

Examining the Effect of Strategy Instruction on Writing Apprehension and Writing Achievement of EFL Learners

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Abstract—Writing as a communicative activity imposes great difficulties on EFL learners and both cognitive and affective aspects of writing have a sharing part in this complex process. The current study aimed to explore the effect of explicit writing strategy instruction, prewriting strategies in particular on reducing writing apprehension, and promoting writing performance. 42 intermediate EFL students participated in this study, 28 students in two experimental groups received the treatment and the results compared to their 14 counterparts in the control group. All the participants received Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) as the pretest and posttest. They further were expected to write two expository essays at the beginning and end of the study. After administrating the pretests and posttests, the results reflected on the effectiveness of explicit writing strategy instruction and the potentials of prewriting strategies in alleviating the level of writing apprehension. Further, explicit instruction of prewriting strategies greatly optimized the writing achievement of students in the two experimental groups. The findings of the present study also suggest that the implementation of explicit strategy instruction by the teacher can make a world of difference for students in learning process.

Index Terms—explicit strategy instruction, prewriting stage, writing apprehension

I. INTRODUCTION

Apprehension as one of the prominent affective factors has stimulated particular attention in second and foreign language acquisition and learning. One of the major reasons for this concern particularly among researchers and educators is its potential negative effects (Atay & Kurt, 2006; Ehram & Oxford, 1995; MacIntyer, et al., 1997). Moreover, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting like the other educational settings is experiencing the problem of anxiety in foreign language in different domains of language (Ozturk & Cecen, 2007). In this respect, Tsui (1996) believes that learning to write in a foreign language involves as much anxiety as learning the other skills. Since writing is predominantly product-oriented, it requires individual work that is students are deprived of help, support and encouragement. As the result, learners suffer a distress and anxiety associated with the writing process. More importantly, considering writing as cornerstone of language learning skill, many studies pinpoint the importance of writing anxiety as a specific type of anxiety, unique to the language particular skill of writing (Bline, et al., 2001; Cheng, et al., 1999; Daly & Wilson, 1983). Only recently, writing apprehension due to its sensitivity to EFL contexts (Masny & Foxall, 1992) calls the researchers' attention to this phenomenon and its specific relation to the language learning. Despite the plethora of studies on writing apprehension in the first language (Atkinson, 2011; Boeing, Anderson & Miller, 1997; Clark, 2004; Daly, 1978; Daly & Miller, 1975; Faigley, Daly & Witte, 1981; Fox, 1980; Marshall & Varon, 2009; Rankin-Brown, 2006; Reeves, 1997; Teichman & Poris, 1989), a new trend has been taken toward the study of writing apprehension in EFL context. A number of studies pinpoint the importance of investigating writing apprehension in this context (Atay & Curt 2007; Cheng, 2004; Cheng, et al., 1999; Erkan & Saban, 2010; Hassan, 2001; Lee, 2005; Ozturk & Cecen, 2007; Salem, 2007; Song, 1998). It should be noted that writing anxiety and writing apprehension are usually used interchangeably; however, writing apprehension has gained popularity in more recent research in literature (Cheng, et al., 1999).

The study of writing apprehension began as a subset of research on communication apprehension. Daly and Miller (1975) coined the term writing apprehension in order to describe the tendency of a person to avoid the process of writing particularly when it is evaluated in some way (Erkan & Saban, 2010). Apprehensive students are likely to suffer from the concern about the possibility of failure, flawed performance, fear of evaluation, negative attitudes toward writing task and writing situation (Cheng, et al., 1999; Daly, 1978; Huwari & Aziz, 2011), their writing performance are mostly lifeless, mechanical, full of grammatical errors, repeated concepts and unsupported organization (Hettich, 1994).

