

## *Impact of an intervention program on pre-writing strategies in fostering writing achievement of Bangladeshi EFL students*

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### Abstract

Language learners experience difficulties in eliciting ideas in L2 writing. Due to the complexity of mastering the writing skill by EFL learners, the process of unlocking ideas hidden in learners' minds and presenting them on paper successfully has attracted huge attention of EFL teachers. The purpose of the present study is to show the impact of explicit instruction in pre-writing strategies on improving EFL students' writing. For that purpose, data were collected from 80 students before and after an explicit instruction program which consisted of 22 classes (75 minutes each). To determine the relationships between writing strategies instruction program and learners writing achievement, a *t*-test was computed and the observed differences turned out to be statistically significant. As the results show, following the intervention, students developed an ability to generate better written production (three-paragraph essays) in terms of the organization of ideas, the development of thoughts, maintaining unity and coherence, etc.

*Keywords:* appropriate planning; prewriting strategies; explicit instruction; idea generation; writing achievement; motivational incentives

### 1. Introduction

The writing skill is a predictor of academic achievement and a basic requirement for professional success. In teaching writing, pre-writing strategies can serve as

motivational incentives in certain cases, especially for students with mild learning disabilities and relatively slow learners (Sundeen, 2013). For this reason, pre-writing activities are used widely by teachers as a beneficial micro-skill to support and improve writing. Pre-writing strategies provoke conscious thoughts, actions, or behaviors needed to plan before writing. Teaching pre-writing strategies has been shown to have a dramatic effect on the quality of students' writing and their academic performance. Researches have also demonstrated that students who are exposed to many different pre-writing strategies achieve potentially superior writing ability over students who are not (Deng et al, 2003). However, besides these success stories there are also reasons for disappointment, as writing proficiency does not always improve satisfactorily after the introduction of a number of pre-writing strategies. If learners are not properly trained to develop their ideas using the clues jotted down during pre-writing, they do not benefit from the activity. Strategy instruction involves explicit and systematic teaching of steps necessary for planning, revising, and/or editing text (Graham, 2006). In fact, the ultimate goal of strategy training is to teach students to use techniques independently.

Although studies focusing upon pre-writing strategies and strategy training have been conducted by many researchers in different ESL and K12 situations (Al-shaer, 2014; Jacobs, 2004; LaRoche, 1993; Mahnam & Nejadansari, 2012; Mohseniasl, 2014), in Bangladesh no investigation of the effectiveness of pre-writing strategy has been undertaken thus far. In fact, the very idea of pre-writing is still a confusing term to many secondary school teachers. However, the term *brainstorming*, which is equated with the stage of pre-writing, has been used on the academic arena of the country for almost two decades, since the year 1997-98 when textbooks recommended by the Textbook Board started introducing the communicative approach to teaching English in schools from the primary to higher secondary level. Thus, the researcher's interest in the present study lies in the effect of explicit pre-writing strategies training on writing improvement and academic performance of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. In this quasi-experimental study, data were collected from the first semester BA English majors studying in a private university in Bangladesh at the pretest and posttest phases of a four-month course. Besides, a questionnaire was distributed among the students to understand their motivation and confidence level with respect to writing and using pre-writing strategies. More precisely, the present research addresses the following research questions:

- Does explicit instruction on pre-writing strategies motivate learners to use pre-writing strategies and thereby bring about positive attitude towards writing?
- Does the instruction help students improve their writing style in terms of organization of ideas, the focus on the topic and length of the paper?

## 2. The importance of pre-writing strategies

Writing in a second language is a complex process because EFL learners often need to overcome writing blocks and face challenges of generating ideas relevant to writing topics and, subsequently, considering the writing purposes, deploy them in appropriate organizational patterns. For Dujsik (2008) writing is more than a means to create a document; it can be a method to discover topics and explore related ideas. According to Tsui (1996), learning to write in a foreign language is more laborious than learning other skills as it involves much anxiety. Considering the fact that writing is predominantly product-oriented, Chamot, Toth, Kupper, Nielsen, and Barrueta (1990) assert that the purpose of writing strategy training is not only to make students aware of their writing process but also to teach them how strategies are associated with good writing. In writing, the pre-writing stage is considered as the most crucial because pre-writing is an activity "that encourages students to write, stimulates thoughts for getting started" (Seow, 2002, p. 316). It also encourages the use of prior knowledge, reliance on critical thinking, etc.

