

EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PRE-WRITING STRATEGIES ON EFL LEARNERS' WRITING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract: This research explores how pre-writing techniques enhance writing comprehension for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Sixty intermediate-level EFL students were divided equally into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group participated in organized pre-writing tasks, such as brainstorming, creating outlines, and using mind maps. In contrast, the control group adhered to conventional writing instruction that did not incorporate these approaches. Writing comprehension was evaluated through standardized tests conducted before and after the intervention. The results indicate a notable enhancement in the experimental group's writing comprehension, with an average increase of 25% compared to a 7% improvement in the control group. Statistical analysis confirmed the effectiveness of pre-writing strategies ($p < 0.05$), highlighting their role in enhancing the organization and clarity of learners' written expression. These results suggest that integrating pre-writing activities into EFL instruction can significantly bolster students' writing skills and overall comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Mastering writing comprehension is a crucial ability for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as it is vital not only for achieving academic goals but also for effective interaction in a globalized society. Despite its importance, many EFL learners face challenges when it comes to expressing their ideas clearly and coherently in written form. One key difficulty is organizing thoughts and structuring them effectively in writing, which can hinder both writing quality and comprehension. As Raimes (1983) asserts, "Many students who are learning a foreign language are often overwhelmed by the task of writing because they struggle with organizing their thoughts in a second language" (p. 4).

To address these challenges, researchers and educators have explored various instructional strategies aimed at improving writing skills. Among these strategies, pre-writing

activities have gained significant attention for their potential to enhance the process of writing. Flower and Hayes (1981) emphasize that the process of writing is complex and involves multiple cognitive stages, including planning, drafting, and revising. Pre-writing activities, which occur in the planning stage, are designed to help learners organize their thoughts, generate ideas, and structure their writing before they begin composing the text. These activities, which may include brainstorming, mind mapping, and outlining, have been shown to facilitate writing comprehension by providing a framework for learners to follow during the writing process.

According to Harmer (2007), "Pre-writing activities are essential as they help students think about the content and structure of their writing before they begin the actual composition" (p. 69). Such strategies not only promote the organization of ideas but also help reduce cognitive load during writing, allowing learners to focus on expression rather than struggling with content. In a similar vein, Kern (2000) argues that pre-writing strategies "aid in reducing cognitive overload by providing learners with a clear structure and direction for their writing tasks" (p. 149).

Given the positive impact that pre-writing strategies can have on writing skills, this study aims to explore their effectiveness in enhancing the writing comprehension of EFL learners. Specifically, the research will examine how pre-writing strategies like brainstorming, outlining, and mind mapping influence learners' ability to organize their ideas and produce more coherent and comprehensible written texts. The goal is to determine whether these strategies provide EFL learners with the necessary tools to improve their writing and, by extension, their writing comprehension.

Research Questions

- a) How do pre-writing strategies affect EFL learners' ability to organize their ideas in writing?
- b) What is the impact of pre-writing strategies on EFL learners' writing comprehension?
- c) Do EFL learners' writing comprehension scores differ significantly before and after the implementation of pre-writing strategies?

Literature Review

Writing has been identified as one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners (Raimes, 1983). A major obstacle for these learners is not only understanding the language but also structuring and expressing their thoughts in writing. According to Flower and Hayes (1981), the writing process involves multiple cognitive stages, such as planning, drafting, and

revising. Pre-writing strategies are critical in the planning stage, as they help learners organize their thoughts, which enhances their overall writing comprehension.

Several studies have shown that pre-writing strategies improve writing outcomes by aiding learners in idea generation and structuring their thoughts before beginning the actual writing process. Harmer (2007) argues that pre-writing activities, such as brainstorming and outlining, help learners feel more confident and organized, which ultimately leads to more coherent writing. Kern (2000) also highlights that pre-writing strategies can reduce cognitive overload and improve the quality of writing by helping learners focus on content rather than language form.

In a study by Schoonen et al. (2003), pre-writing strategies were found to improve both the quality and the coherence of EFL learners' writing. Similarly, Li (2013) found that EFL learners who engaged in pre-writing activities showed better performance in writing tasks, particularly in areas such as content organization and logical flow.

