The Impact of the Self-regulated Strategy Development Model on EFL Students' Persuasive Writing

أثار تطوير إستراتيجية التّنظيم الذّاتي لدى طلبة اللّغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية

Belounis Khaoula, Batna 2 University, Algeria.

date de soumission: 02/05/2018 date d'acceptation: 19/11/2018
date de publication: 10/12/2018

Résumé

The current research work examined the effects of the self-regulated strategy development (SRSD), an instructional model designed to teach writing, on improving EFL students' persuasive writing skills. To achieve such a goal, thirty students at Constantine 1 university received a writing instruction based on the self-regulated strategy development with specific emphasis on planning, setting goals, monitoring and evaluating. In order to collect data, a pre-post test experimental design was used. The comparison and analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores revealed that the SRSD is effective in improving the writing performance of EFL learners.

Keywords: self-regulated strategy development, persuasive writing, strategy-based instruction.

ملخّـــص

يدرس البحث الحالي آثار تطوير استراتيجية التنظيم الذاتي (SRSD)، وهو نموذج تعليمي مصمم لتعليم الكتابة، من خلال تحسين مهارات الكتابة الإقناعية لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. و لغرض تحقيق هذا الهدف، تلقى ثلاثون طالبًا في جامعة قسنطينة 1 تدريبا على الكتابة يعتمد على تطوير استراتيجية التنظيم الذاتي مع التركيز بشكل خاص على التخطيط وتسطير الأهداف، المراقبة والتقييم. من أجل جمع البيانات ، تم استخدام تصميم تجريبي لاختبار ما قبل النشر. كشفت المقارنة وتحليل نتائج ما قبل الاختبار وما بعد الاختبار أن استراتيجية SRSD فعالة في تحسين أداء الكتابة لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تطوير إستراتيجية التنظيم الذاتية، الكتابة الاقناعية، تعليم قائم على الإستراتيجية.

Introduction:

The high complex nature of the writing skill requires that learner writers should manage concurrently a wide range of skills. Not only some linguistic skills related to the mechanical rules such as grammar, spelling, handwriting, and punctuation are required, but also some writing steps and stages of planning, organizing, and revising thoughts which demand high levels of cognitive processes. Across writing genres, English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) learners give evidence to even more complexities with persuasive writing since they lack the ability to develop and support their arguments (Crammond, 1991, as cited in Ceunca-Sanchez, 2008). Consequently, learners are in need for specific methods and instructions that would support them to better develop their writing skills in general and their persuasive skills in particular.

1. Persuasive Writing:

Writing is a challenging skill for the majority of EFL learners. Hence, the importance of learning how to write coherent, correct, and effective texts in the 21st century is unquestionable. The high demanding nature of the writing skill requires students to show competency in expressing themselves in different situations through a variety of writing genres. Persuasive writing is a writing genre that presents many troubles to EFL students since it requires writers to propose appropriate evidence to support their stand "in a way that is clear, convincing, and considerate of diverse points of view" (Nippold, Wad-Lonergan, & Fanning, 2005, p. 125).

According to Smee (2009), persuasive writing refers to the act of "taking a position and trying to get an audience to agree". Similarly, in their work on persuasive writing in children, adolescents, and adults, Nippold, Ward-Lonergan, and Fanning (2005) stated that "In writing a persuasive essay, the author embarrasses a particular point of view…and tries to convince the reader of

the essay to adopt the same perspective and to perform some actions…" (p. 126). From these two definitions, it can be clearly noticed that the persuasive writing genre is an intricate activity that demands two key tasks. First of all, students must be able to take a stand on a particular issue and communicate that point of view to an audience through writing an essay which clearly exposes and sustains that opinion. After that, students have to convince the readers to agree with that view. To say more about this genre of writing, Graham (1990, p. 785) identified four main elements of a persuasive piece of writing:

a) Premise: the subject's statement of belief;

b) Reasons: explanation as to why the subject believed a particular premise;

c) Conclusion: a closing statement…a statement that brings everything together;

d) Elaboration: scored as an elaboration on a premise, reason, or a conclusion.

Learning to compose persuasively is an essential skill for EFL students. Therefore, in order to achieve an effective writing instruction, it is important for teachers to take into consideration the factors that may influence students' ability to write as well as to be aware of the methods, techniques, and strategies that would foster their writing competency.

