

An Investigation Into Writing Strategies of Iranian EFL Undergraduate Learners

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Abstract: This study adopted the cognitive process of writing to investigate the composing strategies of Iranian EFL undergraduate learners. Specifically, the study aimed to address the following research questions: (1) What writing strategies do Iranian EFL writers with different writing ability employ while composing? (2) Are there any differences between the writing strategies used by good EFL learners to those used by the poor ones? Think aloud protocols, post writing interviews, written products and stimulated recalls were collected from three skilled and three less skilled EFL writers while completing an argumentative task. Analysis of the data revealed that, despite employing the strategies in combination and in a recursive fashion by both groups, two groups of writers were found to be different in their planning, drafting and reviewing. Specifically, good and poor writers were found to be different in employing certain strategies like rereading, repetition, L1 use and rehearsing.

Key words: Writing strategies • Skilled writers • Less skilled writers

INTRODUCTION

Before 1960s, the writing classes were following traditional product view of writing in which only the final product of writing was taken into account and the cognitive processes through which the writers construct their ideas and their texts were totally neglected. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, however, L1 writing researchers [1, 2] came to this understanding that composing is a non-linear process of meaning making through which, according to Zamel [3, p.156], “writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning”. In order for the writers to discover meaning, different processes of planning, drafting and reviewing interrupt each other [2]. The writers were found to use planning, for instance, from the beginning to the end of writing [4].

At about the same time, intending to both formalize these findings and depict the way the writers compose, some writing researchers attempted to put forth certain writing models [2, 5]. Amongst different models of writing process, according to many researchers [6, 7], Flower and Hayes’ model is the most influential one. Attempting to depict the mental operations involved in writing processes, they employed a cognitive approach and mainly think aloud technique to propose their model.

In their (1981) model, in line with cognitive approach, they view composing as a thinking process to solve a problem guided by the writer’s goals. There are three main components in the model that must interact: the task environment, the composer’s long term memory and the composing processor. Task environment, according to Flower and Hayes [8, p. 369], includes “anything outside the writer’s skin” like the task and audience. Writer’s long term memory includes the stored knowledge that the writer is able to draw from memory while composing process. This knowledge is not only about the topic and the audience, but also about the different writing plans, genre and rhetorical problems. The composing processor contains the actual composing and writing processes themselves. These are planning, translating and reviewing which are constantly under the control of a monitor. There are three sub-components under planning: generating ideas, organizing information and setting goals. According to Flower and Hayes [8], planning is generating content, organizing it and setting up goals and procedures for writing. In the planning stage, the information is gathered from the task environment and long term memory. Moreover, this information is used in setting goals and establishing plans that further guide the text production. In the translation, the second stage, the ideas previously generated in the planning stage are

translated to the written words drafted on the page. Reviewing, the third element, is concerned with the evaluating or, if needed, revising of what has been composed or planned. Having the goal of writing in mind, the writer attempts to improve the quality of writing by detecting and correcting the language and content. This process leads not only to generating new ideas but it also gives the writer a chance to evaluate the written text. As with many previous studies [9], the current study implemented Flower and Hayes [8] writing model as a general framework for data analysis (see data analysis).

This shift of attention from product to process of writing was also welcomed in firstly ESL setting and recently in EFL context. It was in 1980s that L2 writing researchers [3] realized that writing teachers are supposed to have an understanding of the writing processes and take them into consideration while teaching composition. Different studies investigated nature of L2 writing and consequently they came up with rich insight on, for instance, the differences between good and poor writers and the differences between writing in L1 and writing in L2.

Despite the numerous studies conducted on ESL/EFL writing strategies, there are certain problems that this study is going to address. The first concern is the paucity of writing studies in L2 setting [10-12]. This knowledge gap in the writing literature was spotted in two areas. Firstly, although “[T]he process approach is concerned with the whole writing procedure from the writer’s initial ideas to their finished product” [13, p.301], research from 1990s has looked at specific aspect or sub processes of writing like planning and revision rather than the whole process, as Cumming [14] also observes. Research relating to the sub processes is also small in number. According to Ojima [15, p. 567], as a case in point, studies on planning as one of the writing sub processes are not that remarkable and hence, “very limited”. Also, with regard to reviewing and revising, Myhill and Jones [16, p. 328] argue that few studies have investigated “online revision during writing”. Accordingly, an in-depth study of the writing process to obtain a comprehensive insight on the whole process as well as relevant sub processes of EFL writers is needed.

