Writing Strategies in EFL Argumentative Essays

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J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and Literature – Teaching English as a Foreign Language and German Language and Literature – Teaching German as a Foreign Language

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IZJAVA

Izjavljujem s punom materijalnom i moralnom odgovornošću da sam ovaj rad samostalno napravila te da u njemu nema kopiranih ili prepisanih dijelova teksta tuđih radova, a da nisu označeni kao citati s napisanim izvorom odakle su preneseni. Svojim vlastoručnim potpisom potvrđujem da sam suglasna da Filozofski fakultet Osijek trajno pohrani i javno objavi ovaj moj rad u internetskoj bazi završnih i diplomskih radova knjižnice Filozofskog fakulteta Osijek, knjižnice Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku i Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was twofold: to determine which strategies students utilize in their essay writing and to find any distinctions in the use of writing strategies by skilled and less skilled student writers. The sample of the current study included eight Croatian EFL undergraduate students enrolled at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, J. J. Strossmayer University, Osijek. The data collected via think aloud protocols, semi-structured interviews and student essays was triangulated in order to reach the results related to the two previously mentioned major areas of concern to this study. The results indicated that the subjects utilized a relatively high level and diverse repertoire of writing strategies. Namely, they employed rhetorical, metacognitive, cognitive, communicative, social/affective and other strategies. The findings also showed that students with higher writing abilities do not remarkably differ in the number of writing strategies used compared to those with lower writing proficiency. However, the former displayed a more frequent and effective strategy usage than the latter. The consideration of these results can raise awareness in teaching and be useful in language classrooms. Finally, the paper ends by setting out directions for additional research and by articulating the limitations of the study.

Key words: writing strategies, EFL writing, writing proficiency, strategy use

Sažetak

Svrha ovog istraživanja bila je dvostruka: utvrditi koje strategije studenti koriste u pisanju eseja i pronaći eventualne razlike u uporabi strategija pisanja od strane vještih i manje vještih studenata pisaca. Uzorak trenutne studije uključivao je osam hrvatskih studenata engleskog kao stranog jezika upisanih na Filozofski fakultet, Sveučilišta J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku. Podaci prikupljeni pomoću *think aloud* protokola, polustrukturiranih intervjua i studentskih eseja bili su triangulirani kako bi se došlo do rezultata u svezi s dva prethodno spomenuta glavna područja interesa ove studije. Rezultati su pokazali da su ispitanici koristili relativno visoku razinu i raznolik repertoar strategija pisanja. Oni su, naime, koristili retoričke, metakognitivne, kognitivne, komunikacijske, socijalne/afektivne i druge strategije. Nalazi su također pokazali da se studenti s većim sposobnostima pisanja ne razlikuju značajno u broju korištenih strategija pisanja u usporedbi s onima koji su manje vični u pisanju. Međutim, prva skupina je demonstrirala češću i učinkovitiju upotrebu strategije od druge. Razmatranje ovih rezultata može podići svijest o podučavanju i biti korisno u učionicama jezika. Konačno, rad završava postavljajući smjernice za dodatna istraživanja i izlažući ograničenja studije.

Ključne riječi: strategije pisanja, pisanje u engleskom kao stranom jeziku, vičnost u pisanju, uporaba strategija

Contents

1.   Introduction

Nowadays, the importance and popularity of English language are increasing rapidly due to the fact that English is an international and global language. Consequently, there is an increase in people who wish or need to learn English as their second language. Learning a second language means using it for communicational purposes in order to understand designated interlocutors. In that sense, learners of a second language must make a good use of four language related skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Undoubtedly, each of the four skills mentioned holds an important place in SLA. But interestingly, in the mere beginnings of the studies conducted on EFL teaching and acquisition, it was writing that was proved to be a skill often neglected and overlooked. The reason behind this is that writing was largely considered to be a supportive skill which serves only to aid other facets of language learning such as grammar acquisition (Homstad and Thorson, 1994). As the interest in the role of writing in ESL teaching and SLA has substantially increased over the last decade, so has the attention it received. Despite being a relatively new field, research on writing in SLA now recognizes writing as an important skill and a stepping stone to language proficiency (ibid.). In the academic context, writing is now viewed as a crucial tool for mastering not only syntax of the target language, but also as a means of development of learners' higher cognitive functions such as problem solving (Warschauer, 2010).

Abas and Abd Aziz (2016) believe that good writing depends on, and is mutually supported by both linguistic competence of L2 learners, as well as their writing skills. To explain how writing calls for skill, Leki (1998) drew parallels between writing and pottery making. He compares the two processes and finds similarities in the fact that they are ever-changing in their nature and in the notion that they require strategic knowledge, time for planning and preparation, as well as consideration and assessment of the final product. From this, it can also be inferred that just like one is not born a potter, one is not born a writer. Namely, writing, just like any other skill, involves procedures that first need to be learnt (Reinking and von der Osten, 2017). Moreover, Miftah (2015) and Myles (2002) agree that ability to write is not something that is acquired naturally and so stress the necessity of writing instruction.

Teaching somebody how to write involves teaching them how to use writing strategies. The positive correlation between strategy instruction and the quality of learner's writing is witnessed by many studies (De Silva, 2015; Ong and Zhang, 2013). By teaching writing strategies, teachers create foundations for upstanding academic achievement and writing success of learners who later use them (Abas and Abd Aziz, 2016; Mu, 2005). In other words, teaching writing strategies has proven to be beneficial since writing strategies are found to be the key factor which separates competent from less competent writers. Among the strategies that help improve the learner's writing ability, Talapngoen and Deerajviset (2017) cite metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective strategies.

Since writing strategies are learnable and teachable, Zhu (2001) stresses that, in order to support their learners' writing processes by using various techniques to teach writing strategies, teachers primarily ought to understand writing difficulties of their learners. Similarly, Homstad and Thorson (1994) realize that without knowing the processes that undergo in ESL writers' minds as they learn to write, changes in teaching practices will be neither visible nor possible. Besides, the whole contemporary approach to teaching writing known as "process writing", under which writing strategies assumed their greater importance, advocates the idea of throwing light on the mental procedures that learners engage in while writing (Peñuelas, 2012). Therefore, it is safe to presume that a more comprehensive look at how learners face a writing task leads to a greater understanding of learners' writing processes. Based on that knowledge, teachers should be able to construct meaningful and relevant lessons on writing strategies.

Present-day studies have indicated that argumentative essay writing creates rhetorical difficulties for ESL learners, because they, among other things, lack the skill to employ efficient writing strategies (Zhu, 2001). Even though writing is a difficult skill to master, it is still an integral and essential part of National Curricula worldwide, Croatia being no exception. Although a plethora of new research has been carried out on writing strategies of ESL learners of foreign countries, little to no understanding of writing behaviours of Croatian students exists. This was the motivation behind the current study, which, correspondingly, aims to investigate and analyse Croatian students' use of writing strategies in ESL essay writing. Moreover, it is the hope of the researcher, that the findings of this study will yield pedagogical implications for writing strategy instruction and Croatian curriculum development.

