

Training in the Learning Strategies of Writing: Its Effects on different Ability Groups of Writing, User-groups of the Strategies and Gender with regard to Improving their Belief about Autonomous Learning of Writing

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Abstract

This research was intended to examine if training in the learning strategies of writing brings significantly different effects on students of different ability groups of writing (high, medium and low), user-groups of the strategies (high-users, medium-users and low-users) and gender with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning 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 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 or low ability groups and among the high, medium or low user-groups of the learning strategies of writing with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after receiving the training (F -value = 5.58 and P -value = .006 for the ability groups; F -value = 7.068 and P -value = .002 for the user-groups). The Post Hoc Tests computed demonstrated that the high ability group outperformed the low ability group (P -value = .006), and the high user-group surpassed the medium and low user-groups (P -values = .030, .003). Independent-Samples T Test computed indicated that there was no significant difference between males and females with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after receiving the training (T -value = 1.694, P -value = .103).

Based on the findings, a recommendation has been made that training in the learning strategies of writing should be conducted by giving due attention to the low achievers and to the medium and low-users of the strategies, at least by minimizing factors that might make them not to benefit from the training, to improve

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their belief about autonomous learning of writing. Moreover, studies should be conducted to explore factors that make these students not to benefit from the training to improve their belief about autonomous learning of writing.

Key Expressions: training in the learning strategies of writing, groups, gender, belief, autonomous learning

Introduction

Background of 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 64 first degree programs, 43 second degree programs and 4 PhD programs in various schools/colleges: Natural and Computational Sciences, Medical and Health Sciences, Business and Economics, Governance and Development Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities, Technology and Informatics, Agriculture, and Forestry and Natural Resources. Currently, the university has more than twenty-two thousand students who are

studying various disciplines for the aforementioned degrees.

Students of all departments of Hawassa University, as is the case with students of other universities across the nation, particularly in the first year of the undergraduate studies, take English language courses such as *Communicative English Skills I, Communicative English Skills II, English for Secondary Schools Teaching and Learning, 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 because English is a medium of instruction and nearly all the teaching/learning and reference materials are written in it (Hailemichael, 1993; Gebremedhin, 1986).

Moreover, Hawassa University has English programs that train students for a bachelor's degree and for a master's degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. 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, have not given room for the issue of training in language learning strategies in general and writing skills in particular. Oxford (1990: 8), an authority in the area, defines *learning strategies* as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations." Learning Strategies training has roots in cognitivism and humanism learning theories. As cognitivism began to dominate the principles of teaching/learning, an

important change that has been made is considering a student as an active participant who could manage his/her own learning by "selectively attending to incoming data, hypothesizing, comparing, elaborating, reconstructing its meaning and integrating it with previously stored information for future use" (Wenden, 1991:1). Wenden (1991) says that humanistic views focus on meaningful communication, learning as self-realization, a learner to have an important involvement in decision-making, and a teacher to be a facilitator. Thus, learning strategies-based instruction is a *student-centered approach* to teaching (Ze-sheng, 2008).

Training in the 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). Training in the learning strategies of writing improves students' writing skills, for training brings a significant improvement on students' belief about autonomous learning of writing so that they continue to take on more responsibility for their own learning of writing in and

outside class (Zelege, 2013; Ze-sheng, 2008; Wenden and Rubin, 1987).

“Student writing is at the center of teaching and learning in higher education, fulfilling a range of purposes according to the various contexts in which it occurs” (Coffin et al., 2003:2). In higher education, it is mainly writing that is used as a means to assess students. That is, instructors ask students to write paragraphs or essays in or outside class as well as make students take written examinations and write laboratory reports in order to evaluate students’ achievement of course objectives. Thus, students’ success usually depends on their writing skills. In relation to this idea, McWhorter (1996: 357) says, “As a general rule, the further you progress in your education, the more writing you will be expected to do.” Moreover, writing at tertiary education is used to facilitate learning. That is to say, instructors encourage students to facilitate their learning by writing diaries, questions, problems, and suggestions on the process of teaching/learning and then sharing these with someone else (instructors, peers, or others). This may increase their reasoning and critique skills and, thus, improves their learning.

