

An Investigation into the Socio-Cultural Strategy Use and the Writing Competence of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract: The sociocultural approach to writing strategy use emphasizes the importance of context and the mediating resources that learners can use to enhance the quality of their performance in writing (Lei, 2008). Accordingly, the present study explored the sociocultural strategy use of a convenient sample of 105 BA level students of English Language and Literature who had passed essay-writing courses in a state university in Iran by analyzing their responses to the items of a newly-developed sociocultural strategy use questionnaire consisting of different subscales, namely, artifact-mediated, rule-mediated, community-mediated and role-mediated strategies. The results of the descriptive statistics revealed that the tool-mediated strategies, which are the subcategory of artifact-mediated strategies, had the highest frequency of use which is rather justified in the context of Iran. In addition, the students' overall strategy use and their writing ability were correlated and a statistically significant relationship was found between these two variables. However, the results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that none of the subscales had a unique predicting power in accounting for the learners' writing ability. The researchers also compared the sociocultural strategy use of more- and less-skilled student writers and found a significant difference in the strategy use of different individuals.

Keywords: Sociocultural Strategy use, Writing Ability, More- and Less-Skilled Student Writers

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Introduction

Writing is considered as the most complex language skill whose orchestration requires the learners to convert their ideas and meanings into actual words and present them in the form of an organized text (Chastain, 1988; Richards & Renandya, 2003). Gaining competence in writing skill is not naturally acquired and this skill is usually learned by engaging in a set of instructional practices or through other linguistic and sociocultural experiences (Myles, 2002). Over the past years, the pedagogy and research in writing have gone through various stages of focus on different areas of writing. The earliest view, i.e., the product-oriented approach, considers writing as a physical object and mainly focuses on the formal aspects of language such as lexis, grammar, syntax and other textual devices. The alternative view considers writing as a process and focuses on the individual's thinking process while engaged in cognitive activities such as planning, revising, idea-generating, rereading, etc. The more recent movement, i.e., post-process, is associated with sociocultural theory and considers writing as a social and cultural practice which is a site of ideologies and social/power relations as well as individual complexities (Matsuda, 2003).

In recent years, many L2 writing scholars have extensively explored the writers' composing processes and the particular strategies they use for writing a text. These researchers have investigated the writing strategies of learners in different learning contexts and the relationship between their writing strategy use and their writing competence (e.g., Boshier, 1998; Casanave, 2002; Cumming, 1989; Leki, 1995; Raimes, 1987; Roca de Larios, Manchón, Murphy, & Marín, 2008; Sasaki, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2007; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996; Wong, 2005; Zamel, 1982, 1983). This body of research has indicated that the effective use of writing strategies can enhance the quality of learners' performance and possibly can result in better writing competence. It has also been identified that learners who have problems in writing and mostly struggle with this skill lack the knowledge of writing strategies and, as a result, cannot perform effectively in planning, generating and organizing their ideas or proofreading and revising their written texts (e.g., Harris, Graham, Mason, & Friedlander, 2008).

Due to the importance of context in L2 writing research (Casanave, 2002; Leki, 1995; Sasaki, 2004, 2007; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996; Wong, 2005) and the new paradigm shift from cognitive to sociocultural approaches to SLA and writing studies (Casanave, 1995; Lei, 2008), more attention is directed towards re-conceptualizing writing strategy research from a sociocultural perspective in which writing is not merely approached as an individually

constructed product isolated from its context, but offers a perspective within which writing can be examined as a social practice, with students as active participants in constructing learning processes, and as a result, the interaction between different factors can be explored (Rahimi & Norooziasiam, 2013, p. 1). In fact, Vygotsky (1978) sociocultural theory of mind "is heavily focused on the impact of culturally organized and socially enacted meanings on the formation and functioning of mental activity" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 2). The central notions within this framework are the facilitating roles of mediation and the consideration of learners' zone of proximal development (ZPD) which can reveal information about their current abilities in order to help them overcome any performance problems and realize their potential abilities through some guidance or collaborative objects offered through means like computers and other symbolic tools (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011; Shrestha & Coffin, 2012; van Compernelle & Williams, 2013).

