



The Effect of Strategy-Based Instruction on EFL University Students' Writing Performance: A Study at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar Branch

Mohammad Saad

mohammad.saad@uob.edu.ly

Lecturer, Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Science, University of Benghazi

Received: 2-08-2025; Revised: 08-09-2025; Accepted: 13-09-2025; Published 22 -09-2025

Abstract:

Developing writing proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) remains a significant challenge, particularly at the university level. Conventional teaching approaches, which emphasize grammatical correctness and imitation of model texts, often constrain students' ability to generate ideas and organize coherent essays. This study investigated the relative effectiveness of a strategy-based instructional approach in comparison to traditional methods at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar branch. A quasi-experimental design was employed with an experimental group and a control group. Writing performance was measured through pre- and post-tests, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-samples t^* tests, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Mixed ANOVA. The findings indicate that the experimental group exhibited significantly greater improvement in writing performance than the control group. These results underscore the value of integrating strategy-based instruction into EFL writing curricula in higher education contexts.

Keywords: writing instruction, strategy-based approach, traditional methods, EFL learners, academic writing.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of study

Academic writing constitutes a fundamental skill in higher education, serving as a critical medium for expressing ideas, reasoning, and knowledge acquisition. Among EFL learners, writing is often considered the most challenging language skill due to its reliance on precise grammar, logical organization, and critical thinking (Hyland, 2016). At the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar branch, students frequently encounter obstacles in producing coherent written texts, which adversely affects academic performance.

Traditional writing instruction in many EFL contexts emphasizes grammatical accuracy and replication of model texts. Although such methods may improve sentence-level correctness, they often fail to develop higher-order skills such as idea generation, text cohesion, and effective revision. Consequently, students may produce linguistically correct compositions that lack structural clarity and substantive content.

In contrast, strategy-based instruction prioritizes the writing process and explicitly teaches learners to plan, draft, revise, and self-evaluate their writing. This approach fosters active engagement, critical reflection, and metacognitive awareness, which contribute to higher-quality writing. The present study examines whether strategy-based instruction yields superior writing performance compared to traditional teaching methods among EFL students at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar branch.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the central role of academic writing in higher education, many EFL students at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar branch struggle to produce coherent, well-organized, and content-rich written texts. Traditional writing instruction in this context primarily focuses on grammatical accuracy and imitation of model texts, often neglecting the development of higher-order writing skills such as planning, idea development, cohesion, and revision. As a result, students may demonstrate surface-level linguistic accuracy while failing to communicate ideas effectively. There is limited empirical evidence within this context regarding the effectiveness of alternative instructional approaches, particularly strategy-based instruction, in improving EFL students' overall writing performance. This

gap highlights the need to investigate whether strategy-based instruction can better address students' writing difficulties compared to traditional teaching methods.

1.3 Research Questions

1. Does strategy-based instruction significantly improve EFL students' writing performance compared to traditional writing instruction at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar branch?
2. What differences, if any, exist in students' writing organization, coherence, and content quality between those taught using strategy-based instruction and those taught using traditional methods?
3. How does strategy-based instruction influence EFL students' engagement in the writing process (planning, drafting, and revising)?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To examine the effectiveness of strategy-based instruction in enhancing EFL students' overall writing performance.
2. To compare the writing outcomes of students taught through strategy-based instruction with those taught using traditional writing instruction.
3. To identify the impact of strategy-based instruction on students' use of writing strategies such as planning, revising, and self-evaluating.
4. To provide pedagogical recommendations for improving writing instruction in EFL contexts at the University of Benghazi.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in cognitive process theory of writing, strategy-based language learning theory, and sociocultural theory. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding writing development in EFL university contexts by addressing the cognitive, metacognitive, and social dimensions of writing.

2.1.1 Cognitive Process Theory of Writing

The cognitive process theory of writing, proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981), conceptualises writing as a recursive and goal-directed cognitive activity, rather than a linear sequence of steps. According to this model, writing involves three major processes planning, translating ideas into text, and reviewing which are continuously regulated by the writer's metacognitive control. Writers move flexibly among these processes as they generate, organize, and refine ideas during text production.

This theoretical perspective challenges traditional product-oriented approaches that prioritize final written outcomes and grammatical accuracy (Raimes, 1983). Instead, it underscores the importance of teaching learners to engage in cognitive strategies such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising. In the present study, the cognitive process model serves as the foundation for viewing writing instruction as a means of supporting learners' mental processes throughout the act of writing.

2.1.2 Strategy-Based Language Learning Theory

Strategy-based instruction is rooted in language learning strategy theory, which emphasizes learners' conscious and goal-oriented actions for regulating learning (Oxford, 2017). In the context of writing, these strategies include cognitive strategies (e.g., planning, summarizing, and revising) and metacognitive strategies (e.g., self-monitoring, goal setting, and evaluating progress).

