

A Study of The Use of Writing Strategies from The Social Cognitive View

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Abstract

Writing is a daunting task for second language learners as it involves a complex process. From the pre-writing activities until the drafting and revising stage, learners are required to actively engage with the writing process. As writing skill is crucial for university students to master, there is a need to further develop an understanding of how writing strategies can assist students in their writing. Thus, this study explores the perception of learners on their use of learning strategies based from the social cognitive view. Data was procured from a total of 102 undergraduate university students using a 5-likert scale survey questionnaire which consists of four sections that tends to explore the motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. Descriptive statistics using mean score and Pearson Correlation Analysis was employed in the data analysis procedures. The findings revealed that the respondents reported to have a high level of metacognitive strategy used in writing and there is a high significant correlation between personal factor (metacognitive strategy) and behaviour factor (effect regulation and cognitive strategies) as compared to personal and environment (low significant correlation) and behaviour and environment (medium significant correlation). The findings suggest that language instructors embed writing strategies in writing class to help ESL writers become better writers and they should guide ESL writers to self-evaluate their writings so that they are aware of the problems and consequently think of the appropriate strategies to be used.

Keywords: Writing Skills, Social Cognitive, Writing Strategies, Metacognitive

Introduction

Background of Study

Writing is a crucial skill for university students to develop as it is one of the productive language skills which facilitates the development of learners intellectually and academically. In this regard, writing can also be employed as a means of learning and persuading others (Graham et al., 2013). Having the skills to write enables language learners to complete assignments, enhance their critical thinking and develop their cognitive performance and functioning (Graham & Perin, 2007). Besides accomplishing their academic goals, writing skills is also needed among the university students to get better job opportunities as having good writing ability indicates an ability of the students to attain professional development in their academic areas.

Writing is a daunting task for second language learners as it involves a complex process. From the pre-writing activities until the drafting and revising stage, learners are required to actively engage with the writing process. Hyland (2019) indicates that writing involves a recursive process and does not occur in linear sequence, and it requires cognitive process emphasizing on the importance of a recursive procedure of pre-writing, drafting, evaluating, and revising. Upon completion of learning a language, learners are expected to display a satisfactory writing proficiency. This indicates that writing is a cognitive process as well as metacognitive due to the fact that it encompasses certain processes from planning to post-writing (Flower & Hayes, 1984).

In Malaysia, students spend 11 to 13 years (6 years in primary and between 5 – 7 years in secondary) learning English as a second language in schools. Even with more than 10 years of exposure to the language, the writing skills are still considered weak and far from satisfactory (David et al., 2015; Hiew, 2012). In general, Malaysian students perform unsatisfactorily in English language examinations, especially in the writing section (Azman, 2016). As writing is considered as an important ability for production and dissemination of knowledge within any disciplinary discourse, it is valid to say that the assessment of the students' academic achievements in academic contexts relies largely on their abilities to convey their knowledge and ideas into written output. Hence, to be competent in writing, second language learners must apply certain writing strategies as it plays a critical role in writing instruction and exert significant influence upon writing competence and learning achievements of the learners (Li et al., 2022).

To better understand the significant role of writing competency in an L2 academic setting, the current study aims to investigate the perceptions of language learners on their use of writing strategies when they are completing their writing tasks. Understanding the strategies in L2 writing is essential for language teachers not only to help their students improve their writing skills, but also to help improve the teaching methods and approach. Language learners can develop their writing skills from planning and monitoring their ideas effectively.

Statement of Problem

Writing, within the cognitive framework, is described as a process that involves cognitive and meta-cognitive processes or strategies. These processes or strategies include planning, translating, reviewing, monitoring, generating ideas, organizing, goal-setting, evaluating and revising (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Sasaki, 2002; Zamel, 1983). Zamel (1983) further described writing as a non-linear, exploratory, and generating process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning. However, the writing process can be tedious for our students and they find writing to be a daunting task and even with more than a decade of being exposed to the language, their writing skills still fall in the weak category (David et al., 2015; Hiew, 2012). Thus, educators need to make the writing

process interesting so that students will be able to follow the process and express ideas into a good piece of written output. In addition, educators must understand the important role of writing competency in an L2 academic setting and the perceptions of these language learners in using the writing strategies while doing their writing tasks. This study will explore the perception of learners on their use of these learning strategies and how to overcome factors that influence the use of these writing strategies.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of learning strategies. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How do personal factors influence the use of writing strategies?
- How do behaviour factors influence the use of writing strategies?
- How do the environment factors influence the use of writing strategies?
- Is there a relationship across writing strategies?

