The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing and
Gender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing

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Abstract

This study was intended to examine the effects of students' writing ability, their use of learning strategies of writing and gender on their attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing. To this end, the selected freshman program students of Hawassa University were taught lessons of the Basic Writing Skills course with training in learning strategies of writing. Data were collected through a five-point Likert Scale questionnaire. The research employed a quantitative-methods design. One-Way ANOVA computed revealed that there was a significant difference among the high, medium and low achievers' and users' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing (f-values = 26.159, 3.374; p-values = .000, .041). Post Hoc Tests computed depicted that the high achievers surpassed the medium and low achievers, and the medium achievers outperformed the low achievers (p-values = .000, .001, .010); the high users exceeded the low users (p-value = .048). Independent-Samples T Test conducted demonstrated that there was no significant difference between the male and female students' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing (t-value = 1.200; p-value = .241). Based on the findings of the study, recommendations have been made.

Key terms:
Learning strategies of writing; training in learning strategies of writing; writing ability; attitude; gender

1. Introduction
1.1 Background to the Study
Hawassa University is a public university found in South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State of Ethiopia and is a comprehensive university engaged in the provision of all-round education, research, training and community service. The university has more than 64 first degree programs, 43 second degree programs and 4 PhD programs in various schools/colleges. Students of all the departments of Hawassa

University, particularly in the undergraduate studies, as is the case with students of other universities across the nation, take English language courses such as Communicative English Skills-I, Communicative English Skills-II, Sophomore English, Basic Writing Skills, Advanced Writing-I, Advanced Writing-II and/or Report Writing.

The main objective of offering the English language courses to the students is to help them improve their proficiency as English is a medium of instruction and nearly all the teaching/learning and reference materials are written in it (Hailemichael, 1993; Gebremedhin, 1986). The written as well as oral communications and meetings within the university, usually, and communications with foreign learning institutions, always, are carried out in English. Moreover, formal as well as informal notices of the university usually appear in English. A great deal of information exchange, thus, takes place mainly in writing. It is also mainly writing that has been offered to the undergraduate program students of all the schools/colleges of the university.

The university curricula, however, as is the case with other universities across the country, have not given room for the issue of training in learning strategies of English language in general and writing skills in particular. Learning strategies training has roots in cognitivism and humanism learning theories. Training in learning strategies of writing involves asking students to learn writing by receiving training on the strategies in which explanations are given to the students as to when (contexts), how and why the strategies can be used (Oxford, 1990).

Though the importance of writing in Ethiopian academic context has been felt and acknowledged, the researcher's experience in teaching and advising at Hawassa University shows that the writing performance of the majority of students is deteriorating alarmingly. This is particularly noticeable in tests/examinations, assignments and senior essay/thesis papers. At conferences and workshops conducted on issues related to English language teaching in general and writing skills teaching in particular, many instructors from other universities of the nation have also reflected that their students too seem to have difficulties in writing intelligibly and effectively. Italo's (1999) study, which corresponds with Geremew's (1999) findings, can be taken as an evidence to the this problem in which he concludes that the freshman program students at Addis Ababa University seem to have serious problems in writing in English.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

A vast body of research literature on the topic has confirmed that leaning writing through receiving training on learning strategies of writing improves students' writing skills. This is because training benefits students to learn the role of strategies in improving their writing skills and it improves their motivation to learn writing and belief about autonomous learning of writing, and thus they continue to use the strategies appropriately when they carry out writing tasks in and outside class (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Ze-sheng, 2008; Liang, 2009; McMullen, 2009; Zeleke, 2013). To this effect, the students should have a positive attitude towards learning writing through receiving training on the

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

learning strategies of writing (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991). A research conducted by Zeleke (2013), the first local study in its kind, found that students have a positive attitude towards learning writing through receiving training on learning strategies of writing. This is because students feel that they benefit from training to improve their writing skills by using the strategies appropriately as well as taking on more responsibility for their own learning of writing in and outside class.

However, Zeleke (2013) did not examine the effects of students' writing ability, their use of learning strategies of writing and gender on their attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing. One can argue that students with different writing ability, use of the strategies and gender might not have the same attitude because of their obvious differences. According to Brain (2002: 118-119), for example, "Researchers have put forward a number of reasons for gender differences. Inevitably, some have emphasized biological differences in the brains of males and females…"

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This research was meant to examine the effects of students' writing ability, their use of learning strategies of writing and gender on their attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following null and alternative hypotheses were formulated about the effects.

Null Hypothesis (Ho): Students' writing ability, their use of learning strategies of writing and gender have significant effects on their attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing;

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha): Students' writing ability, their use of learning strategies of writing and gender have significant effects on their attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The researcher hopes that the findings of this study have the following importance. In the first place, it adds value to our knowledge that students with high writing ability surpass students with medium and low writing ability, and students with medium writing ability outperform students with low writing ability; high users of learning strategies of writing exceed low users regarding their attitude towards learning writing through receiving training on the strategies. Moreover, this study may serve as a springboard for future researchers interested to fill in the research gaps especially by exploring factors that impede the medium and low achievers' and the low users' attitude towards learning writing through receiving training on the strategies.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This research did not investigate factors that impede the medium and low achievers' and the low users' attitude towards learning writing through receiving training on the strategies. Moreover, the study was limited to Hawassa University to which the researcher is a member of staff and to freshman program. Freshman program was chosen because getting access to representative sample is possible only here where students of all departments take a writing course.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Learning Strategies of Writing

The following are the learning strategies of writing according to Oxford (1990), an authority in the area.

