



Article

The Relationship between EFL Students' Use of Writing Strategies and Their Writing Achievement

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SUBMISSION TRACK

Received: November 4, 2023

Final Revision: March 22, 2024

Accepted: March 25, 2024

Available Online: April 5, 2024

KEYWORDS

arguments, argumentative writing, EFL students, writing strategies

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ABSTRACT

Research on writing strategies has defined their characteristics and focused on their contribution to writing gains over the last few decades. However, little has been written about how Moroccan EFL students perceive and use these strategies in their attempts to produce an essay. This paper seeks to fill that gap by investigating the employment of writing strategies by 245 students majoring in English at a university. The data were collected through a questionnaire, inspired by some related existing scales, and interviews were conducted with a group of participants. The participants were sampled adhering to the convenience type of sampling since the data collection was completed in one of the students' usual classes. Combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses, findings demonstrated that writing strategies were used to a higher extent, with the students' strong tendency to deploy memory and compensation strategies. It was also found that there is a positive and significant correlation between students' use of writing strategies and argumentative writing. The qualitative findings added that although the participants said they practiced writing strategies, the majority did not know how to use them. Some implications and recommendations are also discussed. The current study has provided useful insights into students' readiness to use writing strategies in the Moroccan context and how their use may mitigate their difficulties in producing a well-argued essay.

I. INTRODUCTION

Expressing one's ideas through writing has become a crucial ability in L2 learning. However, writing has been widely regarded as the most complex skill (Fahim & Mirzaii, 2014; Kang, 2005; Okasha & Hamdi, 2014; Wang, 2023). It does not only involve knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, but it also requires control and metacognition (Hyland, 2003; Zhang, 2021; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997). The degree of the challenge exacerbates even more when students have to produce an argumentative essay (Zhang, 2021). This mode of writing involves a number of higher order thinking skills such as "reasoning, evaluation and persuasion" (Knapp & Watkins, 2005, p. 187), and it is goal-oriented (Ferretti et al., 2009). One of the purposes of setting goals is to

manage the task and to affect the reader (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Increasingly, researchers and scholars have recognized the utility of writing strategies in second language (L2) writing. Indeed, specialized literature in this area has been abundant over the last few decades (Cumming, 1989; Dinsa, 2023; Ferretti & Lewis, 2018; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graham & Harris, 1997; Nussbaum & Kardash, 2005; Crossley et al., 2016). Given its problem-solving nature (Flower & Hayes, 1981), becoming an adept writer requires using a set of self-regulated processes and strategies that may help him/her cope with and hence manage the complexity of a writing task (Graham & Harris, 1997; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997). Indeed, recent lines of evidence show that students who employ writing strategies while writing produce well-developed essays (Teng

& Zhang, 2016; Zhang & Zhang, 2021).

The first section of the paper provides a concise overview of both theoretical and empirical research that has dealt with writing strategies. The second section is concerned with the research methodology of this study, including participants, the sampling technique, and data collection and analysis procedures. The third section is devoted to the description of the results. The fourth section discusses the findings and links them to other studies. The paper ends with a set of pedagogical implications, conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Research on writing has pounced on the cognitive processes employed while writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Odell, 1977; Teng & Zhang, 2016). In fact, Odell (1977) recommends that teachers of writing help students be wary of their use of both cognitive and affective strategies when they deal with a given writing task, for this will make their writings more mature and persuasive. Of significance of instruction in the use of these writing strategies also, he adds, is its suggestion of ways to deal with immature writing produced by some students.

In this line of thought, Cumming (1989) states that the use of writing strategies brings about substantial improvements in L2 writing performance. Following Flower and Hayes' (1981) conception of writing as a problem solving process, Spack (1984) argues that poor writers are usually those who do not assimilate to these writing processes. Also, Flower and Hayes (1981) state that learning to write is a process that requires developing effective composing processes. In other words, those who fail to adequately adhere to what writing takes to come into its final product will not arrive at that end. This new line of research on writing has thus changed its focus from studying what students write to what these students do as they compose. Therefore, studies that have been carried out in this concern have drawn some differences between groups of writers who have been labeled in different terms. Labels used to differentiate between these groups of writers include unskilled (Perl, 1979), experienced vs. inexperienced (Flower, 1979), experts vs. novices (Hull, 1987), more skilled vs. less skilled (Hull, 1987), student vs. experienced adult writers (Sommers, 1980), and poor vs. good writers (Flower and Hayes, 1981), among others.