1.1.   Paper Outline

This paper is divided into seven main chapters. The paper starts with the theoretical background of the present study. The aforementioned part consists of two chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction into the topic of this study, *viz.* writing strategies in EFL essay writing, and gives details regarding the context undertaken within this research. The chapter also outlines the principal objectives of this research, as well as its importance. After this, in chapter 2, writing strategies are defined and classified, as this is the basis for comprehending the analysis. Furthermore, chapter 2 also presents a summary of relevant research in the areas of EFL writing in cohesion with EFL writing strategies.

The analytical part of this paper begins with research questions, aims and hypotheses, discussed in chapter 3, whereas the methodology is explicated in chapter 4. This chapter includes detailed information about participants, research methods and procedures implemented in this research. In chapter 5, the researcher describes the results of this study and submits the data analysis framework. Subsequently, chapter 6 contains discussion of the findings of the two research questions. Here, the researcher deals with the interpretation of the results and their correlation to similar studies. Finally, chapter 7 is a conclusion where answers to research questions are given, recommendations for further research are purposed, and limitations of the current study are disclosed.

2.   Writing Strategies

The following section gives an overview of L2 writing strategies. More specifically, it includes a definition of writing strategies (see Chapter 2.1), the strategy taxonomies (see Chapter 2.2) and a review of the literature in respect to writing strategies within the context of the present research (see Chapter 2.3).

2.1.   Definition of Writing Strategies

The collocation *writing strategies* is comprised of two words, i.e. *writing* and *strategies*, both of which can be inspected and defined separately in attempt to get closer to the term's overall meaning. *Writing* is thus, according to Öz (2006, as cited in Al Asmari, 2013:130.), "the written expression of thoughts, desires, emotions and schemes; and this requires skill rather than knowledge", and *strategy*, as elucidated by Oxford (1990:7), draws roots from the Classic and Byzantine Greek where it meant "generalship or the art of war" and it implied "planning, competition, conscious manipulation, and movement toward a goal". Of course, in the field of SLA and in educational settings, strategies have no connotations with warfare and are instead considered to be tools which help the learners with language acquisition and are under learners' "deliberate control" (Oxford, 2011:12). Hence, when talking about writing strategies, it can be deduced that they are consciously employed tools that aid skillful written expression. Also, the phrase can even be used synonymously with the terms writing techniques, writing procedures and writing behaviours. (Khaldieh, 2000; Zamel, 1983).

Apart from that, several pre-existing definitions of writing strategies emerged in the reviewed literature. For Edward (2005, as cited in Talapngoen and Deerajviset, 2017:51), writing strategies are "set of skills that learners use in process of writing which could help learners overcome their difficult task of writing". Similarly, Flower and Hayes (1980, as cited in Wong, 2005:31) refer to writing strategies as "decisions taken to cope with the problems (both linguistic and rhetorical) posed by writing task as perceived by the writer". Okasha and Hamdi, (2014:675) believe writing strategies to be "ways of controlling writing process to produce well-organized production crystallized by high quality". Nonetheless, the definition of writing strategies best suited for this research is that of Manchon, et al. (2007:231), who say that writing strategies are "any actions employed in the act of producing text", in combination with Torrance et al.'s (2000:181)

perspective on writing strategies which claims them to be sequences "in which a writer engages in planning, composing, revising and other writing related activities". For the needs of present research then, writing strategies are defined as all operations utilized in the act of generating an argumentative essay that occurred during the four distinct stages of writing process – prewriting, drafting, revising and editing.

2.2.   Classification of Writing Strategies

The means of identifying writing strategies are self-report procedures such as questionnaires retrospective interviews, written diaries and journals, and think aloud protocols. Although their reliability is questionable, they presently remain the only way to better understand behaviours and mental processes of the subjects carrying out a writing task (Chamot, 2005). Over the years, these methods were used by many researchers whose goal was to classify and categorize writing strategies. So far, there exists a substantial number of writing strategy taxonomies devised by various experts which makes it difficult to single out just one taxonomy welcomed by everybody (Hsiao and Oxford, 2002).

For example, Sasaki's (2000:269) systematization of writing strategies falls under eight key categories: "planning, retrieving, generating ideas, verbalizing, translating, rereading, evaluating and others". On the other hand, writing strategies purposed by Riazi (1997) are divided into cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies, and quite similarly Wenden's (1991) taxonomic list includes only cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Furthermore, Victori (1995, as cited in Mu, 2005) and Leki (1995, as cited in Abas and Abd Aziz, 2016) found an ample amount of writing strategies and labelled them entirely differently.

Although there are many different classifications of writing strategies, for purposes of developing the coding schema of the current research Mu's taxonomy of writing strategies was adopted due to its simplicity and convenience. Mu (2005:9) distinguishes between five broader categories of writing strategies and those are: "rhetorical, metacognitive, cognitive, communicative and social/affective writing strategies". Because during the analysis of the research results several sub-strategies that are non-existent in Mu's systematization occurred, this researcher introduced yet another group of writing strategies and entitled it *others*.

Chien (2007) explains that the word *rhetoric* denotes elements of organization and modes of writer's thinking in written discourse. By the same token, Mu and Carrington (2007:2) state that rhetorical strategies can best be defined as "strategies that writers use to organise and to present their ideas in writing conventions acceptable to native speakers of that language". The authors mention organizing ideas, use of L1, comparing, rationalising format and modelling to be the types of rhetorical strategies. During the analysis of the research results, this researcher also detected code-switching strategy and placed it in the group of rhetorical strategies.

Metacognitive strategies are the ones "writers use to control the writing process consciously" (Mu and Carrington 2007:2). Oxford (1990:136) argues that the word *metacognitive* alludes to "something beyond the cognitive" and believes metacognitive strategies to be one of the most vital groups of strategies because they serve as a compass to learners by directing their focus on what is important. Metacognitive strategies include higher-order executive mental operations like planning, evaluating and monitoring and contribute to independency and autonomy in EFL writing (Goctu, 2017).

Cognitive strategies belong to those "that writers use to implement the actual writing actions" and entail actions such as generating ideas, summarizing, revising, retrieval, clarification, elaborating and rehearsing (Mu and Carrington, 2007:2). This category of strategies helps the writer to successfully cope with the obstacles they encounter as they write (Wenden, 1991). Cook (2008) points out that cognitive strategies work in conjunction with metacognitive strategies but differ from them in that they include actual writing actions, whereas metacognitive strategies are used to monitor and direct writing.

Communicative strategies refer to the ones "writers use to express ideas in a more effective way" (Mu, 2005:5). This macro-category of writing strategies has roots in theory which sees writing as always aimed at audience, thus insinuating a certain kind of communication (Reinking and von der Osten, 2017; Leki, 1998). On that account, with the help of these strategies, the formerly mentioned communication is further continued instead of abandoned (Williams and Burden 1997, as cited in Zirdum, 2018). Under communicative strategies reduction, avoidance and sense of readers are listed.

Finally, social/affective strategies are tools "that writers use to interact with others to clarify some questions and to regulate emotions, motivation, and attitudes in the writing" (Mu and Carrington,

2007:2) They encompass a broad range of activities, some of which involve interacting with other people to reinforce the task performance, e.g. cooperating and getting feedback, some of which imply usage of external reference sources of information, e.g. resourcing, and some of which have to do with gaining affective control, e.g. resting.