Pre-writing strategies, namely brainstorming, concept mapping, and free writing, have been widely chosen and practiced in EFL classrooms, yet very few students find them important to use as obligatory, especially while doing writing as homework or working on answer scripts during examinations. Schweiker-Marra and Marra (2000), and Stern (1991) have rightly pointed out that the issues of explicit writing strategy instruction as well as the importance of the pre-writing stage as the foundation of good writing have received only minor attention in the EFL contexts. Tompkins (2001) noted that the most neglected stage in writing is the pre-writing stage; many EFL writers struggle to organize the content of academic essays appropriately and logically. Studies regarding this issue have helped researchers identify a number of reasons for slow improvement in students' writing skills even after years of instruction. For example, Krashen (2011) notes that unavailability of reading materials causes poor performance in writing because when children have access to such materials, they in fact engage in reading and reading has been shown to improve vocabulary, grammar, spelling, reading and writing ability. Culham (2016) observes that "most schools don't have [any] scope and sequence or a set of materials and strategies that outlines a core writing curriculum for each grade and across grades. So, although students may have an exemplary writing experience and make great gains one year, they start from the same beginning in the next year because the new teacher doesn't know what was taught the previous year or has a different set of objectives in mind" (p. 12). Blackburn-Brockman (2001) found that teachers who did not pre-write seriously in middle and high school, or those who did not pre-write at all could not guide the learners through the task effectively.

Go (1994) argues that pre-writing involves energizing students' participation in thinking, group interaction, and skeletal writing activities that become components of a writing task. Pre-writing activities are not only aimed to help students acquire the target language more effectively, but also to build their interpersonal, thinking, and planning skills that can be utilized in other fields. It helps students attend to writing tasks, controls their learning more effectively and advances concept understanding. Pintrich (2000) argues that using pre-writing strategies leads to activation of complex cognitive structures in writing that involves goal-setting, prior knowledge activation and planning. Furthermore, Schweiker-Marra and Marra (2000) and LaRoche (1993) investigated the effects of pre-writing activities on psychological factors such as attitude and anxiety, demonstrating that students' writing anxiety can be lowered through a writing program that emphasizes pre-writing activities. Therefore, pre-writing strategies should not be used merely as engaging classroom activities; rather, students should be trained properly to benefit from such tasks through explicit instruction. According to Dexter and Hughes (2011), teacher modeling or demonstration of pre-writing strategies can improve the overall quality of writing by supporting students through the writing process. However, after the presentation of a graphic organizer the teacher is responsible for explaining how to use it effectively. Chamot (2004) mentions that explicit strategy instruction essentially consists in raising students' awareness about the benefits of strategies they use and it involves providing students with new strategies, self-evaluation of strategies used and practice in transferring strategies to new tasks.

Research proves that even university students with difficulties in writing or having poor writing capability can benefit from successful instruction in applying pre-writing strategies. In this connection, Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2006) argue that learners need to be encouraged to adopt planning and monitoring strategies in order to foster a more proactive, positive linguistic behavior. In their research with ESL writers in Hong Kong, Lo and Hyland (2007) found that pre-writing strategies can improve writing engagement, enhance motivation and create opportunities for sharing personal experiences, voicing one's own thoughts and feelings, or writing for real audiences. They also observed that as a result of instruction in this area the length of the compositions written by the students increased by 45% on average, even though they still had problems with organization, style, and language use. Rao (2007), Jacobs (2004) and Read (2005) in their studies with three different populations came to the conclusion that students who had undergone pre-writing strategy training developed positive attitudes towards writing. They achieved improvement in organization or forming structure in their writing, length of the written texts, and details added in them. Meihani and Varmaghani (2013) investigated using self-assessment in

