

L2 Writing Strategies Used by EFL Graduate Students

Syaadiah Arifin*

University of Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA (UHAMKA), Jakarta, Indonesia

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This study investigates the writing strategies and the predominantly strategies used by four Indonesian graduate students when writing in L2 (English). They were divided into 2 groups, skilled and less skilled writers, to examine what strategies they applied when writing. The main instrument of this study is Think Aloud Protocols (TAPs). The analysis of data collected discovered some findings: (1) both skilled and less skilled writers used varied strategies. However, the frequency of using each strategy was different. Skilled writers used each strategy in high frequency. On the other hand, less skilled writers only used each strategy in low frequency, while skilled writers understand the recursive nature of writing. (2) Skilled writers used reading and rereading strategies in high frequency for several purposes: revising and editing the text, developing ideas, and getting new ideas, while less skilled writers rarely used those strategies. They wrote whatever ideas came into their mind, and reread the text once in a while. These findings suggest that effective writing strategies should be introduced explicitly when student writers have already mastered the foundation of writing. Unfortunately, they are seldom guided on the use of writing strategies in the process of their writing. In fact, effective writing strategies and the frequency of using each strategy could help them become good writers and influence the quality of their writing. Based on these findings some suggestions are discussed.

Keywords: L2 writing strategies, Think aloud Protocols (TAPs), skilled and less skilled writers.

Studi ini meneliti strategi penulisan dan strategi yang paling sering digunakan oleh empat mahasiswa pascasarjana Indonesia saat menulis dalam bahasa Inggris (L2). Partisipan dalam penelitian ini dibagi dalam 2 kelompok, penulis terampil dan kurang terampil, untuk meneliti strategi apa yang mereka terapkan saat menulis. Instrumen utama penelitian ini adalah Think Aloud Protocols (TAPs). Analisis data yang dikumpulkan menemukan beberapa hasil: (1) Masiswa, baik penulis yang terampil dan kurang terampil, menggunakan beragam strategi. Namun, frekuensi penggunaan masing-masing strategi berbeda. Penulis terampil menggunakan beberapa strategi dengan frekuensi tinggi terutama strategy membaca dan pembacaan ulang. Sementara

* Corresponding author, email: diaharifin@yahoo.com

itu penulis yang kurang terampil hanya menggunakan setiap strategi dalam frekuensi yang rendah, sedangkan penulis terampil memahami menulis itu bersifat rekursif. (2) Penulis terampil menggunakan strategi membaca dan pembacaan ulang dengan frekuensi tinggi untuk beberapa tujuan: merevisi, mengedit teks, mengembangkan gagasan, dan mendapatkan gagasan baru. Di sisi lain, penulis kurang terampil jarang menggunakan strategi tersebut. Mereka menulis gagasan apa pun yang masuk ke dalam pikiran mereka, dan hanya membaca ulang teks itu sesekali. Penemuan ini menyarankan agar penggunaan strategi yang efektif dalam menulis sudah diperkenalkan dari awal secara explicit oleh guru mereka setelah para siswa memahami dasar penulisan. Sayangnya, mereka jarang dipandu dalam menggunakan strategi penulisan dalam menulis. Padahal, Strategi penulisan yang efektif dan frekwensi penggunaan setiap strategi dapat membantu mereka menjadi penulis yang baik serta mempengaruhi kualitas penulisan. Berdasarkan dari penemuan-penemuan ini ada beberapa saran yang akan didiskusikan.

INTRODUCTION

Whether one writes in his or her native language (L1) or in a ‘learned language’ (L2), writing is considered a laborious cognitive activity, requiring a number of strategies (Nunan, 1989; Richards, 1990). Writing in a second language (L2) is even more complex and challenging than writing in one’s native language (Bailey, 2003). This may be in part because writing in L2 requires proficiency in a number of different areas such as spelling, vocabulary, usage, and grammar. Writing is not an easy task as it needs hard work, lengthy steps, sufficient time, and practices. Another difficulty of writing in L2 is that L2 writers tend to have different command of vocabulary compared to that possessed by most L1 writers (Silva & Matsuda, 2001).