Statement of the Problem

The present researcher’s experience in teaching and advising (students with their senior essays) at Hawassa University shows that the writing performance of the majority of students is deteriorating alarmingly. 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 across the nation have also reflected that their students too seem to have a great difficulty in writing intelligibly and effectively. This is observed in tests/examinations, assignments and senior essay papers. In relation to this, Italo (1999) says that, as he offers the English language courses to the freshman program students at Addis Ababa University, he has observed that the students seem to have serious problems in writing in English. This corresponds with Geremew’s (1999) findings concerning students of the same university.

We can help students improve their writing skills by making them take on more responsibility for their own learning of writing. To this effect, their belief about autonomous learning of writing needs to be

improved through learning the writing lessons in the context of receiving training on the learning strategies of writing (Oxford, 1990). Belief can be defined as perception one holds on something/someone. “Beliefs represent the knowledge or information we have about the world...” (Gross, 2005: 406). Chauble and Chauble, 2007; Albery et al., 2008; Hogg and Vaughan, 2002; Dandapani, 2004 discuss that belief cannot be directly observed; it can only be inferred from responses made by a student. Belief is a result of education, perception and inspiration; not inborn trait. Belief influences a student’s behavior.

Autonomous learning of writing, according to Holec (1981), includes checking if one makes progress, stimulating one’s own interest to practice, deciding procedures one must follow, choosing tasks for one’s own practice, deciding aspects one must focus on, and choosing important materials one must exploit. A study conducted by Zeleke (2013), which was the first local study in its kind, found that training in the learning strategies of writing significantly improves students’ belief about autonomous learning of writing, for training gives more opportunity for students to practice taking

on more responsibility for their own learning of writing.

However, Zeleke (2013) did not examine whether or not the training brought significantly different effects on students of different ability groups of writing (high, medium and low), user-groups of the strategies (high-users, medium-users and low-users of the learning strategies of writing) and gender with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing. One may argue that training in the learning strategies of writing may not bring the same effects on these different groups or gender because of their obvious differences. Brain (2002: 118-119), for example, discusses the differences between males and females as follows:

Researchers have put forward a number of reasons for gender differences. Inevitably, some have emphasized biological differences in the brains of males and females (Brannon, 1996). For example, adult male brains are longer than female brains, and females have a larger corpus callosum. Part of the hypothalamus is larger in males and male brains seem to be more affected by lateralization (the tendency of the two halves of the brain to have different functions), and some researchers have claimed that this tendency is

more marked for males, although the evidence is not very strong.

If a study finds that training in the learning strategies of writing brings significantly different effects on the aforementioned different groups or gender, thus, one would carry out training by giving due attention to help those students who lag behind to benefit from the training with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing. This is on the fact that if these students are unable to benefit from the training to improve their belief about autonomous learning of writing, they might be unable to take on more responsibility for their own learning of writing and thus they might be unable to improve their writing skills.

Objectives of the Study

This study was intended to examine if training in the learning strategies of writing brings significantly different effects on students of different ability groups of writing (high, medium and low), user-groups of the strategies (high-users, medium-users and low-users) and gender with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing.

Research Hypotheses

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

Null Hypothesis (H_0): Training in the learning strategies of writing does not bring significantly different effects on students of different ability groups of writing (high, medium and low), user-groups of the strategies (high-users, medium-users and low-users) and gender with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing;

Alternative Hypothesis (H_a): Training in the learning strategies of writing brings significantly different effects on students of different ability groups of writing (high, medium and low), user-groups of the strategies (high-users, medium-users and low-users) and gender with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing.

Significance of the Study

The present researcher hopes that the findings of this study have the following importance. In the first place, it adds value to our knowledge regarding the effects of

training in the learning strategies of writing on students of different ability groups of writing, user-groups of the strategies and gender with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing. Moreover, this study may serve as a springboard for future researchers who are interested to fill in the research gaps by exploring factors that make the low ability groups and the medium and low user-groups not to benefit from the training to improve their belief about autonomous learning of writing.