Literature Review

Writing Strategies

Learners engage in various writing strategies in order to help them to write better whether they realise it or not. Arndt (1987) claims that writing strategy consists of eight steps which are planning, global planning, rehearsing, reviewing, classifying, evaluating, revising and last but not least editing. In another view, Mu et al (2007) define writing strategy as mindful judgements made by writers when they are involved in the writing process in order to respond to the topics given. Penuelaz (2012) on the other hand, defines writing strategy as to comprise of three main components instead of just one single action. The three components mentioned are planning, composing and revising. Before a learner begins to even start writing an essay or a composition, the planning process must be present first. This will surely involve the process of brainstorming, sorting as well as eliminating suitable information pertaining to the scope of the writing. Then comes the composing process. This process of composing will be helpful provided the planning process is present in the first stage of writing. Finally, when the composing stage is completed, the revising stage occurs. This is the editing process as to finalize the whole writing development. Thus, writing strategies are regarded as specific techniques adopted and adapted by learners in order to be successful in the writing process.

Past Studies on Writing Strategies

Many previous studies on types of writing strategies used by ESL/EFL undergraduate students as well as the relationship between the strategies' frequency of use and writing performance have been conducted. Two recurring similar findings were reported in the studies which are the higher the students' proficiency level, the greater is their strategy use and metacognitive strategies is the most frequently used writing strategies among the ESL/EFL students.

Raofi et al (2014) conducted a qualitative study on writing strategies of 21 Malaysian ESL undergraduate students. The students that were interviewed reported doing some pre-writing activities and having awareness of their own writing problems. In addition, although other kinds of writing strategies, such as social and cognitive strategies, emerged from their interviews, ESL students primarily reported employing different forms of metacognitive techniques, such as planning and rewriting in their L2 writing. Additionally, they stressed the value of social writing techniques and mentioned strongly relying on their lecturers. They also mentioned asking for assistance from their peers, particularly those who are proficient

writers. Overall, the study showed that writing ability has a significant role in influencing the application of writing methods, particularly metacognitive strategies. When compared to students with poor writing skills, those with high writing proficiency used more metacognitive writing strategies. The results of this study show that lecturers should offer adequate teaching in methods, particularly those that are thought to be directly associated to excellent writing performance. This study's findings imply that lecturers should include writing strategy instruction in their writing lessons, particularly those methods that are closely associated with excellent writing performance.

Findings from Raoofi et al.'s (2014) earlier qualitative study are later proven to be in sync with his next quantitative research findings of the same topic. Raoofi et al (2017) investigated the relationship between writing strategy used and L2 writing proficiency among 314 ESL first and second year undergraduate students at a Malaysian university. An assessment of writing ability and a questionnaire about writing techniques were completed by the respondents. As a whole, the respondents used ESL writing strategies at a relatively high level, according to the study's findings. Furthermore, it was shown that social strategy was the least frequently employed category, with effort regulation approach ranking first and metacognitive strategy ranking second. This demonstrates that ESL students in the writing class appear to understand the necessity to regulate and manage their writing processes and that they demonstrated control over organizing, planning, and directing their own writing. Although the social writing method was utilized by the students less frequently than the other categories, it was nonetheless widely employed. In addition, the results revealed that the proficiency groups differed in their total use of writing techniques, with high-proficiency students using more writing strategies than low-proficiency students.

Aside from Raoofi et al. 's 2017 and 2014 researches, there were two recent published research about Malaysian undergraduates' writing strategy conducted by (Aluemalai & Maniam, 2020; Aripin & Rahmat's, 2022). Aluemalai & Maniam (2020) examined the writing strategies used by 50 diploma students aged 19 to 23 years old in the ESL writing classroom Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI). The questionnaire developed by Petric and Czarl (2003) was used to assess three stages of the writing process: pre-writing, writing, and rewriting. It was discovered that students employed planning methods as part of metacognitive tactics more frequently than writing and editing strategies. Meanwhile, Aripin & Rahmat's (2022) study on ESL writers' writing process revealed that both male and female writers use metacognitive writing strategies as their writing regulator to plan, monitor, and evaluate their writing. Nevertheless, the ways they plan, monitor, and evaluate their writing process varies and is gender-specific. Female writers plan, monitor, and evaluate writing tasks with greater accuracy in comparison to male writers. Moreover, female writers used more approaches and were more particular and concerned about the quality of the essay than male writers from the planning stage to the evaluating step.

Conceptual Framework

Over the years, the teaching has undergone many levels of changes. Instructors have changed the way writing is taught. Writing activities can be seen from many views. The social view of writing sees writing as communication between the writer and the audience (reader). The cognitive view of writing sees writing as a thinking process. During writing, writers are actively thinking of the writing process (Rahmat, 2020). The writer constantly thinks of what to write and how to write the content. This study presents yet another view of writing and that is the social cognitive view. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study. According to

Bandura (1977), social cognitive view states that learning process needs three factors; the personal, behaviour and the environment. In the context of this study, the personal factor is done when the writer uses metacognitive strategies. Next, in writing, when writers depend on their behaviour, they use strategies like (i) effort regulations strategies and (ii) cognitive strategy (Raofi, et.al. 2017). Finally, the writer’s dependence on the environment is done through the use of (i) social strategy and (ii) affective strategy.