In spite of its complexity, writing is a dynamic process (Blanchard & Root, 2004; Flower & Hayes, 1980, 1981; Harmer, 2007; Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Writers have to go through some stages in order to produce a piece of writing as a final form. To explain the dynamic nature of writing, Flower and Hayes (1980, 1981) and Blanchard and Root (2004) use the term ‘stage’, while the terms ‘element’ and ‘stage’ are used interchangeably by Harmer (2007). On the other hand, Richards and Schmidt (2002) do not use a specific term. According to Flower and Hayes (1980), there are three stages of writing process: planning, translating, and reviewing. Similarly, Blanchard and Root (2004) propose that writing consists of three stages: pre-writing, writing, and revising & editing. Even though some researchers use various terms and patterns to describe the writing process, the core elements are similar. They can be summed up as prewriting (planning), writing or translating (drafting), reviewing (revising and editing), and post writing (final draft).

Within each stage, there are some writing strategies used by writers to manage the complexity of orchestrating the writing processes. Writing strategies are individual strategies consciously adopted by writers for the purpose of solving problems or reaching a goal during the writing process (Cornaire & Raymond as cited in Beare, 2000; Kieft, Rijlaarsdam, & Berg, 2006; Shapira & Lazarowitz, 2005). Writers have respective strategies to overcome their problems during writing processes. For instance, some writers read/reread an assigned topic several times in order to analyze and understand the demand of the writing task. In the writing stage, some writers read and reread what they have written back and forth for several purposes, such as deciding how they should connect their written text portion to what they are going to write next and joining the current ideas with the new ones. However, others do not employ

these strategies too often. They might also utilize their L1 when writing in L2 for such different purposes as, generating ideas and planning. However, some writers never use this strategy. Such activities as reading/rereading, pausing, and adopting L1 while writing in L2 are parts of writing strategies. This current study focuses on writing strategies used by higher education students when writing argumentative essays.

There were 22 student writers participating in this study. All of them had to do preliminary academic writing tests in English in order to be selected. Four students were selected, and they were divided into two groups, skilled and less skilled writers. Both groups exhibited a good command of grammar, used appropriate and varied vocabulary, and wrote a detailed essay. However, skilled writers could write meaningfully and were able to express their ideas and convey their intended meanings to readers clearly, while less skilled writers' writing content was still unclear and shallow. I have to highlight that all the participants in this study have sufficient competence in English. The difference between them was the quality of their writings.

There have been a number of studies investigating the writing strategies of skilled and less-skilled native and non-native speakers of English. Most of the participants on the previous studies used the terms less skilled writers to refer to the writers who lack competence in English (Alharthi, 2012; El-Aswad, 2002; Wong, 2005; Wang, 2004). However, there has been little research in investigating the strategies used by student writers who have adequate English competence especially in Indonesian context. This study attempts to fill in the gap by exploring their writing strategies.

There has been a significant development in exploring cognitive processing on L1 writing model. These studies were conducted by some L1 writing researchers (e.g. Flower & Hayes, 1980, 1981; Perl, 1980; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986). Some research on L1 writing process which has frequently been cited is Flower and Hayes' (1980, 1981) cognitive model, and Bereiter and Scardarmalia's (1987) cognitive model; their models directly shaped the writing research on L2 learners. Flower and Hayes' (1980, 1981) cognitive model represents the actual writers' mental behaviour while they are writing. Another writing process is proposed by Bereiter and Scardarmalia (1987); there are two processes in their model: a 'knowledge telling' and a 'knowledge transforming'. Their model explains why writers who have different competence write in such a different manner.

Led by the studies on L1 writing processes, some researchers have also investigated different characteristics of L2 writing since the beginning of 1980s. L2 writing is a complex process of discovery which involves planning, reading/rereading the texts, revision, and final editing. L2 writing is different from L1 writing as L2 writers have more than one language at their disposal (Wang & Wen, 2002). They also claim that the use of L1 when writing in L2 is a common strategy among L2 writers. The present studies on L2 writing process have also generated various controversial issues in L2 writing research. Some researchers discovered some similarities between L1 and L2 writing (Berman, 1994; Cumming, 1989; Matsumoto, 1995; Wang & Wen, 2002) as well as some differences Silva (1993). According to Silva (1993), L2 writing is more complex than L1 writing and is not as effective as L1 writing. As writers employ very similar individual strategies when writing in L1 and L2; there might be a transfer of strategies from L1 to L2 (Berman, 1994; Matsumoto, 1995).

