

## The Indonesian Junior High School Students' Strategies in Learning Writing Skill

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### Abstract

This current study focuses its investigation on the skill-based language learning strategies by junior high school students in Indonesia. The purposes of this study are (1) to measure the intensity of use of learning strategy in learning writing skill, (2) to examine the correlation among the strategy categories of learning writing skill, and (3) to compare the use of learning strategies of learning writing by successful and less successful learners. The data were obtained from 257 students from two schools in Malang by administering a questionnaire from O'Malley and Chamot (1990). The strategies are classified into cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective strategies. The result of the statistical analysis shows that the overall use of strategies of learning writing skill by Indonesian junior high school students is at moderate level (2.65) with cognitive strategies reported at the highest use (2.80). It is also revealed a strong correlation among the three learning strategies – cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective with cognitive and metacognitive at the strongest correlation ( $.60 < r < .80$ ). In addition, this study does not find a sufficient proof that successful and less successful learners are significantly different in using the learning strategies in learning writing skill. The findings of this research then imply the need to engage the students with strategies to learn writing skill in order that they can maximize the strategy use. This can be done by incorporating strategies-based instruction in the classroom.

**Keywords:** language learning strategies, successful and less successful learners, writing skill

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## Introduction

Learners of English in EFL context consider writing as the most complex and frustrating course to deal with. It is not without any reason that they think so. In fact, writing skill requires multifaceted and complicated stages leading the students to focus on “how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, how to use discourse markers and rhetorical conventions to put them cohesively into a written text, how to revise text for clearer meaning, how to edit text for appropriate grammar, and how to produce a final product” (Brown, 2007, p. 391). To bridge the students with the complexity of those writing processes, learning strategies are then required to help the students get ease in accomplishing each writing process successfully. It is confirmed by Oxford (2002), who states that language learning strategies are behaviors or actions performed by language learners to create an easier, more successful, self-directed, and enjoyable learning process. Some studies even convincingly prove that strategies positively affect the success of English language learning (Mistar, 2011; Nunan, 1992; Oxford, 1990). Along the same line, the success of a second or foreign language learning “will be due to a large extent to a learner’s own personal investment of time, effort, and attention to the second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language (Brown, 2007, p. 69).”

Considering the crucial role of strategy use in promoting students’ fluency in writing English, an abundant body of studies have been conducted in different EFL countries. The main purpose is to get a deep understanding of various aspects of writing strategies such as the contribution of the strategies to writing proficiency, students’ strategy profile and the strategy use by successful and less successful learners.

Some researchers examine whether writing strategies contribute to students’ writing proficiency. The first research to mention is from Chien (2007), who finds that successful learners of Taiwanese university students focus more on generating texts, revising and editing, while the less successful learners focus more only on generating ideas. This finding implies that successful learners use the strategies more effectively than less successful learners do. Investigating cognitive factors contributing to Chinese EFL learners’ second language (L2) writing performance in timed essay writing, Lu (2010) uncovers that beside L2 proficiency and genre knowledge, strategy use also has a potential role as predictor of the students’ writing performance. Those findings suggest that learning strategies play a crucial role to achieve success in mastering writing skill.

Other studies are carried out to highlight the strategy profile. Administering Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990), Nguyen (2009) investigates learning strategies in writing employed by second-year undergraduate female students majoring in English. This research finds that Vietnamese students prefer to use metacognitive, memory, social, and compensation with quite close mean scores. In addition, Alharthi (2011) reports that final-year Saudi male students majoring in English apply more metacognitive, cognitive, and affective strategies to learn writing. Developing their own strategies, Alnufaie and Grenfell (2012) classify the strategies to learn writing into two categories: process-oriented and product-oriented writing strategies. The findings of this research indicate that 95.9% out of 121 second-year undergraduate Saudi student writers combine both strategies. Interestingly, the top five writing strategies apply by the participants are process-oriented. Involving 766 second year

senior high school students in Indonesia as the subjects, Mistar, Zuhairi, and Parlindungan (2014) also develop strategies to learn writing and uncover twelve strategy categories: self-monitoring, language-focusing, planning, metacognitive affective, cognitive compensation, self-evaluating, social process-focusing, authentic practicing, meaning-focusing, vocabulary developing, metacognitive commencement, and mental processing strategies. Metacognitive affective strategies, furthermore, are reported to be used at the highest frequency.