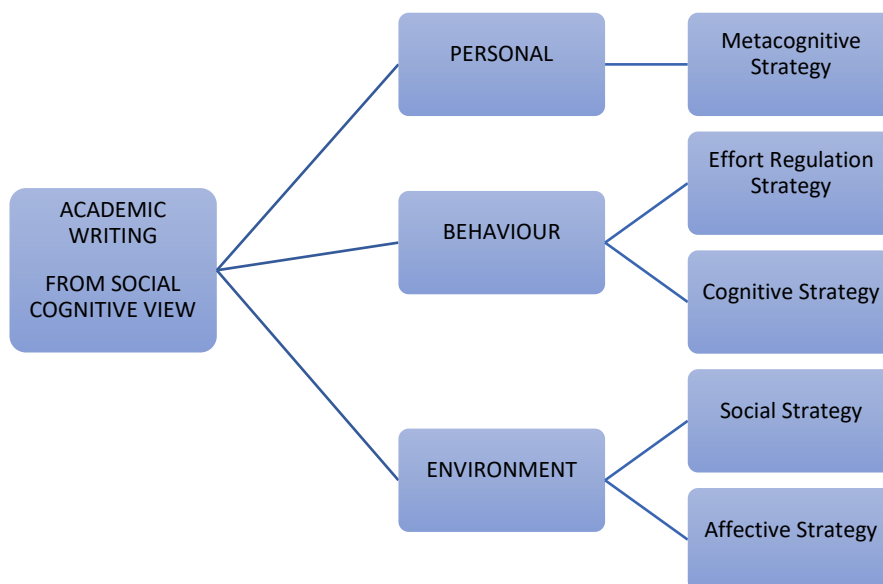


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Exploring Writing Strategies from Social Cognitive View

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 102 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Bandura (1977); Raofi et.al (2017) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 10 items on personal. Section C has 11 items on behaviour and section D has 7 items for environment.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey

| SECTION | SOCIAL COGNITIVE VIEW (Bandura, 1977) | | WRITING STRATEGY (Raofi, et.al ,2017) | NO OF ITEMS | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------|-------------|----|
| B | PERSONAL | i | Metacognitive | 10 | 10 |
| C | BEHAVIOUR | i | Effort Regulation | 4 | 10 |
| | | ii | Cognitive | 6 | |
| D | ENVIRONMEMENT | i | Social | 4 | 7 |
| | | ii | Affective | 3 | |
| | | | | | 27 |

Table 2

Reliability of Survey

| Reliability Statistics | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .933 | 27 |

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .933, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1 Gender

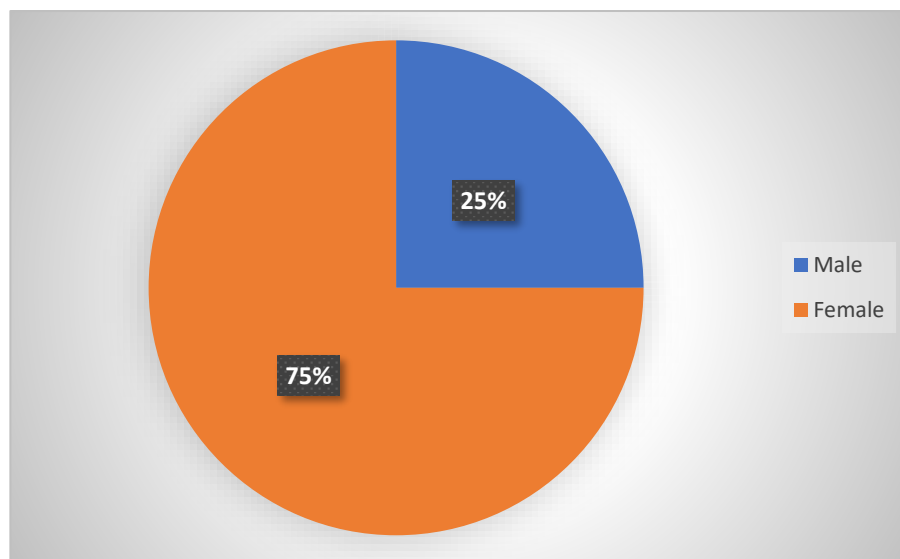


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

As shown in Figure 2, from the total of 102 respondents, majority of the respondents were female (75%) and 25% of the respondents were male.