As there is a widespread consensus among the researchers to propose the role of classroom strategies and explicit instruction on various stages of writing process (Charney, et al., 1995; Huwari & Aziz, 2011; Oxford, 2002; Marshall & Varon, 2009; Masny & Foxall, 1992; Wu, 2010) specifically prewriting stage as the most crucial stage in order to mitigate the problems associated with these phenomena, the current study focused on explicit writing strategies instruction which its effectiveness on the learners' writing performance has been highlighted by many studies (Chamot,

2005; Cohen, 1996; Negari, 2011). Chamot, et al., (1990) assert that the purpose of the writing strategy instruction is to make students aware of writing process and to teach them the strategies associated with the good writing. Moreover, Chamot (2004) maintains that explicit strategy instruction essentially involves the development of students' awareness of the strategies they use and teacher modeling of strategic thinking. Further, student practice with new strategies, student self-evaluation of strategies used and practice in transferring strategies to new tasks are involved as well. More specifically, this study emphasizes on prewriting stage since most of the students' writing problems that teachers have control on them stem from insufficient preparation for their writing assignments (Chastain, 1988). Seow (2002) defines pre writing as "any activity in the classroom that encourages students to write. It stimulates thoughts for getting started (p, 316)". Due to the necessity of exposing students to a variety of strategies to initiate the writing task and to encourage students to practice all the strategies and discover the one that serves them best (Kroll, 2001), three prewriting strategies namely brainstorming, concept mapping and free writing have been chosen in tandem all with the aim of generating and organizing ideas which open the mind of students and are effective at the moment of blocking and confusion. Regarding the issue of explicit writing strategy instruction and the prewriting stage as the foundation of good writing which has received only minor attention in EFL contexts (Schweiker-Marra & Marra, 2000; Stern, 1991) further, the fact that writing environment is conducive to exploring ideas and content (Masny & Foxall, 1992) and the terror of the blank page which may be faced by so many students (Kroll, 2001), more research appears to be needed investigating writing apprehension the role of instructional strategies in alleviating the negative consequences of this two phenomenon.

II. METHOD

A. Participants

The participants in this study were 57 intermediate EFL learners, 16 males and 41 females in three classes in a language institute in Iran. Their age ranged from 16 to 30 with the average age of 20. To ensure their homogeneity in terms of language proficiency, TOEFL was conducted in the three classes. The results indicated that there was not any significant difference among the performance of the three groups. The participating students were all native speakers of Persian. All of whom had been learning English for more than five years. At the end of the course, 15 students were excluded from the study as they did not participate in the posttest. So, the number of the participants decreased to 42 students. There were 14 students in each of the three groups. Two groups randomly were selected as the experimental groups and the third group was considered as the control group.

B. Instruments

For the purpose of this study, a number of instruments were used. In order to measure the degree to which an individual feels apprehensive when writes in English, the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) developed by Daly and Miller (1975) was used (see Appendix A). This test has been extensively used in writing researches and proven to be reliable and valid to be used in both ESL and EFL contexts with the reported Cronbach alpha above .90 (Daly & Miller, 1975; Lee & Krashen, 2003; Lee, 2001; Lee, 2005). It consists of 26 statements, 13 positive statements and 13 negative statements which are answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Further, a "strongly agree" response to a negative question is scored as 5 and a "strongly agree" response to a positive statement is scored as 1. The scores may range from a low of 26 to a high of 130. High scores indicate high levels of apprehension. In additions, two writing topics were selected for pretest and posttest (see Appendix B) and students were offered to write two expository essays about 250 words for about forty minutes. Considering the writing performance, each writing paper was rated based on Jacobs et al. (1981, as cited in Weigle, 2002). According to Jacob et al. scale, five aspects of writing are considered in scaling each writing paper: content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. Moreover, a handout which included definitions of prewriting strategies, namely brainstorming, concept mapping and free writing with the different examples of them was given to the students in the two experimental groups who received the explicit writing strategy instruction as a treatment.

III. PROCEDURE

The instructional period lasted about twelve sessions for about one hour and thirty minutes each session and comprised of three phases. Homogeneity of the students in terms of language proficiency was established through TOEFL. The results indicated that there was not any significant difference between the performance of the two experimental groups and the control group.

