

## TRAINING OF LEARNING STRATEGIES IN WRITING ESSAY

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**Abstract:** Writing essay is still considered difficult for English students to master. The students are expected to be able to express their ideas correctly without making any chance of messages to be misinterpreted by the readers; therefore, they have to know and use the best or the most appropriate ways to write. The purpose of writing this article is to introduce learning strategies and the possibility of training of learning strategies in writing essay to English students. The first strategy is integration of strategy with the process of writing essay: pre-writing, writing draft, and post-writing activities. The second is training learning strategies, such as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies to students to make writing essay easier, faster, more enjoyable, more effective, and more self-directed to achieve the desired result in their writing. To get better result of improvement, the model of training of learning strategies in writing essay should be applied and developed based on the appropriateness of teachers, learners, subjects, and situations.

**Key words:** training, learning strategies, writing essay

### INTRODUCTION

Writing essay is still considered difficult for English students to master. Their difficulties are caused by some factors, such as: psychological, linguistic, and cognitive factors. Psychologically, writing essay is a solitary activity that requires writers to communicate without any possibility of getting direct feedback or interaction. Linguistically, the ability to produce a good piece of

writing essay is facilitated by the ability to write correct sentences, to connect the sentences into paragraphs, and to develop the paragraphs into an essay, a unified thought in written discourse. Cognitively, the students should have an ability to express ideas in acceptable English that the readers receive messages exactly what the students mean. Therefore, the students are expected to be able to express their ideas correctly without making any chance of messages to be misinterpreted by the readers. In order to overcome their difficulties, the students have to know the ways to write to make them more independent, more self-confidence, more self-directed, more enjoyable, and more effective to achieve success in their writing. Teachers, lectures, or educators have to be responsible to help learners learn through appropriate learning strategies. From this point of view, training of learning strategies in writing essay to English students becomes very important for them in the future to achieve success in their writing.

The purpose of writing this article is to introduce learning strategies and the possibility of training of learning strategies in writing essay to English students. An example of training of learning strategies in writing essay below can be a model.

## **LEARNING STRATEGIES**

Oxford (1990:8) defines that learning strategies are specific actions, ways, or efforts taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations to achieve desired results, goals, or objectives. They are operations, steps, and plans used by learners to facilitate the accomplishing, storing, regaining, and use of information to reach the final learning goals. They are special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of information. They are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. Appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence. They are

operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information. In line with Oxford, Wenden (1991) defines that learning strategies are mental steps or operations that learners use to learn a new language and to regulate their efforts to do so.

### **LEARNING STRATEGIES CLASSIFICATION**

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state that learning strategies can be divided into three major strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, and affective/social strategies. Firstly, metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring of comprehension or production while it is taking place, and self-evaluation after the learning activity has been completed. Secondly, cognitive strategies are more directly related to individual learning tasks and entail direct manipulation or transformation of the learning materials. And lastly, affective/social strategies are cooperative learning, which involves peer interaction to achieve a common goal in learning and asking questions for clarification.

On the other hand, Oxford (1990) classifies learning strategies into two major classes: direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are learning strategies that directly involve the target language. They require mental processing of the language. The three groups of direct strategies; memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, do the processing of the language differently and for different purposes. Indirect strategies are learning strategies that support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language. The three groups of indirect strategies: metacognitive, affective, and social strategies have different processes and purposes.

Based on the classification of learning strategies, the writer uses Oxford's point of view that there are six types of strategies, they are: memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies are under the direct class and metacognitive, affective, and social strategies are under the indirect class.

### **Memory Strategies**

The first group of direct strategies is memory strategies. Memory strategies are strategies that aid at entering information into long-term memory and retrieving it when needed for communication. These strategies help learners store in memory the important things they hear or read in the new language and also help learners retrieve information from memory when they need to use it for comprehension or production. In general, they fall into four sets: creating mental linkages (grouping, associating/elaborating, and placing new words into a context), applying images and sounds (using imagery, semantic mapping, using keywords, and representing sounds in memory), reviewing well (structured reviewing), and employing action (using physical response or sensation and using mechanical techniques).