2.1.1 Memory Strategies

Memory learning strategies of writing include placing new words into a context, using key words, and structured reviewing.

Placing new words into a context involves applying words that have been heard or read into a meaningful context as a way of remembering them. For example, learners may make a little story by using the new words.

Using key words to remember something requires learners to go through two steps. First, they should identify a familiar word in their own language that sounds like the new word. Second, they should create an image of some relationship between the new and familiar words. For instance, to learn the French word potage (soup), the English speaker can associate the word with a pot and then draw a pot that is full of potage.

Structured reviewing involves carefully spaced intervals, at first close together and then more widely spaced apart. Learners might start, for instance, with a review of fifteen minutes after the initial learning, then twenty-five minutes afterward, an hour or two afterward, a day later, two days later, a week later, etc. so that they can become so familiar with the information and master it.

2.1.2 Cognitive Strategies

The cognitive learning strategies of writing are different. **Using mechanical techniques** involves writing new words on one side of cards and their definitions or 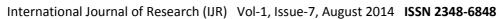full sentences with the words on the other side and then moving the cards from one stack to another when the words are learned. This strategy also includes putting words that have been learned and words that need practice in separate sections of a notebook.

Repeating involves writing the same thing twice or more times. For example, when students carry out a piece of writing, they can repeat words or expressions, styles, tones, examples, evidences, etc. to tell us that they are emphasizing these to help them effectively discuss given ideas or concepts.

Formally practicing with sounds and writing systems focuses on practicing the writing systems of the target language, for example, by copying letters/words or copying or collecting paragraphs developed by using similar methods in the target and students' own languages to compare and contrast the paragraphs in terms of organization of ideas, subject matter treatment, language use, etc. This helps learners write paragraphs in the target language by effectively applying given methods, for it may be easy to understand about the methods from the paragraphs in their own languages.

According to Oxford (1990), "**Recognizing and using routine formulas and patterns** in the target language greatly enhance the learner's comprehension and production. Formulas are unanalyzed expressions, while patterns have at least one slot that can be filled with an alternative word" (P.72). When students carry out writing tasks, to help them maximize the attractiveness of their writing, they can collect, practice and employ commonly used expressions, structures and formats.

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

The **strategy of recombining** involves writing new meaningful sentences by arranging together words or expressions in new ways. For instance, a learner can recombine expressions such as going to the warehouse, going to the supermarket, attending a meeting, walking, and going to the cinema and write a little story about a woman who does all these things in the same morning.

Practicing naturalistically includes writing autobiography, interviews of family or friends, factual reports, stories, poems, diary, newsletters, magazines, simulated radio and television programs, letters, etc. in the target language. **Using sources for getting information** includes using dictionaries, grammar books, reference books, the internet, television news shows, radio programs, etc. to help learners improve their writing regarding word choice, grammar, mechanics, organization, content, etc.

Reasoning deductively involves using general rules and applying them to draw specific rules about a language while writing. It is a top-down strategy leading from general to specific. Reasoning deductively is a common and useful type of logical thinking. For example, to write given adverbs in the correct position, learners can use the general rule that adverbs usually appear before other adverbs, before adjectives, and after verbs they modify.

Translating involves using one's own language to prepare the first draft and then changing it into the target language. Writing a draft in one's own language may make him/her easily generate and organize ideas.

Transferring involves applying one's grammatical knowledge of first language to second/foreign language or his/her knowledge from one aspect of a language to another aspect or conceptual knowledge from one field to another. For example, students can use this strategy to help them understand or produce the four types of sentences, namely simple, compound, complex and compound-complex which are classified on the basis of grammatical structure. They can apply their knowledge about number and types of clauses (dependent/independent) and about types of coordinating conjunctions and/or punctuation marks of these sentences in their first/Amharic language to help them easily understand or produce sentences in English.

With regard to **taking notes** as a strategy, learners can take notes on some issues while reading texts in the target language to help them improve their writing skills. For instance, to help them write a similar descriptive essay about their own rooms at home, students can take notes about the uses of the room, its size, decoration, furniture, the size of its window, and how these are paragraphed. Thus, this could help them produce a descriptive essay that discusses all these.

Summarizing as a cognitive learning strategy of writing is making a condensed version of a paragraph or an essay. Writing a summary usually needs concentration. Learners need to apply the following procedures. First, they should identify the main ideas and the major supporting details of the text. Second, they should write the ideas in their own words.

Highlighting, another cognitive learning strategy of writing, is using a variety of emphasis techniques such as color

underlining, CAPITAL LETTERS, big writing, **bold writing**, and using symbols to help one focus on such information. For example, learners can highlight the title and the introductory sentence of their paragraphs to help them effectively develop the theme and produce an appropriate concluding sentence respectively. This is because if they highlight these, they might pay attention to these and thus might not deviate from these. Learners can also highlight the topic sentence to help them write adequate and important supporting details. When they highlight the sentence, they can focus on it and thus might not move away from it and therefore can include adequate and appropriate supporting details.