As mentioned, the writing strategies (e.g. planning, reading/rereading, rehearsing, using dictionary) that students use in the writing process undoubtedly play an important role in both L1 and L2 writing. According to Hsiao and Oxford (2002), writing and producing language need more writing strategies. To further investigate this issue, the following research questions are posed in the study: (1) What are the writing strategies used by skilled and less-skilled student writers when writing in L2 (English)? and (2) What writing strategies are predominantly used by the students when writing in L2?

METHODS

This study applies a multi-case study methodology. The purpose of the study is to investigate the L2 writing strategies of four graduate students. The data were gathered using four different instruments: think-aloud protocols (TAPs), retrospective interviews, class observation, and semi-structured interviews. In L1 and L2 writing research, the ‘think-aloud’ method is one of the most commonly used techniques; it has been extensively used by researchers to examine the role of strategies in writing. The direct observation was conducted at the time when the subjects were writing aloud their writing tasks. This activity was done in order to observe how the subject behaved, what they did when they came across any difficulty, what strategies they adopted to solve their writing problems, where they paused, repeated the words, used their L1 while writing L2, revised, rehearsed, or reread. All the activities that they did were noted down for later use. To triangulate the protocol data, I administered the retrospective interview on the same day right after the writing session was over to enhance the reliability of the data (Ericsson & Simon, 1984). I asked some questions based on the information I got from the direct observation. In this activity, I also conducted some interviews. I have prepared some questions to direct the interview according to a general idea of what I want to get from the interviewees, and what should come out from the interview.

The participants of this study were student writers. They were carefully chosen through purposeful sampling. Merriam (1998) emphasizes that “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned. Another term for purposeful sampling is ‘purposive sampling’.

In this study, I purposefully selected a small group of subjects for in-depth case studies (two females and two males). The four participants are Fara, Ardy, Dinna, and Ryan (all pseudo names) selected out of 22 candidates. All the participants are English teachers. Some of them, except Ardy, are lecturers teaching at private universities. The students have over ten years of experience studying English as L2 in an Indonesian context. At the time of the research, they were enrolled in their first semester. The subjects were classified into two groups: skilled and less-skilled writers. Skilled writers referred to the writers who could write well and meaningfully while less skilled writers had to survive with the quality of their writing. I chose the participants who were competent in English purposely to explore why some students outperform other students when writing.

When applying the think aloud protocol method, the writers verbalized everything coming into their mind during the writing processes. The verbalizations were recorded and transcribed, then analyzed. The data gathered from the verbalizations and the text produced by the writers are called think aloud protocols. By analyzing the protocols, researchers are able to

determine the strategies used by the writers while performing specific tasks (Latif, 2008). To analyze the protocols generated by writers, coding schemes/systems/taxonomies were employed. In this research, I use mainly a modified version of Flower and Hayes' (1980, 1981) coding scheme as my framework. I did not replicate their model as their model could not accommodate all the strategies that my participants used when I conducted my pilot study. To overcome this problem, I also adopted some writing strategies from Wenden's (1991), Riazi's (1997), Oxford's (1990), Perl's (1979; 1984), and Wong's (2005) models.

