Original Paper

Learning Techniques and Writing Processes Adopted by EFL University Students in a Writing Task

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Abstract

The study aimed at investigating the learning techniques and the writing processes adopted by EFL university students in a writing task. A total of sixty senior university EFL students at Tafila Technical University, 30 males and 30 females, participated in the study out of 120 students who form the subject of the study. The instrument of the study was actually a writing task given to the sample of the study. After collecting the data and analyzing it, results showed that EFL university students at Tafila Technical University have adopted learning techniques while practicing the argumentative writing task, but in a rather low percentage where the highest mean was 0.75 for the metacognitive techniques. It was also found that there were no statistically significant differences in using the learning techniques due to the gender, except for the effective techniques which were in favor of females over males. Results also showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the writing skills adopted due to the gender since all students males and females used similar writing skills to finish the writing task. It was also found that there was no statistically significant differences in the writing skills used attributed to the students' proficiency, except for the nature of revision in which the proficient and less proficient students implemented while finishing the writing task.

Keywords

learning techniques, writing processes, EFL students, Tafila Technical University (TTU), writing task

1. Background of the Study

A Learning techniques can be defined as "specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable more self-directed, more efficient and more transferable to new situation" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). They are techniques used by learners to master the foreign language, however

they are two techniques: "behaviors which directly involve the target language and directly enhance learning", and indirect techniques or "behaviors which do not directly involve the target language learning (Oxford, 1989, p. 235).

Oxford (1990) suggests that the proper use of learning techniques simplifies learning and that there is a positive relationship between the use of language learning techniques and success in Foreign Language (FL) and Second Language (SL) learning. Most of the researches in FL / SL writing focus on the teaching of writing as a skill rather than on the people who practice FL / SL writing. Zamel (2003) presumes that good writing techniques noticed with experienced writers should be introduced to less proficient or inexperienced writers to help them focus more on the requirements of the writing assignments. Consequently, the use of certain techniques is normally affected by many variables such as gender, attitudes, motivation, cognitive style and the teachers' behaviors.

Writing is an integrative skill and an important, constructive and complex process. It is an essential skill especially, for foreign language learning which aims at giving the learners the chance to improve their proficiency to write expository writings such as: personal letters, essays, reports and describing literal and scientific processes. Besides, practicing writing skills enhances cognitive and metalinguisic awareness.

The writing process is often influenced by the purpose of writing, the intended audience and the selected format, e.g., a letter, a report, or an essay. As it is known to all, the writing process passes throw five successive steps: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing, but they are not as easy as they seem. They are complicated and tough. The writing process is extremely recursive; writers have to go back and forth among the different steps of the process. Learners written tasks are affected by contexts, cognitive processing, affective factors and constraints in their ability to compose (Grabe & Kaplan, 1999). Due to their limited competence, EFL learners bring their Native Language (NL) into FL writing tasks. There are some factors that affect FL learners, writing skills such as: anxiety, motivation and apprehension (Kellog, 2001). Other factors that affect the development of the writing skills are affective and attitudinal facts. Williams (2004) and Kaplan (1999) assert this point by claiming that FL writers experience difficulties are attributed to their inability to free themselves from the influence of L1. The linguistic and rhetorical features of FL writing samples draw on the writers' L1 composing processes (Zamel, 2003). For instance, FL writers employ L1 for global organization Friedlander, 2001) and pay less attention to the revising and editing processes (Rames, 1985).

Models of writing stress basic cognitive processes such as planning, on-line possessing, evaluation, content resources, knowledge telling and knowledge transforming (Flower & Hayes, 2001; Kellog, 1994; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). The later concept, knowledge transforming focuses on the restructuring of knowledge, in which the development of exercise is essential to the writing skill. The researcher attempts to explore the techniques and processes used by EFL learners when they compose an argumentative essay.

2.1 Statement of the Problem

The field of learning techniques is very crucial since it takes its importance from the fact that it is involved in every step of learning. They facilitate the internalization, storage, and retrieval of the target language (Oxford, 1990). But the use of learning techniques varies from one learner to another depending on the learner's gender, proficiency, motivation and backgrounds. The present study also attempts to shed some light on the writing processes that Jordanian EFL learners practice while writing an argumentative writing task.

The present study deals with two variables that affect the choice of learning techniques by FL learners which are gender as it is thought that females are better language learners who can use a wide range of learning techniques that are almost different from those used by males (Green & Oxford, 2005). The second variable is proficiency as it is seen that proficient learners are better users of language learning techniques. Many researchers think that any learner should imitate good language learners, so that these techniques could be transferred to less proficient learners (Rubin, 1998; Stern, 1999).

The second part of the present study deals with the writing processes used by FL learners in completing a writing task. Thus, the researcher attempts to find if there is a difference between male and female learners on the one hand and proficient and less proficient learners on the other hand.

2.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study lies in its attempt to shed light on the learning techniques EFL learners utilize when producing an extended piece of writing. Its implications may help writing instructors and their students benefit from the findings of the study. The researcher, also, hopes to open an avenue in this research area due to its importance to EFL specialists in Jordan.

2.3 Purpose of the Study

Many years ago, researches in the process of writing have dealt mainly with the product, that is; FL learners' writing samples were chosen to determine the writers' competence and proficiency development. However, a shift in study orientation has emerged with some researchers now taking a closer look at the way FL/SL learners adopt techniques and procedures to produce written works (Leki, 2005). Observing how FL learners carry out the act of writing provides FL instructors as well as researchers with insights about the difficulties FL learners encounter.