EFL writing classroom and found that participants in the experimental group significantly improved their writing ability having received writing strategy training. The positive effects of instruction in pre-writing strategies has also been observed in the studies by Hatasa and Soeda, (2000), Sasaki (2000, 2002), as well as Manchón, Roca de Larios and Murphy (2007). Talebinezhad and Negari (2009) provided evidence for the effectiveness of several pre-writing strategies as fruitful platforms for students to generate ideas and crystallize their thoughts to embark on the complex process of writing. In a similar study on Palestinians EFL students' argumentative writing, Al-Shaer (2014) found that pre-writing strategies significantly influenced students' ability to make stronger claims, compose more unified and coherent paragraphs, and come up with more developed supporting details. He also marked improvement in the mean scores of the experimental group from the pretest to the posttest. Similar findings were also reported by Mahnam and Nejadansari (2011) in their study of twenty-three adult EFL Iranian students. In this case, explicit instruction on pre-writing strategies resulted in significant improvement in Iranian EFL learners' writing achievement. The results showed the learners who had received pre-writing strategy training during their writing sessions made comparatively more improvement than those who had not received such training.

All of these studies clearly point to the relationship between using pre-writing strategies and writing improvement, but none of them has focused on Bangladeshi adult students, who have little experience in writing in English. The present study fills this gap by providing some insights in this respect.

### 3. Problems with EFL writing skills in Bangladesh

Repeatedly poor performance of university admission seekers especially in the writing part of the admission test has made language practitioners and educators in Bangladesh seriously concerned about the challenges faced by learner writers. Close inspection of the answer sheets on admission tests revealed that most of the learners are unable to write an error-free short composition on any topic and the types of errors they make are quite similar, including common surface errors and organizational problems. At the same time, it was observed that in most cases lesson plans used in schools are designed so as to give excessive attention to the testing situation and the assumed preferences of the raters. The examination-oriented teaching system imposes control on the writing classes from topic selection to evaluation procedures. Besides, the procedures traditionally used in writing instruction also seem incomplete and they are intended only to meet students' demands in a superficial manner. For example, pre-writing typically starts with brainstorming; however, at this stage teachers give clues

the form of questions. However, students regard this activity as a less important one because on examinations they are not asked to employ pre-writing and also because they see it as an activity that is enjoyable but resulting in a waste of time. Besides, even after a brainstorming activity, students fail to use the outcomes of the pre-writing stage because either the gathered ideas are not properly content-oriented or learners cannot compose a comprehensible written text independently due to their low English proficiency and inadequate knowledge of planning and organization standards. In effect, many teachers get too lenient towards the learners and instantly start writing a sample text on the board. Students, however, instead of taking it as an example, simply copy it and start memorizing it immediately. Furthermore, many teachers prefer to assign writing tasks as homework assignments. In this case, students often manage to get someone in their family to do the job for them or directly copy the text from books available on the market. Thus, writing instruction at schools remains incomplete for most of the learners and they struggle a lot when they enter universities because:

- they have focused on memorization instead of committing themselves to developing the requisite writing skills;
- they have limited opportunities to practice writing till the secondary level of education;
- they are not familiarized with writing strategies;
- they possess poor and insufficient knowledge about organizing ideas in writing;
- writing is practiced in the classroom as an individual activity with the teacher as the sole audience;
- most students consider writing to be difficult and unrewarding.

In universities of Bangladesh the basic language course is offered as a foundation course. Here writing instruction is based on the process approach. A number of pre-writing strategies, such as forming spidergrams, clustering or outline planning, are addressed to improve students' writing. Hence, students seem unwilling to go through any pre-writing activity unless it is a mandatory or graded task. In oral discussions, which are conducted as part of pre-writing, students come up with many interesting ideas but they seem less interested and motivated when it comes to actual writing. Students are mostly faced up with writing anxiety, insufficient vocabulary, lack of grammar knowledge, or writer's blocks, etc. While recently a creative questioning pattern has been introduced into the Secondary School Certificate Examination and, as a consequence, students are able to write a few sentences on any subject, they still fail to maintain coherence among them. Such a situation pushes educators and researchers in Bangladesh to promote students' progress in writing through various intervention programs. The intensive writing instruction with explicit pre-writing strategy training employed in the present study is an initiative of this kind.