Equally, several factors have been reported by researchers throughout L2 writing research to account for proportions of variance among students' writing quality; students' level of L2 proficiency (Cumming, 1989), writing expertise (Cumming, 1989), motivation (Dornyei, 2009), speaking/reading-writing relationship (Akki et al., 2023; Campbell, 1990) and writing strategy use (Zamel, 1982), among others, are variables that intersect with L2 writing. As researchers have realized that the product perspective of writing did not account for the complex process of composing (Odell, 1977), they started to investigate what goes in the mind of the writer while writing. According to Zamel (1982), Emig's (1971) classical study has marked one of the earliest attempts to investigate what writers do as they compose. Having conducted a study on learner writing strategies, Zamel (1982) showed how naive a view that teachers had regarding writing as they oversimplified the composing process of students whom she identified to actually exhibit a number of behaviors indicating the nonlinearity of writing.

Indeed, research on writing strategies has come to the forefront in L2 writing. As the latter involves a wide range of cognitive processes (Flower & Hayes, 1981), L2 student-writers, when they are engaged in writing, plan (Sommers, 1980), revise (Sommer, 1980), organize ideas (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and use personal writing styles (Arndt, 1987). Cumming (1989), citing Jones (1983), states that inadequacy of the use of writing strategies may result in poor performance. Similarly, Arndt (1987) argues that poor performance is not merely the result of the lack of knowledge of the mechanics of the target language, but it can also be ascribed to the inefficient use of effective writing strategies. This researcher, thus, states that it is of vital importance that the teaching of L2 writing needs to have a two-fold aim; it should help L2 writers enrich their linguistic resources (cohesion, coherence, formality, etc.) and, at the same time, it must help them become more efficient in the use of writing strategies. This indicates that writing a paragraph or an essay involves a number of composing processes which are applied to it at different stages of this complex task.

Communicating ideas through writing involves a range of requirements such as paying attention to grammar, punctuation, cohesion, etc. These requirements will in turn make writers

engage in planning, editing, revising, drafting, and writing (Khosravi, Choorchaei & Mofrad, 2017). Embedded in this mode of writing is this critical term of *argument*, receiving a wide attention by many researchers who try to define it. While a dictionary may give some synonyms of “argument” including the term “disputation”, this is not what the term is about, at least in the present research. For this reason, some researchers have provided descriptions and definitions of what the term really means. For example, Freely and Steinberg (2009, p. 5) define argumentation as “reason giving in communicative situations by people whose purpose is the justification of acts, beliefs, and values” (p. 5).

Having demystified the term “argumentation” in its more academic and complex sense, the definition that would summarize the above description was provided by van Emmeren, Grootendorst and Henkemans (1996). They defined it as “a verbal and social activity of reason aim[ing] at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader, by putting forward a constellation of propositions intended to justify (or refute) the standpoint before a rational judge” (p. 4). As a matter of fact, the failure to include counterarguments impedes the route to a well-argued point (Liu & Stapleton, 2014), which therefore weakens the persuasiveness of the essay (Ferretti, Lewis & Andrews-Weckerly, 2009). In the literature, lack of incorporating counterevidence in students’ writings has been known as ‘myside bias’ (Liu & Stapleton, 2014, 2020), which is found to be a barrier to effective argumentation of student’s written discourse. Therefore, in addition to providing a clear claim, supporting it with sound arguments (usually in the form of reasons) including more elaborated examples, acknowledging alternative views and refuting them thereof is a necessary part of the whole.

