



EFL Students' Strategies in the Process of Writing

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Abstract

Writing has been taught for many years as one of the skills that need to be acquired to learn English. However, the long process of writing, which consists of pre-writing, writing, and revising stages, makes it more difficult for the students to do it. Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' strategies in the process of writing. The study used a qualitative design that employed a questionnaire as the main instrument for collecting the data. The questionnaire was distributed to 45 first-year college students. The result from the questionnaire shows that the students used some strategies in each stage of the writing process: pre-writing (70.63%), writing (72.95%), and revising (60.16%). In pre-writing, the students primarily applied resourcing and elaborating strategies. During the writing stage, the most commonly employed strategy was rereading. Finally, in the last phase, they solely employed proofreading as their strategy. By understanding the students' strategies in writing, the teacher can help them develop better writing skills as well as facilitate them in becoming more effective writers.

Keywords: *EFL, writing strategies, writing process*

Introduction

Writing is a complicated cognitive activity that combines language abilities, imaginative thinking, and critical thinking. Writing skills are an essential part of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) study since they not only act as a medium of communication but also play an essential role in a student's professional and

academic achievement (Ghafar & Mohamedamin, 2022). Understanding the strategies used by EFL students in the writing process is critical for both educators and researchers, as it offers insight into the metacognitive and cognitive functions involved in this complex job (Talafhah et al., 2019). The relationship between writing and the writing process is inherent and mutually beneficial, forming a dynamic interaction of idea and expression. As a communication act, writing entails expressing thoughts, feelings, and knowledge, while the writing process acts as a road map that guides the trip from concept to the final written result (Graham, 2019).

Writing is a complex and dynamic set of cognitive and physical processes that people participate in to generate written texts. It consists of several stages, each with obstacles, strategies, and factors to consider (Agustinasari et al., 2022; Baharudin et al., 2023). The knowledge of the writing process has been a topic of scholarly discussion, with numerous specialists providing varied viewpoints and hypotheses.

There are a few noteworthy scholars who have contributed to the writing process debate. First, Flower & Hayes (in Zhou, 2023) are well-known for their impact works on cognitive process theory. They presented a model that stresses writing's recursive character, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between planning, translating thoughts into text, and examining and editing the written result. Their work has considerably impacted studies on cognitive components of the writing process. Second, Murray (in Michaud, 2023) was a vocal proponent of the "writing as a process" concept. He contended that composition is a cyclical process of discovery in which authors use the act of writing to explore and enhance their ideas. Murray stressed the value of rewriting and viewed writing as a means for learning and comprehension. Third, Elbow (in Belanoff et al., 2002) is well-known for his research on the "writing without teachers" method. He created the notion of the process of freewriting, emphasizing the value of enabling thoughts to flow naturally without worrying about accuracy right away. Elbow's views encourage a more intuitive and emotive writing style. Fourth, Gere (in Shapiro, 2022) has contributed to the societal viewpoint on writing. She emphasized writing's social and contextual aspects, suggesting that it is affected by cultural, organizational, and social influences. Gere's work promotes a more comprehensive view of writing as a socially placed activity. Fifth, Gee and Zhang (2022) focus on the concept of communities of discourse and how people learn to write in certain social circumstances. He highlights the importance of social norms and communities in developing writing abilities. Gee's work helps us understand writing as an interpersonal and cultural process. Next, Jiang and Hyland (2023) have been acknowledged for the contributions they made to the field of academic writing. They investigate genre concerns, disciplinary traditions, and the social dimensions of academic writing. Their study helps to understand how the

traditions of distinct discourse groups affect writing. Seventh, Sommers (in Ballenger & Myers, 2019) is well-known for her revision work and the notion of "revision as re-vision." She highlights the value of viewing the writing process as a means of re-seeing and re-thinking concepts. Sommers' ideas have affected debates on the need for revisions in the writing process.

These experts' viewpoints on the writing process ranged from cognitive theories to sociocultural and contextual approaches. The ongoing academic discussion reflects the complexities of writing as a talent and the various elements that impact the writing process. Researchers and educators frequently use these diverse viewpoints to inform their knowledge of effectively teaching and assisting writers.