To help them write effective paragraphs or essays, learners can **go through the following series of steps**: write down the main ideas they will discuss in the essay; arrange the ideas from the least important to the most important; develop the ideas into topic sentences and supporting details; draft the essay of an introductory paragraph, body paragraph/s, and a concluding paragraph; revise the essay; edit the essay by focusing on language and unity, coherence, and adequate development of the ideas and rewrite the essay by improving it.

2.1.3 Compensation Strategies

Compensation learning strategies of writing include selecting the topic, adjusting or approximating the message, coining words, and using a circumlocution or synonym. Students can practice writing by **choosing topics that interest** them; when they select topics, they need to consider their readers' interests, needs, and level of understanding.
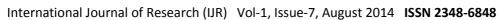
Adjusting or approximating the intended messages is often used when learners cannot construct the most appropriate sentences. For instance, instead of producing the more difficult sentence: I would have liked to have visited Hawassa, but I could not go because I lacked the necessary funds, they can write I did not go to Hawassa, because I did not have money.

Coining words involves making up new words to communicate the intended ideas for which learners do not have the right words. For instance, learners can use tooth-doctor instead of dentist and paper-holder instead of notebook. When students write, they can **use a circumlocution or a synonym** if they could not produce a single word that can accurately reveal the intended concepts/ideas. A circumlocution is a roundabout expression that includes a group of words to express a single concept, and a synonym is a word that has exactly or nearly the same meaning in the same language. For example, if learners cannot think of the word briefcase, they can say leather package that holds papers.

2.1.4 Metacognitive Strategies

The metacognitive strategies of writing are as follows. When students learn to write, they can overview comprehensively a key concept, principle, or set of materials of writing tasks and associate these with what they have already known. **Over viewing comprehensively** often comprises three steps: knowing why an activity is being done, including necessary vocabulary, and making associations with what have already been known. For instance, getting ready to carry out a writing task, students can write a kind

of brainstorming. They can also brainstorm in groups or participate in debates to generate ideas. Moreover, before learners rush to write paragraphs or essays, they can write down their ideas on a paper, without worrying about the correctness of the grammar and order of ideas.

Paying attention as a metacognitive learning strategy of writing is useful to improve one's writing. It has two modes: directed attention and selective attention. Directed attention can be equivalent to concentration which implies deciding generally to pay attention to a writing task and avoid distracters. Selective attention involves deciding in advance to focus on particular aspects of writing such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, tone, etc. Students can also make efforts to find out how to improve their writing skills by reading books.

Before learners rush to carry out a piece of writing, they need to break up the given time into some minutes and allocate these to different tasks such as to write down the main ideas, draft, revise and edit a paragraph or an essay. **Setting goals and objectives** as a metacognitive strategy of writing includes striving to improve one's writing skills in order to succeed in his/her study, write letters or scientific articles, etc.

Identifying the purpose of a writing task involves identifying the general nature of a writing task, its specific requirements, resources available, and the need for further sources before learners start writing. For example, if students are asked to write an argumentative essay, first they note that they want to beat readers' ideas. Then, they need to find counter arguments for each idea,

adequately support each idea with evidences, and use appropriate language signposts to point out opposing arguments, state why the readers think like that, reach the turning point, and refute the opposing ideas. After checking if the learners have the necessary knowledge on these, they look for additional information from someone or somewhere.

Seeking practice opportunities, as a metacognitive strategy of writing, includes going to the target language cinema, attending a meeting where the language is spoken, communicating with pen-pals in the target language, etc.

Self-monitoring involves identifying errors of one's own writing and determining which ones cause serious confusions and then tracking the sources and eliminating such errors. Learners can help each other to monitor their writing errors, without instructor's direct intervention, and read and comment on each other's paragraphs or essays. They may ask their instructor to mark up serious errors and then themselves figure out the correct forms by helping each other and using reference materials.

The last metacognitive strategy of writing is **self-evaluation**. This strategy involves reviewing one's own paragraphs or essays by noting the style, content, language, etc. Students might also compare their paragraphs or essays with each other. Some important criteria for self-evaluation include sentence length, complexity of thoughts, power of arguments, organization, accuracy and social appropriateness.

2.1.5 Affective Strategies
Affective strategies of writing include using one's own progressive relaxation, deep breathing, listening to music, using laughter,

making positive statements about one's own writing performance, taking risks wisely, rewarding oneself, listening to one's own body, using a checklist, writing a diary, and discussing one's feelings with someone else. **Progressive relaxation** involves tensing and relaxing all the main muscle groups one at a time. **Deep breathing** involves breathing low from the diaphragm. When students relax using progressive relaxation or deep breathing, they reduce anxiety and thus successfully accomplish their writing tasks. **Listening to music** before learners start to carry out especially a difficult writing task can put them in a positive mood. **Using laughter**, for example by using classroom activities such as role-plays, games, active exercises, jokes or watching movies, gives pleasure to learners and thus it helps them successfully accomplish their writing tasks.

Making positive statements to themselves about their performance before they start to carry out writing tasks can help learners feel more confident and thus do the tasks effectively. When they perform the tasks with confidence, their performance will be improved.