RESEARCH METHODS

a. Participants

This research involved 60 EFL students who were taking an academic writing class at the State Islamic Institute of Palangkaraya. The participants were Indonesian native speakers with an intermediate English proficiency level. The students were categorized into two groups: 30 participants in the experimental group and 30 in the control group. The two groups were aligned according to their pre-test scores in writing comprehension to maintain comparable proficiency levels.

b. Research Design

A quasi-experimental design with pre-tests and post-tests was employed in this study to evaluate how pre-writing strategies affect EFL students' comprehension in writing. The study sought to explore the impact of pre-writing strategies on the ability to structure ideas and create clear, well-organized written texts.

c. Pre-Writing Strategies Implemented

The experimental group participated in a series of pre-writing strategy sessions for 4 weeks, during which they were introduced to the following activities:

1. Brainstorming: The learners generated ideas and wrote down any thoughts related to the writing topic before organizing them.

2. Outlining: After brainstorming, the students created outlines to organize their ideas logically, determining the structure of their essay (introduction, body, conclusion).
3. Mind Mapping: The students used visual diagrams to connect their ideas, which helped them understand the relationships between concepts and organize their arguments more clearly.

The control group was taught using standard writing methods without incorporating pre-writing techniques. They were instructed to compose essays based on the prompts provided, without engaging in organized planning.

d. Data Collection

1. Pre-Test and Post-Test:

Both groups underwent writing comprehension tests prior to and following the intervention. The task involved crafting an essay on a specific topic within a 30-minute duration. The essays were then evaluated based on the following criteria:

- a. Organization: The clarity and logical sequence of ideas.
- b. Coherence: The flow and connectivity of ideas throughout the text.
- c. Language Use: Vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure.
- d. Task Fulfillment: How well the essay addressed the prompt and stayed focused on the topic.

Two independent evaluators graded the writing tests, and the results were averaged for further analysis. In addition, a feedback questionnaire was administered to the experimental group to collect subjective insights into their experience with pre-writing strategies.

2. Data Analysis

SPSS statistical software was utilized for data analysis. Paired t-tests were applied to assess pre-test and post-test scores within each group, while an independent t-test measured the average difference in writing comprehension outcomes between the experimental and control groups following the intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis showed notable progress in the writing comprehension of the experimental group, which implemented pre-writing techniques, in contrast to the control group, which did not use such strategies.

1. Pre-Test Scores:

- a. The experimental group recorded a mean pre-test score of 60% in the writing comprehension assessment.
 - b. The control group achieved an average pre-test result of 58%.
2. Post-Test Scores:
 - a. Following the intervention, the experimental group demonstrated a notable improvement, raising their average post-test score to 85%, which is a 25% rise from their initial pre-test score.
 - b. In comparison, the control group experienced a slight enhancement, increasing their average post-test score to 65%, reflecting a 7% gain.
3. Statistical Significance:
 - a. A separate t-test was performed to examine the difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. The analysis revealed a statistically meaningful disparity ($t = 5.72$, $p < 0.05$), signifying that pre-writing techniques had a considerable beneficial impact on the writing comprehension of the experimental group.
4. Effect Size:
 - a. The Cohen's d coefficient was computed to be 1.14, categorized as a large effect size, indicating that the pre-writing techniques significantly influenced the writing abilities of the experimental group.
5. Questionnaire Feedback:
 - a. A questionnaire conducted after the intervention showed that 85% of participants in the experimental group believed that brainstorming and outlining were helpful in organizing their ideas and structuring their essays.
 - b. 72% of the participants indicated that employing mind mapping techniques enhanced their capability to link concepts and sustain coherence in their written work.

