ENGLISH STUDENT TEACHERS' ACADEMIC WRITING STRATEGIES: A SURVEY

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Abstract

Student teachers need to have writing skills to support their academic activities and professional lives. Mastery of writing skills is interrelated to the use of academic writing strategies; metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social strategies. The purpose of this study was to describe students' academic writing strategies, specifically in writing their thesis. This was a quantitative study with a survey design. The sample in this study involved 88 students. The instrument in this study was a questionnaire with a Likert scale. The results indicated that the most dominant strategy used by students was metacognitive. Furthermore, the results also showed that there were different strategies used by male students and female students. Male students preferred to use social strategies to cognitive strategies while female students like cognitive strategies rather than social strategies.

Keywords: academic writing, English student teachers, writing strategies

Introduction

To become competent users of English, one must focus on both productive and receptive skills. Writing and speaking are the productive skills, while listening and reading are the receptive skills. All skills are in fact important regarding communication. As Oxford (1990, pp. 201) argues: "Learners need to learn how to learn, and teachers need to learn how to facilitate the process. Although learning is certainly part of the human condition, conscious skill in self-directed learning and in strategy use must be sharpened through training'. We assume the issue of fostering independent learning in the language classroom should become an important aspect of the language teaching pedagogy. Some research had been done concerning English Academic writing socialization and EFL students' perception on writing difficulties in Indonesian context, particularly in Jambi (Mukminin et al., 2015; Habibi et al., 2017). The result of qualitative study conducted through semi-stuctured in-depth interviews with student teachers had five salient themes that emerged in this research were (1) no writing cultural backgrounds, (2) needing long-lasting exposure and internalization, (3) lack of academic writing socialization, (4) lack of institutional supports, and (5) lack of lecturer's help due to higher power distance (Mukminin et al., 2015). Using quantitative analysis research Habibi et al., (2017) found the dominant problems in writing; word choice and poor organization/illogical sequence. This research more focused on EFL student teachers point of views on English academic writing, while this study will investigate student teachers' strategies in English language writing.

The researchers conducted this study as a result that student-teachers in the research site need to take two academic writing subjects in the first and second academic year. In addition, they also have to write a mini research *(skripsi)* in the final year of their study. The purposes of this research were to describe English language writing strategies used by student teachers in one teacher training program in Jambi, Indonesia and to differentiate the strategies used by male and female students. To achieve the objective of the study, the following research questions guided this study: (1) What strategies are dominantly used by Indonesian EFL student teachers?; (2) Are there any different writing strategies used by male and female students?

Literature Review

The present study has been informed by the current language learning methodology (Nunan, 1999, Cook, 2008, Ellis, 2012, Grifiths, 2008), which stresses the autonomy of learners who are viewed as agents of their own learning process. The research findings will be analysed in the light of this theory in order to gain insight from student teachers in Indonesian context. The theoretical for the research is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development, the sources of information on the research into learning strategies are the works of Oxford (1990, 1997, and 2011) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990). The writing strategies was the process goes through to produce the written form. The writer did not only need to know the process of writing but also need to apply these processes to the works. According to Kroll (2003), writing is an activity that needs a process consists of some stages. The stages are pre-writing, drafting, and revising through a feedback from a teacher or from a peer. In pre-writing, the students can make such a free writing on a free topic or a certain topic. After that, through the free writing, the students can continue to make a draft of the free writing. In this part, the researcher can check what they have already written in their free

writing. Then, as the last stage, the students can revise what has been drafted. In this part, mostly the students' writing is getting better than before, since the students have passed some stages.

Furthermore, Harmer (2006) states that there is a process in writing which is an interrelated set of recursive stages. Stages of the writing process: (1) Pre-writing: this stage has a written planning process when students brainstorm, research, describe ideas, and often use diagrams to draw their minds. Arrangement: this stage, the student outlines the points of ideas he or she gets for conveying ideas or opinions. (2) Reviewing: this stage, students review, modify and rearrange the activities they have done, can either re-organize, add words, delete words according to the content that the student has achieved or this is also called a draft fix. (3) Editing: at this stage in the writing process, the researcher fix and correct errors in grammar, and edit to clarify a sentence. (4) Publishing: this is the last stage in the writing process, which can later be published in accordance with the wishes of each. In addition, Nunan (2003) noted that writing is the mental work of creating ideas, thinking about how to develop them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader. Some people write spontaneously, and some people feel comfortable with a formal process of writing. The writing process commonly seen as three-stage process involves generating ideas, developing and organizing the ideas, and revising and editing them. First, generating ideas, in all subject areas, students need to develop skills for getting what they know about a topic down on paper, and generating ideas or finding additional facts. They also need skills to check whether their writing is on-topic and fulfills its purpose. Further, they need to be able to explain the writing assignment and the process they are following to effectively complete the assignment.

