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A Quantitative Study of Writing Strategies Adopted by Kurdish EFL

Learners

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Abstract

Writing, as a productive and cognitive skill, is complex and challenging because it involves the unification of many processes and strategies. Therefore, EFL students adopt many strategies to produce a satisfactory piece of writing. In this respect, this quantitative study attempts to explore the common writing strategies adopted in the stages of writing process, and uncover whether gender difference has any effect on using the writing strategies. Through employing a quantitative method, the data is collected from 60 Kurdish EFL learners (22 males and 38 females) studying at the University of Raparin located in Kurdistan region in Iraq. The results of data analysis show some common writing strategies adopted by the participants, and no significant difference is found between male and female participants in using the writing strategies. Based on the findings, this study provides some implications for teachers to help EFL learners improve their writing skill through using writing strategies.

Introduction:

The process through which writing is produced has evolved significantly in history. Before 1960s, due to the effect of Grammar-translation approach and traditional view of writing, only the final product of writing was considered (Sadi & Othman, 2012). This means that the processes through which writers go were not paid careful attention. In the 1970s, however, research was conducted to explore how writers compose their writing products. Emig (1971), for instance, examined the composing process of six writers of twelfth-grade through using a case study method, and found differences between the reflexive and extensive modes of composition. Further, Hayes and Flower (1980) claimed that if writers want to find meaning, different processes of planning, drafting and reviewing will interrupt each other. Later, Flower and Hayes (1981) proposed an influential writing model. They concluded that first (L1) and second (L2) language writers may undergo three different writing processes, namely, planning, composing, and reviewing. Since then, the various writing models put forth were relatively similar and primarily derived from the model of Flower and Hayes (Chien, 2012).

Previous studies have approached writing strategies from two distinct perspectives, namely, cognitive and sociocultural. A considerable amount of literature has widely shown that writing is a productive and cognitive skill, which is complex and challenging because

it involves the unification of many processes and strategies. Furthermore, producing a coherent, error-free, and extended writing is the most demanding task to do in second language learning (Nunan, 1999) as it requires undertaking particular actions, known as writing strategies (Leki, 1995). In this respect, a substantial body of literature has been carried out to explore the relationship between the EFL/ESL students' writing strategies and their writing achievement (Chen, 2011; Mahnam & Nejadansari, 2012; Shafiee et al., 2013; Hammad, 2013; Raoofi et al., 2014). When reviewing the results of these studies, it can be concluded that writing strategies have strong correlation with students' writing achievement and teachers should work on developing these strategies so that the students improve their writing skill. Moreover, some studies have focused on the relationship between the use of writing strategies and writing skills and revealed that using writing strategies is a good indication of separating skilled from less skilled writers in a way that the skilled or proficient EFL/ESL learners employ particular writing strategies more often than the less skilled ones (e.g. Chien, 2010; Maarof & Murat, 2013; Mu & Carrington, 2007; Ridhuan & Abdullah, 2009; Sadi & Othman, 2012).

On the other hand, writing strategies have also been investigated from a sociocultural perspective (e.g. Kang & Pyun, 2013; Lei, 2008; Xiao, 2012; Yang, 2006). Previous related studies have concluded that emic and mediated

factors such as culture and native language, course topic and assignments, group rules, and L2 proficiency can also strategically facilitate students' writing production.

Since "a learner's socially situated context is closely related to the kinds of writing strategies and mediating tools he or she uses or prefers" (Kang & Pyun, 2013, p. 52), this present study is worth conducting due to two main reasons. First, previous studies have investigated EFL learners' use of writing strategies from different social backgrounds (e.g. Chinese, Persian, Palestinian, Japanese, and Malay); however, little is known about Kurdish EFL learners' use of writing strategies, specifically at the tertiary level. Second, throughout my teaching experience at the university level, many Kurdish EFL learners cannot show a satisfactory performance in producing good English writing despite studying English writing as a particular subject for two years. One of the ways to solve this problem is to explore their writing strategies (Chien, 2012). Therefore, this study contributes to the related literature through exploring Kurdish EFL learners' use of writing strategies at one of the public universities in Kurdistan region of Iraq through answering the following research questions:

1. What are the most common writing strategies adopted by Kurdish EFL learners?
2. To what extent does gender have any effect in the use of writing strategies among Kurdish EFL learners?

Method

The instructional setting and Participants

The study was conducted at the University of Raparin, a public university in Kurdistan region of Iraq. More specifically, the instructional setting was the second-year class of English department in College of Education. The participants were 60 (Male = 22 and Female = 38) Kurdish second-year students majoring in English. These students have studied English academic writing as a subject for about 2 years. Their background information also showed that many of the participants have attended other writing courses before being admitted in the department and written various paragraphs and essays in the past two years.

