

Investigation of English Foreign Language Learners' Writing Strategies

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Abstract

This case study is aimed at (1) describing the types of English Foreign Language (EFL) writing strategies employed by the subjects; and (2) finding out the differences between the writing strategies used by students with good and poor writing mastery. This research was conducted at Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, especially in the graduate program of English language studies. The subjects of this research were six students who had enrolled in the program. The students were categorized into those with good writing mastery and those with poor writing mastery by doing a writing test. The instruments used for this research were writing test, writing scoring rubric, writing scoring conversion, questionnaire, and interview. Afterwards, the data were analyzed by using flow model. There were some arising research findings that could be sketched: (1) All eighteen writing strategies investigated in this research were employed by the subjects; and (2) The students with good writing mastery employed writing strategies more frequently than those with poor writing mastery. In conclusion, employing writing strategies in a high frequency is strongly essential, as it will help to achieve a good writing outcome.

Key words: EFL writing strategy, good writing mastery, poor writing mastery

Investigasi Terhadap Strategi Menulis Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Sebagai Bahasa Asing

Abstrak

Studi kasus ini bertujuan untuk: (1) mendeskripsikan tipe-tipe strategi pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing yang dimiliki responden; dan (2) menemukan perbedaan antara strategi menulis yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa-mahasiswa dengan penguasaan menulis yang baik dan yang buruk. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, khususnya dalam program Pascasarjana dari program studi bahasa Inggris. Responden penelitian ini adalah enam mahasiswa aktif kuliah. Mahasiswa-mahasiswa tersebut dikategorikan menjadi mahasiswa dengan penguasaan menulis yang baik dan mahasiswa dengan penguasaan menulis yang buruk melalui pelaksanaan sebuah tes menulis. Instrumen yang digunakan untuk penelitian ini terdiri dari tes menulis, rubrik penilaian menulis, konversi penilaian menulis, kuesioner, dan wawancara. kemudian, data-data dianalisa dengan menggunakan "flow model". Ada beberapa temuan hasil penelitian yang dapat diuraikan: (1) Kedelapan belas strategi menulis yang diinvestigasi di penelitian ini digunakan oleh responden; dan (2) Mahasiswa dengan penguasaan menulis yang baik lebih sering menggunakan strategi menulis dibandingkan dengan mahasiswa dengan kemampuan menulis yang buruk. Kesimpulannya, sangat penting untuk menggunakan strategi menulis dengan frekuensi yang tinggi karena hal itu akan membantu untuk memperoleh hasil menulis yang baik.

Kata-kata kunci: strategi menulis bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, penguasaan menulis yang baik, penguasaan menulis yang buruk

Introduction

Taking writing strategy usage into account in a writing process is an essential feat to do for a writer. It is undeniable that writing strategy employment influences writing outcome quality. Angelova (1999) in Maftoon & Seyyedrezaei (2012) stated that writing strategy is one of the factors which influence someone to have a good writing outcome. It primarily separates successful from less successful writers (Beare, 2000 and Victori, 1995 in Maftoon & Seyyedrezaei, 2012). In line with it, Asmari (2013) stated that one of the key factors which affect writing is the writing strategies. In accordance with that, in order to achieve a good writing outcome, a writer needs to strongly consider an effective way to employ a writing strategy.

Having an excellent writing skill is essential yet difficult to achieve – even for a graduate student majoring in English Department. This research pointed out English Foreign Language learners who have learnt and practiced English for years (at least four years in their undergraduate program) as research subjects. They are students of graduate program of English language studies in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. All of them graduated from English Department in their undergraduate studies. To obtain the students' writing score data, the researchers conducted a writing test and assessed them by using a writing scoring rubric. Later, to grade the students writing products the researchers utilized scoring conversion used in the university. After having such process, the researchers have found that four out of eight graduate students had poor writing mastery. Three students were found to produce good writing products and one student produced intermediate writing product quality. Even after having years of learning and practicing English, the students still got difficulties to produce a good writing product.

Albeit having learnt and practiced English for years, four graduate students were still producing poor writing quality. Thus, a global assumption, that says through years of learning and practicing English writing will lead a student to have a good writing outcome, is not

true here. Another factor may affects the writing achievement. A number of researchers proved that employing effective writing strategy contributes to achieve good quality of writing outcome. It is clear that it may influence the writing outcome quality of the subjects. As the found phenomenon disagree with the global assumption and that the writing strategy employment is believed to be the main cause of it, the researchers found it was interesting to conduct a research on.

