and 10 male students out of which there were 5 foreigner students, 3 female and 2 male respectively.

4.2 Instrument
Petric and Czárl (2003) questionnaire was used to capture the writing strategies used by the participants of this study. This instrument is based on Flower and Hayes' cognitive model of first language processing with the addition of some items related specifically to second language learners. The instrument was devised to survey the "self-reported writing strategies of a large number of non-native speakers of English who write in English for academic purposes" (Petric & Czárl, 2003, p. 188). This suited the context of this study as all participants were non-native speakers who had to write in English for academic purposes for courses such as BUMS, English literature, psychology, diploma engineering, political science. In terms of the reliability of the questionnaire, Petric and Czárl (2003) checked its internal consistency using the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The coefficient obtained was 0.634. The questionnaire was also checked for its validity by Petric and Czárl. Three types of validity were checked, content, construct and response validity.

4.3 Data collection and analysis
About 30 questionnaires were distributed, and 20 valid questionnaires were collected. After the questionnaires were collected, the data was analyzed by SPSS. [7] Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were used to describe the overall characteristics of the students' writing strategy use. The frequency with which one uses a particular strategy was also analysed, to know out of the three pre-writing, while writing, and revising strategies which one is www.the-criterion.com

most utilized by the students. Finally, the t-tests were conducted to find out the relationship between the writing strategy to gender and learners' background.

5. Results and discussions

Table 1 T-test of the mean of the individual writing strategies employed by ESL and EFL students.

Variance	Mean		Standard deviation		t	sig
	ESL (N=15)	EFL (N=5)	ESL (N=15)	EFL (N=5)		
Pre-writing strategies	.3715	.4135	.2167	.2015	.523	.287
While writing strategies	.1214	.1416	.1098	.1954	.4623	.124
Revising strategies	.2187	.3902	.1290	.1034	-.333	.112

From table 1, we can see clearly that ESL and EFL learners' strategy use vary from one another. The results about the differences in the use of individual strategies between the two groups are presented in Table 1 from which we can know that ESL and EFL students showed some significant differences in the use of 3 individual writing strategies. The table gives a slight view of the strategy use among the ESL and EFL learners. The small significant difference among their strategy use describes that they both vary from one another when it comes to writing in the second language and utilizing writing strategies. The pre-writing strategy is used most by the EFL learners in comparison to the ESL learners. Slight difference in the while-writing strategy shows that EFL learners utilize it more frequently than ESL learners. Similarly, in the revising stage EFL learners are more active than the ESL learners.

A t-test was conducted in order to find out if there is any difference in writing strategy use between the female and male students. The results are demonstrated in the following table.

Table 2 T-test of the mean of the writing strategies employed by the female and male students

Variances	Mean		Standard deviation		t	sig
	Female (N= 10)	Male (N= 10)	Female (N= 10)	Male (N=10)		
Pre-writing strategies	3.0167	3.0134	.47860	.59872	-.325	.608
While writing strategies	3.1162	3.1032	.38976	.39765	1.256	.014
Revising strategies	2.1876	2.1795	.32167	.35198	.256	.654

As shown in Table 2 of the three stage categories of writing strategies, there was no significant difference found as per the frequency of all the three strategy use between both female and male students. Although females' mean was higher than males' mean at a significant level. This notion contributes to the understanding, that females are more conscious and particular of their writing and strategy use in comparison to their male counterparts. Females utilize more writing strategies at all stages than males.

6. Discussion and implication

Results of the study ensure, that students were found to use 'drafting strategies' while writing the most. This would include strategies such as rereading what they write, using bilingual/monolingual dictionaries, checking grammar and vocabulary, and checking the plan and changing it. On the other www.the-criterion.com

hand 'before writing' strategies was scored the lowest in the case of ESL learners whereas, EFL learners make much use of before/pre-writing strategies, as the data analysis interpret. Strategies such as reviewing the requirements, writing notes about the topic, outlining, looking at samples of writing and thinking of what to write are strategies that were used the least, mostly in the case of ESL learners. This can evidently affect the quality of the final piece of writing produced by students.

The two groups (EFL & ESL) do show some differences in specific strategy use. The EFL students were inclined to use topic-examining strategy, brainstorming strategy statistically more often than the ESL students in the pre-writing stage, EFL students also paid much more attention to the correctness of grammar and vocabulary during the while-writing stage; they employed social strategy more often than the ESL group. In the revising stage, ESL students were more likely to hand in their writing without checking. Second, the study shows the choice of writing strategies differs a little between female students and male students. It is found that female students showed higher frequency of reporting use than male students with respect to strategy use. And in the specific categories of strategies, the female students employ brainstorming strategies more often than male students. Strategies used by EFL learners are somewhat different from those used by ESL learners. Therefore, with teachers' help, students can practice using writing strategies according to their different learner characteristics.

7. Limitation of the Study

Although the results of this study may be perceptive, it is imponderable to fully cover the areas outlined. The scope of the research is limited in terms of its number and type of participants, and the type of data collected being quantitative only. This was due to time constraints. Even so, this study can perhaps assist us in gaining some tangible thought-provoking aspects of the learners while they are performing writing tasks, which may pave the way for future research.

8. Recommendations for Future Studies

Although the validity and reliability of the questionnaire was ensured, the study nevertheless is not immune to criticism. The findings cannot be generalised because of the limited number and type of participants, because of the setting (being only one educational institution), and because the data collection methods are purely quantitative which does not allow for much insight, elaboration or explanation to why the results are so. There is no qualitative data to back up the quantitative one. Thus, more studies should be conducted among different learners in different contexts using various data collection methods to replicate the findings of this study and to also shed light on the use of writing strategies and how it relates to their actual writing styles and preferences in both L1 and L2. For future studies, it is suggested that think-aloud protocols as well as interviews with students can be used to enable us to expand our knowledge of students' use of writing strategies when attempting writing tasks. Furthermore, due to the time limitation, the researcher was unable to account for different variables such as learning aptitude, motivation, anxiety, etc. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies should investigate these different variables so that individual differences in second language learning can be better understood.

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