Research Instrument

The research instrument utilized in the present study was a questionnaire, which was designed by Petrić and Czár (2003) and adapted by the researcher for the current study for the purpose of data collection. The questionnaire consisted of two major parts. The first part was about the participant's background information, and the second part was about the learners' perceptions about the writing process, which comprises three sections: before writing (8 items), while writing (14 items), and post writing (16 items). Furthermore, the items were presented in a five-point Likert Scale (1=Not True to 5=Always True). It is worth mentioning that the Cronbach Alpha of the instrument was 0.72, which was considered reliable for data

collection (Hudson, 1991 cited in Krysik & Finn, 2013).

Results

To answer the first research question, the obtained data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, a feature of Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20, and the following results were obtained:

Table 1: The participants' use of pre-writing strategies

Pre-writing strategies	Percentages			N	Std.
	NT & UNT	ST	UT & AT		
1. I make timetable for the writing process.	57	25	18	23	1.22
2. I revise the requirements of essay writing.	27	40	33	30	1.00
3. I look at a model written by a native speaker or more proficient writer.	43	25	32	27	1.45
4. I start writing without having a written or mental plan.	58	18	24	23	1.33
5. I think about what I want to write and have a plan in my mind, but not on paper.	29	18	53	34	1.31
6. I note down words and short notes related to the topic.	23	32	45	33	1.32
7. I write an outline of my paper.	44	33	23	26	1.21
8. I write notes or an outline in my native language	39	23	38	28	1.20
Total average scores	40	27	33	28	1.25

Note: NT = Never True, UNT = Usually Not True, ST = Somewhat True, UT = Usually True, AT = Always True; M = Mean; Std. = Standard Deviation

According to the total average scores presented in Table (1), only one third (i.e., 33%) of the students employ the writing strategies in the pre-writing stage. Among the used strategies, the most common one is strategy 5, which indicates that the students make a plan in mind, but not on a paper (% = 53; M = 3.4). The following most common pre-writing strategy is that the students write words and notes relating to the writing topic (% = 45; M = 3.3). Generally, the students rarely use the strategies in the pre-writing stage.

Table 2: The participants' use of while-writing strategies

While-writing strategies	Percentages			N	Std.
	NT & S	S	UT & AT		

	UNT	T	AT		
1. I start with the introduction.	5	1 3	82	4 .2	. 93
2. I stop after each sentence to read it again.	30	2 7	43	3 .1	1 .33
3. I stop after a few sentences or a whole paragraph, covering one idea.	38	3 8	25	2 .8	1 .09
4. I reread what I have written to get idea how to continue.	8	3 3	59	3 .7	1 .00
5. I go back to my outline and make changes in it.	25	3 5	40	3 .2	1 .05
6. I write pieces of the text in my native language then translate them into English.	44	1 3	43	2 .9	1 .48
7. I check grammar and vocabulary.	10	3 0	60	3 .8	1 .04
8. I simplify what I want to write if I do not know how to express my thoughts in English.	23	3 5	42	3 .2	. 98
9. If I do not know a word in English, I will write it in my native language, and later try to find an appropriate English word.	25	2 8	47	3 .2	1 .26
10. If I do not know a word in English, I find a similar English word that I know.	7	2 8	65	3 .9	1 .00
11. If I do not know a word in English, I stop writing and look up the word in a dictionary.	17	2 8	55	3 .6	1 .19
12. I use a bilingual dictionary.	25	4 0	35	3 .1	1 .18
13. I use a monolingual dictionary.	42	2 7	31	2 .8	1 .29
14. I ask somebody to help me when I have problems.	33	2 0	47	3 .2	1 .37
Total average scores	24	2	48	3	1

		8		.3	.15
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Note: NT = Never True, UNT = Usually Not True, ST = Somewhat True, UT = Usually True, AT = Always True; M = Mean; Std. = Standard Deviation

Concerning the common strategies utilized by the students in the while-writing stage, the total average scores given in Table (2) show that approximately half of the students adopt while-writing strategies in the writing process (% = 48; M = 3.3; Std. = 1.15). Regarding the most common writing strategy adopted in the while-writing stage (see strategy 10 in table 2), the majority of the students perceived that they use ‘synonyms’ for the words they do not know while trying to express their ideas in the writing process (% = 65; M = 3.9; Std. = 1.0). Another common while-writing strategy is strategy 5, in which most of the students usually check grammar and vocabulary of what they write during the writing stage (% = 60; M = 3.8; Std. = 1.04). The following most common writing strategies adopted by the majority of the students are strategy 4 and strategy 11, in which the students often reread what they have written to get an idea for writing the remaining sentences in the text (% = 59; M = 3.7; Std. 1.00) and use dictionary for finding the meaning of unknown words (% = 55; M = 3.6; Std. 1.19), respectively.

