

“A Paradigm of the Writing Skills Required for Autonomous Learning Strategies among EFL Learners at the University of Jeddah from their Perspectives”

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Abstract

This study aims to suggest a paradigm of the writing skills required for autonomous learning strategies among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives. It involved (363) English foreign language (EFL) learners in the English language institute, which is located in Jeddah City in Saudi Arabia. The EFL learners were selected randomly to be the participants of this study. The method of the study was the descriptive method. The way to collect the data was the writing skills checklist and autonomous learning strategies checklist. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) is used for analyzing data. The findings of the study reveal that the writing skills required for autonomous learning strategies among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives were vocabulary, then organization of ideas, grammar, and content. The least writing skills were the mechanics of writing (punctuation, question marks, spelling, and capitalization). The autonomous learning strategies used by EFL learners to develop the writing skills-were cognitive, affective and social strategies.

Keywords: Autonomous learning strategies, writing skills, Memory, Cognitive, Metacognitive, Compensation, Affective, Social strategies.

Introduction:

Over the last years, many researchers and educators focused on Autonomous Learning (AL) and its implications for learning and teaching (Abdullah & Mohamed, 2015; Genç, 2015; Ezzaidi, 2020). Today, learners are responsible for their learning and take charge to be more autonomous learners (Imane, 2015). In other words, autonomous learning changes the role from the teacher-centered approach to the learner-centered approach which means that learners have the chance and freedom to design and plan their learning by selecting what they want to learn, when, and how according to their needs and interests (Boyadzhieva, 2016). Furthermore, it can help to develop the traditional teaching model to the contemporary teaching model by encouraging learners to use autonomous learning strategies (memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies) (Liu, 2016).

Griffiths (2018) investigated that autonomous learning strategies are an essential elements of learner autonomy, and by using memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies, and learners are able to become autonomous and able to regulate their own learning (p.53). Autonomy is based on learners' capacity to self-guide for practicing critical thinking, and independent action. In addition, it involves learner self-direction and responsibility (Andrade, 2012). If the teachers train the learners to be ready, competence and responsible in taking accountability for monitoring, suggesting, evaluating their learning which is established in cooperation with their teachers and reflecting on their writing, they will probably learn better because their learning is controlled by the learners themselves (Almusharraf, 2018).

Writing is a communication productive skill. Many people assumed that communication means speaking nevertheless, people write to keep a record of something to remember it and organize their information in a piece of paper. Because of that, writing gets a low amount of importance in a comparison to other language skills (listening, speaking, and reading) (Salma, 2015). However, writing is a complicated skill and it has become a basic skill for participating in and interacting with the global community where English is the prevailing language. Through writing people convey the knowledge of these languages to others and from one culture to another (Nasser, 2015). Thus, in the autonomy classroom, writing is as essential as speaking; both are productive and communicative skills. Learners speak to generate written text and write to express themselves and assist them to speak (Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017, p. 54).

This study aims to propose a paradigm of autonomous learning strategies based on the writing skills that EFL learners need to pursue their writing and to achieve their learning goals. The present study supposes that through practicing autonomous learning strategies memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective and social, learners can reflect on and critically evaluate their writing processes and performance, which may help in the development of their writing level.

Statement of the Problem:

Saudi learners commence learning English from with the purpose of passing the examination because they had very little opportunity to practice English outside the classroom. They lack the important skills to understand basic instructions. They are unable to write without mistakes in vocabulary, grammar and spelling (Ashraf, 2018). In spite of the stressed importance of writing skills, especially in the present time, it is considered as one of the most complicated skills that learners can achieve. EFL learners lack many of the important writing skills and these problems are discussed by many researchers such (Rabab'ah, 2005; Olivares & Fonseca, 2013; Salma, 2015).

Through working as a Pre-service teacher, the researcher noticed that there is a weakness of writing skills among EFL learners. They unable to write simple sentences without a lot of grammatical mistakes and face many obstacles while writing as planning, generating ideas and follow logical sequence of paragraphing. According to the related studies that revealed the weakness of writing skills among EFL learners (Ashraf, 2018) the researcher suggest a paradigm of the writing skills required for autonomous learning strategies among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives.

Study Questions:

The problem of the research is addressed in the following main question:

Q: What is the suggested paradigm of the writing skills required for autonomous learning strategies among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives?

This main question can be branched out into the following sub questions:

Q1. What are the writing skills required for autonomous learning strategies among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives?

Q2. What are the autonomous learning strategies that can be used to develop the writing skills among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives?

