

A CLOSER LOOK AT ACADEMIC WRITING STRATEGIES OF EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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Abstract

Investigating writing strategy use across different sociocultural contexts has been proposed as a core area of research in second language acquisition. This study drew upon Mu's (2005) taxonomy of English as a second language/English as a foreign language writing strategies to explore strategy use among English as a foreign language pre-service teachers at a private higher education institution in Indonesia. Through a qualitative approach, the research focused on metacognitive strategies employed by 30 pre-service teachers. Participants were selected using purposive sampling for focus group discussions (FGDs) to gain detailed insights. A set of semi-structured questions was used to guide the FGDs, enabling the researchers to explore specific aspects of the metacognitive strategies these pre-service teachers used to regulate their learning processes. The findings revealed that a significant majority of participants actively applied metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating in their writing processes. These approaches proved instrumental in enhancing writing proficiency and academic performance. The results from the interviews provided rich understanding of how these pre-service teachers from a private educational setting conceptualized and utilized strategies to manage and improve their writing ability. This study deepens comprehension of metacognitive strategy use for academic writing within a specific institutional context while also suggesting practical implications for English as a foreign language instruction in private teacher education programs.

Keywords: Metacognitive strategies, EFL learners, academic writing

Introduction

Effective academic writing is crucial for pre-service teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to master. It allows them to effectively communicate complex ideas and concepts to diverse audiences. However, many EFL pre-service teachers struggle to develop their academic writing skills, which can hinder their ability to convey their thoughts effectively. There are several challenges that EFL pre-service teachers face in academic writing. Firstly, their limited English proficiency hampers their ability to express complex ideas and concepts. Additionally, issues like classroom management and the lack of facilities and resources in schools can create difficulties in developing engaging and interactive lessons. Motivating students,

especially those who are not interested in learning English, can also be a significant challenge. Building positive relationships with students and creating a supportive learning environment can be difficult as well, negatively affecting student engagement and motivation. Finally, the increasing importance of digital multimodal composing in academic writing poses a significant hurdle for pre-service teachers who need to develop new skills in this area (Hafner & Ho, 2020; Jiang, 2018). These challenges emphasize the need for targeted support and training programs to enhance the academic writing abilities of pre-service teachers.

Moreover, further difficulties that the pre-service teachers often encounter are also in grammar and sentence structure,

particularly in using conjunctions correctly (Tuzel & Akcan, 2009; Correa & Echeverri, 2017). This can lead to sentences that are unclear or difficult to follow, making it challenging for readers to understand the writer's intended meaning. Additionally, pre-service teachers may struggle with selecting the appropriate vocabulary and lexical choices to convey their ideas effectively. This can result in texts that lack precision, clarity, and nuance, making it difficult for readers to grasp the writer's intended message. Furthermore, they also may find it challenging to develop coherent ideas and organize their writing effectively, leading to texts that lack structure, coherence, and flow. Finally, pre-service teachers may struggle with adapting to the specific conventions and styles required in academic writing, such as formatting, citations, and references (Spilkova, 2001; Maria & Ekaterina, 2017). This can result in texts that lack the professionalism and credibility expected in academic writing, making it difficult for readers to take the writer's ideas seriously. Research has identified that the quality of writing among ESL/EFL learners is influenced by multiple factors. L2 learners frequently encounter challenges such as insufficient vocabulary and grammar, low motivation, and lack of confidence when writing compositions (Eckstein & Ferris, 2018). Anxiety is another factor that negatively impacts writing quality for many learners, while effective content organization and development are significant hurdles for others (Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986; Busse & et al., 2023). Consequently, Quible and Griffin (2007) advocate for greater focus on enhancing writing competence within the language classroom. One approach to achieving this is by teaching writing strategies, which empower learners to tackle their writing tasks more confidently and effectively. In line with this, Oxford (1990)

asserts that utilizing various writing strategies enables learners to monitor their writing process and fosters both confidence and independence. For that reason, this present study aims to investigate the academic writing strategies employed by EFL pre-service teachers, exploring the techniques they use to craft coherent and well-structured texts. By examining the writing strategies of these pre-service teachers, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their writing practices and to identify areas for improvement, ultimately informing the development of targeted support and training programs to enhance their academic writing abilities.