### **Cognitive Strategies**

The second group of direct strategies is cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies are strategies that require mental operations, operated directly on the incoming information. Cognitive strategies, such as summarizing or reasoning deductively, enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means. They are essential in learning a new language. Cognitive strategies involve four strategy sets: practicing (repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing systems, recognizing and using formulas and patterns, recombining, and practicing naturalistically), receiving and sending messages (getting the idea quickly and using resources for receiving and sending messages), analyzing and reasoning (reasoning deductively, analyzing expressions, analyzing contrastively, translating, and transferring), and creative structure for input and output (taking notes, summarizing, and highlighting). These strategies are unified by a common function, that is manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner.

### **Compensation Strategies**

The third group of direct strategies is compensation strategies. Compensation strategies are strategies that enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations in knowledge. Compensation strategies, like guessing or using synonyms, allow learners to use the language despite their large gaps in knowledge. These strategies are intended to make up for an inadequate repertoire of grammar and, especially, of vocabulary. Ten compensation strategies exist, clustered into two sets: guessing intelligently in listening and reading (linguistic and nonlinguistic clues), and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (switching to the mother tongue, getting help, using mime or gesture, avoiding communication partially or totally, selecting the topic, adjusting or approximating the message, coining words, and using a circumlocution or synonym).

### **Metacognitive Strategies**

The first strategy group of indirect strategies is metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies are strategies that involve actions beyond purely cognitive devices, and which provide a way for learners to coordinate their learning process. In other words, metacognitive strategies allow learners to control their own cognition. Metacognitive strategies involve three strategy sets: centering your learning (over-viewing and linking with already known material, paying attention, and delaying speech production to focus on listening), arranging and planning your learning (finding out about language learning, organizing, setting goals and objectives, identifying the purpose of a language task, planning for a language task, seeking practice opportunities), and evaluating your learning (self-monitoring and self-evaluating).

### **Affective Strategies**

The second strategy group of indirect strategies is affective strategies. Affective strategies are strategies that enable learners to

control or regulate feelings or emotions, motivations, and attitudes related to language learning. The term affective refers to emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values. Language learners can gain control over these factors through affective strategies. The affective side of the learners is one of the biggest influences on language learning success or failure. Good language learners are those who know how to control their emotions and attitudes about learning. In one hand, negative feelings can stunt progress, even for the rare learner who fully understands all the technical aspects of how to learn a new language. On the other hand, positive emotions and attitudes can make language learning far more effective and enjoyable. The affective strategies involve: lowering anxiety (using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation, using music, and using laughter), encouraging yourself (making positive statements, taking risks wisely, and rewarding yourself), taking your emotional temperature (Listening to your body, using a checklist, writing a language learning diary, and discussing your feelings with someone else).

### **Social Strategies**

The last strategy group of indirect strategies is social strategies. Social strategies are strategies that facilitate interaction with others, often in a discourse situation. Appropriate social strategies are very important in language learning. This importance of strategies is based on the fact that language is a form of social behavior; it is communication that occurs between and among people. Learning a language thus involves other people. The three sets of social strategies are asking questions (asking for clarification or verification and asking for correction), cooperating with others (cooperating with peers and cooperating with proficient users of the new language), and empathizing with others (developing cultural understanding and becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings).

## **PARTS OF AN ESSAY**

An essay can be defined as a short composition that concentrates on one particular topic of strong interest to the writer. According to Oshima & Hogue (1991), an essay is a piece of writing several paragraphs long instead of one or just two paragraphs. Furthermore, Smalley and Ruetten (1986) state that an essay is a group of paragraphs that develops one central idea. From these definitions, it can be stated that an essay is a piece of writing that develops one limited topic or idea; however, a topic of an essay is too complex or too broad to be developed in a single paragraph. Therefore, it is necessary to write an essay that develops the central idea in several paragraphs.

