WRITING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION TO IMPROVE WRITING PERFORMANCE OF BANGLADESHI EFL LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the most difficult skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner to acquire. This skill becomes more difficult for a Bangladeshi EFL learner when he opts to pursue higher studies and is evaluated through the skill of writing in English. This article presents the findings of an experimental case study of writing strategy instruction on the learners' performance for writing a listing paragraph. The study was conducted on 43 undergraduate level EFL learners majoring in English Language and Literature in International Islamic University Chittagong, Bangladesh. The results demonstrated a positive result for the Bangladeshi EFL learners. The learners are able to write listing paragraphs effectively after the writing strategy instruction. Most of the learners' written listing paragraphs had more organizational features such as topic sentence, supporting sentences, cohesive devices, concluding signal and concluding sentence. Furthermore, the post-test paragraphs showed fewer errors in terms of subject-verb agreement, use of tense and sentence structure among others. Additionally, the learners scored higher marks based on the evaluation of the raters. The results draw attention to the advantages of writing strategy instruction to write listing paragraph for significant achievements such as maintaining organizational aspects and grammatical correctness.

Key Words: EFL learner, Writing Skill, Listing Paragraph, Organizational Problem, Grammatical Problem.

INTRODUCTION

English is a universal language and has achieved the status of lingua franca of the world at present (Hossain 2013; Jenkin, Cogo & Dewy 2011). It is a commonly learnt language by people of different classes for different needs. It enjoys the status of second or foreign language and can address the different needs of different people. The ability of the language to fulfill the various needs of the people has given rise to the development of different fields of English language for example, English for Academic Purpose (EAP), English for Science and Technology (EST), Business English, Technical English, Scientific English and Aviation English. Among all these fields of the English language, Hossain (2013) notes that learners of schools, colleges and universities formally learn English for Academic Purposes (EAP).The learners present their understanding of any subject through writing and are evaluated also through writing skill. They have to write assignment papers, present reports, submit project papers and theses mostly in English. They disseminate their knowledge of any content area to the wider academic community with the help of the writing skill. Coffin et al. (2003) truly observe that writing lies at the center point of teaching and learning in higher educational level and it addresses different objectives of different learners in different contexts. In the present world of global village, the needs of writing skill range from acquiring specialized knowledge in particular discipline to career

development (Hyland 2013).This highly needed skill appears as the most important as well as the most difficult skill.

Alsamadani (2010) and Javid et al. (2013) mentioned the difficulty of the writing skill for many reasons. Alsamadani (2010) refers to the challenging nature of the writing skill because of necessity for the learners to develop mastery over different sub skills. According to Alsamadani (2010), a writer has to write thesis statement followed by supporting details, and has to review and edit the written work after writing. On the other hand, Javid et al. (2013) referred to the linguistic differences between L1 and L2 as the cause of difficulty for a writer.

However, the difficulties of developing writing skill are multifarious. They should not be put together or not to be "generalized" (Raimes 1991:420). The difficulties include organizational as well as linguistic features. Silva (1993:696) notes that "L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing", that is, a Bengali learner's difficulties are not like those of Arabic learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In relation to rhetorical features and grammar of English, English writing skill has its own conventions to follow. Moreover, the difficulty might be due to the influence of thought pattern and culture, as Yu (2012) points out. The difficulties might include different teaching techniques or methods.

Different studies (Afrin 2016; Ahmed & Ahasan 2015; Sultan 2015; Yuen & Mussa 2015; Younes & Albalawi 2015; Shahhoseiny 2015; Mahmoud 2014; Mustaque 2014) have highlighted the writing problems of English in different contexts. Certain studies (Afrin 2016; Mustaque 2014) have highlighted the problems of Bangladeshi EFL writers.

Afrin (2016) and Mustaque (2014) examined the writing problems of the Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners and found difficulties in terms of grammar, vocabulary and organization. The findings of Afrin (2016) and Mustaque (2014) are in line with Shamsuzzaman and Everatt's (2013:71) comment about the Bangladeshi learners' minimal writing competence and "seriously flawed" writing skill. Afrin (2016) and Mustaque (2014) also refer to Bangladeshi EFL learners' lack of knowledge about writing standard paragraphs and essays and recommend to initiate writing strategy training to help the learners overcome the writing problems and for developing the writing performance of the Bangladeshi EFL learners.