Table 3: The participants’ use of post-writing strategies

Post-writing strategies	Percentages			M	St d.
	NT & UNT	S T	UT & AT		
1. I read my text aloud.	40	27	33	2.8	1.28
2. I read what I have written.	18	18	64	3.5	1.09
3. When I have written my paper, I submit it without reading it.	60	20	20	2.2	1.32
4. I use a dictionary when revising.	42	28	30	2.8	1.21
5. I make changes in vocabulary.	27	31	42	3.2	1.09
6. I make changes in sentence structure.	23	45	32	3.0	1.02
7. I make changes in the structure of the essay.	49	33	16	2.2	1.1.

		5		.5	09
8. I make changes in the content or ideas.	29	3	28	2	1.
		3		.9	13
9. I focus on one thing (e.g. content, structure, etc.)	52	1	30	2	1.
		8		.7	25
10. I drop my first draft and start writing again.	32	4	28	2	1.
		0		.9	02
11. I check if my essay matches the requirements.	25	4	30	3	1.
		5		.1	14
12. I leave the text aside for a couple of days and then I can see it in a new perspective.	45	3	22	2	1.
		3		.6	14
13. I show my text to somebody and ask his/her opinion.	34	3	33	2	1.
		3		.9	22
14. I compare my paper with the essays written by my friends on the same topic.	38	3	29	2	1.
		3		.8	23
15. I give myself a reward for completing the assignment.	33	4	25	2	1.
		2		.7	16
16. I check my mistakes after I get back the paper with feedback from the teacher, and try to learn from them.	15	1	67	3	1.
		8		.8	12
Total average scores	36	3	33	2	1.
		1		.9	15

Note: NT = Never True, UNT = Usually Not True, ST = Somewhat True, UT = Usually True, AT = Always True; M = Mean; Std. = Standard Deviation

Regarding the strategies employed in the post writing stage, the total average scores presented in Table (3) indicate that only one third of the students adopt post writing strategies (% = 33; M = 2.9; Std. = 1.15). Among the adopted strategies, strategy 16 is perceived to be the most common post writing strategy indicating that the students often check the feedback they get from the teacher about their writing and try to learn from the feedback (% = 67; M = 3.8; Std. = 1.12). Moreover, strategy 2 is found to be the second most common post writing strategy in which the students read what they have written before submitting it to the teacher (% = 64; M = 3.5; Std. = 1.09).

To answer the second research question, which aimed at exploring the effect of gender difference in the use of writing strategies, the obtained data was statistically analyzed using *t-test*, which is a feature of inferential statistics in the SPSS program and used to show whether there is a significant difference between the mean scores of two groups. The analysis produced the following results.

Table 4: Effect of gender difference in the use of writing strategies

Items	Gender	Number	Mean	Std.	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-writing strategies	Female	22	2.8	.53	.961
	Male	38	2.8	.43	.963
While-writing strategies	Female	22	3.3	.33	.913
	Male	38	3.3	.52	.902
Post-writing strategies	Female	22	2.8	.45	.093
	Male	38	3.0	.45	.095

Sig. \leq .05

As shown in Table (4), the mean scores of both male and female students for pre- ($M = 2.8$) and while-writing ($M = 3.3$) strategies are similar. Although there exists a small difference in mean scores of male ($M = 2.8$) and female ($M = 3.0$) for the post-writing strategy, this difference is *not* statistically significant (Sig. (2-tailed) = .093 & .095 > .05). Thus, gender difference does not have any effect in the use of writing strategies.

Discussion and Conclusion

The of present study aims to explore the common writing strategies adopted by Kurdish EFL university students and show the effect of gender difference in the use of these strategies. The results obtained from the quantitative data analysis produce that while-writing strategies are used more commonly than those in the pre- and post-writing stages. In addition, the results also show that gender difference does not have any effect in the use of the writing strategies among the Kurdish EFL learners. In other words, there does not exist any statistically significant difference between male and female Kurdish EFL students in the use of writing strategies in the writing process.

It is worth noting, however, that the use of these strategies among the Kurdish EFL students is still considered unsatisfactory because only one third (i.e., 33%) of the students adopt pre- and post-writing strategies and nearly half (i.e., 48%) of them use while-writing strategies during the writing process. It can be concluded from these findings that one of the reasons for the students' weakness in the writing skill can be related to insufficient use of writing strategies in the writing process. To support this, previous research has shown that there is a strong correlation between the students' use of writing strategies and their writing achievement (Chien, 2012; Hammad, 2013). In other words, the more writing strategies are adopted by the students, the more quality writing they produce.