The second impetus for carrying out this study was the dearth of an in-depth writing study in Iran as an EFL setting. To the best knowledge of the researcher, no in-depth study has been reported on the writing strategies of the Iranian students. Considering the fact that writing strategies play an important role in composing and writing efficiently demands the knowledge of the dynamic

cognitive processes and writing strategies [17], the strategies that Iranian EFL university students employ in their composing is worth investigating.

Good And Poor Writers: Several researchers investigated the composing processes and strategies of L2 students’ writers. As a consequence of these attempts, each researcher came up with a somehow unique taxonomy of writing strategies that participants have used in composing. Literature on L2 writers shows that skilled writers seem to spend more time thinking and planning [18, 19, 20], did more global planning [21] and were more able to adjust their global plans while writing [21]. Poor writers, on the other hand, spend less time thinking and planning and work in small planning units, writing a phrase at a time and asking themselves what to do next [22, 23].

With regard to writing fluency and stop composing to translate the idea or content, less skilled writers often stopped to translate their generated ideas into English and often stopped to refine English expression [24]. English proficiency or lack of it appeared to explain part of the difference in strategies and in fluency--less skilled writers still had to stop often to translate and were forced to think on smaller, local scales [21].

In terms of reviewing and revising, good writers seem to review more often and more thoroughly [25, 26, 23] and hence, they put more time on this stage of writing. In their reviewing, good writers pay attention not only to linguistic concerns and accuracy, but they also consider change of focus or meaning [23]; that is, they are more likely to make revisions that affect the “global aspects” [27, p.107] of their writing. Poor writers, however, limited their reviewing strategies to the surface level editing [28] and “usually at the level of the word” [27, p. 107]; in other words, these writers focus on individual words and phrases [29].

Methodology

Participants: The study involved three undergraduate Iranian EFL good writers (Ali, Majid, Elham) and three undergraduate Iranian EFL poor writers (Sahar, Fati, Pari) who were in the last year (semester 8) of their study in Bandar Abbas Azad University in Iran. These six writers were selected from initial 32 volunteer participants who were willing to participate in the study. Given the fact that the aim of the study was to investigate the writing strategies employed by good and poor writers, care was taken to reliably differentiate good writers from poor writers. In order to select and classify the writers, two points were taken into accounts.

Table 1: Summary of the Participants' Profile

Name	Score on the holistic scoring (between 34 and 100)	Average score on the previous writing courses (out of 20)	Instructors' ideas	Strategy user	Age	Sex	Group
Elham	86	18	Good	High	31	Female	Good
Ali	84	18.5	Good	High	27	Male	Good
Majid	83.5	17.5	Good	High	26	Male	Good
Fati	51.5	14.3	Poor	Mid	25	Female	Poor
Pari	50	14	Poor	Low	26	Female	Poor
Sahar	44.5	13.3	Poor	Low	24	Female	Poor

Table 2: The Modified Coding Scheme

Major categories	Code	Subcategories	Code
Abandoning idea or language	AB	adding	add
Brainstorming	BR	audience	aud
Circumambulation (verbalizing different Farsi words to find suitable English equivalent)	CIR	reordering	reo
Direction reading	DR	content	c
Editing (changes for formal correctness)	ED	Farsi	f
Formulating position (taking side)	FP	English	e
Goal setting	GS	deletion	del
Generating/Organizing idea	G/OI	global	g
Use of mother tongue	L1	language appropriate	l
Monitoring language	MO	local	lo
Rehearsing (trying out ideas/language to express them)	RH	next/new paragraph	npr
Repeating words in English or Persian	RP	outline	o
Rereading what has been written	RR	preposition	pr
Revision (making changes for meaning)	RV	punctuation	punct
Scanning back over written text	SC	reordering	reo
Self-questioning for content or language	SQ	spelling	sp
Self-talk	ST	sentence structure	ss
Task interpretation	TI	style	st
		substitution	sub
		topic	t
		underline	u
		title	tt
		word choice	wc

