أثر استخدام استراتيجية تحديد الأهداف على تحسين مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب المدارس الثانوية الرسمية للغات

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المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة الى تحسين مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب الصف الثانى الثانوى بالمدارس الرسمية للغات من خلال تنفيذ استراتيجية تحديد الأهداف. وكان المشاركون في هذه الدراسة (٦٠) طالباً من طلاب الصف الثانى في مدرسة المحلة الرسمية للغات (المجموعة التجريبية) ومدرسة الشهيد محمد فضل الرسمية للغات (المجموعة الضابطة) بالمحلة الكبرى ، الغربية ، مصر. واعتمدت الدراسة على التصميم شبه التجريبي باستخدام مجموعتين: مجموعة تجريبية (٣٠) ومجموعة ضابطة (٣٠). ولجمع البيانات ، تم استخدام ثلاثة أدوات: قائمة مراجعة مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية ، واختبار مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية ، ومعيار تقييم مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية. وتم إجراء المعالجة التجريبية خلال الفصل الدراسي الثاني من العام الدراسي (٢٠٢٣-٢٠٢٤). وتم اختبار المجموعتين قبليًا وبعديًا باستخدام اختبار مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية. وأظهرت النتائج أن طلاب المجموعة التجريبية تفوقوا على زملائهم في المجموعة الضابطة في اختبار مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية البعدي. وعند مقارنة درجات الاختبار القبلي والبعدي للمجموعة التجريبية ، أشارت إلى تطور كبير. وهذا يعني أن استراتيجية تحديد الأهداف كانت مفيدة في تحسين مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية للطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية : مهارات الكتابة ، استراتيجية تحديد الأهداف، طلاب المدارس الثانوية الرسمية للغات

Using the Goal Setting Strategy in Improving EFL Writing Skills of Official Language Secondary School Students

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Abstract

The primary goal of this research was to improve second year official language secondary school students' EFL writing skills by implementing a goal-setting strategy. The participants of this research were (60) second year official language secondary school students at Al Mahalla Official Language School (experimental group) and El-Shaheed Mohamed Fadlallah Official Language School(control group), Al Mahalla El Kubra , Gharbya ,Egypt. The research adopted the quasi-experimental design using two groups: an experimental group (n = 30), and a control one (n = 30). The instruments included an EFL writing skills test, and an EFL writing skills rubric to score the writing test. The experimental treatment was conducted during the second semester of the academic year (2023-2024).The two groups were pre-and post-tested using EFL writing skills test. The results showed that the experimental group students outperformed their control group colleagues in the EFL writing skills post-test. When the experimental group's pre-test and post-test scores were compared, they indicated a significant development. It means that the goal-setting strategy was beneficial in improving students' EFL writing skills.

Keywords: EFL writing skills, goal-setting strategy, official language secondary school students.

Introduction

The English language is the most widely spoken language globally, and it can be considered the most important language due to the large number of speakers and its extensive reach. English is the predominant language used in various fields, including politics, economics, commerce, medicine, and tourism. It also dominates the media industry. Writing is one of the most essential language skills because it is utilized in numerous daily activities and life situations, and it is closely connected to other language skills.

Writing is an important part of communication and education because it allows people to share ideas, experiences, and information. It is critical to academic evaluation and prepares pupils for future undertakings. Developing writing abilities enables students to successfully organize their thoughts, present ideas coherently, and demonstrate comprehension. Proficient writing leads to success in numerous sectors of life, highlighting the importance of coherence, grammar, and spelling in the writing process (Durga& Rao, 2018).

The writing process is influenced by cognitive, cultural, motivational, and social factors. However, writing is a complex process that requires a specific combination of skills, language skills, and knowledge (Binu, 2021). The importance of English writing has grown in recent years as the world has become more globalized and technologically advanced. English is widely accepted as a universal language (McKinley, 2022).

According to Finch and Fafinski (2019), writing sub-skills related to accuracy include spelling correctly, forming letters correctly, using correct layouts, selecting the right vocabulary, writing legibly, joining letters together correctly, using grammar correctly, joining sentences, and correctly using paragraphs (a section of

a longer piece of writing that begins on a new line and typically focuses on one idea).