This study explores the learning techniques and the writing processes that EFL university learners adopt when accomplishing a writing task. It is an attempt to increase our understanding of the writing process of EFL learners through the technique of introspection.

2.4 Questions of the Study

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1) What are the learning techniques university EFL learners adopt in an argumentative writing task?

2) Is there a significant difference between the learning techniques that students employ in an argumentative writing task attributed to the sex?

3) Is there a significant difference between the learning techniques students employ in an argumentative

3

writing task attributed to their proficiency in the English language?

4) What are the writing processes that university EFL learners adopt in an argumentative writing task?

5) Is there a significant difference between the writing processes that students employ in an argumentative writing task attributed to the sex?

6) Is there a significant difference between the writing processes that students employ in an argumentative writing task attributed to their proficiency in the English language?

2.5 Limitation of the Study

The technique which is employed in the study may have some limitations, since the reports done by the students are sometimes incomplete or disordered due to the additional cognitive processing demand. However, using such a technique may provide researchers with much useful data about the processes of comprehension and composing. The researcher attempts to compensate such limitations by carrying out personal interviews with some participants.

2.6 Definitions of Terms

1) Cohesion: The concept of cohesion is a semantic one, referring to "relations of meaning" that exist within the text, and it "occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another" (Halliday & Hasan, 1994, p. 4).

2) Coherence: It is the quality of a text when it makes sense or is pleasing because all the parts of steps fit together well and logically (Cobauild, 1996).

3) Technique: It is a set of well designed activities that are used to achieve a set of educational objectives (Abu Jalil, 2001).

4) Memory technique: They are techniques used by the students to help them remember new language items.

5) Cognitive techniques: They are techniques which help students think about and understand the new language.

6) Comprehension techniques: They are techniques used by students to help them compensate for the lack of knowledge.

7) Affective techniques: They are techniques relating to how students feel about the new language.

8) Social techniques: They are techniques used by students to interact with other people.

All the above definitions are taken from the same reference book (Griffiths & Parr, 2001).

3. Review of the Related Literature

The researcher will review now some of the studies and views which he believed have something to do with the present study. However, this chapter will be divided into three main sections: learning techniques, writing and learning techniques and the writing processes.

3.1 Learning Techniques

In the field of language learning, research into learning techniques has been a notable area of growth in the recent years (Oxford 1989). An investigation of the literature helps us better understand what is

meant by learning techniques.

The term technique has been defined as "the art of planning movement of armies forces in a war", "a particular plan for winning success in a particular activity, as in a war, a game, a competition, or for a personal advantage", "skillful planning generally" (Longman Dictionary, 1978). Educationally, the term technique could be defined as "a set of well designed activities that are used to achieve a set of educational objectives" (Abu-Jalil, 2001). In language learning, a technique is planning movements, mental or behavioral, that have nothing to do with war. It is a particular plan that may or may not be "skillful" (Ellis, 1994).

The literature presents various definitions of learning techniques but a general definition for the term technique in language learning is a mental or behavioral activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use (Ellis, 1994). "Learning techniques are the behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages during learning that are intended to influence the learner's encoding process" (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986, p. 315). Chamot (2003) defines learning techniques as strategies approaches or deliberates actions that students take in order to facilitate learning, recall both linguistic and content area of information. Rubin (1987) indicates that learning techniques are strategies which contribute to the development of language system which leaner constructs and affects learning directly. Language learning techniques are behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable (Oxford, 1989). Later, Oxford (1990) indicated that learning techniques are behaviors, steps, operations, or strategies employed by learners to facilitate acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information.

As there are various ways of defining techniques, there are also various ways of categorizing them. O'Malley and Chamot (1990), for example, outline a scheme which includes cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective techniques. Cognitive techniques work with information in ways that enhance learning, metacognitive techniques and described as "higher order executive skills" that could planning, monitoring, or evaluation of an activity, and social-affective strategies entail interaction with another person or ideational control over effect (pp. 44-45). McLaughlin and Scovel (cited in Nyikos & Oxford, 2003) refer to just two broad types of learning techniques: cognitive and metacognitive techniques. The former refer to the unconscious and automatic techniques that can be consciously strengthened through strategy training, while the latter refers to the metacognitive techniques that allow for conscious management and control over students' learning by the students themselves. Dansereau (cited in O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) draws the distinction between primary techniques and support techniques. The former collection refers to the techniques that operate directly on learning materials such as memory techniques, whereas the latter refers to techniques that help in establishing appropriate learning attitude such as concentration techniques.

3.2 Students' Adoption of Learning Techniques

Previous research shows that students adopt certain techniques for particular language tasks (Oxford, 1994); for example, when writing, students may use techniques like planning, self-monitoring,

deduction and substitution. In speaking, for example, language learners may choose techniques like risk-taking, paraphrasing, circumlocution, self-monitoring and self-evaluation. For listening tasks, students select certain techniques such as elaboration, making inferences, selective attention and self-monitoring. With regard to reading tasks, they employ techniques of reading aloud, guessing, deduction and summarizing. Chamot and Kupper (1989) identify a certain number of factors that influence students' choice of techniques. These factors include prior language study, type and degree of difficulty of the task and motivation. Motivation and prior education are also included in O'Malley and Chamot's list (1990) along with cultural background, learning styles, aptitude or learner effectiveness, age and gender.

