

## Palestinian EFL University-level Students' Use of Writing Strategies in Relation to their EFL Writing Performance

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### ABSTRACT

Limited empirical research has been conducted on EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Writing in the Palestinian context. Thus, the present study aimed at (1) examining Palestinian EFL university-level students' writing strategies, (2) assessing Palestinian EFL university-level students' writing performance, and (3) examining the relationship between English writing performance and writing strategies among Palestinian EFL university-level students. The data of the study were collected through administering a self-developed questionnaire and an English essay test to 66 Palestinian university-level students and conducting semi-structured interviews with 9 students selected from the 66 ones. In analyzing the quantitative data, means, standard deviations, percentages, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient were calculated. Moreover, the interviews were transcribed, coded, and organized into a number of themes. The study concluded that the participants did not exhibit a satisfactory level of strategy use when writing in English, and there was a strong positive correlation between the participants' use of English writing strategies and their EFL writing performance.

**KEY WORDS:** Palestinian, EFL, Students, Writing Strategies, Writing Performance.

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### INTRODUCTION

Writing is an important productive skill. It may be considered as the most important skill that second language students should enhance (Hyland, 2003). It is a means of communication in that it helps people share ideas, arouse emotions, and defend opinions (White & Arndt, 1991), and sometimes a writer writes a message for readers who are away in space and time (Scholes & Comley, 1989). Furthermore, good writing skills are crucial for good writing reports on readings, preparing research papers, or having essay tests (Gebhardt & Rodrigues, 1989).

However, writing tended to be neglected in both first and second language programs (White & Arndt, 1991). In the past, the structural approach giving priority to listening and speaking at the expense of reading and writing dominated EFL schools, and by 1970, the communicative approaches emerged to confirm that all language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) should be given equal emphasis (Saraswathi, 2004). Increasingly, educators around the world centered on issues related to writing in a second or foreign language (e.g., Manchon, 2009; Weijen, Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & Sanders, 2009; Yanyan, 2010; Al-Samadani, 2010; Jahin & Idrees, 2012; Wei, Shang, & Briody, 2012).

Among the issues EFL/ESL (English as a Second Language) educators have focused on are writing processes and strategies. According to White and Arndt (1991), writing is a thinking process which demands intellectual effort, and it involves generating ideas, planning, goal setting, monitoring, evaluating what is going to be written as well as what has been written, and using language for expressing exact meanings. Some authors (e.g., Brown & Hood, 1989; Scholes & Comley, 1989) provide that writing process involves three main stages: Pre-writing stage, drafting stage, and post-writing stage. According to them, writers usually practice many strategies in the three stages including brain storming and writing ideas very quickly in the pre-reading stage; beginning writing in the drafting stage; and rearranging, adding, and checking grammar, spelling, and punctuation in the post-writing stage. Winterowd and Murray (1988) state that it is in the post-writing stage, writers should proofread their writing, examining each line carefully for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and style.

Having a variety of writing strategies and skills can help writers complete their writing tasks successfully and confidently (Gebhardt & Rodrigues, 1989). A number of studies investigated the strategies and skills EFL/ESL utilized while writing an essay. Examples for the descriptive studies examining EFL/ESL writers' strategies include a study of Mu and Carrington (2007) that investigated the writing processes of second language writing of three Chinese postgraduate students. Using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the study found that the participants employed rhetorical strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social affective strategies in their writing. In the same vein, Yanyan (2010) examined the role of metacognitive knowledge in English writing of

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Chinese EFL learners, and the study concluded that the participants' metacognitive knowledge was positively connected with proficiency in English writing. Al-Samadani (2010) examined the relationship between Saudi first and second language competence and their self-regularly abilities, and the study revealed that there was a positive relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, Ahmed (2010) examined the organization problems Egyptian EFL pre-service teachers encountered when writing an essay. Wei, Shang, and Briody (2012) investigated the relationship between English writing ability levels and Taiwanese EFL learners' metacognitive behaviors during writing process, and it was revealed that advanced writers had the better use of metacognitive behaviors. Additionally, Sadi and Othman (2012) examined the writing strategies of Iranian EFL learners, and the study concluded that both good and poor writers used L1 use, re-reading, repetition, self-questioning, revision, and editing. The study also revealed that while the strategies more used by the good writers were re-reading, repetition, revision, and brainstorming, the strategies more used by the poor ones were editing, self-questioning, self-talk, and abandoning ideas. Reshadi and Aidinlou (2012) also investigated the relationship between writing metacognitive awareness and the use of two types of cohesive ties among Iranian EFL learners in the process of writing. The study concluded that the cognitive awareness had no relationship with the use of cohesive ties (i.e., coordinating, correlative, and transitional conjunctions).

