

Writing Strategies Used By Indonesian Graduate Students

Nanik Rahmawati^{1*}, Endang Fauzati², Sri Marmanto³

^{1,2,3}English Education Department, Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jl.Ir. Sutami no. 36A, Kentingan, Jebres Surakarta, 57126 Ph: 085728244441, Indonesia

Abstract

The study is aimed at investigating the English language writing strategies used by Indonesian graduate students at an academic writing class. The objectives of this study were to determine the types of writing strategies used by the students and to find out why the students employed such strategies. The study applied a qualitative method approach. A structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire based on Cazrl and Petric writing strategies inventory were employed in collecting data. The result showed that students used three major strategies which are before, during and after writing strategies. Secondly, the reason why they employed such strategies are students' belief, students' awareness, students' language proficiency, writing time, and writing activity environment. The implication of the study are that writing time and environment may become a foundation to develop a teaching method or technique which may be implemented in a classroom teaching activity to achieve a better writing outcome. Moreover, By understanding the differences of the writing strategies employment, it exploits what differ the high and the low to upgrade the students writing quality into a better writing.

Keywords: Case study; Foreign language learner; Qualitative; Writing strategies

1. Introduction

English has become one of subjects which is examined in the national exam in Indonesian schools. Moreover, it is included in the national examination from junior until senior high school level. It means that every student should master this subject. Thus, English learners should master every language skill such as writing. In addition, mastering English writing skill is not an easy task. Many students still find difficulties in producing words in their writing. Thus, writing strategies play an important role to increase learner's writing ability. Every learner has preferred writing strategies before, during and after writing. And there must be a reason why they use writing strategies employed. Those become the concern of the writer.

A scholar such as Amari (2013, p. 130) suggests that one of the key factors which affect writing is the writing strategies. Thus, it is strongly indicated that the student's writing is influenced by his or her writing strategies which are employed during writing process. In fact, the researcher see that preferred writing

strategies help students to increase their writing quality.

Furthermore, since their writing strategies usage and writing production are connected, it makes possibilities to prove what actually the differences between the writing strategies used by those with good and those with poor writings are. Afterward, the result will be useful especially for those students with poor writing in order to produce a better result. Not only identifying the differences between those two, but also investigating the factors which influence their usage of writing strategies become the concern of the writer. By doing so, the reasons why the students choose to employ certain strategies will be revealed. In addition, those findings will also be advantagous for the students who want to have a reflections toward their writing strategies usage.

Previouse studies related to the topic had been conducted. Raofi Said et al.'s Research (2014) Their research is entitled A Qualitative Study into L2 Writing Strategies of University Students. Their objective were to investigate the writing strategies the second research objective was to investigate the writing strategies of different level of proficiency of Malaysian university students learning English as a second language. They

*) Penulis Korespondensi.

E-mail: nanikrahmawati17@gmail.com

IJER, 4 (1), 2019, 23-29

use interview as the instrument to collect the data in this research. Regarding to analyze the data, they use a typology based on Mu's (2005) taxonomy of L2 writing strategies (Rhetorical, cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective strategies). Based on the result of the research there are found some facts. The first is that the students reported using a variety of writing strategies. Therefore, all of the participants are reported doing some pre-writing activities. Afterwards, the highly proficient student writers reported using more metacognitive strategies such as organizing ideas and revising content than less skilled ones.

Another researcher, Maarof Nooreiny and Murat Mazlin's Research (2013) who conducted research entitled Writing Strategies Used by ESL Upper Secondary School Students had four research objectives. The first objective is to examine strategies used in essay writing among 50 intermediate and low proficiency ESL upper secondary school students. And the second objective is to examine the most frequently used strategies by intermediate level English proficiency Students. Afterwards, the third objective is to examine the most frequently used strategies by low English proficiency ESL students. The fourth objective is to determine any significant differences in strategy use between the two groups.