3.3 Language Proficiency and the Adoption of Learning Techniques

With regard to language proficiency and the adoption of learning techniques, the research suggests that more proficient language learners should use various learning techniques more than that of less proficient learners (Green & Oxford, 1995; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Oxford, 1985; Rubin, 1995, 2001; Stern, 1983) and better able to choose techniques appropriate to the task (Vann & Abraham, 1990). Good language learners are thought to seek ways to practice second language and maintain a conversation (Naiman et al., 1978; O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, & Russo, 1985; Rubin, 1987) to have a positive attitude toward speakers of the target language (Oxford, 1990) to organize and plan learning around preferred ways of learning (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 2005), to monitor their speech and that of others (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Naiman et al., 1978; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1987), to seek verification and clarification, to attend to both form and meaning, to look for patterns, use deduction, and make inferences (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1987; Stern, 1980), and to be active participants in the learning process (Wenden, 1995).

Abraham and Vann (1987) and Vann and Abraham (1990), looked at the language learning techniques used by both successful and unsuccessful. These distinctions were made by measuring the relative speed with which they moved through an intensive English program. They found that unsuccessful learners were using techniques generally considered useful, and often the same ones as those used by the successful learners; the difference by the degree of flexibility the learners showed when choosing techniques and how appropriately they were applied to the given situation. The findings from these two studies seem to contradict the idea that successful learners use a larger repertoire of techniques and use them more frequently.

A similar argument to McIntyre's comes from Green and Oxford (2005). In their Puerto Rico study, they found that about a third of the individual techniques were used more frequently by the more successful learners, almost all of them involving active use of the target language. Although they concede that this is not sufficient evidence of the causality, they nevertheless suggest that a casual relationship exists here between technique use and proficiency level, and that "this relationship is best visualized not as a on-way arrow leading from cause to effect, but rather as an ascending spiral in

6

which active use techniques help students attain higher proficiency, this in turn make it more likely that students will select these active use techniques" (Oxford, p. 288).

More research findings indicate that more successful language learners are aware of the techniques they use and why they use them (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Green & Oxford, 1995) and that they generally mold their techniques to the language task and to their own personal needs as learners (Wenden, 1991) using techniques appropriate to their own stage of learning, personality, age, purpose for learning the language, type of language (Bates, 1972) and gender (Oxford & Nyikos, 2001).

The literature also shows that students who are less successful at language learning are also able to identify their own techniques, but they do not know how to choose the appropriate techniques or how to link them together into a useful technique chain (Block, 2006). Technique training aims to "explicitly teach students how, when and why techniques can be used to facilitate their own efforts at learning and using foreign language" (Weaver & Cohen, 1998, p. 69), and to promote learner autonomy by allowing students to spontaneously choose their own techniques. Park (2007) noticed that proficient learners seemed to use more cognitive and social techniques. Bruen (2001), on the other hand, found "ten successful techniques", and noted that forty percent of the techniques were related to metacogntive techniques. However, other studies showed that the number of techniques used by non-proficient learners were similar to that of proficient learners (Vann & Abrahams, 1990).

3.4 Gender Learning Techniques

One main factor that affects students' adoption of learning techniques is gender. An investigation of the literature on this variable shows that gender has an important impact on the students' choice of a learning technique. Research has demonstrated an increasing evidence of sex differences in the use of language learning techniques. Females use more techniques more frequently than males (Green & Oxford, 1995). They show more use of social learning techniques (Politzer, 1983), more frequent use of formal rule-based practice techniques and conversational input elicitation techniques (Oxford & Nyikos, 2002), greater use of functional practice techniques for searching and communicating meaning and self-management (Ehram & Oxford, 1989), and more use of general study techniques (Ehram & Oxford, 1989; Oxford & Nyikos, 2002).

Green and Oxford (1995) studied the gender issue more deeply than other researchers. Out of the fifty techniques listed in Oxford taxonomy (1990), fifteen are used differently by males and females. Fourteen of them are more frequently used by females. These techniques are remembering, reviewing, connecting words and location, skimming, seeking similar words in mother tongue and target language, summarizing miming, thinking metalinguistically, thinking about one's progress in learning, rewarding oneself, noticing one's anxiety, asking for help, asking for correction and asking others to slow down. The technique which is used more frequently by males is watching television or movies in the foreign language.

3.5 Writing and Learning Techniques

Most of the researchers of L2 have been interested in learning techniques, but less has been explored on the techniques in a specific domain. A few studies were conducted on speaking skill, e.g. (Huang & Vann Naerssen, 2007), reading skill, e.g. (Padron & Waxman, 2009).

Second language learners, most of the time, find that writing is a tough and exhausting process. Such learners may have a limited scope of vocabulary, may suffer from the inability to write coherent and cohesive texts and may be unable to spell words and use grammatical structures correctly. Such problems lead the students to claim that they have the ideas but they do not have the ability or the skill to express them in the target language. Myles (2002, pp. 5-9) indicated that students' writing in a second language is faced with a social and cognitive challenges related to the second language acquisition. Learners may continue to exhibit errors in their writing for the following social reasons: negative attitude towards the target language, continued lack of progress in L2, a wide social and psychological distance between the target culture and a lack of integrative and instrumental motivation for learning.

Most research in SL writing focuses on the teaching of writing rather than on the learners' experiences in the process of writing. Zamel (2003), for example, presumes that good writing techniques obtained from good writers should be taught to less proficient or inexperienced writers to help them understand and less focus on the requirements of the assignments. However, the employment of the techniques is always affected by many variables such as gender, attitude, motivation, cognitive style, self-confidence and teacher's behavior.