Although an essay consists of several paragraphs, basically it has three main parts: an introductory paragraph, developmental paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. An introductory paragraph, the first part of an essay, opens the essay. Because this paragraph is the first thing that a reader sees, it should introduce the topic to be discussed and the central idea of the essay. Moreover, it can be said that an introductory paragraph should inform the reader the topic to be discussed, indicate generally how the topic is going to be developed, state the central idea precisely and clearly in the theses statement, and be interesting enough to make the reader want to continue reading the essay. In other words, it should introduce the topic of the essay, give a general background of the topic, indicate the overall plan of the essay, and arouse the reader's interest in the topic.

Developmental paragraphs, the second part of an essay, are the body of the entire essay. It usually consists of two or more paragraphs. Each paragraph discusses one aspect or subdivision of the topic; therefore, the number of the developmental paragraphs will vary with the number of subdivisions. Although there is no rule to determine the exact number of paragraphs, the student essay usually subdivides the body into two to four paragraphs. The controlling idea of each developmental paragraph should echo the central idea in the theses statement; besides, it should have unity and coherence.

The last part of an essay is a concluding paragraph. Just as an introductory paragraph used to open the essay discussion, a concluding paragraph wraps up the discussion, bringing up the logical end. It is a very important paragraph that the writer tells the readers he has completed the essay. Usually a concluding paragraph consists of two parts: a summary of the main points or restatement of the theses statement in different words and the writer's comment on the subject discussion. Since this is the last opportunity to make the point, a writer should write a strong, effective message that the readers will remember.

### **PROCESS OF WRITING ESSAY**

According to Oshima, writing is a process, not a "product" (1991). This means that a piece of writing is never complete; that is, it is always possible to review and revise, and review and revise again. The writing process is the means by which one discovers what he wants to say and how he can best say it. Because the writing process is a reflection of one's natural thinking process, the writing process will enable him to call up ideas and is expressed in written language. But a writer may sometimes suffer from "writer's block" when he is going to write. This means that his ideas will not easily come into his head, and he sits staring at his blank paper. To overcome this problem, it is important for a writer to learn the stages or the process of writing.

Oshima (1991) states that there are four main stages in the writing process: pre-writing, planning, writing and revising drafts, and writing the final copy. The first stage is pre-writing. Two steps to be considered in pre-writing stage are choosing and narrowing a topic and brainstorming. Firstly, choosing a topic is used to determine the topic a writer is interested in and he masters or, at least, has background knowledge about. Secondly, narrowing a topic is used to narrow the subject to a particular aspect of the general subject that is too broad to be discussed in an essay. After a writer has chosen a

topic and narrowed it to a specific focus, the next prewriting step is brainstorming. Brainstorming that is also called generating ideas has function to get the writer started writing more quickly and save time in the later stages of the writing process. Listing, free-writing, and clustering are the three useful brainstorming techniques. The second stage is planning. In the planning stage, the writer organizes the ideas he generated by brainstorming; then, he makes an outline that is very useful as a skeleton of an entire essay. The next stage is writing and revising drafts, in this stage, a writer writes the first rough draft and then, he reads and revises it. Next, he writes the second draft, proofreads, and revises again. The important aspects of composition to be revised are: content, vocabulary, organization, language use, and mechanics. After these three stages have been done, it comes to the last stage that is writing the final copy. In this stage, a writer must be sure that he makes all the corrections and is ready to hand in.

In line with the statements above, McCrimmon (1983) states that the writing process is divided into three stages: planning, drafting, and revising. Planning, as the first stage in the writing process, is a series of strategies designed to find and produce information in writing. It is an orderly procedure used to bring the desired result. Secondly, drafting, as the second stage in the writing process, is a series of strategies designed to organized and develop a sustained piece of writing. It is the procedure for drawing up a preliminary sketch. Finally, revising, as a third and final stage in the writing process, is a series of strategies designed to re-examine and re-evaluate the choices that have created a piece of writing. It is the procedure for improving or correcting a work in progress.

