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# WRITING STRATEGIES USED BY INDONESIAN HIGH AND LOW ACHIEVERS

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## Abstract

The objectives of current study were to determine the types of writing strategies used by the students and to describe the differences of writing strategies utilization between high and low achievers. This research was conducted at academic writing program, Language Training Center of Universitas Gadjah Mada. The subjects were three of high achievers and three of low achievers who had enrolled in the program. The study applied a qualitative method approach. Structured interview and open-ended questionnaire based on Cazrl and Petric writing strategies inventory were employed in collecting data. The result showed that all twenty writing strategies investigated in this research were employed by the subjects; secondly, high achievers employ writing strategies more frequently than those with low achievers. The implication of the study is that by understanding the writing strategies employment of the high and the low students to upgrade the students writing quality into a better writing.

**Keywords:** case study; English as a foreign language; qualitative; writing strategies.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

English has included as a subject 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 are important in increasing

learner's writing ability. Every learner has preferred writing strategies. 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 writing strategies are keys affecting writing quality. 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 of high and low achievers' writing strategies. Afterward, the result will be useful especially for those students with poor writing in order to produce a better result.

Thus, the researcher commit to conduct a research to investigate the type of writing strategies used by Indonesian graduate students and the differences between high and low achievers. Numerous data collecting techniques were done in collecting the required data. However the research questions of this research could be formulated as follow:

*1.1 What are the types of writing strategies used by the graduate students?*

*1.2 What are the differences of high and low achievers' writing strategies employment?*

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Definition of Writing Strategies**

There are scholars who contribute in defining writing strategies. Writing strategy is defined as the sequence in which a writer engages in planning, composing, revising and other writing related activities (Torrance et al., 2000 in Penuelaz, 2012, p. 83). In their opinion, writing strategies are sequence of activity instead of a single one. The sequence is also elaborated more into three different phases, those are planning, composing, and revising the writing. However, they also mention another related activity that is not clearly explained.

Furthermore, writing strategies are also defined as conscious decisions made by the writers to solve a writing problem. (Mu and Carrington, 2007, p. 2). Based on their opinion, in choosing what writing strategies that will be used the user are fully conscious. It means, it is the user plan whether or not they use a certain strategy. Moreover, they also explain the purpose of writing strategies usage, in which it aims to solve a writing problem.

Based on those scholars' definitions, the researcher synthesizes writing strategies definition into conscious behaviors and techniques employed by a writer to achieve a certain goal in a problem-solving activity in writing. Dealing to the term strategies, the researcher equally puts the term strategies with behaviors and techniques that are consciously used by the users. Therefore, regarding to the purpose of writing strategies implementation, the researcher states that it aims to solve a problem in the writing activity. Afterwards, that definition is the one that will be used in this research.

## 2.2 Petric and Czarl's writing strategies taxonomy (2003)

In their taxonomy, they categorize writing strategies into three main types of writing strategies. Those three types are before writing, when writing, and after writing strategies (Petric and Czarl, 2003, p. 210-211). Each of those three categories are broken-down into some more specific activities.

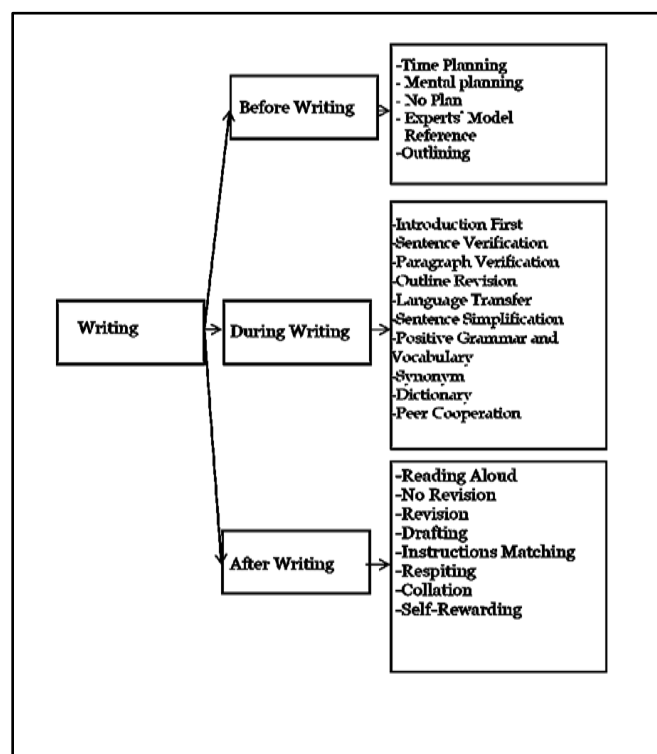


Figure 2.1 Writing Strategies Taxonomy based on Petric and Czarl (2003)