2.3.   Related Research on Writing Strategies

To examine writing strategies of EFL learners, a line of research was initiated. Empirical studies related to the present research have so far dealt with identifying ESL learners' writing strategies and determining a connection they have with academic success.

With respect to identifying EFL students' writing strategies, several studies were undertaken. For instance, in an investigation of EFL writing strategies of three postgraduate Chinese students, Mu and Carrington (2007) discovered that all of their research participants used the overall writing strategies, i.e. rhetorical, cognitive, metacognitive and social/affective strategies, in their writing practice. Likewise, Sasaki (2000: 269) found dozens of writing strategies when he handled the research on Japanese ESL learners. The identified strategies in his study involve "planning, retrieving, generating ideas, verbalizing, translating, rereading, evaluating, resting, questioning, and impossible to categorize". Al-Zankawi (2018) further explored writing strategies of undergraduate students of Kuwaiti origin. Among the seven researched strategies, i.e." planning, reading, revising, evaluating, editing, re-reading, and use of L1", Al-Zankawi (2018:153) evidenced that the two most frequently utilized strategies by students were reading and planning. The research of Baker and Boonkit (2004) revolved around metacognitive, cognitive, compensation, memory, social, affective and negative strategies and was performed on undergraduate Thai ESL learners. The results showed that cognitive, metacognitive and compensation strategies were utilized more than the remaining four. For purposes of identifying writing strategies of Chinese senior high school learners, Liu (2015) reached for Chamot and O'Malley's framework of writing strategies. Interestingly, his findings revealed socially connotative strategy, i.e. consulting others with the difficulties in writing, as the most commonly used one.

When discussing the interrelationship of writing strategies and writing achievement, a vein of research on writing strategies of EFL students agreed on positive relationship between one's writing proficiency and the use of writing strategies (Kasper, 1997; Al Asmari, 2013; Graham and

Perin, 2007; Talapngoen and Deerajviset, 2017). Weather this positive correlation is grounded in frequency and number of writing strategies writers use, still remains unclear since findings related to this issue suggest a mixed result. On the one hand, Liu (2015) noticed that high-achievers tended to employ writing strategies more often than the low-achieving students. Similarly, Raoofi et al. (2017) examined the link between writing strategy usage and writing success of undergraduate ESL learners and revealed that proficient writers demonstrated a higher quantity of strategy use in comparison to less proficient writers. Moreover, Abdullah (2009) asserts that one of the distinctions between strong and weak EFL writers can be perceived in the total of strategies they utilize and bases that conclusion on the results of his research administered on four undergraduate Malay ESL students. On the other hand, in her study on EFL writing strategies of Thai high school students, Nopmanotham (2016) failed to observe any significant difference in the incidence of use of writing strategies between high and low English ability groups. Also, contrary to findings of Liu (2015), Raoofi et al. (2017) and Abdullah (2009), Sang-Hee (2002), in his study conducted on graduate EFL students with diverse ethnical backgrounds, found that there were no evident differences between skilled and less skilled writers regarding the amount of writing strategies they employed.

Impelled by the observation that writing strategies are a crucial predicator that separates high-achieving from low-achieving writers, particular studies aimed at contrasting the two groups regarding the way they use writing strategies. They were hoping that, by concentrating on quality as oppose to quantity of the strategies being used by good and weak writers, patterns necessary to explain the difference in strategy usage between the two types of writers would emerge. Therefore, Raimes (1985) scrutinized writing processes of unskilled ESL learners belonging to four language groups: Chinese, Greek, Spanish and Burmese. The researcher concluded that, even though research subjects used all of the examined strategies, they rarely lingered when using strategies related to planning and revising. This underscores Zamel's (1983) research findings conducted among Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew and Persian EFL learners. Namely, Zamel (1983) too found that unskilled students, unlike the skilled ones, devoted less time and attention to writing strategies like generating ideas and revising. Even so, Victori (1999) argues that, no matter what type of writing strategy is in question, the most important feature that splits the students into the groups of bad and good writers is the degree of awareness to which learners are using certain strategies. That is to say, Victori (1999) believes that effective writers use writing strategies consciously and intentionally and the researcher reached this conclusion upon studying writing behaviours of undergraduate students enrolled in EFL classes in Barcelona. Another difference

between strong and weak EFL writers was observed by Sang-Hee (2002). His research uncovered that low-achieving writers used the strategy of translation from L1 to L2 far more frequently than their counterparts. Finally, Kasper (1997) conducted a research on writing behaviours of ESL learners of different national backgrounds and realized that good writers amongst them understood that the main objective of writing is communication, whereas the weak writers thought the point of writing to be grammatical accuracy.

3.   Aims, Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study is considered as an investigatory one. Its primary tenet was to identify writing strategies EFL writers employed in their essays and to compare skilled and less skilled EFL writers in their use of writing strategies in order to further the understanding of writing behaviours of Croatian EFL students.

Correspondingly, the main two research questions of concern were:

・ What writing strategies are used by EFL writers?

・ What is the difference between skilled and less skilled EFL writers in their use of writing strategies?

In the light of these questions, it was hypothesized that EFL writers use all types of writing strategies when approaching a writing task. The hypothesis is made based on the prior research findings and thus also assumes that skilled EFL writers tend to use a vaster number of different strategies and that they do so more frequently and efficiently than the less skilled writers.

4. Methodology

In the section hereunder, the research design is described. The section therefore gives information about research subjects (see Chapter 4.1), research methods (see Chapter 4.2) and procedures involving data collection and analysis (see Chapter 4.3).

4.1. Participants

The study participants comprised eight undergraduate students at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia. Their native tongue is Croatian and their major is English combined with one of the many study programmes offered by the university. The students ranged in age from nineteen to twenty and their English proficiency level was approximately upper-intermediate. Four of the students had lower, and four higher proficiency in writing. The writing proficiency of the students was assessed via a writing test made out of an argumentative essay, which was graded by several teachers using the same criteria. All the students voluntarily participated in the research and signed consent forms. The more detailed information concerning these students are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Baseline Information on the Participants

Name	Age	Sex	English Level	Year of Study	Major	Writing Proficiency
Participant 1	19	female	B2	1st year undergraduate	English - Croatian	higher
Participant 2	19	male	B2	1st year undergraduate	English - Croatian	lower
Participant 3	19	female	B2	1st year undergraduate	English - Croatian	lower
Participant 4	19	female	B2	1st year undergraduate	English - Croatian	lower
Participant 5	19	female	B2	1st year undergraduate	English - Croatian	higher
Participant 6	19	female	B2	1st year undergraduate	English - Hungarian	lower
Participant 7	20	female	B2	2nd year undergraduate	English - Philosophy	higher
Participant 8	20	female	B2	2nd year undergraduate	English - History	higher

4.2. Instruments

As for the research method, the researcher chose triangulation, involving a think aloud protocol, semi-structured interview and document analysis. This mixed method approach was selected because it "can broaden the scope of the investigation and enrich the researcher's ability to draw conclusions" (Dornyei, 2007:186). The main source of data was concurrent think aloud protocol as it yielded the best access to the thinking processes in student writers' minds and allowed the researcher to observe strategies students use while writing an essay. After all, think aloud method is claimed to have "a sound theoretical basis" since it can equip the researcher with "a valid source of data about participant thinking, especially during language based activities" (Charters, 2003:68). At the end of the think aloud sessions, semi-structured interviews were also used. Mohite (2014) explains that interviews "provide an insight into past experiences, perceptions and feelings of interviewees" and that they "allow the researcher to establish the reasons for interviewees' behaviours and mental processes". For the same reason, interviews containing thirty five questions (see Appendix 1) were undertaken in this study to expand the data collected via think aloud method, to test the validity of the think aloud method and to dispose the researcher of any kind of confusions and ambiguities regarding participants' strategy use. In addition to previously stated, Table 2 contains a complementing summary of data collected from the eight participants.