According to Polio (2014), learners of EFL writing skills may struggle to generate complicated sentences of good quality. Many of these learners continue to create sentences that are less lexically advanced with more mistakes. This is caused by having less variance in vocabulary of some learners than their more skilled peers (Irmanda et al., 2021). Moreover, most non-native speakers who learn English writing skill have lack of understanding the content to be written. This is a number of problems that need to be trained to support each other during acquisition and practice learners' experiences (Fauzan et al., 2018). In addition, it was found that most learners of writing do not quite the organization of thoughts, mastery of needed vocabulary is still less, and they still lack of idea in construction as well as the grammar use (Patak et al., 2021).

Writing is a crucial skill for English as a foreign language (EFL) learner, as it allows them to communicate effectively in academic and professional contexts. However, many EFL students struggle with writing, facing challenges such as generating ideas, organizing their thoughts, and using appropriate language (Javadi-Safa, 2018). Researchers have explored various instructional strategies to improve EFL writing, including process-based approaches, collaborative writing, and the use of technology (Lee, 2019; Mushir et al., 2023).

Graham (2018) mentioned that there are numerous ways for teachers to learn how to teach writing. The first way to gain this knowledge is to teach it to others. As teachers use various instructional methods, they form opinions about the value and efficacy of each. In essence, they learn through doing. The second way teachers learn how to teach writing is to observe and learn from others. They are

likely to recall some of the instructional methods used by those who taught them to write (teachers, mentors, parents, guardians, and peers). They may then incorporate some of these practices into their own teaching methods.

Lee et al., (2017) found that traditional views of testing influenced writing assessment, which was used to obtain grades and measure accountability. However, in order to help students improve their writing skills, teachers must shift the focus of assessment to summative and formative. In other words, assessment focuses on student progress rather than grades and achievement. Assessment is a long process of acquiring student knowledge and involves showing student progress (Saputra et al., 2018).

Based on the previous review, EFL writing is considered crucial for EFL learners for their academic success at the secondary stage. It is also necessary for official language secondary school students as they are frequently asked to compose essays, emails, blogs and paragraphs during their academic tasks. However, it represents a great challenge for them. The EFL official language secondary school students should be aware not only of the basic stages, phases, components and skills of writing but also, they should be aware of the main elements and skills required in order to compose an effective and successful piece of writing. Consequently, there is a need for investigating new interventions that can help EFL learners develop their EFL writing skills. One of these interventions is the goal- setting strategy.

One intriguing method that has gotten little attention in the EFL writing literature is the use of goal-setting strategy. According to Locke and Latham (2002), goal- setting may improve motivation and performance by creating clear, demanding, and achievable objectives. The goal orientation model is useful in this

aspect because it matches students' goals with their particular interests, beliefs, and self-identity, allowing them to take greater ownership of the work. At the same time, SMART goals must be set: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (Locke & Latham, 2006).

Effective goal-setting strategy can considerably improve EFL students' writing skills. Goal-setting allows students to actively engage in creating objectives and measuring progress, which increases motivation and production (Graham & Hebert 2010). To achieve the best outcomes when employing this strategy to increase EFL learners' writing skills and motivation levels, certain strategies must be prioritized. Setting goals in writing can help students concentrate their efforts, track their progress, and build successful writing skills (Brunstein & Glaser, 2011).

According to Knowles et al., (2014), adult learners' educational objectives are impacted by the relevant activities provided to them, as well as the method by which they gained the information or skill. Adult learners have the power to build their surroundings and are influenced by the interactions they have with other people in their environment. When learners perceived that learning was useful to their objectives, they were more likely to complete them.

Goal- setting is the process of establishing a standard for performance and it is an effective successful strategy that improves an adult learner's academic success (Aydin, 2017; Seli, 2019). There are two main types of goals in adult education: (a) goals for self-improvement; and (b) outcome goals, or those goals to demonstrate competence by meeting a standard (Welsh et al., 2019). Goals affect academic performance by serving a function (Schippers et al., 2020). When an adult learner sets a goal, the learner knows which activities in which to focus upon and which activities are irrelevant. Secondly, successful adult learners exhibit

effort and persistence when setting high goals as goal setting leads to complex tasks and then the adult learner can control the time they spend on a task (Alessandri et al., 2020).