Oxford (1990), Nunan (1991) and Ellis (1997) put the strategy training idea to equip learners with strategies to address their own needs in the learning process. Moreover, Oxford (1990) lends strong support for strategy training and raises the idea of strong necessity of strategy training in the contexts of ESL and EFL. The strong supports of Oxford (1990), Nunan (1991) and Ellis (1997) remind us of the Chinese saying quoted in Wenden (1985:1). The saying (Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a life time) means that if the learners become well equipped with necessary strategies to work out their problems, they will be able to improve their writing performance.

Following the observations mentioned above, different studies (De Silva 2015; Baghbadorani & Roohani 2014; Nguyen & Gu 2013; Rahimi & Noroozisiam 2013; Ibnian 2011; Negari 2011; McMullen 2009; Gu 2007; Rao 2007) are conducted in many contexts to instruct the ESL/EFL learners to use strategies to overcome the writing problems and thereby to develop their writing performance.

STUDIES ON WRITING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

Different studies were conducted in different contexts to teach writing strategies to improve writing performance of the EFL learners. The writing strategy instruction studies focused on different writing tasks.

De Silva's (2015) experimental study of teaching strategies to72 undergraduate learners in Sri Lanka for writing a description of a graph and an essay gave positive result. The result showed a very positive writing performance of the experimental group. Writing improved significantly in the aspects of cohesion, organization and grammar because of writing strategy instruction. Baghbadorani and Roohani (2014) did an experimental study following Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD), POW + TREE mnemonics and transition word chart. After the strategy instruction, the persuasive writing ability of the EFL learners in terms of format and content, organization and coherence, sentence construction and vocabulary in writing increased. The study of Nguyen and Gu (2013) was conducted on 91 Vietnamese university EFL learners with the help of metacognitive regulation for writing compare and contrast essay. Results showed that because of strategy training, the experimental group's scores improved.

Rahimi and Noroozisiam's (2013) experimental study was done based on sociocultural strategies on 43 EFL learners in Iran. The findings revealed that experimental group's performance in terms of organization and cohesion increased. In Negari (2011) strategy of concept mapping in line with the SRSD of Harris and Graham (1996) was taught. Results showed that experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of scores and their writing performance improved. Ibnian (2011) did a quasi-experimental study on Jordanian EFL learners using brainstorming strategy for the improvement of essay writing skill. The findings revealed that brainstorming strategy had helped develop Jordanian EFL learners' essay writing skill in terms of content, organization and mechanics of writing. McMullen's (2009) one group pre-posttest study taught strategies from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)of Oxford (1990) using Cohen and Weaver's (2006) framework to sixteen Saudi EFL university students. Evaluation of the written scripts showed that fifteen out of sixteen students got more marks in semester result. In Rao's (2007) study in China, the learners used brainstorming strategy. Findings showed higher score for the experimental groups in the post-test. Gu (2007) investigated the impact of strategy based instruction (SBI) following Chamot et al.'s (1999) framework. Despite a drop in the experimental group's delayed test scores, the experimental group did better than the control group in both the post-test and the delayed test.

These writing strategy instruction studies demonstrated positive development in terms of better score and better writing tasks of different genres. However, based on the researcher's experience as a teacher of writing skill for many years, it can be commented that paragraph writing should be focused first among all types of writing tasks. Paragraph writing helps the teacher in two ways. It helps the teacher to move forward to talk about writing essay of many paragraphs. It also helps the teacher to move backward to discussion of sentences which make up a paragraph.

The present study is conducted as a response to Afrin (2016) and Mustaque (2014) for conducting writing strategy training in the context of Bangladesh. Furthermore, the present study fills the gap of strategy training as pointed out by Shamsuzzaman and Everatt (2013) to enhance the Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners' learning outcomes in terms of writing performance. Moreover, the need to conduct writing strategy instruction in more L2 contexts is emphasized by Plonsky (2011) and creates the ground to fulfill the objective to see whether writing strategy instruction develops the writing performance of

the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL learners. The objective of this study is to investigate the effect of writing strategy instruction for better performance in write listing paragraph.