A research on writing strategy is not a new topic as a number of researchers already had conducted researches on students' writing strategy. Alkubaidi (2014), a Saudi Arabian, conducted a research on writing strategy employed by seventy four female Saudi undergraduate students. She shed light on the most frequently used of writing strategy and the relationship between learners' learning style preference and writing strategy usage. She found out that Saudi learners used more "before writing strategies" than "during writing strategies" and "reviewing writing strategies". Moreover, she found out that there was no correlation between the participants' learning style preference and writing strategies. Mu & Carrington (2007) elucidated the types of writing strategy employed by three Chinese post-graduate students in an Australian higher education institution. They disclosed that the three participants employed rhetorical, metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies in their writing practice. Maarof & Murat (2013) investigated writing strategy employed by fifty students from four upper secondary school students in Malaysia. They indicated the strategies used in essay writing among 50 high-intermediate and low proficiency ESL upper secondary school students and the significant differences in strategy used between the two groups. They uncovered that the while-writing strategies were most frequently used whereas the revising strategies were least used. Furthermore, the high-intermediate and low proficiency ESL upper secondary school students employed different type of writing strategies. Chen (2011), a Chinese, conducted a research on writing strategy employed by 132 college students (non-English majors) at Dezhou University. He studied the most frequently used

writing strategy and the relations between the writing strategy and writing achievement. He revealed that the compensation strategies were used with the highest frequencies. Furthermore, he found out that pre-writing strategies and revising strategies positively correlated with students' writing achievements which indicated that the more often the students used the strategies, the higher the scores they would get in the writing test.

The previous reviewed studies have been devoted to describe secondary (Maarof & Murat, 2013), undergraduate (Alkubaidi, 2014 & Chen, 2011), and post-graduate (Mu & Carrington, 2007) students' writing strategy. None of those studies pointed out EFL graduate students as research subjects. In regard to students' nationality background, the three reviewed studies investigated Saudi (Alkubaidi, 2014), Chinese (Mu & Carrington, 2007 and Chen, 2011), and Malaysian (Maarof & Murat, 2013) students as subjects of their research. That is to say, Indonesian students have not been investigated yet. In regard to the research's location, the reviewed studies held their research in Saudi (Alkubaidi, 2014), Australia (Mu & Carrington, 2007), Malaysia (Maarof & Murat, 2013), and China (Chen, 2011). It is noted that none of them held writing strategy research in Indonesia. Furthermore, none of them focused on the differences between strategies used by good and poor writing mastery students.

Based on the previous elaboration, the researchers conducted a research (1) to describe the EFL writing strategies employed by Indonesian Graduate Students and (2) to reveal the differences between the strategies used by the students with good and poor writing mastery. Thus, the researchers desiderated to conduct a research entitled EFL Writing Strategy Used by Indonesian Graduate Students.

This research may give students and lecturers or teachers a better way in teaching and/ or learning writing. The insight derived from this research can contribute to the development of a new teaching writing method which can be implemented in classroom. Students can use it to guide them improve their self-learning writing. In general, it can give a

theoretical discernment to the writing strategy studies.

Methodology

This research is a case study which belongs to a qualitative research. It was conducted at the graduate program of language studies of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta from April to September 2017. The researchers obtained the data from the participants and documents. The participants of this research were the six students who enrolled in the program. The documents used in this research were the results of students writing test (the test had been conducted by the researchers).

A sequence of actions has been carried out to identify participants' writing ability. The researchers held a writing test on April 2017 at Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta to obtain the primary data of the students' writing score so that the students can be classified into those with good and those with poor writing mastery. The researchers adapted a writing prompt conducted by educational testing service (ESP) (2008, p. 13). Indicators used to assess the writing quality were content, organization, mechanics, vocabulary, and grammar (Blanchard and Root, 2004; Brown, 2001; NSW Department of Education and Training, 2007; Waller, 2011; Peha, 2002; Whitaker, 2009). To score the subjects' writing, the researchers utilized a writing rubric provided by Brown and Bailey (1984, p. 39-41) in Brown (2003, p. 244-246).