Literature Review

Learning Strategies Taxonomy

The taxonomy of language learning strategies (LLS) categorizes the various methods learners use to enhance their language acquisition and use. Oxford's (1990) widely accepted classification system includes six key categories: Memory Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, Compensation Strategies, Metacognitive Strategies, Affective Strategies, and Social Strategies. Memory Strategies as outlined by Oxford (1990) involve techniques that help learners retain and recall new information by creating strong mental associations. For example, drawing pictures to remember new words or pronouncing new words to aid memorization and linking new information to existing knowledge. These strategies are effective because they leverage multiple senses and cognitive pathways, facilitating deeper processing and integration of new information with existing knowledge, which enhances overall retention and recall (Dong et al, 2017). Cognitive Strategies, like practicing and receiving/sending messages, involve mental processes to make sense of new information

to enhance understanding and retention. Practicing might include activities like repetition or using new words in sentences, which helps solidify knowledge through application. Receiving and sending messages involve comprehending and producing language, such as listening to a conversation or writing a message. These strategies help learners process information deeply, make connections, and apply their knowledge in practical contexts, thereby reinforcing their learning and improving language proficiency (MacArthur & Lembo, 2009). Compensation Strategies, including guessing intelligently and overcoming knowledge gaps, help learners overcome limitations to continue communication. Guessing intelligently might involve using context clues to infer the meaning of unknown words or phrases. Overcoming knowledge gaps can include using synonyms, gestures, or rephrasing to convey meaning when precise vocabulary is lacking. These strategies ensure that communication remains effective despite incomplete language proficiency, fostering confidence and encouraging continuous interaction in the target language (Lai, 2009). Metacognitive Strategies, such as centering learning and evaluating learning, involve learners' regulation and control of their own learning processes through self-regulation techniques. Centering learning involves focusing attention on key tasks and setting clear learning goals. Evaluating learning includes self-assessment and reflection on progress, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. These strategies help learners become more aware of their cognitive processes, allowing them to plan, monitor, and adjust their learning activities effectively, leading to more efficient and autonomous learning (Huang, 2015). Affective Strategies, like lowering anxiety and encouraging oneself, focus on the learner's emotional requirements and

address the emotional aspects of learning to enhance performance and motivation. Techniques for lowering anxiety may include relaxation exercises, positive visualization, or creating a supportive learning environment. Encouraging oneself can involve setting achievable goals, self-reinforcement, or maintaining a positive mindset. These strategies help learners manage their emotions, reduce stress, and build confidence, which are crucial for sustaining motivation and fostering a positive attitude towards learning (Li, 2022). Social Strategies, including joining a group or seeking help from friends, involve interaction with the target language and its speakers. It emphasizes the importance of interaction and collaboration in language learning. Joining a group, such as a study circle or language club, provides opportunities for practicing the target language in a supportive environment (Oxford, 1990). These categories are not mutually exclusive, and learners often use a combination of strategies to achieve their goals.

Writing Strategies Taxonomy

Writing strategies are essential tools that help learners become more proficient and confident writers. Understanding the taxonomy of writing strategies can provide valuable insights into how these tools can be effectively utilized in English language learning. This review will explore four writing strategies that are often used by scholars, view their classifications and their impact on learners' writing proficiency based on Oxford (1990)'s taxonomy. Writing strategies are deliberate, goal-directed techniques that writers use to plan, draft, revise, and edit their writing. These strategies can be cognitive, metacognitive, social, or affective, each serving distinct functions in the writing process and they have a role in enhancing writing proficiency.