## 4. The study

### 4.1. Method

Instruments used in the present study included: (a) writing tasks, used as pre-tests and posttests, to measure writing achievement and (b) a questionnaire aimed to investigate students' motivation and confidence level towards writing and using pre-writing strategies during the act of writing. The scores that the students obtained in the writing tasks were compared with the help of a paired two-tailed *t*-test to determine the statistical significance of the changes in their writing achievement. All 80 students who had enrolled in the course called "Composition" (3 credits) during the ongoing trimester were chosen as the participants of the study. The students were divided in two sections, Section A and Section B, following the university's policy that the standard class size is 40 and the students admitted earlier are placed in Section A. For the purpose of the study, the students in Section B were designated as the experimental group and the students of Section A constitute the control group. The pretest was administered at the beginning of the course and consisted of two separate parts: (1) elaborative writing and (2) responding to a questionnaire. In the elaborative writing part, the learners were asked to write a three-paragraph composition on a given topic and just after the writing session, the questionnaire (Appendix) was distributed. It inquired about the participants' previous writing experiences, their awareness of writing strategies and the motivation to use them.

Next, intensive training (75 minutes each) was implemented during twenty sessions in order to encourage learners to use pre-writing strategies in the process of writing with the hope of increasing the length of their written compositions as well as improving their writing achievement. The students in the experimental group had to attend two training sessions and one individual conference session each week. In individual conference sessions, the students were provided with opportunities to discuss individual writing problems whereas in training sessions, besides writing activities, controlled practice on using pre-writing strategies and their benefits was provided. Furthermore, there was a requirement that the strategies that were introduced and practiced were in fact applied in class. Although the students in the control group had to attend a similar number of classes for the same duration, their classes followed a traditional model of teaching writing.

Knowing that students had some experience with some pre-writing strategies, such as mind-mapping or listing questions through the textbooks of *English for Today* series, the training sessions were planned. When presenting any of the strategies, teachers first capitalized on what students already knew about the strategy, giving an overview of reasons why it was useful for the particular

text genre. Next, ensuring students' active participation, an elaborative demonstration of a given strategy was provided through board work. Later, practice activities were offered as pair and group work for reinforcement. Each session closed with homework which student had to complete as individual tasks. Regular feedback was provided and corrections were offered during the individual conference sessions. In fact, before any new pre-writing strategy was introduced, the learners were asked to write on a given topic using any suitable model of pre-writing they knew. Subsequently, the learners were shown how the particular pre-writing activity that the teacher intended to apply contributed to their writing. For example, in one session, the students in the experimental group were asked to write about their "favorite fruit" within twenty minutes. It was found that 25% of the students used a "mind-map" as a pre-writing activity, 15% use "free writing", and the rest used no pre-writing strategy at all. The length of the submitted texts was between 100-130 words. Next the students were asked to follow the instructions displayed on the board. Then, the instructor, with the assistance of the students completed the pre-writing exercises shown in Figure 1.

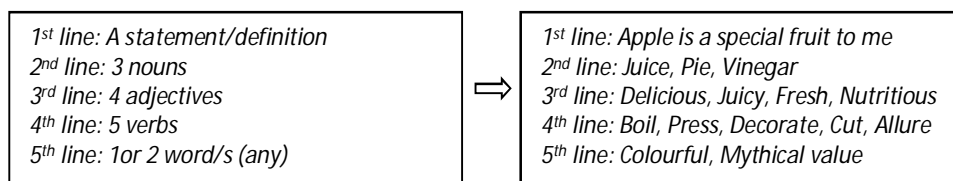


Figure 1 An example of a pre-writing activity (descriptive)

Next, the students were asked to elaborate on their ideas about the fruit using clues from the board. At this stage, one student volunteered to write the elaboration on the board while the other students actively participated and assisted him. As the clues contained different types of words, they led the students to use different sentence patterns and to express their ideas in a unique and interesting way. Next, the students compared two versions of their writings and found the second one was better and comparatively more descriptive. According to this model, the writer moves through four steps: first, he displays what he knows; second, the instructor assists him in finding better ideas; the third phase is aimed to enhance motivation as it shows that the invested effort, including selecting an appropriate pre-writing strategy and elaborating ideas guided by it, can produce positive appreciation of the writing; and, finally, in the fourth step, the student becomes an autonomous user of the strategy. In other words, Model-1 is intended to enhance motivation of the students. It is presented in Figure 2.



