

# Students' Self-Regulated Strategies in Approaching Second Language Writing

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**Abstract**—The requirements writers need to succeed in second language writing are demanding. Studies in this field are mostly on how second language writers could overcome writing hurdles, including writing and self-regulated strategies. Through previous literature, thematic data analyses, and cross-tabulation, this study aimed to inspect participants' writing strategy use and their perception of how these strategies affect their writing. These results showed that the participants expressed low self-efficacy based on their preference to use non-self-regulated than self-regulated strategies. The analysis also indicated a need for second language writers to write accurately due to writing anxiety. Additionally, the findings showed the need for self-regulated strategy-based instruction for second language writing.

**Index Terms**—self-regulated strategies, writing strategies, second language writing

## I. INTRODUCTION

Acquiring the writing ability may require a significant investment of time and effort because success demands good management of cognitive skills to produce a good composition. This demand for cognitive skill management becomes especially taxing as writing in a second language. In this case, attention is on the structure, content, and cultural variation a language could have beyond a sentence level (Kaplan, 1965). There are many formal studies on second language writing and how it is instructed. These studies have produced journals, books, graduate courses, and conferences discussing second language writing (Matsuda et al., 2003). One point of discussion on this topic involves the daunting hurdle that second language writers must overcome. The obstacle is how complex second language writing could be once at the university level (Mitchell et al., 2021). These writers need to adapt to different cultural variations and provide plausible arguments, peer-reviewed resources, and paraphrases of these resources. The hurdles could change the writing willingness since the changing era has made people more interested in writing and expressing everything using visual language on social media (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). Consequently, writers used writing strategies to manage uncertainties to circumvent and overcome these hurdles (Gordon in Griffiths, 2008). Studies have shown that self-regulated writing strategies positively affect second language writing development (Teng & Zhang, 2020). This necessitates more instructions on the use of writing strategies. The increased technology and online learning to meet learners' needs also increase their writing skills. This is because examples of good writing and writing strategies are easy to find (Anggrawan et al., 2019). The advance of human intelligence in creating sciences and new systems may be used wrongly. Therefore, learners should be careful in fulfilling their curiosity about knowledge in the best way (Suhadi et al., 2022).

Observing writing students of an Indonesian university would suggest that writing strategies are not yet implemented or employed effectively in overcoming writing hurdles. Previous studies have expressed the presumably positive effects of writing strategies. Therefore, ascertaining whether the hypothesis from this observation has merit may improve the results of the compositions. This study aimed to determine writing strategies prominently used by students when faced with hurdles in their Academic Writing course. It also intended to identify the practical reason behind the preference of each of these writing strategies. Questionnaire data were collected from students taking an Academic Writing course in an Indonesian university. First, the study focused on the literature on second language academic writing, the involved cognitive process, and the employed writing strategies. Second, students' usage of writing strategies and preferences were taken from the findings. Third, the factors causing the preference for certain writing strategies were discussed to provide implications for developing Academic Writing education. The findings, discussions, and conclusions may contribute to developing second language writing and provide additional considerations for future studies on this topic.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Second Language Academic Writing

Academic writing is advanced and complex because it requires the writers to think critically, form hypotheses, and create possible solutions and arguments for the topic they used for their academic writing composition. Due to this daunting difficulty, studies have attempted to determine the most effective way to approach and overcome the hurdles and limitations of academic writing instruction in educational contexts (Karabinar, 2013; Kaufhold & Yencken 2021; Maamuujav et al., 2021; Tardy, 2021). Most of these studies focus on second language learners due to the additional difficulty of writing in another language than their native tongue. In learning a new language, there is a difficulty in how the language used is irrelevant to the literal meaning, requiring more interpretation (Yulianti et al., 2022). Therefore, this may be overcome by introducing cultural aspects to the learning process. This would improve the writers' skill of writing a language with a cultural background to be understood before being used (Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022).

