



The Effect of LLS Instruction on the Use of Writing Strategies in English by Foreign Postgraduate Students in India

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Abstract

This study intends to examine the impact of Strategy-Based Instruction on the strategy use by foreign post-graduate students, studying at two universities in India while writing in English. A total of one hundred students, who are non-native speakers of English, participated in this study. Fifty students in the experimental group received writing instruction through an online platform. The results were compared to their fifty counterparts in the control group. All the participants received an adapted version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Questionnaire and a Writing Questionnaire as the pretest and posttest. Descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests were run to analyze the data using SPSS. The findings showed that students who received language learning strategy instruction recorded higher scores than the students who did not receive any kind of instruction towards the skill of writing academic essays. The results revealed that students' use of strategies in writing increased noticeably after strategy instruction and implied that students can be trained to use language-learning strategies successfully in their writing through direct strategy instruction.

1. INTRODUCTION

A major change in the teaching and learning processes has been experienced for decades in the disciplines of language sciences and pedagogy. There was a significant move from a methodology relying dominantly on teachers to a more learner-oriented model to make the learning process more autonomous for students since the 1970s. Accordingly, several researchers have stressed how diverse learners can learn with the use of different language learning strategies (LLSs). Furthermore, research on language learning suggested that optimally employing language learning strategies enhances and develops how proficient a learner becomes in a second language (L2) or Foreign Language (FL) with regard to listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

For most foreign students, specifically post-graduates studying in India, academic writing is a daunting task as they must write academic essays and papers. This is due to the fact that writing is usually the last skill to be learned in most of the educational curricula and the least used tool for communication. These students are usually neither cognizant of the use of writing strategies nor of the extent to which they need to develop the use of such strategies to overcome the difficulties they face towards their academic progress. Thus, the present study is conducted to investigate the impact of instructing language learning strategies on the frequency and type of strategies used targeting the improvement of the writing proficiency of the foreign post-graduate students in English.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fifty years ago, research into language learning strategies arose, and several studies defined them differently and identified a number of factors affecting them. Rubin (1975), together with Stern, was the first to introduce the "learning strategies" term in second-language acquisition research. Learning strategies, according to Rubin, are the tactics or instruments that a student can employ to obtain information and achieve learning. (Rubin, 1975, p.43). O'Malley et al. (1985) led a pioneering investigation. Their understanding was grounded on earlier explanation of learning strategies as the procedures that aim to support how a learner acquires, stores retrieve, or produces language (Rigney, 1978).

Later, pioneering linguists and scholars also constructed distinct categories of language learning strategies. Some of these categories, such as Oxford's (1990) classification of strategies and O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) taxonomy, have been adopted by numerous studies in the second/foreign language learning field. In their taxonomies, Oxford divided learning strategies into six categories; cognitive, metacognitive, memory, compensatory, social, and affective strategies, While O'Malley and Chamot classified them into cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective categories.

The concept of strategy training was proposed by Oxford (1990) to provide learners with strategies to meet their own needs during the learning process. Furthermore, Oxford (1990) stressed the significance of teaching strategy in the contexts of ESL and EFL with regard to the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

A significant body of L2 research focused on writing strategies in the past few decades (Oxford, 1990; Whalen & Menard, 1995; Victori, 1999; Sasaki, 2002; Wong, 2005; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Roca de Larios et al., 2008; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012; Dockrell, Marshall, & Wyse, 2015; Yasuda, 2014). Writing strategies, according to research, are critical for the development of writing in a second language as they illustrate the nature of the writing process, enable writers to create effective writing models, and help to understand variations in L2 learners' writing performance.

In their study, Grenfell and Harris (2002) characterized writing strategies as purposeful acts and tactics which learners get trained on and adopt in their writing. Moreover, Gu (2007) tested how teaching strategy affected Singaporean pupils' learning autonomy for a duration of one academic term taking writing as their main focus. The data described the strategy training as an instrument that supported the learning process manifesting that with the conclusion that the experimented pupils' group has outpaced the control group with regard to their writing performance. Likewise, McMullen (2009) delved into the preferences in utilizing learning strategies by Saudi undergraduate students and investigated the ranking of each used category. The result of the intervention demonstrated that the instruction of strategies led the female students to use more strategies and considerably improved the Saudi students' writing output. It also reported that the most commonly employed strategies were metacognitive, whereas the least usually applied were memory strategies. Nguyen and Gu (2013) also revealed, in their study in Vietnam, that writing strategy training effectively facilitated strategy use and improved the performance in ESL writing.