Other relevant studies used the experimental method in approaching EFL writing. For example, Ali (1998) identified the effect of using journal writing on Egyptian EFL pre-service teachers writing skills, and it was concluded that journal writing had positive effect on students' writing performance. Chuo (2007) investigated the effect of Web Quest writing instruction program on Taiwanese EFL learners' writing, and the study revealed that Web Quest strategy was effective for improving students' writing. Barjesteh, Vaseghi, and Gholami (2011) also examined the effect of incorporating diary writing on Iranian EFL college students' abilities in writing and their attitudes towards writing, and the study concluded that diary writing could be one of the creative pre-writing activities. Tabatabaei and Ali (2012) examined the effect of using reading activities as pre-writing activities on Persian EFL students writing performance, and it was found out that using such activities improved students' writing performance.

As for the Palestinian context, little empirical research (e.g., Khalil, 2005; Abd Al-Raheem, 2011) probed Palestinian EFL students' writing in general and EFL students' writing at Palestinian universities (i.e., Al-Aqsa University) in particular. Al-Aqsa University is one of the Palestinian universities that are under the jurisdiction of Palestinian Ministry of Education. It consists of many faculties including Faculty of Education whose students are pre-service teachers. At the end of the study, Faculty of Education students majoring English language teaching have to earn Bachelor of Art in English language teaching. For earning such degree (i.e., Bachelor of Art), they have to study different courses (i.e., ELT (English Language Teaching) courses, linguistics courses, literature courses) with a total number of 132 credit hours. Among the linguistic courses EFL pre-service teachers should study is *Writing Skills*. Such course aimed at improving students' writing performance, and it was based on other linguistic courses. In other words, students should study many linguistic courses including *Listening & Speaking Skills* and *Reading Skills* prior to having *Writing Skills*. Based on her experience as an instructor of ELT courses at Al-Aqsa University, the researcher noticed that EFL students' writing performance was low. Given that very limited research approached this research area, the present study examined Palestinian EFL university-level students' writing strategy use in relation to their performance level in English writing.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What strategies do Palestinian EFL university-level students practice when writing essays in English?
2. What is Palestinian EFL university-level students' current writing performance level?
3. Is there a significant correlational relationship between Palestinian EFL university-level students' use of writing strategies and their EFL writing performance?

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The study recruited sixty six participants selected randomly from the third-year B.A English majors at Al-Aqsa University in Gaza. All the third-year B.A English majors at Al-Aqsa University were 220 students (29 males and 191 females). For getting a representative quantitative sample from the third-year B.A English majors at Al-Aqsa University, the study used stratified systematic random sampling technique. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) view that stratified sampling technique

involves both randomization and categorization, and it can assist in having a sample representative of the whole population. Thus, the study randomly selected sixty six students (9 males and 57 females) to administer the questionnaire and the English writing test developed by the researcher. The selection of the third year was based on the fact that they had completed different academic courses (i.e., ELT courses, linguistics courses, literature courses and one compulsory English writing course). It is noteworthy that all the sixty six students had been studying English as a foreign language for ten years, and their ages ranged from nineteen to twenty one years.

Out of the sixty six students another nine ones were selected to be interviewed in this study so as to gather in-depth data about Palestinian EFL university-level students' writing strategies. The nine participants were selected based on the gender, i.e., male and female students and students' performance level, i.e., high, middle, and low performance level. All the participants took part in the study voluntarily, and they were informed that their identities would be kept confidential.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The study was carried out at Al-Aqsa University in the second semester of the academic year 2012-2013. Data were collected in Feb. 2013 through administering a self-developed questionnaire and an English essay test to sixty six students studying English at Al-Aqsa University. While the participants completed the questionnaires within ten minutes, they were given seventy minutes to finish the test.

Out of the sixty six students, nine students were invited to be interviewed in three focus groups each of which consisted of three male and female students with different EFL writing performance levels. Each interview was conducted within thirty minutes, and it was audio-taped. Furthermore, the researcher allowed the nine participants to use their first language (Arabic) while talking so that they could express their thoughts appropriately.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The questionnaire data were processed statistically using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 17. The participants' responses to the questionnaires were analyzed in terms of percentage, mean, and standard deviation so as to measure the participants' use of EFL writing strategies. Then for assessing the participants' EFL writing performance, their writing samples were sent to three English language teachers, using the ESL composition profile developed by Jacob et al (1981). The total score of each sample was the mean of the three raters' scores. Render (1990) views that the ESL composition profile of Jacob, et al. (1981) is a good analytic scoring tool, and Haswell (2005) provides that this profile is a very popular tool. As for identifying the relationship between Strategy use and the participants' EFL writing performance, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated.