Table 1. L2 coding scheme of the present study

Planning/ Pre-writing	Translating/ drafting	Reviewing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Planning (Pl) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global planning (Plg) Local planning (Pll) ❖ Structuring (Sc) ❖ Organizing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizing the paragraph (Op) ❖ Goal Setting : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting content goals (Scg) Formatting position (Fp) ❖ Generating Ideas/ developing the content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading/rereading the assigned topic/ the prompt (Rt) • Reading/ rereading the sentences (Rd) • Brainstorming (Br) • Note-taking (Nt) • Rehearsing (Rh) • Repeating the words (Re) ❖ Translating from L2 to L1 (Tr) ❖ Using dictionary (Dc) ❖ Pausing (P) ❖ Commenting (C) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Generating ideas / developing the content : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading/rereading the assigned topic/ the prompt (Rt) • Reading/rereading the sentence/s (Rd) • Rehearsing (Rh) • Repeating the words/ chunks (Re) ❖ Language switching (Ls) ❖ Summarizing (Sm) ❖ Translating from L2 to L1 (Tr) ❖ Using dictionary (Dc) ❖ Speaking-Writing (Sw) ❖ Pausing (P) ❖ Commenting (C) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Evaluating the text (Ev): scanning & reading the paragraphs ❖ Revising the text (Rv): making changes to the text that affect meaning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a adding (Rva) - d deletion (Rvd) - sub substitution (Rvs) - re-organization (Rvr) - word choice (Rvc) - Editing (Ed): making changes to the text that do not effect meaning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - addition (Ea) - deletion of syntactic markers such as plural endings and articles (Eds) - punctuation (Ep) - spelling error (Esp) - syntactical/ grammar (Eg)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are 20 the strategies used by student writers when writing in L2:

1. Speaking while writing (Sw): This behavior is probably a function of composing aloud. This strategy refers to periods when writers seem to be dictating to themselves. In other words, what they are saying is being written almost at the time they are saying it.

2. Planning (Plg, Pll): Planning means anything writers do before they get involved in actual writing. (Perl, 1981). Planning, according to Hayes and Flower (1983) is a very broad activity that includes not only generating ideas and content, organizing, and setting up goals, but also includes deciding on the meaning, on what part of that meaning the writer will convey to an audience, and choosing rhetorical strategies. Planning has many types. Some researchers (e.g. Sasaki, 2000; Victory, 1995) list its subcategories such as global planning, local planning, organizing planning, and thematic planning and so on. In this study, I just listed planning as one of the strategies which consisted of local planning and global planning so as to avoid the contradiction of classifications between Victory and Sasaki. Local planning refers to ‘what to write next’, whereas global planning indicates ‘detailed planning of overall organization’).

3. Reading/rereading the assigned topic (Rt): The purpose of this strategy is to analyze the demands of the writing topic. After identifying its problems, writers tend immediately to proceed to note down the points for the categories identified.

4. Reading and rereading what have been written (Rd): There are some purposes of employing this strategy. The first purpose is reading/rereading within a sentence (one sentence): writers do this activity when they are waiting new ideas to appear in their mind. In other word, they try to develop the content of their writing. Writers mostly read/reread within a sentence to generate ideas. The next, reading/rereading a sentence or between sentences: Writers read a sentence or several sentences to decide how they should connect their text with what they are going to write next. Moreover, this behavior is also to maintain the coherence and the flow between the current sentence and the next sentence. Another purpose is that this strategy also helps writers decide on the appropriate syntax and lexis for the next sentence. Reading and rereading the paragraph were applied when writers were not sure if they were on task, when they ran out of ideas or when they transited from one writing episode to the next.

5. Rehearsing (Rh): Rehearsing refers to whatever writers do to develop what they want to say. When rehearsing, writers attempted to generate or retrieve information on the topic as well as develop these ideas. At other times, rehearsal of a particular idea does lead to writing. When this occurs during drafting, the writer often starts speaking the words while writing them (Rh →Sw). Rehearsal is also used by writers when considering a revision or trying to decide on words that best express their meaning before committing them to paper. It is also used to help them find or decide on the particular form of the word they want to use.

6. Pausing (P): In the current study, this strategy was counted if it lasted more than five seconds. From the retrospective interview, writers used this strategy because of several reasons: the first, when the idea had been previously rehearsed or recorded in their notes in great detail, there was little need to pause to reformulate it. The next, when they read/reread the previous sentences, they paused a while to reformulate the idea. Writers paused when they needed to take a rest a while after writing long sentences. The third is, when it was related to the complexity of the idea to be expressed. The last, when they wanted to plan what to do next.