Study Objectives

The current study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identifying the writing skills required by EFL learners at the University of Jeddah
2. Identifying autonomous learning strategies for developing writing skills among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah
3. Suggest a paradigm of the writing skills required for autonomous learning strategies among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives

Significance of the Study:

The findings of the research may benefit the following parties:

1. Enriching the research library on EFL studies that focus on the most modern strategies in teaching and learning.
2. Helping teachers in general and EFL teachers in specific to adapt the autonomous learning strategies for improving writing skills among EFL learners.
3. Helping EFL learners to use some autonomous learning strategies, which may help them perform their writing tasks successfully.
4. Help curriculum designers to create more interactive and up to date writing tasks that encourage EFL learners to use autonomous learning strategies.

Limitation of the Study

The current study will be limited to the following scope:

- **Scope of materials:** Six autonomous learning strategies: memory, cognition, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies, and it will be limited to the development of the writing skills.
- **Scope of location:** English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in the English language institute at the University of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.
- **Scope of time:** The first semester of the year 2020.

Definition of Terms:

Autonomous Learning Strategies

Dam (1995, p.45) defined the autonomous learning strategies as the process when learners independently choose aims, purposes, and sets goals; choose materials, methods and tasks; exercises choice and purpose in organizing and carrying out the chosen tasks; and chooses criteria for evaluation. In other words, training individuals to solve specific aspects of their learning, guiding the learner to question, plan, control and assess his own learning.

In this study, the term "autonomous learning strategies" will include six strategies. These strategies are memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies.

Writing skills

Nunan (2003, p.88) defined writing as an intellectual activity of inventing ideas and thinking about the way to express and organize them into a statement and paragraph that will be understood clearly by a reader.

The definition of Nunan (2003) will be adopted in this study.

Literature Review:

1.1 The Definition of Autonomous Learning Strategies

"Autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981; p.3). Ortega (2015) indicated that autonomous learning strategies are "conscious mental and behavioural [sic] procedures that people engage in with the aim to gain control over their learning process" (p. 208) while Griffiths (2018) stated that autonomous learning strategies are "actions chosen by learners for the purpose of learning language" (p.33).

Autonomous learning strategies defined in this study as procedures that EFL learners follow to develop the writing skills which is presented in a paradigm.

1.2 The Classifications of Autonomous Learning Strategies

Review of literature revealed that many researchers classified autonomous learning strategies in different criteria. In this study, the researcher classified autonomous learning strategies according to the function of each strategy.

1.2.1 Memory Strategies

They mean techniques used to remember more effectively as creating mental linkages as grouping, association and placing new words into a context. In addition, employing actions as using physical responses and mechanical techniques (Oxford, 1996, p.47).

1.2.2 Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies interact directly with language and enhance learner's self-regulation in processing and remembering language information (Griffiths, 2018, p.32). For example activating learners' knowledge by using a KWL chart (What I know, what I want to know, and later... what I learned), remembering the original association they used to learn something, and then putting it into reverse to retrieve that information (Oxford, 2017, p.272).

1.2.3 Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies describe mental operations used by learners in the self-management of their learning. For example, self-management, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, planning and directed attention (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p.138).

1.2.4 Compensation strategies

They are those strategies selected by learners to overcome any difficulties in learning. Some examples of compensation strategies using a synonym or even an antonym to keep communicating and learning, gathering the books and technology devices and looking for opportunities to practice the language online (Oxford, 2017).

1.2.5 Affective strategies

Affective strategies to regulate emotions and feelings while learning to reduce bad thoughts and anxiety. These strategies like watching films, listening to songs, breathing and relaxing for a while (Oxford, 2017, p.217).

1.2.6 Social strategies

These strategies make learners deal with each other in order to communicate. They deal with their teachers, parents and friends to ask for correction, questions or explanation. This mean cooperate and interact with others (Oxford, 2017, p.230).

3.1 Writing skills

Nunan (2003, p.88) defined writing as an intellectual activity of inventing ideas and thinking about the way to express and organize them into a statement and paragraph that will be understood clearly by a reader. Writing mean learners transforming their thoughts and ideas in organized ways to communicate and to be understood by others.

Many studies proved that writing is the most complicated skill for EFL and ESL learners (Al-Khasawneh 2010; Javid, Farooq and Umer, 2013; Nuruzzaman, Islam, & Shuchi, 2018; Alharbi, 2019; Alzamil, 2020). Saudis are facing many writing problems in grammar, limited vocabulary and a lot of spelling mistakes (Huwari, & Al-Khasawneh, 2013; Alzamil, 2020). In addition, they lack to organize their ideas, write topic and concluding sentences (Salem, & Savignon, 2007).