Writing in a second language could be difficult because it has the combined complexity of the writing task with a certain knowledge of the second language's culture (Kaplan, 1965) necessary to make the resulting composition comprehensive. This difference in the depth of cultural knowledge between the students' first and second language seems profoundly correlated. The difficulty in writing regarding the language's cultural background is related to the environment where the language is uttered by the speaker full of certain meanings (Hasyim et al., 2020). In using language, especially in a socio-cultural context, the cultural value system helps society to perform good attitudes and behavior to maintain the existed social norm in their environment (Takwa et al., 2022). Seeing this condition, literary works as the product of writing activity can be present as a trigger to awaken awareness of the importance of maintaining the relationship between humans and nature or the environment (Siwi et al., 2022). According to Nemati and Taghizadeh (2013), second language learners are significantly held back in developing their writing productivity due to the loss of certain advantages during first language learning. This includes the passage of a critical period, an age optimal for language learning. There are also affective factors, such as lower learning motivation and higher anxiety, a difference in context and source of input, and corrections to language errors compared to first language learning. These difficulties could be faced by focusing more on the cultural and environmental background of the second language, such as by reading through a literary work (Arafah et al., 2021). A particular aspect of second language writing could be found in a literary work because it explores the phenomena of human life in a certain period. This enables students to learn how a language was used in that era (Fadillah et al., 2022; Mutmainnah et al., 2022). The language style changed with time, making a literary work more interesting and easy to understand (Afiah et al., 2022; Asriyanti et al., 2022). Therefore, the cultural aspect of how language is used is seen in a specific writing style compared to another type of writing in a different era. The change of language in the modern era should be learned more before using, as happened in the Tolaki community of Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi. The traditional meaning has been shifted to a modern one, causing more difficulties in understanding the language's meaning (Takwa et al., 2022).

### *B. Cognitive Process in Writing*

Writers are often faced with the complexity of the writing process, which frequently includes external and internal factors. External factors include the context of the writing task or when they are due, while internal challenges include the writer should approach the writing assignment. Flower and Hayes (1981) constructed a theory to model the cognitive processes when writing a composition. In this model, writing includes three major components. First, the task environment includes considerations regarding aspects outside the writer. Second, the writers' long-term memory shows how they accumulate information about the writing topic, readers, and the plans useful in the writing process. Third, the writing process includes the basic process classified under monitoring, such as planning, translating, and reviewing.

Revesz et al. (2019) described this writing process in the formulation, planning, execution, and monitoring stages. In the planning stage, writers formulate and translate plans into language form. They undergo an intricate high-order process of retrieving and arranging ideas from their long-term memory to formulate plans. Moreover, writers undergo low-order processes, such as lexical retrieval and syntactic encoding, to translate plans into linguistic code. In the execution stage, the literal writing action takes place. The writers then move to the monitoring stage to evaluate whether the written text has fulfilled the planned content. They also revise discrepancies that would derail the text from what has been planned. These stages occur throughout the entire process of writing a composition, increasing the complexity that second language writers consider. Despite the complexity, proper regulation and employment of these cognitive processes positively impact the writers' capabilities in writing. Zabihi (2018) found that using cognitive processes enables higher fluency and complexity at the cost of lower accuracy for second language writers.

Reinforcement of cognitive processes also positively impacted the aspect of learning. Arnold et al. (2017) showed that the cognitive processes of writing might positively impact the retrieval of information that was used and synthesized in content creation. This may be due to how information is accumulated to improve content planning and translation to suit the composition purposes and context. The information is drilled and retained in the writer's long-term memory.

### *C. Writing Strategies*

The strenuous writing process, management of related cognitive processes, and considerations of the cultural variable of another language require second language writers to utilize methods to make the process more effective. For the past decade, many studies have analyzed and classified the writing strategies employed by second language writers to

overcome their shortcomings. However, some classifications refer to the same actions, albeit coded differently. Shofiya (2013) synthesized the writing strategies employed by second language writers. The strategies include planning, evaluating, using L1, monitoring, re-reading, questioning, repeating, revising, resourcing, clarification, retrieval, rest or deferral, organizing, rehearsing, comparing, summarizing, defining terms, lead-in, avoidance, and note-taking. Other strategies are elaborating, assigning goals, rationalizing, format, getting feedback, modeling, inferencing, sense of readers, and generating ideas. Practicing writing skills in English must relate to the language format, the function of words, and the cultural aspects of the language used (Arafah et al., 2020). Additionally, the format used in writing must follow regulations such as using abbreviations to find efficiency, but not in academic writing limited to only several words (Hasjim et al., 2020).