Taking risks wisely involves a conscious decision to take risks regardless of the possibility of making errors or encountering difficulties while writing. When it is said wisely, it means not unnecessary risk, like saying anything at all regardless of its degree of relevance; risk taking must be tempered by a good judgment. After learners have successfully accomplished especially difficult writing tasks, to help them keep on writing well, they can reward themselves for their performances by telling themselves that

they have done well and that they deserve a rest, an entertainment, etc.

Listening to one's own body while writing involves thinking about one's own emotions: if he/she feels tension, anxiety, or fear, or if he/she tries to avoid or minimize the problems by taking appropriate actions. This could help him/her to successfully accomplish the tasks.

Before they start writing paragraphs or essays, learners can also set criteria such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics in the form of a checklist to assess their own progress and this could make them work hard because in the end they are to see their performance against the criteria by showing the paragraphs or essays to their classmates, friends, parents or neighbors or by referring to the print or electronic resources.

Writing a diary involves recording one's own feelings, attitudes and motivations about his/her practicing of writing and information about strategies one finds useful in the process of learning writing. **Discussing one's feelings with someone else,** before and/or while writing, regarding his/her feelings about the writing and problems he/she may encounter (e.g., unable to use the correct grammar or mechanics) in the process of writing helps him/her improve his/her writing skills.

2.1.6 Social Strategies

Social strategies of writing includes asking instructor, cooperating with peers, cooperating with proficient writers of the target language, developing cultural understanding, and becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings. When students carry out writing tasks, they can **ask their**

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

instructor for correction of some errors. For example, they may ask their instructor to tell them if they are correctly ordering sentences to show how a story starts and ends. The instructor may say that no correction is needed. To help them successfully accomplish their writing tasks, learners can also **ask their instructor for clarification** on what to do, how to do, when to do, etc before/while doing the tasks.

Cooperating with peers involves a concerted effort to work together with other learners on a writing activity. Learners can ask and help each other how to improve their writing tasks. For instance, after they have completed writing, they can ask one another to read and correct their paragraphs or essays. **Cooperating with proficient writers of the target language** involves getting permanent or temporary persons who can help learners improve their writing skills. **Developing cultural understanding** involves learning about the culture of the target language people so that learners can know what is culturally appropriate to say in their writing.

With regard to **becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings**, before/while writing paragraphs or essays, learners need to think about the thoughts and feelings of their readers; they should think about what their readers may like and dislike (e.g., ideas, words/expressions, examples, etc). Learners should keep in mind the readers they are writing to and trying to meet their needs and as a result they may pay attention to the learners' ideas.

2.2 Approaches to Learning Strategies Training

2.2.1 Narrow Focus, Broad Focus, or Combination Approaches

Oxford (1990) discusses that learning strategies training can be conducted by using a narrow focus, broad focus, or combination approach. **A narrow focus approach** involves teaching students one or two learning strategies. This approach has the following benefits. Firstly, it makes the trainer to cover more learning strategies in short time as only one or two strategies are introduced at a time independently. Secondly, it minimizes the possibility of confusing students with different types of strategies because the strategies are introduced one by one. Thirdly, a narrow focus allows the instructor to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of training because he/she teaches each strategy separately. However, the downside of this approach is that it does not promote students' language learning because the strategies are not integrated to interact with one another.

A trainer who uses **a broad focus approach** introduces more learning strategies from all the classification groups. This approach requires a trainer to conduct the training by integrating different types of language learning strategies of each category so that learners could notice how the strategies interact with each other. **A broad focus approach** improves learners' belief about language learning. "However, this broad focus does not allow precise assessment of training effectiveness in reference to any specific strategy" (Oxford, 1990, p. 205).

A combination approach is an amalgamation of broad focus and narrow

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

focus approaches. This approach involves some procedures. Firstly, the trainer provides students with all the language learning strategies of all the classification groups and asks them to rate the role of the strategies. Secondly, among strategies reported by students as useful, the trainer chooses strategies that are not too familiar and too strange. Then, a separate or an integrated and an implicit or an explicit training is conducted on the strategies. "This is an excellent way to approach strategy training. It gives learners the "big picture" at first, and then moves into specific strategies which the learners have chosen themselves. The element of learner choice in instructing structuring training is very important, since learning strategies are the epitome of learner choice and self-direction" (Oxford, 1990, p. 205).

2.2.2 Separate versus Integrated Approaches

Learning strategies training can be carried out by using a separate or an integrated approach. **A separate approach** involves teaching learning strategies without incorporating them into the language lessons. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), "Arguments in favor of separate training programs advance the notion that strategies are generalizable to many contexts…and that students will learn strategies better if they can focus all their attention on developing strategic processing skills rather than try to learn content at the same time…" (P. 152). However, according to some scholars such as Oxford (1990) this approach does not enhance students' language learning since students do not receive training on how and when to use strategies and on how to evaluate

their learning as well as the success of strategies.

Wenden (1991), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) believe that an **integrated approach**, unlike a separate approach, requires the trainer to teach strategies by including them into appropriate tasks of a language course. Students are shown when and how to use strategies and how to evaluate the importance of the strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state, "Those in favor of integrated strategy instruction programs, on the other hand, argue that learning in context is more effective than learning separate skills whose immediate applicability may not be evident to the learner…and that practicing strategies on authentic academic and language tasks facilitates the transfer of strategies to similar tasks encountered in other classes…". (P. 152).