In this research, they use questionnaire as the instrument to collect the data. Regarding to the data analysis, they use statistical formula as MANOVA and descriptive statistics. In this research, they employ 50 students from four upper secondary school students from a sub-urban area of the state of Selangor in Malaysia. Regarding to the type of research, this research is claimed as a quantitative research. There results were that all writing strategies are used by the students in the English language classroom is at medium level. Therefore, it is also identified that the while-writing strategies were most frequently employed by both intermediate and low proficiency students. Afterwards, the results also show that There was no statistically significant difference between the intermediate and low proficiency students on the frequency of writing strategy use. Thus, the researcher commit to conduct a research to investigate the type of writing strategies used by Indonesian graduate students. In addition, the researcher wants to reveal the factors behind the writing strategies usage by the students. Numerous data collecting techniques were applied to collect the required data. However the research questions of this research could be formulated as follow:

1. What are the types of writing strategies used by the graduate students?
2. What are the factors contributing to the use of writing strategies used by the students?

2. Research Method

a. Research Design and Participants

This research was categorized as qualitative research. Qualitative research is research which focuses on understanding social phenomena from the perspective of the human participants in natural settings and it does not begin with formal hypotheses, but it may result in hypotheses as the study unfolds (Ary et al., 2010, p. 22). The type of this research is a case study.

The subjects of this research are six students of academic writing class on Language Training Center in a university in Indonesia. All of the subjects were graduate students who intended to pursue their study at the higher level of postgraduate degree and take this short course as their academic preparation.

b. Data Collection Technique and Analysis

In collecting the data, the writer had an questionnaire, interview, and observation. The questionnaire and interview that was used in this research was developed based on Petric and Czarl (2003) writing strategies inventories. The observation was conducted when the participants carried out writing activities at class. The researcher used non-participatory observation, thus there was no interaction between the researcher and the participants.

All studies need valid data to prove the credibility of the data so the data collected needs the trustworthiness. Creswell (2012, p. 259) defines Triangulation as the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals (e.g., a principal and a student), types of data (e.g., questionnaire and interviews), or methods of data collection (e.g., documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research. In this research, the researcher used questionnaire, interview and non participatory observation as the method triangulation to maintain the validity of collected data.

In analyzing the data, the researcher used the flow model to analyze the data which is proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10) displayed that there are three stages that should be done in using the flow model, those are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/ verification. Those three stages should be done in order.

3. Results and Discussion

The results consisted of two parts which were: (1) types of writing strategy employed by the subjects, and (2) the factors contributing to the use of writing strategies. In this research the writing

IJER, 4 (1), 2019, 23-29

strategies were categorized into three major types. Those were before writing, during writing, and after writing categories. Afterwards, each of the type consisted of several more specific activities that were seen.

Since there was no scale provided by Petric and Czarl in order to show the levels of frequency of strategy use, the researcher of the present study decided to apply Oxford's (1990) scale which was found to be useful for the present study. It is the key to understanding mean scores of the strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) to see whether the participants are high, medium or low strategy users. Actually, the SILL was not used in the present study. However, Oxford's scale was applied in this study because it helps to see the frequency levels of the use of writing strategies, which was one of the main purposes of this study, and it also uses the five-point Likert scale.

Table 3.1 Oxford's scale showing the frequency levels of strategy use

High	Always	4.5 to 5.0
	Often	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Seldom	1.5 to 2.4
	Never	1.0 to 1.4

Firstly, before they start writing there were some activities identified. Those activities were time planning, experts' model preference, and outlining strategy. During writing, there were some activities that were employed by the respondents, those were introduction first, sentence verification, paragraph verification, outline revision, language transfer, positive grammar and vocabulary, sentence simplification, synonym, dictionary, and peer cooperation activity. After Writing, the strategy dealt with the activities employed by the students after the writing activity. In this part, there were some activities carried out by the respondents, those were reading aloud, revision, drafting, instructions matching, and self-rewarding activity.

Here are the participants' statements about their usage of the strategies taken from questionnaire (QTR) and interview (INT). Below are the statements of them that they use first strategy which is before writing.

1) Time Planning

Yes, I make it. I spend planning my English writing task for so long because I want to write many things.

(A/INT/001)

2) Experts' Model Preference

The subjects read either e-book or printed book. The information written in the book is helpful for the subjects. They read several references written by the scholars who were known well in the field especially native.

I search it (reference) in many sources, online and printed text. By doing so, I develop the idea of the composition easily.

(E/QTR/002)

3) Outlining

In this activity, the subjects wrote down the outline of the text that they wanted to write. In writing the outline, there were differences among them

I always write the outline, because by writing it down, my writing will be focus more on the issue that I have intended to present about.