Write ----- Provide sample ----- Compare ----- Edit

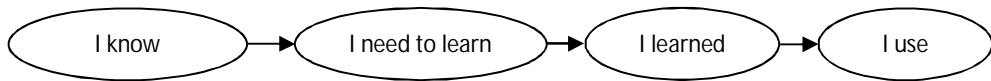


Figure 2 Model 1 of strategy training

As success in writing depends on subject knowledge and writer's blocks can be minimized by integrated reading activities, students are encouraged to use multiple sources by, for example, regular web browsing, reading newspapers, looking through encyclopedias, using dictionaries, etc. Further, selective reading activities were frequently employed to help the learners build up primary ideas about different text genres. For example, before working on narrative writing, the learners had a chance to focus on informal letters describing incidents or events. As Smith (2001) states, "the reader who develops strategies for understanding the mood and tone of a reading passage will be able to incorporate mood and tone into his or her writings. And writers who have an awareness of audience and purpose will have those skills needed to determine the author's purpose when they read" (pp. 12-13).

It has to be kept in mind that the pre-writing stage involves not only coming up with ideas through research and thinking but also making an organizational plan of the text to be composed. Often students move directly from getting ideas to constructing an outline, or even directly from getting ideas to writing their first draft. The problem is that such short-cuts fail to make use of all the benefits that pre-writing may offer. Brainstorming offers a "warm-up" benefit for exploring ideas from where students' thinking gets started, but it does not do much to create the focus and organization, which are the main goals of academic writing. Therefore, the steps in between getting ideas and drafting are essential. For this reason, the students were trained how to group their ideas and how to link ideas using transitional devices in the way depicted in Figure 3 (Model 2).

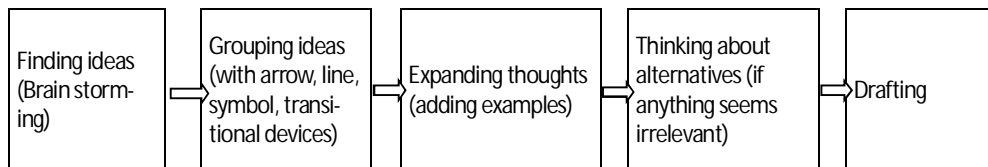


Figure 3 Model 1 of strategy training

It is also true that if writers rely too much on one organizational strategy and if the strategy does not work for a particular purpose, they get stuck (*Teaching*

*writing as process*, 2016). Therefore, in order to reduce writing anxiety and promote better written production, learners were also made aware of the need for flexibility in using pre-writing strategies in the training sessions. For example, in the case of descriptive writing, the guided coining words technique or compound word-formation technique were introduced as alternatives. For writing narratives, a flow chart seemed to be the best option as students' scripts showed that drawing conclusion was difficult for many of them. Furthermore, bringing one's own voice and tracing the climax in one's own narrative is essential and thus attention was given to these elements. In the same way, for cause-and-effect writing the "fish-bone" structure and for compare-and-contrast writing the "ven-diagram" were used as pre-writing. In every case oral participation was encouraged. Students' verbal expressions about any concept not only worked as motivational means but also created opportunities for the teachers to provide positive reinforcement, which further enhanced students' confidence (Gattis, 1998). After twenty two training sessions over the period of twelve weeks a posttest took place. As in the pretest, the students were asked to write on a given topic in addition to completing the questionnaire. The duration of each writing test was 50 minutes.

#### 4.2. The instruments

To validate the pretest and posttest, the tasks were based on the course description of ENGL 101 (Composition), which had been approved by the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh. Ten faculty members who had been teaching the same course for five years or longer were requested to check the tasks for appropriateness. The task was piloted with 20 students who had already completed the same course, and they were not the participants of the study. As regards the questionnaire, it was distributed among 35 students of the same level for piloting and the language used was revised as required. The questionnaire included 21 questions focusing on the participants' perceptions about writing, perceptions about pre-writing and writing confidence. Each of these three sections consisted of 7 questions. All the 21 items were answered on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest score. Nine of the questions were reverse-coded (see the appendix).

