

The Effect of Strategy-Based Instruction on EFL Writing Performance and Self-Regulated Learning

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Received: 14/07/2018
Accepted: 01/10/2018

Abstract

In spite of the fact that the language learning strategy concept has been around for a long time, it is still appealing and vibrant as evidenced by its accumulated body of literature within the field. Research over the years has revealed that the employment of language learning strategies (LLSs) has a significant share of variance in language achievement and success and a number of studies have shown a significant positive correlation between strategy use and successful language learning. Therefore, many theorizers and practitioners in language teaching have embarked on Strategy-based instruction (SBI) approach which focuses on the training of strategic learning by incorporating the strategy instruction into the regular language curriculum. The purpose of such SBI programs is to foster the use of LLSs by the second language learners and to help learners to employ more strategies and to apply them in a more appropriate way. Although many scholars have advocated the contribution of LLSs to developing second language skills and components, the empirical evidence supporting the role of SBI programs in enhancing particular skills in particular contexts through particular methodologies has not received adequate research interest in L2 research contexts.

Self-regulation is another important variable which has been considered to be relevant to strategy use by a number of scholars (Oxford et al., 2014; Tseng et al., 2006). Educators have stressed the identification and instruction of learning strategies for self-regulation. According to Zimmerman (2000, 2008), self-regulation refers to planned self-generated thoughts, feelings, and activities resulting in the achievement of goals with the use of feedback from prior performance making the process cyclical.

Because of the importance of the LLSs, and also given the significant moderating role of the context, as discussed above, in influencing the efficacy of SBI, and finally, considering the heightened significance of self-regulation as a viable construct in English Language Teaching (ELT), this study investigated the effects of strategy-based instruction (SBI) in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing course on enhancing self-regulated learning and writing performance. In so doing, a

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sample of 49 Iranian EFL students were recruited. The participants were the students of two intact classes doing their BA in the field of English Language Literature. They were randomly assigned to experimental group ($n=26$) and control group ($n=23$). To ensure the homogeneity of the two groups, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Allan, 2004) was administered to all the students of the two groups prior to the initiation of the treatment. In order to compare the mean scores on OPT, an independent samples T-test was run to examine the existing difference between groups. The result of the independent samples T-test indicated that the groups were not significantly different in terms of language proficiency before the experiment.

For the purpose of the current study, a sixteen-week metacognition training program was integrated into the writing course of the experimental group. The SBI framework employed in the study was CALLA framework developed by Chamot et al. (1999) which constitutes five basic stages of preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion. The students in the control group received the regular, traditional writing instruction. The data were collected through administration of Timed-writing Essays and Self-Regulated Language Learning Questionnaire (SRLQ). To analyze the data paired-samples *t*-tests and Analyses of Covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted. The findings indicated significant differences in favor of the experimental students in the writing performance and self-regulated learning. The participants of the current study became more autonomous and self-regulated after receiving instruction in metacognitive strategies. A likely justification for the improved writing performance of EFL learners in the present study might lie in the contribution of the learners' academic self-efficacy which is embedded in the belief system of self-regulated learners (Bandura & Locke, 2003). Those with high academic self-efficacy are confident that they will succeed; as a result, this sense of success and agency increases their academic motivation, thereby enhancing their academic performance (Zimmerman, & Schunk, 2008). The results of the current study also indicated that the experimental group students, who were taught the writing metacognitive strategies outperformed the students in the control group in self-regulation. The plausible justification is the fact that metacognitive strategy training has contributed to the development of self-regulation because metacognition has been considered as the chief element of self-regulation theory (Zimmerman, 1989). In other words, there is much overlap between the underlying nature of the two constructs in a sense that Zimmerman (1989) defines students' self-regulation as "the degree that students are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process" (p. 329).

Overall, this study provides strong empirical evidence in favor of SBI in enhancing learners' writing ability and their self-regulation. The findings offer theoretical and pedagogical implications for both theorizers and practitioners. Given the nature of self-regulation and its contribution to language achievement, it is argued that strategy training should be more extensively integrated into the ELT curriculum. The empirical evidence obtained by this study might be an incentive for theoreticians, practitioners and teacher educators to pay more attention to SBI and take actions in explicit training of LLSs especially metacognitive ones with the aim of fostering their learners' self-regulation.

Keywords: self-regulated learning, writing performance, strategy-based instruction, EFL