(C/QTR/03)

Below are the statements of them that they use second strategy which is during writing.

1) Introduction First

During writing process started from this kind of activity which deals with the writing from the introduction before any other part of the writing. Moreover, in doing this activity, subjects elaborated the background and the purpose of writing that were going to be used. Then, the subjects also employed this activity in order to make their writing suits the theme.

I always start to write the introduction first. Because start by writing the background, gap and then the purpose of the study keeps me in track

(B/QTR/006)

2) Sentence Verification

At this activity, the writer tried to check and re-check every sentence the writers have made in order to minimize mistakes. The subjects of this research stopped writing for a while after writing a sentence to check that sentence. Afterwards, in the process of employing this strategy they checked the vocabulary, coherency of the sentences and the grammar.

Once I write a sentence, I am sure on that so it is no need to check again because it consumes times.

(E/QTR/006)

3) Paragraph Verification

In paragraph verification activity, the subjects of this research stopped writing everytime the subjects finished writing each paragraph to check that paragraph. Moreover, in carrying out this strategy, the subjects used

IJER, 4 (1), 2019, 23-29

this activity to make sure that their writing is coherent and they will find out how the next paragraph will be written. In the use of this activity, they checked whether or not the paragraph was on the right track.

Yes, I often stop writing at end of the paragraph to make sure that it is as I planned.

(D/QTR/08)

4) Outline Revision

At this activity, the outline that had been written will be revised by the subjects. They revised the outline in the middle of the writing process. Moreover, in the process of employing this strategy the subjects checked if the ideas precisely put into their writing. They revise the main idea written in the outline.

Yes I do. I revise the outline during writing process. I make sure whether or not the ideas has written down in my composition.

(B/QTR/09)

5) Language Transfer

By carrying this activity out, the subjects of this research wrote the parts or the whole text in native language firstly and then translated it into English. The subjects of this research tended to find out some unfamiliar words that they dealt with, during the writing process and then, directly opened up the dictionary to find the English term of those unfamiliar words to save times.

I Seldom write down unfamiliar English terms in my native language. I tend to write what in my mind in English.

(A/INT/10)

6) Sentence Simplification

In carrying this activity out, the subjects of this research simplified the sentences that were used in their writing. The subjects simplified the sentences in order to make it more compact. Moreover, in employing this strategy the subjects considered the readers capability to comprehend their texts.

I often simplify some complex sentences into the simple ones. It helps the readers to comprehend my writing product.

(A/QTR/012)

7) Positive Grammar and Vocabulary

In carrying this activity out, the subjects wrote down their text without stopping to check the grammar and the vocabulary that were used within their text. Yet, the subjects assumed that their grammar and vocabulary mastery were not

good enough to rely on. They tended to check their grammar and vocabulary used in their writing later.

During writing process, I often make correction to the grammar or vocab that i think do not appropriate. Usually i complete one or more pharagraph then i check the grammar and vocabulary.

(A/QTR/012)

8) Synonym

The subjects of this research by replacing some English terms with their synonymous. In the middle of writing process, when they did not understand terms in English, they used their synonymous to help them to write. Moreover, in the use of this strategy they kept writing although some terms were replaced by the synonymous.

I always write down the synonymous of certain term if I do not know the exact translation of it in English because it is easier for me.

(C/QTR/013)

9) Dictionary

In carrying out this activity, the subjects used some dictionaries to help them during writing process. Moreover, they utilized two types of dictionary, they were monolingual and bilingual dictionaries.

Both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries are very usefull for English learner in writing. I often use the bilingual one, eventhough sometimes the monoligual is better in showing the similar words.

(D/QTR/13)

10) Peer Cooperation

Dealing with this activity, the subjects of the research asked somebody to give feedback during writing process. They asked peer students to give opinion about the quality of their works. In other words, they asked someone else to assess their works. Further, the aspects which are consulted include grammar and content of the writing.

Yes, I ask somebody to help during writing activity. I do that because there should be a second opinion, whether or not my writing is correct and the idea can be catched easily.

(B/INT/015)

Below are the statements of them that they use third strategy which is after writing.

IJER, 4 (1), 2019, 23-29

1) Reading Aloud

Regarding with this activity, the subjects of the research read their text loudly after the writing has done. However, it was found out that the subjects read their writing products in a low voice instead of reading it loudly.