#### 4.3. Analyses

In order to analyze the data collected for the research project, descriptive statistics were applied to determine the means and standard deviations using SPSS 21. Both on the pretest and the posttest students' elaborative written samples and responses to the questionnaire were collected as primary data. A paired-samples *t*-test was used to determine the statistical significance of the differences observed.

## 5. Results and discussion

The analysis showed that the differences between the experimental and control groups on the pretest were small with respect to the categories included in the questionnaire (i.e., “perceptions about writing”, “perceptions about pre-writing” and “writing confidence”. The data shown in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that on the pretest the mean for the “perceptions of writing” scale was 13.1 in the control group and 13.53 in the experimental group. With respect to “perceptions about pre-writing”, the means were 11.23 and 10.5, respectively. In the case of “writing confidence”, the mean for the control group was 10.05 and for the experimental group it equaled 9.23. The analysis of the posttest responses to the questionnaire items showed that the control group made a slight improvement in case of their “perceptions of writing” (the posttest mean of 13.3 and the pretest mean of 13.1), “perceptions about pre-writing” (the posttest mean of 10.5 and the pretest mean of 13.62), as well as “writing confidence” (the posttest mean of 10.43 and the pretest mean of 10.05). On the other hand, the changes in the experimental group were more considerable, which can be attributed to the training sessions. The analysis showed that the participants’ knowledge about and attitudes towards the writing activity became more positive at the time of the posttest. As can be seen from Table 1, the experimental students’ knowledge about and attitudes towards pre-writing strategies improved substantially on the posttest in comparison with the pretest (20.78 vs. 11.23). The participant also seemed more motivated to write after the intervention (19.6 vs. 13.53). Also the students’ confidence in handling writing tasks had also increased because of the intervention (an increase from 9.23 to 21.9).

In the writing task included in the pretest, 8 out of 80 learners submitted blank scripts, 61 wrote 5-10 sentences but there was no cohesion among them and some were not relevant to the topic, 74 scripts contained no topic sentences and 78 scripts were full of several types of grammar errors. In addition, in no script were transitional devices used and spelling errors were common in all the texts. In addition, none of the learners opted for any pre-writing activity when completing this task. By contrast, on the posttest a large group of learners (85%) in the experimental group employed pre-writing strategies. Not a single student in this group submitted a blank script, and 30 students wrote 25 or more sentences in which thesis statements, topic sentences and transitional devices were used correctly. In the control group, 57% of the students used pre-writing strategies on the posttest and the length of their texts remained limited to 12-17 sentences. This discrepancy may be ascribed to the fact that the learners in the experimental group had become aware of the positive effects of using pre-writing strategies, and, as a result, they were able to fall back on these strategies in their writing confidently and effectively.

The results are consistent with the findings of Talebinezhad and Negari (2007) as well as Mahnam & Nejadansari (2012), discussed above.

Table 1 Differences in perception about writing and pre-writing as well as writing confidence on the pretest and the posttest for the experimental group

	No of students	Perceptions about writing (questions 1-7)		Perceptions about pre-writing strategy use (questions 8-14)		Writing confidence (questions 15-21)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Pretest	40	13.53	4.47	11.23	4.77	9.23	2.85
Posttest	40	19.60	3.17	20.78	4.35	21.90	4.17

Table 2 Differences in perception about writing and pre-writing as well as writing confidence on the pretest and the posttest for the control group

	No of students	Perceptions about writing (questions 1-7)		Perceptions about pre-writing strategy use (questions 8-14)		Writing confidence (questions 15-21)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Pretest	40	13.10	2.89	10.50	3.23	10.05	3.13
Posttest	40	13.30	2.24	13.62	5.38	10.43	3.18

While examining the effect of strategy Instruction on the writing apprehension and writing achievement of EFL learners, Mohseniasl (2014) found that the students who had received such instruction improved their writing skills in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. In the present study, the students' papers, composed on both the pretest and the posttest, were assessed by means of Roebuck's *Analytic Scoring Rubrics*, modified by Maftoon and Rabiee (2006). According to this assessment scheme, the total of 20 marks was separated into four components: mechanics, vocabulary, grammar, and organization. Each area could be awarded up to 5 points, (5 for no errors, 4 for 1 to 3 errors, 3 for 4 to 6 errors, 2 for 7 to 9 errors, and, finally, 1 for 10 and more errors). The statistical significance of the differences in this respect on the pretest and the posttest in both groups was determined by means of a two-tailed unpaired *t*-test (see Tables 3 and 4).