Thus, it is clear that research into writing and writing strategies has been well-established. Such headway, however, has failed to be made in the Moroccan EFL context. While the local official documents have stressed the importance of teaching writing as a process rather than a product, its reflection in empirical research remains largely lacking. Therefore, the present study seeks to partially fill this gap by investigating the use of writing strategies by 245 Moroccan university

students majoring in English studies. It also aims at examining whether there is a relationship between students’ use of these strategies and their argumentative writing achievement. The study will contribute both to the body of literature on the same topic and to the Moroccan context and other similar contexts. Indeed, insights into how students use these writing strategies will be gained, which will be a step forward to designing a local model. The guiding research questions are as follows:

1. To what extent do Moroccan EFL students use writing strategies?
2. Is there any relationship between students’ use of writing strategies and argumentative writing?

II. METHOD

The approach and the research design

In this study, mixed methods approach was adopted. Indeed, eliciting the strategies that the students use is a difficult undertaking that should involve a combination of methods to gain more informative insights into what strategies they actually practice, which ones they use more, and why they employ one more than another (Petric & Czarl, 2003). In examining learning strategies in general, scholars advocate the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Oxford & Amerstofer, 2018; Pawlak, 2018) because “the most valuable insights will likely come from mixed-methods studies” (Pawlak & Oxford, 2018, p. 528). Influential as it was, Oxford’s (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) has informed the present research instrument, particularly in the creation of the questionnaire for writing strategy use. The specific design is explanatory sequential design where quantitative results are explained by the qualitative strand.

Participants

A sample of 245 EFL students belonging to the department of English was non-randomly selected. The number of the participants consists of 105 males (42.86%) and 140 females (57.14%), and their age range was between 19 and 22 years old (Group 1), between 23 and 25 (Group 2) and 26 or above (Group 3).

Data collection instruments

There are many reasons behind the employment of the questionnaire, the most relevant of which is the opportunity to administer it to a large

sample of respondents from different locations. In fact, according to Dornyei and Taguchi (2010), questionnaires are ‘versatile’ in the sense that they “can be used successfully with a variety of people in a variety of situations targeting a variety of topics” (p. 6). Convenience, for the participants too, is ensured as they can complete the questionnaire at their own pace (Bryman, 2012). The internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured through Cronbach’s Alpha, the commonly used statistical test (Bryman, 2012; Loewen & Plonsky, 2016), and was found to be 0.85, which indicates, according to Bryman (2012), an acceptable level of reliability. Moreover, the students’ essays were holistically graded by two raters who are familiar with writing assessment, and the value was found to be 0.82, which is an acceptable estimate.

The study also employed a semi-structured interview. Before actually interviewing the participants, the interview questions were piloted on 3 participants to check for their understanding of the questions. Essentially, following Bryman’s (2012) recommendations for formulating questions and piloting, a set of procedures were followed, namely: the general area of writing strategies was identified, the research questions were specified, the interview themes were set, and the interview questions were formulated, piloted, revised, and finally finalized.

Data analysis

Scale item analysis for writing strategies was then carried out. The analysis was mainly descriptive in accordance with the first two research questions which inquired about students’ perceived level of autonomy and their perceived level of writing strategies use. Moreover, concerning the

other question which addressed the relationships between writing strategies (WS) and writing achievement (WA), Pearson correlation was used to answer the research questions and subsequently evaluate the hypothesized relationships.

Since the interpretation of the qualitative data is “only one of several ‘right ways’” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 32), one of the suggested ways to support the interpretation of the participants’ responses was to cite examples of text data. In this way, other researchers can understand the way through which the present data was analyzed, which adds to transparency and credibility. Given the large quantity of narrative data, the researcher read it repeatedly and drew a number of codes when necessary. The objective of the codes was to ascertain the emerging themes that would later be needed for subsequent analysis.

III. RESULTS

Students’ perceived level of writing strategies use

The second research question of the present research aimed to find out about the students’ level of their use of writing strategies. Following the same way of presenting and describing the results, the analysis of the writing strategies is presented in tables each containing a sub-scale with a group of items.