Q2 Faculty

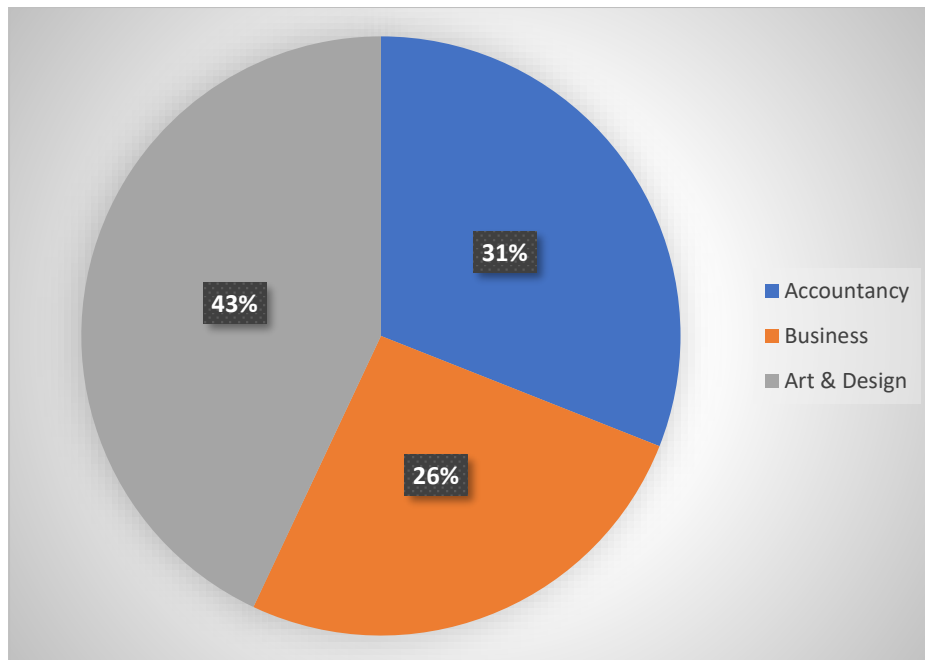


Figure 3- Percentage for Faculty

Figure 3 displays the faculties involved in the study. Three social sciences faculties were chosen with majority of the respondents were from Art and Design (43%), 31% of the respondents were from the Business faculty and 26% were from the Accountancy faculty.

Findings for personal factor

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do personal factors influence the use of writing strategies? In the context of this study, personal factors are measured by metacognitive strategies.

PART 2-METACOGNITIVE (MWS)