Furthermore, Kurniasih et al. (2020) said that the process method encourages students to engage in the learning process rather than focusing just on the product. Learning will be more ordered in acquiring ideas, organizing concepts, constructing paragraphs, and reflecting on errors. Furthermore, they said that students had difficulties during their writing process. As a result of experiencing the process method, students will better recognize their writing issues and develop strategies to overcome them. However, it should be noted that these phases are not usually sequential, and writers may return to prior stages as they perfect their work. Personality characteristics, circumstances, and the context of the writing assignment all impact the writing process (Zaswita & Ihsan, 2020). Understanding the complexities of each stage may help educators, researchers, and students create successful writing tools and pedagogies.

On a practical level, in the process of writing suggested by experts (Harmer, 2004; Hyland, 2009), writing involves at least three steps to be followed. The first is pre-writing, which refers to what a writer does to prepare to write. The second step is writing, where a writer starts building blocks of good writing, such as good sentences, paragraphs, and multi-paragraph papers. Revising is the next step, the most challenging part of writing. In this step, a writer needs to polish their writing by improving content, structure, emphasis, and continuity and eliminating mechanical errors in the writing. Those steps need to be followed by English learners to make good writing.

Similarly, Bloom (2008) classified the strategies of writing based on its stages: pre-writing strategies (resourcing, elaboration, and grouping), writing strategies (rereading, substitution, and strategic use of the L1), and revising strategies (guided proofreading, resourcing, and recombining). The strategies involved within these writing stages help writers generate, organize, and fine-tune their writing. Considering this role, it is not an understatement to say that writing

strategies determine learners' writing performance (Vacalares et al., 2023). To illustrate this point, research found that better writers tend to employ better writing strategies and are noted to use writing strategies more often than less proficient writers (Teng et al., 2022).

This study aims to investigate information by diving into the distinctive strategies used by EFL students throughout the writing process. Analyzing such strategies may assist in comprehending the cognitive and metacognitive processes that influence language learners' ability to write. Thus, this investigation is expected to provide educators with insights into strategies to improve EFL students' writing ability.

Method

A qualitative method was applied in this study. The selection of this method was based on its capacity to provide a complete understanding of the phenomenon, including students' writing strategies. As stated by Cleland (2017), the qualitative method enables the exploration of inquiries that cannot be easily put into numbers to comprehend the participants' experience.

Forty-five students of an English Education Study Program at one of institution in Cimahi were partaken as the participants. They were in the first semester and had completed the class Writing for General Communication. In this class, they have been introduced to the writing process and strategies. They have also learned how to write a good paragraph with good grammar and mechanics.

A questionnaire was used to collect the data. It was a five-point Likert Scale Questionnaire ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The questionnaire was adapted from ESLP 82 Questionnaire: Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills and Use of Writing Strategies. There were 40 questions, which were divided into three stages of the writing process proposed by Bloom (2008): pre-writing (12 items), writing (14 items), and revising (14 items).

In analyzing the data, the Likert Scale formula was employed. The average score of each statement on the questionnaire was find out. It was then interpreted by using the following interval score:

Tabel 1: Interval Score of Likert Scale Questionnaire

0% - 19.99%	Never
20% - 39.99%	Rarely
40% - 59.99%	Sometime
60% - 79.99%	Often

80% - 100%	Always
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Results

This part discusses the results gained from the questionnaire. It elaborates on four points: 1) the stages in which the students frequently used writing strategies; 2) the strategies used in the Pre-Writing stage; 3) the strategies used in the Writing stage; and 4) the strategies used in the Revising stage.

To investigate the frequency of overall writing strategies used by the students in each stage of the writing process, qualitative analysis was used. The percentage of strategies in each writing stage was calculated and interpreted. Table 2 shows the result. Of the three writing stages, the students mostly use strategies in the Writing stage (72.95). It was followed by Pre-writing (70.63%) and Revising (60.16%).

Table 2. Students' Writing Strategies in Each Writing Process

Stages	%
Pre-writing	70.63%
Writing	72.95%
Revising	60.16%

A comprehensive analysis was then applied to investigate the tendency of writing strategies used by the students in each process of writing. Table 3 presents the strategies in the Pre-writing stage. This stage is the initial phase for the students to prepare themselves for writing by organizing the ideas they intend to include in their written work. The table implies that checking some vocabulary words in the dictionary (87.56%) and double-checking the instruction given by the teacher (81.78%) are the most frequently used strategies by the students. Then, making a plan or note by using their native language (79.11), relating the assigned topic to the previous knowledge (77.33%), and brainstorming (77.33%) are the things that they regularly do. On the other hand, making a timetable (50.22%), reviewing how to write well (54.22%), and making an outline in English (56%) are the less commonly applied strategies in this stage.