Results of the first sub-scale of writing strategies do not seem to be that conclusive. That is, at times some items received high joint agreement ratings from the participants, yet at other times others were significantly rated in terms of the disagreement levels or the neutrality ones. In response to item 1, more than two thirds of the

Table 1. Students’ Use of metacognitive writing strategies

No	Items	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
1.	I organize my ideas before writing an essay.	2.9	11	9.8	45.3	31
2.	Before I write, I set goals to achieve at the end of my writing.	2	18.4	15.1	45.7	18.8
3.	I revise and re-revise my writing to make sure that it includes everything I want to discuss in my writing after finishing it.	2.9	9.8	8.6	44.9	33.9
4.	When I am writing an argumentative essay, I spend considerable time to better attract and convince the reader.	1.6	5.3	15.5	52.2	25.3
5.	I check my writing to make sure it is grammatically correct.	3.3	7.3	6.5	42.9	40
6.	I set up a plan that I will follow in writing an essay.	2	13.9	16.3	44.9	22.9
7.	I control the timing devoted for each process (e.g. when to move from drafting to writing and to revising).	7.8	25.3	23.7	30.6	12.7
8.	If necessary, I go back to my plan and make some changes in it and continue writing.	4.5	16.3	11.8	47.8	19.6

participants agreed (45.3%) or strongly agreed (31%), and only a minority disagreed (11%) or strongly disagreed (2.9%). Concerning item 2, less than two thirds of the respondents agreed (45.7%) or strongly agreed (18.8%) that they set goals to achieve at the end of their writing. For item 3, the majority of the participants agreed (44.9%) or strongly agreed (33.9%) that they revise and re-revise their writing.

Regarding item 4, over two thirds of the respondents agreed (52.2%) or strongly agreed (25.3%) that they spend considerable time to better attract and convince the reader. Results of item 5 present that the majority agreed (42.9%) or strongly agreed (40%), and only insignificant percentages were divided among the remaining response levels. Also, with respect to item 6, two thirds of the participants agreed (44.9%) or strongly agreed (22.9%), while another third of them seemed not to do so. Contrary to those of the previous statements, results of item 7 indicate that most of the participants do not control the timing devoted for each process (e.g. when to move from drafting to writing and to revising). Indeed, as perceived by the participants, over half of them disagreed (25.3%), strongly disagreed (7.8%) or were neutral (23.7%). Regarding item 8, most of the participants agreed (47.8%) or strongly agreed (19.6%) with the item.

In response to item 9, a large proportion of the participants disagreed (30.6%), strongly disagreed (11.8%), or remained uncertain (21.6%). Only one third of them agreed (25.3%) or strongly agreed (10.6%). More than half of them agreed (37.6%)

or strongly agreed (19.6%) that they work hard to do well in their writing. However, over one third of them disagreed (16.3%), strongly disagreed (4.1%) or remained uncertain (22.4%). Also, concerning item 11, the majority of the participants agreed (47.8%) or strongly agreed (31.4%). Regarding item 12, a large number of the respondents agreed (44.1%) or strongly agreed (37.6%) that they concentrate as hard as they can when doing a writing task.

With respect to the third subscale which elicited students' use of cognitive and memory strategies, the majority of the participants rated the items in higher agreement levels. Results of item 13, most of the respondents agreed (55.1%) or strongly agreed (26.9%) that they consider the task or instructions carefully before writing. Concerning item 14, more than two thirds of the respondents agreed (41.6%) or strongly agreed (29%). In response to item 15, a large number of the participants agreed (56.3%) or strongly agreed (20.8%). Similar results were achieved throughout the remaining items of the subscale.