7. Commenting (Cm): This strategy refers to any statements which writers talk about themselves, the room they are in, their state of mind, their perception of the topic, etc. This strategy is different from planning as it does not refer to what the writer will do next; it is distinguished from rehearsing in that it does not develop ideas on the topic.

8. Organizing paragraph (Op): Writers organize what they are going to write in the first, second, etc. paragraph. They use this strategy mainly as a planning strategy.

9. Setting content goal (Scg): When planning their essay, writers organize their paragraph, and decide the parts they want to include, and which part should be omitted. Just like organizing paragraph, this strategy mainly used as a planning strategy.

10. Structuring/ ordering the idea (Sc): Given the parts the writer has decided to include, what order should the parts be put in? should they be described from the most to least important, from largest to smallest, or how?

11. Repeating the words/ chunks (Re): Writers often repeat the last words or phrases when writing or rehearsing before they continue writing. From the direct observation and in-depth interview, I knew whether participants in my study repeated or read the words. Based on their answer if the words/phrases were short they would repeat it. Within sentences, repetition serves two functions: firstly, keeping the writer's thoughts at the same pace as his/her writing, and secondly, assisting the writer in finding the ideas or the means for their expression to complete the sentence. Another purpose is to engage in a mental search for words and ideas the writers wanted to write next.

12. Formatting the position/ taking stance (Fp): Writers have to take their stance after reading the topic when writing an argumentative essay. They have to decide whether to agree or disagree with the statement. Usually after taking their stance, they plan what to write next.

13. Using dictionary (Dc): This strategy refers to the use of a dictionary to look up or confirm lexicon, grammatical, semantic or spelling doubts, or to look for alternatives words (synonyms, or antonyms).

14. Translating from English to Indonesian (Tr): This strategy is adopted when writers lose or forget words in English or encounter difficulty in structuring the available lexical items into a coherent meaningful sentence.

15. Note taking (Nt): This strategy is adopted by writers when writing down pieces of information briefly in a systematic way in the planning stage.

16. Brainstorming (Br): Brainstorming or listing, is a process of generating some information or ideas within a short time in the pre-writing or planning stage.

17. Summarizing (Sm): This strategy summarizes what have just been written (in terms of content or of rhetoric).

18. Evaluating (Ev): This strategy evaluates the text which has been produced so far. It can be at word, sentence, or text level.

19. Revision (Rv): This strategy refers to any changes that writers make in their texts. These changes affect meaning of the text.

20. Editing (Ed): Editing refers to any minor changes and surface changes that writers make. Editing is different from revising. When revising, writers make changes in the text which result in altered meaning. However, when editing, writers make changes in the text which do not change the meaning.

The table below shows the strategies used by student writers in each stage when writing in L2.

Table2. Writing strategies used by each writers when writing in L2 (English)