METHODOLOGY

The present study followed an experimental case study approach for conducting writing strategy instruction to the Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners. The paragraphs written at the beginning and at the end of the writing strategy instruction were considered as the pre-test and post-test of the study. The pre and post-test paragraphs were collected to evaluate the impact of the writing strategy instruction. The researcher chose 43 sample learners as the subjects for this study purposively. Creswell (2012) stated that samples are selected purposively in a qualitative study, like this study, because the objective of a qualitative study is not to generalize findings, rather to make an in-depth study. Moreover, purposive sampling is done when the samples are "information rich" (Patton 1990:169). This study chose the learners purposively because they will provide rich findings and the difficulty of writing needs in-depth understanding.
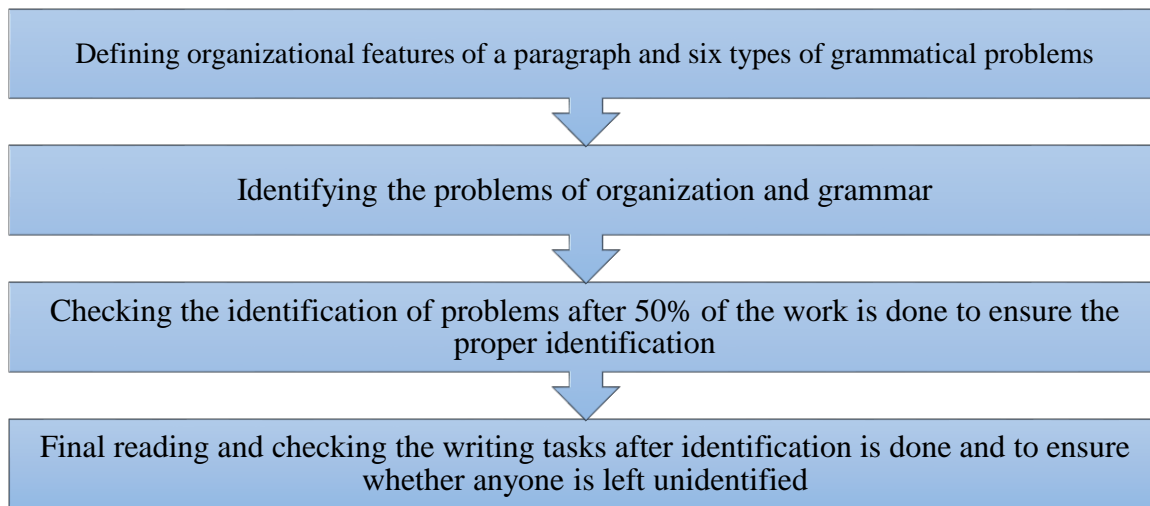
The writing strategy training continued in eight sessions. In the first session, the learners wrote a paragraph which was considered as pre-test. After paragraph writing was over, learners were informed about writing strategy and the procedure of the writing approach adopted for this study. Then model paragraphs were discussed with reference to the features of a listing paragraph. Finally they were demonstrated the process of brainstorming, process of transferring the brainstormed ideas on the graphic organizer meant for listing paragraph before writing the paragraph. After that, the learners were supplied transition word chart and self-editing check list too and they were shown how they could use the word chart and check list in relation to writing a listing paragraph.

The second to sixth sessions continued in the same way. At the beginning, the learners received their examined scripts. Then, a discussion with the teacher was held for 50 minutes on the problems identified in the learners' writings tasks. Only the organizational features and six types of grammatical aspects were focused in the writing tasks. After the discussion of the writing problems, topic of the session was written on the board. The learners brainstormed in groups for 10 minutes through mutual discussion on the individually provided sheets of papers and transferred the ideas on the graphic organizers. Then six chosen learners presented the graphically organized ideas before the other learners. After the presentations of graphically organized ideas by the six learners in 25 minutes, they were asked to reorganize, add and develop the ideas on the respective graphic organizers. Finally they all wrote the paragraphs in 30 minutes and referred to the transition word chart if needed. After completing writing the paragraphs, they checked their writing paragraphs using the check list. Thus, the learners practiced writing paragraphs in the second to the sixth sessions. In the seventh session, fifteen randomly chosen learners presented before others on the white board or verbally in 5 minutes each. The learners focused on the different problems of organization and grammar identified in their written paragraphs. After the presentation of the learners, the researcher analyzed the commonly found problems of organization and six types of grammar before the learners. This was how the learners carried out practice of writing 6 listing paragraphs in the class room. On the seventh session, the learners wrote the listing paragraph as the post-test.