Table 2. Summary of Data Collected from the Eight Participants

	Think aloud protocol	**Semi-structured interview**	**Documents**	**Length of observation**
Participant 1	1 transcript with 40.095 characters	1 transcript with 34.409 characters	1 outline, 1 final paper (368 words)	108.09 min
Participant 2	1 transcript with 40.095 characters	1 transcript with 26.374 characters	1 outline, 1 final paper (368 words)	102 min
Participant 3	1 transcript with 18.494 characters	1 transcript with 22.421 characters	1 outline, 1 final paper (326 words)	60.41 min
Participant 4	1 transcript with 18.494 characters	1 transcript with 22.065 characters	1 outline, 1 final paper (326 words)	58.72 min
Participant 5	1 transcript with 25.799 characters	1 transcript with 29.493 characters	1 outline, 1 final paper (370 words)	67.56 min
Participant 6	1 transcript with 25.799 characters	1 transcript with 28.587 characters	1 outline, 1 final paper (370 words)	71.44 min

Participant 7	1 transcript with 16.735 characters	1 transcript with 25.789 characters	1 outline, 1 final paper (362 words)	74.76 min
Participant 8	1 transcript with 16.735 characters	1 transcript with 21.943 characters	1 outline, 1 final paper (362 words)	71.45 min

4.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia in March 2020[1]. Initially, the subjects of this study were scheduled for writing sessions in a setting that facilitates thinking aloud. They were given directives to write an argumentative essay on the topic of online shopping and to verbally express their thoughts in Croatian while performing the given task. The sessions were audiotaped and then transcribed by language professionals. Shortly after, the participants met with the researcher's supervisor and were made aware of the purposes and details of the recurrent interview. The subjects were also told that the interviews were voluntary and that their answers would be kept confidential. All interviews were conducted in the Croatian language, taped, later fully transcribed and saved by computer.

The gathered content was subsequently subjected to analysis. In consonance with qualitative and descriptive research, analytic induction was used to analyse the data (Denzin, 1970; Katz, 2001). In this approach the researcher returned perpetually to transcripts and documented essays to re-read and re-examine the data in search of salient or iterative themes relevant to this study. In order to detect writing strategies used by student writers an elaborate coding scheme (see Appendix 2) was developed as well. At one point, the research provides some quantitative data so the coded strategies were manually counted. For the purposes of displaying the results in the section that is to come, the researcher translated all the quotes from student interview responses into English as the last step of this research procedure.

5.   Results

The analysis of participants' writing strategies yielded the results of this study. In this section they will be presented in terms of the first (see Chapter 5.1) and second (see Chapter 5.2) research question.

5.1.   The First Research Question

The first research question was seeking to find writing strategies EFL students use when approaching writing. The data analysis allowed identifying these strategies and classifying them following Mu's (2005) taxonomy of writing strategies. A desire to check what writing strategies student writers used rendered the results of the first research question. The findings demonstrate that the detected writing strategies belong to the groups of rhetorical, metacognitive, cognitive, communicative, social/affective and other strategies which are visible in Table 3. It can be observed from Table 3 that students used a variety of different types of writing strategies during the completion of their essays.

Table 3. Main Writing Strategies Identified

Rhetorical	Metacognitive	Cognitive	Communicative	Social / Affective	Others
Organizing ideas Use of L1 Code-switching Formatting /Modelling Comparing	Planning Evaluating Monitoring	Generating ideas Summarizing Revising Retrieval Clarification Elaborating Rehearsing	Avoidance Reduction Sense of readers	Resourcing Cooperating Getting feedback Resting	Accommodating teacher's demands Using current or past ESL writing training Risk-taking

Table 4 shows writing strategies which were the most popular among participants. It turned out that all students used the strategies of organising ideas, formatting/modelling, planning, evaluating, generating ideas, revising, resourcing and using current or past ESL writing training. Oppositely, writing strategies such as sense of readers, comparing, resting, cooperating and accommodating teacher's demands were utilized by less than a half of subjects. In general, the domains of metacognitive and cognitive strategies proved to be the most prominently employed

ones, whereas sub-strategies belonging to the groups of communicative and social/affective strategies were the least favoured by students.

Table 4. Writing Strategies per Participant

Writing strategies	Sub-strategies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Rhetorical	Organizing ideas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
	Use of L1		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		5
	Code-switching	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	5
	Formatting/Modelling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
	Comparing		✓					✓	✓	3
Meta-cognitive	Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
	Evaluating	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
	Monitoring	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Cognitive	Generating ideas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
	Summarizing	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
	Revising	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
	Retrieval	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
	Clarification	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	7
	Elaborating	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	7
	Rehearsing	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Communicative	Avoidance	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
	Reduction	✓	✓		✓		✓			4
	Sense of readers							✓	✓	2
Social/Affective	Resourcing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
	Cooperating		✓		✓			✓		3
	Getting feedback	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	6
	Resting	✓	✓						✓	3
Others	Accommodating teacher's demands					✓		✓	✓	3
	Using current or past ESL writing training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
	Risk-taking			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	5

A more comprehensive analysis can be done by looking at the Table 5 which summarizes fragments of students' thoughts as they elaborate on techniques they used while writing an essay. These fragments contain extracts from semi-structured interviews and reveal the use of different sub-categories of writing strategies.