Scope of the Study

This study did not explore factors that make the low achievers and the medium and the low users of the strategies not to benefit from the training to improve their belief about autonomous learning of writing. Moreover, this study was delimited to Hawassa University, to which the researcher is a member of staff, and to freshman program. According to the existing placement policy, students from across the nation are randomly distributed to the higher learning institutions. Thus, the student population does not vary from one

university to another in terms of characteristics such as demography, academic and social background, age, etc. Freshman program was chosen because getting access to representative sample is possible only here where students of all departments take a writing course.

Review of Related Literature

Controlled Writing

Controlled writing asks students to carry out writing activities that are completely controlled by the instructor. Some of the typical controlled writing tasks include copying correct sentences, filling in blanks by choosing correct responses among given alternatives, matching beginning and endings of sentences, and sequencing jumbled words (Baker and Westrup, 2000; Atkins et al., 1996; Gomez and Gomez, 1996). Students are asked to write down correct sentences of the target language from the black/white board or a screen in their notebooks. The main objective of this task is to demonstrate new vocabulary and grammar of the target language. "Copying sentences helps students to practice new language and is also a good way to practice

their writing skills. It is especially useful for students who normally write in a different script. Everything the students copy is correct and this is a motivating way to learn: it helps build confidence in their writing skills” (Baker and Westrup, 2000: 70). However, as these scholars state, the downside of this activity is that it does not promote learners’ critical thinking since it involves just copying and students do not have to think more.

Moreover, students are asked to carry out substitution drills. They are given incomplete sentences of the target language and are asked to complete the sentences by choosing appropriate words, phrases, or clauses among the alternatives given. This activity is also intended to practice the target language vocabulary and grammar.

Matching beginning and endings of sentences is also a controlled writing task. For this activity, first, correct sentences are selected and half of each sentence is put under the right hand column of the black/white board or a screen and the other half appears under the left hand column. Then, students are asked to decide which two sentence halves go together to form a complete sentence. Sequencing jumbled

words in a sentence is also a controlled writing task. Learners are given incorrect sentences as to word order and are asked to rewrite the sentences by putting words in the correct order. In conclusion, the teaching/learning of controlled writing focuses on accuracy.

Guided Writing

Guided writing, unlike controlled writing, asks students to accomplish tasks by writing appropriate responses of their own; they are not usually made to repeat something or choose responses among given alternatives or match something. “Here, the students are given guidance, e.g. some content by way of ideas, notes etc, but in the exercises they have some choice and far more opportunity to make mistakes” (Atkins et al., 1996:116). Guided writing involves tasks such as filling in gap-fill sentences, changing sentences, completing sentences, and writing parallel sentences (Westwood, 2008; Baker and Westrup, 2000; Atkins et al., 1996).

For gap-fill sentences, students are provided with incomplete sentences and are asked to complete the sentences by supplying appropriate words, phrases or clauses of their own. “This is a more challenging activity, where students have to think of and

write some of the words in sentences themselves” (Baker and Westrup, 2000:72).

For changing sentences, learners are given correct sentences and asked to rewrite the sentences by making changes on the grammatical structures such singular to plural, active voice to passive voice, different tenses, etc.

Students can be also given the beginning of sentences and are made to correctly end the sentences by writing words/group of words of their own, unlike controlled writing where learners are asked to choose among alternatives given.

In guided writing, correct sentences are also given to students and students are asked to rewrite the sentences by making the sentences true for themselves. Westwood (2008: 71-72) writes the following regarding guided writing:

...guided writing usually entails more direct modeling by the teacher of specific writing strategies, styles and genres, followed by guided and independent application of the same strategies by the students. A teacher could begin, for example, by demonstrating at the whiteboard how to generate ideas for a given topic, how to create and organize an opening

paragraph, and how to develop the remaining ideas in logical sequence. Students then take it in turns to present their own material to the group, receiving constructive feedback from peers.