This study adopted Mayring's (2000) model for content analysis. The first step of the model was to provide ideas to the raters about the organizational features of a paragraph (one paragraph, indentation, topic sentence, controlling idea, supporting sentences, cohesive devices, concluding signal and

concluding sentence) and grammar aspects (subject verb agreement, verb tense, word order/incomplete sentence/sentence structure, singular-plural, spelling, and capitalization). The second step was to identify the problems of organization and grammar. This was done by the researcher and the two raters. The third step was that all the problems were accurately determined through a formative check to ensure the identification of the problems. The last step necessitated that the paragraphs would be read again and it was checked to see whether any problem was left unidentified as a summative check of reliability. Inter-rater reliability was maintained by the two teachers who were informed of the writing problems. Figure 1 illustrates the four steps of Mayring's (2000) model of content analysis.

Figure 1: Four steps of Mayring's (2000) model of content analysis

Defining organizational features of a paragraph and six types of grammatical problems

Identifying the problems of organization and grammar

Checking the identification of problems after 50% of the work is done to ensure the proper identification

Final reading and checking the writing tasks after identification is done and to ensure whether anyone is left unidentified

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In general, the writing strategy instruction conducted to the learners for writing listing paragraph contributed to better performance of the Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners. The learners' better performances are seen in the maintenance of organizational features of a standard listing paragraph and fewer grammatical errors in terms of six types of grammar and in the scores provided by the raters.

Table 1indicates the number of organizational problems in the pre-test listing paragraphs and the magnitude of change in the post-test paragraphs. The highest problem is seen in case of using cohesive devices followed by writing concluding sentence and concluding signal. In the pre-test only 13.95%used cohesive devices in writing a listing paragraph, 20.93% wrote effective concluding sentence and 23.25%used concluding signal. Among the other organizational features, 67.44% maintained indentation and 69.76% wrote effective topic sentence in the pre-test paragraphs. The least problem is seen in case of writing one paragraph and writing supporting sentences in the pre-test listing paragraphs.

However, because of writing strategy instruction, improvements are evident in all the features. The highest development is using cohesive devices followed by writing effective concluding sentence and concluding signal. In relation to using cohesive devices, the magnitude of improvement is 600%,

followed by writing effective concluding sentence (356%) and concluding signal (280%). The developments are seen in case of other organizational features of paragraph though the percentages vary between the items. All the paragraphs had these features of organization. However, in terms of percentages, writing one page and writing supporting sentences had the least development (39%). "Maintaining indentation" and "writing topic sentence" had 48% and 43% of improvements respectively. What comes to attention is that the highest number of problems has the highest percentage of development and the least number of problems has the least percentage of development.

Table 1: Percentage of organizational problems in the pre and post-tests of listing paragraph and the magnitude of change

No		Pre-test in percentage	Post -test in percentage	% Magnitude of change
1	One paragraph	72.09	100	39
2	Indentation	67.44	100	48
3	Topic sentence	69.76	100	43
4	Supporting sentences	72.09	100	39
5	Cohesive Devices	13.95	97.68	600
6	Concluding signal	23.25	88.38	280
7	Concluding sentence	20.93	95.34	356

The post-test listing paragraphs show development in terms of grammatical aspects. Table 2 demonstrates the problems of grammar in the pre-test and post-test paragraphs. Table 2 indicates that the highest number of problems of pre-test paragraphs is seen in the case of "word order/incomplete sentence/sentence structure" (96), followed by "singular-plural" (55) and "verb tense" (50). Among the other problem of grammar identified in the pre-test paragraphs, "spelling" (48) and "subject-verb agreement" (41) are the fourth and fifth problems and the least problem is "capitalization" (38).

However, writing strategy instruction conducted to teach writing listing paragraph to the learners has led to improvements in terms of grammatical aspects of six types. The learners' post-test paragraphs contained fewer errors in comparison to those of the pre-test paragraphs. Table 2 shows that the learners have committed 475 errors in total in the pre-test paragraphs, but the number of errors reduced to 46% in the post-test paragraphs. "Singular-plural" has the highest improvement at 75% in the post-test paragraphs, followed by "verb tense" (68%), and "subject-verb agreement (66%). Among the other problems of grammatical aspects, the learners have committed 55% errors regarding "word order/incomplete sentence/sentence structure" and 39% in terms of "capitalization". The least development is seen for "spelling" at 35%.