2.2.3 Implicit versus Explicit Approaches

A learning strategies training can be conducted by choosing an implicit or an explicit approach. An **implicit approach** is an embedded approach. The trainer who chooses this approach sets language tasks intended to make students employ learning strategies to help them successfully accomplish the tasks, but the trainer does not inform students about the role of the strategies and when and how to use the strategies (Wenden, 1991; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, Wenden and Rubin, 1987). This approach, according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990), has two merits. Firstly, as the strategies are embedded, it minimizes the risk learners may oppose the training. Secondly,

"An advantage cited for strategy training embedded in instructional materials is that little teacher training is required….As students work on exercises and activities, they learn to use the strategies that are cued by the textbook" (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990: 153). On the other hand, this approach has some drawbacks. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), it does not make students take on more responsibility for their own learning. Moreover, it does not make learners use strategies flexibly in a variety of contexts and maintain strategies overtime (Wenden and Rubin, 1987).

An **explicit approach**, unlike an implicit approach, requires the trainer to apply the following procedures: identifying language learning strategies by name, explaining/describing the importance of the strategies, demonstrating (through actual language tasks) in which contexts to use and how to use the strategies, and how to transfer the strategies into other contexts, making students practice the strategies, and asking students to evaluate the importance of the strategies in improving their language performance. With regard to this approach, Chamot (2005:123) writes, "Explicit instruction includes the development of students' awareness of their strategies, teacher modeling of strategic thinking, identifying the strategies by name, providing opportunities for practice and self-evaluation." According to Wenden and Rubin (1987), an **explicit approach** helps learners maintain strategies over time for a variety of learning contexts and thus they take on more responsibility for their own learning. In Oxford's (1990: 201) language, "the general goals of such training are to

make language learning more meaningful, to encourage a collaborative spirit between learner and teacher, to learn about options for language learning, to learn and practice strategies that facilitate self-reliance."

2.3 Procedures for Conducting a Learning Strategies Training Lesson

There are several models suggested for conducting a language learning strategies training lesson by various scholars (Hosenfeld et al., 1981; Chamot and Kupper, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Grenfell and Harris, 1999). Oxford (1990) writes that the instructor of a language learning strategies training lesson should follow the procedures below (note that only the model of Oxford is discussed here for being chosen for the present study): ask learners to do an activity without strategy training; ask learners if they have used any strategy while doing the activity, and ask them to evaluate the role of the strategy (if used); suggest and explain some useful strategies and the rationale for using the new strategies; ask learners to practice the strategies by doing the task again or through other language tasks; demonstrate how to transfer the strategies to new learning tasks; ask learners to practice the strategies in new learning tasks; ask learners to evaluate the importance of the strategies used, i.e., if they found the strategies useful in helping them successfully accomplish writing tasks.

2.4 Attitude

Attitude can be stated as the positive/negative image one forms about something after he/she perceives it and forms opinions about it and when the opinions get very strong. Dandapani (2004:193) defines attitude as "a dispositional readiness to respond to certain

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

situations, persons, objects or ideas in a consistent manner, which has been learned and has become one's typical mode of response." Chauble and Chauble, 2007; Albery et al., 2008; Hogg and Vaughan, 2002; Dandapani, 2004 discuss that attitude cannot be directly observed; it can only be inferred from responses made by a person. Moreover, attitude is not inborn trait; it is a result of education, perception and inspiration. Attitude is mainly described as positive or negative. The above scholars discuss that a person's attitude towards something (e.g., instructional method) is usually measured through a set of questions constructed on a five- point Likert Scale questionnaire. "Likert developed a more refined Likert Attitude Scale. It resembles a simple questionnaire, but involves refined techniques of item-selection. It is a series of statements either favorable or unfavorable on a five- point scale…Each response is given a numerical score. An individual's score is the sum of his ratings on all items" (Dandapani, 2004: 194).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 60 students (46 males, 14 females). They were between 18 – 21 years old. All of them completed Grade 12 and are currently in their Year-I program at Hawassa University, Ethiopia.

3.2 The Research Design

This research was meant to examine the effects of students' writing ability, their use of learning strategies of writing and gender on their attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing. To this end, the selected freshman program students of Hawassa University were taught lessons of the Basic Writing Skills course with training in the strategies. The effects were examined through hypothesis testing. Thus, the study employed a quantitative-methods design.

3.3 Preparation of Teaching Material

A teaching material on Basic Writing Skills course was prepared, based on the course syllabus, by choosing the combination, integrated and explicit approaches. It was prepared by using the model of Oxford (1990). Her model was chosen because it includes procedures that are easy to understand and thus preferred by many researchers. The teaching material asked the students to make use of the learning strategies of writing while completing sentences by writing appropriate subjects and predicates and rewriting sentences by correcting errors, completing paragraphs by writing appropriate topic sentences, concluding sentences and relevant details, rearranging jumbled sentences in logical orders and completing paragraphs by writing appropriate cohesive devices, completing essays by writing appropriate thesis statements and concluding paragraphs, identifying parts of an essay: introduction, body and conclusion, rearranging jumbled paragraphs in logical orders and writing essays to argue for/against. To validate the teaching material, comments were obtained from the researcher's most senior colleagues.