In conclusion, goal- setting leads students to reach their goals by focusing their attention, effort, and actions. When adult learners are involved in the learning process, the learners evaluate their performance against standards that are specific and objective. In addition, goals can be categorized as outcome goals, which focus on the final result, or process goals, which focus on the steps required to achieve the outcome. Process goals are particularly beneficial for complex tasks, as they direct attention to relevant behaviors and strategies.

Context of the Problem

Many studies have found a lack in EFL writing skills among secondary school students (Dugler, 2011; Nazim& Ahmad, 2012; Baştuğ, 2015; Helwa, 2016; Qoura et al., 2018; Mohamed et al., 2019; El-Mistikawy 2021; Hassan, 2021; Ali et al., 2024; Sawangwan,2024).According to these studies, the majority of EFL students struggle with their EFL writing skills. This is because they lack knowledge, ideas, vocabulary, and correct language. Students dislike writing because they lack drive or are terrified of being assessed. Students usually recall vocabulary and grammar before using it in real-world situations. Furthermore, students do not develop their own works of writing, but rather remember parts of writing in order to avoid low grades.

Based on the researcher's experience as an English language teacher for 14 years, she noticed the low level in some EFL writing skills (content - vocabulary - grammar - organization-mechanics of writing) that should be mastered at their level; these problems resulted in a lack of high motivation to learn writing. They

have limited experience in writing. They do not have the ability to write a well-organized essay format. They tend to memorize a certain introduction and conclusion without regarding their relevance to the given topic. Moreover, their paragraphs have incorrect grammatical structure and irrelevant vocabulary. Additionally, their ideas within their paragraphs are irrelevant. Also, they could not summarize, analyze and criticize other's writings.

To document the problem of the study, the researcher conducted a pilot study to investigate the problem of second year official language secondary school students' weakness in EFL writing skills. The participants consisted of 30 second year official language secondary school students of El Shaheed Mohamed Fadlala Official Language School in Al Mahalla El Kubra city. The researcher designed an EFL writing test and applied it on 2nd January 2022.

Questions of the Research

To face this problem, the present research attempted to answer the following questions:

1-What are the EFL writing skills required for second year official language secondary school students?

2- What are the features of the goal- setting strategy for improving some EFL writing skills among second-year official language secondary school students?

3- What is the effectiveness of using the goal -setting strategy for developing some EFL writing skills among second-year official language secondary school students?

Delimitation

This research was delimited to:

1-Participants: A group of 60 second year official language secondary school students. They were selected from Al Mahalla Official Language School (experimental group=30) and El Shaheed Mohamed Fadlala Official Language School (control grou=30).

2- Place: Gharbia Governorate, Al- Mahalla Al-Kubra.

3-Instructional Context: Some EFL writing skills necessary for second year secondary stage (content -vocabulary - grammar –organization – mechanics of writing).

4-Time: The second semester of the school year 2023-2024

Instruments and materials of the Research

The following instruments were developed to measure the dependent variables of the research:

a) An EFL writing skills checklist.

b) An EFL writing skills pre-post test and a rubric for scoring it.

Validity of the EFL writing skills test:

1-Face Validity

To ensure validity of the EFL writing skills test, it was submitted to a panel of jury (N=14). They were asked to judge the following points and give recommendations:

1- Test questions are suitable to students' level.

2- The questions represent the target skills.

3- Test instructions are clear.

2-Internal Consistency

To estimate the internal consistency, the Pearson correlation coefficient between the scores of the study participants in each sub-skill and the total score of the test was calculated. Table (1) presented these correlations. This table shows that the correlation coefficient is significant at 0.01 and 0.05 levels. Consequently, there is an internal consistency between the sub-skills the test measured.