A. Phase One

Prior to the instruction, at the first session, two experimental and one control groups received Writing Apprehension Questionnaire (WAT) as the pretest. Further, they wrote about a selected topic about forty minutes.

B. Phase Two

After all the students participated in the pretest, during the next ten sessions, the two experimental groups received a handout that included definitions of prewriting strategies, namely brainstorming, concept mapping and free writing. The

presentation of these strategies was in consecutive manner. Explicit teaching of writing strategy was presented to the two experimental groups following Chamot et al., guideline (1990):

1. Presenting the name and description of strategy: The teacher first capitalizing on what students already know about writing in English gave an overview of strategies before actually beginning the instruction. Then the teacher presented all the description and required information for the strategies as well as the purposes, the benefits and the significance of each one.

2. Modeling the strategy: The teacher presented the examples of each writing strategies on the board and modeled them for the students. Moreover, the teacher modeled how to rewrite the gathered information into complete sentences.

3. Make practice of strategies: During each session, the students practiced on the provided topics and rehearsed the use of each strategy

4. Guide and feedback: during the sessions, needed guide and feedback provided for the students.

For the first presentation of each strategy, the instructor let students think individually for five minutes get ready for the writing, tap their imagination for information and fresh their minds and ideas. For the first practice, the students were allowed to practice the use of strategy on the board and in their notes under the supervision of the instructor. They further were allowed to verbalize their ideas in pairs or groups in order to exchange their ideas and collaborate with each other. Moreover, brainstorming and concept mapping were taught in tandem. When the students finished brainstorming about one topic "role of fast food in today life" for example, there may be a variety of ideas about it. The instructor asked the students to gather all the key terms and those phrases related to "health effect" in one category and paved the way to teach concept mapping and how to organize the ideas in the graphical representation. In addition, the students rehearsed free writing on several topics as a daily practice. The instructor taught the students to use connectors to organize the key terms and phrases into sentences to write a paragraph. Many writing practices were provided for the students in order to be able to use strategies individually and in their notes as well.

The instruction for the control group conducted in the conventional form that is the flow of the course was similar to the regular writing course. The class followed the routines without receiving any instruction of strategy use in writing. The same instructor taught the students in the control group with the same hours of instruction.

C. Phase Three

At the last session, the three groups received the Writing Apprehension Questionnaire (WAQ) as the posttest and they wrote about a selected topic. The allotted time for writing was forty minutes.

Considering their writing performance, their writing papers were scored based on Jacob et al. (1981, as cited in Weigle, 2002) by two raters. The interrater reliability for pretest and posttest were .952 and .963 respectively. According to Jacobs et al., scaling each paper was rated one five aspects of writing: content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. These five aspects are weighted to emphasize first content (30 points), language use (25 points), organization and vocabulary equally (20 points) and mechanics with very little emphasis (5 points). The final score for each paper was the average score of the two scores given by the two independent raters.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Test of Homogeneity of the Groups

The results of one- way ANOVA indicated that there was not any significant difference between the performance of the two experimental and the control groups $F(2, 39) = .117, p = .890, p < 0.05$.

TABLE 1.
ONE-WAY ANOVA TEST OF HOMOGENEITY FOR THE THREE GROUPS IN TOEFL

ANOVA TOEFL Grades					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.619	2	2.310	.117	.890
Within Groups	772.357	39	19.804		
Total	776.976	41			

B. Results on Writing Apprehension Test

This study examines whether there is a significant difference between those students who received explicit instruction of prewriting strategies in the experimental groups and the other students in the control group. Considering pretests' mean scores in Table 2, the mean score of the first experimental group showed that the participants experienced high level of writing apprehension. The second experimental group had lower writing apprehension and the participants in the control group had a moderate level of writing apprehension before administrating the treatment. After the data were collected through writing apprehension test as posttest, three Paired Sample t-tests were conducted in order to examine the effectiveness of the treatment and whether each group's writing apprehension changed after the treatment (Table 2). considering the mean scores and the level of significance ($p < 0.05$), there is a statistically significant decrease in the mean scores of the first experimental group from the pretest ($M = 81.2143$) to the posttest ($M = 74.4286$), $p = .001, t(13) = 4.552$. Therefore, it can be concluded that explicit writing strategy instruction has a positive effect on the first experimental group and there is a statistically significant improvement in terms of writing