Prior (2006) justifies the use of sociocultural theory as a paradigm for writing research by asserting that such a paradigm describes the context of writing in its totality while the cognitive approach is rather narrow in its understanding of context. In fact, in this paradigm, writing is considered as a social activity in which the participants possibly benefiting from some mediation strategies can create a written text and reach the intended outcomes. The shift in focus of instruction and research from evaluating the final product of L2 writing to an emphasis on identifying the actions and behaviors that learners engage in while producing written texts also justifies conducting studies to explore the mediation strategies students writers use to come up with a refined text. In fact, while studies on L2 writing strategies continue to expand, research informed by the sociocultural approach is still in its infancy (Kang & Pyun, 2013). Accordingly, in order to shed more light on this area, the present study attempted to explore the relationship between sociocultural strategy use and writing competence of a group of Iranian undergraduate EFL learners who have passed an essay writing course in an academic context.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

In the traditional cognitive framework, writing is considered as a non-linear, exploratory and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning (Zamel, 1983, p. 165). In this paradigm, writers use a variety of strategies like planning, translating, generating ideas, monitoring, etc., to effectively convey

their intended meanings. However, as stated earlier, the cognitive paradigm specified no role for the context and was rather narrow in understanding the issues that may emerge in the process of writing and possibly affect the writers' strategy use. Therefore, the subsequent models of writing attempted to specify a role for some contextual factors like task environment, writers' goals and motivation, etc., while accounting for the writers' performance (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1981; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hyland, 2003). Despite these changes which might lead to new findings, Lei (2008) criticizes the previous studies and asserts that writing strategies are still studied as internal cognitive processing within the confines of the brain, which interacts with the outside context in a bidirectional manner (p. 218).

To further explicate the issue, Lei (2008) suggested that the study of writing strategies should not be confined to the internal cognitive processes and must consider the recent development in research about cognition and context. Lei proposed and elaborated upon a sociocultural approach to writing strategy research which considers writing as a literate activity which involves dialogic processes and is contextualized in the social, cultural and historical milieu (Prior, 2006). This theory emphasizes the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking (Lantolf, 2004, pp. 30-31). L2 learner strategy from a sociocultural perspective can also be defined as, a learner's socially mediated plan or action to meet a goal, which is related directly or indirectly to L2 learning (Oxford & Schramm, 2007, p. 48). As for its application in the composing process, the writers can benefit from a set of socio-historically provided resources and collaboration termed as *mediation* to regulate the material world or their own and each other's social and mental activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In fact, by locating writing activities in the *activity theory* framework, which situates individuals' actions in collective activities, and considering writing strategy use as a socially mediated action, Lei (2008, 2009) re-conceptualized L2 writing research from a sociocultural perspective consisting of four main categories of writing strategies (namely, artifact-mediated, community-mediated, rule-mediated, and role-mediated strategies) which are further divided into some sub-strategies (see Table 1) to highlight the dialectic relationship between context and cognition and the importance of mediating resources in writing strategy use.

Table 1. Sociocultural strategies (Lei, 2009, p. 204)

General Categories		Specific Strategies
Artifact-mediated strategies	Tool-mediated strategies	English reading material-mediated strategies
		The Internet-mediated strategy
		Outline-mediated strategy
		Writing exercise-mediated strategy
	Sign-mediated strategies	L2-mediated strategy
		L1-mediated strategy
		Non-verbal sign-mediated strategies
Community-mediated strategies	Teacher-mediated strategy	
		Peer-mediated strategy
		Other social agent-mediated strategy
Rule-mediated strategies	Rhetoric-mediated strategy	
		Assignment versus exam rule-mediated strategy
		Good writing criteria-mediated strategy
		Time-mediated strategy
Role-mediated strategies	Author-mediated strategy	
		Language learner-mediated strategy
		English major-mediated strategy

Based on the description of these strategies provided by Lei (2008, 2009), the artifact-mediated strategies refer to the learners' engagement in the activities and practices like reading English written materials, surfing the net, practicing writing and using a variety of L1 and L2 resources present in the context to improve their writing. The community-mediated strategies emphasize the mediating roles of instructors, peers and more capable and knowledgeable individuals in the community from whom learners can learn many factors, practices and strategies to enhance the quality of their performance. In fact, the community-mediated strategies highlight the social, dialogic and distributed nature of any writing practice. Rule-mediated strategies mostly refer to the writers' familiarity with writing conventions, rhetorical/textual organization, genre features, and criteria determined for acceptable performance on the assignments and in exam sessions. And finally, the role-mediated strategies refer to the authorial identity of the learners who engage in the writing practices and want to demonstrate their ability in writing and gain others' recognition as an English major student. The present study used this framework and the data collected and presented by Lei (2009) and other relevant studies to develop a questionnaire and subsequently investigate the use of these strategies by a group of student writers in an EFL context.