Fara	Ardy	Dinna	Ryan
L2 (455 words=19 sentences)	L2 (415 words =18 sentences)	L2 (685 words= 33 sentences)	L2 (523 words= 26 sentences)
Planning (5 minutes) - Reading the assigned topic (Rt) - Planning globally (Plg) - Organizing the paragraph (Op) - Setting content goal(Scg) - Brainstorming (Br) - Rehearsing (Rh) - Repeating (Re) - Pausing (P) - Note-taking (Nt)	Planning (8 minutes) - Reading the assigned topic (Rt) - Rehearsing (Rh) - Formatting position (Fp) - Planning globally (Plg) - Organizing the paragraph (Op) - Brainstorming (Br) - Setting content goal(Scg) - Reading/ rereading (Rd) - Note-taking (Nt)	Planning (2 minutes) -Reading the assigned topic (Rt) -Planning globally (Plg) -Formatting position (Fp) -Setting content goal (Scg) -Organizing the paragraph (Op) -Note taking (Nt) -Brainstorming (Br) -Translating (Tr)	Planning
Translating (46 minutes) - Speaking the words as they are written (Sw) - Planning locally (Pll) - Formatting position (Fp)	Translating (40 minutes) - Reading the assigned topic (Rt) - Planning locally (Pll) - Speaking the words	Translating (38 minutes) - Reading the assigned topic (Rt) - Formatting position (Fp) - Pausing (P) - Translating (Tr) - Structuring (Sc)	Translating (40 minutes) - Reading the assigned topic (Rt) - Formatting position (Fp) - Planning (Plg) - Rehearsing (Rh) - Summarizing(S)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading rereading(Rd) - Repeating (Re) - Rehearsing (Rh) - Summarizing (Sm) - Editing, deletion (Ed) - Structuring (Sc) - Pausing (P) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> as they are written (Sw) - Formatting position (Fp) - Reading/ rereading(Rd) - Repeating (Re) - Rehearsing (Rh) - Summarizing (Sm) - Editing, deletion (Eds) - Revision (Rva) - Structuring (Sc) - Pausing (P) - Using dictionary (Dc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using dictionary (Dc) - Speaking the words as they are written (Sw) - Summarizing (Sm) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setting the content goal (Scg) - Brainstorming (Br) - Organizing the paragraph (Op) - Structuring (Sc) - Pausing (P) - Repeating (Re) - Commenting (Cm) - Using dictionary (Dc) - Speaking the words as they are written (Sw)
<p>Reviewing (14 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating/ reading the text - Editing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deletion (Eds) - Addition (Ea) - Grammatical/ syntactical (Eg) - Revising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adding words, phrases (Rva) - substituting one phrase or clause for another (Rvs) - Changing the organization of information in the text by moving sentences/ words (Rvr) - Deletion one phrase or clause (Rvd) 	<p>Reviewing (9 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating/ reading the text(Ev) <p>Editing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Deletion (Eds) -Addition (Ea) <p>Revising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adding words, phrases (Rva) 	<p>Reviewing (4 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating/ reading the text(Ev) <p>-Editing</p> <p>Addition (Eds)</p>	<p>Reviewing (5minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating/ reading the text(Ev) - Editing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Addition (Ea)
<p>Post- writing (14 minutes) Rewrite the draft silently</p>	<p>Post –writing (15 minutes) Rewrite the draft silently</p>	<p>Post-writing (14 minutes) Rewrite the first draft silently</p>	<p>Post-writing(14 minutes) Rewrite the first draft silently</p>

The table below illustrates the most commonly used individual writing strategies by Fara, Ardy, Dina and Ryan in L2 (English) during the writing processes.

Table 3. The frequency of using each writing strategy when writing in L2 (English)

FARA		ARDY		DINA		RYAN	
Writing strategies (L2)	Frequency (L2)	Writing strategies (L2)	Frequency (L2)	Writing strategies (L2)	Frequency (L2)	Writing strategies (L2)	Frequency (L2)
Sw	45	Sw	35	Sw	35	Sw	27
Rd	30	Rd	26	Rd	6	Rd	2
Re	13	Re	7	Re	-	Re	3
Nt	5	Nt	11	Nt	2	Nt	1
Br	1	Br	-	Br	1	Br	-
Rh	12	Rh	8	Rh	0	Rh	12
P	7	P	2	P	6	P	5
Revision Rva 4 Rvr 2	6	Revision Rva	4	Revision -	-	Revision	
Editing Eds 7 Ea 3 Eg 2	12	Editing Eds 5 Ea3	9	Editing Eds2	2	Editing Eds 2 Ea 2	4
Op	4	Op	3	Op	2	Op	4
Ev	2	Ev	2	Ev	1	Ev	1
Sc	6	Sc	3	Sc	-	Sc	4
Scg	4	Scg	3	Scg	2	Scg	
Planning Plg 1 Pll 5	6	Planning Plg 1 Pll 3	4	Planning Plg 1	1	Planning Pll	2
Fp	1	Fp	1	Fp	1	Fp	
Cm	2	Cm	4	Cm	3	Cm	4
Sm	1	Sm	1	Sm	1	Sm	1
Rt	2	Rt	3	Rt	1	Rt	1
Dc	0	Dc	1	Dc	3	Dc	1