The theory used to classify the writing strategy was the theory developed by Petric & Czarl (2003). To collect the data of writing strategies used by the participants, the researchers utilized questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire and the interview were used to find out the types of writing strategies used by the participants. The researchers modified the questionnaire developed by Petric & Czarl (2003) as one of the instruments.

The obtained data were analyzed using writing scoring rubric (Brown & Bailey, 1984 in Brown, 2003), writing scoring conversion, and flow model (developed by Miles & Huberman,

1994). In assessing the students' writing, the researchers utilized mark-remark reliability to maintain the consistency of the scoring. Then, the results of scoring were consulted to the writing scoring conversion developed by UMS. In employing flow model, there were three stages carried out by the researchers. Those were data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. As data collection proceeded, the researchers reduced the data by writing summaries, coding, and teasing out themes. Later on, in data display, every data that had been "reduced" were presented by displaying through extending words. The third stage of the analysis activity was conclusion drawing.

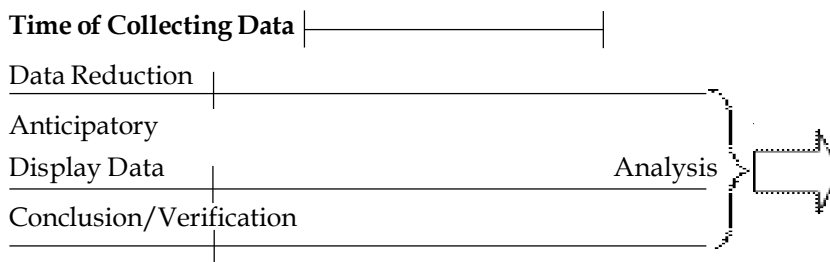


Figure 1

Illustration of Flow Model by Miles & Huberman (1994)

Findings and discussions

This section elaborates three research findings and the discussion of the findings. Those two elaboration (findings and discussion) are floored below.

Findings

The researchers elaborated the findings in the setting of the research regarding to the writing strategies employed by the subjects. This section counters two main parts which are: 1 types of writing strategy employed by the subjects and; 2 the differences of writing strategies utilization between those of having good and those of having poor writing mastery.

1 Types of Writing Strategy

In this research, the writing strategies were employed into three main stages. Those are

before writing, during writing, and after writing stages. Afterwards, each of the stage consists of several specific strategies that are found. Below are strategies that were identified employed by the respondents.

Three strategies employed by Sstudents before writing

Before starting the writing, subjects employed time planning, experts' model reference, and outlining strategies. The subjects made a time calculation in their mind instead of writing it on the paper. They planed the time when their writing should be finished, as student A said, "I rarely

calculate the time to write. It is not written, I plan the time when should the work be done in my mind. I only write the idea in my mind" [A/INT1/001]. In employing experts' model reference, they read both references which were in the form of soft file and printed file. They sought some

information related to their text that they were going to write such as the idea and certain point of view toward the topic that was used to write as student E said, "I seek it (reference) in internet, in my experience, if I could not find the .pdf, I asked my lecturer to get the printed version. I read the abstract, the similar title, the object, and the discussion" [E/INT2/002]. In employing outlining strategy, they utilized either their native or the target language. In this case, the subjects employed Bahasa Indonesia as their native language and English as the target language; such as student C who said, "I often write the outline of my writing in English before I start writing. Sometimes, I write it in Bahasa Indonesia". [C/QTR1/003-004].

Ten strategies employed during writing

During writing, there were some strategies employed by respondents., Those were

introduction first, sentence verification, paragraph verification, outline revision, language transfer, positive grammar and vocabulary, sentence simplification, synonymy utilization, dictionary utilization, and peer cooperation strategies.