2. Strategy-based Instruction:

Strategy instruction, also called strategy training, is a term that recently received a fair amount of research studies in the language teaching methodology. It is worth mentioning that professionals in the foreign language learning domain try to find ways to effectively aid students learn, communicate, and progress in learning foreign languages. Most theorists and researchers (e.g. Alexander, Graham & Harris, 1998; Glaser & Brunstein, 2007) agree that much has been proved as regards to the positive rela-

tionship between learners' strategic behaviours and their learning outcomes. In this respect, the integration of a strategy-based instruction approach (henceforth SBI) in EFL classrooms has quickly attracted EFL teachers' interest (Gu, 2007, p. 21).

Generally put, SBI is a teaching model that is mainly based on learning strategies. Ze-sheng (2008, p. 1) defines the term as

> A learner-centered approach that has two major components: firstly, students are explicitly taught how, when, and why strategies can be used to facilitate language learning and language use tasks; secondly, strategies are integrated into everyday materials and may be explicitly or implicitly embedded into the language tasks.

In the same vein, Cohen (2000) states that strategy-based instruction refers to "a learner-centered approach that extends classroom strategy training to indicate both explicit and implicit integration of strategies into the course content" (Weaver & Cohen, 1994; in Cohen, 2000). Moreover, SBI is an approach which emphasis the training of learning strategies by incorporating them into the regular language curriculum .This approach is based on the belief that the learning process is facilitated and fostered by making students conscious of employing strategies in learning a new language (Cohen, 2003).

3. Self-regulated Strategy Development (SRSD):

Most of the research done on self-regulated strategy development (e.g De La Paz, 2005; Graham & Perin, 2007) have investigated its effectiveness with learners with learning disabilities. However, very little studies on the impact of this strategy-based instructional model (henceforth SRSD) on advanced foreign language learners have been conducted. Since EFL students show low capacities when engaged to persuasive writing tasks and activities at the university level, it is urgent that they are provided

with appropriate strategy instruction for developing their writing skills of planning, generating ideas, monitoring, and evaluating their own written texts.

Recent research has shown that writing demands high levels of self-regulation skills and strategies. SRSD is a writing intervention which has received a considerable amount of research. According to Graham and Harris (2005), SRSD is an instructional approach which is designed to help students learn specific strategies for planning, organizing, revising, and evaluating their writing works. This model does not only stress difficulties in writing, but also focuses on attitudes and beliefs about writing as a process; more importantly, it emphasizes the role of self-regulation in writing. That is, "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are directed toward achieving goals" (Liens, 2011, p. 3). Thus, self-regulation, self-efficacy, self-instruction, self- monitoring, and self-evaluation are considered as significant concepts in the SRSD model. These concepts give language learners the opportunity to access the cognitive procedures which they need in order to facilitate learning. In this instructional model, students are expected to collaborate in the development of strategies for planning, organizing and revising as well as in developing some procedures for regulating and managing those strategies for different writing tasks. Self-regulated strategy development has a strong impact on improving the writing performance since it is based on strategy instruction which enables students enrich and improve their skills as writers by teaching them new or different ways to structure and formulate their writing, namely the persuasive genre.

3.1 Stages of Self-regulated Strategy Development:

According to Santangelo, Harris, and Graham (2008), SRSD model follows six stages of instruction: 1) develop students' background knowledge, 2) discuss students' current skills and abilities, 3) model the strategy to be taught, 4) help students

memorize the strategy, 5) support it, and finally 6) help students establish independent practice. These stages are detailed in the following.

3.1.1 Develop Background Knowledge:

In this introductory stage, the chief goal is to guarantee that learners will successfully understand, learn, and apply the strategy. Essentially, teachers should first identify what necessary skills students will need and they should know whether students possess those skills. In this concern, teachers may teach again or activate students needed skills via some appropriate accommodations and modifications.

3.1.2 Discuss the Strategy:

Ensuring students' motivation and willingness to learn a new strategy is the main purpose of this study. Obviously, this is likely to happen by having students involved in examining and discussing their actual writing performance, their understanding of the writing process and the aspects of writing they wish to improve. At this phase, the teacher should provide a clear description of the strategy to be deployed with an indication to its purposes and benefits. The teacher may describe when, how, and for which reasons it can be used. Finding meaning to strategies help students remember them and even generalize them to applicable academic situations.

3.1.3 Model the Strategy:

In this stage, students are explicitly shown how to use the new strategy. When modeling, it is better for the teacher to use a "think-aloud" process that exactly shows the "how" and "why" of every single strategy steps and especially shows how to use a positive encouragement for self-talk in order to maintain motivation and foster students' self-confidence (e.g. this is a hard writing task, but I can do it if I try). Then, in this context, the teacher must model not only the use of the writing strategies but also

all the self-regulation procedures that will come into play after modeling has been done. After the strategy is modeled, students should have the opportunity to discuss the benefits and challenges of the strategy and should look for ways to modify and adjust it to be more effective. Finally, the concept of setting goals may be introduced so that students' attention is drawn to set their targets based on their own performance.