Table 5. Writing Strategies: Participants' Fragments

Writing strategies	Sub-strategies	Fragments
Rhetorical	Organizing ideas	"well, I mostly [organize] as it should go, introduction, main part, positive, negative"
	Use of L1	"then we would sometimes have to stop and translate into Croatian first"
	Code-switching	"it is much easier for me to write in English because I structure sentences in English in my head even when I'm writing in Croatian"
	Formatting / Modelling	"I think generally about how, let's say, margins, font should look like"
	Comparing	"well, I do [think about the difference in approach to writing in Croatian and English]"
Metacognitive	Planning	"we talked about how we would do it, if we were going to use a concept or not"
	Evaluating	"I started writing something else, and as I write something else, I leave both parts, and then think again about the first one"
	Monitoring	"I try avoiding repetition, if I, for example, used *one of them*, *second* in the first paragraph, then in the second one I use *first of all* or *another thing is that*"

Cognitive	Generating ideas	"then we started writing a concept, just to write down some ideas what to write about"
	Summarizing	"once I'm done, I like to read [the text] to see how it all adds up and how it sounds altogether"
	Revising	"we changed one sentence maybe, changed a few conjunctions"
	Retrieval	"I remember the next first [word] that has a similar meaning"
	Clarification	"at the end I like to read the instruction once again to see if I've maybe missed some guideline"
	Elaborating	"if something has additionally crossed my mind, then I include it into text somehow"
	Rehearsing	"I try using some paraphrase or something to explain that what I had in mind"
Communicative	Avoidance	"well, If it's not urgent, then I leave [writing] for the time being"
	Reduction	"because we weren't sure, and we wanted to go further, not to linger too much on that so we gave up from that idea then"
	Sense of readers	"[I think about] the fact of how readable that essay would be"
Social/Affective	Resourcing	"if we have a certain literature, then I like going through it first"
	Cooperating	"my colleague and I usually work in pair "
	Getting feedback	"*name* and I always send each other our compositions when we finish them, and then we purely help each other constructively or check if we have any grammatical errors"
	Resting	"well, if it's not urgent then I leave it for some other time"
Others	Accommodating teacher's demands	"the professor gave us MLA structure at the beginning and told us how to work, so I followed the instructions"
	Using current or past ESL writing training	"today we have [split the main part into paragraphs] because in high school they really insisted on this"
	Risk-taking	"I even do sometimes [apply grammatical structure whose accuracy I'm not sure of], I mean, I bluff"

5.2. The Second Research Question

The second research question was designed to investigate the potential differences between skilled and less skilled EFL writers based on their strategy use. For these purposes, writing strategies of students who scored higher in essay writing were compared to writing strategies of students whose

essay grades were lower. The further analysis of the data collected revealed that skilled writers used a slightly bigger amount of writing strategies than the less skilled writers did. However, a brief glance at the total numbers of writing strategies of skilled and less skilled writers shows that they do not differ in value a lot. This manifests itself in the Table 6 below.

Table 6. Number of Writing Strategies Used by Skilled and Less Skilled L2 Writers

	Skilled writers				Less skilled writers			
	P1	P5	P7	P8	P2	P3	P4	P6
Total number of strategies per participant	19	19	21	22	17	17	19	18

Table 7 shows differences between higher and lower achieving writers in their macro-strategy usage and once again attests to the fact that the difference between the two groups, although noticeable, is not major.

Table 7. Macro-strategies Used by Skilled and Less Skilled L2 Writers

	Rhetorical	Meta-cognitive	Cognitive	Communicative	Social / Affective	Others
Skilled writers	15	12	27	7	10	10
Less skilled writers	14	11	24	6	10	6

For further in-depth details regarding the differences between skilled and less skilled writers, the participants' answers from semi-structured interviews were more thoroughly scrutinized. Thereby, the researcher aspired to find and shed light on strong and weak points of students' approach to strategy usage. The analysis revealed that the most prominent difference between the two groups of writers resides in the frequency and/or manner in which participants employed certain sub-strategies, i.e. use of L1, code-switching, planning, evaluating, generating ideas, revising, sense of readers, accommodating teacher's demands, reduction and risk-taking. In the following paragraphs, these findings will be summarized and exemplified respectively.

<u>Use of L1 vs. Code-switching</u>

From the interview data, the researcher discovered that less skilled writers reported on using use of L1 strategy, which refers to translating the generated idea either from or into L1. Notwithstanding, skilled writers were more prone to utilizing code-switching strategy, which points to alternating between two languages. In other words, when asked in which language they generate ideas, the majority of less skilled learners claimed to rely on their mother tongue for translating and back-translating (see Example 1). Skilled student writers, contrariwise, stated that they thought in English during the writing process and all but one denied using Croatian (see Example 2).

Example 1. P2: "I sometimes [generate ideas] in English and then translate them to Croatian, and sometimes I [generate ideas] in Croatian and then translate them to English" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 2, translated by the researcher)

Example 2. P1: "I don't think [that I generate ideas in my mother tongue and then translate them to English] (…) if I write in English then it's like some *switch* happens and then I'm all in English" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 1, translated by the researcher)

<u>Planning</u>

In this study, the strategy of planning has to do with developing a mental plan to achieve the aim of the paper. In respect to this strategy, the differences between the lower and higher achieving writers occurred in duration of execution of planning and in concern with global planning. More specifically, lower achieving writers generally spent less time in planning and were less focused on detailed planning (see Example 3), whereas higher achieving writers mostly devoted a longer period of time to planning and were oriented towards creating a detailed plan (see Example 4).

Example 3. P4: "[I start writing] immediately on computer (…) [I think] in general [about the topic] (…) I mostly just single out the most important things and I don't try hard" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 4, translated by the researcher)

Example 4. P7: "I plan a few days and think about what I'm going to write (…) I first start with details and then, er, they somehow form a global theme" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 7, translated by the researcher)

<u>Evaluating</u>

The evaluating strategy includes a reconsideration of written text and goals, as well as the assessment of one's own L2 writing proficiency. The students with lower writing proficiency and the students with higher writing proficiency differed in their use of this strategy too. The former tended to evaluate only the small segments of the generated text, like vocabulary and sentence structures (see Example 5), and the latter evaluated the text in general but also by keeping an eye on parts. Moreover, when prompted to estimate one's own L2 writing proficiency, less skilled writers seemed to know that they are lacking in writing competence just like the skilled writers recognized they exceed the average when it comes to their writing capabilities.

Example 5. P3: "I write one sentence and then I, maybe, read it once again (…) I try not to, let's say, repeat [linking words]" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 3, translated by the researcher)

Example 6. P5: "[I go back] to the previously written sentence to see if it all fits somehow" (…) I like to read [the whole passage] to see if it builds on another, how it sounds overall (…) sometimes it happens that something I wrote in the main part would perhaps better fit into the conclusion" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 5, translated by the researcher)

<u>Generating ideas</u>

The next sub-strategy which the two groups of students employed divergently is generating ideas. Generating ideas can be represented by acts of selecting ideas, hypothesising, defining terms, outlining, repeating, summarising, lead-in, inferencing, etc. Amongst these actions, lower and higher achieving writers displayed the least resemblance when it comes to outlining. Namely, a half of the lower achieving writers admitted not to have a habit of outlining at all and the remaining half's outlining was far less detailed and sophisticated (see Example 7) in comparison to higher achieving writers' outlining (see Example 8).

Example 7. P3: "[my outline includes], well, let's say, short notes, here are just short notes, and somewhere there is almost a sentence" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 3, translated by the researcher)

Example 8. P5: "[I include] essay structure [in my outline] (…) there are mostly short notes (…) I write [key words and sentences] (…) I draw and write some kind of marks because

that way is a lot easier for me" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 5, translated by the researcher)

<u>Revising</u>

Revising strategy is that pertaining to making changes in both outline and written text. The analysis of this strategy exposed the fact that less skilled student writers, who drafted outlines prior to writing, rarely modified them during writing (see Example 9). On the other hand, skilled writers claimed their outlines to be constantly susceptible to change (see Example 10).