Similarly, De Silva (2015) conducted an intervention study to assess how teaching writing strategy impacted the learning of 72 undergraduate learners in Sri Lanka. The findings showed that these strategies are learnable and that learners may be directed to practice them. Accordingly, following the strategy training, they utilized writing techniques more often, which in turn improved their writing skills considerably. In one of the latest studies, Mastan et al. (2017) emphasized the same conclusion in their study of ESL intermediate students' writing skills, suggesting that explicit writing strategy instruction positively affects writing performance and pedagogy.

One recent research has revealed that collaborative writing strategies significantly influence the writing skills of Indonesian 12-grade students after explicitly teaching

collaborative writing to experimental group students and employing free writing in control class (Maharani, 2019). The collaborative writing strategy was employed to assist students in planning, drafting, revising, and editing their final writing product.

In addition, several studies have examined the different types of strategies used during the writing process. Issacson and Cleason (1997) argued that the writing process can be evaluated by examining the strategies utilized by students at various stages of writing. He reported five steps in writing: planning, organizing, writing, editing, and revising. In Rao's (2007) study, the learners in a Chinese university employed a brainstorming strategy orally and noted forms to encourage them to think, develop and arrange their ideas. The Chinese learners in the experimental group reported higher scores in the post-test. In other words, the instruction of the brainstorming strategy was successful in developing the writing skills of the students.

Considering the online platforms, Alias et al. (2012) examined the efficacy of employing Facebook Notes in LLS instruction in a unique short experiment. Forty students from a Malaysian university participated in this study. According to the findings, the use of Facebook Notes boosted LLS use and, hence, enhanced learners' writing skills.

De Silva (2015) in her longitudinal intervention study divided writing strategies into five categories: planning, evaluation, formulating, resourcing and revision. She found that students were prone to use planning, formulation and resourcing strategies more significantly after the instruction, a finding similar to that found by Macaro (2001).

In contrast, Hsiao and Oxford (2002) highlighted that the actual number of strategies accessible or offered to learners to aid them in L2 writing as well as their categorisation can always be questioned.

Therefore, although L2 writing has been studied by a large number of researchers, there are still fewer studies that investigated the nature of the strategies used by second or foreign language learners in writing English. Moreover, relatively a few studies have examined writing strategies used by post-graduate students in the contexts of second language learning. The complexities of L2 writing and the crucial role of the writing skills in the academic contexts make it urging to examine to what degree post-graduate students employ strategies to develop their writing proficiency in English after strategy instruction and how their writing skills are linked to their use of writing strategies. Hence, this study addresses the following hypothesis and research questions.

2.1. HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

H₀: Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) instruction has no significant effect on the use of LLSs by the foreign postgraduate students at the University of Mysore and Jain University in India in writing in English.

2.2. Research Questions

1. Do the control and experimental groups utilise LLSs differently prior to LLSs instruction?
2. Do the control and experimental groups utilise LLSs differently after receiving LLSs instruction?
3. Which LLSs categories are the most and least frequently used by the foreign post-graduate students prior to LLSs instruction?
4. Which LLSs categories are the most and least frequently used by the foreign post-graduate students after receiving LLSs instruction?

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is an intervention study with an experimental two-group design of a pre-test and a post-test. The participants in this study were one hundred volunteering foreign post-graduate students of intermediate proficiency level studying at two universities in India, namely, Jain University and the University of Mysore. They have been learning English for

over five years. They were divided into a control group (N=50) and an experimental group (N=50). Prior to LLSs instruction, the students were pretested using a writing activity adopted from the International English Language Test (IELTS). The control group did not receive any special teaching. In contrast, the experimental group received explicit online instruction on various LLSs related to writing in English for three weeks. Using an online conferencing service, as physically meeting and training the students, was not feasible due to the Covid 19 lockdown restrictions in India. To assess the effects of the online training sessions, the groups were retested employing the writing activity utilized previously in the pretest.

A modified version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire (Oxford, 1990), a strategy checklist, and a writing activity questionnaire were used as instruments in the study. The SILL questionnaire was adjusted based on the Writing Strategy questionnaire by Petric and Czarl (2003), the Language Strategy Use Inventory by Cohen, Oxford, and Chi (2005), and the Writing Skill questionnaire by Mistar, Parlindungan, and Zuhairi (2014) to better address the need for a more thorough investigation into the writing strategies employed by the foreign postgraduate students. Moreover, the adapted questionnaire's reliability was examined, and it demonstrated a strong internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha value of .912 for the 54 items. Construct and content validity tests were also conducted to verify the validity of the questionnaire. The data of the survey questionnaires were collected through Google Forms. The obtained data were analyzed through SPSS using descriptive and inferential statistics by calculating the means and standard deviations and conducting t-tests.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following subsection presents the results of each research question one by one.