3.4 Preparation of Writing Skills Test

A writing test was prepared by the researcher. It was constructed based on the course syllabus. The test was intended to measure

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

the students' writing skills with regard to discussing relevant contents, organizing contents appropriately and using accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics. The students were asked to complete sentences by writing appropriate subjects and predicates and rewrite sentences by correcting errors, complete paragraphs by writing appropriate topic sentences, concluding sentences and relevant details, rearrange jumbled sentences in logical orders and complete paragraphs by writing appropriate cohesive devices, complete essays by writing appropriate thesis statements and concluding paragraphs, identify parts of an essay: introduction, body and conclusion, rearrange jumbled paragraphs in logical orders and write essays to argue for/against. To validate the test, comments were obtained from the researcher's most senior colleagues.

3.5 Preparation of Questionnaires

Two different questionnaires were adapted in the form of a five-point Likert Scale by considering the students' English language ability to make the questionnaires easy to understand. The first questionnaire was meant to collect data on the students' use of the learning strategies of writing. This questionnaire was adapted from Oxford (1990) and included items in which each item has five possible responses: always, usually, sometimes, rarely and never. The second questionnaire was intended to obtain data on the students' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing. This questionnaire was prepared by taking ideas from Gardner (1985), an authority of AMTB (Attitude Motivation Test Battery) for

Second Language Learning, and included items in which each item has five possible responses: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaires included a cover page that discusses the purpose of the questionnaires and asks the students to read the items carefully and respond honestly and frankly. The researcher's most senior colleagues were requested to comment on the questionnaires regarding face validity and clarity of the items. Cronbach Alpha was computed on SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 20 to examine the reliability of the items of the questionnaires. The computation showed that the items were reliable at above 0.80. Cronbach Alpha was chosen because the questionnaires have a five-point Likert Scale.

3.6 Selection of Study Setting and Departments

The researcher purposefully chose Hawassa University to which he is a member of staff. From the existing departments of the university, Mathematics and Management were randomly selected by drawing lots. The researcher used a simple random sampling because it allows a department to have equal chance of being selected; the probability of a department being selected is unaffected by the selection of another department. Thus, it is possible to be confident that the departments chosen represent all the departments of the university.

3.7 Administration and Scoring of the Test

The writing test was administered before conducting the training. The purpose of administering the test before the training was to categorize the students into three ability

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

groups (high, medium and low). Careful attempts were made to make the environment conducive for taking the test. The test paper of each student was corrected by two randomly selected English language instructors of the university who had received training on how to correct the test papers. The analytic approach was chosen to mark the compositions. This approach is preferred for being the most effective approach to achieve reliability. The rating scale used was the one provided by Heaton (1990). Heaton (1990: 146) describes the scale in this way: "The following rating scale is the result of considerable and careful research conducted in the scoring of compositions in the United States."

3.8 Administration of the Learning Strategies of Writing Questionnaire

The questionnaire meant to collect data on the students' use of the learning strategies of writing was administered before conducting the training. The purpose of administering the questionnaire before conducting the training was to classify the students as high users, medium users and low users of the strategies. The questionnaire was filled in by 60 students (46 males, 14 females) who were selected to be taught the writing lessons through training in the strategies. Careful attempts were made to make the environment conducive to fill in the questionnaire.

3.9 Grouping of Students

The following procedures were applied to assign the students into high, medium and low ability groups. First, Pearson r was computed on SPSS version 20 to see the correlations of the scores given by the instructors regarding the students' performance to discuss relevant contents,

organize contents appropriately and use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics. Second, the average scores were taken since Pearson r computed showed that the r-values are closer to 1.000; the p-value is .000; the correlations are significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). Third, based on the scores, the students were categorized as high, medium and low ability groups where each group included 20 students.

To assign the students into high, medium and low user groups of the learning strategies of writing, the researcher employed the procedures suggested by Oxford (1990). First, for the questionnaire meant to collect data on the students' use of the strategies, values 1 to 5 were given for never, rarely, sometimes, usually and always respectively so that the minimum scores a student would score is the number of the items of the questionnaire multiplied by 1, and the maximum scores a student would score is the number of the items of the questionnaire multiplied by 5. Second, each student's scores are found and are divided by the total number of the items of the questionnaire. Third, students who scored from 3.5–5.0, 2.5–3.4 and 1.0–2.4 were named as high, medium and low user groups respectively where each group included 20 students.

The researcher selected 14 male students, from among 46 male students, whose scores on the test and on the learning strategies of writing were similar with that of 14 female students.

3.10 Administration of the Attitude Questionnaire

The questionnaire intended to collect data on the students' attitude towards learning the

writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing was administered after conducting the training to the Mathematics Department students for 30 hours (5 hours for 6 consecutive weeks) and to the Management Department students for a semester (5 hours for 16 consecutive weeks). Careful attempts were made to make the environment conducive to fill in the questionnaire.
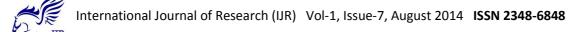
3.11 Methods of Data Analysis

The results of the attitude questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS version 20. To analyze the data, the researcher applied the procedures used by prominent social science researchers of these days. In order to examine the effects of the students' writing ability, their use of learning strategies of writing and gender on their attitude towards receiving training in the learning strategies of writing, the following procedures were applied to analyze the results of the questionnaire. First, for the questionnaire, values 1 to 5 were given for strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree respectively so that the minimum scores a student would score is the number of the items of the questionnaire multiplied by 1, and the maximum scores a student would score is the number of the items of the questionnaire multiplied by 5. The negatively worded items were re-coded into Same Variables.