In conclusion, the teaching/learning of guided writing focuses on accuracy; however, here, there is a greater tolerance of errors than in controlled writing.

Free Writing

Free writing normally asks students to produce paragraphs or essays on their own/given topics without being controlled by the instructor: they decide about what to write, how much to write, how to organize, the pace, and the writing conventions (Zemach and Rumisek, 2005; Feldman, 2000; Baker and Westrup, 2000; Atkins et al., 1996; Gomez and Gomez, 1996).

The main role of the instructor is to give a little support to guide students how to come up with effective paragraphs or essays. The teaching/learning of free writing mainly asks students to discuss as many ideas/contents as possible. Students are taught to keep on writing down whatever comes into their mind about the topic; they should not stop writing to think and choose the most

appropriate vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization even if they may encounter problems. Students are not usually encouraged to stop writing to refer to a dictionary or other materials to help them make their writing error-free. Feldman (2000:196-197) says the following about free writing:

In free writing, you write continuously for a fixed period of time, such as 5 or 10 minutes. The only rule that governs free writing is to write continuously, without stopping. It does not matter if the product is good; it does not matter if it's good. The only principle you must follow in free writing is to get something-any-thing-down on paper.

The typical tasks of the free writing include writing paragraphs or essays on students' own/given topics: writing creative texts, diaries, dialogues, a new version of a story, and rewriting the ending of a book. Free writing considers that the *process* of writing is much more important than the product of writing. "Proponents claim that free writing provides the incentive and practice necessary to write in effective and interesting ways, as well as practice in choosing topics..." (Gomez and Gomez, 1996: 211). However, according to these

scholars, free writing can hardly improve students' writing skills.

Learning Strategies of Writing

According to Oxford (1990), the following are learning strategies of writing.

Memory Strategies of Writing

Memory 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.

Cognitive Strategies of Writing

The following are the cognitive strategies of writing. **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: 72), "**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." 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 *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 paraphrased. 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.

Compensation Strategies of Writing

Compensation 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*.

Metacognitive Strategies of Writing

The metacognitive strategies of writing are discussed 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. ***Overviewing 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 and it means deciding generally to pay attention to a writing task and avoid distractors. *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.

Affective Strategies of Writing

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.

Social Strategies of Writing

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 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.

Research Methodology

The Research Design

This study was intended to examine if training in the learning strategies of writing brings significantly different effects on students of different ability groups of writing (high, medium and low), user-groups of the strategies (high-users, medium-users and low-users) and gender with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning 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 learning strategies of writing. The effects of the training were examined through hypothesis testing. Thus, this research employed a quantitative-methods design.

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*** discussed earlier. The teaching material was prepared by using the ***model of Oxford (1990)***. Her model was chosen, first, because it is the most suitable model and thus it has been preferred by many researchers. Second, the model briefly discusses procedures that are easy to understand. The writing tasks/exercises in the teaching material asked to complete sentences by writing appropriate subjects and predicates, rewrite sentences by correcting errors, complete paragraphs by writing appropriate topic sentences, concluding sentences and relevant details, rearrange jumbled sentences in logical

orders, 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 teaching material, comments were obtained from most senior colleagues of the researcher.

Preparation of a Writing Test

A writing test was prepared by the researcher. The students were asked to complete sentences by writing appropriate subjects and predicates, rewrite sentences by correcting errors, complete paragraphs by writing appropriate topic sentences, concluding sentences and relevant details, rearrange jumbled sentences in logical orders, 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 most senior colleagues of the researcher.

Preparation of Questionnaires

Two different questionnaires were adapted in the form of a five-point Likert Scale. The first questionnaire was intended to collect data on the students' use of the learning strategies of writing. This questionnaire was adapted from Oxford (1990) and included items where each item has five possible responses: *always, usually, sometimes, rarely, never*. The second questionnaire was intended to obtain data on the students' belief about autonomous learning of writing. This questionnaire was adapted from Spratt et al. (2002) and included items where each item has five possible answers: *strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, 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 the *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 of the questionnaire were reliable at above 0.80. *Cronbach Alpha* was chosen because the questionnaire is in a five-point Likert Scale.