Results of the students' use of social and compensation strategies are at times positive, yet at other times negative. In response to item 18, almost two thirds of the participants disagreed (29.4%), strongly disagreed (17.1%) or remained neutral (17.6%). Only quite a small number of them reported their agreement (35.9%). For item 19, almost half of the respondents disagreed (19.6%), strongly disagreed (9.4%) or were uncertain (17.1%). Similarly, concerning item 20, only just over half of them agreed (34.7%) or strongly

Table 2. Students' self-regulated strategies for writing

No	Items	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
9.	I write a lot to develop my writing skills.	11.8	30.6	21.6	25.3	10.6
10.	I work hard to do well in my writing.	4.1	16.3	22.4	37.6	19.6
11.	If I feel that a writing task is difficult, I do not give up but try to engage in it.	2	7.3	11.4	47.8	31.4
12.	I concentrate as hard as I can when doing a writing task.	1.2	5.7	11.4	44.1	37.6

Table 3. Students' use of cognitive and memory strategies

No	Items	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
13.	I consider the task or instructions carefully before writing.	1.6	6.5	9.8	55.1	26.9
14.	I put newly learned vocabulary and grammar in my writing.	2	11.4	15.9	41.6	29
15.	I generate as many relevant ideas as I can when I am writing an essay.	.4	4.9	17.6	56.3	20.8
16.	I use my experiences and previous knowledge while writing.	.4	2.4	6.1	43.3	47.8
17.	I try to use appropriate linking words and good paragraph structuring to ensure cohesion and coherence in my writing.	.8	2.4	9	51.4	36.3

Table 4. Students' use of social and compensation strategies

No	Items	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
18.	In order to generate ideas for my writing, I usually discuss the writing topic with a friend or classmate.	17.1	29.4	17.6	26.5	9.4
19.	After finishing an essay, I give it to a classmate or teacher to give me feedback.	9.4	19.6	17.1	38.8	15.1
20.	I try to identify friends or classmates whom I can ask for help in my writing.	9.8	18	20.4	34.7	17.1
21.	I use different words that have the same meaning to avoid unnecessary repetition of some words.	.8	4.9	12.2	43.3	38.8
22.	When I do not find a specific word to express something, I try to use a word of similar or closely similar meaning.	.8	2	6.9	46.9	43.3

Table 5. Students' use of affective strategies

No	Items	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
18.	In order to generate ideas for my writing, I usually discuss the writing topic with a friend or classmate.	17.1	29.4	17.6	26.5	9.4
19.	After finishing an essay, I give it to a classmate or teacher to give me feedback.	9.4	19.6	17.1	38.8	15.1
20.	I try to identify friends or classmates whom I can ask for help in my writing.	9.8	18	20.4	34.7	17.1
21.	I use different words that have the same meaning to avoid unnecessary repetition of some words.	.8	4.9	12.2	43.3	38.8
22.	When I do not find a specific word to express something, I try to use a word of similar or closely similar meaning.	.8	2	6.9	46.9	43.3

agreed (17.1%). However, the two remaining items received significant positive results. For example, regarding item 21, over two thirds of the participants agreed (43.3%) or strongly agreed (38.8%) that they use different words that have the same meaning to avoid unnecessary repetition. Also, concerning the last item, the majority of the respondents agreed (46.9%) or strongly agreed (43.3%).

Regarding the last sub-scale, the three items generally received positive results. In response to item 23, almost two thirds of the participants agreed (47.3%) or strongly agreed (17.1%). Concerning item 24, more than two thirds agreed (49.8%) or strongly agreed (23.7%) that they try to relax whenever they feel afraid of writing. Results of the last item present that the majority of the respondents agreed (45.3%) or strongly agreed (38%), while only an insignificant proportion of them expressed their disagreement or their neutrality.

The qualitative results

The results of the interview yielded three main themes, namely: the practice of writing, writing perceptions, and strategic writing behaviours.

The practice of writing

The theme of the practice of writing emerged

out of the participants' responses to the question relating to the number of essays they write throughout a given semester in which they had the course. The question was: "How many essays do you write from the beginning of the semester until the end of it?" From the analysis of their responses, it appears that the participants do not practice writing enough. This is because the majority said they wrote only up to two, three or four essays, and only one participant (P1) said she did once or twice a week. For example, P7 said he wrote about four essays a week, while P5 and P11 did not specify the number, saying that they wrote a lot.