As Oxford (1990) pointed out that cognitive strategies involve the mental processes used to generate and organize ideas. These include such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, revising, and editing. These strategies help writers structure their thoughts coherently and produce well-organized texts (MacArthur & Lembo, 2009). Metacognitive strategies refer to the self-regulation of the writing process, including planning, monitoring, and evaluating that enable writers to self-regulate their writing process. By setting clear goals, tracking progress, and assessing their work, writers can make informed adjustments to improve their writing quality (Huang, 2015). Social strategies involve interactions with others to enhance writing. These include like peer feedback, collaborative writing, and seeking help, emphasize the importance of interaction and collaboration in the writing process. These strategies provide opportunities for writers to gain diverse perspectives, receive constructive criticism, and enhance their writing through social support (Bodenberg & Nichols, 2019). Affective strategies focus on managing emotions and attitudes toward writing. Techniques such as self-motivation, anxiety reduction, and confidence building are crucial for maintaining a positive mindset and reducing the emotional barriers that often hinder effective writing (Li, 2022). Together, these strategies form a comprehensive taxonomy that addresses the multifaceted nature of writing, providing learners with a toolkit to navigate the complex task of writing with greater ease and effectiveness. Table 1 review various writing strategies and their classifications on learners writing.

Table 1. Writing strategies and its description categories

Strategy categories	Categories Description
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Cognitive	Brainstorming: Generating a wide range of ideas before starting to write. Outlining: Structuring ideas and creating a framework for the writing. Drafting: Writing initial versions of the text. Revising: Making changes to improve the content and structure of the writing. Editing: Correcting grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.
Metacognitive	Planning: Setting goals and deciding on the steps needed to achieve them. Monitoring: Keeping track of progress and making adjustments as needed. Evaluating: Assessing the quality of the writing and the effectiveness of strategies used
Social	Peer Feedback: Receiving and providing feedback to/from peers. Collaborative Writing: Working with others to produce a piece of writing. Seeking Help: Asking teachers or more proficient writers for assistance.
Affective	Self-Motivation: Encouraging one-self to write and stay engaged.

	<p>Anxiety Reduction: Techniques to reduce writing-related anxiety, such as deep breathing or positive self-talk.</p> <p>Confidence Building: Activities that boost confidence in writing abilities.</p>
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Research on writing strategies in EFL context

In recent years, there has been a growing number of studies focusing on the writing strategies of ESL/EFL learners. These investigations have explored the relationship between the writing strategies used by learners and their proficiency in a second/ foreign language (L2/FL), as well as the impact of these strategies on their writing performance. Additionally, the studies have examined the overall strategies employed in L2/FL writing. Some research has categorized learners' writing strategies using existing pedagogical taxonomies. Overall, this body of research indicates that learners utilize a variety of strategies throughout the writing process, which significantly affects the quality of their writing. Research on writing strategies in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context has shed light on the various approaches learners employ to enhance their writing skills. Studies have shown that EFL learners tend to use writing strategies primarily during the "While Writing" stage, followed by "Pre-writing" and "Revising Writing." For instance, Dari et al. (2022) held a study in an Indonesian context found that most students were medium users of writing strategies, with "While Writing" being the stage where they tend to use strategies most frequently. Another study from Suprpto et al. (2022) in an Indonesian university's English language department

revealed that most students used writing strategies during the "While Writing" stage, followed by "Pre-writing" and "Revising Writing." Additionally, Tsai (2021)'s research has demonstrated that integrating writing strategy training into EFL writing instruction can significantly improve learners' strategy use and writing performance. Furthermore, Wudneh (2018) conducted a study in Ethiopia found that metacognitive and cognitive writing strategies were the most commonly used, with no significant differences in strategy use between genders or year levels. These findings emphasize the importance of teaching writing strategies to help learners overcome their writing problems and develop awareness of using a variety of strategies in the writing process. Another study on writing strategies in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context is "The Effects of Writing Strategy Instruction on EFL Learners" by Zhang et al. (2019). This research examined the impact of integrating writing strategy training into EFL writing instruction on learners' strategy use and writing performance. The study involved 120 EFL learners who were randomly assigned to either a treatment group receiving writing strategy instruction or a control group without such instruction. The results showed that the treatment group significantly improved their strategy use and writing performance compared to the control group. The study highlights the importance of teaching writing strategies to help learners overcome their writing problems and develop awareness of using a variety of strategies in the writing process.