Previous studies related to the topic had been conducted. Raoofi Said et al.'s Research (2014) Their research is entitled "A Qualitative Study into L2 Writing Strategies of University Students." The objective were to investigate the writing strategies, secondly, the object was to find out the writing strategies of different level of proficiency of Malaysian ESL (English as a second language) college students. They

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. The first result is that the students found employing various writing strategies. Therefore, All participants are found doing pre-writing activities. Afterwards, the upper proficient student writers reported using more metacognitive strategies like organizing ideas and revising content than lower 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 50 intermediate and low proficiency ESL upper secondary school students. 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 find out significant differences in strategy use among the two.

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.

### **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design and Participants**

This research was categorized as a qualitative research. Qualitative research is research which focuses on understanding social phenomena from the human participants' view in natural settings and it does not started from 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.

Six students of academic writing class on Language Training Center in Universitas Gadjah Mada are the subjects of the research. 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.

#### **3.2 Data Collection Technique and Analysis**

In collecting the data, the writer had questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire and interview that were used in this research were developed based on Petric and Czarl (2003) writing strategies inventories.

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.

#### **IV. FINDINGS**

The results consisted of two parts which were: (1) types of writing strategy employed by the subjects, and (2) the differences of writing strategies utilization between high and low achievers. In this research the writing 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. From five times activity if writing, how many they used such strategies on average. If they used it once. It means the students seldom using the strategies, and thus they called as low users. Here are the table of oxford's scale.

*Table 4.1 Oxford's scale showing the frequency levels of strategy use*

Level	classification	Frequency usage
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, activities that were employed by the respondents 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 employed before writing strategies.

#### 1) Time Planning

Before the subjects of this research started writing, they planed the time allocation of the writing process toward the time allotment. Based on the analysis, the subjects made a time calculation in their mind instead of writing it on the paper.

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

(A/INT/01)

#### 2) Experts' Model Preference

The subjects read either e-book or printed book. The informationwritten 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/04)

### 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/05)

Below are the statements of them that they use during writing strategies.

#### 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 will 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/06)

#### 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, they checked the vocabulary, coherency of the sentences and grammar in the process of employing this strategy.

*I rarely make a sentence verification because i do not want to stop everytime i finish my sentence. When needed I check the vocabulary, coherency and grammar.*

(C/QTR/07)

#### 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 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 pharagraphto 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 employment of the strategy the participants checked if the content correctly written in the text. They revise the 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 dealtwith, during the writing process and then, directly opened up the dictionary to find the English term of those unfamiliar words to save times.

*When I found unfamiliar terms, sometimes i make a language transfer by writing it in my first language before I look up at dictionary.*

(C/QTR/10)

#### 6) Sentence Simplification

In using this activity, the subjects of this research make the complex sentences that were used in their writing more simple. The subjects simplified the sentences so it will be compact. Moreover, in employing this strategy the subjectsconsidered 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/011)

#### 7) Positive Grammar and Vocabulary

In carrying this activity out, the subjects without stoppingwrote down their text. They do not check the vocab and grammar written in their text. Even, the participants realized that their vocabulary and grammar were not that rich. Later, they checked their vocabulary and grammar previously used.



*Sometimes I check my grammar and vocabulary after completing my writing, eventhough I am still not sure about it (whether or not the writing is correct)*

(D/INT/12)

#### 8) Synonym

The subjects of this research did synonym 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/13)

#### 9) Dictionary

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

*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/14)

#### 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 asked friend near me to give feedback toward my writing. I can ask about the grammar and whether or not my writing is coherent.*

(C/QTR/15)

Below are the statements of them that they use after writing strategies.

#### 1) Reading Aloud

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

*I do not read it loud because reading it in a low voice is enough for me.*

(B/QTR/16)

## 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.

*Yes I do, I sometimes revise the vocab, often revise sentence structure and seldom revise the content.*

(C/INT/17)

## 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. Not only once when they write the draft first before having the fixed versions. Often, 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.