Related Studies

Writing strategies are specific processes or techniques that writers employ in order to create a text and enhance the quality of their writing. Research on L2 writing strategy use has emerged from the pioneering work on writing processes by scholars like Flower and Hayes (1981) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987). According to their ideas, during the writing process, writers use strategies like planning, translating, monitoring, revising, etc. to create their texts and successfully convey their intended ideas. Some researchers (e.g., Arndt, 1987; Cumming, 1989; Leki, 1995; Mu & Carrington, 2007; Raimes, 1985, 1987; Roca de Larios, Murphy, & Manchon, 1999; Sasaki, 2000, 2002; Wong, 2005) have conducted comprehensive and in-depth studies of specific writing strategies to develop their own strategy models that are supported by the data collected in specific contexts. For instance, Wong (2005), using the think-aloud procedure, examined the writing strategies of a group of proficient learners of English in Hong Kong and identified the following strategies: questioning, self-assessment, rereading, setting goals, editing, and revising. As for the in-depth studies of specific strategies, a reference can be made to Leki (1995) study in which a group of ESL students coping strategies across the curriculum were investigated and suggested as including specific strategies like clarifying strategies, focusing strategies, relying on past experiences, looking for models, accommodating teachers demands, etc.

Some other researchers (e.g., Raimes, 1985; Sasaki 2000, 2002; Zamel, 1982) have explored the relationship between writing strategy use and the writing ability/competence of learners. By investigating eight ESL students strategies, Raimes (1987) found that there were few connections between their L2 proficiency, writing abilities and composing strategies. However, Sasaki (2000) believes that L2 proficiency plays a role and influences the participants use of specific writing strategies.

In order to account for the role of social and contextual factors in writing process, some researchers have turned to the sociocultural theory as the dominant paradigm for writing research (Prior, 2006). In a rather pioneering study of sociocultural strategy use in writing, Lei (2008) investigated Chinese EFL learners writing strategy use within the Activity Theory framework. More specifically, the researcher, using the data obtained from procedures like interviews, stimulated recall and process logs, explored how two proficient English major students in a Chinese university strategically mediated their writing processes with different resources. She identified four different types of writing strategies as located within the sociocultural strategy framework: artifact-mediated, rule-mediated, community-

mediated, and role-mediated strategies. In addition, the researcher believed that while mediating resources can facilitate the learners' writing process, some intra-cultural and inter-cultural contradictions may arise as well. The findings also revealed the participants' agency in strategy use and the identified strategies and their subcategories were believed to interact with each other to fulfill the writers' goals. Using a rather similar procedure, Lei (2009) reported a more comprehensive study on sociocultural strategy use in writing in which she qualitatively investigated and compared the strategy use of four more-skilled and four less-skilled student writers studying English at a university in South China. Similar to the previous study, Lei (2009) identified four interrelated categories of strategies. She also found contradictions in strategy use which appeared to exist within writing activities and some interactions between the basic strategy patterns. Moreover, it was found that the two groups' strategies differed in four aspects: writers' language awareness, solutions to contradictions, goals for strategy use, and motives for writing activities. Finally, it was suggested that in order to establish writing strategy training from a sociocultural perspective, educators must implement procedures like raising the writers' language awareness, manipulating artifacts and creating writing communities.

In another qualitative study, Xiao (2012), interviewed six Chinese proficient English major students to get some ideas about their writing strategy use experience. More specifically, he intended to fulfill the tenets of sociocultural strategy which aims for connecting cognition and context and emphasizes the importance of mediating resources in strategy use. The categories of sociocultural strategies that he identified matched the previous ones and included features like the diversity of mediating resources, idiosyncratic use of these resources, and the common goal to enhance their language knowledge and writing ability (Xiao, 2012, p. 175). The researcher also suggested that teachers can conduct artifact manipulation and community construction to help students enhance the quality of their performance and the strategy use.

In an experimental study, Rahimi and Norooziasam (2013) investigated the effect of sociocultural writing strategy instruction on the improvement of a group of Iranian EFL learners' writing competence by using experimental and control groups. The students' pre- and post-test scores were compared and it was found that the students in the experimental group, who benefited from explicit instruction and negotiation on mediational strategies, have made significantly more improvements in their writing ability compared to the ones in the control group.