Some researchers report the use of writing strategy by successful and less successful learners. Nguyen (2009), for instance, reports that successful learners apply the learning strategies more frequently, and they deploy more metacognitive, memory, compensation, and cognitive strategies than less successful learners do. In line with the previous research, Mistar, Zuhairi, and Parlindungan (2014), also confirm that learning strategies are more often used by the successful learners of Indonesian senior high school. These research results convincingly prove that successful and less successful learners employ the learning strategies in different way.

As reviewed above, most studies are carried out to examine the learning strategies applied by university students and only one involving senior high students as the subjects. So far, it is not found any study reporting the use of strategies to learn writing used by junior high school students, whereas in fact writing skill is taught in junior high level where EFL learners begin to develop their English proficiency in all the four skills. Moreover, in Indonesian context this area of research has not grabbed much attention. It then becomes a great challenge for researchers to rise to this challenge. This current research is then conducted in an attempt to 1) measure the intensity of use of strategies in learning writing, 2) to examine the correlation of strategy categories of learning writing skill, and 3) to compare the use of strategies of learning writing by successful and less successful learners.

### Research Method

Descriptive and ex-post facto were the designs used in this current research, which involved 257 seventh and eighth graders of Indonesian junior high school from two schools. The subjects were assigned to respond a questionnaire taken from learning strategy from O'Malley and Chamot (1990) asking their strategy preference to learn writing skill. The questionnaire from O'Malley and Chamot was utilized because of its simplicity considering the subjects of the study were junior high school students. This instrument was translated into Indonesian language, simplified, and adjusted to the subjects' language competence. Moreover, the data of the students' writing performance were elicited by asking them to write a descriptive paragraph about themselves. Unfortunately, when the writing test was conducted, only 232 students participated. The students' compositions were scored based on the scoring rubric adapted from Bachman and Palmer (1989).

Having got the required data, a set of statistical analysis was performed. To examine the intensity of use of the learning strategies, analysis of mean score of each strategy category was done. The interpretation of the average score was based on Oxford's (1990) criteria. It is categorized *low* when the mean is between 1.00 and 2.44, *moderate* between 2.45 and 3.44, and *high* between 3.45 and 5.00. Further computation was measuring the correlation coefficient to know the inter-correlation of each writing strategies category. To answer the third research question, the subjects participated in writing test (232 students) were grouped based on their

writing score to get successful and less successful groups. Based on the passing grade, it was found 84 successful learners and 148 less successful learners. From each group, only 25% of them were analyzed (21 successful and 37 less successful learners). The final analysis was administering independent samples t-tests to examine the difference in the use of strategies between successful and less successful learners. To assist the computations of all the statistical data, computer statistical package SPSS Version 15 was used (Pallant, 2011).

## Results and Discussion

### Results

#### *Problem 1: How often do the EFL learners of Indonesian junior high schools apply learning strategies in learning writing skill?*

To answer this first question, a statistical analysis was performed, and Table 1 presents the overall use of writing strategies by Indonesian junior high school students is at moderate level (2.65). The deployment of cognitive strategies is at the highest mean (2.80), showing that students assume that cognitive are the most appropriate strategies to deal with writing problems. Metacognitive with the score of 2.66 are the second preferable strategies to deploy. Accounted the lowest score (2.49), social/affective strategies are reported to be used the least by the students. It indicates that most students do not use these strategies as it might be believed that these strategies are not appropriate to promote writing ability. Interestingly, each writing strategy category is used at moderate level, meaning that the strategies are used 'sometimes'. This result indicates that no strategy category is dominant. In other words, the students combine all the three strategies to improve their writing ability.