3.6 Writing Process

One of the most neglected skills in EFL classes is writing. While we checking our students' writing, even in formal exams, we feel frustrated to find terrible mistakes related to the form and the content of their writings. If we ask them, 'How do you feel yourself in writing?', we get answers like: 'I do not know enough ideas … I can not elaborate ideas together … I do not know meanings of some words in English … I can hardly form a correct sentence …, etc.' Kharma (1995, p. 8) indicated that EFL students attempting to write a proper English discourse failed to "organize a passage". Using the devices (punctuation, capitalization, indentation, paragraphing) normally, develop coherence, unity and topicalization, use methods of development and develop a whole theme in several paragraphs of expository prose". Silva (2003) argued that L2 composing processes are more constrained, more complicated and less effective. L2 writers planned less and had difficulty in organizing ideas. Their transcribing was less fluent and less productive. They received and reflected on their texts less and they revised more, but with more difficulty and less intuition. L2 texts were less fluent (fewer words), less accurate (more errors), and less effective. At the discoursal level, their sentences included more coordination, less passivization, distinct patterns in the use of cohesive devices, fewer lexical ties and less lexical control and sophistication.

Writing is an integrative skill, and an important constructive and complex process. It is an essential

8

skill in foreign language learning. It provides the learners with the opportunity to develop the proficiency they need to write, e.g., personal letters, essays, research papers and journals. In addition, writing skill enhance cognitive and metacognitive awareness. Writers often use the writing process in different ways. The writing process is influenced by the purpose of writing, the intended audience and the selected format, e.g., letter, report, journal entry …, etc. The five activities that comprise the writing process are: prewriting, drafting, revising and publishing. These steps are more complex. Rather than being linear, the writing process is extremely recursive as writers go back and forth among the different steps of the process. In other words, any activity can turn up at any moment in the writing process or it can precede or follow one another.

Recent research in composition has given us important insights into the writing process, and it has revealed that composing is a non-linear, expository and generative process in which writers discover and formulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning. A dominating belief among researchers in the composing process, which has widely spread is based upon the fact that through the study of composing process teachers can gain insights into how to teach it. Raimes (1985) noted that unskilled writers (whether in L1 or L2) seem to follow similar steps in the composing process and suggested that certain writing skills may transfer from L1 to L2. She also addressed the relationship between linguistic proficiency and writing skill, suggesting that students whose proficiency is judged as insufficient for academic course work generate language and ideas is much the same as way as more proficient students. In other words, they use what they have and more on from there. Lapp (cited in Richards, 1990) indicated that skilled writers spend time planning the task while unskilled writers spend little time. In consequence, they are confused when they begin. At the drafting stage, skilled writers write quickly and accurately, spend time reviewing what they write, and do most of their reviewing at the sentence or paragraph level. Unskilled writers spend little time reviewing what they write, reviewing only short segments of the text, and are concerned principally with vocabulary and sentence formation. At the revision stage, skilled writers revise at all levels of lexes, sentence and discourse, review and revise throughout the composing process, and use revisions to clarify meaning. On the other hand, unskilled writers do not make major revisions in the direction or the focus of the text, make most revisions only during the first draft and focus mainly on the mechanics of grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary. Silva (2003) observes that unskilled L2 writers revise at a superficial level. They reread and reflect less on their written texts, revise little, and when they do, the revision is primarily focused on grammatical correction. Ferris (2005) argues that redrafting is essential since students are more likely to reread their essays and pay attention to their teachers' comments on earlier drafts.

After reviewing some of the related literature, we can see that the field of learning techniques is wide and has many explorations which need to be investigated. In addition, several ambiguities and troubles in the field of learning techniques need to be intensively explored for a better understanding of FL learners' techniques. However, most of the reviewed studies revealed that there are differences in the

use of learning techniques and writing processes between proficient and less-proficient learners in favor of the proficient learners. They also assure that the use of some learning techniques are varied according to gender in favor of females over males (Politzer, 1983). Regarding the writing processes, some of the reviewed studies focused on certain steps in the writing processes which are more frequently employed by the proficient writers than those less-proficient writers. However, the researcher could not find any study which tackles the differences between males and females regarding the uses of writing processes. In audition, the researcher could not find any study which supports the relationship between the learning techniques and writing, especially in an argumentative writing task. This is one major reason which pushes the researcher to conduct the present study, hoping to clear some of the ambiguities that cover this issue. It is also worthy to mention that the researcher could not find any Arab study which attempts to explore the learning techniques and writing processes.

4. Methodology and Procedures

This chapter presents the subject, the sample, data collection instruments, procedures, data analysis and statistical analysis.

4.1 Subject and Sample

The subject of the study is consisted of all the students in the Department of English at Tafila Technical University, with a total number of 160 students. 60 students (30 males and 30 females) were chosen randomly to represent the subject of the study. They were chosen from all levels regardless any intentional considerations. Table 1 below demonstrates the distribution of the sample of the study according the independent variables of the study.