apprehension. Furthermore, there is an insignificant decrease in the mean scores of the second experimental group from the pretest ($M = 74.4286$) to the posttest ($M = 71.7143$), $p = .308$, $p < 0.05$, $t(13) = 1.061$. Though there is a decrease in the mean scores of this group from the pretest to posttest, the level of significance does not demonstrate statistically significant improvement. On the other hand, there is a statistically significant decrease in the mean scores of the control group from the pretest ($M = 78.8571$) to the posttest ($M = 76.5714$), $p = .014$, $p < 0.05$, $t(13) = 2.853$. Therefore, there is a statistically significant improvement in terms of writing apprehension which is likely due to the chance. These findings are in line with the findings of Fox (1980), Holmes and Moulton (2003), Salem (2007) and Wu (2010) who adopted process approach to writing instruction and relieved the levels of apprehension by providing a non-threatening environment in the classrooms.

TABLE 2.
PAIRED-SAMPLE T-TESTS OF WAT FOR EACH OF THREE GROUPS

Paired differences		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pretest	81.2143	7.60747	2.03318	4.552	13	.001
Ex G1	Posttest	74.4286	5.94480	1.58881			
Pair 1	Pretest	74.4286	7.26122	1.94064	1.061	13	.308
Ex G2	Posttest	71.7143	6.70738	1.79262			
Pair 1	Pretest	78.8571	3.73872	.99921	2.853	13	.014
C G	Posttest	76.5714	5.01865	1.34129			

Note. Ex G1: Experimental group1, Ex G2: Experimental group2, C G: Control group

C. Results of Writing Achievements

The second issue addressed in this study was whether the explicit instruction of prewriting strategies would improve students' writing achievement in the two experimental groups. Conduction of one-way ANOVA (Table 3) showed that there was not any significant difference between three groups in terms of writing performance $F(2, 39) = 1.286$, $p = .288$, $p < 0.05$. Therefore, all the participants in the two experimental groups and the one control group had the same writing performance prior instruction.

TABLE 3.
TEST OF BETWEEN GROUPS ON PRETESTS OF WRITING PERFORMANCE

ANOVA Pre					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	238.536	2	119.268	1.286	.288
Within Groups	3617.875	39	92.766		
Total	3856.411	41			

After students' participation in the posttest of writing performance, three separate Paired Sample t-tests were run to examine each group's writing achievement separately (Table 4). Considering the mean scores and the level of significance ($p < 0.05$), there was a statistically significant increase in the mean scores of the first experimental group from pretest ($M = 68.7143$) to the posttest ($M = 81.9286$), $p = .000$, $p < 0.05$, $t(13) = -5.317$. Furthermore, there was a statistically significant increase in the mean scores of the second experimental group from pretest ($M = 62.8929$) to the posttest ($M = 75.8214$), $p = .000$, $p < 0.05$, $t(13) = -8.076$. On the other hand, there was not any statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the control group from the pretest ($M = 65.4286$) to the posttest ($M = 66.4286$), $p = .615$, $p < 0.05$, $t(13) = -.516$. Therefore, the two experimental groups outperformed in the posttest writing in comparison to the control group. In other words, the learners' performances in the control group were lower than the two experimental groups and there was not any statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest of the control group ($p = .615$, $p < 0.05$). The findings of this fraction of study are consistent with the findings of Ahangari & Behzadi (2012), Chularut & DeBacker (2004), Dujsik (2008), Goldstein & Carr (1996), Ibnian (2011), Li (2007), Negari (2011), Ojima (2006), Piovesan (2007), Pishghadam & Ghanizadeh (2006), Roa (2007) and Talebinezhad & Negari (2007) who tried to provide evidence for the effectiveness of brainstorming, concept mapping and free writing as a prewriting strategies.