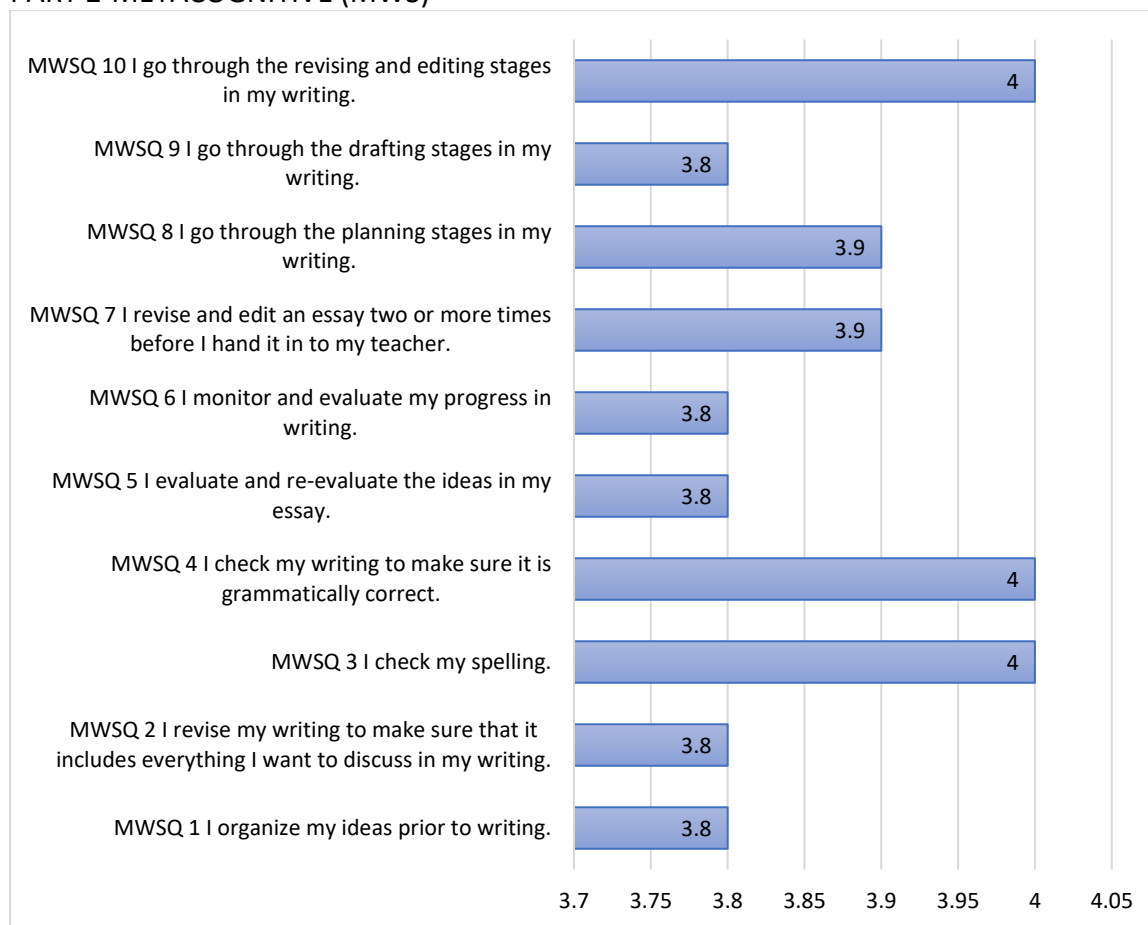


Figure 4: Mean for Metacognitive

Based on Figure 4 which shows the mean for metacognitive strategies, the factors that respondents greatly used in their writing is to check on their spellings, grammar and revise and edit the stages of their writing. These metacognitive strategies are vital in producing a good piece of writing. Figure 4 also shows that revising and editing an essay two or more times before handing it in (3.9) and going through the planning stages in writing (3.9) are the next important metacognitive strategies followed by the respondents in their writing. By following these metacognitive strategies, respondents can improve their writing skills.

Findings for behaviour factor

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How does behaviour factors influence the use of writing strategies? In the context of this study, behaviour is measured by (i) effort regulation and (ii) cognitive factors.

PART 3-EFFORT REGULATION (ERS)

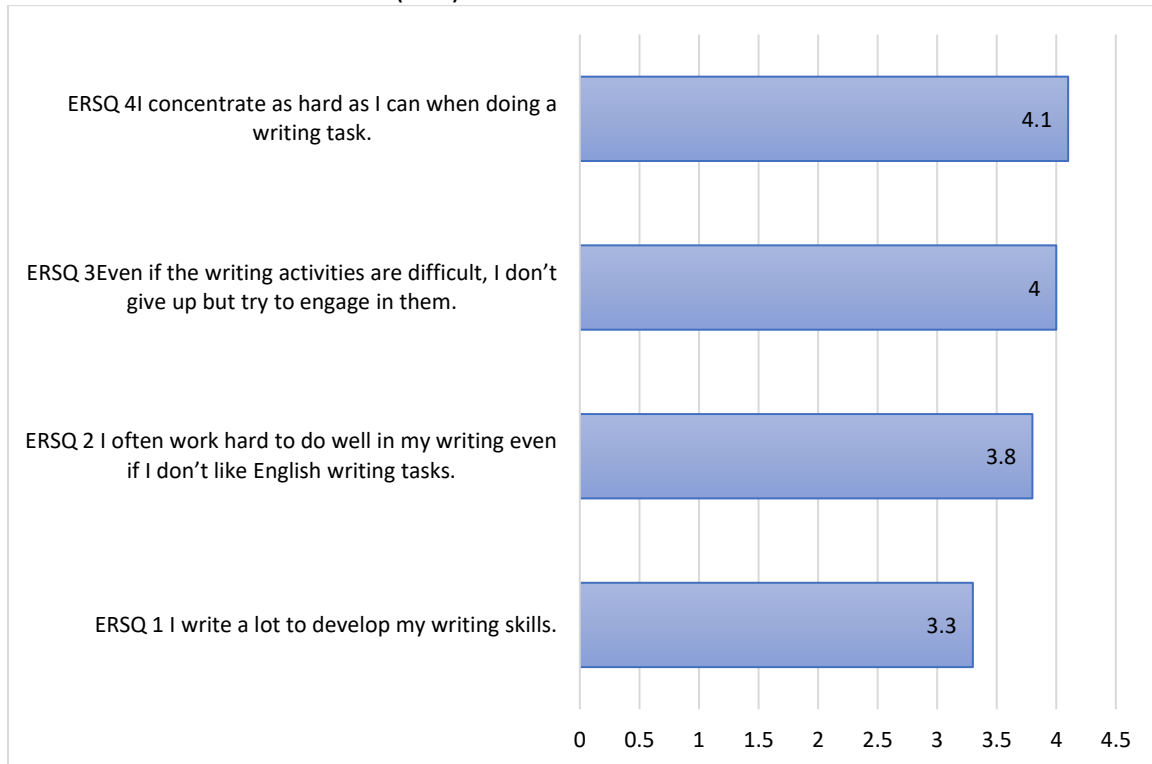


Figure 5: Mean for Effort Regulation

Figure 5 presents the mean scores for effort regulation. Among the four items, the mean scores range from 3.3 to 4.1. The highest mean score is obtained from item ERSQ 4. This indicates that the respondents concentrate as hard as they can when they are doing a writing task. This is followed by ERSQ 3 with the mean of 4.0 where the respondents agree that they try to engage and do not give up even though the writing activities are difficult. Meanwhile, the lowest mean is 3.3 where the respondents agreed that they have to write a lot in order for them to develop their writing skills (ERSQ 1).