Research Methodology

Participants

This research involved 30 EFL pre-service teachers who were in the second year (semester 2) of their study in Nusantara

PGRI Kediri University of Indonesia and they were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that participants were representative of the target population. They were at the intermediate level of English proficiency. Their language proficiency was determined by the standardized tests administered by the local campus. These tests were designed to rigorously evaluate various aspects of language skills, ensuring an accurate measurement of proficiency levels. The class met for about 100 minutes every week for eight weeks.

Instruments

In this study the instruments were obtained through focus group discussions (FGDs). FGDs are a qualitative data collection method that involves guided group discussions with selected participants. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and attitudes on the research topic. The participants were divided into smaller groups to facilitate in-depth discussions. Each FGD session was guided by a set of semi-structured questions designed to elicit detailed responses about their academic writing strategies. The discussions were moderated by a researcher to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to share their experiences and insights.

Procedure

To explore the writing Strategies of EFL pre-service teachers, FGDs were conducted as the primary data collection method. These discussions provided a platform for participants to share their experiences and strategies in a collaborative setting. Each FGD session was meticulously planned and facilitated to ensure an open, inclusive, and productive dialogue.

Preparation: Before the discussions, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and the structure of the FGDs.

Informed consent was obtained from each participant.

Sessions: The FGDs were conducted in a neutral, comfortable setting to encourage open communication. Each session lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' permission for accurate data transcription.

Moderation: The moderator facilitated the discussion by posing open-ended questions, encouraging interaction, and ensuring that all participants contributed. The moderator also took notes to capture non-verbal cues and group dynamics.

Data analysis

The data analysis involved a meticulous process to ensure comprehensive understanding and accurate interpretation of the information gathered from the FGDs. Initially, the audio recordings from the discussions were transcribed verbatim to capture every detail of the participants' responses. Following transcription, the data underwent thematic analysis, a method that involved coding the transcribed text to identify key themes and patterns related to the academic writing strategies of the pre-service teachers. This systematic approach allowed the researchers to categorize the strategies and uncover the underlying reasons for their use, providing a rich, detailed understanding of the participants' approaches to academic writing. Thematic analysis thus facilitated the extraction of meaningful insights, which were crucial for addressing the research questions and forming the basis for the study's conclusions and recommendations.

Findings and Discussions

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 30 pre-service teachers revealed several key findings regarding the use of metacognitive strategies in their writing processes. The

data, coded into themes of planning, monitoring, and evaluation, provided a detailed understanding of their approaches and challenges.

Table 2. Example of coding the FGDs data

Metacognitive strategies	Responses	Explanation
Planning	"I always start with a <u>mind map</u> to organize my thoughts and structure my essay."	Mind mapping
	"Using a <u>mind map</u> helps me see the connections between my ideas before I start writing."	
	"Creating an <u>outline</u> is essential for me. It gives me a clear roadmap of what I need to write."	Outlining
	" <u>Outlining</u> helps me	

	ensure that my essay has a logical flow and that I cover all necessary points."	
	"I spend a few minutes <u>brainstorming</u> all possible ideas on the topic before narrowing them down."	Brainstorming
	" <u>Brainstorming</u> sessions with my peers are really helpful for generating diverse perspectives."	
	"I use a <u>checklist</u> to make sure I include all the required elements in my essay."	Checklist

	“Before writing, “I set <u>specific goals</u> for what I want to achieve in each section of my essay.”	Setting goals
	" <u>Setting deadlines</u> for each stage of the planning process helps me avoid last-minute writing.”	Time management
	“I plan out my <u>research</u> process, deciding which sources to consult and what information to look for.”	Research
Monitoring	"I break down my writing into smaller sections and <u>set deadlines</u> for each	Setting short-term goals

	part to make sure I'm making steady progress.”	
	"I <u>use a timer</u> to allocate specific periods for writing and manage my time effectively. ”	Time management
	"When I write, I often <u>ask myself</u> if my arguments are clear and well-supported. "	Self-question
	" <u>Checking my outline</u> helps me maintain the structure and flow of my essay.”	Revisiting the outline
	"Revising my draft as I go along in writing helps me catch errors early	Draft reviews