In employing introduction first strategy, subjects elaborated the background and the purpose of writing that were going to be used, as student A said, "I often (start writing from the introduction). I write the issue, the reason why I choose the issue. And it converges into the problem statement" [A/INT2/005]. Later, in employing sentence verification strategy, they checked the vocabulary, sentences coherency, and grammar, as it is noted by student A who said, "I rarely (re-check it for each sentence I write). It is to check the structure, the grammar" [A/INT2/006]. In employing paragraph verification strategy, they elaborated the ideas which were going to be written in the next paragraph as told by a student: "When I am done with a paragraph, I will check it, whether it fits or not, and then thinking what I will write for the next paragraph. I check the vocabulary, grammar, and more importantly the content" [F/INT2/006]. In the process of employing outline revision strategy, subjects checked if the ideas were precisely put into their writing. They revised the main idea written in the outline. It is noted by student B who said: "I revise the outline when I am in the middle of writing process. When I found something inappropriate, I will revise the outline. It is to make the writing outcome better and I can deliver what I want to deliver precisely" [B/INT1/011]. In employing language transfer strategy, subjects kept writing although they sometimes did not know some English terms. They used their native language terms in order not to lose the idea. It is as noted by student E who said, "It is more to keep my idea safe from losing it" [E/QTR1/013].

In using positive grammar and vocabulary strategy, subjects wrote down their text without stopping to check the grammar and the vocabulary that were used within their

text. Yet, the subjects assumed that their grammar and vocabulary mastery were not good enough to rely on. It is as noted by student F who stated "I sometimes do not check the grammar and the vocabulary during the writing process. If there are some mistakes (in grammar and vocabulary) I will correct it later" [F/INT1/012]. In employing sentence verification strategy, subjects simplified the sentences that were used in their writing. They simplified the sentences to make it more compact as noted by student D who stated "when I elaborate the main idea I go namby-pamby, if I write it too much, it will not be coherent. So straight to the point" [D/INT2/009]. Further, in employing synonym strategy, subjects chose more familiar words to replace some less familiar terms. They wanted to make the content of their writing product easier to be comprehended by most readers. It is as stated by student A, "I tend to choose a familiar word. It is to make my writing easier to understand by the readers" [A/INT1/016]. In employing dictionary strategy, they utilized two types of dictionary. Those were monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. It is as student A said, "I often use both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries" [A/QTR1/016-017]. In employing peer cooperation strategy, subjects asked somebody else to help them to get rid of some mistakes during writing process. They employed this strategy by asking someone else to assess their works. It is noted by student A who said, "...to check the grammar, and then whether or not the sentences are connected" [A/INT2/011].

Seven strategies employed after writing

After writing, there were some strategies employed by the subjects, those were reading aloud, revision, drafting, instructions matching, respiting, collation, and self-rewarding strategies. Regarding to the use of reading aloud strategy, subjects of this research read their text loudly after they had finished writing it. However, it was found out that subjects read their writing products lowly instead of reading it loudly. It is as

noted by student A who said "...not too loud, the thing is that I can hear it. Not too loud, if it is readable I will know if it is suitable" [A/INT2/013]. In employing revision strategy, subjects revised vocabulary, sentence structure, text structure, and content of their text. Moreover, they also sometimes had a revision for each aspect one by one. There were times when they wrote a draft first before the final one. Sometimes, they prepared it as a draft. Yet after writing, they found it was not good enough to make it as the final version; as student B said, "Actually, it is not prepared from the beginning. In the writing process I think if it is not good enough it is not 100%..." [B/INT2/016].

In employing instructions matching strategy, they checked the margin and the number of words. Usually they wrote it by using Microsoft office platform and then they check it in the soft-file form. Student B said, "Yes, I match my writing to the instructions. For instance, in the computer we could see the number of words we wrote. It is to match the number of words criterion" [B/INT1/027]. Afterwards, in employing respiting strategy, they did some activities, such as doing another work, taking a rest, and having a refreshing to get a new perspective. Student A said, "I rarely leave it unrevised. There is a rest before I recheck it. It is to do other works" [A/INT2/020].

Moreover, in employing collation strategy, they felt unconfident toward their own works. They compared theirs to the others to see the others' topic, to ensure the gab. It is as student B said I compare the text structure and the topic, to ensure whether my work is same or different. I do not want it to be mainstream [B/INT2/019]. In employing self-rewarding strategy, they had some sort of entertainment after they had finished

writing some sort of text. Those entertainments were such as hanging out somewhere, watching movies, or playing games. It was described by one of the students in this statement, "yes I often do it (giving myself some appreciation). It can be by watching TV or downloading a new movie or hanging out somewhere" [A/INT2/22].