Table 1: Pre-Test and Post-Test Writing Comprehension Scores

Group	Pre-Test Score (Mean)	Post-Test Score (Mean)	Mean Difference	p-value
Experimental Group	60%	85%	+25%	p < 0.05
Control Group	58%	65%	+7%	

Explanation of the Table:

- a. Pre-Test Score (Mean): The mean score of the group prior to the intervention.
- b. Post-Test Score (Mean): The mean score of the group following the intervention.
- c. Mean Difference: The gap between the pre-test and post-test results shows that the experimental group achieved a significantly higher improvement (+25%) compared to the control group (+7%).
- d. p-value: The statistical relevance of the distinction between the two groups is evident, as a p-value of <0.05 confirms that the disparity is statistically significant.

The outcomes of this research highlight the beneficial influence of pre-writing strategies—specifically brainstorming, outlining, and mind mapping—on the writing comprehension of EFL students. The test group, who engaged in these structured pre-writing activities, demonstrated a substantial enhancement in their written comprehension results, outperforming the comparison group by a substantial margin.

1. Impact of Pre-Writing Strategies

The substantial improvement noted in the test group supports the argument that pre-writing activities enhance the writing process by providing a structured framework for learners to organize their thoughts before starting the actual writing. The pre-test and post-test comparison demonstrates that the pre-writing strategies helped learners focus on content structuring, leading to more coherent and structured essays.

Brainstorming was particularly effective in helping learners generate ideas. According to feedback from the experimental group, students found that the brainstorming activity allowed them to freely express their ideas, which were later organized into a coherent structure. This activity is consistent with the findings of Flower and Hayes (1981), who noted that the generation and organization of ideas are essential steps in the writing process, especially for language learners.

Outlining, as another pre-writing strategy, helped students identify the main points they wanted to discuss in their essays. This activity provided a clear roadmap for their writing, leading to more organized and focused essays. The significant improvement in organization scores in the post-test further supports the effectiveness of outlining in the writing process. Harmer (2007) also emphasized that outlining is a key tool for reducing cognitive overload during writing by giving students a clear structure to follow.

Mind mapping, which visually connected ideas and arguments, helped learners maintain a logical flow throughout their essays. The feedback from students indicated that this activity helped them visualize relationships between their points, leading to a more coherent and cohesive structure. The use of mind mapping aligns with Kern (2000), who argued that visual tools assist learners in organizing complex information in a more accessible way.

2. Cognitive Benefits and Confidence Boost

The positive results of this study can also be attributed to the cognitive benefits provided by pre-writing strategies. Pre-writing activities help learners plan and organize their thoughts, which reduces cognitive load and makes the writing process more manageable. By focusing on

content organization rather than struggling with how to begin or develop their ideas during the writing task, students can devote more mental resources to improving their writing quality.

The increase in confidence levels reported by the experimental group is also noteworthy. 72% of the participants in the test group stated that the preparatory writing strategies made them feel more confident in approaching the writing task. This finding is consistent with Raimes (1983), who argued that pre-writing activities help alleviate anxiety by giving students a clear sense of direction in their writing.

3. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While the findings of this research are encouraging, there are various constraints that must be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted with a relatively small sample size (60 students), and the findings may not be fully generalizable to a larger or more diverse population of EFL learners. Future studies should include a larger, more varied sample, potentially involving learners from different proficiency levels or educational backgrounds.

Additionally, this study focused only on writing comprehension, and did not explore the effects of pre-writing strategies on other elements of writing, including syntax, word choice use, or the ability to revise and edit. Future research could examine these areas to offer a deeper insight of how preparatory writing strategies influence the holistic writing approach.

Another limitation was the application of a single writing task to assess writing comprehension. Future studies might benefit from including multiple writing assessments over time to assess extended effect of pre-writing strategies on learners' writing development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the study provides strong evidence that pre-writing strategies, such as brainstorming, outlining, and mind mapping, significantly enhance the writing comprehension of EFL learners. These strategies help learners organize their thoughts, reduce cognitive load, and produce more coherent and structured written texts. The findings suggest that teachers should incorporate these pre-writing strategies into their teaching to support EFL learners in improving their writing skills. additional studies are required to investigate long-term effects of these strategies along with their impact on other dimensions of written skills, including syntax, lexicon, as well as editing abilities.

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