Planning stage

At this stage, all writers except Ryan planned their essay before they started writing their essays. They all devoted time to planning the content and organization of their essays. In the case of Ryan, he did not write any outline at the planning stage. However, he did mental outlining as soon as he got the topic. The case of Ryan was actually similar to the findings of El-Aswad's (2002) study in which some of his respondents did mental planning while writing in Arabic and English. Therefore, it can be argued that planning does not always take place in the planning stage as proposed by some researchers (Flower & Hayes, 1980, 1981; Hammer, 1997; Cherry, Jolliffe, and Skinner at al., 1985). It could possibly take place in the writing stage.

As soon as the writers got the assigned topic, they read it. They engaged in mental activity to formulate their thoughts what to write next; they tried to analyze the demands of the writing topic. After identifying its problems, they tended directly to continue noting down the points for the categories identified and took their stance. They generated and developed their ideas using different strategies. Both skilled and less skilled writers, except Dinna, mainly

relied on reading/rereading, rehearsing, and repeating strategies to generate ideas (see Tables 3). Dinna had different ways in generating and developing her ideas. She adopted ‘knowledge telling’ model proposed by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987). She wrote whatever ideas coming into her mind, and read the last sentence fast.

Skilled writers planned their writing extensively. This finding is in line with the finding of Victori (2005). She summarized her findings that skilled writers spent more time on planning and thinking than less- skilled ones did. In this study, skilled writers planned globally before writing in both L1 and L2. They always organized their essay extensively. Skilled writers realized the importance of planning strategies to create a good piece of writing. In the retrospective interview, they stated that the planning stage was very helpful in guiding them during the writing process. They also added that they always planned their writing extensively while writing their writing assignments. The other less- skilled writers, Dinna, spent a little time on planning her essay. Even though she organized her essay what to write next in global, she only noted down few key points.

Translating stage

The next stage is the translating/writing stage. All student writers, particularly skilled writers, adopted a variety of strategies. However, skilled writers adopted highly recursive style of writing compared to less-skilled writers (see Table 3). It made skilled writers’ writings highly recursive. They read/reread their text back and forth, repeated the words/chunks, and rehearsed to get ideas.

With regard to less-skilled writers, their writings tend to be less recursive than those of skilled writers as the frequency of their writings strategies was low. One possible reason why Dinna adopted linear style of writing was her writing behavior resembled that of knowledge-telling model proposed by Bereiter and Scardamalia’s (1987). The model is called the “what-next-strategy” and “I think...what else” The writer probes contents and discourse knowledge and writes down the ideas as they emerge. Children and less-skilled writers usually begin without any major initial planning, or they plan a little because they just tell what they have to express in a simple way. This strategy is called ‘natural’ or ‘unproblematic’ because it involves hardly any planning or revision (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

The data from the think-aloud analysis, observation, and retrospective interviews show that none of the participants in this study adopted language switching (the use of L1 when writing in L2). This strategy is considered a very common strategy among L2 writers (Krapels, 1991; Wang & Wen, 2002). However, the previous studies above are not in line with the current research. There were no participants in this study (both skilled and less-skilled writers) employed this strategy. They consistently spoke in English during the writing process. I interviewed all of them one by one why they did not use their L1 when writing in L2. Skilled writers mentioned that they were used to thinking in their L2 when writing in L2. Moreover, they felt much more comfortable to use their L2 when writing in L2.

Reviewing stage

In the reviewing stage, skilled writers said they normally reread their whole essays at least once to check what they thought was right. They reviewed their essays thoroughly to find the flow of their text in order to add more connected ideas. Fara went over the structure of her essay,

read the text carefully and did the external revisions/editing, so did Ardy. They only did few internal revisions/editing (revision/editing done during the writing process) because they preferred doing external revisions/editing (revisions/editing done in the reviewing stage). In the retrospective interview, both Fara and Ardy said that in the translating stage they often read and reread what they had written; one of the purposes of doing it was to monitor their writing. Therefore, they only did few internal revisions and editing. In the reviewing stage, both of them did deep-level and surface changes. Compared to other writers, Fara did deep-level changes more often.