Table 3. The Strategies Used by the Students in Pre-Writing Stage

No	Statements	%
1	I review my class notes, handouts, and assignment requirements before beginning to write.	69,78
2	I consider the task or assignment and instructions carefully before writing.	81,78
3	I discuss what I am going to write with other students or my teacher.	68,44
4	I brainstorm and write down ideas before I begin to write.	76,89
5	I make plans and notes in my native language before writing.	79,11
6	I make an outline or plan in English.	56,00
7	I make a timetable for when I will do my writing.	50,22
8	Before writing the first draft, I do extra study outside the classroom to improve my writing.	54,22
9	I think of the relationships between what I already know and new things that I learn.	77,33
10	I notice vocabulary related to a topic that I will write about and try to remember the words.	71,11
11	I use a dictionary to check things I am not sure about before I write.	87,56
12	I use a grammar book to check things I am not sure about before I write.	75,11

Table 4 presents the strategies used by the students in the Writing stage. This stage is the phase where the students begin to arrange their ideas into good writing by using good sentences, paragraphs, grammar, and punctuation. The table indicates that before applying some writing strategies, most of the students are self-motivated. They attempt to convince themselves that they can do the assignment given by the teacher well. In the process of writing itself, using writing tools (90.67%) and double-checking the grammar (81.33%) are the strategies that the students always use. Furthermore, restructuring the ideas (79.11%), using their prior knowledge to develop the idea (78.67), and finding out the synonym of the word (77.78%) are strategies regularly applied. In contrast, thinking of the new word or synonym (42.22%) and reordering the organization as writing (56.00%) become infrequent strategies employed in this Writing stage.

Table 4. The Strategies Used by the Students in the Writing Stage

No	Statements	%
1	I try to write in a comfortable, quiet place where I can concentrate.	76,89
2	I use my background knowledge (world) knowledge to help me develop my ideas.	78,67
3	I like to write in my native language first and then translate it into English.	71,56
4	I like to write a draft in my native language first and then translate it into English.	66,67
5	I edit for content (ideas) as I am writing.	65,33
6	I edit for organization as I am writing.	56,00
7	I like to change, or make my ideas clearer as I am writing.	79,11
8	I use a dictionary to check things I am not sure about when I write.	71,11
9	I use a grammar book to check things I am not sure about when I write.	81,33
10	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	77,78
11	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English when I am writing.	42,22
12	I make my writing assignments fun for myself.	72,00
13	I use writing tool to assure my writing	90,67
14	I encourage myself by telling myself that I can do well.	92,00

The revising stage is the act of reorganizing, incorporating, and eliminating paragraphs, sentences, or words in the process of writing. In other words, at this stage, the students can make modifications to their writing. Related to the strategies used in the Revising stage, table 5 reveals that revising the content of the writing (75.11%), re-editing the organization of the idea (67.56%), and rechecking the grammar (67.11%) are the strategies regularly done by the students. On the contrary, asking for feedback either from the teacher (41.78%) or the peer (45.78%) about their writing is a strategy they occasionally use. The students often give a self-reward after completing their writing.

Table 5. The Strategies Used by the Students in the Revising Stage

No	Statements	%
1	I give myself a reward when I have finished writing.	71,11
2	I go back to my writing to revise the content and make my ideas clearer.	75,11
3	I go back to my writing to revise and improve my organization.	67,56
4	I go back to my writing to edit the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.	63,11
5	I use a dictionary after I finish writing a draft.	64,89
6	I use a grammar book after I finish writing a draft.	67,11
7	I discuss my work with other students to get feedback on how I can improve it.	45,78
8	I discuss my work with my teacher to get feedback on how I can improve it.	41,78
9	I evaluate others students' writing and give them feedback on how they can improve it.	60,44
10	If I do not understand a comment when getting feedback, I ask the person to explain it to me.	57,33
11	I make notes or try to remember feedback I get so I can use it the next time I write.	55,11
12	I record the types of errors I have made so I do not keep making the same types of errors.	60,44
13	I read the feedback from my previous writing and use this feedback in my next writing.	56,89
14	I use the feedback to help with my other English skills (reading, speaking, and listening).	55,56

Discussion

Writing is a complicated skill that requires organized and planned strategies. This section discusses the most frequently used strategies by the students in the process of their writing following Bloom's (2008) classification of strategies in writing based on the writing stages: pre-writing, writing, and revising.