**Table 1** *Frequency of Use of Strategies of Learning Writing*

Strategy category	Mean	Frequency	Rank
Cognitive	2.80	Moderate	1
Metacognitive	2.66	Moderate	2
Social/Affective	2.49	Moderate	3
Overall Strategies	2.65	Moderate	

#### *Problem 2: Does the strategy categories of learning writing skill correlate each other?*

The computation finds that the writing strategy categories correlate to each other significantly. Detail statistical description is in Table 2.

**Table 2** *Inter-correlation among Strategy Categories of Learning Writing*

	Cognitive	Metacognitive	Social/Affective
Cognitive	1		
Metacognitive	.789**	1	
Social/Affective	.546**	.489**	1

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

The finding of the analysis above describes that the highest correlation coefficient is between cognitive and metacognitive strategies with  $r=.789$ ,  $p<.01$ . In addition, cognitive and social/affective are found to have coefficient of  $r=.546$ ,  $p<.01$ , while the correlation between metacognitive and social/affective strategies is found to be the lowest with  $r=.489$ ,  $p<.01$ . Furthermore, in terms of the correlation strength, it is uncovered that cognitive and metacognitive are at the strongest correlation ( $.60<r<.80$ ), and the moderate correlation is from the two pairs of strategy category – cognitive and social/affective strategies and metacognitive and social/affective strategies ( $.40<r<.60$ ).

Something to highlight from the result of correlation coefficient is that all of the coefficients show positive correlation at .01 level of significance with 2-tailed test. This indicates that the higher frequency in using certain strategy of learning writing skill, the higher frequency in deploying the other two strategies, and the vice versa. In other words, each category of writing strategies has influential attitude toward the other categories.

***Question 3: Is there any difference in the use of strategies of learning writing skill by successful and less successful learners?***

To compare the strategy used by Indonesian EFL junior high school students, independent samples t-test was performed and the result is presented in Table 3. As it can be seen from the table, the differences in the use of strategies by the successful and less successful learners range from  $-.14$  (the lowest difference) for social process-focusing strategies to  $.01$  (the highest difference) for vocabulary developing strategies. It is also revealed that no significant difference is found in the use of strategies to learn writing by successful and less successful learners. This indicates that both successful and less successful learners share the same strategies at almost the same intensity of use.

**Table 3** *The Difference in the Use of Strategies of Learning Writing Skill by Successful (N=21) and Less Successful Learners (N=37)*

Strategy Categories	Groups	Mean	Mean Difference	t-value
Cognitive	Successful	2.78	-.04	.672
	less successful	2.82		
Metacognitive	Successful	2.67	.01	.708
	less successful	2.65		
Social/Affective	Successful	2.40	-.14	.1277
	less successful	2.54		

## Discussion

As stated earlier, this present study is conducted generally to describe the use of strategies to learn writing by junior high school students in Indonesian context. In terms of the strategy use, this study uncovers that the overall use of the three strategy categories is at moderate level with cognitive strategies applied at the highest mean score. This indicates that junior high students in Indonesia have not obtained sufficient exposure to the awareness of using language learning strategies. In addition, the highest mean score achieved by cognitive strategies explains that the students more frequently employ cognitive strategies to learn writing skill than the other two strategy categories – metacognitive and social/affective strategies. This finding implies that the students use more mental processes to deal with the complexity of writing. Resourcing, memorization, practice, checking, and revision are strategies used when the students engage their cognitive side in writing skill. This finding is in line with Alharthi (2011) who reports that together with metacognitive and affective strategies, cognitive strategies involving thinking before writing, simplifying questions, checking for grammar and spelling, and using the dictionary during writing are used at high frequency. Since cognitive strategies link to mental processes, this result also supports the previous research done by Alnufaie and Grenfell (2012). They reveal that the top five strategies used by undergraduate Saudi students are process-oriented, and the two of them – *using similar English word when the students do not know the exact word and simplifying what to write when they do not know the exact expression* – relate to cognitive strategies.