3.1.3 Memorize the Strategy:

During this stage, it is important to ensure that students have a clear knowledge of the strategy steps and that they can use them automatically. This is, in some situations, the fastest stage of self-regulated strategy development in which checking students' memorization may seem boring; a creative teacher can make memorizing a kind of fun but involving all his students 'when trying to remember the steps and accept their paraphrasing parts of the strategy as long as the original meaning is maintained. Students who show a difficulty in memorizing may be provided with some prompt such as step-lists in order to move to the subsequent stage successfully.

3.1.5 Support the Strategy:

The goal of this stage is to make students responsible to use of the new strategy. A well-scaffolded instruction which helps students to use the new strategy is the one based on cooperative peer groups, appropriate feedback, and positive reinforcement. Generally, students take different amounts of time in the mastery of any skill. In self-regulated strategy development most students are able to correctly and independently apply a new strategy after two or four explicit collaborative instruction.

3.1.6 Independent Performance:

At the end, the chief aim of self-regulated strategy development model is to ensure students' constant use of the strategy in multiple settings and with different tasks. This generalization

and maintenance is productively accomplished by encouraging students and raising their awareness of the benefits that the strategy provides and the different ways it can be modified to accommodate any new academic task.

4. Data Collection and Procedures:

This study examines the impact of explicit self-regulatory strategy instruction inspired from the self-regulated strategy development model to teaching writing on the persuasive writing performance of EFL students.

4.1 Participants:

A pre-post-test experimental design is adopted to conduct this study. Second year LMD students of letters and English language at Constantine 1 university were selected to be the population of this work. It is believed to be the appropriate population because it is in the second year that students will be exposed to more complex and different writing genres including persuasive writing. A sample population of 30 subjects has been randomly selected and provided to the researcher by the Department of Letters and English language at Constantine 1 University. The sample comprised 10 males and 20 females with an age range of 19 to 23. The participants had almost seven years of experience of English language learning and none had received an SRSD based instruction before.

4.2 Research Question:

The question that the current research is attempting to answer is:

1. Does implementing the self-regulated strategy development model in EFL classes enhance students' persuasive writing abilities?

4.3 Hypothesis:

1. If EFL students receive an instruction based on self-regulated

strategy development model for writing, they will improve their persuasive writing competencies.

4.4 Instruments:

In order to collect data, two writing tests have been used in the current study; a pre-test and a post-test. They are used for the purpose of confirming or disconfirming the above stated hypothesis. On the one hand, a pre-test of persuasive writing proficiency was administered to both groups' participants in order to determine their real level of writing prior to the instructional phase of the study. On the other hand, the post-test was administered to the participants of both groups just after the completion of the intervention program. More details are going to be provided in what follows.

4.5 Pre-test:

Before the instructional stage of this study, participants were given a pre-test in order to collect data about their actual ability to write persuasively. The pre-test involved a specific assignment which had to be completed in the classroom for a period of 90 minutes. The key requirement of the assignment is to produce an essay about the topic of "Should teachers and their students be friends on facebook?" In fact, to raise students' motivation, two writing topics were presented to them for selection before writing. However, their choice fell on the previously mentioned topic. After students have finished the assignment, their papers were collected and assessed on a basis of a holistic scale rubric from "0" representing the lowest mark (no persuasion) to "10" representing the highest mark.

4.6 The Intervention Program:

Self-regulated strategy development model to teach writing was implemented to teach participants to plan and write persuasive pieces of writing focusing on the POW+TREE strategies. The treatment phase of the study was carried out on the basis

of the six stages of instruction which the SRSD model entails (Graham, Harris, 2003). These stages were incorporated into four writing sessions on persuasive writing; each lasted for 80-85 minutes.

During the first session, students were exposed to the first stage of SRSD, which is developing background knowledge. At the beginning, the teacher asked participants about what they know concerning writing persuasively. Then, the whole class (teacher and students) discussed the criteria of an acceptable persuasive piece of writing by shedding light on the most important elements that any effective persuasive paper should encompass. Afterwards, students were introduced to the POW and the genre-specific strategy of persuasive writing TREE. The teacher provided participants with a graphic representation of the TREE strategy and the words represented by the mnemonic POW+TREE, and explained them as follows: POW stands for: Pick my idea, Organize my notes, Write and say more. The second genre-specific strategy of persuasive writing (TREE) was exposed to students as being the strategy that helps them to carry out the second step of POW (Organizing notes) by facilitating the act of generating ideas relevant to persuasive essays. Students were told that TREE symbolizes the four main steps of persuasive writing: Topic, Reasons, Explanation, and Ending (Wrap it up). Subsequently, students were given a sample persuasive essay and asked to figure out the elements represented by TREE, including topic sentence, reasons (three or more), explanation for each reason, and concluding sentence. The session ended having students ask whatever questions they have.

