

WRITING SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT



In the last few decades Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) have received considerable importance in the field of second or foreign language (SL/FL) learning. The present paper investigates the impact of LLSs instruction on the writing proficiency of 20 undergraduate Assamese ESL learners. It is an intervention study conducted with a goal to examine if LLSs instruction enhances experimental groups' ability in writing summary and essay in English. Though there was no significant difference between control and experimental groups in their performance in writing summary and essay in English before strategy instruction, it was found that there was an impact after the LLSs instruction which is evident from the independent samples t-test. The obtained T values (4.819 & 6.220) in both the cases are significant ($p=.000$ & $.000$; $p<.05$). Therefore, the experimental group outperformed the control group after receiving LLSs instruction.

Keywords: *Language Learning Strategies, Assamese ESL, Writing Proficiency, LLSs Instruction.*

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INTRODUCTION

In Assam teaching and learning of English is considered extremely important in educational institutions and hence it is introduced in the early stages of school education. This is because English occupies the position of the second language in the society and its knowledge opens up a vast area of better economic and social status for an individual. English is also a compulsory subject in the educational curriculum of the state. However, despite having a favourable teaching learning atmosphere, learning English is still considered to be a very difficult task by most learners. Even at the undergraduate level, having learnt English for about ten to twelve years, Assamese ESL learners exhibit below expected level of competence and performance. An important need of the hour is to make ESL classrooms more learner centric. The present teaching learning situation such as curriculum development, text-book preparation, teaching and evaluation etc., concentrate primarily on what the teacher is expected to do in the class and how the learners are expected to perform in the examinations. Little or no attention is paid on *how* the learners are expected to approach the learning task.

In this context it can be stated that LLSs research is based on *how* to learn a language rather than *what* to learn. It recommends that learners should be autonomous and teachers should merely be facilitators of learning. The educational system should prepare learners for autonomous learning because in this era of information explosion it is not possible for any educational system to teach learners everything. Therefore, the teacher's primary role in the

language classroom is to provide awareness and training of LLSs to his/her students. LLSs are 'operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information...; specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.'(Oxford, 1990:8)

Writing is a difficult skill to master for the language learners. Beginners struggle to find appropriate words and advanced students find it difficult to link their ideas with coherence and to produce appropriate target language discourse. A number of studies have proved positive result of LLSs instruction for writing skill development. For example Sexton, Harris & Graham (1998), Wischgoll (2016), Cer (2019) etc.

Sexton, Harris & Graham (1998) conducted a study where The Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRS) model was used to assist six students with learning disabilities (LD) develop a strategy for planning and writing essays, self-regulation of the strategy and the writing process, and positive attributions regarding effort and strategy use. The students received all services in a team-based inclusion setting; the process writing model was used in the team. Instructional effects were investigated using a multiple-baseline across-subjects design. Instruction had a positive effect on students' approach to writing, writing performance, and attributions for writing. Effects transferred across settings and teachers; maintenance data was mixed. It was found that collaborative practice of the composition and self-



regulation strategies appears critical for students with LD.

Wischgoll (2016) conducted a research in the high school setting that showed that the acquisition of writing skills could be supported by single-strategy training. It was examined if the development of academic writing skills could also be effectively supported by training single strategies or even combined strategies. The focus of the study was on the benefit of combined cognitive strategies with and without a metacognitive strategy. Sixty German-speaking psychology undergraduates participated in the study which lasted for three hours. All participants wrote an abstract of an empirical article. It was found that learners who received the additional self-monitoring strategy intervention benefited significantly more in terms of acquisition of academic writing skills and the quality of their texts than learners who did not receive this intervention.

Cer (2019) conducted a study to investigate the effect of metacognitive strategies of "knowledge of cognition" and "regulation of cognition," for improving learners' writing skills. The working group for the study included 44 pupils (21 control, 23 experimental) at a private secondary school. The pupils in the experimental group were instructed in metacognitive strategy-based writing practices, whereas the pupils in the control group were instructed in traditional writing practices. The results revealed positive result of the LLSs instruction and it is concluded that it is necessary to effectively use the metacognitive strategy in learning and teaching to improve writing skills.

HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the backdrop of above discussion the present study was undertaken to investigate the impact of LLSs instruction on writing skill development of Assamese ESL learners. In this context following hypothesis and research questions were formulated.

H₀: There is no significant impact of the Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) instruction on the Assamese ESL learners' performance in writing summary and essay in English.

Research Questions:

1. Is there any difference between control and experimental groups in their performance in writing summary and essay in English before strategy instruction?
2. Is there any difference between control and experimental groups in their performance in writing summary and essay in English after strategy instruction?

METHODOLOGY

This Intervention Study adopted an experimental design known as 'pre-test - post-test control-group design'. The target population in the study was the first semester undergraduate Assamese ESL learners from the humanities and allied subjects of Dibrugarh University, Assam. They had 10 to 12 years of English learning experience at the time of the experiment. The average age of the participants was 19 to 20 years. A total of 20 participants took part in the study.



The learners were pretested before LLSs treatment. They were then divided into control group (N=10) and experimental group (N=10). The control group did not receive any special teaching. They received traditional method of teaching. The experimental group received LLSs instruction for four weeks on different LLSs pertaining to writing skill development in English. After the treatment sessions, the groups were again post tested on the same writing activity questionnaire in order to identify the impact, if any, of the LLSs instruction on the experimental group.