After analyzing the quantitative data, the interviews were transcribed in Arabic verbatim, translated into English, and reviewed by the participants. Then, the transcribed data were coded and organized into six categories including: (1) goal setting, (2) generating ideas, (3) organizing ideas, (4) drafting, (5) revising, and (5) Using L1 (Arabic). For achieving the data credibility, another researcher reviewed and coded the transcribed material, and the two researchers had a high degree of consistency.

### **Instruments**

#### ***A self-developed Questionnaire***

Based on some relevant references (e.g., Winterowd & Murray, 1988; Brown & Hood, 1989; Scholes & Comley, 1989). A 22-item questionnaire was designed in this study. The questionnaire was composed of three categories: 'Pre-writing Stage', 'While-writing Stage', and 'Post-writing Stage'. All the questionnaire items required multiple choice answers with a five-point likert scale: 1= always, 2= often, 3= sometimes, 4= occasionally, and 5= never. The content validity and face validity of the questionnaire were approved, and its internal consistency was determined by the researcher using Cronbach Alpha. According to Hudson (1991) (as cited by Krysik & Finn, 2013), Cronbach Alpha is used for measuring reliability, and a research scale must have an alpha coefficient of 0.60 or over. The alpha coefficient for the overall questionnaire (22 items) was at 0.87 which is considered a high level of reliability. Cronbach Alpha was also run for the categories of the questionnaire: the alpha coefficients were at 0.65 for 'Pre-writing Stage' (4 items), 0.75 for 'Drafting Stage' (8 items), and 0.82 for 'Post-writing Stage' (10 items). Table 1 shows the values for the three categories of the questionnaire.

**Table 1. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the questionnaire**

Category	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Pre-writing stage	4	0.65
Drafting stage	8	0.75
Post-writing stage	10	0.82
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0.87</b>

### *An Essay Test*

Among the effective instruments used to evaluate students' writing is a written essay (Campell, Smith, & Brooker, 1998). Thus after approving the content validity of the essay test, each participant in this study was asked to write a well-organized essay within seventy minutes. It is noteworthy that the topic of the essay was familiar to the participants, so as to help them generate ideas about it. The researcher provided the participants with the following introductory paragraph: "Write a well-organized essay within seventy minutes about your favorite university subject. Your essay should include an introductory paragraph, at least two supporting paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph."

### *A semi-structured Interview*

For the questionnaire data to be supplemented, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006) provide that semi-structured interviews can allow the researcher probe beyond the interview questions, the thing which can help in gathering in-depth data about the phenomenon. The questions of the interview were developed based on some relevant references (e.g., Winterowd & Murray, 1988; Brown & Hood, 1989; Scholes & Comley, 1989). Each interview lasted thirty minutes and was audio-recorded for transcription. Interview questions are given below:

1. what do you do before you start to write in English? Do you storm your brain for ideas on the given topic? If yes, why? Do you set a goal for writing an English essay? If yes, why? etc..
2. Do you feel confused before you start to write in English? If yes, why?
3. How do you draft your English writing? Do you develop a discussion for the topic? If yes, how? etc..
4. Do you feel confused during drafting? If yes, why?
5. What do you do after you finish your drafting? Do you check grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc..?

## **RESULTS**

### *The Results of the First Question*

The first question was "What strategies do Palestinian EFL university-level students practice when writing essays in English?" The answer to this question required administering two methods: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Prior to introducing the interview data, the quantitative data were given. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the means and percentages of use for each strategy. Following is the rubric put by three researchers to determine the participants' EFL writing strategy use:

- Excellent: 90% and above
- Very good: 80%-89.9%
- Good: 70%-79.9%
- Poor: Less than 70%

**Table (2): Means, standard deviations, percentages, and ranks of the first category items in the questionnaire**

No.	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage	Rank
1	I identify the purpose for writing an essay.	4.16	0.91	83.2	2
2	I identify the audience I will write my essay to.	3.22	1.20	64.4	4
3	I storm my brain for ideas on the given topic.	4.21	0.82	84.1	1
4	I generate a list of related words about the topic.	3.47	1.11	69.4	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>3.76</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>75.3</b>	

Table 2 shows that the first and third items ('I identify the purpose for writing an essay'; 'I storm my brain for ideas on the given topic') fell into the very good level, and the second and fourth items ('I identify the audience I will write my essay to'; 'I generate a list of related words about the topic') fell into the poor level. From the percentage scores of the above items, it can be noticed that most participants focused only on setting a goal for writing and generating ideas related to the given topic in the pre-writing stage.

