Strategy Use and Performance in EFL Writing

Abstract

The competence to write in English has become an essential ability especially as English has gained the status of lingua franca in several professional domains. However, many EFL learners in Taiwan struggle to write a "well-organized and generally coherent essay that demonstrates sufficient control of vocabulary and sentence structures" (GEPT High-Intermediate Writing Test Rating Scale). To help improve EFL learners' English writing, efforts should be made to understand their writing difficulties by analyzing the characteristics of their use of English. In addition, an understanding of the learning strategies employed by EFL learners can help to focus instruction on the strategies that can enable them to overcome their difficulties and write more effectively. To address these issues, we examine the learning strategies and writing difficulties among a pool of 1,500 EFL learners who took the GEPT High-Intermediate Writing Test (roughly equivalent to the CEFR B2 level). Their learning strategies are investigated by use of a writing strategy questionnaire based on Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of learning strategies. Statistical analyses are employed to explore the relationships between strategy use and writing performance, and a comparison is made between the more proficient and the less proficient EFL writers. Furthermore, we characterize Taiwanese EFL learners' writing difficulties by analyzing a representative sample of writing scripts randomly selected from each GEPT band score. The writing difficulties can be linked to the learning strategies on which EFL writing instruction should focus; hence, the findings of this study are of pedagogical significance for writing instructors.