Table (1)

Pearson correlation coefficient between the scores of the study participants in each sub-skill and the total score of the test

Skills Correlation	Content	Organization	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mechanics of writing	All Over The Test
Content	1	0.692**	0.486**	0.671**	0.655**	0.847**
Organization		1	0.581**	0.375*	0.466**	0.751**
Vocabulary			1	0.597**	0.588**	0.815**
Grammar				1	0.721**	0.829**
Mechanics of writing					1	0.838**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level & **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Reliability of the EFL Writing Skills Test

In order to establish the reliability of the EFL writing skills test, the following statistical methods were used.

1- Alpha – Cronbach

Alpha – Cronbach was calculated for the test as a whole. The results are shown in table (2):

Table (2)

Alpha – Cronbach Cofficient for EFL Writing Skills Test

Test	Alpha – Cronbach
EFL Writing Skills Test	0,872

It is clear from table (2) that the value of Alpha – Cronbach of the test as a whole was (0,872), which is a high and statistically acceptable reliability value.

2- Test-Retest Reliability

The test was administrated to the same group after two weeks. The correlation coefficience between the results of the first and second administration was measured by Pearson correlation. The correlation between the results is shown in table (3) which is high (0.942) and is significant at 0.01. Therefore, the whole test with its main skills can be considered to be reliable.

Table (3)

Reliability Co-efficient For the EFL Writing Post-Test

Skills	Content	Organization	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mechanics of writing	All Over The Test
Correlation	0.793**	0.816**	0.801**	0.780**	0.895**	0.942**

Table (3) clarifies that the correlation co-efficient is high and significant at the level of significance (0.01), which indicates the reliability of each main skill and the test as a whole.

The Goal -Setting Strategy

The purpose of using the goal -setting strategy is to improve EFL writing skills for secondary official language school students.

Purpose of Using the Goal -Setting Strategy

Using the goal -setting strategy aimed at improving EFL writing skills for second-year official language secondary school students through:

1. Identifying the importance of the goal-setting strategy in the English language in particular.

2. Identifying the importance of EFL writing skills in general and to second-year official language secondary school students.

Objectives of Using the Goal -Setting Strategy

For improving the students' EFL writing skills, using the goal-setting strategy aimed at improving these skills:

1. Set goals to their learning that may improve their learning process in general and writing skills in particular.

2. Use correct spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

3. Use a variety of sentence types, structures and lengths to serve the topic.

4. Avoid run-on or wordy sentences.

5. Construct complete and grammatically correct sentences.

6. Develop the main ideas that are relevant to the topic.

7. Generate details that support the main ideas.

8. Use accurate, meaningful sentences to express the connected idea.

Content of the sessions

The content of the sessions used was presented through 14 sessions, ranged from 80 to 90 minutes. It included orientation session, goal-setting strategy plan, new words, online dictionary, power point presentations, worksheets, videos, free topics for writing and a reflective log. The implementation began with the pre-test. Session one dealt with the introductory phases of the goal-setting strategy. The rest of the sessions aimed at improving some EFL writing skills. At the beginning of each session, the researcher presented the skills, objectives, procedures and teaching aids. Within each session, the researcher used formative assessment focused on measuring participants' progress during sessions.

Procedures of the sessions

- Pre- writing stage
- While writing stage

- After writing stage
- Reflective Evaluation

Assessments Techniques of the Goal -Setting Strategy

The assessment of the EFL writing skills used in the implementation of the goal-setting strategy is consisted of two types formative and summative.

1-Formative assessment

It was used for assessing the participants' progress within each session for providing the appropriate feedback for the participants. Within each session, the researcher provided her participants with worksheets to make sure they grasp the content of the session. Then, within the end of the session they were given an activity to write about.

2-Summative assessment

It was used for assessing the participants' progress at the end of the experiment through administering the EFL writing skills post- test and to determine the effect of the goal-setting strategy in improving the participants' EFL writing skills.