2 Differences Between Writing Strategies Employed by the Students with Good and Poor Writing Mastery

This section elaborates three arising differences of writing strategies employment by the two categories of students. It is based on the frequency usage, dominant category usage, and dominant strategy within all three writing activities.

Comparison of writing strategy employment frequency

The data in Table 1 showed that there is a different frequency of the writing strategies employment frequency between the students with good and poor writing mastery. Students with good writing mastery employed writing strategies more frequently than those with poor writing mastery. It is consistent in all three writing strategy stages. In Table 1, higher mean score means higher the frequency. The mean scores of the good

Table 1
Writing Strategy Usage Mean Score

Strategy					
N = 3	Mean	Before	During	After	Good Writing Mastery
		3,0	3,2	2,9	

Strategy					
N = 3	Mean	Before	During	After	Poor Writing Mastery
		2,75	2,71	2,757	

writing mastery students are 3,0 (before writing), 3,2 (during writing), and 2,9 (after writing). While the mean scores of the poor writing mastery students are 2,75 (before writing), 2,71 (during writing), and 2,757 (after writing). It *clearly* shows that the mean scores of good writing mastery student are higher than those of the poor writing mastery's. Thus, it can be stated that the good writing mastery students employ writing strategies more often than the poor writing mastery students do.

The writing stage where writing strategy was employed more frequently.

In employing writing strategies there were differences writing activities in which the subjects dominantly employed those strategies. As mentioned previously, the strategies are categorized based on three stages of writing activities which are before, during, and after writing. In Table 1, students with good writing mastery dominantly employed the writing strategies during the writing activity (mean 3,2). In other words, the strategies they employed before (mean 3,0) and after writing (mean 2,9) were less dominantly used compared to the strategies employed during writing activity. On the other hand, the poor writing mastery students dominantly employed the writing strategies after they were writing (mean 2,757). Consequently, the strategies employed during (mean 2,71) and before writing (mean 2,75) were less dominantly used compared to the strategies employed after writing.

Strategies comparison in before writing stage

The data in Table 2 show that there were differences related to the dominant strategies

Table 2
Dominant Writing Strategy Usage (Before Writing)

Good Writing Mastery			Poor Writing Mastery		
No			No		
1	Before Writing	Freq	1	Before Writing	Freq
	Experts' Model Reference Outlining (English)	4,66 4,66		Experts' Model Reference	4,00

employed by the subjects in before writing stage. Students with good writing mastery equally employed experts' model reference and outlining (in English) strategies as the most dominant strategies. While students with poor writing mastery employed only experts' model reference as the most dominant strategy.

As can be seen in Table 2, the mean scores of experts' model reference (4,66) and outlining (4,66) strategies of students with good writing mastery were higher than the mean score of experts' model reference (4,00) of students with poor writing mastery. Notice that students with good writing mastery equally employed two strategies, while those with poor writing mastery employed only one strategy.

Strategy comparison in during writing stage

In during writing stage, it was found out that students with good writing mastery equally employed introduction first and dictionary (bilingual) strategies as the most dominant strategies. On the other hand, students with poor writing mastery employed dictionary (bilingual) strategy as the most dominant strategy in during writing stage.

Table 3 presents the mean score of writing strategies employed either by the good or poor writing mastery students. The higher the mean score is, the more frequently that strategy is employed. The mean scores of introduction first (4,66) and dictionary (4,66) strategies employed by students with good

Table 3
Dominant Writing Strategy in During Writing Stage

Good Writing Mastery			Poor Writing Mastery		
No		Freq	No		Freq
1	During Writing		1	During Writing	
	Introduction First Dictionary (Bilingual)	4,66 4,66		Dictionary (Bilingual)	4,00

writing mastery are higher than the mean score of dictionary (4,00) strategy employed by the poor writing mastery ones. Moreover, students with good writing mastery equally employ two strategies as the most dominant strategies while the poor writing mastery students employ only one strategy.

Strategy Comparison in After Writing Stage

There were differences about the most used writing strategy in after writing stage. Students with good writing mastery equally employed revision (sentence and text structure) and instructions matching strategies as the most dominant strategies. On the other hand, students with poor writing mastery employed instructions matching strategy as the most dominant strategy.