Firstly, the sources of data were in line with the Angelova's [30] conclusion that holistic scoring supported by the instructors' ideas are the better indicators of the EFL writers' writing abilities. Perhaps that is why Hu and Chen [11] differentiated the writers on the basis of their scoring assessment and the composition instructors' ideas. Secondly, considering the fact that L2 writers can be influenced by many factors [31] and more precise assessment would be gained through employing multiple data sources [12], I used different data sources to differentiate good writers from poor writers. These sources were holistic scoring of the writing products of the participants, participants' scores on their previous writing courses, the participants' composition instructors' ideas and their knowledge of writing strategy elicited by a questionnaire. The questionnaire was a validated version of the questionnaire previously put forth by Petric and Czar [10]. The learners whose mean score was above 3.5 (M=3.5) on the questionnaire items were considered to

be high strategy user, the ones between 2.5 and 3.4 (3.4=M =2.5) were medium strategy user and the ones below 2.4 (M=2.4) were low strategy user [32]. According to the results of the aforementioned criterions, three good writers and three poor writers were selected and assumed pseudonyms. Table 1 shows the participants' profile.

Writing Task: The six selected participants were required to compose an argumentative essay. The writing prompt was the one previously used in Sasaki's [21] study. The title was "*Some people believe that the women should stay home after they get married. Others, however, hold the opposite idea. What do you think? Write a composition of 200-300 words within two hours*". Compared to other writing task types like narrative where the writers employ certain unsophisticated process like retrieving information and writing it down, in the argumentative task which is believed to be more demanding [5], the participants should employ more

sophisticated strategies. Hence, in line with the aim of study i.e., to investigate the similarities and differences between good and poor writers, this kind of writing task seems more suitable in eliciting differences in composing between two groups of writers.

Data Collection and Analysis: In order to both enhance the trustworthiness of the study [33] and increase the depth of understanding of the issue under study [34], data of the study were gathered through several methods and sources. In addition to think aloud protocols as the main source of the data of the study, as was the case for many other writing studies [2], semi-structured interviews, stimulated recalls and written texts were complimentary and supplementary sources of data. Despite its drawbacks, concurrent think-aloud is ‘the only way available to us to develop some understanding of learners’ mental processing’ [35, p.115]. In order to maximize the reliability of the data coding, the participants’ think aloud protocols were transcribed verbatim [36]. What is more, I also performed inter rater and intra rater reliability of the coding. I asked an experienced Iranian EFL university instructor to code the 10% of the data. The inter rater reliability was 85%. I also performed intra rater reliability. Out of 6 think aloud protocols gathered from two tasks performed by the six participants, I randomly selected 1 protocol from each group to be coded again after a week from the first coding. The intra-rater reliability was 88%. The scheme I used to code the data was primarily an adopted version of

the coding scheme used by El Mortaji [9] and Wang [3] (see table 2). I also had an eye on other coding scheme put forth by different researchers like Flower and Hayes [2]. Hence, the coding scheme almost played the role of the guide for me and I was open to other kinds of writing strategies emerging from the data. Besides, for the ease of analysis, I followed Flower and Hayes’ [2] model of writing and divided writing into three processes of planning, drafting and reviewing. Table 2 shows the adopted coding scheme.

RESULTS AND DISSCUSION

Table 3 reports the summary of the type and frequency of the writing strategies that each writer employed while composing. In general, twenty one writing strategies were identified. As shown in table 3, L1 use, rehearsal, rereading, repetition, self-questioning, revision and editing were the most frequently used strategies by two groups while task interpretation, abandoning, scanning, formulating position and blank leaving were the least employed strategies. The strategies that two groups employed with almost similar frequencies were L1 use and rehearsing, goal setting, direction reading and formulating position. The strategies that the good writers employed more than their poor counterparts were repetition, rereading, revision and brainstorming. The strategies that the poor writers employed more than the good writers were editing, self-questioning, self-talk, task interpretation and abandoning idea.