There are many variables due to the need for writing strategies depending on the situation and individual writers' preferences. Several studies on writing strategies focused on a particular aspect of strategy use that could serve as categories for certain writing strategies (Bailey, 2019; Maarof & Murat, 2013; Haukås et al., 2018). Bailey (2019) categorized these strategies use into planning (before writing), problem-solving (during writing), and corrective feedback (post writing). Moreover, Maarof and Murat (2013) and Haukås et al. (2018) used similar categories but with slightly different coding, resulting in prewriting, while-writing, and revising, as well as monitoring and evaluating.

#### *D. Self-Efficacy, Writing Anxiety, and Self-Regulated Strategies*

As employing writing strategies would imply a desire for self-improvement, a certain level of self-regulation and self-efficacy is necessary to utilize these strategies. Self-efficacy is the belief in the ability to achieve certain actions and how this belief could affect life events (Ramachaudran, 1998). Although self-efficacy does not directly affect the learning process, people with established self-efficacy experience greater ease in other aspects of learning (Arafah et al., 2020). Therefore, people with high self-efficacy would be more motivated to regulate strategies.

Writing anxiety may also negatively affect second language writers' self-efficacy. Studies have shown that many second language writers struggle with writing anxiety (Nugroho & Ena, 2021; Prasetyaningrum et al., 2021; Jawas, 2019). According to Karlina and Pancoro (2018), this anxiety originated from a lack of acquired linguistic knowledge and would result in poor writing performance. Anxiety is a part of psychological problems that affect people's egos, making them believe in their inability to write rather than improving writing skills (Purwaningsih et al., 2020). This supports Sunardi et al. (2018), which found that second language learners' deficiency caused them to struggle to engage with literary works, negatively impacting their motivation to participate. Moreover, it is more difficult for a non-native speaker to use a language. This is because the structure and cultural style of the second language and the mother tongue differ (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019). This anxiety arises as second language learners enter different advanced writing, becoming more aware of their skill level and errors (Bailey et al., 2017). However, this writing anxiety could be overcome with the continuous use and instruction of writing strategies (Bailey, 2019). Writing strategies improve self-efficacy because the two have a mutualistic symbiosis.

Zimmerman (2013) provided a social cognitive model of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) that includes behavioral forms, where writers observe their performances and strategically adapt. The model also has environmental forms, such as monitoring and strategically controlling varying environmental factors, and covert forms, implying observing and adapting certain effective factors. Moreover, the study showed the importance of self-efficacy for SRL, as participants indicated higher academic achievement when self-efficacy and SRL were administered. Teng and Zhang (2020) found an improvement in writing achievement in participants that received SRL strategies-based instruction. Participants showed a slightly negative attitude towards using goal-oriented monitoring and peer-learning strategies. Additionally, the results showed how improvements in participants writing gain only began after significant time had passed. These studies support the notion that self-efficacy should be established within the people planning to utilize SRL and self-regulated strategies.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### *A. Participants and Data Collection*

This study aimed to examine the most prominent strategies used by students to overcome writing hurdles. Data were collected from Academic Writing course students selected based on their likelihood to employ writing strategies in producing a composition. The use of strategies in this course may be more frequent than in other courses due to the need for careful sentence structure, information management, and paraphrasing of used sources. Additionally, students that took this course in the past showed great potential in writing production. Some of the most successful students had their research published by renowned academic publishers. This potential indicates a higher chance of writing strategies use, which is the prime criterion of this study.

Data were collected through mixed questionnaires adapted from Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI) theory by Schraw and Dennison (1994). The success of the writing process is related to self-regulated strategies. This self-regulation may be a form of metacognitive awareness in the form of action. Therefore, the MAI was restructured in the form of how it is used as a writing strategy to suit the purposes of this study. The mixed questionnaire was given to 19 Academic Writing course students after a class session. Most students were in the middle or near the end of their studies. The course included students that wished to retake the course to achieve a higher GPA before the end of their studies.