	and improve the quality of my writing.	
	"I <u>use</u> <u>grammarly</u> to monitor my language accuracy while writing."	Use writing tools
	"I <u>regularly</u> <u>reread</u> on what I have written to ensure it aligns with my topic and main arguments."	Reflection on progress
Evaluation	"After completing my draft, I <u>read</u> <u>through</u> it <u>several</u> <u>times</u> to <u>check</u> for coherence and logical flow."	Self-assessment
	" <u>Getting</u> <u>feedback</u> from classmates helps me identify	Peer feedback

	weaknesses and strengths in my writing that I might have missed."	
	"I use the <u>assignment rubric</u> to evaluate my paragraph and ensure that I meet all the criteria."	Using rubrics
	" <u>Revising</u> allows me to refine my ideas, while <u>editing</u> ensures my essay is polished and error-free."	Revising and editing
	"I use a <u>revision checklist</u> to systematically evaluate different aspects of my essay, such as argument strength, evidence,	Revision checklist

	and conclusion. ”	
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The findings from the FGDs revealed that pre-service teachers employ a variety of metacognitive strategies during the planning phase of their academic writing. Mind mapping emerged as a popular technique, with many participants using it to visually organize their thoughts and structure their paragraph. This method helped them see the connections between ideas and create a coherent outline. This is in line with the research conducted by Spencer et al. (2013) who found that the use of the mind map in nurse practitioner education helps visualize relationships between concepts, aiding in information acquisition, data retention, and overall comprehension. Additionally, outlining was frequently mentioned as an essential step, providing a clear roadmap for writing and ensuring that all necessary points were covered. Brainstorming, both individually and in group sessions, was another common pre-service teachers' strategy, aiding in the generation of diverse perspectives and ideas. The use of checklists was highlighted for its effectiveness in keeping track of required elements and ensuring that no critical components were missed. Participants also emphasized the importance of setting specific goals for each part of their paragraphs, which helped them stay focused and organized. Planning their research process and managing their time effectively were other crucial strategies that enabled them to gather relevant information and allocate sufficient attention to different sections of their paragraphs. Wingate et al. (2021) described that successful and unsuccessful students allocate considerable differences in time to planning and revising, highlighting the importance of effective

process use in academic writing instruction. In addition to this, Roberts (2000) pointed out that careful planning and effective time management can make the process of writing-up a research thesis rewarding and pleasurable. These varied approaches to planning indicate that pre-service teachers are actively engaged in organizing their writing tasks, which likely contributes to more structured and coherent essays.

Building on the insights from the planning phase, the findings indicated that pre-service teachers use a range of metacognitive strategies to monitor their academic writing process. Setting short-term goals was a common practice, allowing participants to break down their writing tasks into manageable sections and maintain steady progress. Goal setting with progress feedback exerts the greatest impact on achievement outcomes in writing tasks, including transfer (Schunk & Swartz, 1993). Effective time management, such as using timers and taking breaks, was frequently mentioned as a way to sustain focus and productivity. Self-questioning emerged as a crucial strategy, with participants regularly asking themselves if their arguments were clear and well-supported, which helped maintain the coherence and quality of their writing. As Daniel and Williams (2019) reported that self-questioning strategy instruction has mixed effects on students' reading comprehension outcomes, with medium to large effects when received for two or more hours. Revisiting outlines during the writing process was another important technique, ensuring that their work remained aligned with the planned structure. Draft reviews and peer feedback were also integral to the monitoring phase, providing opportunities to identify and correct gaps or inconsistencies early on. The use of writing tools for grammar and spell-checks helped participants maintain

language accuracy, while reflecting on their progress enabled them to stay aligned with their writing goals. These findings parallel the research outcomes reported by Darvishi et al. (2022) and Gao et al. (2018), the complementary peer-review approach, self-monitoring, and AI quality control assistance, improves peer-feedback quality and is perceived as more helpful than regular peer-review interface. Overall, these monitoring strategies reflect a proactive approach to self-regulation, helping pre-service teachers maintain control over their writing process and enhance the quality of their paragraphs.