Second, histograms were produced for the scores of each of the ability and user groups and for males and females to see if the distributions have the shape of the cross-section of a bell. "Overall the histogram is a good chart to use when displaying the characteristics of a single scale variable as it is simple to understand and is able to display the shape and distribution of the data very clearly and accessibly" (Connolly, 2007:46). Third, One-Way ANOVA was computed on SPSS version 20 to examine if there was a significant difference among the three ability and user groups regarding their attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing. The significance level was taken at .05. One-Way ANOVA tells us only there is a significant difference among groups (if any); it does not indicate which of the groups outperforms. For that reason, Post Hoc Tests was carried out to see between which of the groups the differences exist.

In order to examine if there was a significant difference between the male and the female students' attitude towards learning the writing lessons in the context of receiving training on the learning strategies of writing, Independent-Samples T Test was computed on SPSS version 20. The significance level was taken at .05. Independent-Samples T Test is chosen because the groups are independent: males vs. females. In relation to this idea, Stephens (2004: 34) says, "The purpose of the test is to compare the means of two populations when independent samples have been chosen." Independent-Samples T Test only tells us that there is a significant difference between two groups (if any); it does not show the magnitude of the difference. For that reason, Cohen's d is computed in order to determine the effect sizes. However, note that Cohen's d was not computed since the Independent-Samples T Test did not reveal a significant difference between the male and the female students' attitude.

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results of One-Way ANOVA and Post Hoc Tests for the Ability Groups

The following tables demonstrate the results of One-Way ANOVA and Post Hoc Tests computed for the high, medium and low ability groups' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing.

Table 1: Results of One-Way ANOVA for the Ability Groups

mean			std. deviation			std. error			sum of squares		df		mean square		f-value	p-value
high ability group	medium ability group	low ability group	high ability group	medium ability group	low ability group	high ability group	medium ability group	low ability group	between group	within group	between group	within group	between group	within group		
112.65	103.45	96.30	7.28	6.52	7.64	1.63	1.46	1.70	2687.23	2927.70	2	57	1343.62	51.36	26.159	.000

Table 1 above depicts the results of One-Way ANOVA computed to examine if there was a significant difference among the high, medium and low ability groups' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing. The table indicates that the high achievers score the mean of 112.65 whereas the medium and low achievers score the mean of 103.45 and 96.30 respectively. The sd. deviation of the high achievers is 7.28; the sd. deviation of the medium achievers is 6.52; the sd. deviation of the low achievers is 7.64. The sum of squares for the between group is 2687.23 whereas the sum of squares for the within group is 2927.70. The mean square for the between group is 1343.62 while the mean square for the within group is 51.36.

(i) groups	(j) groups	mean difference (i-j)	std. error	sig.	95% confidence interval	
					lower bound	upper bound
high ability group	medium ability group	9.20000*	2.26634	.001	3.5035	14.8965
	low ability group	16.35000*	2.26634	.000	10.6535	22.0465
medium ability group	high ability group	-9.20000*	2.26634	.001	-14.8965	-3.5035
	low ability group	7.15000*	2.26634	.010	1.4535	12.8465
low ability group	high ability group	-16.35000*	2.26634	.000	-22.0465	-10.6535
	medium ability group	-7.15000*	2.26634	.010	-12.8465	-1.4535

The table also shows that the f-value is 26.159 and that of the p-value is .000 which show that there is a significant difference among the ability groups' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing (df = 2, 57; f-value > table value; p-value < .05).

Table 2: Results of Post Hoc Tests for the Ability Groups

Table 2 above demonstrates the results of Post Hoc Tests computed to identify the ability group that significantly surpassed concerning its attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the strategies. As indicated in the table, the mean difference between the high and medium ability groups is 9.20000*. The p-value is .001 which shows that the mean difference is significant indicating, as the mean score of the high ability group in Table 1 above shows, the students in this group outperform the students in the medium ability group with regard to their attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the strategies (p-value < .05). The high and low ability groups exhibit the mean difference of 16.35000*. The p-value is .000 which shows that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of these groups in which, as the mean score of the high ability group in Table 1 above demonstrates, students in this group outperform students in the low ability group regarding their attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the strategies (p-value < .05). The above table also depicts that 7.15000* is the mean

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

difference between the medium and low ability groups. The p-value is .010 indicating the mean difference is significant. As the mean score of the medium ability group in Table 1 above depicts, students in this group outperform students in the low ability group regarding their attitude towards learning the writing lessons in the context of receiving training on the strategies (p-value < .05).

4.2 Results of One-Way ANOVA and Post Hoc Tests for the User Groups
The following tables show the results of One-Way ANOVA and Post Hoc Tests carried out for the high, medium and low user groups' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing.