In addition to those statements, Olson (1982) divides the writing process into seven stages: prewriting, pre-composing, writing, sharing, revising, editing, and evaluation. The first stage, prewriting, is a generative activity to initiate thinking and fluency. It aims to stimulate a free flow idea through activities which require a writer to process new experiences or to retrieve past experiences. The second stage, pre-composing, is the stage in which the writer makes initial

plans about how they will approach the blank page. The pre-composing activities are usually the introduction of the writing prompt. The writer's activities include making lists, organizing through the use of charts and diagrams, and brainstorming as planning activities. The third stage, writing, is drafting to give ideas shape and form in the symbols of written language. It is a juggling of constraints requiring high level critical thinking skills. The fourth stage, sharing, is the activities of giving and receiving feedback to and from other writers concerning how writer's words affect the readers. It has a very important function because in sharing, writing that is essentially one way communication becomes two-way communication. The writer who thinks and talks about the writing of others is preparing to review his or her own writing. The fifth stage, revising, is the activity to reflect upon what has been written to rethink, re-see, and reshape words and ideas after a writer has generated a draft and received feedback. In other words, revision is an act of creative criticism; that is a reshaping of thought through the addition, substitution, deletion, and rearrangement of words. The sixth stage, editing, is a particular subcategory of constraints in the composing process involving conforming to the conventions of written English, including accurate grammar, punctuation, and spelling. The goal is for the paper to stand alone without needing interpretation or explanation by the writer because of distractions caused by errors. The last stage, evaluation, is a special form of sharing in the writing process. It is the final feedback given to a writer when a paper is completed. This evaluation will give confirmation to the assessments made by the writer throughout the writing process.

Based on the statements above, it can be concluded that there are three big stages in the process of writing essay, that is: pre-writing/planning, writing draft, and post-writing/revising, and writing the final copy. Pre-writing consists of all activities done by the writer in the process of writing before writing the rough draft. It is the writer's plan and preparation to write that includes: generating ideas,

exploring subjects, focusing on a topic, forming a main idea, developing the main idea by making an outline. Next, it comes to the second stage, that is writing draft. It is writing the rough draft that includes: writing the theses statement, developing the theses statement into several developmental paragraphs, writing an introductory and a concluding paragraph, considering the unity and coherence aspects in this writing. The last stage is post-writing. Post-writing is all activities done by the writer in the process of writing after writing the rough draft. The activities include: revising for the theses statement, topic sentences, the concluding sentence, the supporting details, and some important aspects, such as: content, vocabulary, organization, language use, and mechanics. When all activities of revision have been done writing the final copy is the last thing to do in the last stage of the writing process.

### **STEPS IN THE STRATEGY TRAINING MODEL**

According to Oxford (1990:203-204), there are eight steps in the strategy training model. The first five steps are planning and preparation steps, while the last three steps involve conducting, evaluating, and revising the training. The eight steps to consider are as follows:

*First, determine the learners' needs and the time available.* Consider first who the learners are and what they need. Are they children, adults, college students, graduate students, etc? What learning strategies have the students been using, according to the strategy assessment results? Which strategies are appropriate for the students? Then, how much time do we need for training.

*Second, select strategies well.* After knowing the learners' needs, selecting strategies is very important in order to determine the appropriate learning strategies because appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence.

*Third, consider integration of strategy training.* In the training of learning strategies, there are two techniques, separate and integrated

technique. From these two options, it is more helpful to apply integrated technique. It means that the trainer should integrate strategy training with the tasks, objectives, and materials used in the regular training program. When strategy training is closely integrated with language learning, learners better understand how the strategies can be used in a significant and meaningful context.

*Fourth, consider motivational issues.* Assume that learners will be motivated to learn strategies in order to become more effective learners. We can explain how using good strategies can make language learning easier so that the students are interested in participating in strategy training. Another way to increase motivation is to let learners have some say in selecting the language activities or tasks they will use, or to let them choose they strategies they will learn.

*Fifth, prepare materials and activities.* The materials used for language instruction will double well for strategy training materials. We might develop some handouts on when and how to use the strategies we want to focus on. We might develop a handbook for learners to use at home and in class.