It was silent reading, because i do not know how good or bad my writing was, I am not confidence. Moreover, I am afraid that I would disturb the other

(E/QTR/016)

2) Revision

Regarding with this activity, the subjects of this research had a revision especially in the vocabulary. They employed this strategy by replacing the vocabulary that they believed it was incorrect with the correct one.

I will replace inappropriate vocabulary with the more appropriate one. In example: I made a mistake is better rather than I do a mistake.

(A/QTR/18)

3) Drafting

After writing a text, the subjects tended to write down their first writing as a blueprint of the final version of it. Moreover, the mistake was revised instead of considered it as a draft. There are times when they write the draft first before the final one. Sometimes, they did not prepare it as a draft, yet, after writing they find it not good enough to make it as the final version. Further, when their feeling is not really good, they tend to write the draft first.

Yes (I write a draft). Usually when I am I have no idea at all, I do not want to make it as a final version, so I write the draft, and then I re-write it.

(A/QTR/017)

4) Instructions Matching

Regarding with this activity, the subjects of this research paid attention to the instructions given to write some sort of text that they worked on. In this process, they checked the margin and the number of words as usually they wrote it by using Microsoft office platform.

Yes, at the end I match my writing to the instructions. For instance, to match the number of words requirements, I usually look at the total words written in left down of the window (computer).

(B/INT1/20)

5) Resping

Regarding with this activity, the subjects of this research took a break for a few moment before continuing revising. For a couple of days before going back again to revise the writing produt, they

left it. While not revising their works, they did some activities, such as doing another work, taking a rest, and have a refreshing to get a new perspective.

Often, I will keep it, later, I will revise it within a couple of days in order to get new perspective.

(F/QTR/021)

6) Collation

Regarding with this activity, the subjects of this research compared their works to other's works. In carrying this activity, they found out that there were some works which they believe as a better work than that of theirs. Thus, they felt unconfident toward their own works. They compared theirs to the others to see the others' ideas, to ensure the gab.

Sometimes, I compare it to the others', for instance, there is a writing which has a same variable, what the points that my friend write are, and if I found it almost similar, I will write it differently.

(F/INT/22)

7) Self-rewarding

Regarding with this strategy, the subjects of this research gave some appreciation to themselves in several forms. They had several sort of amusement after they had finished writing some sort of text. Those amusements were fun activities such as eat out somewhere, shopping or watching movies.

I often give myself appreciation after I have finished writing some texts. My favorite reward is watching movies.

(E/QTR/22)

Secondly, it was revealed that there were four factors contributing to the use of the strategies. Those factors were identified to be students' belief, students' language proficiency, writing time, and writing process environment. In particular, subjects' language proficiency contributes to the use of writing strategies. Students' vocabulary and grammar mastery became the reasons why they employ the strategies. The subjects' vocabulary mastery influence the use of some strategies. Furthermore, related to time spent in producing writing, it was found out that the subjects tended to employ some writing strategies if they had relatively a longer time to write. Otherwise, by the time the subjects had a short time to write, they tended to leave a certain writing strategy.

4. Conclusion

In regard to the findings of the three research objectives, there are three arising conclusion which can be drawn. Firstly, two major strategies were employed by the subjects. Before writing, the subjects carried out

IJER, 4 (1), 2019, 23-29

time planning, experts' model reference, and outlining activities. Afterwards, in the during writing activity, they carried out introduction first, sentence verification, paragraph verification, outline revision, language transfer, positive grammar and vocabulary, sentence simplification, synonym, dictionary, and peer cooperation activities. Then, after they were writing, they carried out reading aloud, revision, drafting, instructions matching, respiting, collation, and self-rewarding activities.

Secondly, the factors identified contributing to the use of writing strategy are students' belief, students' awareness, students' language proficiency, writing time, and writing activity environment.

In conclusion, employing writing strategies in a high frequency by considering students' belief, awareness, language proficiency, writing time, and writing activity environment is highly recommended since it helps students to achieve a good writing outcome. The implications of the study could be improvements in learning and teaching of academic writing and the design of new teaching syllabuses that concern on the strategic teaching of English writing in the future.

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IJER, 4 (1), 2019, 23-29

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