Previous research has consistently shown that explicit instruction in writing strategies leads to improvements in writing quality, organizational coherence, and overall performance, particularly among adolescent and university-level learners (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hyland, 2003). By making

the writing process explicit and manageable, strategy-based instruction transforms writing from a mechanical exercise into a purposeful communicative activity.

Within this framework, writing proficiency is viewed not as an innate ability but as a skill that can be developed through systematic strategy instruction, guided practice, and reflection. This perspective directly informs the instructional approach adopted in the current study.

2.1.3 Metacognitive Awareness and Learner Autonomy

Metacognitive theory further informs this framework by highlighting the role of learners' awareness of their own cognitive processes. Wenden (1998) argues that successful language learners actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. In writing instruction, metacognitive awareness enables learners to identify weaknesses in content, organization, and clarity and to select appropriate strategies to address these challenges.

Strategy-based instruction also fosters learner autonomy by equipping students with tools to manage their writing tasks independently (Oxford, 2017). As learners gain greater control over their writing processes, they become less reliant on teacher feedback and more capable of self-directed improvement. This aspect is particularly significant in EFL university contexts, where learners often have limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom.

2.1.4 Sociocultural Theory and Scaffolding

Sociocultural theory, drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), emphasizes the social nature of learning. From this perspective, writing development occurs through interaction, collaboration, and guided support from more knowledgeable individuals. In strategy-based writing instruction, teachers play a crucial role in modeling writing strategies, providing scaffolding, and gradually transferring responsibility to learners.

Collaborative activities, such as peer review, further support writing development by encouraging dialogue, reflection, and heightened awareness of audience expectations (Liu & Hansen, 2002). Through sustained social interaction, learners internalize writing strategies and apply them independently, leading to continued improvement in writing performance.

2.2 Previous studies

Traditional approaches to teaching writing have been critiqued for treating writing as a fixed product rather than a dynamic cognitive process (Raines, 1983). These methods often rely on grammar drills and highly controlled writing exercises, which limit learners' opportunities for meaningful expression. As a result, writing may be perceived as a mechanical task rather than a communicative skill.

Process-oriented and strategy-based approaches have emerged as alternatives, emphasizing explicit instruction in cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Such strategies include brainstorming, outlining, drafting, peer review, self-monitoring, and revision (Oxford, 2017).

Empirical studies indicate that strategy-based instruction enhances writing quality, organizational coherence, and learner confidence (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Research conducted in EFL university settings has shown that strategy-based instruction significantly improves students' ability to structure ideas and produce coherent texts (Hyland, 2003). These findings support the implementation of strategy-focused writing instruction in higher education, particularly in contexts where students exhibit persistent difficulties in academic writing.

Writing is widely recognized as a complex cognitive activity that involves multiple stages, including planning, translating ideas into text, and revising (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Their cognitive process model of writing emphasizes that writing is recursive rather than linear, highlighting the importance of revisiting and refining ideas throughout the writing process.

One of the major advantages of strategy-based instruction is its contribution to learner autonomy. When students are explicitly taught writing strategies, they become more capable of managing their own learning and writing development (Oxford, 2017). This autonomy enables learners to approach writing tasks with greater confidence and independence.

Metacognitive awareness has been identified as a key factor in successful writing. Strategy-based instruction promotes students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their writing, which enhances overall writing quality (Wenden, 1998). Such awareness allows learners to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and adjust their strategies accordingly.

In EFL contexts, students often face challenges due to limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Strategy-based instruction provides structured support that helps learners overcome these challenges by guiding them through each stage of the writing process (Hyland, 2003). This guidance is particularly beneficial for university-level academic writing.

Revision is another critical component emphasized in process-oriented instruction. Rather than focusing solely on grammatical correction, strategy-based approaches encourage students to revise content, organization, and coherence, leading to more meaningful improvements in writing quality (Ferris, 2003).

Collaborative learning activities, such as peer review, are frequently incorporated into strategy-based writing instruction. Research indicates that peer feedback enhances students' awareness of audience and improves writing performance by encouraging reflection and critical analysis (Liu & Hansen, 2002).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that students who receive strategy-based writing instruction show higher levels of motivation and engagement in writing tasks (Graham & Perin, 2007). Increased motivation is associated with greater persistence and improved writing outcomes.

The role of the teacher remains central in strategy-based instruction. Teachers are responsible for modeling writing strategies, providing scaffolding, and gradually transferring responsibility to learners (Vygotsky, 1978). This support enables students to internalize strategies and apply them independently.

Despite its effectiveness, implementing strategy-based instruction requires adequate teacher preparation. Instructors need training in both writing pedagogy and strategy instruction to ensure successful classroom application (Hyland, 2016). Without such preparation, the benefits of this approach may be limited.

Overall, the literature strongly supports the integration of strategy-based instruction in EFL university writing classrooms. By addressing cognitive, metacognitive, and social aspects of writing, this approach responds to learners' academic needs and aligns with contemporary theories of second language writing (Hyland, 2003; Oxford, 2017).