Improvements in terms of organizational features of post-test listing paragraph are seen more consistent in comparison to development of grammar aspects. Brainstorming and the use of graphic

organizer have contributed to the decrease of the organizational problems. In terms of organizational problems, the highest problem has the highest improvement. However, improvements are seen in varying percentages in case of grammatical problems. The differences of percentages of improvements might be held for various reasons. The learners might have poor understanding about "word order/incomplete sentence/sentence structure" on account of limited practices. The improvements of the learners in case of "verb tense" and "singular-plural" might happen because of their specific focus to select easy means of expression to be free from the problems of "verb tense" and "singular-plural". Again, positive result for "subject-verb agreement" might be due to presenting several ideas consecutively. This type of presentation of ideas is easy for matured learners of tertiary level. On the other hand, less improvement for "spelling" might be accounted to the learners' lack of attention and the differences of sound systems between the mother tongue and the target language. Similarly, no "capitalization" rules in Bengali language might be the cause of poor development in this respect.

Table 2: Grammatical problems in the pre and post-test listing paragraphs and the magnitude of change

No.		Pre-test	Post-test	% Magnitude of change
1	Subject Verb Agreement	41	14	66
2	Capitalization	38	23	39
3	Verb Tense	50	16	68
4	Spelling	48	31	35
5	Singular- Plural	55	14	75
6	Word Order/ Incomplete Sentence/Sentence Structure	96	43	55
	Total	475	257	46

Averaged scores of the two raters also have shown improved performance for the Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners. The post-test scores of the learners are higher than those of the pre-test. Table 3displays the scores of the learners in both the tests and the overall gain for writing listing paragraphs. The overall mean gain score of the learners in the post-test is 3.45 which means a considerable development in terms of performance by the Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners.

Table 3 Mean gain of scores of the listing pre and
post-test listing paragraphs

	N	Mean score	Mean Gain Score
pre-test	43	3.66	3.45
post-test	43	7.11	

The findings of this study in terms of higher scores go in line with Nguyen and Gu (2013),Negari (2011), McMullen (2009), Gu (2007), and Rao (2007). The findings of this study in terms of development of organizational features concur with De Silva (2015), Baghbadorani and Roohani (2014), Rahimi and Noroozisiam (2013), and Ibnian (2011). Moreover, impacts of writing strategy instruction on the learners' writings confirm the findings of De Silva (2015) and Baghbadorani and Roohani (2014). Furthermore, the improvement of writing performance because of writing strategy instruction is in line with the findings of Negari (2011).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This paper provides instructional implications for learners, teachers of writing skill, researchers, administrators of the academic institutions and law makers. The learners will benefit from the study for developing performance of writing a listing paragraph. The learners will also draw benefit from the study because chronological presentation of ideas which is practiced in listing paragraph is needed in other types of paragraphs. Furthermore, the learners will be able to write more difficult types of paragraphs because writing a listing paragraph which is a bit easy to write will help them overcome writing anxiety. Again, the study will give benefit to the learners to make them better equipped to develop writing a listing paragraph focusing on organizational features and grammatical accuracy. The writing teachers will benefit from writing strategy instruction to teach listing paragraph to the learners. Again, the writing teachers may follow the study procedure to make the learners better equipped to write a listing paragraph. The researchers may replicate the study in other contexts to develop a more grounded and well supported teaching technique. Furthermore, the administrators of the academic institutions and law makers should focus on training the teachers in line with the demands of the learners so that the learners can benefit from the training considerably. The education policy makers will draw the benefits of this paper as means to initiate modifications in the course curriculum, to adjust class time and to reformulate the academic policy.

This paper has limitations in relation to sample, methodology and duration of this study. This paper might have given different results provided that the samples were drawn from other contexts. If the writing instruction were held using computer or networking sites, it might have produced different results. Again, if the study were conducted for longer time, there might have been different results. This paper suggests replicating similar study in other educational contexts and different levels.

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