Table 3: Frequency of Use and Type of Strategies Adopted by Individual Writers in the Narrative (T1) and Argumentative (T2) Task

Strategies	Less skilled writers				Skilled writers				Grand total
	Pari	Fati	Sahar	Total	Ali	Majid	Elham	Total	
Use of L1	43	80	57	180	35	54	62	151	231
Rehearsal	12	41	51	104	18	37	48	103	207
Repetition	32	2	41	75	31	66	14	111	186
Rereading	5	17	43	65	17	32	47	96	161
Revision	9	7	8	24	15	9	21	45	69
Editing	6	21	7	34	7	5	8	20	54
Self-question	16	11	5	32	5	2	1	8	40
Monitoring	5	9	12	26	6	1	3	10	36
Goal setting	1	4	12	17	5	4	6	15	32
Direction reading	2	3	5	10	5	3	1	9	19
Self-talk	2	6	3	11	0	0	0	0	11
Task interpretation	3	2	2	7	1	0	0	1	8
Brainstorming	1	0	1	2	3	1	1	5	7
Abandoning	1	4	1	6	0	0	0	0	6
Scanning	1	1	1	3	1	0	0	1	4
Formulating position	1	1	0	2	1	1	0	2	4
Generating idea	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Circumambulation	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

As the table above shows, the quantitative findings uncovered certain individuality and complexity of the writers' strategy adoption plus identifying some differences in the strategies that good and poor Iranian undergraduate EFL writers employed. However, in spite of being valuable, these quantitative data do not shed light on the quality of the differences in strategy use by two groups of writers. In some case, as will be discussed below, the quantitative data is even misleading. What follows is a more detailed analysis of the way two groups were different.

Planning Before Writing: Before starting their writing, two groups of writers tried to set themselves goal and plan the content and organization while employing the steps they had been taught in their composition classes. However, they differed in terms of the quality of their knowledge and the way they applied it in their writing. Poor writers seemed to have no problem with the declarative knowledge but with the procedural one; they were good at setting abstract goals to achieve but not the concrete or what Flower [37] describe as "operational" ones. All six writers mentioned the terms like "introduction" and "conclusion" but it was only the good writers who were able to make an operational use of their knowledge. In this respect, poor writers directly reverted to their learned knowledge to produce and classify their ideas while good writers firstly came up with certain ideas first and then tried to place them in their own paragraph. For instance, Sahar, the poor writer, firstly used her learned knowledge about different parts of an essay as an aid to generate/organize idea whereas Ali, the good writer, firstly created his ideas and then by considering the format of his essay, he placed them in their due places. In fact, Ali seemed to use a more or less top-down trend to generate idea and structure his essay while Sahar behaved more in bottom-up fashion. Consider what Ali did before writing.

- Excerpt 1 (Ali, good writer)

"Some people believe that women should stay home after they got married. Others however hold the opposite idea. What do you think? Write a composition of 200-300 words within 2 hours (DR in English). About the working of the women after they got married, working of women after marriage, working of the women after marriage (L1 use, DR in Farsi). Should stay home, stay home, I disagree (FP).

What do you think ? (DR in English), I believe that the women should (writing) should (RR in English) stay should stay home after they get married (writing) due to certain reasons (RH in Farsi) because of some (writing) because of some (RR in English) reasons (writing). Ok due to certain reasons... the first one is that the women can treat the kids better if stay at home (RH in Farsi). What is treat in English? (SQ in Farsi)...doing the chores...earning money is men's responsibility (IG in Farsi) ...I believe that women should stay home after they get married because of some reasons (RR in English) treat what is treat in English? (SQ in Farsi) Treat, treat (RP in Farsi), I believe that women should stay home after they get married because of some...some reasons (RR in English) how can I start? Why women should stay home? (SQ in Farsi). Firstly because of treating the kids and secondly because they can do the chores better (RH in Farsi). I believe that women should stay home after they got married because of some reasons (RR in English). First, treat, more attention to kids (RH in Farsi). First (RR in English), women should pay more attention to their sons (writing)."

This sort of planning was not witnessed in the poor writers' think aloud protocols. As the poor writers' planning in Feng's [38] study, Sahar, Pari and Fati just had a sketchy plan in their minds before starting their text. Sahar, for instance, did not use much global planning at the beginning of her writing and because of this, she failed to consider her text as a whole. Unlike Ali whose major and minor aims were clearly stated, Sahar's planning was vague and foggy; it was done very generally and at a very global stage. An example is given below from Sahar's think aloud protocols.