With regard to less-skilled writers, they only reread their texts once. Having finished completing their essay, Dina and Ryan glanced through their written text and made some changes. They mostly focused on editing vocabularies, basic grammar rules, and spellings. This finding is in agreement with the finding of some researchers (e.g. Faigley, 1981; Pianko, 1979; Perl, 1979, 1981; Sommers, 1980). Based on the retrospective interview, the reasons why less-skilled writers concentrated on surface changes was they were not used to revising their essay extensively as they did not realize that revision can help them generate and develop their ideas. They added that their first draft had already contained their ideas; therefore, revising their texts was not really necessary. They corrected the texts only what they knew and most of them dealt with common errors, vocabularies, and grammar rules. This condition showed that these writers need more training in revision strategies.

Post-writing stage

The aim of this stage is to edit and revise the written composition in order to improve the quality of writers' writing. However, doing the think-aloud a procedure is very tiring as writers had to do two things: verbalizing their thoughts and writing at the same time. After applying this approach for more than an hour, writers felt very exhausted. In the post writing stage they did not verbalize their thoughts; they just rewrote the text silently.

Predominant strategies used by writers

As seen from the table (see Table 3) above, the most predominant strategies used by skilled and less-skilled writers were speaking while writing. This strategy is probably a function of composing aloud. The second predominant strategies used by both skilled writers were reading/rereading (see Tables 3). They stated that based on their experience, this strategy was an effective strategy to develop and generate ideas; reading/rereading strategy was to be the most significant strategy in generating their ideas and getting some sense of direction in their essay and further rereading also led them to other ideas.

The second predominant strategy used by less-skilled writer, Dinna, was editing (see Table 3). Dina edited her texts quite often, and she was more interested in editing the texts rather than revising it. This finding aligns with what have been found by other researchers (e.g. Perl, 1979, 1981; Sommers, 1980). The second predominant strategies adopted by the less skilled writer, Ryan, were rehearsing and pausing. Ryan generated ideas mainly from rehearsing. He also paused a lot during the writing process. According to Pennington and So (1993), this strategy is mainly used by less skilled writers. Based on the information from retrospective interview, Ryan paused a lot for different purposes such as, taking a rest for a while after writing long sentences, reformulating the idea, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers need to inform students that writing is not a linear process; they can go back and forth in order to generate ideas and make sure they think right. They should also encourage their students to use effective writing strategies in a productive way. Effective writing strategies refer to the ability to control and direct the use of writing strategies. This finding is consistent with the studies of some researchers (e.g. Abdullah et al., 2011; Macaro, 2009). The skilled writers who applied effective strategies knew when to choose the appropriate strategies at the right moments; they knew how to generate ideas, when to plan, when to revise, why they read/reread the sentence(s) they have written. They understood the recursive nature of writing, and they rarely wrote repetitive statements. Unlike skilled writers, less-skilled writers did not experience writing as cyclical processes of generating ideas and revising texts to find their intended meanings. They were not able to control and direct their own writing process. Dinna often showed a lack of control and direction in writing processes, and she often lost her focus on the topic, while Ryan often wrote repetitive sentences.

Writing strategies are considered as a problem-solving task with goals to be accomplished. Therefore, writing strategies should be introduced and taught in the writing class. Students who are able to use writing strategies effectively can generate meaningful writings. From the findings above, it could be concluded that skilled writers use more effective planning and revising strategies compared to the less skilled writers. This study is in agreement with the studies conducted by Cumming (1989) and Sasaki (2000). Teachers should increase learners' engagement with pre-task activities by facilitating them to plan their writing because. This activity would improve the quality of the language used during the task by reducing the overall mental burden. Planning directs learners' attention and efforts to the writing process particularly when the task is complex. Less-skilled students paid very little attention to revision and editing strategies; consequently, teachers need to be aware of the role of revision. These strategies play an important role in the development of good writing. Teachers could also show the examples of revised works to the students; so, they will know how to revise and edit their work. This step should furnish sufficient opportunities for students to practice writing of different types.

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