A writing activity questionnaire was designed as an instrument to test the participants' writing proficiency in English. The questionnaire contained two summary writing activities and an essay writing activity. Out of the two passages, one was selected from previous undergraduate level question papers of the Dibrugarh University and the other was selected from the TOEFL (2005). In order to make the task challenging and to sustain learners' interest, the passages having difficulty level of slightly above the learners' usual proficiency level were selected. Topics for the

essay writing activity were selected from TOEFL. These included topics of general interest of learners which help in the assessment of learners' ability for descriptive and argumentative writing. There were four options for the essay writing task. The questionnaire contained space in it for writing the summaries and the essay. The experiment lasted for four weeks comprising of three phases. The first phase was the pre-test, second phase was the LLSs instruction and the third phase was the post-test.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Results for the first research question:

1. Is there any difference between control and experimental groups in their performance in writing summary and essay in English before strategy instruction?

Table 1 indicates that the difference of the two groups in summary and essay writing is not very high. However, in order to know if the differences are statistically significant it is necessary to look into the results of the t-test shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Mean Scores of the Groups in Summary and Essay Writing in Pre-test

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Summary writing	Experimental Group	10	3.90	.994	.314
	Control Group	10	3.20	.919	.291
Essay Writing	Experimental Group	10	2.10	.876	.277
	Control Group	10	2.00	1.155	.365



The Leven's test for equality of variances states that the F values (.070 & 1.899) are not significant ($p=.794$ & $.185$; $p>.05$). Therefore, there is not much variability in the mean scores of the

two groups. The T values obtained (1.635 & .218) are not significant ($p=.119$ & $.830$; $p>.05$). It indicates that the difference in the mean scores of the two groups in writing summary and essay was not statistically significant before LLSs treatment.

Table 2: T-test of Groups in Summary and Essay Writing in Pre-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Summary writing	Equal variances assumed	.070	.794	1.635	18	.119	.700	.428	-.200	1.600
	Equal variances not assumed			1.635	17.889	.120	.700	.428	-.200	1.600
Essay writing	Equal variances assumed	1.899	.185	.218	18	.830	.100	.458	-.863	1.063
	Equal variances not assumed			.218	16.778	.830	.100	.458	-.868	1.068

Results for the second research question:

2. Is there any difference between control and experimental groups in their performance in writing summary and essay in English after strategy instruction?

An independent samples t-test is carried out to investigate if there is any difference between control and experimental groups in their performance in writing summary and essay in English after strategy instruction.

Table 3: Mean Scores of the Groups in Summary and Essay Writing in Post-test

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Summary writing	Experimental Group	10	6.30	1.160	.367
	Control Group	10	3.70	1.252	.396
Essay writing	Experimental Group	10	4.50	.527	.167
	Control Group	10	2.10	1.101	.348

Table 3 states that there is considerable difference in the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in writing summary and essay in the post-test context.

The Leven's test for equality of variances in Table 4 states that the F value (.127) of summary writing is not significant ($p=.683$, $p>.05$). But in case of essay writing, the F value (6.517) is significant ($p=.020$, $p<.05$). On the other hand, the obtained T values (4.819 & 6.220) in both the cases are significant ($p=.000$ & $.000$; $p<.05$). This implies that the mean scores in summary and essay writing of the experimental and control groups differ statistically

significantly after the LLSs treatment. The strategies instruction improved the summary and essay writing ability of the experimental group to a considerable extent. They outperformed the control group in the post-test context though there was no significant difference between the two groups before the LLSs instruction. In other words, the null hypothesis can be rejected and it can be stated that there is significant impact of the LLSs instruction on the Assamese ESL learners' performance in writing summary and essay in English.



Table 4: T-test of Groups in Summary and Essay Writing in Post-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Summary writing	Equal variances assumed	.172	.683	4.819	18	.000	2.600	.540	1.466	3.734
	Equal variances not assumed			4.819	17.896	.000	2.600	.540	1.466	3.734
Essay writing	Equal variances assumed	6.517	.020	6.220	18	.000	2.400	.386	1.589	3.211
	Equal variances not assumed			6.220	12.922	.000	2.400	.386	1.566	3.234

DISCUSSION

The impact of LLSs instruction in writing skill development was significant. The data analysis revealed that the difference in the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in writing summary and essay was not statistically significant before LLSs treatment. However, the mean scores

in summary and essay writing of the experimental and control groups differed statistically significantly after the LLSs treatment. This indicates that before LLSs intervention the two groups were homogenous in their ability in writing



summary and essay, but after the LLSs intervention the experimental group outperformed the control group. This finding lends credibility of the LLSs instruction for writing skill development of the Assamese ESL learners which is in line with Sexton, Harris & Graham (1998), Wischgoll (2016), Cer (2019).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study proved that LLSs are teachable and after the LLSs instruction the members of the experimental group outperformed the control group in the proficiency level. The study recommends that LLSs instruction should be introduced in the Assamese ESL teaching learning situation to increase language proficiency. The findings further suggest that the curriculum planners and policy makers should integrate strategies-based instruction in the educational system from early stages of learning.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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