Table 1. The Distribution of the Sample According to Independent Variables

Variables	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
	Males	30	50%
	Females	30	50%
Sex and	Proficient males	10	17%
Proficiency	Proficient females	20	33%
	Less proficient males	17	23%
	Less proficient females	13	27%
Total		60	100%

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The members of the sample were first asked to write an argumentative essay answering the following question: "What do you say about Tafila Technical University?" After completing the writing task, a special questionnaire of forty items was developed by researcher and distributed to the students. It was

divided into six categories that match the six learning techniques (affective, metacognitive, social, compensatory, cognitive and memory) which were identified by Oxford (1990). Then, the students were classified into two categories: proficient and less-proficient writers according to the grades they achieved on the written task. After that, all the members of the sample were interviewed to discover what writing processes they had adopted in writing.

4.3 The Interview

The students who participated in the interview were asked some questions to define the type of writing processes they employed to finish the writing task. The questions run as follows:

1) Before writing, what do you usually do? Do you start writing immediately or you try to check special resources to collect some information about the subject?

2) Do you start writing by making draft and then edit it or not?

3) After finishing the writing task, do you revise what you have written?

4) While revising, what are the main linguistic items you focus on; (structure, meaning, spelling, cohesion, coherence …, etc).

5) Do you always edit what you have written? Why/why not?

4.4 Evaluation of the Argumentative Essay

The essays written by the students were evaluated holistically which is the most recommended technique for assessing the overall proficiency level of writing sample raters (Khaldieh, 2000). The evaluation criterion and the grades given to each part of the writing sample are based upon the following aspects:

1) Content ………………………., 20%

2) Organization …………………..., 20%

3) Vocabulary ……………………… 20%

4) Language use …………………… 30%

5) Writing mechanics ……………… 10%

6) Total …………………………..... 100%

The students who collect 80% out of 100% are classified as proficient writers, and those who collect less are classified as less-proficient writers. After finishing the evaluation process it was found that there were 17 proficient females and 13 less-proficient, and 10 proficient males and 20 less-proficient.

After completing the task, the students were asked to fill in the questionnaire to keep them engaged in the wring task. Each item of the questionnaire was answered by 'Yes' or 'No' depending on the student's adoption of wring technique. A jury of five specialized TEFL university professors had confirmed the validity of the questionnaire.

Table 2 below shows the paradigm on which the data analyses and the classification of SL writers' techniques are based on Green and Oxford (2005).

Table 2. Oxford's Technique Classification

Affective techniques for anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and self-reward
Social techniques such as asking questions and becoming culturally aware
Metacognitive techniques for evaluating ones progress, planning for language tasks, paying attention and monitoring errors
Memory related techniques such as grouping, imagery, rhyming, and structured reviews
General cognitive techniques such as reasoning, analyzing summarizing, and practicing
Compensatory techniques such as guessing meanings from context and using synonyms and gestures to covey meaning

4.5 Variables of the Study

The study includes the following variables:

1) Independent variable: Sex.

2) Dependant variables: Learning techniques and writing processes.

4.6 Statistical Analysis

For analyzing the collected data, the researcher employed the statistical analysis package (SPSS) for calculating the means and standard deviations of the questionnaire items as a whole, then for the learning techniques in general and finally for the items of each technique to answer the first question of the study. The means of the writing processes were also calculated then Chi-square was found to see if there is a significant difference in using the writing processes due to sex and proficiency.

5. Findings of the Study

The present study aims at investigating the learning techniques and writing processes adopted by EFL university learners in a writing task. This section presents the findings of the study according to the previous assigned questions. The results of the first question regarding the means and standard deviation of the questionnaire items are clearly shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of the Questionnaire Items

Item number	Items	Means	Standard deviation
1	I read the assignments and make sure of what was required of me	0.95	0.22
2	I do not feel confident writing in foreign language on the bases of my past experience	0.33	0.48
9	I am so frustrated because I do not feel that I have the appropriate linguistic knowledge in English to write an	0.31	0.47

	essay, especially when the teacher expects me to use complex sentences, which I have much difficulty mastering		
4	I am stressed out, I experience anxiety when I write	0.42	0.50
5	Well, although I am anxious, I am trying to get this essay done. Writing in L2 is a real challenge to me, but I think I can manage	0.87	0.34
6	I like the challenge of writing in L2 although I know I am no confident that I know enough of the language to get all of my sentences right. I do not care, but at least I will try and then learn from my mistakes	0.85	0.36
7	Writing assignments are my least favorite task. I want to use my English only for reading purposes; I rarely write in English. I need English to do research	0.28	0.45
8	I find myself handicapped when translating from Arabic into English, it is a hard job	0.88	0.32
9	I wish I could think in English	0.92	0.28
10	I feel that I do not possess enough vocabulary to write in English	0.80	0.40
11	I like discussion about the topic in class. It gives me a lot of ideas	0.82	0.39
12	I try to understand how many issues I will be discussing in my essay	0.63	0.49
13	I know I should Start with an outline	0.60	0.49
14	I write down ideas then I try to elaborate them	0.50	0.50
15	I edit what I have written. I check for accuracy before I go on	0.22	0.42
16	I search for outside resources about the subject matter; I do not depend only the material covered in class	0.47	0.50
17	Editing comes last. Focus on grammatical accuracy is my main concern	0.85	0.36
18	I know I have to use conditionals here or comparative there. I have to use such or such grammatical rule	0.63	0.49
19	Although I have to use such and such a word or expression, it does not sound right to me	0.87	0.34
20	I need to check my instructor's feedback on my previous writing assignments concerning certain grammatical rule	0.15	0.36