In this study, EFL learners selected the most problematic skills through the writing skills checklist that consisted of vocabulary, content, grammar, organizing the ideas, and mechanics of writing.

Previous Studies:

Koura & Zahran, (2017) conducted a quasi-experimental study to investigate how using habits of mind strategies could develop students' self-autonomy and writing skills. A sample of thirty-three EFL students, whose ages ranged from 14 to 15 years old were chosen randomly. In this study, writing skills test including the five components; Conventions, coherence, organization, word choice and description. Analytic scoring rubric, habits of mind checklist applying prior knowledge to new situation, metacognition habit, striving for accuracy and precision, questioning and posing problems, and autonomy scale were used to collect data. The results indicated a strong relation between using habits of mind strategies and autonomy and writing development.

Yeung, (2016) explored the construct of learner autonomy in the area of writing skills. In this quantitative study, three groups of seventy secondary students participated. Their ages ranged between 12 and 16. The questionnaire designed to measure students' readiness for autonomous learning of English writing. Findings collected through factor analysis of the questionnaire data, followed by a paired-sample t test. Learner autonomy in the study proposed as a construct embracing

factors that constitute autonomous attitudes, including motivation, self-confidence, and independence from the teacher, autonomous skills and metacognitive knowledge. The results indicated that the development of independence from the teacher might be a pre-condition for a learner to become autonomous, and a prerequisite for autonomy development in terms of writing skills.

Abdullah, Rohaya & Mohamed, Abdul, (2015) examined the development of learner autonomy abilities in writing via Web-based Asynchronous Peer Feedback (WAPF). Purposive sampling was adopted consisting of ten respondents from three public Higher Institutions of Learning volunteered. Their ages ranged from 23-24 years old. The study adopted an interpretive qualitative design. The primary data was collected by the WAPF given by the peers to the respondents. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis. The findings revealed that three types of WAPF, which are social, affective and cognitive, assisted in the development of learner autonomy abilities in writing, which eventually improved their essay performances. That means, through the writing experience, the respondents had improved their learner autonomy abilities in reflecting, decision making and revising of their essays.

Study Methodology:

This study adopted the descriptive method. EFL learners were (18 to 19) years old and they responded to (363) checklists. They studied in the English language institute at the University of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

Statistical Methods:

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher used the following statistical methods:

Percentages and frequencies to calculate the percent and frequency of the writing skills and autonomous learning strategies.

Study Tools:

The tools for collecting data of this study included two checklists; writing checklist and autonomous learning strategies checklist. The purpose of the checklists were to collect data on writing skills EFL learners required and the autonomous learning strategies utilized by them. The checklists were translated into Arabic language to help EFL learners overcome any problems they might encounter in understanding instructions and items. Both checklists were published electronically to (20) participants other than the research sample to test reliability and to make sure that all items appear clearly. The researcher designed the checklists on Google form due to the spread of Covid-19, which caused fully online education in all universities and schools in Saudi Arabia. The first checklist consisted of five writing skills presented as follows; vocabulary, content, grammar, organizing the ideas, mechanics of writing. The technique to take the data was in required and unrequired. The second checklist encompassed autonomous learning strategies grouped into six categories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, compensation strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. It included (26) items, which EFL learners responded in important and unimportant strategies.

Validity of the Tools:

To assess the checklists validity, the checklists were given to specialized reviewers to judge the validity of the writing skills and the autonomous learning strategies. The researcher took their valuable notes into consideration and made all the necessary modification accordingly.

Study Procedures:

1. Revising the related literature and previous studies related to autonomous learning strategies and writing skills.
2. Preparing the writing checklist and the autonomous learning strategies checklist.
3. Refereeing the checklists by number of experts and specialist in the related field and doing the necessary modification according to their suggestions.
4. Applying the checklists on a pilot study which was carried out on a group of (20) EFL learners other than the study sample to determine the validity, and reliability
5. Analyzing the data statistically by using appropriate statistical analysis (percent and frequency).
6. Explicating the results of the study.
7. Providing suggestions and recommendations in light of the research results.

Summary of Findings:

Results Related to the Frist Question:

What are the writing skills required for autonomous learning strategies among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives?

After reviewing the related literature and previous studies the researcher, prepared the writing skills checklist. It included five writing skills that EFL learners were asked to determine the most important writing skills that they required. Table 1. Presents the results.

