

## WRITING STRATEGIES USED BY ESL UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the writing strategies employed by upper secondary school students learning English as a Second Language (ESL). Writing in a second language requires not only linguistic competence but also cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies [1]. The research explores how learners plan, draft, revise, and monitor their writing, and how these strategies influence writing quality. Using a mixed-methods approach involving questionnaires, writing samples, and interviews, the study identifies the most frequently used strategies and their relationship to students' proficiency levels [2]. The findings reveal that successful ESL writers use a wider range of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, while less proficient learners rely heavily on surface-level translation and memorization. The study highlights the importance of strategy-based instruction in improving ESL writing performance [3].

**Introduction.** Writing is one of the most complex skills in second language learning because it requires the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and communicative competencies [4]. For ESL upper secondary school students, writing in English is particularly challenging due to limited vocabulary, grammatical difficulties, and lack of discourse awareness [5]. Modern language pedagogy emphasizes learner autonomy and strategic learning, in which students actively control their writing process through planning, drafting, revising, and evaluating their texts [6]. Understanding how ESL learners use writing strategies is therefore essential for improving both instruction and learning outcomes.

**Literature Review.** Oxford defines language learning strategies as specific actions that make learning more effective, self-directed, and transferable [1]. In

writing, cognitive strategies include organizing ideas, summarizing, and translating, while metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's writing [2]. Flower and Hayes developed a cognitive process model of writing, showing that writing is recursive and involves constant interaction between planning, writing, and revising [7]. Research indicates that proficient ESL writers spend more time on planning and revising than less proficient learners [8]. Roca de Larios et al. found that weaker writers rely heavily on first-language translation, whereas stronger writers use idea-based composing strategies [9]. Furthermore, Graham and Harris demonstrated that explicit instruction in writing strategies significantly improves students' writing performance and motivation [10]. These studies suggest that strategy use is a key predictor of writing success.

**Methodology.** This study used a mixed-methods design. Sixty upper secondary ESL students aged 15–18 participated in the research. Data were collected through a writing strategy questionnaire adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) [1], analysis of students' written compositions using a standardized rubric [10], and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed statistically, while qualitative data from interviews were coded thematically to identify patterns in strategy use.

**Results and Discussion.** The findings of the study indicate clear differences between high-proficiency and low-proficiency ESL learners in their use of writing strategies. High-proficiency students demonstrated frequent and effective use of planning, monitoring, and revising strategies [7]. Before writing, they typically generated ideas through brainstorming, created outlines, and set clear goals for their texts. During the writing process, they monitored their language use, coherence, and organization, making adjustments when necessary. After completing a draft, they engaged in systematic revision, focusing not only on grammatical accuracy but also on clarity of ideas, logical flow, and overall text quality.

In contrast, low-proficiency learners relied heavily on translation and memorization strategies [9]. Many of these students reported thinking in their first

language and translating sentences word-by-word into English. This approach often resulted in unnatural sentence structures, limited vocabulary use, and reduced coherence. Their writing process was generally linear rather than recursive, meaning they spent little time revising or reorganizing their ideas once a draft was completed.

The study also found that students who actively evaluated their own writing and sought feedback from teachers or peers produced significantly more coherent and accurate texts [10]. These learners used feedback not merely to correct surface-level errors but to improve content development, argumentation, and organization. Peer and teacher feedback helped students become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to make more informed revisions.

Overall, the results strongly support the view that strategic control over the writing process leads to higher writing quality [2]. Students who applied metacognitive strategies – such as planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation – were better able to manage the cognitive demands of second-language writing. They wrote with greater confidence, produced more organized texts, and demonstrated improved linguistic accuracy. These findings highlight the importance of explicit instruction in writing strategies as a key component of effective ESL writing pedagogy.

**Conclusion.** The study confirms that writing strategies are a critical factor in ESL writing development. Upper secondary students who use a variety of cognitive and metacognitive strategies write more effectively and independently [1], [8]. Therefore, ESL teachers should incorporate strategy instruction into writing lessons to help learners become more confident and successful writers [10].

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