21	I write sentences with some blanks, then I ask for the right form of a word	0.35	0.48
22	I ask for the meaning or the right form of a word from a native speaker	0.70	0.46
23	I ask for a proofreading from a native speaker	0.50	0.50
24	When I meet my instructor I always ask him/her for help with some language structures	0.55	0.50
25	I discuss assignments with my classmates	0.62	0.49
26	I use Arabic words to substitute English words Which I do not know	0.50	0.50
27	I do not know how to say/write such and such , therefore, I supply the English equivalent	0.70	0.46
28	When writing, I use a dictionary	0.63	0.49
29	I check a grammar book if I do not know a certain grammatical rule	0.62	0.49
30	I write most sentences in Arabic and then I translate them into English. I use L1 because it is easier for me to think in Arabic	0.60	0.49
31	I write all expressions and vocabulary I know and feel confident about them first, and then I try to develop my essay in Arabic whenever I can not do it in English	0.78	0.42
32	I always try to look for model structures and try to construct similar sentences	0.22	0.42
33	I always try to write complex sentences. I try to use the cohesive devices	0.38	0.49
34	I try to make use of the expressions and structures which were presented and used in class	0.80	0.40
35	I write only simple sentences because I make mistakes when I try to combine ideas together	0.87	0.34
36	I consult a dictionary and my own notes most of the time. I am not sure of what I have written. I have to meet my instructor during his/her office hours and ask him/her for help with some language structures	0.53	0.50
37	I use certain language structures or vocabulary to mean such and such	0.63	0.49
38	I check my instructor's feedback or corrections and try to	0.55	0.50

14

	memorize them		
39	I always review my writing lessons	0.57	0.50
40	When writing, I check for spelling mistakes every now and then	0.60	0.49

Table 4 below presents means and standard deviations of the learning techniques in general.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Categories of Learning Techniques

Number	Technique	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Affective techniques	0.62	0.18
2	Metacognitive techniques	0.74	0.17
3	Social techniques	0.53	0.32
4	Compensatory techniques	0.52	0.28
5	Cognitive techniques	0.51	0.17
6	Memory techniques	0.60	0.12
	Average mean	0.57	

As it is cleared in Table 4 the metacognitive techniques got the highest mean while the cognitive techniques got the lowest mean.

Table 5 below presents means and standard deviations of items which deal with the affective techniques.

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations of Affective Techniques

Number	Item	Mean	Standard deviation
1	I read the assignments and make sure of what was required of them	0.95	0.22
2	I do not feel confident when writing in foreign language depending upon the bases of my past experience	0.33	0.48
3	I am frustrated because I do not feel that I have the appropriate linguistic knowledge of English to write a correct essay, especially when the instructor expects me to use complex sentences, which I hardly mastering	0.32	0.47
4	I am stressed out. I experience anxiety when I write	0.42	0.50
5	Well, although I am anxious, I am trying to get this essay done. Writing in L2 is a real challenge to me, but I think I can manage	0.87	0.34

6	I like the challenge of writing in L2 although I know I am no confident that I know enough of the language to get all of my sentences right. I do not care, but at least I will try and then learn from my mistakes	0.85	0.36
7	Writing assignments are my least favorite task. I want to use my English only for reading purposes; I will rare write in English. I need English to do research	0.28	0.45
8	I find myself handicapped when translating from Arabic into English, it is a hard job	0.47	0.50
9	I wish I could think in English	0.85	0.36
10	I feel that I do not possess enough vocabulary to write in English	0.63	0.49

The above Table shows that the first item got the highest mean; this means that the students are sure of what they want to do before starting the writing task. The seventh item got the lowest mean; this indicates that the students do not believe that they need to learn to write well since they rarely use writing for further study.

Table 6 below presents the means and standard deviations of items related to the metacognitive techniques.

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of Items of Metacognitive Techniques

Number	Item	Mean	Standard deviation
1	I try to understand how many issues I will be discussing in my essay	0.88	0.32
2	I know I should Start with an outline	0.92	0.28
3	I write down ideas then I try to elaborate them	0.80	0.40
4	I edit what I have written. I check for accuracy before I go on	0.82	0.39
5	I search for outside resources about the subject matter; I do not depend only the material covered in class	0.63	0.49
6	Editing comes last. Focus on grammatical accuracy is my main concern	0.60	0.49
7	I know I have to use conditionals here or comparative there. I have to use such or such grammatical rule	0.87	0.34
8	Although I have to use such and such a word or expression, it does not sound right to me	0.53	0.50

16

9	I need to check my instructor's feedback on my previous writing assignments concerning certain grammatical rule	0.63	0.49

Table 6 shows that the second item has got the highest mean. This fact signals the importance of starting the writing task with an outline to have a clear idea of what the students going to write. It also indicates a high sense of planning ability to monitor their work. The eighth item got the lowest mean. It seems that the subjects have a high sense of responsibility in choosing words and expressions that best express their thoughts and views.

Table 7 below presents means and standard deviations of items which related to the social techniques.

Table 7. Means and Standard Deviation of Items of Social Techniques

Number	Item	Mean	Standard deviation
1	I write sentences with some blanks, then I ask for the right form of a word	0.50	0.50
2	I ask for the meaning or the right form of a word from a native speaker	0.50	0.50
3	I ask for a proofreading from a native speaker	0.55	0.50
4	When I meet my instructor I always ask him/her for help with some language structures	0.62	0.49
5	I discuss assignments with my classmates	0.50	0.50

Table 7 shows that the fourth item has got the highest mean which indicates that the subjects are extremely in need of their instructor's help. As it is clear in the table, the first, second and third items have got the lowest means, this shows that the subjects do not usually trust their colleagues' comments on their writing tasks. They are actually anxious about their self-esteem in front of their colleagues.