Example 9. P2: "I never [change the outline in terms of extending and shortening during the writing process]" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 2, translated by the researcher)

Example 10. P8: "yes I do [change the outline in terms of extending, shortening, reorganizing elements] as I write individually" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 8, translated by the researcher)

Furthermore, when talking about changes done to the text itself, everybody belonging to the group of less skilled writers seemed more concerned with error correction and alterations related to structure (see Example 11), while the majority of skilled writers concentrated themselves on revision of the content (see Example 12).

Example 11. P4: It seems to me that we, uh, made one mistake during writing, that I capitalized *online shopping*, that's what I just, yeah, [corrected]" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 4, translated by the researcher)

Example 12. P8: If I put some argument in the wrong paragraph, and then I realise that it maybe fits better into some other part of the text, [then I do corrections]" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 8, translated by the researcher)

<u>Sense of readers</u>

Another writing strategy in the use of which dissimilarities between the skilled and less skilled writers were spotted is sense of readers. The strategy, referring to anticipation of reader's response, was used two times by skilled writers who took into consideration how readers might react to their written piece (see Example 15). In comparison, there was no mention of usage of this strategy in less skilled participants' transcripts.

Example 15. P7: "I've replaced it [an argument] with something people can identify more with?" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 7, translated by the researcher)

Accommodating teacher's demands

Similarly to the writing strategy sense of readers, the strategy called accommodating teacher's demands appeared to be characteristic only for students with higher writing proficiency. This writing strategy is related to meeting the teacher's requirement when approaching a writing task. Hence, in their interviews, three learners with higher proficiency in writing brought up the role of the professor (see Example 16).

Example 16. P7: "the professor wants from us [to keep the text short], to keep only, uh, the essential, so I often do it" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 7, translated by the researcher)

Reduction vs. Risk-taking

Reduction strategy pertains to giving up some difficulties while writing and risk-taking strategy can be defined as willingness to experiment with something new, different or less familiar. By cross-referencing the data from the interview, the researcher noticed that less skilled writers use the reduction strategy where skilled writers utilize risk-taking strategy. One skilled and one less skilled writer are an exception to this claim. In other words, when inquired whether they would use a structure in writing whose accuracy they are not entirely sure about, some less skilled student writers said they would not (see Example 17) and several skilled writers said they would (see Example 18).

Example 17. P2: "no, I will not [apply a grammatical structure if I'm not 100% sure in its accuracy], I [play it safe]" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 2, translated by the researcher)

Example 18. P1: "I sometimes do [use complex grammatical structures even though I'm not sure in their accuracy], I [bluff]" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 1, translated by the researcher)

Overall strategy use

At last, when observing the overall strategy use of skilled and less skilled writers, there is evidence that implies that skilled writers, unlike their counterparts, utilized their writing strategies more

consciously, showing a higher level of self-awareness. More explicitly, less skilled writers generally reported on their strategy use with a dose of confusion and uncertainty and their strategy use sounded to be intuitive and incomplete (see Example 19). In opposition to this, skilled writers were apt to verbalize their strategy use thoroughly (see Example 20).

Example 19. P4: "I get stuck in a lot of places (…) I don't know [how I string sentences], I write whatever comes to mind" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 2, translated by the researcher)

Example 20. P8: "I do [read every written sentence once again during writing, because of the sequence of thoughts] (…) I [string sentences], er, so that they're, uh, of course, logical, so that they make sense, but also I try sometimes [stringing them] stylistically, let's say, with alliteration or something like that" (An extract from the semi-structured interview with participant 2, translated by the researcher)

6.   Discussion

The results of this study will be discussed in the upcoming sections. For clarity and convenience they will be organized around the first (see Chapter 6.1) and second (see Chapter 6.2) research hypothesis.

6.1.   First Research Hypothesis

The first hypothesis stated that EFL writers use all types of writing strategies when approaching a writing task. The results of this research indicate that all eight participants were resourceful learners. In the face of a writing task, they used a wide range and a considerably high amount of writing strategies, which can be categorized into rhetorical, cognitive, metacognitive, communicative, social/affective and other strategies. The reason why subjects demonstrated such high and diverse use of writing strategies might be that these subjects are EFL university students who have consequently already come across some writing techniques in their tertiary education. Since university context often exposes them to EFL writing which, to some degree, dictates their academic accomplishments, it is presumable that it was inevitable for these students to allocate certain attention to ways and procedures for bettering their writing abilities. Regardless of this speculation, the findings obtained from the present study coincide with other studies including those of Al-Mashour (2003), Al-Zankawi (2018), Baker and Boonkit (2004), Lee et al. (2015), Mu and Carrington (2007), Nopmanotham (2016), Sasaki (2000), Raoofi et al. (2017), Zhu (2001), since their research also proved that students, when performing writing tasks, mostly employ various kinds of writing strategies quantitatively at a moderate to high level. Accordingly, the first research hypothesis is confirmed.

Consistent with earlier findings (Baker and Boonkit, 2004; Peacock, 2001), the investigation of writing strategies in the current study also revealed that metacognitive strategies, considered by Victori (1995, as cited in Mu and Carrington, 2007) to be higher-order executive skills mastered by adults, were the most frequently employed macro category of strategies. By way of Wenden's (1991:315) explanation that metacognitive strategies are "directly responsible for the execution of a writing task", it is not surprising that this group of strategies was found to be the most prominently employed one. Moreover, when talking about predominance of strategies utilized by the subjects of the present study, the results allege that metacognitive strategies were followed by

the group of cognitive strategies. More specifically, students took advantage of metacognitive strategies such as planning and evaluating and employed them recursively in combination with cognitive strategies of generating ideas and revising to attain their writing goals. This might be accredited to the notion that metacognitive and cognitive strategies are not independent from one another (Cook, 2008). Furthermore, the students' high occupation with planning echoes the findings of Al-Zankawi (2018), in whose research of EFL writing strategies, planning was established to be the second most used strategy. The possible explanation why planning ranks so high when student's writing strategies are being scrutinized could be that "all people have to think before writing when they are given a topic by the teacher. It is impossible for them to write without thinking about the main ideas. As a matter of fact, thinking itself is planning" (Mu and Carrington, 2007:7).

Ellis (1985) argues that students may use fewer communicative strategies in academic settings especially if the emphasis is on accuracy of language production, rather than on fluency. This may be the reason why participants in the current study utilized the group of communicative writing strategies the least. Also, these results somewhat parallel the findings of Lee et al. (2015). The frequency of social/affective strategy use was similarly not high. These patterns are in line with findings of Baker and Boonkit (2004) and Raoofi et al. (2017) but are slightly inconsistent with the research done by Liu (2015). Namely, unlike the subjects of the present research who seldom used cooperating strategy, Liu's (2015) participants reported that they loved working in pairs. Nonetheless, the lower use of social strategies attributed to the current study may be explained with reference to multiple factors. First, it may be that social strategies are utilized to support other types of strategies and so students are less mindful of them (Baker and Boonkit, 2004). Second, based on cultural values of learners' society, language learners may favour strategies that allow them to complete the task individually rather than social strategies that necessitate collaboration with other people (Chamot, 2005). Third, judging by findings of Liyanage and Bartlett (2013), personality features like extroversion and introversion may cause use or non-use of the social strategies. Furthermore, disinclination to use affective strategies may also stem from different reasons. For example, in this study, resting strategy was noted to be one of the least employed sub-strategies but the logic behind this could be that resting may simply not be an option if there is limited time to produce a piece of text.