- Excerpt 2 (Sahar, poor writer)

"Some people believe that the women should stay home after they get married nonsense. Others however hold the opposite idea. What do you think? Write a composition of 200-(DR in English), 300 words in 2 hours (DR in Farsi). Some people believe that the women should stay home after marriage (DR in Farsi)...I totally disagree with the idea (FP). I firstly should write an introduction and then some supporting ideas (GS). What can a good introduction be? (SQ) ... Or I can say I disagree first and then (GS, IO)." (00.01.40)

Planning While Writing: Like planning before writing, two groups of writers were also different in their planning while writing. Planning to finish or start a paragraph was the strategy only employed by the good writers. Consider the following examples;

Excerpt 3 (Majid, good writer)

“...ok, this was enough for the first one. Let’s go to the second idea...what was it?”

Excerpt 4 (Ali, good writer)

“Ok, this was our first idea, let’s go to the second.”

Excerpt 5 (Elham, good writer)

“... Although I can continue another one or more sentences her, I think it is enough for this idea.”

The adoption of planning to finish/start a sentence or paragraph only in the argumentative task by the good writers suggests certain interrelated points. The first point is that unlike the poor writers, the good writers of the study planned and monitored the organization of their argumentative essays while composing. According to Flower and Hayes [8, p. 374], the monitor plays the role of the strategist determining “when the writer moves from one process to the next”. As shown in the examples above, the monitor coordinated the back and forth movement that the writers should have between three distinct and at the same time, related activities of planning, translating and reviewing. The second point is that, unlike the poor writers who failed to look at their essay holistically, the three good writers considered their argumentative text as a whole. They seemed to be aware of the fact that they should compose their argumentation in a way that different parts would make a whole and because of this, they constantly monitored these different parts so that they would be on the right track. The final point vis-à-vis using planning to finish/start a paragraph is that the composing processes of the good writers gave more support to the recursive nature of their writing, as also noted by other writing researchers like Flower and Hayes [8], El Mortaji [9] and Lim *et al.* [12]. The writers were constantly involved reviewing and planning their ideas and texts throughout their composing activities and, opposed to the linear model of writing in which the planning is done only at the beginning and reviewing is

applied only at the end of composing, the three good writers were involved in constant planning from the very beginning up to the end of composing.

Drafting: Two groups of good and poor writers were also different in their actual drafting stage. The differences were found to be in using certain strategies including L1 use, rehearsing, rereading and repetition. As table 2 shows, poor writers resorted to their mother tongue for 150 times and good writers employed their first language for 180 times. However, there were certain major differences between two groups of writers in the way they used their L1. Given the fact that nearly all ideas they produced were firstly rehearsed in Farsi, they had to translate them into English while composing. The first difference between two groups in the way they use L1 was found to be in the fact that, due to focusing on the single words, poor writers had problem translating their Farsi ideas into English written discourse while good writers were found to constantly juggle between English and Farsi. Good writers (see example 5 below) were found to focus on the idea they intended to get across while the poor writers limited their attention to the abstract Farsi words and by the time they intended to convert these Farsi words into written English, they performed a direct translation which resulted in producing some unacceptable English. The examples are “in the best form”, “what in house” and “work of women” instead of “correctly”, “either in house” and “women’s job”, respectively produced by Sahar. This direct translation strategy was also adopted by other two writers. Fati produced “old thinking” instead of “traditional view” and Pari wrote “women better work” instead of “women work better”.

Excerpt 6 (Ali, good writer)

“Now the third point. Earning money is the men’s responsibility and the women are responsible for inside the house affairs (RH in Farsi). Islam has men (writing) Islam force the men that (RH in Farsi) support (writing) *support* (RP in English) their families in financial issues (writing) and you should know that (RH in Farsi) it is good to know that (writing) ...”