Finally, Kang and Pyun (2013), using qualitative procedures like interviews, think-aloud protocols and stimulated recalls, investigated the writing strategies and mediated actions of two American learners of Korean from the sociocultural perspective. The analysis of data revealed that learner's socially situated context can have an influence on the types of writing strategies and mediating tools they prefer and use. They further substantiated this finding by asserting that a learner's written product is a result of a dynamic and complex interplay between sociocultural factors including a learner's cultural/historical experience, L2 proficiency, motivation, learning goals, and the context or the community in which the learner is situated (p. 64).

As the investigation of related literature revealed, few studies have been conducted on writing strategy in a sociocultural tradition. Therefore, the present study aims to add to the body of research on sociocultural strategy use in writing by developing and implementing a sociocultural strategy use questionnaire which attempts to inspect the use of these strategies by Iranian EFL learners. More specifically, the researchers wanted to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Iranian EFL learners use sociocultural strategies in writing ?
2. Is there any significant correlation between the sociocultural strategy use and the writing competence of Iranian EFL learners?
3. How well do the subscales (tool-mediated, sign-mediated, rule-mediated, role mediated and community-mediated) in the sociocultural strategy framework predict the writing ability of the learners and which one is the best predictor?
4. Is there any significant difference between the more-skilled and less-skilled writers in sociocultural strategy use?

Method

Participants and Setting

A convenient sample of 105 students (26 males and 79 females) undergraduate students of English language and literature from a State university in Iran participated in the study. The average age of the participants was about 23 and their proficiency level was from intermediate to advance. These students had already passed an essay-writing course and were quite familiar with the conventions and principles of academic writing and possibly the resources they should use to enhance the quality of their writing.

Instrument

The main instrument in the study was a sociocultural strategy use questionnaire in writing which had been developed based on the informative data provided in the literature (e.g., Kang & Pyun, 2013; Rahimi & Norooziasiam, 2013) on the topic and more specifically the interview extracts presented in Lei (2008, 2009) qualitative case studies on sociocultural strategy use in writing. It contained 65 items about the four main categories of strategies and sixteen subcategories (as shown in Table 1 above). In the process of developing this questionnaire, the researchers first developed an item-pool of about 100 items and then the instrument was given to some other EFL experts for comments and possible revisions.

Finally, the researchers came up with 65 Likert-scale form items and used it for the present study which can be considered as the piloting for this instrument. It was also pilot tested to determine its reliability index that was found to be $r=.865$ which is rather satisfactory and justifies the use of this instrument in an Iranian context.

Procedure of Data Collection and Analysis

In order to collect the necessary data, the researchers first gave the sociocultural strategy use questionnaire to the students who had passed the essay writing course in the university. All the participants responded to the questionnaire in the classroom sessions. Then the students final score on the essay-writing course was used as a criterion for their writing competence. In fact, since this score was the outcome of the students performance in the semester they have been studying the course, it possibly provided a more reliable and valid appraisal of their writing ability and was hopefully more in line with the sociocultural theory which considers the role of both cognition, contextual factors and mediational resources in the students writing. Based on this score, the students were categorized as more- and less-skilled writers. In order to answer the intended research questions, the patterns of descriptive statistics and a series of statistical procedures like correlation, multiple regression and t-tests were run.

Results and Discussion

In order to answer the first research question on the frequency of sociocultural strategy use by the participants of the study, descriptive statistics were used as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the use of various sociocultural strategies

Strategies		Mean	SD
Artifact-mediated strategies	Tool-mediated	61.77	9.23

	Sign-mediated	43.67	6.54
	Rule-mediated strategies	37.09	8.38
	Community-mediated strategies	48.21	9.20
	Role-mediated strategies	23.60	3.78

As it can be seen, the tool-mediated strategies which were the subcategory of artifact-mediated strategies and were further subcategorized into English reading material, the Internet, outline and writing exercise-mediated strategies had the highest mean ($M=61.77$, $SD=9.23$) and consequently were more frequently used by the learners. This finding is line with Lei (2009) ideas based on which the mediating artifacts play a major role in the students learning-to-write process and the use of these mediating resources can help them understand the English-speaking world and gain knowledge of English language. Moreover, such strategies make them familiar with instances of good writing and provide them with some guidance to follow in their own writing so that they can develop some sense of self confidence in expressing their intended ideas to achieve their goals in writing which highlight the social and distributed nature of strategy use. In fact, due to the nature of these strategies that are comparatively more tangible and accessible than other strategy types for Iranian EFL learners, this finding is rather justified. Another worth-mentioning fact is that some of these strategies and skills are taught directly to the students and most of the students have the experience of using these strategies during the course of their studies or for other social purposes like reading written texts, searching for information or organizing their ideas.