The second session was devoted to the second and third steps of SRSD; discuss it and model it. At the outset of this session, students recalled the steps of POW+TREE mnemonic along with the elements of good persuasive writing. After that, the instructor started to discuss the importance of using POW+TREE

mnemonic and explained its usefulness in helping students monitor themselves during the writing process. At this stage, students' attention was driven to the notion of goal setting. They are told that the chief goal of the persuasive writer is to communicate his thought and have all his parts included. Again, students were given a sample essay and asked to identify the elements of persuasive writing. Students then are asked to copy them down in the appropriate space of the graphic organizer provided by the instructor. Next, in the modeling stage, the instructor shows students how to apply the mnemonic (POW+TREE) while planning and composing a persuasive essay. The modeling usually took place through the "talk-aloud" and "self-talk" self-regulatory procedures. This was especially done to encourage students reinforce themselves in planning and monitoring their writing process.

The next stage of the intervention program dealt with the memorize it and support it steps of SRSD. In order to ensure that students will be able to apply the mnemonic in the next stages of instruction, the teacher encourages them to memorize the procedures that POW+TREE represent. It is worth mentioning that students were interested in and motivated to memorize the strategy. Students found it very easy to recall all the steps of the mnemonic; therefore, the instructor did not consume a great amount of time in this stages (memorize it). However, participants were made aware that memorizing helps them become independent and automatic learners during writing persuasive essays.

Afterwards, the teacher moved directly to the next stage, support it, which is characterized by collaborative practice. Both teacher and students started to write a persuasive essay having the teacher encourages students to set goals (to include all the parts of persuasive essay), use the strategy (POW+TREE) learned in the previous stages of instruction (they were allowed to use the POW chart and the TREE graphic organizer), their self-reinforcement statements, and their self-monitoring procedures. The teachers'

role in this stage was to guide students when necessary; thus, each student wrote his essay by his own. It is important to state that while participants were writing, the instructor provided enough support to guarantee that all students were applying the strategy in the right way. Teachers' support, guidance, and control faded gradually vis-à-vis the preceding stages.

The sixth and the last stage is independent performance. Participants were asked to write a persuasive assay using the strategies they have learned previously without reference to the chart and the graphic organizer of POW and TREE. Before they start writing, students were encouraged to set goals and work hard to fulfill them throughout the assignment. As the name of this stage indicates, students work independently; they were neither supported by their teacher nor by their classmates. As all students finish writing, their papers were collected and the lesson ended by informing them that they will have a test next time.

4.7 Post-test:

Immediately, after completion of the intervention program, both groups' participants were administered a post-test in which they were asked to write a persuasive essay. The aim was to check whether there is a significant difference between the two groups' performance after the application of the SRSD model for persuasive writing in EFL classes. Students' productions were assessed following the same procedures used in the pre-test.

5. Findings and Discussions:

5.1 Findings:

In order to answer the research question focusing on the impact of self-regulated strategy development on EFL learners' persuasive writing, the data were collected and analyzed statistically. In fact, the results obtained from the two groups' pre-tests were compared and used as a baseline from which improvements in subjects' performance in the post-test could be measured. As

a result, an independent t-test was run to find out whether participants in the two groups performed significantly differently in their persuasive writing tests or not.

The table below shows the mean scores, the standard deviation and the standard error of the pre-test scores of participants in both experimental and control groups:

Control Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Pre-test	2.6	1.14	0.29
Experimental Group	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**Standard Error**
Pre-test	2.58	1.24	0.32

Table 01: Descriptive statistics of the pre-test scores of the two groups

From the above table, it is evident that there is no significant difference between the performances of the learners' pre-test scores in both groups. That is, the two groups did not differ significantly in their performance before the implementation of the intervention program.

In order to determine whether there is a significant difference between participants' performance in the pre/ post-tests, the researcher analyzed and compared their scores using the independent t-test shown in Table 02 below:

Groups	N	Mean Difference	Variance	Df	Sig.	T value
Control Group	15	2.66	1.19	28	2.76	2.80
Experimental Group	15	3.86	1.37	28	2.76	

Table 02: Independent t-test comparing the Performance of the groups in the Post-test Persuasive Writing.