Then, developing and organizing ideas. Students need to know how to organize what they have learned about any topic or assignment into a well-structured whole. In longer writing assignments, they need to know how to create a strong, focused introduction that catches the reader's interest; how to link ideas in logically connected paragraphs that contain enough supporting detail; and how to conclude with a strong ending. Last, revising and editing. Students need individual and group skills to assess their own work and the work of others for content, clarity, form and style, and for errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling. Ultimately, students have individual responsibility for the accuracy of their work, but they need to know how to help each other improve. To sum up, based on some description and explanation about the process of writing from some theories, it can be assumed that it has some stages to produce well-written works. The stages in a process of writing to make writing into a good writing are planning, writing/execution and revising or final touches.

Methodology

Research design, participants, and locale of the study

This study used a survey approach. To obtain data on writing strategies used by participants, we distributed closed-ended questionnaires. This research was carried out at the one English language study program, in one state university in Jambi Province. One of the reasons to take the site was because *writing* courses are offered in the program. The courses encompass comprehensive aspects (general, academic and critical purposes). In addition to that, the site of the study was accessible. This study took 6 months from April to September 2020. The participants of this research were the eighth semester students in which the most of the participants in this research were female. There were 88 participants that consisted of 13 male and 75 female.

Data collection and analysis

The researchers adapted the questionnaire as a means of collecting data from previous study done by Mohite (2014). The questions focused on their academic writing and language learning strategies; Metacognitive strategies, Cognitive strategies and Social strategies. We modified the focus of the questionnaire. It has become more specific, from Writing Strategies into students' academic writing strategies, especially on their thesis writing. Furthermore, we deleted the questions that are not related to the academic writing and changed it with the similar questions to see the students' stability in filling out the questionnaire.

The result of pilot study showed the reliability of the questionnaire was 0.86. It means that the questionnaire was reliable to be used. After we got the data, we analyzed the questionnaire from students. According to Dornyei (2003), descriptive statistics are used to summarize sets of numerical data in order to conserve time and space. We used descriptive quantitative in analyzing respondent contribution from the questionnaires. We counted and analyzed the percentage of the essay writing strategies from the respondents. Besides calculating each item of the strategy which they used, we also calculated the more dominant essay writing strategy used by them.

Ethical considerations

To deal with the ethics of research, particularly, to keep our participants' identities and study site, we masked the names of the participants and research site. Also, participation in this study was totally voluntary and participants were allowed to resign anytime they wanted. All participants were given an informed consent form.

Findings

Writing is a complex language skill to master. Kroll (2003) stated that writing is an activity that needs a process which consists of some stages. The stages in a process of writing to make a good writing are planning, writing/execution and revising or final touches. In order to make a good writing, every student has their own strategies. The researchers focused on three strategies; Metacognitive strategies, Cognitive strategies and Social Strategies.

Figure 1. *Metacognitive strategies*
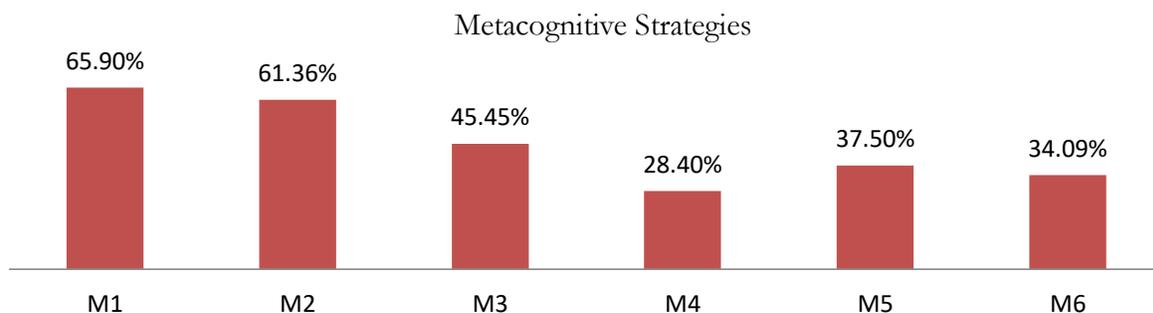
Note: "I read some examples to enrich my insight about thesis writing." (M1)
"Reading around the research topic helps me in writing thesis." (M2)
"I use grammatical structures which are required for thesis writing." (M3)
"If I don't know what to write next for my thesis, I take a short break to refresh my mind." (M4)
"I check my grammar." (M5)
"I check my vocabulary." (M6)