Findings and Discussion of the Research:

The aim of using goal-setting strategy was to improve EFL official language secondary school students' EFL writing skills. To measure the effectiveness of goal-setting strategy, the participants were pre-tested and post-tested in EFL writing skills. For comparing the initial and the final mean scores of the participants in the overall EFL writing skills to find whether there was a statistically significant difference between them in the pre and the-post assessment

of the tests, the researcher used the two sample t-test. The findings of the research are presented below with the hypotheses of the research as follows:

Results of the First Hypothesis:

The first hypothesis stated, "There is a statistically significant difference at the ≤ 0.05 level between the mean score of the experimental group and that of the control group in the EFL writing skills post- test in favor of the experimental group". To verify this hypothesis, the t- test was used to compare the mean scores of the two groups. Results are presented in Table 4.

Table (4)

Comparing the Experimental and the Control Groups on the EFL writing Skills Post- test

Main Skills	Full Mark	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	A Sig	η2
Content	6	Experimental	5.00	0.74	12.156	0.01	0.718
		Control	2.77	0.68			
Organization	6	Experimental	5.10	0.61	16.309	0.01	0.821
		Control	2.67	0.55			
Vocabulary	6	Experimental	5.70	0.47	13.771	0.01	0.766
		Control	3.67	0.66			
Grammar	6	Experimental	5.30	0.60	13.275	0.01	0.752
		Control	3.17	0.65			
Mechanics of writing	6	Experimental	5.23	0.57	13.792	0.01	0.766
		Control	3.17	0.59			
EFL Writing	60	Experimental	26.33	1.94	22.732	0.01	0.899
		Control	15.43	1.77			

The results presented in table (4) clearly show that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in all skills of the EFL writing skills post-test, as well as in the total score of the test. These differences are in favor of the experimental group. All the values of (t) were statistically significant at both level of significance (0.01) and degree of freedom is (58). These results confirm the first hypothesis. These differences could be attributed to the implementation of the goal-setting strategy. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the study was confirmed.

Results of the Second Hypothesis:

The second hypothesis stated that "there is a statistically significant difference at a significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean scores of students in the experimental group in the pre-test and post-test of the EFL writing test as a whole, and in each skill of it, in favor of the post-test scores". The "t" value was calculated for two related samples (Paired-Samples t-test) to determine the significance of the differences between the mean scores of students in the experimental group in the pre-test and post-test of the EFL writing test as a whole, and in each skill of it. Additionally, to measure the effect size of the experimental treatment on the EFL writing skills test, the Effect size (η^2) was calculated, as shown in table (5).

Table (5)

Comparing the Results of the Experimental Group in the Pre-test and Post-test of the EFL Writing Skills

Main Skills	Full Mark	Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	A Sig	$\eta2$

Content	6	Pre	2.70	0.70	17.940	0.01	0.917
		Post	5.00	0.74			
Organization	6	Pre	2.60	0.67	21.745	0.01	0.942
		Post	5.10	0.61			
Vocabulary	6	Pre	3.30	0.95	16.155	0.01	0.900
		Post	5.70	0.47			
Grammar	6	Pre	2.70	0.79	28.580	0.01	0.966
		Post	5.30	0.60			
Mechanics of writing	6	Pre	2.70	0.75	20.362	0.01	0.935
		Post	5.23	0.57			
EFL Writing	60	Pre	14.00	2.17	45.954	0.01	0.986
		Post	26.33	1.94			

Table (5) points out that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants in the pre-post test of the EFL writing main skills in favor of the post test at the level of α ≤ 0.01. Thus, this hypothesis was verified. It also indicates that the effect size of the experimental treatment on the EFL writing sub-skills ranged from(0.900-0.986) .Accordingly, it is a large value and greater than (0.14) and indicates a significant effect of experimental treatment. Therefore, the second hypothesis of the study was accepted.

Results of the Third Hypothesis:

To test the validity of the third hypothesis in the study, which states that "there is a positive correlation at a statistically significant level (α ≤ 0.05) between the scores of the participants in the experimental group in the EFL writing skills post test , the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated as shown in Table (6).