Two groups were also different in using rehearsal strategy. The difference was found to be in the length and place of the rehearsed ideas. Good writers, who had a

good interaction with their text, rehearsed their new ideas in three occasions for different purposes. They rehearsed the several sentences at the beginning of the paragraphs; they rehearsed a single idea before each sentence; and they rehearsed for English chunks within the sentences. Poor writers, in contrast, due to writing the ideas as they came to them, tended to rehearse just between and within the sentences in progress so that they might find a way to move the text ahead. Hence, the good writers' rehearsing proved to be more effective. The same finding about the effectiveness of the rehearsing strategy by the good writers was reported by Hu and Chen [11] and Yang [39]. Consider the following excerpts.

Excerpt 7 (Elham, good writer)

"Because once a woman gets married, a woman, the first thing she does is to carry out her responsibilities at home, which is her most important responsibility and after that she can deal with the outside the family issues (RH in Farsi), I think when a woman gets married (writing)..."

Excerpt 8 (Fati, poor writer)

"I think situation and position (RH in English) I think it depends on their position (writing) *position* (RP in English) or situation (writing), *situation* (RP in English) *position or situation* (RR in English) but I think I like (writing), but I like to work outside (RH in Farsi), I like work (EH in English) I like be (writing), I want to be in the society (RH in Farsi), society (RH in English)..."

Rereading and repetition were two other strategies two groups of good and poor writers employed differently. Two groups of writers seemed to be different in the purpose for which they employed repetition strategy. While good writers used repetition for the discursal purposes like vocabulary seeking or more coherent writing, poor writers appeared to use repetition in order to come up with an idea to write. Due to having a highly recursive writing process, Ali and Majid constantly referred to their produced text to get help from so that it would help them in continuing their written discourse. The help they sought from the produced materials seemed to be mostly for the lexical decision than the idea generating. They needed to know how to proceed than what to say next. Therefore, considering the fact that Ali

and Majid did not have any pauses after repetition in their writings, it seemed that employing repetition strategy enabled them to both follow their ideas and establish links between single words during their writings successfully. Consider the flowing instances of repetition in the Ali and Majid's think aloud protocols.

Excerpt 9 (Ali, good writer)

"Earning money is the men's responsibility... The men *the men* have to support *have to support* the family in financial issues."

Excerpt 10 (Majid, good writer)

"...and religion *religion* is so important *so important* about connection *connection* with the opposite sex, opposite sex, opposite sex ahan opposite sex with the opposite sex."

Unlike Ali and Majid who frequently employed repetition strategy to compose a more coherent essay, Sahar and Pari were the poor writers who employed repetition strategy as a compensatory strategy to move the text ahead. Rather than seeking help from two other partially useful sources of their ideas and plans, they seemed to mainly rely on their written materials. Perhaps that is why Pari, when in trouble generating new materials, kept repeating the last produced discourse so that it might help her generating new ideas. Consider the following examples.

Excerpt 11 (Pari, poor writer)

"I think emm no for example I think I cannot stay at home because I *I* ...am very what? Very, very, very busy so emm so so what? Nothing comes to my mind, I forgot the sentence, what should I say? Emm so so so nothing..."

Excerpt 12 (Sahar, poor writer)

"Today, today ... there are many *many* many, successful, what was the word? Aha successful..."

Rereading was another strategy that Ali, the good writer and Sahar, the poor writer, in particular, employed differently. Ali was the good writer who appeared to constantly refer to the written text in his writing for

different purposes of recalling a specific vocabulary, remembering what he was writing and knowing how/what to write. Sahar, however, mainly reread over the chunks in progress to both move the writing forward and remember what she was writing. This local rereading appeared not to enable her to generate complete and related ideas. Consider two examples below.

Excerpt 13 (Ali, good writer)

“...the first reason is that the women can treat the kids better if stay at home (RH in Farsi). What is treat in English? (SQ in Farsi)...doing the chores...earning money is men’s responsibility (IG in Farsi) ...*I believe that women should stay home after they get married because of some reasons* (RR in English) treat what is treat in English? (SQ in Farsi) Treat, treat (RP in Farsi), *I believe that women should stay home after they get married because of some...some reasons* (RR in English) how can I start? Why women should stay home? (SQ in Farsi). Firstly because of treating the kids and secondly because they can do the chores better (RH in Farsi). *I believe that women should stay home after they got married because of some reasons* (RR in English). First, treat, more attention to kids (RH in Farsi). *First* (RR in English), women should pay more attention to their sons (writing).”