In order to answer the second research question, the researchers correlated the students total sociocultural strategy use with their final writing score. The results of the analysis (as presented in Table 3) showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between these two variables ($r=.288$, $N=105$, $p<.0005$).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and results of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient for the students sociocultural strategy use and their writing score

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	Sig. (two-tailed)
SCT strategy	105	42.87	5.41	.288	.003
Writing score	105	14.74	2.68		

This finding means that the students who have possibly used more sociocultural strategies have higher score on writing, as well. However, this relationship is not large enough (i.e., $r=.288$). The previous studies which have investigated the relationship between writing strategy use and writing ability (e.g., Cumming, 1989; Raimes, 1987; Sasaki, 2000,

2002) have found a rather complicated relationship between them and have identified another intervening factor which can be involved and play a role in this relationship, i.e., L2 proficiency. It should be reiterated that writing is a very complicated process and different kinds of cognitive, metacognitive and strategic processes are involved in creating a written text and a variety of motivational, affective and sociocultural factors may affect the students performance while writing (Harris & Graham, 1996; Oschner & Fowler, 2004). Therefore, among a clutter of factors that affect the students performance, expecting to find and reporting a direct relationship between the students writing competence and the extent of strategy use in such a small-scale quantitative-based study must be done with cautions.

In order to account for the unique contribution of each of the subscales (tool-mediated, sign-mediated, rule-mediated, role mediated and community-mediated strategies) in the sociocultural strategy framework in the prediction of learners writing competence, a standardized multiple regression procedure was run and the results indicated that none of the subscales can act as a strong predictor of the learners writing ability (see Table 4). Despite not showing a significant result, the rule-mediated strategies ($B=.064$, $Beta=.198$, $t=1.696$, $p>.05$) has a better predicting power compared to the rest of the subscales. As it was mentioned, these strategies refer to the writers familiarity with writing conventions, rhetorical/textual organization, genre features, and criteria determined for acceptable performance on the assignments and in exam sessions (Lei, 2009).

Table 4. Coefficients of the Standard Multiple Regression

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients				Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	t	sig	Zero order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	10.2	2.16	4.74	.000			
Tool-med.	.04	.033	1.34	.183	.238	.134	.125
Sign-med	-.06	.043	-1.42	.156	.010	-.142	-.134
Rule-med.	.06	.037	1.69	.093	.291	.168	.159
Role-med.	-.02	.084	-.238	.812	.163	-.024	-.022
Community	.05	.033	1.61	.110	.265	.160	.151

This finding reveals the dominance of product-oriented approaches to writing instruction and the focus upon skill and genre discourses (Ivani, 2004; Peterson, 2012) in the context in which the study has been conducted. In fact, in such approaches, the focus is on the explicit teaching of some mechanical aspects of writing and the structural and rhetorical conventions of the texts without dedicating a role for teaching and practicing effective

strategies in different phases of writing (namely, planning, generating ideas, editing and revising) or even raising the awareness of the students about such strategies which applying them possibly can help them create better written texts.

Finally, an independent samples t-test was run to compare the strategy use of more- and less-skilled student writers and, hence, to provide the answer for the final research question. The results of the analysis (as displayed in Table 5) revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the more-skilled student writers ($M=44.08$, $SD=5.59$) and the less-skilled ones ($M=41.37$, $SD=4.77$) in their sociocultural strategy use ($t(103)=2.636$, $p=.010$).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics and results of Independent samples t-test for differences in SCT strategy use of more- and less-skilled student writers

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
More-skilled	58	44.08	5.59	2.636	103	.010
Less-skilled	47	41.37	4.77			

This finding points to the superiority of more-skilled student writers in using sociocultural strategies to enhance the quality of their writing. There may also be some qualitative differences in the strategy use of different individuals and the specific variations and subtleties can be found by using qualitative procedures like using in-depth interviews or think-aloud protocols. Support for this claim can be found in Lei (2009) who believed that the more- and less-skilled student writers differ in their language awareness, the way they cope with the contradictions arising from their use of mediating resources and participation in writing activities and other activities, and their goals for strategy use and motives for the writing activities (p. 232). In the same regard, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) believed that there are qualitative differences between the writing processes of more- and less-skilled writers which should be accounted for by different writing models. Similarly, Toomela (2000) suggested that externally similar activities may be supported by structurally qualitatively different mental operations (p. 357). Sasaki (2000, 2002) also identified some qualitative differences in the strategy use of skilled and unskilled writers in the planning, monitoring, text-generating and refining of their written texts.