1. Do the control and experimental groups utilize LLSs differently prior to LLSs instruction?

To answer the first question, the means and standard deviations of the participants' LLS use scores are calculated

Table 1: Mean Scores of the Total Use of LLSs in Pre-test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error of Mean
Control group	50	3.0838	.30806	.04357
Experimental group	50	3.0040	.28384	.04014
Total	100	3.0439	.29741	.02974

A comparison of the mean scores by both the control group (M=3.083, SD=.0435) and the experimental group (M=3.004, SD=.040) in Table 1 reveals that there is no difference in the use of LLSs between the two groups. In other words, the use of language learning strategies by all the participants is similar before receiving any kind of training in the use of LLSs to improve their writing skills.

However, to validate the results, an independent t-test is carried out to investigate if any significant difference exists between the control and experimental groups in using the LLSs in writing in English prior to the instruction. The Levene's test of equality of variance in Table 2 shows that the F test (F=.836) is not significant (P=.363, $p > .05$) which means that there is no significant difference in the variability of the two groups. The t-value (1.347) is also not significant ($p=.181$, $p > .05$). Thus, there is no significant difference between the control group and the experimental group in the use of LLSs in the pre-test context. Furthermore, the foreign post-graduate students in India showed a medium use of the writing-related strategies in the pre-test context with a mean of overall strategy use is 3.04. This means that the researched

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groups apply language learning strategies whilst writing in a comparable manner prior to any type of direction or teaching and they use these strategies moderately.

Table 2: Independent Samples Test in the Total Use of LLSs in Pre-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Writing Strategy	Equal variances assumed	.836	.363	1.347	98	.181	.07981	.05924	.19737	.03775
	Equal variances not assumed			1.347	97.350	.181	.07981	.05924	.03776	.19738

As with regard to the strategy checklist, additional statistical analysis is performed to determine whether there are significant differences in the implementation of writing-related strategies reported by the control group and the experimental group ahead of starting the strategy instruction. Tables 3 and 4 summarize the findings.

Table 3: Mean Scores in the Total Use of LLSs of Checklist in Pre-test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Mean
Control group	50	1.4309	.11143	.01576	
Experimental group	50	1.4291	.11766	.01664	

Table 3 reveals that no variation is detected between the two groups when it comes to employing the writing strategies of the checklist at the beginning of the experiment. Likewise, in Table 4, the analysis of Levene's test of equality reveals that the F test (F=1.214) is not significant (p=.273, p>.05) and the obtained t-value (.079) is also not significant (p=.937, p>.05). This confirms the previous results that, given similar conditions, the students of the two groups display an equal likelihood to use the needed LLSs for their English writing output.

Table 4: Independent Samples Test of Overall Use of LLSs of Checklist in Pre-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Checklist Strategies	Equal variances assumed	1.214	.273	.079	98	.937	.00182	.02292	-.04366	.04730
	Equal variances not assumed			.079	97.712	.937	.00182	.02292	-.04366	.04730

2. Do the control and experimental groups utilize LLSs differently after receiving LLSs instruction?

The second research question was addressed by assessing the frequency of language learning strategies employed by the foreign postgraduate students in both groups in the post-test setting (see Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5: Mean Scores in the Total Use of LLSs in Post-test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error of Mean
Control group	50	3.0947	.30731	.04346
Experimental group	50	3.3058	.31799	.04497
Total	100	3.2002	.32870	.03287

Table 5 shows the means and the standard deviations of the two groups (control group M=3.09, SD=.307; experimental group M=3.30, SD=.317) reporting a difference in the use of LLSs after the treatment with higher use in favour of the experimental group.

However, though the figures in Table 6 reveal no variability between the groups (F=.043, P=.507, $p > .05$) in the Levene's test, the t value shows a significant difference (P=.001, $p < .05$) in the use of LLSs between the groups. It was also found that the mean of overall strategy grew to 3.20 in the post-test setting. Thus, it can be assumed that after LLSs instruction, students in the experimental group utilized more writing-related strategies than those in the control group which means that they benefited from the treatment provided and opted to include them more often in their learning process.