However, the majority of them write essays only either if asked by their teachers or if the exams are closer. For example, P10, P15, and P12 said they wrote two essays or so throughout the whole semester. P15 explained his reluctance towards writing essays by saying that "writing is something boring". Similarly, P13 answered that she only wrote one and when asked to explain more, her reply was: "I don't like writing. I enjoy speaking and reading more than writing. Writing is difficult". Also, P 14, in his own words, said the following:

I would write basically two essays maximum because, you know, I just feel like it's a lot to just sit down and jot ideas or think of a certain topic. But once I'm in the

exam, I just feel like you have got to do it. I'm working under pressure. So, the ideas just come out of my mind and just like organizing.

Writing perceptions

Another question the respondents were asked was: "Do you enjoy writing essays?" The analysis of the participants' responses revealed that almost all of the students did not enjoy writing at all. Very few said they might enjoy writing other in modes but not the argumentative one. Mainly, they were asked to see whether or not they enjoyed writing essays the question after which a follow up probe in the form of an explanation was sought. Indeed, through the examination of the nature of their answers and in their explanation of the responses they provided, a number of factors appeared to contribute to their negative perceptions of writing in general, and of argumentative writing in particular. The most recurring words across the interviewees' responses were "difficult", "challenging" and "boring". For example, P6 responded that he likes to write some types of essays except for the argumentative type. His words were:

I enjoy writing essays especially positive and negative effects or solution, but rarely I write argumentative essay, because honestly it is difficult and challenging. You should spend a lot of time just in writing argumentative essay, and sometimes I don't have enough arguments.

A very similar response came from P7, saying: "not really. I don't enjoy writing, I rather enjoy speaking and reading". When asked to explain his attitudes, he said "I just don't feel like writing; it's boring little bit". P8, on the other hand, enjoys writing in general but not on paper because, according to him, spelling related problems make it difficult for him, thereby choosing to "write on the computer because it will correct spelling mistakes automatically". Therefore, her being afraid of making spelling mistakes hindered the practice of writing essays. Moreover, P12 held negative attitudes towards the writing skill, saying that whenever she has to write an essay, she suffers from lack of vocabulary, thereby, according to her, making it a difficult task as she has to use the dictionary and the internet.

Strategic writing behaviours

The sixth and the last theme, strategic writing behaviours, was also derived from the participants' responses to the questions probing into writing strategies that might be used by the students interviewed. Mainly, the questions addressed to the

participants were: "When you face a difficulty in writing, how do you manage it?" Do you revise your essays after finishing them? What do you exactly revise? What do you revise in an argumentative essay? The aim of these questions was to examine how the students would deal with difficulties that they might face during the act of writing, to see both whether they revise their products before either handing them to their teachers or after finishing them in general and what they revise exactly.

In this respect, the analysis of the data revealed that the students resorted to seek help either from others including their peers and/or teachers or simply from the Internet. For instance, P6 said this: "when I face a difficulty while writing an essay, sometimes I ask other students or some teachers. Sometimes I just check it out in the Internet like YouTube to figure out the difficulty". Other participants expressed that they were confronted with the writer's block and reported varied ways of dealing with the problem they happened to face during writing. For example, P11 stated this: "firstly, I take a break. Then, I look in the dictionary or Google or everything that would help me". Similarly, P7 summarized the way he solved or dealt with the difficulty as follows:

I get blocked a lot when I am writing essays. When I am blocked, I take a break. Then, I read again the topic, and I try to change the plan. I take like a new plan to write again. Sometimes, I write down the headlines that I want to discuss in paragraphs of the essay before I am writing. So, I just return to the plan and change it again to avoid this block if I change the plan again. That's why I don't get blocked too much when I do this.