Conclusion

Summary and Pedagogical Implications of the Study

The present study in a quantitative paradigm investigated the sociocultural strategy use of a group of Iranian EFL learners in writing context. In this approach, writing strategies are

defined as *mediated actions which are consciously taken to facilitate writers' practices in communities* [italics in original] (Lei, 2008, p. 220). For this purpose, a convenient sample of 105 undergraduate students who had passed an essay writing course responded to a newly-developed sociocultural strategy questionnaire which explored the use of a variety of strategies like artifact-mediated, rule-mediated, community-mediated and role-mediated strategies. The results of the data analyses indicated that the tool-mediated strategies, which are considered as the subcategory of artifact-mediated strategies, were more frequently used by the students.

The researchers also correlated the sociocultural strategy use of the students with their writing ability and found a significant relationship between these two variables. Moreover, the predictive power of each of the individual subscales in accounting for the learners writing ability was also examined, but none of the subscales had a unique significant contribution. Finally, the sociocultural strategy use of the more- and less-skilled student writers was compared and a significant difference was found between these two groups of learners in this regard. Similar to what was found by Lei (2008, 2009), there might also be some qualitative differences and contradictions in the way these learners make use of these resources and possibly there may exist some interactions between these strategies which can enhance their effectiveness.

As for the pedagogical implications of the study, it can be asserted that if we enhance the students awareness of these strategies or explicitly teach them to use these strategies, they possibly can improve their writing and perform better in the assessment tasks. In fact, the students awareness of the effects of English reading materials, the resources that the English textbooks, the Internet and the community can provide for them, the assistance of more capable individuals like teachers and peers and the effects of contextual and social factors can help them improve their writing. Moreover, the students awareness of the facilitative functions of the mediating resources and using them in writing can help them improve their writing. In the same regard, Lei (2009) suggested that teachers [must] recommend appropriate artifacts to students and explicitly demonstrate their use for writing activities when necessary (p. 242). Teachers can also introduce appropriate and useful writing resources and textbooks to the learners and provide them with useful comments and feedback to improve their writing. They can raise the students awareness about the criteria for good writing, give them writing tasks which are interesting, engage them more fully in the assignments, dynamically help them to enhance their understanding of the effective actions

that they can take in different phases of writing (e.g., planning, composing and revising stages) and effectively use the available resources to improve their knowledge of language which can help them write more fluent and accurate texts in terms of lexis, structure and content. The students can also benefit from the assistance and guidance of more capable individuals in the community like their peers and writing experts to improve their writing ability. The students themselves should put great effort to improve their writing as well. On the whole, since the principles of sociocultural strategy demand for collaborative actions and highlight the social and dialogic nature of writing, the instructors can use more community-mediated strategies like conferencing, dialogue journaling and peer-reviewing to help the learners improve their writing. The instructors also can create communities of practices in which the learners can collaboratively work on the writing tasks, review and comment on each other's work and learn from each other.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestion for Further Research

The findings of the present study due to the small number of participants should be reported with caution and because of the specific and context-sensitive nature of the strategies, any generalizations to other contexts should be avoided. In addition, since the questionnaire has been developed based on the data in related studies in the literature, any criticism about the process of questionnaire-development and the reliability and validity of the data is warranted. Therefore, because of the specific nature of these strategies, it is better to conduct in-depth interviews with Iranian students and develop the items which are more sensitive to the Iranian context and, thus, more appropriately target the students' particular mediating procedures and actions towards improving their writing. In addition, having access to the students' actual written texts could have provided a better picture of their writing ability and, hence, a more reliable assessment and qualitative investigation and comparison of different aspects of writing in the performance of the two groups of learners could have provided more trustworthy results. Finally, the present study has only focused on the use of sociocultural strategies in writing and further studies can be conducted to explore the use of these strategies in other aspects of communicative competence.

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