For 28 degrees of freedom, the critical value of t required for 5 per cent (0.05) level of significant (one-tailed) is 2.76. As the observed value of t (2.80) is greater than 2.76, we can conclude that participants in the experimental group performed better than those of the control group. In other words, the implementation of the SRSD model to teach students how to write persuasively has increased students' persuasive writing abilities.

5.2 Discussion:

The main objective behind conducting this research work is to examine the effects of the self-regulated strategy development model on improving EFL students' persuasive writing. Thirty (30) second year LMD students at Constantine 1 university took part in the study as being the sample whose writing performance was evaluated and analyzed. The results of the data analysis showed that the writing scores of the experimental participants in the post-test were higher than those of the pre-test. Besides, essays written by subjects of the experimental group consisted of more persuasive writing parts than those of the control group. Therefore, the self-regulated strategy development model of instruction implemented to teach persuasive writing to EFL students enhanced the learners' writing ability. In particular, the findings revealed that SRSD played an important role in enriching the writing classes and developing composition skills among less able EFL learners.

The current research support several studies (e.g Santangelo et al., 2008; Mason, Kubina, and Hoover, 2011; Mason & Shriner, 2008) examining the effectiveness of the self-regulated strategy development on improving the writing abilities of foreign language learners either with or without certain behavioural disorders. It is also important to mention that SRSD model helps students to develop a set of self-regulation behaviours which give them the opportunity to take control of their own learning process.

Conclusion:

Based on the experimental findings, self-regulated strategy development together with teaching some specific self-regulated strategies were proved to potentially enhance the writing abilities of EFL learners. In fact, the self-regulated strategies seem to be a valuable issue especially for novice writers to develop knowledge and experience of the writing process in order for them to be successful in composing different writing genres. Additionally, the results abstained from the present research revealed that explicit strategy instruction help to scaffold and improve learners' writing skills in general and persuasive writing genre in particular.

References:

- Alexander, P. A., Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (1998). A perspective on strategy research: Progress and prospects. Educational Psychology Review, 10(2), 129-154.

- Cohen, A.D (2000). Strategies in learning and using a second language. Foreign Languge Teaching and Resaerch Press.

- Cohen, A. D. (2003). Strategy training for second language learners. digest, second language learning. Retrieved from: http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0302cohen.html.

- Cuenca-Sanchey, Y. (2008). Self-regulated strategy development through a critical literacy approach: teaching students with disabilities to write persuasively by understanding the world. Retrieved May 22, 2017 from http:// mason.gmu.edu/ycuencas/documents/literacy course EDRD 830//final paper litarcy 05.12.08a.pdf.

- De La Paz, S. (2005). Teaching historical reasoning and argumentative writing in culturally and academically diverse middle school classrooms. Journal of Educational Psychology, 97(2), 139-158

- Glaser, C., & Bronstein, J. C. (2007). Improving fourth-grade students' composition skills: Effects of strategy instruction and self-regulation procedures. Journal of Educational Psychology, 99(2), 297-310.

- Graham, S., Harris, K.R. (2005). Writing better: effective strategies for teaching students with learning difficulties. Baltimore: Paul H. Books.

- Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). A meta-analysis of writing instruction for adolescent students. Journal of Educational Psychology, 99(3), 445-476.

- Leins, J. E. (2011). Self-regulated strategy instruction with the self-regulation micro-analytic assessment and attribution training in high school students with learning disabilities. (unpublished master's thesis). George Mason University. Fairfax , US.

- Mason, L., Kubina, R., & Hoover, T. (2011). Effects of quick writing instruction for high school students with emotional disturbances. Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 19, 114-128.

- Mason, L. H., & Shriner, J. (2008). Self-regulated strategy development instruction for writing an opinion essay: Effects for six students with emotional/behavioral disorders. Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 21, 71-93. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11145-007-9065-y.

- Nippold, M. A., Ward-Lonergan, J., & Fanning, J. L. (2005). Persuasive writing in children, adolescents, and adults: A study of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic development. Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 36, 125-138.

- Santangelo, T., Harris. K.R, & Graham, S. (2008). Using self-regulated strategy development to support students who have 'Trubol giting thangs into werds." Remedical and Special Education, 29(2), 78-89

Smee, A. (2009). "Persuasive writing: beyond the three reasons." Yale-New heaven teachers institute, http:://www.teachersinstitute.yale.edu/curriculum/units/2009/1/09.01.09.x.htm.

- Ze-sheng, Y. (2008). Promoting learner autonomy through strateg-based instruction. Sino-Us English Teaching, 5(12), 1-6.