*Rarely that I do drafting. But yes when I am not feeling good my first writing will become the draft, next I can choose the content of my writing that can be put in my final version so I can write efficiently.*

(A/QTR/18)

## 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 looked at the counted of words and the margin appearing in Microsoft office platform.

*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/INT/19)

## 5) Respite

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 product, they left it. While not revising their works, they can do anything such as finishing another work; have a refreshing and taking some rest to get various perspectives.

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

(F/QTR/20)

#### 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 were not confident with theirs. To ensure the gap, they compared theirs to the others so they can see each others' ideas.

*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/21)

#### 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)

Table 4.2 Writing Strategy Usage Mean Score				
	Strategy			High
	Before	During	After	
N = 3				
Mean	3,4	3,08	2,67	Achiever
	Strategy			Low
	Before	During	After	
N = 3				
Mean	2,17	2,54	2,59	Achiever

Afterwards, as it seen on the table above, there are two differences between high and low achievers. First, it was revealed that the higher the number of the mean score is, the higher the frequency will be. Second, high achievers mostly employ strategies before writing activity while low achievers mostly employ strategies after writing activity.

## **V. DISCUSSION**

As presented in the findings that the subjects carried out three major. In the findings, it was identified that the subjects carried out time planning, expert' model reference, and outlining activities before starting writing. Moreover, during writing activity, they were identified to carry out introduction first, sentence verification, paragraph verification, outline revision, language transfer, sentence simplification, positive grammar and vocabulary, synonym, dictionary, and peer cooperation activities. In addition, after writing, they carried out reading aloud, revision, drafting, instructions matching, respiting, collation, and self-rewarding activities. In other words, twenty activities were carried out by the subjects.

In comparison, the result is in line to that of Maarof and Murat's (2014) as in their study, they also found out that the subjects employed twenty activities (including before, during, and after writing). There are three identical factors between the two studies which are assumed to drive the two studies into a convergent conclusion. It is noted that the subjects' chosen in the two studies come from the same ethnic, thus, the ethnicity factor is hypothesized playing its role to drive the two studies share a resembling result. The hypothesis supports to the research's finding in Nambiar's research (2009) as he stated that subjects' ethnicity influences to the use of strategies.

In addition, it is found that both studies pointed subjects who learn English as a second language, this similar characteristic is assumed to drive them into the same conclusion. The assumption that students' characteristics as a second learners fortifies the theory of Ellis (1994). Further, it was noted that the two studies were held in South East Asia countries (Indonesia and Malaysia). Since the locations where the studies held were close, it is assumed that geographical conditions contribute to lead the two studies into a correspondent result. The hypothesis that geographical factor contributes to the use of writing strategy supports the theory conducted by Ellis' (1994) and Nambiar's (2009) research finding.

Related to the dominant activities employed in all three writing stages (before, during, and after writing), the subjects dominantly carried out experts' model and outlining reference before writing, dictionary (bilingual) during writing, and instructions matching (after writing). Notwithstanding, the result does not correspond to that of Maarof and Murat's (2013) study's result, as the three activities were not dominantly carried out by their research subjects. As noted previously that there are similar characteristics of the two studies (geographical condition, ethnicity, and English L2 learners), however, the three shared factors assumed do not contribute to the dominant writing strategies usage. It is proved that a different group of students prefer different dominant writing strategies.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

In regard to the findings of the two research objectives, there are two arising conclusion which can be drawn. Firstly, three major strategies were employed by the subjects. "Before writing", the subjects carried out time planning, experts' model reference, and outlining activities. Afterwards, in the "during writing" activity, they carried out introduction first activity, sentence verification activity, paragraph verification activity, outline revision activity, language transfer activity, positive grammar and vocabulary activity, sentence simplification activity, synonym activity, dictionary activity, and peer cooperation activities activity. Then, in "after writing", they carried out reading aloud activity, revision activity, drafting activity, instructions matching activity, respiting activity, collation activity, and self-rewarding activity.

Secondly, in all three stages (before, during, and after writing) high achievers employed strategy more frequently than that of low achievers ones. Hence, high achievers are more active in using writing strategy than the poor writing mastery ones.

In conclusion, employing high frequency of writing strategies is highly recommended since it helps students to achieve a high quality writing outcome. The implications of the study could be improvements in learning and teaching of academic writing and newer teaching syllabuses that concern on the English language writing strategies in the future.

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