Table 4
Dominant Writing Strategies (After Writing)

Good Writing Mastery			Poor Writing Mastery		
No		Freq	No		Freq
1	After Writing		1	During Writing	
	Revision (Sentence and Text Structure) Instructions Matching	4,33 4,66		Instructions Matching	4,66

Table 4 shows the mean score of writing strategies employed by the good or poor writing mastery students in after writing stage. The higher the mean score is, the more frequently the strategy is used. The mean scores of revision (4,33) and instructions

matching (4,33) strategies employed by students with good writing mastery were lower than the mean score of instructions matching (4,66) strategy employed by those with poor writing mastery. It is also noted that students with good writing mastery employed two dominant

strategies, but students with poor writing mastery dominantly employed only one strategy in after writing stage.

Discussion

This research identified that the subjects employed time planning, expert' model reference, and outlining strategies in before writing stage. In during writing stage, they were identified to employ introduction first, sentence verification, paragraph verification, outline revision, language transfer, positive grammar and vocabulary, synonym strategy, dictionary, and peer cooperation strategies. In after writing stage, they employed reading aloud, revision, instructions matching, respiting, collation, and self-rewarding strategies. Thus, eighteen strategies were identified in this study.

That result shares similarity to that of Maarof & Murat's (2014). They found out that the subjects employed all twenty writing strategies (in before, during, and after writing stages). There are three identical factors between the two studies which are assumed to drive the

two studies into a convergent conclusion.

The first is that the subjects in both studies were from the same ethnic. Nambiar's research (2009) stated that subjects' ethnicity influences the use of strategies. Thus, the ethnicity factor is

suspected to play a role that the two studies share a resembling result.

Second, both studies chose subjects who learn English as a second language. This similar characteristic may affect both researches to the same conclusion. The effect of English as Second Language was also mentioned by Ellis (1994).

Third, both studies were held in South East Asia countries (Indonesia and Malaysia). As both countries are geographically close, it might contribute to similar result. The hypothesis that geographical distance factor may contributes to the use of writing strategy was also supported by Ellis (1994) and Nambiar's (2009).

This research result is in line with that of Raoofi, Chan, & Rashid (2014). Their research showed that the high proficient students employed writing strategies more frequently than those with low ones. The result also corresponds to the result of Maarof and Murat's study (2013), as their study displayed that high-intermediate students employed writing strategies more frequently than those of low proficiency ones did. Although this research and the above two research studied different academic level, they consistently showed that writing strategy segmented the good from the poor writing mastery writers. That assumption is supported by Beare (2000) and Victory (1995) in Maftoon & Seyyedrezaei (2012), as it was stated that writing strategies primarily separate successful from less successful writers. It indeed supports Asmari's (2013) idea as she stated that one of the key factors that affects writing outcome is writing strategies. Thus, it is strongly acceptable that in this setting, the higher the frequency of writing strategies usage is, the better the writing outcome will be.

Conclusions and Suggestions

In writing activity the participants employed eighteen types of writing strategy. Before writing stage, they employed time planning, experts' model reference, and outlining strategy. During writing stage, they employed introduction first, sentence and paragraph verification, outline revision, language transfer, positive grammar and vocabulary, sentence simplification,

synonym, dictionary, and peer cooperation strategy. And then, in after writing stage, they employed reading aloud, revision, drafting, instructions matching, respiting, collation, and self-rewarding strategy.

Students with good writing mastery employed writing strategies more frequently than those with poor writing mastery. It was consistent in all three writing stages (before, during, and after writing).

In conclusion, effectively employing writing strategy is important in pursuance to have a good writing outcome. This research shows that writing strategy does separate students with good and poor writing mastery. Thus, intensively employing writing strategy will enhance the writing outcome quality.

As noted, this research was done with a relatively small number of subjects and small coverage area of research. Moreover, this research deals with writing mastery as a research variable, yet there are still many other potential variables existed. Consequently, this research could not manage to utilize observation technique to find out the types of writing strategy and factors behind their use. So, suggestion for future researches: (1) may have a writing strategy based research on larger scale which means a research with a larger number of subjects and a wider area coverage, (2) may use other potential variables besides students writing mastery, i.e. English and non-English major students, (3) may have a writing strategy based research on a different academic level of students, and (4) may have a deeper investigation by having a deep observation to dig up the strategies and factors which contribute to the quality of writing.

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