Selection of Study Setting and Departments

The researcher purposefully chose Hawassa University to which he is a member of staff. The university admits a cohort of students with similar educational background and demographic characteristics that all other universities across the nation admit. From the existing departments of the university, Mathematics and Management Departments were randomly selected by drawing lots. The researcher used a simple random sampling because it allows every department to have equal chance of being selected; thus, it is possible to be confident that the departments chosen represent all the departments of the university.

Administration and Correction of the Test

The writing test was administered to the students. 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, who had received training on how to correct, of the university.

The *analytic approach* was chosen to mark the compositions. This approach was chosen for being the most effective approach to achieve reliability. The rating scale used for the approach 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.”

Administration of the Pre-training Questionnaires

The questionnaires meant to collect data on the students’ use of the learning strategies of writing and intended to obtain data on their belief about autonomous learning of writing were administered before conducting the training. The purpose of administering the questionnaire which was meant to collect data on the students’ use of the learning strategies of writing before conducting the training was to classify the students as high-users, medium-users and low-users of the learning strategies of writing. The purpose of administering the questionnaire which was intended to gather data on the students’ belief about autonomous learning of writing before conducting the training was to see if

there was a significant difference among the high, medium and low ability or user-groups and between males and females with regard to their belief about autonomous learning of writing. The questionnaires were filled in by 60 students (46 males and 14 females) who were selected to be taught the writing lessons through training in the learning strategies of writing. Careful attempts were made to make the environment conducive to fill in the questionnaires.

Grouping Students

The following procedures were applied to assign the students into the high, medium and low ability groups. First, *Pearson r* was conducted on *SPSS* version 20 to see the correlation of the scores given by the two instructors. Second, the coefficient of determination was computed to examine the extent to which the scores given by the instructors are related. Third, the average scores were taken since *Pearson r* computed showed that the correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed), and the coefficient of determination computed demonstrated that the scores given by the instructors are related at 85%.

In order to assign the students into the 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 learning strategies of writing, 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 score 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 includes 20 students.

The researcher selected 14 male students, among 46 male students, whose scores were similar with that of 14 female students with regard to their belief about autonomous learning of writing before they were taught the writing lessons through training in the learning strategies of writing.

Examining the Students' Belief about Autonomous Learning of Writing before the Training

One-Way ANOVA was computed on *SPSS* version 20 to see if there was a significant difference among the ability groups and among the user-groups of the learning strategies of writing regarding their belief about autonomous learning of writing before conducting the training. The significance level was taken at .05. The computation showed that there was no significant difference concerning their belief. Moreover, *Independent-Samples T Test* was computed on *SPSS* version 20 to see if there was a significant difference between male and female students' belief about autonomous learning of writing before they were made to learn the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing. The significance level was taken at .05. In order to compute *One-Way ANOVA* and *Independent-Samples T Test*, the researcher applied all the detailed procedures he employed below to conduct the aforementioned statistical tests in the case of analyzing the results of the post-training questionnaire.

Administration of the Post-training Questionnaire

The questionnaire which was intended to collect data on the students' belief about

autonomous learning of writing and administered before the training was also administered after conducting the training to Mathematics Department students for 30 hours (5 hours for 6 consecutive weeks) and to 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. This questionnaire was filled in by all the students who had filled in it before the training. The purpose of administering this questionnaire was to obtain data on the students' belief about autonomous learning of writing after the training.

Methods of Data Analysis

Analysis of the Results of the Post-training Questionnaire

The results of the post-training 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 if training in the learning strategies of writing brought significantly different effects on different ability groups of writing,

user-groups of the strategies and sex with regard to improving the students' belief about autonomous learning of writing, the following procedures were applied to analyze the results of the post-training 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.

Second, histograms were produced for the scores of each group as well as males and females to see if the distributions have the shape of the cross-section of a bell where many of the scores are closer to the mean scores. In relation to this idea, Connolly (2007:43/46) says "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".