Table 3: Results of One-Way ANOVA for the User Groups

mean			std. deviation			std. error			sum of squares		df		mean square			
high user group	medium user group	low user group	high user group	medium user group	low user group	high user group	medium user group	low user group	between group	within group	between group	within group	between group	within group	f-value	p-value
110.15	100.25	97.90	8.03	22.57	13.34	1.79	5.05	2.98	1690.63	14282.10	2	57	845.32	250.56	3.374	.041

Table 3 above depicts the results of One-Way ANOVA conducted to examine if there was a significant difference among the high, medium and low user groups' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing. Accordingly, the table reveals that the high users of the learning strategies of writing score the mean of 110.15 while the medium and the low users score the mean of

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing and Gender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

100.25 and 97.90 respectively. The sd. deviation of the high users is 8.03; the sd.

Table 4: Results of Post Hoc Tests for the User Groups

(i) groups	(j) groups	mean difference (i-j)	std. error	sig.	95% confidence interval	
					lower bound	upper bound
high user groups	medium user groups	9.90000	5.00563	.151	-2.6817	22.4817
	low user groups	12.25000*	5.00563	.048	-.3317	24.8317
medium user groups	high user groups	-9.90000	5.00563	.151	-22.4817	2.6817
	low user groups	2.35000	5.00563	.896	-10.2317	14.9317
low user groups	high user groups	-12.25000*	5.00563	.048	-24.8317	.3317
	medium user groups	-2.35000	5.00563	.896	-14.9317	10.2317

deviation of the medium users is 22.57; the sd. deviation of the low users is 13.34. The table also depicts that the sum of squares for the between group is 1690.63 whereas the sum of squares for the within group is 14282.10. The mean square for the former group is 845.32, but the mean square for the latter group is 250.56. The f-value is 3.374 and that of the p-value is .041 which indicate that there is a significant difference among the users' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing (df = 2, 57; f-value > table value; p-value < .05).

Table 4 above reveals the results of Post Hoc Tests carried out to identify the user group which significantly exceeded regarding its attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the strategies. From the table, one can see that the mean difference between the high and medium users of the strategies is 9.90000. The p-value is .151 which indicates that the mean difference is insignificant (p-value > .05). The above table also demonstrates that 12.25000* is the mean difference between the high and low users of the strategies. The p-value is .048 indicating, as the mean score in Table 3 above shows, the high users exceed

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

the low users with regard to their attitude towards learning the lessons through receiving training on the strategies (p-value < .05). Table 4 above also demonstrates that 2.35000 is the mean difference between the medium and the low user groups. The p-value is revealed as .896. This shows that the mean difference is not significant indicating these groups do not exceed one another with regard to their attitude towards learning the lessons

through receiving training on the strategies of writing (p-value > .05).

4.3 Results of Independent-Samples T Test for the Male & Female Students

The following table demonstrates the results of the Independent-Samples T Test computed for the male & female students' attitude towards learning the writing lessons in the context of receiving training on the learning strategies of writing.

Table 5: Results of Independent-Samples T Test for the Male & Female Students

mean		std. deviation		std. error		df	t-value	p-value
males	females	males	females	males	females			
106.1429	101. 5714	7.15603	12.32705	1.91253	3.29454	26	1.200	.241

From Table 5 above, one can see that the mean scores of the males and females are 106.1429 and 101.5714 respectively. The std. deviation of the males is 7.15603 whereas the std. deviation of the females is 12.32705. The table also depicts that the t-value is 1.200 and the p-value is .241. This shows that there is no significant difference between the male and female students' attitude towards learning the writing lessons in the context of receiving training on the learning strategies

of writing (t-value < table value; p-value > .05).

4.4 Major Findings of the Study

One-Way ANOVA computed revealed that there was a significant difference among the high, medium and low ability and user groups' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing (f-value = 26.159 and p-value = .000 for the ability groups; f-value = 3.374 and p-value = .041

The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

for the user groups). The Post Hoc Tests conducted indicated that the high achievers outperformed the medium and the low achievers, and the medium achievers surpassed the low achievers regarding their attitude (p-values = .000, .001, .010). Moreover, the high users of the learning strategies of writing surpassed the low users (p-value = .048). The Independent-Samples T Test conducted demonstrated that there was no significant difference between the male and the female students' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the strategies (t-value = 1.200; p-value = .241).

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings, this study concludes that there is a significant difference among the high, medium and low achievers' attitude towards learning writing through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing in which the high achievers surpass the medium and low achievers, and the medium achievers outperform the low achievers of writing. It is also concluded that the high users of the learning strategies of writing significantly exceed the low users to have a positive attitude towards learning writing through receiving training on the strategies. This study, however, concludes that there is

no significant difference between male and female students' attitude towards learning writing through receiving training on the strategies.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the conclusions of this study:

- ➢ Before one rushes to conduct training in the learning strategies of writing, he/she should identify the medium and low achievers and low users of the learning strategies of writing so that he/she would give due attention to make these students, at least by minimizing factors that affect the students, enjoy the training and thus benefit from it;

- ➢ Studies should be conducted to investigate factors that impede the medium and low achievers' and low users' attitude towards learning writing through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing.

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The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

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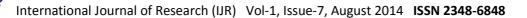
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The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**

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The Effects of Students' Writing Ability, their Use of Learning Strategies of Writing andGender on their Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing | **Dr. Zeleke Arficho Ayele**