TABLE 4.
PAIRED-SAMPLE T-TESTS OF WRITING PERFORMANCE FOR EACH OF THREE GROUPS

Paired differences		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pretest	68.7143	12.28776	3.28404	-5.317	13	.000
Ex G1	Posttest	81.9286	10.04194	2.68382			
Pair 1	Pretest	62.8929	8.13865	2.17515	-8.076	13	.000
Ex G2	Posttest	75.8214	5.77663	1.54387			
Pair 1	Pretest	65.4286	7.81482	2.08860	-.516	13	.615
C G	Posttest	66.4286	7.81482	2.42177			

Note. Ex G1: Experimental group1, Ex G2: Experimental group2, C G: Control group

V. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study reflected on the effectiveness of explicit writing strategy instruction and the potentials of prewriting strategies in provoking the dormant thought. It shed lights on both cognitive and affective aspects of writing skill which play indispensable role in the complex process of writing. It proved the effectiveness of equipping students with the efficient composing process which resulted in positive outcomes. Furthermore, the current study supported the Chen's statement (2007) that the impact of explicit instruction engages learners more to the dynamic internal changes in the learning process as the learners became more sensitive to the learning process and were willing to know about other stages of writing process by the end of the course.

This study has some implications for language teaching and learning pertaining to the problems of apprehension, blocking and composing. The fact that writing in a foreign language imposes great difficulties on EFL learners and both cognitive and affective aspects of writing have a sharing part in it, writing instruction should be conducted in a way to be most beneficial for foreign language learners. Cohen and Macaro (2007) assert that "the ultimate goal of any language instruction is not only to teach learners for a moment but to instill within learners a sense of what it is like to be a lifelong language learner" (p.284). Furthermore, the implementation of strategy instruction in language classrooms provides true guidance and ample opportunity for learners to practice more. Therefore, language classrooms should have a dual focus on both teaching content and learning strategies.

Prewriting strategies can be considered as a fruitful platform for students to generate as many ideas as possible and crystalize their dormant thought to embark on the complex process of writing. Further, students are able to overcome the problems of losing the track of mind, prepare a fair plan in order to refer to it in other stages of writing process. Its consideration by the teachers and educational designers can help students to reinforce their confidence, creativity and their performance and help students to enjoy the process of writing.

APPENDIX A. WRITING APPREHENSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: below are 26 statements about writing. Please mark from "Strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" that best describe your agreement or disagreement with these statements. Remember that there are no correct answers; only give your honest response.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I avoid writing.					
2. I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.					
3. I look forward to writing down my ideas.					
4. I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.					
5. Taking a composition course is a very frightening experience.					
6. Handing in a composition makes me feel good					
7. My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on my composition.					
8. Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.					
9. I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication.					
10. I like to write down my ideas.					
11. I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas clearly in writing.					
12. I like to have my friends read what I have written.					
13. I'm nervous about writing.					
14. People seem to enjoy what I write.					
15. I enjoy writing.					
16. I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly.					
17. Writing is a lot of fun.					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
18. I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them.					
19. I like seeing my thoughts on paper.					
20. Discussing my writing with others is enjoyable.					
21. I have a terrible time organizing my ideas in a composition course.					
22. When I hand in a composition, I know I'm going to do poorly.					
23. It's easy for me to write good compositions.					
24. I don't think I write as well as most other students.					
25. I don't like my composition to be evaluated.					
26. I'm not good at writing.					

APPENDIX B. WRITING TOPICS

Pretest

A: Please write about 250 words on the following statement:

Some people believe that students should be required to attend classes. Others believe that going to the classes should be optional for students. Which point of view do you agree with? Use specific reasons and details to explain your answer.

Posttest

B: Please write about 250 words on the following statement:

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? With the help of technology, students nowadays can learn more information and learn it more quickly. Use specific reason and example to support your answer.

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