6.2.   Second Research Hypothesis

The second research hypothesis postulated that skilled EFL writers are more likely to use a higher number of strategies and that they do so more frequently and efficiently than the less skilled writers. The first part of that hypothesis, regarding the amount of strategies used by skilled and less skilled writers is refuted. In other words, the inconclusive results of the current study failed to evidence a major distinction between writers of higher and lower proficiency in the quantity of strategies they used, and are thus in accordance with Nopmanotham (2016) and Sang-Hee's (2002) research, though in contrast to findings of Liu (2015) and Peñuelas (2012). Even so, the fact that this study could not find a more compelling difference in strategy totals between the two groups of student writers might be due to the small sample of participants on which the research has been conducted. However, differences associated with frequency and effectiveness of strategy use of skilled and less skilled student writers were managed to be found in the present study. Combined with findings of previously existing studies (Kasper, 1997; Raimes, 1985; Victori, 1999; Zamel, 1983) the findings of this research revealed that learners with higher writing proficiency use writing strategies more effectively, and at times more recurrently than those with lower proficiency. Hence, the second part of the above written hypothesis is retained.

When thoroughly inspected, the differences between the skilled and less skilled EFL writers observed in this study suggest that skilled writers often reached for the use of L1 strategy, whereas less skilled writers were more prone to code-switching. The results concur with Sang-Hee's (2002) findings. Adhering to Sadi and Othman's (2012) claim that translating is a trait of less skilled writers, this is understandable. Even Matsumoto (1995) argues that highly professional EFL writers do not use translation and that less proficient writers use L1 more often. In this regard, it can be inferred that skilled writers had no need for their mother tongue because they are adept enough at thinking and writing in English.

Cumming (1989) states that one of the characteristics of good writers emerges from the fact that they are primarily concerned with meticulous planning and idea gathering and Sadi and Othman (2012) add that good writers tend to spend more time on planning. Moreover, Karimi's (2016:216) research vouches that "outline strategies are associated with improved quality of writing". All of these theories verify the results of the current research, since the participants skilled at writing were found to devote more time and attention to detail when executing planning strategy, just like

they were more inclined to use elaborate outlining when generating ideas. The same could not be said for participants less skilled at writing and so this research result repeats those of Raimes (1985), Victori (1999) and Zamel (1983).

The findings further showed that students with lower writing proficiency, contrary to those with higher proficiency in writing, used evaluating strategy to assess small chunks of text, like sentences. Correspondingly, they made a poor use of revising strategy which served them only for purposes of error correction and was not utilized with intend to make changes to originally made outlines. This adds on to the existing literature which noticed that less skilled writers, when evaluating and revising their texts, usually pay attention solely to mechanics by making surface level changes instead of evaluating whether their writing is clearer, more purposeful and more interesting to the reader (Arndt, 1987; Raimes, 1985). Additionally, Sommers (1980) noted that less skilled writers do not revise and change outlines flexibly and that their outlines are rather fixed. The possible explanation for these illustrated behaviours could be that less skilled student writers apparently lack understanding of what revision involves. Matsumoto (1995) stresses that revision is not just error correction; it also involves meaning-changing activities.

The results of the present study evidenced that higher achieving student writers occupied themselves with writing strategies such as sense of readers and accommodating teacher's demands more times than lower achieving student writers did. This might imply that proficient writers' cognitive activities while writing are broader, as they are more aware of writing being interactional activity between the writer and the reader, and of different expectations teachers have of their writing. These findings are backed up by the study of Johns (1993, as cited in Homstad and Thorson, 1994:18) who endorses that successful writers "negotiate the relationship between their own purposes and the interest and values of real audiences".

Through further analysis it was found that skilled writers often utilized risk taking strategy. This is in agreement with Oxford's (1990) view of this strategy which suggests that more successful learners push themselves to take risks so that they could profit from them. Oppositely, unskilled students, for the most part, did not feel the need to employ risk taking strategy but were far more frequent users of reduction strategy than the skilled student writers were. Lewis (2011:48) offers a possible clarification to why this is so. Namely, she says that reduction strategies tend to be employed by writers "who are anxious about making mistakes, who value accuracy over fluency or who are reluctant to take risks with the language".

Finally, students with higher writing proficiency were proved by this study to possess greater self-awareness and consciousness when it comes to their writing strategy use in comparison to the learners with lower proficiency in writing. These results were affirmed by Sang-Hee (2002) and Victori (1999), who too discovered that effective EFL learners show clearer knowledge and better awareness of strategies they employ and writing problems they encounter. Other research indicates that more skilled writers know why they use certain writing strategies (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) and that they mould their strategies to adapt them both to the writing task and to their own personal preferences (Wenden, 1991).

7.   Conclusion

This paper contributed to studies on writing strategies of EFL learners. The current research was intended to explore and establish what writing strategies are used by Croatian EFL students as they write an argumentative essay and to seek for differences in strategy use between skilled and less skilled EFL writers. The topic was of interest to the researcher due to the fact that in the Croatian context not enough similar research has been undertaken.

According to the findings of this study, participants used different writing strategies classified as rhetorical strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, communicative social/affective strategies and other strategies belonging to none of the itemized groups. As the analysed data unfolded, the results have also demonstrated that difference between skilled and less skilled EFL writers lay in the efficiency of the strategies employed but not so much in the amount of writing strategies utilized by both groups. That is, skilled writers seemed to use writing strategies more consciously, they made a better use of them and they attributed more time and attention to them compared to the less skilled writers, albeit both groups utilized approximately the same number of writing strategies during the writing process.

As a final thought and with regard to results of this study and their implications for teaching practices, it can be said that success in EFL argumentative writing largely depends on the effective use of appropriate writing strategies. Thus, understanding how EFL students face essay writing is crucial for EFL teaching. Teachers are urged to detect factors that hinder success of less skilled student writers, to raise learners' awareness about EFL writing and to teach students writing strategies along with the effective ways of employing them in order to help them enhance their essay writing achievements. To conclude, although some findings of this study did overlap with the previous research findings of, for purposes of gaining even better insights into EFL learners' use of writing strategies, further research is definitely recommended.

7.1.   Recommendations for Further Research

On the basis of the findings of the present study, it is the opinion of the researcher that there exists an extensive scope for further research in this particular area of SLA. Therefore, several suggestions for imminent research will be expressed in this chapter.