The results shown in the tables reveal that the performance of both groups was better on the posttest than on the pretest. However, in this case the pretest-posttest gain amounted to only 1.11 in the control group ( $M = 8.60$  vs.  $M = 9.71$ ). In the case of the experimental group, the gain was 5.89 and the difference was statistically significant ( $M = 8.94$  vs.  $M = 14.83$ ). This indicates

that on the posttest the learners manifested greater mastery of the writing skill than on the pretest. On average, the mean of students' writing achievement increased by 5.8875. The *t* value for the experimental group amounted to 13.941. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be extremely statistically significant. Furthermore, the length of the students' papers also increased from the pretest to the posttest. On average students in the experimental group wrote 57 words more on the posttest than they did on the pretest. The average word count during the pretest was 39 and on the posttest it reached 96.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for the writing tasks and on the pretest and posttest

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Pretest experimental	40	4.00	15.00	8.94	3.13
Posttest experimental	40	10.00	18.50	14.83	2.32
Pretest controlled	40	3.00	16.00	8.60	3.29
Posttest controlled	40	4.50	17.00	9.71	2.97
Valid N (listwise)	40				

Table 4 Paired samples *t*-tests for the writing tasks and on the pretest and posttest

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Paired Differences		<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					95% confidence interval of the difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	(pretest-post-test)	-5.89	2.67	.42233	-6.7417	-5.0333	-13.941	39	.000
Pair 2	(pretest-post-test)	-1.11	1.33	.20992	-1.5371	-.68790	-5.300	39	.000

The results indicate that by engaging in suitable pre-writing activities which involved, among others, concentrating on the main concepts, building up a list of vocabulary, establishing logical connections among ideas or using appropriate transitional devices, EFL students demonstrated improvement in their writing in terms of organization and coherence, which also allowed reflective thinking via visual representation of concept associations. This observation is similar to the findings reported by Lo and Hiland (2007). This shows that the application of pre-writing strategy training could enable ESL learners to handle the pre-writing stage successfully and consequently could help students improve their writing in terms of organization of ideas, focus on the topic, and the length of their texts.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of writing classes is to assist learners in developing the skill of organized writing and in expressing their ideas successfully with powerful expressions. By becoming familiar with a variety of pre-writing strategies and by using them successfully and

appropriately in their writing process, the learners achieved confidence in their writing abilities and managed to reduce their writing anxiety. The study has demonstrated that instruction in pre-writing strategies enhanced students' ability to generate ideas and to elaborate upon them. It was also revealed that learners wrote almost three times as much after the training session than they did before. Therefore, it can be assumed that explicit training in the use of pre-writing strategies boosts students' confidence and improves the quality of their L2 writing.

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## Appendix

*Writing Apprehension Questionnaire*

*Directions: below are 20 statements about writing. Please mark from "Strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" that best describe your agreement or disagreement with these statements. Remember that there are no correct answers. Only give your honest response.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I avoid writing because it is boring					
2. Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.					
3. I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas clearly in writing.					
4. In most cases learning writing is very important for doing good result					
5. Writing is very important for getting better job					
6. I enjoy Writing					
2. I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.					
3. Taking a composition course is a very frightening experience.					
4. Unseen writing / writing composition helps me to get confidence in writing					
5. My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on my composition.					
6. Writing is a lot of fun.					
7. Making improvement in writing is very tough					
8. I always get good marks in writing					
9. I like to have my friends read what I have written.					
10. I'm nervous about writing.					
11. People seem to enjoy what I write.					
12. Writing is a way to show my creativity					
13. I'm not good at writing. I always make a lot of mistakes in it					
14. I have many other questions to answer in examination besides writing so I need not give much importance on it					
15. I know about prewriting strategy but I never use it					
16. I know how to use prewriting to get good marks in the examination					
17. I know about prewriting strategy					
18. I always use prewriting strategy					
19. Prewriting makes the writing task easier					
20. prewriting is simply waste of time					
21. prewriting itself is a difficult task					