Generating a writing plan before writing a composition has a benefit to the writers (Chai, 2006). Figure 1 shows that the statement "I read some examples to enrich my insight about thesis writing" was the highest percentage of strong agreement that chosen by 58 students (65.90%). In addition, 54 students (61.36%) was strongly agreed on "Reading around the research topic helps me in writing thesis". It means that most of the students tried to make a preparation before they start writing.

For the execution or writing activity, the statement "I use grammatical structures which are required for thesis writing" was agreed by 40 students (45.45%) and 25 students (28.40%) agreed the statement "If I don't know what to write next for my thesis, I take a short break to refresh my mind". So, that is the reason why 33 students (37.5%) agreed on "I check my grammar" and 30 students (34.09%) agreed on "I check my vocabulary" to make sure that they write a right words after they take a break for a while.

**Figure 2.** *Cognitive strategies*

Cognitive Strategies
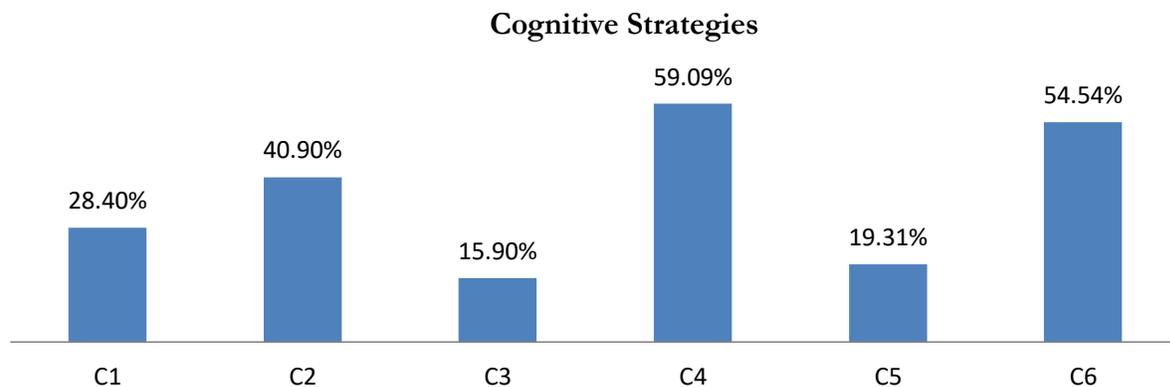
Note: "I prepare a list of keyword from my thesis to help me find the references, both from books and journals" (C1)
"I always write a draft and then I revise my thesis". (C2)
"I think in English when writing thesis." (C3)
"I think in Indonesian first and then translate my ideas into English". (C4)
"I use a monolingual dictionary for writing thesis." (C5)
"I use a bilingual dictionary for writing thesis." (C6)

Next, some students decided to take a note before they start writing. From the data, 25 students (28.40%) agreed on "I prepare a list of keyword from my thesis to help me find the references, both from books and journals" and for revision, 36 students (40.90%) agreed on "I always write a draft and then I revise my thesis". Cognitive strategies are known as resources in the hands, which can be applied for learning a second language through repetition, grouping, imagery, transfers, note taking and summarizing (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Furthermore, 14 students (15.90%) agreed with the statement "I think in English when writing thesis", while 52 students (59.09%) strongly agreed on "I think in Indonesian first and then translate my ideas into English". Moreover, 17 students (19.31%) agreed on "I use a monolingual dictionary for writing thesis", whereas 48 students (54.54%) agreed with the statement "I use a bilingual dictionary for writing thesis".