Primarily, since the current study focused only on first-year and second-year undergraduate EFL students, future research could cover analysis of writing strategies used by other demographics of EFL learners. Besides, forthcoming studies could explore students' writings in other contexts, that is to say, beyond argumentative writings. Another recommendation stemming from the present study is to investigate whether the differences between high achieving student writers and students with low proficiency in writing would become more transparent after training on the use of writing strategies. In respect to this, it would also be interesting to look into how the think aloud protocol can be used as an instruction tool that impels the learner to take part in higher order thinking processes. Lastly, more research related to students' attitudes towards writing and their link to writing strategy use is needed.

7.2.   Limitations of the Study

During the current study it was endeavoured to analyse the collected data validly and objectively. However, just like in all studies, there were several limitations to the present research which are worth summarizing here and which should be cautiously taken into account when interpreting the results.

Firstly, although necessary for a qualitative analysis, the sample size of participants was very small and, in addition to that, it was homogenous as it consisted of only first-year and second-year EFL students. This might have affected the reliability and representativeness of the results. Secondly, instruments in this study were think aloud protocols and semi-structured interviews tackling the area of the research. However, both think aloud method and interviews have their shortcomings, as they heavily depend on subjects' ability to self-reflect on their strategy use. Lastly, in disclosure of writing strategies, an inter-rater reliability of the data obtained via think aloud protocols and semi-structured interviews was not calculated. In that respect, the analysed results might incidentally be a subject to an inherent bias of the researcher.

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9.   Appendices

9.1.   Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

Hello x, my name is y and today I will conduct an interview with you about the steps you take and the approach you use when writing a composition in a foreign language. I will be recording this interview.

First I will ask you some questions about your experiences in writing compositions.

1. Do you like writing compositions? Do you find writing easy or difficult? / How easy or difficult you think writing is?
2. Do you think you are good at writing or not? How good do you think you are? How do you rate your writing competence in English?
3. How many texts in English did you write during this academic year? What kind of texts were these? Can you name several topics?
4. Did you receive any instruction in writing in English (information about the typical structure etc.)?

Now I will ask you some questions about today's task and your usual writing strategies.

5. Before this interview you wrote a composition together with your colleague. Did you find this unusual? Was it difficult or easy? Was it easier or more difficult than writing on your own? How satisfied are you with your final result? Do you think that your own composition on this topic would be different from this one? In what way?
6. What did you do before you actually started writing? What did you talk about?
7. How much did you and your colleague think about the topic of the composition before you started writing it? When you write on your own, how much do you think about the topic of the composition before you start writing it? Do you think about the details of the topic or just the general topic? Did you do this today with your colleague as well?
8. Do you usually make a mental plan before you start writing (without a written draft)?

9. Do you make a draft before writing or do you start writing immediately? Did you make a draft today with your colleague? (Yes/no – Did this affect the writing process and the quality of the composition? In what way?)

10. If you write a draft, what elements do you write down in it? Do you take care to cover all aspects of the given topic? rephrase

11. If you write a draft, what do you do after? How do you use it in your writing? Do you change it during writing – shorten, elaborate, move elements around?

12. Do you like to start writing quickly or do you take your time to plan the composition? Did you start writing today's composition quickly? In your opinion, did this affect the writing process and the quality of the composition? (ask only if they haven't written the draft) Do you sometimes start writing immediately without writing a draft?

13. If you do plan your writing, what do you do? Please describe the planning process ..... do you plan all parts of the composition or just one particular part of the text (introduction/conclusion/main part)? Why?

14. Do you think about the structure of the composition? What exactly do you think about? How did you structure today's composition? Does the composition have an introduction and a conclusion? Can you show them to me?

15. How do you organize/structure the main part? Do you divide it somehow? ..... Did you do this today?

16. Do you think about differences between writing in English and writing in Croatian? Have you ever learnt about what a composition should look like in a certain culture? Have you paid attention to these conventions today? Could you support evidence or give examples?

17. What do you do while writing, do you go back to what you have already written while you write, after each sentence or paragraph of only after you have finished?

18. While writing, do you reread every sentence after writing it? Why?

19. How do you decide on the order of sentences?

20. How do you connect sentences/parts of the text to each other? What language devices/words/structures do you use?

21. Do you have to imagine things in order to write them down? How does this work? Did you do that today as well? When exactly?

22. Do you make notes about certain points in the composition while writing it? Why do you do this?

23. Do you use additional resources when writing (dictionaries, textbooks etc.)? What exactly do you use them for?

24. Do you formulate ideas in your mother tongue and then translate them into English? Did you do that today?

25. Do you back translate the sentences into your mother tongue to check them? Did you do that earlier today? Can you give me an example?

26. Do you think about your spelling and grammar while writing? Do you check them (in a grammar book or a dictionary or online)?

27. What do you do if you cannot remember a certain word you need? What if you don't remember the word at all – do you use a different word or do you give up on this point and write something completely different?

28. How do you decide which grammar structures to use?

29. Do you use complex structures even if you are not 100% sure about how to use them?

30. Do you reread the instructions for the task while writing? Why (not)?

31. Do you compare you writing with your friends? Why (not)?

32. What kind of problems do you encounter while writing? How do you deal with them? Do you ask for help? Did you encounter any problems today? Please explain.

33. Do you like to solve writing problems alone or do you talk to your friends/the teacher about them?

34. How do you feel about discussing your writing with others?

35. Have you ever experienced a writer's block? If yes, how do you deal with it? If not, why do you think this doesn't happen to you?

9.2.   Appendix 2 – Coding Scheme

Writing strategies	Sub-strategies	Definition	Code
Rhetorical	Organizing ideas	Deciding on the parts and sequence of the ideas to express	R-OI
	Use of L1	Translating generated idea from/into L1	R-L1
	Code-switching	Alternating between two languages	R-CS
	Formatting / Modelling	Genre consideration	R-F/M
	Comparing	Different rhetorical conventions	R-C
Meta-cognitive	Planning	Developing a mental plan to achieve the aim of the paper	M-P
	Evaluating	Evaluating one's own L2 writing proficiency, reconsidering written text, goals	M-E
	Monitoring	Checking and identifying problems	M-M
Cognitive	Generating ideas	Selecting ideas, hypothesising, defining terms, outlining, repeating, lead-in, inferencing, etc.	Cog-GI
	Summarizing	Synthesising what has been read	Cog-S
	Revising	Making changes in plan, outline or written text	Cog-Rev
	Retrieval	Getting information from memory	Cog-Ret
	Clarification	Disposing of confusions	Cog-C
	Elaborating	Extending the contents of writing	Cog-E
	Rehearsing	Trying out ideas or language	Cog-Reh
Communicative	Avoidance	Avoiding some problem	Com-A
	Reduction	Giving up some difficulties	Com-R
	Sense of readers	Anticipating readers' response	COM-SOR
Social / Affective	Resourcing	Referring to libraries, dictionaries	S/A-R
	Cooperating	Working with peers to complete a task	S/A-C
	Getting feedback	Getting support and help from professors, peers	S/A-GF
	Resting	Ceasing work	S/A-Rest
Others	Accommodating teacher's demands	Meeting the teacher's requirement	O-ATD

	Using current or past ESL writing training	Using strategy taught in the previous writing class	O-UWT
	Risk-taking	Willingness to experiment with something new, different or less familiar	O-RT