In the pre-writing stage, resourcing and elaborating were the most frequently used strategies by the students. These strategies involve the act of checking vocabulary in the dictionary and double-checking teacher directions.

Consulting a dictionary for vocabulary verification is an essential strategy in the writing process to ensure accurate word usage and understanding of the meaning. It means the students tried to enhance the accuracy and clarity of their expressions. Previous research by Nation (2001) emphasizes the significance of vocabulary knowledge in language competency, implying that a broad vocabulary range can help improve students' writing skills. The activity of consulting a dictionary supports Nation's statement because it enhances vocabulary acquisition and reinforcement, eventually improving competency in written language.

Double-checking instructions provided by the teacher is a strategy being used by the students to make sure that their writing will fulfill the requirements. Additionally, research by Graham and Harris (2006) supports the idea that by cross-referencing teachers' instructions, students not only enhance their understanding of the assignment but also engage in metacognitive processes, fostering a more profound comprehension of writing objectives and expectations.

In the next stage, the writing stage, the rereading strategy was the most frequently used strategy by the students. This strategy includes two activities: using a grammar book to confirm any information that is unclear and using a writing tool to ensure the writing.

Consulting a grammar book is an activity in the writing process that can help students to ensure linguistic accuracy in their writing. The use of grammar books allows students to improve their language by verifying grammatical rules and conventions. This idea is supported by research from Čolović-Marković (2012), which emphasizes the role of explicit instruction in second-language writing. The use of grammar books gives students an actual means to help them remember grammatical structures. Additionally, Byrnes (2005) highlights the significance of metalinguistic knowledge, suggesting that an awareness of grammar rules contributes to improved writing performance. Thus, the use of grammar books serves as a practical means to enhance metalinguistic awareness in the writing process.

In addition, the use of writing tools such as spelling and grammar checkers has become increasingly popular. The use of writing tools supports the strategy of rereading by providing students with real-time feedback so they can improve their writing directly. In addition, writing tools facilitate the writing process by making it easier to recognize and fix linguistic problems since they are user-friendly and efficient. Research by Warschauer (2006) supports the idea that integrating technology into writing practices positively impacts writing outcomes.

The last stage is revising, where the students refine their work to ensure clarity and coherence. In this stage, proofreading was the most frequently used strategy by the students. This strategy involves two activities: proofreading for content clarity and proofreading for organizational improvement.

Proofreading is an essential strategy for improving the coherence of ideas. In accordance with Flower and Hayes' cognitive theory of writing (Pulungan, 2016), the revision stage includes assessing and modifying the text to enhance its coherence and content. Furthermore, research by Sparks et al. (2014) emphasizes the importance of clear communication in writing, suggesting that the revision process should address aspects such as word choice, sentence structure, and overall coherence. By proofreading for content clarity, students engage in an effort to improve the readability of their writing.

In addition to refining content, proofreading is also a powerful strategy for improving the organizational structure of writing. Berggren (2019) underscores the importance of revising and editing to enhance overall writing quality. Proofreading allows students to identify and rectify issues related to the logical flow of ideas and the coherence of the overall structure of their writing.

Conclusion

This research investigates the strategies employed by the students in each stage of the writing process: pre-writing, writing, and revising. The pre-writing stage observes the frequent use of resourcing and elaborating strategies, with students often turning to dictionaries for vocabulary verification and double-checking teacher instruction. In the writing stage, rereading emerges as the dominant strategy, with students employing activities like consulting grammar books and utilizing writing tools. Finally, in the revising stage, proofreading takes center stage, focusing on content clarity and organizational improvement.

Therefore, this research sheds light on the multilayered nature of writing strategies used by students and their crucial role in the development of effective written communication.

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