Another question that sought to find out the strategies they used was related to the revision strategy. They were asked about whether they practiced the strategy of revision and what they revised exactly both in essay writing in general and in argumentative essays in particular. The analysis showed that most of the participants did revise their essays after finishing them. However, when asked about what they would revise when writing an argumentative essay, they did not really seem to revise what should be normally revised in this type of essays, with an exception of very few of them who appeared to know some important aspects to attend to and to revise them accordingly. For example, P6 said: "I always revise essays to make sure if there are no grammatical mistakes or some spelling mistakes". When asked about what he would revise in an argumentative essay, his answer

was: “I check my arguments if they are really strong because I should influence and convince the reader”. Similarly, P7 also showed that he does not only check spelling and grammar mistakes, but he also pays attention to some aspects that are specifically related to this mode. They were simply preoccupied with the grammar and spelling related revisions only.

Generally, the participants attempted to use the revision strategy. However, what they said they would check in their essays may not show their knowledge of this strategy. They did not provide enough details that would display their awareness of the intricate details of what to exactly revise in an argumentative essay. In other words, when asked about this writing mode, their responses were generally related to the general conventions that a writer would check in any essay regardless of the specific type. Because unless one attends to the sophisticated details of this genre i.e. the claim, the supporting arguments, the examples, the counter-arguments, the rebuttals, etc., the essay may not be rigorously revised, which will certainly, as a result, lead to low quality essays.

The relationship between writing strategies and writing achievement

To answer the second question of whether there is a relationship between students’ perceived level of writing strategies use and their writing achievement, Pearson correlation has been used, the results of which are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. The Correlation between Writing Strategies and Writing Achievement

		Writing Strategies	Writing Achievement
Writing Strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.147*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.021
	N	245	245
Writing Achievement	Pearson Correlation	.147*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	
	N	245	245

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

It can be seen in Table 6 that a positive correlation was found between the two variables ($r = 0.14$), indicating a weak relationship between students’ perceived level of writing strategies use and their writing achievement. This means that the more the students used writing strategies, the higher EFL writing achievement the students showed.

Also, since the p-value (0.02) was shown to be less than the level of significance (0.05) set as a criterion above, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between writing strategies and writing achievement in support of the alternative one that there exists a relationship between the two variables.

IV. DISCUSSION

Concerning the findings obtained on writing strategies, it seems that EFL students’ level of writing strategies use is generally high, though some strategies received low levels of agreement ratings. It has been found that the highest percentages, adding the two levels of agreement (91% and 90.2%), have been manifested in the students’ strong tendency to use their experiences and previous knowledge while writing and to resort to using alternative words in case of any lack of a specific word for something, respectively. These strategies are related to memory and compensation strategies. Equally, students have demonstrated substantially high levels of agreement (87.8%, 82.9%, and 82%) with regards to strategies related to, respectively, using appropriate linking words and good paragraph structuring to ensure cohesion and coherence in their essays, checking their writing to make sure it is grammatically correct, and considering the task or instructions carefully before writing. This strong tendency of the students to use memory, compensation, cognitive and metacognitive strategies may suggest how important these strategies are for EFL learners, at least in the Moroccan context.

These results are to some extent consistent with other studies’ findings in other EFL contexts. For example, in a study conducted by Baker and Boonkit (2004), it was revealed that metacognitive, cognitive and compensation strategies are the most frequently used. Furthermore, Forbes (2018) carried out a study on one student’s use of a set of metacognitive strategies and concluded that the student was observed to show an increased practice of the planning strategy. Concerning the revision strategy, more than two thirds (78.8%) stated that they revise their essays after finishing them. While this might be a good indicator that they engage in this critical strategic behaviour, the qualitative analysis has demonstrated quite the reverse as their approach to revising their essays is restricted to checking over only language mechanics especially in relation to the argumentative mode of writing.

In fact, this can also be discussed in relation to the literature on the importance of the revision strategy and how it distinguishes between high and low achieving writers.