Excerpt 14 (Sahar, poor writer)

“We are (writing)...we have successful mothers (MO, RH), we have successful mothers that (writing), they...they can perform their duties efficiently (RH in Farsi) their duties (RH in English) that they do (RH in English) they do their duties (writing) well, shape, form (CIR)...form, yes, that’s right, in the best (writing) form, form is a better choice (ST in Farsi)...If I write their duties here, it is better (MO)...*they do in the best form their duty* (RR in English).”

Reviewing: Both groups of writers reviewed and modified their texts in both stages of during writing and post writing. Therefore, in line with previous studies, reviewing was adopted throughout the whole process and it was not limited to the end of activity. With respect to the differences, regardless of the individual differences among the writers of the same group, the three good

writers were mostly concerned with the global aspect of their composing whereas the poor writers employed reviewing at the local level of their essay. That is why Elham, the good writer, also added some paragraphs in her redrafting stage. Two groups were also different in their reviewing behaviors. Ali and Elham, for instance, tried to concentrate on the ideas and content in their first drafts and hence, they focused more on the writing holistically. In writing their first drafts, they did not deal with the mechanics or language aspect of their writing whereas Sahar and Fati were the poor writers who were concerned about the language aspect in both while writing and post writing stages.

There was also another possibility for this difference. The three good writers had already mastered and automatized the language side of the writing while the poor writers seemed to have problem with this issue. Moreover, the three good writers seemed to give priority to getting their message across than the grammaticality of their texts and it was in their redrafting stage that they dealt with the modifications. It can be said that they behaved so in order to lessen the writing constraints during writing and they intentionally ignored to pay the conscious attention to the correctness of their written discourse. Sahar and Fati, in contrast, were the poor writers who were obsessed with the accuracy of their writing from the very first moment and because of this, it happened that they forgot their main ideas and hence, had to reread the materials they already produced in order to remember what they were writing. Consider the following excerpts;

Excerpt 15 (Ali, good writer)

“I think that *I think that* the eye catching issue I write issue here for the time being and change it later since repetition is not good in writing so *I think that the eye catching issue* after eye catching issue *eye catching issue*.”

Excerpt 16 (Sahar, poor writer)

“The more of men agree are agree with or to? With is correct I think.”

As observed in example 15, Ali was not satisfied with the chunk “eye catching” but he did not stop to think about other choices. Rather, he preferred to continue with

his writing and he came back to look for a better choice in his redrafting stage. In example 16, however, Sahar stopped to check if she has used the correct proposition or not. Confirming the choice she made without any justification, she continued her writing. Therefore, another difference between two groups of good and poor writers was the justifications they had for themselves for the changes they exerted to their text.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the understanding of the writing strategies that three good and three poor Iranian EFL learners employed while carrying out an argumentative writing task. Due to having small number of the participants (n=6) in the study, it is hard to generalize the results. All the same, certain pedagogical implications can be inferred from the study. Due to the teacher-centered policy and educational system in Iran, the writers of this study were found to heavily rely on their teachers as their only reference. This is especially true for the poor writers who appeared to use certain rules and chunks in their writing which they had previously memorized in their classes. Their conception of writing was narrowed to the producing a set of error free sentences arranged one after another on a piece of paper. This limited knowledge about composition besides lack of practice affects students' writing improvement since they would not learn the main purpose of writing which is its communicative purpose.

The writers see writing as a two-draft-activity where in their first draft they mainly produced idea and in the second draft, they transferred those ideas to the final draft. The instructors should teach the students that writing is thinking and it is during writing that discovery and creativity take place. To do so, the instructors are advised to read the students' essays and constantly give them feedback so that the writers would be able to work on their later drafts to improve them.

The final implication of the study is about the use of L1 while composing in English. Use of mother tongue is an indispensable element of writing in another language [33](Wang, 2004) and can help writers in decision making and idea generations. However, as revealed by the data of the study, L1 use would be of help only when the writer concentrates on the meaning and not the single word. The instructors are then suggested to teach the writers how to use this helpful way of using L1 strategy.

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