Third, *One-Way ANOVA* was computed on *SPSS* version 20 to examine if there was a

significant difference among the three ability groups and the three user-groups with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after the training. 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 which of the groups. For that reason, *Post Hoc Tests* was carried out to examine where the differences lie, i.e., between which of the groups.

In order to examine if there was a significant difference between male and female students' belief about autonomous learning of writing after the training *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

HAG=High Ability Group; MAG=Medium Ability Group; LAG=Low Ability Group

is .006, which shows that there is a significant difference between the mean

(I) groups	(J) groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
HAG	MAG	7.45000	4.73371	.298	-4.4482	19.3482
	LAG	15.80000*	4.73371	.006	3.9018	27.6982
MAG	HAG	-7.45000	4.73371	.298	-19.3482	4.4482
	LAG	8.35000	4.73371	.220	-3.5482	20.2482
LAG	HAG	-15.80000*	4.73371	.006	-27.6982	-3.9018
	MAG	-8.35000	4.73371	.220	-20.2482	3.5482

Table 2 above demonstrates the results of *Post Hoc Tests* computed to identify the ability group that significantly exceeds to improve its belief about autonomous learning of writing after the training. As indicated in the table, the mean difference between the high and medium ability groups is 7.45000. The P-value is .298, which shows that the mean difference is not significant indicating none of these groups exceeds one another to improve their belief about autonomous learning of writing after receiving the training (P-value > .05). The high and low ability groups exhibit the mean difference of 15.80000*. The P-value

scores of these groups wherein, as the mean score of the high ability group in Table 1 above demonstrates, the students in this group outperformed the students in the low ability group with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after receiving the training (P-value < .05). The above table also depicts that 8.35000 is the mean difference between the medium and low ability groups. The P-value is .220 indicating the mean difference is insignificant; after receiving the training, none of these groups exceeded each other with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after receiving the training (P-value > .05).

Results of One-Way ANOVA and Post Hoc Tests for the High, Medium and Low 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’ belief about autonomous learning of writing after the training.

Table 3: Results of One-Way ANOVA for the High, Medium and Low User-groups

Mean			Std. Deviation			Std. Error			Sum of Squares		DF		Mean Square		F-value	P-value
HUG	MUG	LUG	HUG	MUG	LUG	HUG	MUG	LUG	BG	WG	BG	WG	BG	WG		
54.95	44.10	40.65	8.97	9.46	17.39	2.00	2.11	3.89	2227.43	8981.30	2	57	1113.72	157.57	7.068	.002

HUG=High User-group; MUG=Medium User-group; LUG=Low User-group; BG=Between Group; WG=Within Group

Table 3 above depicts the results of *One-Way ANOVA* conducted to examine if there is a significant difference among the high, medium and low user-groups’ belief about autonomous learning of writing after

receiving the training. Accordingly, the table reveals that the high user-group scores the mean of 54.95 while the medium and the low user-groups score the mean of 44.10 and 40.65 respectively. The Sd. Deviation of the high user-group is 8.97; the Sd. Deviation of the medium user-group is 9.46; the Sd. Deviation of the low user-group is 17.39. The table also depicts that the Sum of Squares for Between Group is 2227.43 whereas the Sum of Squares for Within Group is 8981.30. The Mean Square for the former group is 1113.72, but the Mean Square for the latter group is 157.57. The F-value is 7.068 and that of the P-value is .002 which indicate that there is a significant difference among the groups with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after 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: Results of Post Hoc Tests for the High, Medium and Low User-groups

(I) groups	(J) groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
HUG	MUG	10.85000*	3.96947	.030	.8727	20.8273
	LUG	14.30000*	3.96947	.003	4.3227	24.2773
MUG	HUG	-10.85000*	3.96947	.030	-20.8273	-.8727
	LUG	3.45000	3.96947	.687	-6.5273	13.4273
LUG	HUG	-14.30000*	3.96947	.003	-24.2773	-4.3227
	MUG	-3.45000	3.96947	.687	-13.4273	6.5273