The mixed questionnaire contained closed-ended questions with a Likert scale based on how participants used writing strategies ranging from “Strongly Disagree (SD)” to “Strongly Agree (SA)” (Joshi et al., 2015). There were also open-ended questions in the form of a space where participants elaborated on their answers by providing a brief description. As the questionnaire was adapted from MAI, the statements on which the participants based their answers were related to strategies that used the metacognitive awareness of planning, information management, comprehension monitoring, debugging strategies, and evaluation. Due to the limited number of participants, this study also included open-ended questions to improve the credibility of the data analysis. Moreover, the course lecturer informed the participants that they would participate in the study to accelerate the data collection process. The questions were presented in the Indonesian language to improve data accuracy.

#### B. Questions and Data Analysis

The study questions were:

RQ1: What are the writing strategies that students employed?

RQ2: What are the effects of certain writing strategies?

The participants' mixed questionnaire responses were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed to answer the study questions. Cross-tabulation analyses were conducted to analyze the quantitative data from the close-ended questions to determine the relationship between self-regulation elements and students' writing strategies. Furthermore, a thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data based on the participants' brief descriptions to elaborate on their responses. This analysis aimed to determine the effects of certain writing strategies on the participants.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Students' Employed Writing Strategies

Through the MAI, the participants were asked to relate their experiences in writing with the statements in the mixed questionnaire using a Likert scale. The data on metacognitive awareness were divided and coded based on how they are used as writing strategies. These codes include self-regulated strategies, which use planning, evaluation, and comprehension monitoring, and Non-self-regulated strategies, which use information management and debug strategies. For the strategy of planning, 73.7% of the participants related to the statements, while 26.3% did not. Based on the evaluation strategy, 39.5% of the participants disagreed, and 60.5% agreed. For the comprehension monitor, 25% of the participants disagreed, and 75% agreed with the statements relating to these strategies.

TABLE 1  
SELF-REGULATED STRATEGIES

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agree
Planning	1.3%	25%	26.3%	59%	14.7%	73.7%
Evaluation	6.6%	32.9%	39.5%	42%	18.5%	60.5%
Comprehension Monitor	0%	25%	25%	61.8%	13.2%	75%
Average Disagree			30.2%	Average Agree		69.7%

Data on the Non-self-regulated showed similar results. For information management strategy, 84.2% of the participants related to the statements representing this strategy, while 15.8% did not. Regarding debug strategies, 96% of the participants related to the statements, and only 4% did not. A higher percentage of participants related to the statements on the strategies than on self-regulated strategies.

TABLE 2  
NON-SELF-REGULATED STRATEGIES

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agree
Information Management	0%	15.8%	15.8%	75%	9.2%	84.2%
Debug Strategies	0%	4%	4%	70%	26%	96%
Average Disagree			9.9%	Average Agree		90.1%

The data showed that 90.1% of the participants related more to the statements on Non-self-regulated strategies, while 69.7% related to self-regulated strategies use. Also, 9.9% of participants relate to statements on Non-self-regulated strategies, while 30.2% do not relate to self-regulated strategies. It shows that most participants are more inclined to use non-self-regulated strategies.

This study aimed to determine the writing strategies employed by participants and how their use affected their writing. The mixed questionnaire results indicated that self-efficacy is not established within the students, affecting how they apply their strategies. This was shown by the significant gap between how the participants related to using self-regulated and Non-self-regulated strategies. The findings are consistent with Arafah et al. (2020) and Teng and Zhang (2020) regarding learning achievement using self-efficacy and SRL. The studies found that self-efficacy should be implemented and turned into a habit to have positive effects and be used strategically. When this requirement is not met, the self-regulated strategies cannot be used effectively; resulting in negative attitudes toward strategy use and a lack of

belief in the capability to employ strategies. Furthermore, the reluctance to use self-regulated strategies indicates that the participants struggle with writing anxiety. This is in line with Sunardi et al. (2018), where participants' language deficiency negatively affected learning engagement, resulting in low motivation. The low motivation may have affected the participants' self-efficacy, making them focus on strategies that remedy errors instead of improving writing results.

### *B. Effects of Used Writing Strategies*

The brief description of participants' answers in the close and open-ended mixed questionnaire contributed to the strategies' effects on the writing process. This sub-section includes themes that could be taken from the brief descriptions. It also includes excerpts taken and translated from these descriptions to be elaborated on in the discussion.