Table 8 below presents means and standard deviations of items that comprise the compensatory techniques.

Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations of Items of Compensatory Techniques

Number	Item	Mean	Standard deviation
1	I use Arabic words to substitute English words Which I do not know	0.22	0.42
2	I do not know how to say/write such and such , therefore, I supply the English equivalent	0.63	0.49
3	When writing, I use a dictionary	0.62	0.49

| 4 | I check a grammar book if I do not know a certain grammatical rule | 0.60 | 0.49 |

Table 8 shows that the second item received the highest mean, this explains that the subjects try to use synonyms when they are not sure of the exact word. The lowest mean went the first item which indicates that the subjects resort only to lexical items when they find themselves in a maze. Table 9 presents means and standard deviations of items that match the cognitive techniques.

Table 9. Means and Standard Deviations of Items of Cognitive Techniques

Number	Item	Mean	Standard deviation
1	I write most sentences in Arabic and then I translate them into English. I use L1 because it is easier for me to think in Arabic	0.15	0.36
2	I write all expressions and vocabulary I know and feel confident about them first, and then I try to develop my essay in Arabic whenever I can not do it in English	0.35	0.48
3	I always try to look for model structures and try to construct similar sentences	0.70	0.46
4	I always try to write complex sentences. I try to use the cohesive devices	0.70	0.46
5	I try to make use of the expressions and structures which were presented and used in class	0.78	0.42
6	I write only simple sentences because I make mistakes when I try to combine ideas together	0.23	0.42
7	I consult a dictionary and my own notes most of the time. I am not sure of what I have written. I have to meet my instructor during his/her office hours and ask him/her for help with some language structures	0.38	0.49
8	I use certain language structures or vocabulary to mean such and such	0.80	0.40

Table 9 shows that item number five has got the highest mean, this indicates that the subjects make use of the words and expressions introduced inside the class while writing their essays. On the contrary, the first item has got the lowest mean which means that the subjects do not often resort to translation when writing English texts.

Table 10 below presents means and standard deviations of items that match the memory techniques.

Table 10. Means and Standard Deviations of Items of Memory Techniques

Number	Item	Mean	Standard deviation
1	I check my instructor's feedback or corrections and try to memorize them	0.55	0.50
2	I always review my writing lessons	0.57	0.49
3	When writing, I check for spelling mistakes every now and then	0.60	0.49

As it is clearly shown in Table 10 above the last item has got the highest mean while the first item got the lowest. This explains that the subjects always focus much on their spelling as they write in English while they do not pay much attention to their instructors' remarks or corrections.

5.1 Results Related to the Second and Third Questions

When analyzing the second and third questions which investigate the differences between learning techniques adopted by the students when writing due to sex and proficiency, a Two-way analysis of covariance was employed as it is shown in the Tables 11, 12 and 13.

Table 11. Shows Two-Way Analysis of Covariance

Variable	Technique	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Means of squares	F	Significance α = 0.05
	Affective	0.239	1	0.239	8.458	0.01
	Metacognitive	3.437	1	3.437	1.210	0.28
	Social	0.144	1	0.144	1.372	0.25
Gender	Compensatory	1.50	1	1.50	0.192	0.66
	Cognitive	1.612	1	1.612	0.006	0.94
	Memory	4.419	1	4.419	0.004	0.95
	Total	5.366	1	5.366	3.623	0.06

Table 11 shows that there are no significant differences in using learning techniques due to the gender except for affective techniques in favor of females. The mean of females is 7.47 which is higher than that of males 6.20.

Table 12 below shows the differences in the use of the language learning techniques due to proficiency.

Table 12. Two-Way Analysis of Covariance for Proficiency Variable

Variable	Technique	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Means of squares	F value	Significance α = 0.05
	Affective	5.829	1	5.829	2.066	0.16

	metacognitive	1.888	1	1.888	0.665	0.42
Proficiency	Social	3.956	1	3.956	0.038	0.85
	Compensatory	5.653	1	5.653	0.722	0.40
	Cognitive	1.921	1	1.921	0.673	0.42
	Memory	1.153	1	1.153	0.094	0.76
	Total	1.569	1	1.59	0.106	0.75

If we take a look at Table 12 we can see that there are no significant differences due to the students' proficiency. Table 13 below shows the interaction between sex and proficiency of the subjects.

Table 13. Two-Way Analysis of Covariance for Interaction between Sex and Proficiency

Variable	Technique	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Means of squares	F value	Significance $\alpha = 0.05$
	Affective	1.866	1	1.866	0.007	0.94
	Metacognitive	9.185	1	9.185	0.323	0.57
Interaction	Social	2.435	1	2.435	0.023	0.88
between sex	Compensatory	8.032	1	8.032	0.103	0.75
and	Cognitive	0.108	1	0.108	3.295	0.06
proficiency	Memory	2.025	1	2.025	0.016	0.90
	Total	5.275	1	5.275	0.356	0.553

Table 13 above shows that there is no interaction between sex and proficiency of the subjects in the use of learning techniques.

5.2 Results of the Interview

The results of the question number four which inquires about the writing processes that university EFL learners use in an argumentative writing task. These writing processes are: prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. Table 14 below explains the results of the interview for males and females.