However, this finding contrasts to some other research results such as reported by Nguyen (2009) who finds metacognitive, memory, social, and compensation as the most frequently used strategies by Vietnamese university students. Along the same line, Mistar, Zuhairi, and Parlindungan (2014) also uncover that Indonesian senior high students prefer to apply metacognitive affective strategies to learn writing skill. The disparate findings among those studies might be due to the distinct subjects. This present study involves junior high students as the subjects. In this school level, EFL students have just learned English for one and two years since English is a compulsory subject from grade seven of junior high school. It can be said that their experience in learning English will also influence their knowledge of learning strategy to deal with writing difficulties. Another factor that likely affects the different result of this current research from the previous two is the instrument. Strategy from O'Malley & Chamot (1990) is the questionnaire used in this study. Meanwhile, Nguyen (2009) obtains the data of strategy preference from SILL by Oxford (1990) and Mistar, Zuhairi, and Parlindungan (2014) develop a new questionnaire namely Posteriori Taxonomy of Strategies of Learning Writing Skill.

The intensity of use of the three strategy categories – cognitive, metacognitive and social/affective –, which are used at the moderate level indicates that the strategies are applied *sometimes*. It can be noted that the use of learning strategy in the writing is not really recognized by the Indonesian junior high school students and even the teachers. This result supports the previous research conducted by Mistar, Zuhairi, and Parlindungan (2014), who report that writing strategy use by Indonesian senior high students is also at moderate level. These findings then confirm that EFL students especially in Indonesia are lack of exposure to language learning strategy. This is proven by several studies which report learning strategies are 'sometimes'

applied. Interestingly, this happens not only in writing skill but other skills as well such as in speaking skill (Novitasari, 2009; Umamah, 2008).

With regard to the correlation among the strategy categories, the statistical analysis reveals that all the three strategy categories significantly correlate each other. This means that the higher frequency in using certain strategy of learning writing skill, the higher frequency in deploying the other two strategies, and the vice versa. It can be concluded that the use each category of writing strategies influence the other two categories. This finding is actually predictable as previously, Oxford and Ehrman (1995) report the significant correlation among SILL strategy categories. Along the same line, Mistar (2011), who measures the interrelationship among language learning strategy categories in his Learning Strategy Questionnaire (LSQ), also reveals that the eight strategy categories correlate each other significantly. In addition, other studies with different strategy categories such as Setiyadi with Language Learning Strategies Questionnaire (LLSQ) and Mistar, Zuhairi, & Umamah (2014) with their strategies of learning speaking skill find that statistically each learning strategy category has significant intercorrelation. These findings finally confirm that improvement on one strategy category will improve the other categories.

An interesting result comes up when comparing the strategy applied by successful and less successful learners. Both groups are found to apply cognitive strategies more than the counterparts, meta-cognitive and social/affective strategies. However, this study fails to prove the significant difference between successful and less successful learners in employing the three strategy categories. This shows that both groups share the same strategies and use them almost equally. This insignificant result might be explained by the students' writing score, which is not far different, ranging from 63 to 92. The finding of this study is contrast to the previous studies by Nguyen (2009) and Mistar, Zuhairi, and Parlindungan (2014) who report significant difference between successful and less successful learners in using strategies to learn writing. In addition, Chien (2007) reports that successful learners of Taiwanese university students give their focus more on generating texts, revising and editing, while the less successful learners focus more only on generating ideas. Meanwhile, Alharthi (2011) finds that only skilled writers of Saudi students of King Abdul Aziz University plan their writing globally and locally, while both skilled and less skilled students apply cognitive strategies. To gain deeper knowledge on the difference between successful and less successful learners in applying writing strategies, more studies are totally required.

## Conclusion

This study investigates the intensity of use of strategy to learn writing used by Indonesian junior high school students. The analysis reveals that all of the three strategy categories – cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective strategies – are used at the moderate level ( $M=2.65$ ) with cognitive strategies found to be used at the highest frequency ( $M=2.80$ ). Furthermore, it is also reported that there is strong inter-correlation among the three strategy categories. Finally, the difference between successful and less successful learners in using the strategies is reported insignificant. Regarding the intensity of use found in this current research and the insignificant difference in using the strategies by successful and less successful learners, strategies-based instructions in writing class is strongly required to equip the students with appropriate strategies to improve their writing performance.

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