Table 6: Independent Samples Test in the Total Use of LLSs in Post-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower		Upper
Writing Strategies	Equal variances assumed	.443	.507	3.375	98	.001	.21107	.06254	.08696	.33518
	Equal variances not assumed			3.375	97.886	.001	.21107	.06254	.08696	.33518

As in the pre-test context, the strategy checklist analysis was conducted after completing the LLSs instruction. Table 7 and Table 8 show the means, standard deviations and t-values of independent samples t-test for the two groups.

Table 7: Mean Scores in the Total Use of LLSs of Checklist in Post-test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Control group	50	1.4273	.12217	.01728	
Checklist Strategies	Experimental group	50	1.7364	.10749	.01520

As observed in Table 7, the experimental group' strategy usage is greater than that of the control group post the instruction.

Table 8: Independent Samples Test of Overall Use of LLSs of Checklist in Post-test

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		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Checklist Strategies	Equal variances assumed	3.904	.051	13.431	98	.000	.30909	.02301	.26342	.35476
	Equal variances not assumed			13.431	96.435	.000	.30909	.02301	.26341	.35477

Moreover, statistics in Table 8 show that the F value (3.904) in Levene's test of equality of variance is not significant ($p=.051$, $p \leq .05$). However, the t value (13.431) is significant ($p=.000$, $p \leq .05$). Hence, it can be concluded that, after the LLSs instruction, there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups in the use of the writing strategies of the checklist. The results are found to corroborate prior conclusions that LLSs are taught to the foreign postgraduate learners which demonstrate that, as compared to the other group, the experimental group's students were more aware of the newly presented strategies and actively adopted them more regularly.

3. Which LLSs categories are the most and least frequently used by the foreign post-graduate students prior to LLSs instruction?

In response to the third research question, it was necessary to assess the frequency of the writing strategy categories and their ranking. As a result, Oxford's (1990) scale is employed for measuring the level of strategy utilization (high, medium and low). The scale ranges from 1 to 5 and can be summarised as follows:

1. High level: always or almost always used (4.5 – 5.0) and usually used (3.5- 4.4).
2. Medium level: sometimes used (2.5 – 3.4)
3. Low level: usually not used (1.5 – 2.4) and never or almost never used (1.0 – 1).

The data in Table 9 lists the descriptive statistics of the seven LLSs categories employed to improve the writing skills of the foreign post-graduate students in the pre-test setting. These categories are based on those used by Oxford (1990) and De Silva (2015). As such, Resourcing strategy topped the list as the most commonly utilised strategy (M=3.40, SD=.33) while Help-seeking and affective strategy came last in the ranking (M=2.26, SD=.53). Then Self-initiation and vocabulary management strategy comes second in the list (M=3.29, SD=.21), followed by Revising (M=3.21, SD=.48), Monitoring and evaluation (M=3.18, SD=.58), Brainstorming and planning (M=3.02, SD=.49), and Transfer (M=2.91, SD=.53). In other words, before LLSs instruction, all of the strategy categories adopted by students were placed within the medium level of use with the exception of help-seeking and affective strategies, which were utilized at a low frequency level. Resourcing strategies were identified as the most frequently used by foreign postgraduate students among the seven categories of language learning strategies while affective strategies ranked last.

Table 9: Frequency of LLSs use in Pre-test

Strategy	N	Mean	Rank	Strategy use	Std. Deviation
Resourcing	100	3.4033	1	Medium level	.33264
Self-initiation & vocabulary management	100	3.2970	2	Medium level	.21577
Revising	100	3.2175	3	Medium level	.48122

Monitoring & evaluation	100	3.1800	4	Medium level	.58179
Brainstorming & planning	100	3.0277	5	Medium level	.49206
Transfer	100	2.9160	6	Medium level	.53119
Help-seeking & affective	100	2.2660	7	Low level	.53771
Valid N (listwise)	100				

4. Which LLSs categories are the most and least frequently used by the foreign post-graduate students after receiving LLSs instruction?