PART 4-COGNITIVE (CWS)

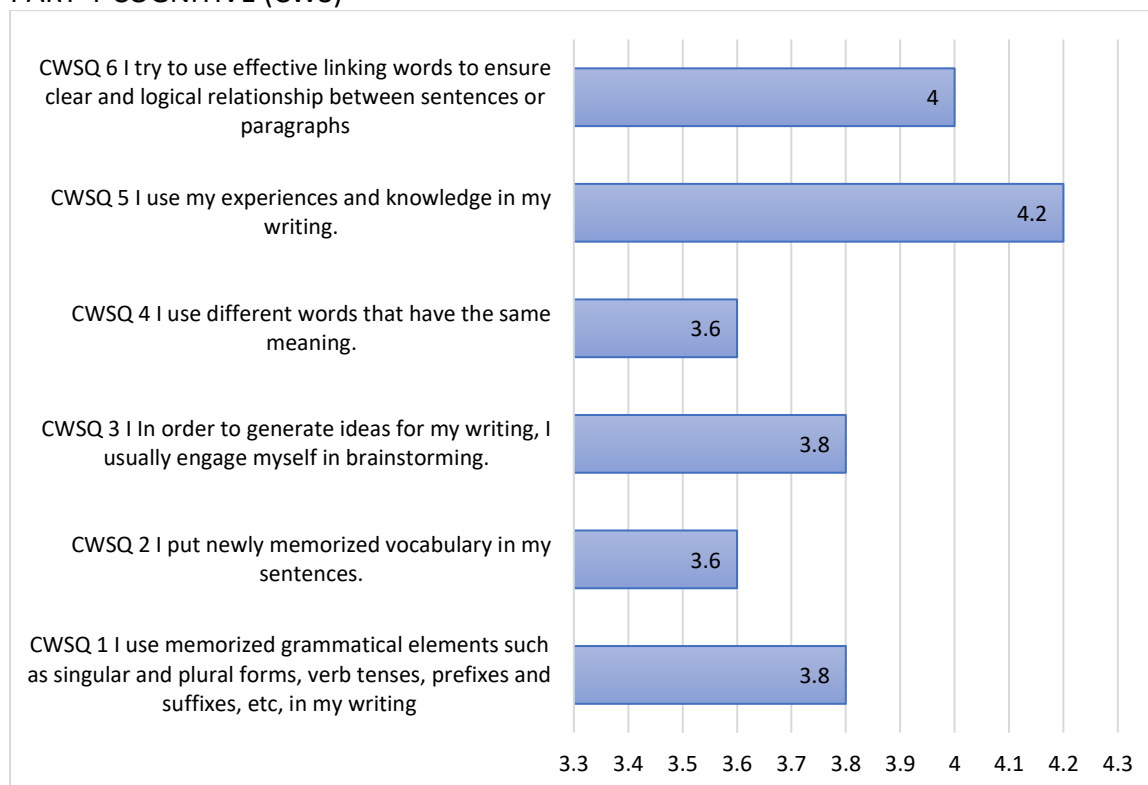


Figure 6: Mean for Cognitive

Figure 6 presents the mean scores for cognitive strategy factors. The mean scores range from 3.6 to 4.2. Respondents reported the highest mean score of 4.2 for CWSQ 5 where they use their experiences and knowledge in their writing. This is followed by CWSQ 6 with the mean of 4 where the respondents try to use effective linkers to connect sentences and paragraphs. Furthermore, CWSQ 2 and CWSQ 4 are the lowest mean of 3.6 for using new memorised vocabulary and synonyms in their writing.

Findings for environment factor

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do the environment factors influence the use of writing strategies? In the context of this study, environment factors are measure by (i) social, and (ii) affective factors.

PART 5-SOCIAL (SWS)