Figure 3. *Social strategies*

Social Strategies

68.18%	61.36%	61.36%	61.36%	53.40%
S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
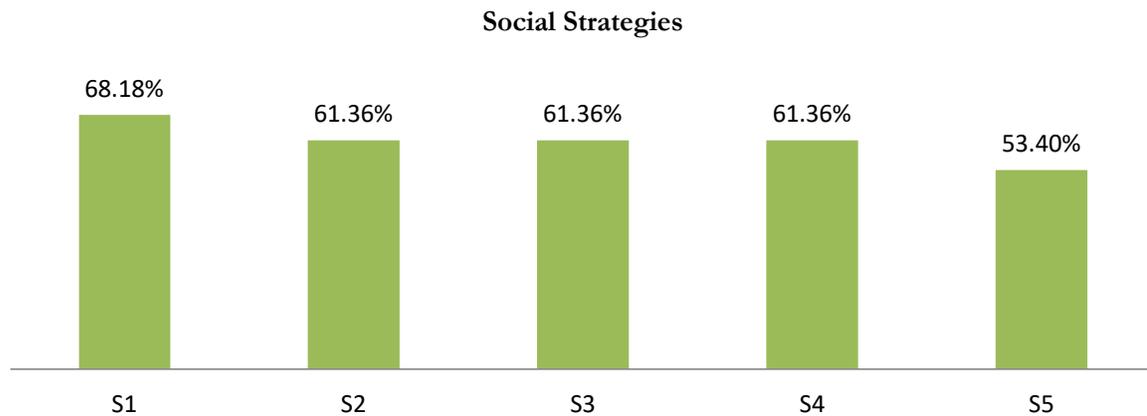
Note: "I read the supervisor's feedback and follow the advice." (S1)
"Sharing and discussing ideas with other students or supervisor helps me a lot in writing thesis." (S2)
"The more feedback I get from my supervisor, the better my thesis." (S3)
"The error correction and supervisor's feedback help me to revise my thesis." (S4
"I get benefit from feedback a lot from my supervisor or other students." (S5)

Students also have to think about their environment around them. Social strategies aim at developing awareness of and feeling for others. They include the actions learners choose in order to interact with their colleagues, or to help them overcome learning difficulties (Raoofi et al., 2017, pp.78). Figure 3 shows that 54 students (61.36%) agreed on "Sharing and discussing ideas with other students or supervisor help me a lot in writing thesis", "The more feedback I get from my supervisor, the better my thesis" and "The error correction and supervisor's feedback help me to revise my thesis*".* The result of the study is consistent with Masriani et al. (2018) which indicated that the students still needed peers to correct their writing, to help them in solving writing problems and to discuss the ideas in their writing. It is appropriate with some students who chose statement "I

read the supervisor's feedback and follow the advice" gained 60 strong agreements with the highest percentage (68.18%) and 47 students (53.40%) agreed with the statement "I get benefit from feedback a lot from my supervisor or other students". It means that the students can revise their writing after they got feedback from their social environment. Furthermore, this research found that there is a different strategy between male and female students.

Figure 4. *The comparison of writing strategies used by male and female students*
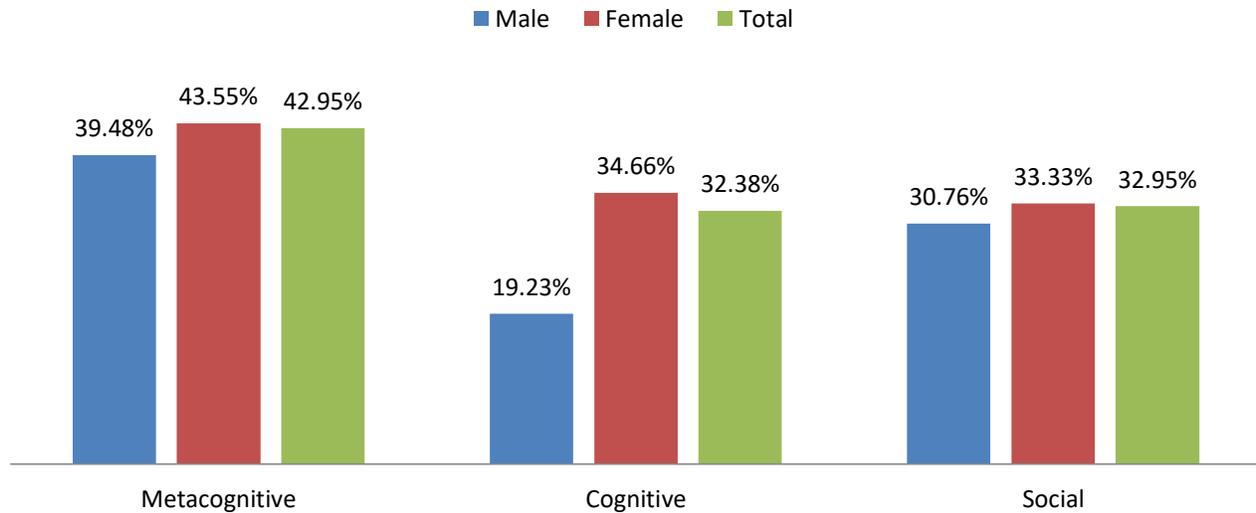