Another reason for the students' weakness in the writing skill is probably due to the inadequate use of pre-writing strategies. As revealed in the results of this study, the students adopt pre-writing strategies less than the others in the writing process. It has been claimed in the previous studies that students who are weak in writing skill rarely depend on pre-writing strategies (see Manham & Majidansari, 2012; Mu & Carrington, 2007; Ridhuan & Abullah, 2009). Moreover, for skilled writers, pre-writing strategies play more important role than the other strategies in the production of better compositions because they help the writers/students brainstorm and generate necessary and related ideas for their compositions and ultimately create a unified and coherent piece of writing.

Despite its significant contribution to the related literature, this study has two main limitations. First, the results obtained in this study cannot be generalized because it is limited to a specific group of Kurdish EFL students (i.e., second stage students) and a particular context (i.e., University of Raparin). Second, only quantitative method of data collection is utilized due to students' unwillingness of voluntary participation in qualitative method like writing essays and interviews; if there was an opportunity to do so, deeper understanding of the students' use of writing strategies would have been achieved.

Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study reveal that the Kurdish EFL students' use of writing strategies is insufficient. Therefore, teachers, specifically those who teach academic writing, should raise the students' awareness to the importance of writing strategies in the writing process by teaching and practicing these writing strategies in the classroom. Therefore, one of the ultimate goals of teachers in the instruction of writing strategies is to help their learners use these strategies independently. To achieve this goal, the strategy instruction should involve explicitly and systematically teaching steps which are necessary for pre-, while-, and post-writing. In so doing, Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD), proposed by De La Paz and Graham (2002) and Harris and Graham (1996), is helpful. SRSD is an approach for assisting students to learn particular strategies for pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing/reviewing a text. In addition, SRSD instruction is also featured by explicit teaching, individualized instruction, and criterion-based versus time-based learning, and learners are treated as active collaborators in the learning process.

Instruction with this approach takes place in six subsequent stages. First, learners should be introduced with the notion of writing strategies. Their background knowledge should be developed through providing any opportunity, which helps them to use the strategies successfully. Second, the strategies should be described so that the learners understand the purpose and benefits of using them in writing. Third, teachers should show the learners how to use the strategies by giving various activities and tasks inside or outside the classroom. Fourth, learners should be cautioned that the steps of the strategies should be memorized or at least some mnemonics should be used to remember the strategies. For example, they should remember that before they start writing there are some strategies the students may employ to collect and organize necessary ideas for their writing. After this stage, they should also know that other stages, such as while and post writing, have their own strategies and are different from the previous ones. Fifth, teachers should keep in mind that learners alone may not be coping with employing the strategies. Therefore, they need continuous scaffolding and support so that they master using the strategies. Finally, after going through the stages, learners should be able to use the strategies independently, with very limited scaffolding and support.

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تۆئۆزىنەنە ۋە يەككى ھەژمارەبى دەربارەبى بەكارھېتائى ستراتېيەكانى نوسىنى ئىنگلىزى لە لايەن خۆئىندكارانى كورد
ئەم تۆئۆزىنەنە ۋە ھەژمارەبى دەو ئامانجى سەرەكى ھەيە، ئەوانىش دۆزىنە ۋە ستراتېيەكانى نوسىنى ئىنگلىزى كە لە لايەن خۆئىندكارانى كورد بەكاردەھىتەن،
ۋە دۆزىنە ۋە جىاۋازى جىندەرى لە بەكارھېتائى ئەو ستراتېيەكانە. بۇ ئەم مەبەستە لە پىگەي راپرسىيە ۋە زانىارى پىويست لە ۶۰ خۆئىندكارى بەشى ئىنگلىزى
زانكۆي راپەرىن كۆكراۋەتە ۋە. دۋاى شىكىردنە ۋە زانىارى بە دەست ھاتوو، ئەنجامەكان دەرى دەخەن كە سەرەپاى ئەۋەي كە خۆئىندكارەكان بەرپىزەيەكى كەم
ستراتېيەكانى نوسىن بەكاردەھىن، بەلام ستراتېيەكانى "ناو-نوسىن" زياتر بەكاردەھىتەن لە ستراتېيەكانى "پىش-نوسىن" و "دۋاى-نوسىن". ھەرۋەھا
ئەنجامەكان دەرىدەخەن كە ھىچ جىاۋازى بە جىندەرى نىە لە بەكارھېتائى ستراتېيەكانى نوسىنى ئىنگلىزى لە نيوان بەشدارىۋانى تۆئۆزىنەنە ۋە كە.

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