Table 1. The most important writing skills according to the checklist results

	Writing skills	Percentage of importance	Frequency
1	Vocabulary	95%	344
2	Organization of ideas	87.8%	318
3	Grammar	87%	315
4	Content	85.6%	310
5	Mechanics of writing (punctuation, question marks spelling and capitalization)	79.8%	289

In the table.1 above the frequencies and percentages were used to investigate the most writing skills required for autonomous learning strategies among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives. The most writing skills frequented was vocabulary by (344) and (95%), organization of ideas was frequented (318) (and 87%), grammar was frequented (315) and (87.8%) were nearly the same. Then, content was frequented (310) and (85.6%). Mechanics of writing (punctuation, question marks, spelling and capitalization) were less frequented by (289) and (79.8%) among the writing skills needed by EFL learners in the English language institute at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives.

The findings are partially in line with the results of Al-Khasawneh (2010); Javid, Farooq and Umer, (2013) who also reported that Saudi EFL learners also ranked vocabulary as the most difficult area. The second problematic area in this regard remains the grammar. Difficulties in organizing of ideas and that they cannot write a short paragraph without mistakes have been unanimously identified as the third problematic area. The use of mechanics of writing were the lower skill that learners faced. The results of this study contradict with the research conducted by Alharbi, (2019); Nuruzzaman, Islam, & Shuchi, (2018); Alzamil, (2020) who investigated that the Saudi EFL learners reported that they had many difficulties in using the mechanics of writing such as capitalization, spelling and use of articles.

Results Related to the Second Question:

What are the autonomous learning strategies that can be used to develop the writing skills among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives?

After reviewing the related literature and previous studies the researcher, prepared the autonomous learning strategies checklist. It included (26) items divided into the following; (3) memory strategies, (8) cognitive strategies, (4) metacognitive strategies, (4) compensation strategies, (4) affective strategies and (3) social strategies. Participates were

asked to determine the important and unimportant strategies that they used. The researcher assigned that the strategies that have (65%) and over as important and the strategies less than (65%) as not important. Table 2. Presents the results.

Table 2. The Most Important Autonomous Learning Strategies that EFL learners Used to Develop the Writing Skills

	Autonomous Learning Strategies	Percent
1	Encouraging learners to alleviate their writing anxiety before writing. (By making them feel that they are equipped with the strategies needed to perform their writing tasks).	83%
2	topic./Encouraging learners to demonstrate knowledge of the subject	77%
3	Asking learners to follow the logical sequence of ideas.	76%
4	Enabling learners to collaborate at the pre-writing stage to generate their ideas.	74%
5	Enabling learners to utilize words and expressions meaningfully in written contexts.	72%
6	Encouraging learners to use dictionaries to compensate for their limited vocabulary knowledge.	71%
7	Helping learners to use syntactic knowledge to write	70%
8	Helping learners to self- reward themselves at the post-writing stage.	70%
9	Asking learners to consult peers share constructive feedback regarding the writing process.	70%
10	Helping learners to clarify the mechanics of writing by referring to dictionaries/grammar books/model texts...etc	70%
11	and generate new Encouraging learners to provide proper supporting details ideas.	69%
12	Empowering learners to self-alleviate their writing apprehension by stopping and relaxing for a while.	68%
13	Enabling learners to revise the first draft considering the mechanical drills .and correct expressions	67%
14	Helping learners to use lexical knowledge to write.	66%
15	Asking learners to monitor self-regulate and manage their writing.	64%
16	Encouraging learners to organize the essay/paragraph by consulting writing books.	64%
17	Encouraging learners to consult the instructor for clarification.	64%
18	Asking learners to evaluate and reflect on their own writing.	63%
19	Helping learners to memorize and use correct mechanics of writing.	62%
20	Helping learners to highlight the main idea/theme.	61%
21	Encouraging learners to achieve an effective organization of the introduction, body, and conclusion.	61%
22	Helping learners to memorize the words and expressions appropriate for the writing topic.	60%
23	Assisting learners to use the generated ideas to write.	60%
24	Helping learners to understand grammar items by referring to dictionaries and grammar books.	57%

25	Empowering learners to manage their feelings, emotions, and attitudes while writing.	52%
26	Assisting learners to memorize the language structures appropriate for the writing topics (e.g. The Present Simple for descriptive writing, The Past Simple for past events and storiesetc.).	20%

From table.2 above the percentages was used to investigate the autonomous learning strategies that are used to develop the writing skills among EFL learners at the University of Jeddah from their perspectives. The items related to each strategies are illustrated in the following:

1. Memory strategies items (19, 22 and 26). The percentages of memory strategies items were (62%, 60% and 20%), less than (65%) that means EFL learners considered them unimportant strategies.
2. Cognitive strategies items (2, 5, 7, 11, 13, 14, 20 and 23). The percentages of cognitive strategies items were (77%, 72%, 70%, 69%, 67%, 66%, 61% and 60%), more than (65%) which revealed that EFL learners believed that cognitive strategies important strategies except helping learners to highlight the main idea/theme and assisting learners to use the generated ideas to write.
3. Metacognitive strategies items (3, 15, 18 and 21). The percentages of metacognitive strategies items were (76%, 64%, 63% and 61%), metacognitive strategies items were less than (65%) that means EFL learners considered them unimportant strategies except the strategy asking learners to follow the logical sequence of ideas, they considered it an important strategy.
4. Compensation strategies items (6, 10, 16 and 24). The percentages of compensation strategies items were (71%, 70%, 64% and 57%), the compensation strategies; encouraging learners to use dictionaries to compensate for their limited vocabulary knowledge and helping learners to clarify the mechanics of writing by referring to dictionaries/grammar books/model texts, were more than (65%) which EFL learners considered them important strategies except items (16 and 24).
5. Affective strategies items (1, 8, 12 and 25). The percentages of affective strategies items were (83%, 70%, 68% and 52%), EFL learners thought that affective strategies important strategies by valuing them more than (65%) except the strategy empowering learners to manage their feelings, emotions, and attitudes while writing by (52%) which mean they found it unimportant strategy.
6. Social strategies items (4, 9 and 17). The percentages of social strategies items were (74%, 70% and 64%), more than (65%) that means EFL learners considered social strategies important strategies.

Recommendation:

In the light of the results reviewed throughout this study, the researcher finds it is important to give some recommendations.

For EFL curriculum designers, it is recommended that they:

- Enrich the syllabus with different materials for lessons to enhance the writing skills of learners.
- Increase the number of practice activities to upgrade the language achievement level of the learners.

For EFL Supervisors, it is recommended that they:

- Prepare instructional materials that increase teachers' awareness of autonomous learning strategies significance and the necessity of using these strategies in teaching English.
- Conduct training courses that help teachers to enhance their abilities in the implementation of autonomous learning strategies based writing skills in their classes.

For EFL teachers, it is recommended that they:

- Move from the traditional method of teaching writing skills into modern techniques, such as the autonomous learning strategies that encourages learners to be independent.

- Enhance their abilities in EFL instruction and use their creativity to apply various techniques in teaching the writing skills in order to ignite their learners' interest in learning.

Suggestions for Further Study:

Further Studies should be conducted to:

- Examine the teachers' perception of using autonomous learning strategies to enhance learners' writing skills in teaching the English language.

Examine other skills of language such as (listening, speaking and reading), using autonomous learning strategies as the teaching strategies. **References:** Abdullah, R., & Mohamed, A. R. (2015). Enhancing Learner Autonomy Abilities in Writing via WAPF. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 5(11). doi:10.6007/ijarbss/v5-i11/1900

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المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم مقترح لمهارات الكتابة المطلوبة لاستراتيجيات التعلم المستقل بين متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة جدة من وجهة نظرهن. وشارك فيها (363) متعلمة من معهد اللغة الإنجليزية في مدينة جدة بالمملكة العربية السعودية. تم اختيار متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بشكل عشوائي ليكونوا عينة هذه الدراسة. واتبعت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي وتم جمع البيانات باستخدام قائمة مهارات الكتابة وقائمة استراتيجيات التعلم المستقل. وتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS). حيث كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن أكثر مهارات الكتابة المطلوبة لاستراتيجيات التعلم المستقل بين متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة جدة من وجهة نظرهن هي المفردات وكانت الأعلى من بين مهارات الكتابة الأخرى تليها تنظيم الأفكار والقواعد والمحتوى. بالإضافة إلى أن أقل مهارات الكتابة هي آليات الكتابة مثل (علامات الترقيم وعلامات الاستفهام والتهجئة والأحرف الكبيرة). أما بالنسبة لاستراتيجيات التعلم المستقل المستخدمة من قبل متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لتطوير مهارات الكتابة فكانت أكثر الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة هي الاستراتيجيات المعرفية، والوجدانية، والاجتماعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات التعلم المستقل، مهارات الكتابة، التذكر والاستدعاء، المعرفية، ما وراء المعرفية، التعويضية، العاطفية، الاجتماعية.