The revision strategy is indeed observed to be practiced by both poor and good writers (Sommers, 1980). However, following the literature, it has been found that writers revise both at a surface level and at a global one. The results of this research concerning the practice of the revision strategy are in accordance with student writers in Sommers' (1980) study. This researcher conducted a study on both student writers and experienced writers' practices with regard to how they revise during the act of composing. Results indicated that the former type of writers reduced their revision to no more than making changes on the lexical level but not on the semantic one. In other words, these writers simply reworded their sentences as a way to avoid the lexical repetition, thereby failing to solve problems at the conceptual or textual level, which in turn led them to repeating the same idea but with different words only.

Another closely related item that falls within the same component of metacognitive strategies has to do with whether students write for a purpose in mind. Specifically, this strategy is related to students' anticipating of the audience while writing an argumentative essay. While the quantitative results showed that the majority of the students (77.5%) reported using this strategy, the qualitative findings appear to prove the inefficiency of this practice. Indeed, in responding to what they pay attention to while writing an argumentative writing, very few of the participants mentioned the terms 'audience', 'reader' and 'you'. The others were concerned with only language related aspects. As a matter of fact, the participants were not asked in the interviews a direct question: Do you take audience into consideration while writing an argumentative writing?, as this would apparently lead to a positive answer. This is because the aim of the interview was to elicit what and how they practice a strategy as "strategies in themselves are not inherently good or bad, but can be applied successfully or unsuccessfully" (Cohen, 2011; Grenfell & Harris 1999, as cited in Forbes, 2018, p. 152).

In line with the recognition of the recursive nature and nonlinearity of the writers' cognitive writing strategies employed while in the process of producing a piece of writing (Flower & Hayes,

1981), the students seemed to do the same as the majority of them (67.3%) reported using strategies recursively. That is, writers, at times, plan, write, reread, and yet at other times, they go back to planning and editing in a non-restricted, dynamic way whenever necessary. It is worth noting that this recursive use of strategies is not limited to either poor or good writers. Indeed, in her study of unskilled writers' composing processes, Perl (1979) observed that these writers exhibited a number of composing strategies: their "talking led to writing which led to reading which led to planning which again led to writing" (p. 324). While this points to the recursiveness of the composing process these unskilled writers engage in, and while this consistency implies that they are not novice writers, the researcher warns that this does not necessarily suggest that they are skilled writers, an implication that applies to the present study's finding.

The students' responses to the question of whether they would identify peers whom they can ask for help indicated that they are not that collaborative as only 51.8% reported using the strategy. The qualitative analysis revealed that most of the students resort to the dictionary or internet when faced with a difficulty. Very few of them would consult with their peers or their teachers. This can also be compared with item 18: "In order to generate ideas for my writing, I usually discuss the writing topic with a friend or classmate" about which one of the least rating levels (35.9%) was reported. This indicates that these students have a strong tendency to work alone as far as writing is concerned. The current finding is in line with Teng and Zhang (2016) who studied different multidimensional models of self-regulated learning strategies, concluding that Chinese university students appeared to lack willingness to engage in peer learning as part of self-regulation strategies in writing.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study investigated Moroccan EFL students' use of writing strategies and how these relate to their argumentative writing achievement. Based on the findings obtained, students' level of use of writing strategies was high, with some strategies being rated at lower levels. This, however, does not mean that all of the students have demonstrated the same level or that those students have shown a high level of use across all the strategies. What

this implies is that some students either do not use those strategies or are unaware of them in the first place. Given this state of affairs, teachers should raise students' awareness of the importance of the use of writing strategies and teach them how to use them. It is also recommended that teachers show their students how the use of these strategies helps produce more efficient and well-developed essays.

This study has been afflicted by some weaknesses upon which recommendations for future research can be suggested. First, the generalizability of the results is constrained by the fact that the sample was taken from one research site. Second, the present research investigated

the constructs from the students' point of view. While this has revealed a great deal of evidence with regard to students' practices, further research may include teachers' views on how they see their students' readiness. Third, at the level of data collection tools, the investigation relied mainly on two data collection tools, the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview, which might limit the rigour of the findings. Even though these tools were warranted by the objectives of the study, for future studies, more interesting insights could be obtained by employing, in addition to the methods used in the present study, other forms of data gathering techniques.

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