Figure 4 indicates that most of female students used "Metacognitive Strategies" with 43.55%, followed by "Cognitive Strategies" with 34.66% and the last strategy is "Social Strategies" with 33.33% of option "agree". On the other hand, male students tended to use "Metacognitive Strategies" with 39.48%, followed by "Social Strategies" with 30.76% and the last strategy is "Cognitive Strategies" with 19.23% of option "agree".

Discussion

The purposes of this study were to figure out the dominant writing strategy used by Indonesian EFL learners and to find out writing strategy differences between male and female students. In relation to the most dominant strategy, it was found that metacognitive strategy was dominantly used by the students. This finding confirms some studies (Masbirorotni & Fajaryani, 2020; Rustam, Hamra, & Weda, 2016) which indicate that metacognitive strategy is one of the most dominant strategies in language learning, including writing. One of the surprising findings indicated that most students seem to have preparation before started writing. It was showed by the students' answer that they read some examples about thesis writing. This is in contrast with a study of Cliff and Hanslo (2009) which reported that EFL students in university tend to be under-prepared. Another interesting finding from metacognitive strategy is that the students acknowledged that they take a break to refresh their mind when they do not know to write the thesis. This infers that the students sometimes feel bored, stuck, and even frustrated with their thesis. It is in line with the

statement of Harmer (2001) that the student can be frustrated when they do not have the words or grammar that they need to write.

Besides using metacognitive strategy, the students used social and cognitive strategies. Social strategy aims at developing awareness of and feeling for others. They include the actions learners choose in order to interact with their colleagues, or to help them overcome learning difficulties (Raoofi et al., 2017). The findings of this study revealed that sharing and discussion with friends and supervisors help the students in writing. This confirms a study by Masriani et al. (2018) which indicated that the students still needed peers to correct their writing, to help them in solving writing problems and to discuss the ideas in their writing. Cognitive strategy is known as a resource in the hands, which can be applied for learning a second language through repetition, grouping, imagery, transfers, note taking and summarizing (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). This strategy is the least dominant writing strategy used by EFL learners. The findings of this strategy, again, imply that the students are well-prepared. It was indicated from their survey responses that many of them write a draft, revise the thesis, and prepare a list of keywords for searching references. This contradicts Cliff and Hanslo (2009) study which revealed that EFL students in university tend to be under-prepared.

The study also showed that female students were more anxious compared to male students in writing. This supports the study of Pappamihiel (2002) which found that male students were less anxious than female students in mainstream classroom. From the findings, it was found that female students were more attempted their work by their own self. It is related to some students who gave same statement while they filled the questionnaire. After they focused on Metacognitive strategies, they chose to focus on Cognitive Strategies first before they ask for help from the person around them. It is different from male students who have chosen Social Strategies after they tried to push themselves on their writing. This finding of male and female writing strategy preferences is also similar with the research of Maharani et al. (2018) The research found that the factors underlying the choice of writing strategies used by male students were purpose of learning language, motivation, degree of awareness, learning style, and belief, whereas the factors underlying the choice of writing strategies used by female students were purpose of learning language, motivation, degree of awareness, learning style, belief, and learning environment. It is similar with the finding of this research that most of the students chose writing strategies based on their learning environment because they asked their social to give a feedback of their writing before they chose Cognitive Strategies.

Conclusions

The findings showed that the most dominant strategies used by students was metacognitive strategies which involved tactics that make students can control their writing. Most of the students used Metacognitive strategies before they start writing (42.95%). However, the finding showed that there is any different writing strategies between male and female students, male students tended to use Social strategies (30.76%) rather than Cognitive (19.23%) while female students focused more on Cognitive strategies (34.66%) rather than Social strategies (33.33%). It is related to students' confession when they filled the questionnaire that female students are more organized about what they have to do before and after writing.

Disclosure statement

There is no conflict of interest reported by the authors.

Acknowledgments

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