*Sixth, conduct "completely informed training".* In conducting the training, we inform learners as completely as possible about why the strategies are important and how they can be used in new situations. We provide practice with strategies in several language tasks, and point out how transfer of strategies is possible from task to task. We might also give learners the explicit opportunity to evaluate success of their new strategies, exploring the reasons why these strategies might have helped.

*Seventh, evaluate the strategy training.* Learners' comments about their strategy used are part of the training itself. These self-assessments provide practice with the strategies of self-monitoring and self-evaluating. Evaluating the strategy training is very useful in the improvement of training of learning strategies.

*At last, revise the strategy training.* As in any training effort, the evaluation above will suggest possible revisions for materials. Evaluating and revising of the training of learning strategies will be useful for learners to make sure that they have enough knowledge of learning strategies and they can apply the learning strategies to improve the desired results, goals, or objectives.

## **LEARNING STRATEGIES IN WRITING ESSAY**

Based on the theoretical framework above, learning strategies which are applicable in writing essay are as follows.

First, in terms of memory strategies students can apply creating mental linkages strategies to the materials they had already known by doing brainstorming activities before writing. The next memory strategies they can use are reviewing strategies. They can review reading what they have written when they gained difficulties or when they face "writer's block. These strategies are used to recall their mind so that they remember and are able to continue to write their essay.

Second, in terms of cognitive strategies, the students can apply recognizing and using formulas and patterns, analyzing and reasoning, and using resources for sending messages, translating, and transferring strategies. They can use these strategies because in writing essay, they will be accustomed to writing the paragraphs sequentially, using funnel type of introduction, and using dictionaries to help them express the difficult words or ideas. Besides that, they commonly translate and transfer their ideas of their own language, Indonesian, into their target language, English, as the strategies to make them easier to express their ideas.

Third, in terms of compensation strategies, the students can apply the strategies of selecting a topic. They have to select a good topic to write based on their background knowledge, personal experiences, and references besides the topic to choose should be interesting and up to date.

Fourth, in terms of metacognitive strategies, the students can apply the strategies of arranging and planning, stating the purpose, getting help, using synonym, and self-monitoring. These strategies are relating to making an outline for planning their writing, stating the central idea in the theses statement, asking others for help to express the missing ideas, using synonym to express the difficult words, and correcting the mistakes of their writing by reviewing what they have written.

Fifth, in terms of affective strategies, the students can apply lowering anxiety strategies. These strategies are used when they face problems that they are not able to continue to write their essay, and then they stop writing to relax.

At last, in terms of social strategies, the students can apply the strategies of asking for corrections to others. They might ask their family, friends, or lectures for correcting the mistakes of their writing.

In short, in writing essay from the considerations of choosing a topic up to writing the final draft, the students can apply the strategies of creating mental linkages, reviewing well, practicing, analyzing expressions, using resources for sending messages, selecting a topic, arranging and planning, stating the purpose, getting help, using synonym, self-monitoring, lowering anxiety, and asking for corrections.

## **TRAINING OF LEARNING STRATEGIES IN WRITING ESSAY: A MODEL**

When the students are asked to write essay, they need some steps to write. In this model, the steps to write essay are divided into three main steps: pre-writing, writing draft, and post-writing activities. Pre-writing activities consist of all activities done by the writer in the process of writing essay before writing the rough draft. It is the writer's plan and preparation to write that includes: generating ideas, exploring subjects, focusing on a topic, forming a main idea, developing the main idea by making an outline. Secondly, writing

draft activities are all activities done by the writer in the process of writing rough draft. This process includes writing the theses statement, developing the theses statement into several developmental paragraphs, writing an introductory and a concluding paragraph, considering the unity and coherence aspects in this writing. And, post-writing activities are all activities done by the writer in the process of revising and writing the final copy. Integrated with the steps of writing essay, training of learning strategies to s English tudents can be done as follows.