Table 10: Frequency of LLSs Use in Post-test

Strategies	N	Mean	Rank	Strategy use	Std. Deviation
Resourcing	100	3.5233	1	High level	.41372
Revising	100	3.4830	2	High level	.44269
Self-initiation & vocabulary management	100	3.3500	3	Medium level	.52555
Brainstorming & planning	100	3.2575	4	Medium level	.62911
Monitoring & evaluation	100	3.1608	5	Medium level	.47167
Transfer	100	2.9680	6	Medium level	.50670
Help-seeking & affective	100	2.65	7	Medium level	.62750
Valid N (listwise)	100				

The figures in Table 10 show that, after the LLSs instruction sessions, Resourcing is still the most used category and Help-seeking and affective is the least used strategy. However, there is an increase in using Resourcing and Help-seeking and affective strategies as their mean score are higher than earlier (resourcing $M=3.52$, $SD=.41$, help-seeking and affective $M=2.65$, $SD=.62$). As presented in the table, Revising came second ($M=3.48$, $SD=.44$) to be followed by Self-initiation and vocabulary management ($M=3.35$, $SD=.52$), Brainstorming and planning ($M=3.25$, $SD=.62$), Monitoring and evaluation, ($M=3.16$, $SD=.47$), and Transfer ($M=2.65$, $SD=.62$). It is evident that the foreign post-graduate students used more strategies in all categories while writing after the instruction of the writing-related strategies. The average use was high in both resourcing and revising and medium in the other categories indicating that the participants had an increased tendency to utilize the strategies after being taught to them.

Accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that the instructions of LLSs have a significant impact on the use of LLSs by the foreign post-graduate students while writing in English.

5. DISCUSSION

According to the findings, the LLSs instruction, which foreign post-graduate candidates were engaged in, promoted the use of the writing strategies in English and improved their scores in the writing activity questionnaire. The t-tests showed that though both the groups reported similar rates of using the LLSs before the instruction, a significant difference was demonstrated after the instruction sessions were conducted. These findings show that the intervention encouraged the experimental group students to use strategy categories more regularly and in a systematic way to meet the stated writing goals.

The performance of the participants after the instruction treatment was superior to that of the control group in terms of the writing activity questionnaire. The results of this

investigation are congruent with McMullen (2009), Gu (2007), and Rao (2007), Nguyen and Gu (2013), De Silva (2015) and Mastan et al. (2017) in terms of higher scores in writing in post-test contexts. All of these studies concluded that conducting strategy instruction contributed to raising strategy use in writing tasks. These findings showed that students could be instructed to use writing strategies effectively and that after receiving strategy training, their use of writing strategies and writing performance both improved significantly. In other words, intentional writing strategy instruction aids in the advancement of writing skills, resulting in better writing performance and pedagogy.

It was also found that Resourcing strategy ranked first pursued by Revising, Self-initiation and vocabulary management, Brainstorming and Planning, Monitoring and evaluation, and Help-seeking and affective strategies. This finding is similar to that of the studies by Macaro (2001) and De Silva (2014) who revealed that the learners became more dependent on resourcing strategies in the post-test settings. This reflects, in one way, the results of Williams and Burden (2000) that learners 'have various resources at their disposal and make use of them in different ways.' (p. 144). The high frequency of various resources especially might be also attributed to the online mode of instruction which was conducted by the researcher. Thus, the involved students might have had smoother access to online resources and to the fact that technology influences learning strategies nowadays.

Moreover, affective strategies were the least ranked strategies among all the categories. This demonstrates the students' lack of proclivity to use their emotions as an influential element which is also consistent with McMullen (2009) and Oxford (1990). One of the probable causes for the participants' low use of affective strategies in this investigation could be connected to their level of English mastery. According to Bremner (1998), affective strategies are tendencies that are present among low-proficiency learners to help them feel more secure in using the new language. As a result, it might be claimed that as learners' proficiency improves, the utilisation of affective strategies reduces. Because the study's subjects were postgraduate students, it's safe to presume that they didn't have to utilise these strategies very often.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that foreign post-graduate students in two universities in India are medium users of writing strategies in writing Essays in English. The LLSs instruction promoted the overall use of strategies, and the students became more autonomous in developing their writing. In addition, they showed their disposition to employ resourcing strategies more than the other categories and reluctance to use affective strategies in the writing process. The study also suggests that the instruction of LLSs can improve both the strategy use and the writing performance of foreign post-graduate students when writing in English. Learners will better be prepared to write academic essays focusing on various categories of strategy. Thus, explicit instructions in the educational systems should be given greater time and practice from the early stages of English learning. Developing the writing skill of postgraduate students should be the objective of all ESL/EFL programs to assist them in overcoming difficulties during their academic achievements. For the success of instructors and students, further empirical studies in this domain are necessary in order to lay robust conceptual and methodological foundations in the field of language pedagogy.

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