HUG=High User-group; MUG=Medium User-group; LUG=Low User-group

Table 4 above reveals the results of *Post Hoc Tests* carried out to identify the user-group that significantly surpasses to improve its belief about autonomous learning of writing after receiving the training. From the table, one can see that the mean difference between the high and medium user-groups is 10.85000*. The P-value is .030 which indicates that the mean difference is significant. As the mean score of the high user-group in Table 3 above shows, the students in this group outperform that of the students in the medium user-group to improve their belief about autonomous learning of writing after receiving the training (P-value < .05). The above table also demonstrates that 14.30000* is the mean difference between the high and low user-groups. The P-value is .003 indicating, as

the mean score in Table 3 above shows, the students in the high user-group exceed that of the students in the low user-group with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after receiving the training (P-value < .05). Table 4 above also demonstrates that 3.45000 is the mean difference between the medium and low user-groups. The P-value is revealed as .687. This shows that the mean difference is insignificant indicating these groups do not exceed one another with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after being taught the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing (P-value > .05).

Results of Independent-Samples T Test for Male and Female Students' Belief about Autonomous Learning of Writing after the Training

The following table demonstrates the results of *Independent-Samples T Test* computed for male and female students' belief about autonomous learning of writing after being taught the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing.

Table 5: Results of Independent-Samples T Test for the Male and Female Students' Belief about Autonomous Learning of Writing

Mean		Std. Deviation		Std. Error		DF	T-value	P-value
Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females			
54.0000	48.5833	8.17124	8.07306	2.18386	2.33049	26	1.694	.103

From Table 5 above, one can see that the mean scores of the males and females are 54.0000 and 48.5833 respectively. The Std. Deviation of the males is 8.17124 whereas the Std. Deviation of the females is 8.07306. The table also depicts that the T-value is 1.694 and that of the P-value is .103. This shows that there is no significant difference between the males and females with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after receiving the

training (T-value < table value; P-value > .05).

Major Findings of the Study

One-Way ANOVA computed revealed that there was a significant difference among the high, medium or low ability groups and among the high, medium or low user-groups of the learning strategies of writing with

regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after receiving the training (F-value = 5.58 and P-value = .006 for the ability groups; F-value = 7.068 and P-value = .002 for the user-groups). *Post Hoc Tests* conducted to examine where the differences lie, i.e., between which of the groups, indicated that the high ability group outperformed the low ability group (P-value = .006). And, in the case of the user-groups, the high user-group surpassed the medium and the low user-groups (P-values = .030, .003). Moreover,

Independent-Samples T Test conducted demonstrated that there was no significant difference between the males and females with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing after they were taught the writing lessons through training in learning strategies of writing (T-value = 1.694, P-value = .103).

Conclusions

Based on the findings, this study concludes that training in the learning strategies of writing brings a significantly different effect on the high and low ability groups with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing in which the high ability group outperforms the low ability group. It is also concluded that training in the learning strategies of writing results in significantly different effects on the high and medium user-groups and on the high and low user-groups with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing wherein the high user-group surpasses the medium and low user-groups. This study, however, concludes that training in the learning strategies of writing does not bring a significantly different effect

on males and females with regard to improving their belief about autonomous learning of writing.

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 low achievers and the medium and low-users of the learning strategies of writing so that he/she would give due attention to benefit these students, at least by minimizing factors that might affect the students, to improve their belief about autonomous learning of writing. This is because these students significantly lag behind, compared with the high achievers and the high-users, to improve their belief about autonomous learning of writing. Being unable to benefit from the training to improve their belief about autonomous learning of writing on the part of these students may mean unable to take on more responsibility

for their own learning of writing in and outside class, and this in turn may mean unable to improve their writing skills;

- Studies should be conducted to explore factors that hamper low achievers and medium and low user-

groups of the learning strategies of writing not to benefit, compared with the high achievers and the high users, from the training to improve their belief about autonomous learning of writing.

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