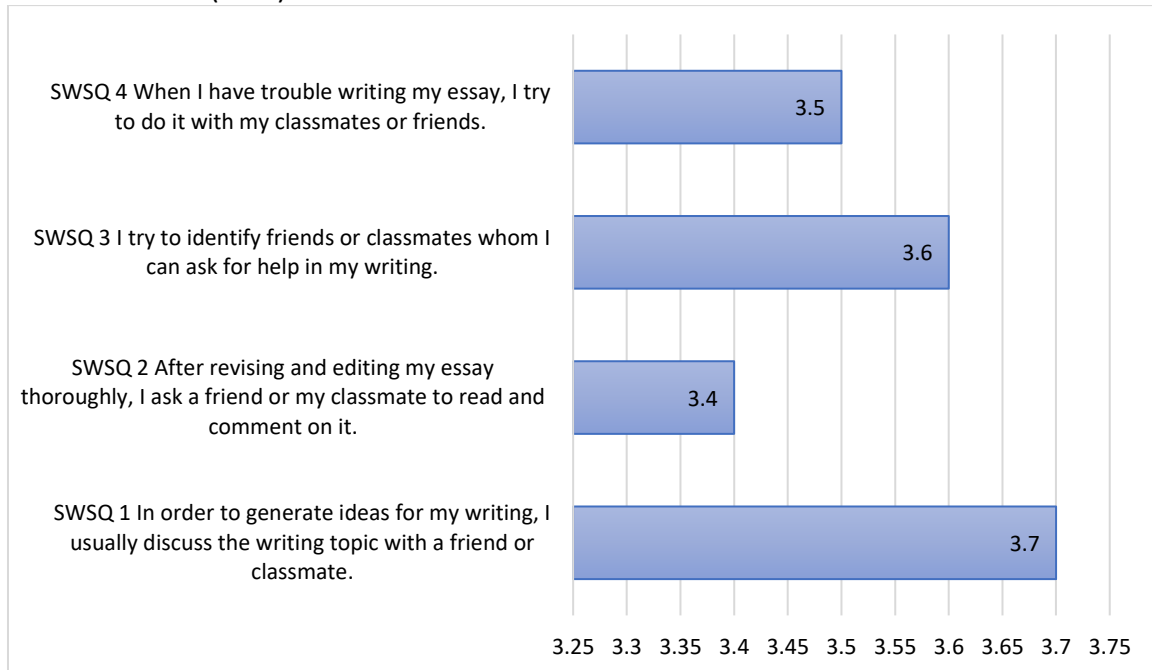


Figure 7: Mean for Social

Figure 7 presents the mean scores for social dimension. Generally, among the four items, the mean scores range from 3.4 to 3.7. It was found that the item with the highest mean score is SWSQ1 ($M=3.7$), indicating that most students agree that they usually discussed the writing topic with a friend or classmate in order to generate ideas for their writing. This was followed by item SWSQ3 ($M=3.6$) with the second highest mean score, indicating that the students agree that they identified their friends or classmates whom they can ask for help for their writing. Meanwhile, the item with the lowest mean score is SWSQ 2 ($M=3.4$), in which students agree that they asked their friends or classmates to read and comment on their essays after the essays have been revised and edited.

PART 6-AFFECTIVE (AWS)

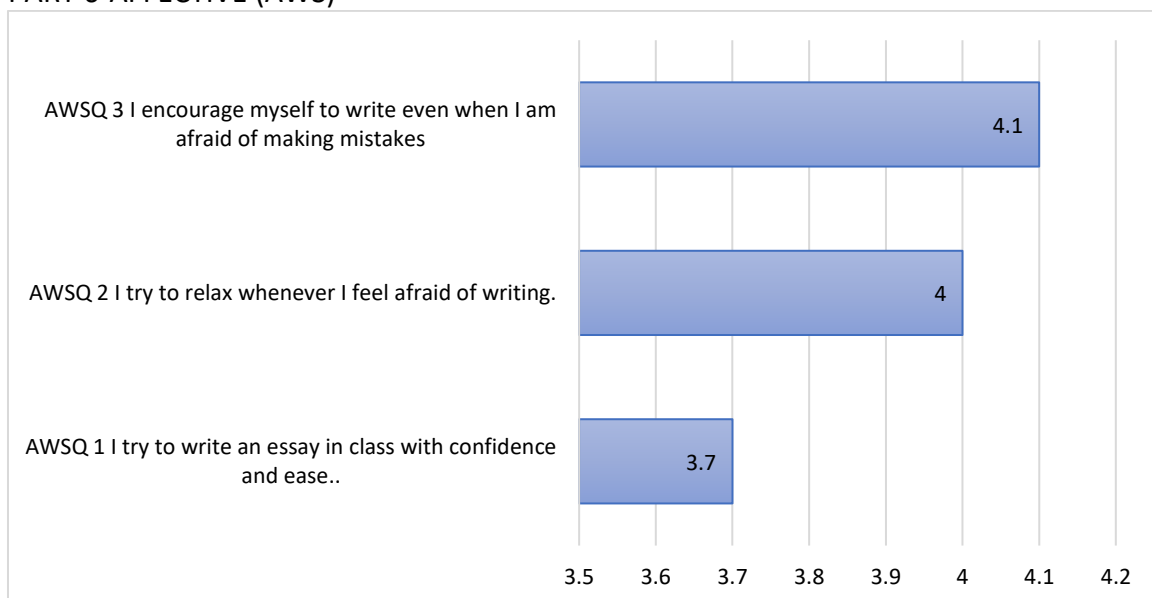


Figure 8: Mean for Affective

Figure 8 presents the mean scores for affective dimension. Generally, among the four items, the mean scores range from 3.7 to 4.1. It was found that the item with the highest mean score is AWSQ3 (M=4.1), indicating that most students agree that they encouraged themselves to write even when they are afraid of making mistakes. This was followed by item AWSQ2 (M=4) with the second highest mean score, indicating that the students agree that they tried to relax whenever they feel afraid of writing. Meanwhile, the item with the lowest mean score is AWSQ1 (M=3.7), in which the students agree that they tried to write an essay in class with confidence and ease.