First, in the step of pre-writing activities: generating ideas, exploring subjects, focusing on a topic, forming a main idea, developing the main idea by making an outline, the students can be trained memory strategies, compensation strategies, and metacognitive strategies. In term of memory strategies, the students can apply creating mental linkages strategies to the materials they had already known by doing brainstorming activities. They are asked to write everything they remember about the topics by listing, drawing, free-writing, and clustering. They need to choose some topics to consider. They need to apply reviewing strategies about the topics. In term of compensation strategies, they have to choose one topic which should be familiar (based on their background knowledge, personal experiences, and references) for the students so that they have a frame work of the topic, interesting, up to date, and neither too broad nor too specific. If the topic is too broad the students cannot include all relevant materials in details and if the topic is too specific, they cannot develop and finish their writing because they lack of materials. The students should be sure that they have enough knowledge, experiences, or references and materials about the topic discussion so that they are sure they can finish writing their essay. When they are not sure, they have to change another topic. In term of metacognitive strategies, the students have to make a good outline. Making an outline is considered organizing strategy that is arranging and planning. Training to make a good outline

before writing essay is important to guide the students to focus their ideas to achieve unity in their writing.

Second, in the step of writing activities, the students are trained some strategies. When the students write an outline, they have to state the theses statement clearly and correctly. The theses statement should consist of a topic and a central idea. The central idea becomes the most important part in the essay because it is the purpose of writing essay and the essay can be developed. In this case, we train the students metacognitive strategies: setting goals and objectives. After writing the theses statement, the students need to develop the supporting sentences into details. They have to write the developmental paragraphs, the introductory paragraph and the concluding paragraph. The ways how to develop the developmental paragraphs are based on the central idea stated in the theses statement. In writing the rough draft, the students have to consider some elements of writing essay: content, organization, language use, vocabulary, and mechanics. In the process of writing rough draft, the students are also trained cognitive strategies. They can apply recognizing and using formulas and patterns, analyzing and reasoning, and using resources for sending messages, translating, and transferring strategies. When the students face the writer's block, not knowing what to do and unable to continue writing during the writing process, the students can be trained the affective strategies. They need to use lowering anxiety strategy. They need to break, to stop, or to have a rest in order to be relax and to refresh their mind. In order to recall their memory, reviewing strategies of memory strategies can also be applied by writing everything relating to the topic as they remember or by reading what they have written. By using combination of some learning strategies, the students will be helpful to finish writing rough draft.

At last, in the step of post-writing activities, the students can be trained metacognitive strategies and social strategies. The focus of this step is revising the essay. The students have to read and to revise

again and again. The more they read and the more they revise, the better it will. In this step, the students are trained metacognitive strategies and social strategies. In term of metacognitive strategies, the students have to apply self-monitoring and self-evaluating strategies. They read and revise the topic, the theses statement, the content, the organization, the vocabulary, the language use, and the mechanics by themselves. They may be helped using checklists, books, dictionaries, or others. By using self-monitoring and self evaluating strategies, the students are able to correct the mistakes or to improve their writing by themselves. Besides training metacognitive strategies, the students are trained social strategies. They can apply the strategies of asking for clarification, asking for correction, cooperating with peers, and cooperating with proficient users. The strategies of asking questions and cooperating with others above will help students share knowledge and experiences among students to improve their writing. After evaluating and having revision strategies, the last activity to do in writing essay is writing the final copy to hand in.

After the all possible strategies are trained to students through integrated technique, the quality of writing essay will be improved from time to time.

### **CLOSING REMARK**

Learning strategies are specific actions, ways, or efforts taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations to achieve desired goals or objectives (Oxford, 1990). They are direct strategies: memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies and indirect strategies: metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Training of learning strategies in writing essay will be helpful for English students. First, in the step of pre-writing activities: generating ideas, exploring subjects, focusing on a topic, forming a main idea, developing the main idea by making an outline, the students can be trained memory strategies, compensation strategies, and

metacognitive strategies. Second, in the step of writing draft activities, the students are trained metacognitive, cognitive, memory, and compensation strategies. At last, in the step of post-writing activities, the students can be trained metacognitive strategies and social strategies. By training and applying various of learning strategies in writing essay, the students are able to improve and develop their writing from time to time. To get better result of improvement, the model of training of learning strategies in writing essay should be applied and developed based on the appropriateness of teachers, learners, subjects, and situations.

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