The evaluation phase revealed that pre-service teachers engage in several metacognitive strategies to refine their academic writing, reflecting a strong commitment to producing high-quality work. Self-assessment emerged as a key strategy, with participants dedicating time to read through their drafts multiple times, ensuring coherence and logical flow. This agrees with past research that indicated self-assessment training significantly improves English language learners' writing skill and proficiency levels (Mazloomi & Khabiri, 2018; Vasu et al., 2020). This self-critical approach allowed them to identify and address weaknesses independently. Peer feedback also played a significant role, as participants often sought input from classmates to gain diverse perspectives and uncover areas for improvement that they might have overlooked. Prior research has shown that peer-feedback significantly improves students' academics self-concept in the domain of academic writing in higher education (Simonsmeier et al., 2020; Lal, 2020; Rosenthal et al, 2020). Using rubrics to evaluate their work against established criteria helped participants understand their performance relative to expectations and identify specific areas for enhancement. Previous investigations have confirmed that

the rubric positively impacted students by offering guidance and showing the elements the lecturer would take into account in evaluating their assignments (Martínez-Molina, 2019; Gallardo, 2020; Nawrin & Sadek, 2023). Reflective journaling provided a space for participants to document their writing experiences, noting what worked well and what needed change, thereby fostering continuous improvement. The process of revising and editing was described as iterative, with multiple rounds of revisions ensuring clarity, coherence, and correctness. Lawrence (2021) asserted that revision an integral part of any good writing process, and it involves seeing the work from different perspectives and angels. Teacher feedback was highly valued for its professional insights, guiding participants towards more effective writing strategies. Utilizing revision checklists enabled systematic evaluation of different paragraph components, ensuring no aspect was neglected (Strawson et al., 2020). Addition to this, comparing final drafts with earlier versions helped participants recognize their progress and understand the impact of their revisions. These evaluation strategies collectively fostered a culture of reflective practice and continuous improvement, empowering pre-service teachers to develop their academic writing skills systematically and effectively.

Conclusion

The study concluded that EFL pre-service teachers utilize various metacognitive strategies in their academic writing, specifically in the areas of planning, monitoring, and evaluation. During the planning phase, participants employed techniques such as mind mapping, outlining, brainstorming, and setting specific goals to organize their ideas and establish a structured framework for their paragraphs. These strategies aided in initiating their

writing process clearly and coherently. In the monitoring phase, pre-service teachers practiced setting short-term goals, effectively managing their time, asking themselves questions, revisiting outlines, and seeking feedback from peers. These activities helped them remain focused, track their progress, and ensure the coherence and quality of their work throughout the drafting process. Lastly, in the evaluation phase, participants used self-assessment, peer feedback, and rubrics to refine their drafts. Reflective journaling and iterative revisions further enhanced their ability to critically evaluate and improve their writing. These strategies highlight the importance of a comprehensive and self-regulated approach to academic writing, which contributes to the development of proficient and reflective EFL pre-service teachers.

Based on the findings, there are several key recommendations to enhance the academic writing skills of EFL pre-service teachers. Firstly, teacher education programs should include explicit instruction on metacognitive strategies such as mind mapping, outlining, and goal setting. Secondly, promoting collaborative learning through peer feedback and group brainstorming sessions can provide valuable perspectives and constructive feedback. Thirdly, encouraging reflective practices such as journaling and self-assessment can help pre-service teachers become more aware of their writing processes. Additionally, it is important to support the use of technological tools for grammar checking, mind mapping, and time management with appropriate training. Furthermore, providing structured feedback and clear assessment rubrics can guide revisions and help pre-service teachers understand high-quality writing criteria. Finally, emphasizing effective time management strategies will help pre-service teachers manage their writing workload

efficiently. By implementing these recommendations, EFL pre-service teachers can develop essential metacognitive strategies for successful academic writing.

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