Table (6)

The Correlation Coefficient between the Scores of Students in the Experimental Group in the Post Assessment of the EFL Writing Skills Post Test

Motivation	Variable / Correlation
0.802**	Content
0.793**	Organization
0.814**	Vocabulary
0.638**	Grammar
0.740**	Mechanics of writing
0.918**	EFL Writing

Table (6) indicates that there is a strong positive correlation that is statistically significant at the level of 0.01 between the scores of the participants in the experimental group in the post assessment of the EFL writing test. These results show that the participants' scores in the EFL writing skills test have increased. Therefore, the third hypothesis of the research was verified.

Discussion of the research Findings:

The findings of this research suggested that incorporating the goal- setting strategy into EFL writing can be an effective way to improve the writing skills of official language secondary school students. The goal- setting intervention helped the participants stay motivated, focus their efforts, and develop more effective

writing strategies, leading to significant improvements in their writing performance. The research's implications for teaching practice include the importance of providing explicit instruction on goal -setting and supporting students in the goal-setting process. Additionally, the findings highlight the potential benefits of incorporating self-regulation strategies, such as progress monitoring and reflection, into EFL writing instruction.

The participants of the experimental group posttest results exceeded their pretest results in all the EFL writing skills. Moreover, the effect size of the goal-setting strategy was significantly high. It was noticed that the most improved skill was" vocabulary", as this skill was clear to the students during the writing orientation session, and the classroom feedback after each writing task. Engaging in different writing activities helped to improve the participants' EFL writing skills. On the other hand, the least improved skill was "content". This is because the students gave much care to the other writing skills, assuming that this skill was not as important as the other skills. However, all the skills including "content" were much developed; compared to the results of the pretest. This indicates that the goal- setting strategy was remarkably effective in improving the experimental group students' EFL writing skills.

The goal-setting strategy played a crucial role in improving students' EFL writing skills. Students learnt strategies that supported their comprehension (their awareness of the writing skills) and they learnt how to carry out these strategies effectively (their control of strategies). These strategies enabled students to monitor their writing process by considering their thinking processes before, during, and after phases of writing. These results agreed with Bosch and Pool (2019), Chung et al., (2021), Pham (2023) and Wilson et al., (2023).

Conclusions

Based on the findings, this research demonstrated the value of goal-setting strategy on improving official language secondary school students' EFL writing skills. It transformed teaching from "teacher telling" to "students participating and doing". Consequently, it enabled the participants to form good skills which resulted in the participants' abilities to avoid accepting knowledge passively. It provided the participants with living learning experiences and real life challenges that enabled them to use English for real purposes, construct knowledge, acquire and apply skills. Moreover, involving EFL students in the goal-setting process can foster greater commitment and ownership, further boosting the impact of goal-setting strategy. Providing timely and constructive feedback also plays a vital role, allowing learners to monitor their progress and make necessary adjustments to their writing strategies. Ultimately, the strategic application of goal-setting strategy, suited to the special needs and characteristics of EFL learners, can serve as a powerful tool in improving their writing skills. By using this strategy, teachers can empower EFL students to set achievable writing goals, develop effective writing behaviors, and finally, improve their overall writing skills.

Recommendation of the Research

Based on the results and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations were offered:

1- Creating a complete goal- setting program for the EFL writing curriculum. This should include teaching students good goal-setting strategies, such as defining precise, demanding, and proximate writing objectives.

2-Encouraging students to set process goals that focus on developing key writing behaviors and strategies, such as organizing ideas, using appropriate vocabulary,

and implementing revisions. This can help students make progress on the underlying skills required for effective writing.

3-Involving students in the goal setting process, allowing them to collaborate with teachers in establishing their writing goals. This can enhance goal commitment and ownership, leading to better writing outcomes.

4-Considering the individual differences among students, such as their writing proficiency levels and learning styles. Adapt the goal setting strategy to cater the specific needs of each student.

Suggestions for further research

The following topics may be considered for further researches:

1. Using goal-setting strategy in developing other English language skills (listening, speaking and reading).

2. Using goal-setting strategy in developing students' twenty first century skills and their attitudes towards leaning English language skills.

3. The impact of goal-setting strategy on enhancing other psychological aspects (e.g., psychological flow and self-confidence) in EFL skills.

4. Investigating EFL teachers' attitudes towards using goal-setting strategy in teaching.

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