Findings for relationship across writing strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 4- Is there a relationship across writing strategies?

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social and affective strategies data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 3, 4, 5 and 6 below.

Table 3

Correlation between Personal and Behaviour

| | | TOTALMEAN PERSONAL | TOTALMEAN BEHAVIOUR |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| TOTALMEANPERSONAL | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .731** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 102 | 102 |
| TOTALMEANBEHAVIOUR | Pearson Correlation | .731** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 102 | 102 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows there is an association between personal and behaviour. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between personal and behaviour ($r=.731^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between personal and behaviour.

Table 4

*Correlation between Personal and Environment***Correlations**

| | | TOTALMEAN PERSONAL | TOTALMEAN ENVIRONME NT |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| TOTALMEANPERSONAL | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .316** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .001 |
| | N | 102 | 102 |
| TOTALMEANENVIRONM ENT | Pearson Correlation | .316** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 | |
| | N | 102 | 102 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows there is an association between personal and environment. Correlation analysis shows that there is a low significant association between personal and environment ($r=.316^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a weak positive relationship between personal and environment.

Table 5

*Correlation between Behaviour and Environment***Correlations**

| | | TOTALMEAN BEHAVIOUR | TOTALMEAN ENVIRONME NT |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| TOTALMEANBEHAVIOUR | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .463** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 102 | 102 |
| TOTALMEANENVIRONM ENT | Pearson Correlation | .463** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 102 | 102 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows there is an association between behaviour and environment. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate significant association between behaviour and environment ($r=.463^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a moderate positive relationship between behaviour and environment.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

The findings of the current research show that the participants reported a high level of metacognitive strategy used in writing such as they check their spelling, make sure their writing is grammatically correct, and they go through the revising and editing stages in their writing. These personal factors contribute to the participants' development of writing skills and this result is similar to that of previous studies (Raofi et al., 2014; Alvemalai & Maniam, 2022) which reported various types of strategies used in L2 writing with the main focus being on the different types of metacognitive strategies such as planning, organizing ideas, monitoring, revising and evaluating. One possible explanation for the high use metacognitive strategy is that the participants are ESL university students taking a writing course and they may have explicitly learned or been taught some writing techniques on ESL writing.

With regard to the behaviour factor, the participants reported a high level of effort regulation strategy used in their writing and this finding echoes with that of Raofi et al.'s. (2017) study that indicated effort regulation appears to be among the key strategies employed by successful L2 learners / was the most used strategy with regard to L2 writing. The participants also reported using cognitive strategy at a high level and this finding is in harmony with the previous qualitative research by (Raofi et al., 2014). In the research, it was reported that the interviewees use synonyms, new words they learned from books, new knowledge and they also use vocabulary and phrases that they learned.

It is also reported from this study that the participants used social and affective strategies at a high level with the latter being the highest. The results obtained from the present study is in line with the previous studies where it was found that learners with high language proficiency use more affective strategies than those with low proficiency (Raofi et al., 2017; Lai, 2009; Liu, 2008).

With regards to the association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social and affective strategies, the results of this study show that there is a high significant correlation between metacognitive (personal) and effort regulation and cognitive (behaviour) strategies, $r=.731^{**}$, $p=.000$ as compared to personal and environment (low significant correlation) and behaviour and environment (medium significant correlation). From the results, it can be assumed that participants prefer to use both metacognitive and effort regulation together with cognitive strategies in their L2 writing thus showing that these two strategies are important contributors to the development of L2 writing skill. A similar pattern of results was obtained in Bai and Wang's (2020) study in which it was found that growth mindset which can be positively associated with cognitive and metacognitive strategies have positively and significantly predicted effort regulation in L2 writing.

(Pedagogical) Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study have some pedagogical implications especially for writing instruction and language classroom. It is very crucial for language teachers or instructors to include writing strategies in their writing class and to help improve ESL writers. Besides, language teachers can also promote the appropriate strategies for ESL learners to apply in their writing making their writing readable and comprehensible. They should be encouraged to apply the cognitive strategies where they use their own experience and knowledge in writing tasks. Furthermore, language teachers should guide students to self-evaluate their writings so that they are aware of the problems and consequently think of the appropriate strategies to be used.

For future studies, the findings suggest using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods that would be useful to probe deeply into how ESL learners construct their writing using the writing strategies.

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