2.3 Conclusion

In summary, the literature demonstrates a clear consensus that writing in EFL university contexts is a complex cognitive, metacognitive, and socially mediated process that cannot be effectively addressed through traditional product-oriented instruction alone. Research grounded in cognitive process theory, strategy-based language learning theory, and sociocultural theory consistently supports the effectiveness of strategy-based writing instruction in enhancing learners' writing quality, organizational coherence, motivation, and autonomy. Empirical studies further emphasize the critical roles of metacognitive awareness, feedback, revision, and collaborative learning in fostering meaningful writing development. Despite strong theoretical and empirical support for strategy-based approaches, the literature also highlights the need for further research on their systematic implementation in specific EFL university contexts. Accordingly, the present study seeks to contribute to this body of research by examining the impact of strategy-based writing instruction on EFL university students' academic writing performance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A quasi-experimental mixed-design was adopted, with instructional method (strategy-based vs. traditional) as the between-subjects factor and time (pre-test vs. post-test) as the within-subjects factor.

3.2 Participants

The study sample consisted of 60 undergraduate students enrolled in the Department of English at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar branch. Participants were assigned to two groups:

Experimental Group: 30 students

Control Group: 30 students

3.3 Instruments

Instruments included:

A writing pre-test

A writing post-test

An analytic scoring rubric assessing content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary

3.4 Procedure

Both groups completed the writing pre-test at the semester's outset. The experimental group received strategy-based instruction involving planning, brainstorming, outlining, drafting, peer feedback, and revision. The control group received traditional instruction emphasizing grammar explanation and imitation of model texts. After eight weeks, both groups completed a post-test to measure writing development.

3.5 Data Analysis

SPSS Version 26 was used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, paired-samples t tests, one-way ANOVA, and Mixed ANOVA were performed to determine differences in writing performance.

3. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Writing Performance

Group	Test	N	Mean	SD
Experimenta	Pre-test	30	62.40	6.85
Experimenta	Post-test	30	78.60	5.92
Control	Pre-test	30	61.90	7.10
Control	Post-test	30	66.30	6.78

Descriptive analysis shows a marked improvement in the experimental group's post-test scores compared to the control group.

4.2 Paired-Samples t Test

Table 2

Group	Mean Difference	T	df	p
Experimental	16.20	14.87	29	< .001
Contro	4.40	3.62	29	.001

The experimental group demonstrated substantial improvement, whereas the control group showed only modest gains.

4.3 One-Way ANOVA

Table 3

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	p
--------	----	----	----	---	---

Between Groups	2163.24	1	2163.24	49.82	< .001
Within Groups	2516.60	58	43.39		
Total	4679.84				

The ANOVA confirms statistically significant differences in post-test performance between groups.

4.4 Mixed ANOVA

Table 4

Effect	F	df	p	Partial η^2
Time	112.45	1, 58	< .001	.66
Group	24.18	1, 58	< .001	.29
Time \times Group	89.73	1, 58	< .001	.61

The significant interaction effect indicates that the instructional method influenced performance improvement over time.

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that strategy-based instruction led to significantly greater gains in writing performance than traditional methods. The interaction effect demonstrates that improvement over time varied according to instructional approach.

These results are consistent with prior research highlighting the benefits of process-oriented and strategy-focused writing instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hyland, 2016). Strategy-based teaching facilitated active engagement in the writing process and supported development in organization, coherence, and overall text quality.

In the context of the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar branch, these results emphasize the limitations of grammar-centered instruction and underscore the pedagogical advantages of integrating strategy-based approaches in EFL writing curricula.

5. Conclusion

Strategy-based instruction proved to be more effective than traditional methods in enhancing university students' writing performance. The consistent improvement in the experimental group supports the adoption of strategy-focused pedagogical practices to develop higher-order writing skills. These findings provide evidence for the integration of strategy-based instruction into EFL curricula at the university level.

6.1 Pedagogical Implications

Explicit instruction in writing strategies should be integrated into EFL courses.

Process-oriented writing activities should be prioritized over purely grammar-focused instruction.

Teacher training programs should include professional development in strategy-based writing pedagogy.

6.2 Limitations

The study was conducted at a single university branch, which may limit generalizability. The intervention lasted only eight weeks, preventing assessment of long-term effects.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should include multiple institutions to increase generalizability and examine the long-term impact of strategy-based instruction. Additionally, research could focus on the effects of specific strategies, such as peer feedback or self-regulation, on different dimensions of writing.

6. References

- Ferris, D. R. (2003). *Response to student writing: Implications for second language students*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32(4), 365–387. <https://doi.org/10.2307/356600>
- Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools*. Alliance for Excellent Education.

- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2016). *Teaching and researching writing* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Liu, J., & Hansen, J. G. (2002). *Peer response in second language writing classrooms*. University of Michigan Press.
- Oxford, R. L. (2017). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Raimes, A. (1983). *Techniques in teaching writing*. Oxford University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wenden, A. (1998). Metacognitive knowledge and language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(4), 515–537. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/19.4.515>