Table 14. Means of Writing Processes Used by Male and Female Students

Sample	Writing processes			
	Prewriting	Drafting	Revising	Editing
Proficient males	0.80	0.80	0.90	1.00
Less proficient males	0.70	0.80	0.90	1.00
Proficient females	0.90	0.90	1.00	1.00
Less proficient females	0.90	0.90	1.00	1.00

Table 14 above shows that both males and females are active users of writing processes, especially proficient females. It could be attributed to the nature of females who are usually careful and competitive about what they are doing. It is also worth mentioning that the less proficient male and female students focus more on grammatical and spelling mistakes while revising their writings, ignoring cohesion and coherence elements. However, this is not true with the proficient males and females who focus much on all elements of language techniques while writing English texts.

The results of the fifth question which talks about the existence of significant differences between writing processes and sex is clearly shown in Table 14. Taking a look at the table shows that there is a slight difference in using the writing processes by the subjects which may be due to sex, Chi-square is about 0.05. In summary, the table shows that female students use writing processes more effectively, especially in the revising stage.

The results of the sixth question which focuses on the existence of significant differences between the writing processes and proficiency reveal no noticeable significant differences attributed to proficiency, as the Chi-square result is 0.08. But, as it is shown in Table 14 the proficient students take into account the overall clarity of the English text (i. e. cohesion, coherence, grammar and spelling). Besides, they take advantage of this stage to develop their texts, whereas, the less proficient students only busy themselves correcting grammatical and spelling mistakes.

5.3 Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Three instruments were used to collect the data of the study: a questionnaire, an interview and a writing task. All were used to investigate the language learning techniques and writing processes adopted by the university EFL students in the department of English at Tafila Technical University.

5. 4 Discussion of the Results

As it is clearly shown in the analysis of the collected data, the EFL students adopted the learning techniques in different degrees. They used metacognitive technique more than that of other techniques with a mean of (0.74). This shows that the students are aware of what they are planning to do. Whereas, the cognitive technique is the least used with a mean of (0.51).

The results of the study showed no significant differences in using learning techniques due to proficiency. This result agrees with some other studies in this field such as those of Chamot and El-Dinary (2004) who assured no significant differences in using a technique and proficiency between proficient and less proficient students. The current result is also matched with the results of the studies conducted by Skehan (1989) and Rees-Miller (2003) who pointed out the existence of correlation between the technique and proficiency does nor necessarily suggest casualty in a particular direction. Van and Abrahams (2000) found that unsuccessful learners were using techniques generally considered as useful, and often the same ones as those employed by successful learners. However, this result contradicts with some other studies which found clear significant differences in technique use and proficiency. These studies assured that proficient and successful students are better users of learning techniques than those of less proficient students such as: Green and Oxford (2005), Naiman et al.

21

(1978), Oxford (1995), Rubin (1995; 2001), and Stern (1983).

The researcher believes that the lack of significance between proficient and less-proficient students could be attributed to the nature of the educational system in Jordan. Means, methods of instruction and curricula at the university are almost the same as that of schools. Another reason might be rated to the less interest that writing process receives in comparison with the other language skills. Instructors focus much on listening, reading and speaking and neglect writing.

The results showed that no significant differences in the use of writing techniques attributed to sex except for the affective techniques which were employed more by female students. This contradicts with some of the results of the studies that previously mentioned in this paper such as: Nyikos (1988) O'Malley and Chamot (1990), and Green and Oxford (2005) who found that female students tended to employ more learning techniques than that of males. In addition, female students were found to use more social techniques than that of males; this might be related to their female nature that prefers group work.

The results of the interview did not show any significant differences in using writing processes attributed to proficiency. All of the subjects reported to have used the four stages of writing process. This might be related to the methods of teaching adopted by the students' teachers who deal with writing as a process rather than a project. One important result which is clearly noticed from the interview is that, in the revision stage, less-proficient students focus on superficial elements such as spelling and grammar ignoring other more important language elements. This result agrees with the findings of Silva (2003), Lapp (cited in Richards, 1990; Sommers, 2000).

It seems that the subjects of the study do not have a clear idea about the last two stages of writing processes (revision and editing) which are very necessary to produce a coherent and cohesive text. Revision involves adding, substituting, deleting and moving words around as writers rework and polish their pieces, whereas editing is the process of getting the piece ready for the audience. The writer is expected to attend to the surface features of writing mechanics, grammar and spelling as well as the other aspects of the piece of writing. These two important processes are not used properly by the students; such inability might be teacher induced. To my own experience, as a supervisor of English language for almost ten years, most of the EFL teachers in Jordan do not care much about writing as one important language skill.

5.5 Conclusion

The findings of the study could be concluded in the following two points:

1) The results of the present study unexpectedly, showed no significant differences between the proficient and less proficient EFL university learners in the use of learning techniques and writing processes when writing in English. Therefore, curricula designers and teachers of writing courses should take into account the importance of using these factors to improve the students' abilities to write accurately and precisely.

2) As a result of the questionnaire and interview, the EFL students claimed that they frequently, use

22

learning techniques and writing processes, so it is the role of their instructors to encourage and reinforce them since writing is a recursive process.

6. Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1) English language departments in Jordanian universities are recommended to improve the syllabuses and writing courses which emphasize much in the using of learning techniques and writing processes.

2) EFL instructors should focus much on teaching language learning techniques to help their students write better.

3) EFL university instructors are called to lead the students to utilize the stages of writing processes to help them produce meaningful English texts.

4) The researcher recommends for more specific studies which focusing on learning techniques using different instruments and larger samples.

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