#### *(a). Self-Regulated Strategies*

The effect of self-regulated strategies on their writing could be perceived from the questionnaire where participants provide a brief description elaborating their answers. In this case, 69.7% of the participants answered positively about using these strategies. These strategies helped the participants finish their writing efficiently and effectively, as shown by the following excerpts:

*Evaluating my writing progress [...] so I know how far my writing has gone.*

*Planning what information to put in my writing is important [...] so I do not have to rewrite.*

*[...] I evaluate my writing progress because I need to know what is holding my writing back.*

*Rechecking my understanding of the topic helps [...] because I am afraid if the sentences [that] I made do not make sense with the topic.*

*Setting writing goals [...] so my writing progress is not "all over the place."*

About 30.2% of the participants responded negatively to using self-regulated strategies. These strategies do not appeal to them because of redundancy, the belief that they cannot employ these strategies, and affective factors within the participants, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

*[...] setting goals is not important because I usually write near the deadline*

*I do not check my progress [...] I struggle to change what I have already written*

*I do not think about the effectiveness of strategies [...] I do not pay attention to [the] strategies [that I use].*

*Evaluating my writing from summarizing [...] I think it is not too important.*

*I do not set writing targets [...] it does not fit my learning style.*

*I do not set writing targets [...] I do not want to push myself into writing.*

*Setting writing targets is not important [...] I start my writing according to my mood.*

Most participants expressed a positive impact from using self-regulated strategies, though a significant number are not inclined to use self-regulated strategies in their writing. This may be due to the lack of need to improve their writing, indicating a lack of an established self-efficacy to use self-regulating strategies effectively.

#### *(b). Non-Self-Regulated Strategies*

About 90.1% of the participants responded positively to the statements related to using non-self-regulated strategies. The brief description includes how the strategies helped the participants reduce writing mistakes, increase accuracy, and sort out confusion related to an assignment, as seen in the following excerpts:

*I focus on important information [...] to ensure that I do not make mistakes in my writing.*

*Asking others if there is something that I do not fully understand [...] I do not like inaccurate information.*

*[...] I do not want to make a mistake because my information is not accurate and clear.*

*I ask others if there is something I do not understand [...] to ensure that I understand what I need to do.*

*Asking others [...] broadens the knowledge of the material or idea that I am writing.*

*Checking new information [...] helps me understand more about the material.*

About 9.9% of the participants did not relate to the statements regarding using these strategies. Their descriptions mentioned their inability to use these strategies due to time constraints. Their use made a certain part of writing harder to understand, and they did not show expected effectiveness when applied, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

*I do not ask others for help in my writing [...] not effective when I put their suggestion to use.*

*Categorizing information [...] made it harder to understand.*

*I do not categorize information [...], it made me confused.*

*I do not check the meaning my writing has as a whole [...] I do not have the time to do so.*

The participants' main focus of what they may want to achieve in their writing could be perceived based on how most of them related to the statements on non-self-regulated strategies. The brief descriptions indicated that the main focus is on writing accuracy. This indicates that error correction is the main concern compared to improving writing effectiveness.

The participants were more inclined to use strategies that improve writing accuracy and prevent errors. This may be because second language writers are more susceptible to typos and misunderstanding information from cultural differences. The result could be writing anxiety that made the participants use strategies that helped them overcome this hurdle. This finding supports Nemati and Taghizadeh (2013), which showed how second language writers struggle with high learning anxiety due to context and input source differences and how they receive corrections to language errors in

their writing. Additionally, Bailey (2019) found that second language writers used problem-solving strategies to overcome writing anxiety.

## V. CONCLUSION

Self-regulated, strategy-based instruction in second language writing is still lacking. The study participants may have high writing anxiety that affected their performance and ability to employ self-regulated strategies. Therefore, there is a need to improve second language writers' self-efficacy and self-regulation to affect writing gains positively. This study used few participants, resulting in limited data due to time constraints. Future studies should include more participants to improve data credibility and provide a detailed description of second language writers' strategy use. The results hopefully contribute to emphasizing the need for strategy-based instruction in second language writing.

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