**Table (3) Means, standard deviations, percentages, and ranks of the second category items in the questionnaire**

No.	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage	Rank
1	I write phrases and sentences with errors and disorganized ideas.	3.60	0.98	72.1	1
2	I develop a clear discussion for the topic.	3.13	0.96	62.6	3
3	I develop the main idea in each paragraph.	3.19	1.08	63.8	2
4	I explain the areas of expertise to non-expert readers.	2.24	1.09	44.7	8
5	I insert quotations or paraphrasing from outside sources.	2.35	1.06	47.1	7
6	I transform personal experiences and views.	2.74	1.18	54.7	4
7	I re-read phrases and sentences while writing.	2.62	1.20	52.4	5
8	I have a time limit in my mind while writing the first draft.	2.46	1.34	49.1	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>2.79</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>55.8</b>	

Table 3 shows that while the first item ('I write phrases and sentences with errors and disorganized ideas') fell into the good level, the other seven items were of poor level. It seems that the participants tended to draft their compositions without considering some important points including time limit, their own experiences, or others' experiences.

**Table (4) Means, standard deviations, percentages, and ranks of the third category items in the questionnaire**

No.	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage	Rank
1	I change the order of parts to make the content or purposes clear.	2.68	1.19	53.5	6
2	I add words, sentences, or paragraphs when necessary	3.06	1.26	61.2	4
3	I take out unnecessary words, sentences or paragraphs.	2.64	1.09	52.7	8
4	I write the same thing in a different way.	2.65	1.08	52.9	7
5	I substitute one word for another.	2.82	1.08	56.5	5
6	I combine two or three sentences into one.	2.59	1.04	51.8	10
7	I change parts which are inappropriate for the situation, the purpose or the audience..	2.63	1.04	52.6	9
8	I correct grammar.	3.47	1.10	69.4	3
9	I correct punctuation marks.	3.57	1.14	71.5	2
10	I correct spelling.	3.69	1.07	73.8	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>2.98</b>	<b>0.70</b>	<b>59.6</b>	

As shown in table 4, while the ninth and tenth items ('I correct punctuation marks') and ('I correct spelling') fell into the good level, the other eight items were of poor level, the thing which means that a majority of the participants did not tend to practice revising strategies, as they seemed to be concerned about only writing mechanics (i.e., punctuation, spelling, paragraphs, etc.) in the final stage of writing.

**Table 5: Means, standard deviations, percentages, and ranks of the questionnaire categories**

Category	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
Pre-writing Stage	3.76	0.71	75.3
Drafting Stage	2.79	0.67	55.8
Post-writing Stage	2.98	0.70	59.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.05</b>	<b>0.57</b>	<b>61.0</b>

The data in table 5 show that the level of the participants' strategy use is poor. The overall percentage score of all participants' responses on the three categories fell into the poor usage level (61.0%) with a standard deviation 0.57. which means that the participants did not exhibit a satisfactory level of strategy use. The table also indicates that the participants showed more use of pre-writing stage strategies than the other two stages strategies, and they also seemed to use the post-writing stage more frequently than the while-writing stage strategies.

### *The Semi-structured Interviews Results*

The interviews were fully transcribed, coded, and organized into six categories including: (1) goal setting, (2) generating ideas, (3) organizing ideas, (4) drafting, (5) revising, and (5) Using L1 (Arabic).

#### *Goal Setting*

The interviews analysis revealed that all the participants tended to set a purpose for writing an essay ,i.e., argumentative, expository, etc.

#### *Generating Ideas*

Generating ideas is another strategy used by all interviewees in this study. The interviews data revealed that a majority of the participants tended to center on generating ideas related to topics they were going to write on in the pre-writing stage. The following two excerpts may show the way the participants employed such strategy:

Participant T. 9 (a female student): *I first think about the writing topic I'm going to write on. Then, I retrieve my background information about the topic. I often write what comes to my mind on a paper in order not to forget the related ideas while writing the essay.*

Participant T. 1 (a female student): *When I want to write a composition on a writing topic I try to storm my mind and decide all main ideas, opinions, and facts related to the topic. Then, I record these ideas in the margin. Recording the ideas in the margin can assist in identifying the number of the essay paragraphs I am going to compose.*

It is noteworthy that four of the nine participants reported that they had a difficulty with generating ideas. They seemed to use expansion drills so as to compensate this weakness:

Participant T. 5 (a male student): *In writing essays, I encounter a problem which is the inability of finding relevant ideas. I usually put three or four paragraphs under the same idea. For example, I may compose an essay consisting of five or six paragraphs and handling only two main ideas, as I repeat the same meaning in different structural patterns. That is why I get low marks in my essay exams. Indeed, I often feel anxious because of this problem, and I think that most of my colleagues suffer from it.*

Participant T. 7 (a female student): *Unfortunately, I struggle in generating ideas for writing English essays because the topics our instructor asks us to write on are unfamiliar to me, i.e., racial discrimination, globalization, etc. This may due to the fact that I do not read much about other cultures or different subject matters. I think that I need to read extensively to become more culturally aware.*

#### *Organizing Ideas*

Another important strategy employed by Palestinian EFL learners is organizing ideas. The interviews showed that some participants (five students) tended to make outline before they begin writing:

Participant T. 9 (a female student): *After generating the ideas, I organize them in a way that could help in organizing the essay paragraphs in a logical manner. I often arrange ideas from the most important to the least.*

Participant T. 4 (a male student): *Prior to starting the writing process, I make outline for the essay I'm going to compose. First, I count the number of the paragraphs that will be included in the essay, i.e., an introductory paragraph, three or four supporting paragraphs, and a concluding one. Then, I identify the ideas supporting paragraphs will handle, and arrange them in a logical manner.*

#### *Drafting*

The interviews revealed that after generating main ideas, most participants developed a discussion for such ideas through writing words, phrases, and sentences with errors:

Participant T. 6 (a female student): *After identifying the main ideas at the start of writing, I write the needed information supporting such ideas. At this stage, I am only concerned about writing the facts I can remember about the topic, my personal experiences, and my own opinions .In fact, I do not pay any attention to grammatical or spelling mistakes so as to be able to record all ideas that come to my mind while writing.*

#### *Revising*

While only a few interviewees were found to revise their writing, (i.e., essay organization, simple grammatical mistakes, and mechanical levels) in the while-writing stage, others tended to use such strategy in the post-writing stage:

Participant T. 4 (a male student): *While writing the first draft I usually re-read sentences and paragraphs so as to check that the lines I have written are well-organized, i.e., checking the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding one with each sentence smoothly leading to the next one. I also check all grammatical, spelling, and punctuation mistakes while writing.*

Participant T. 6 (a female student): *Finishing writing, I check the organization of the essay paragraphs and sentences. Additionally, I check all punctuation and spelling errors, since in the while-writing stage I am only concerned about writing the facts I can remember about the topic, my personal experiences, and my own opinions. In fact, I do not pay any attention to grammatical or spelling mistakes while drafting so as to record all what comes to my mind while writing.*

#### *Using L1 (Arabic)*

Most interviewees reported that they used their mother tongue language (Arabic) in the first two stages, i.e., pre-writing stage and while-writing stage. The following two excerpts may clearly show how the participants used the L1 in writing:

Participant T. 2 (a female student): *I often use Arabic when recording the ideas related to the topic I am going to write on, then I translate them into English. In fact, using Arabic helps me produce more relevant ideas.*

Participant T. 3 (a female student): *I usually compose phrases and sentences in Arabic, then I translate it into English. From my instructor's feedback, I found out that I used to translate words and phrases literally, the thing which made me use words and phrases in inappropriate contexts. Though my instructor advised me not to use Arabic while writing, I can not stop using it. In fact, using Arabic helps a lot in writing complete meaningful paragraphs, and I used to employ it in early stages of writing.*

To sum, the interview and questionnaire data revealed that the study participants did not exhibit a satisfactory level of EFL writing strategy use. They seemed to pay most attention to only a few strategies, i.e. generating ideas, using L1 (Arabic) and revising mechanical levels (punctuation, spelling, paragraphs, etc.).

#### ***The Results of the Second Question***

The second question was "What is Palestinian EFL university-level students' current writing performance level?" For this question to be answered, the study administered an English essay test. The students' writing samples were sent to three English language university teachers, using the ESL composition profile developed by Jacob et al (1981). The total score of each sample was the mean of the three raters' scores. Following is the rubric put by three English language university-level teachers to determine the participants' EFL writing performance:

- Excellent: 90% and above
- Very good: 80%-89.9%
- Good: 70%-79.9%
- Poor: Less than 70%

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for the participants' writing performance.

**Table 6: Descriptive statistics for the participants' writing competence**

Writing proficiency level	Raw frequency	Percent Frequency
Excellent	0	0
Very Good	3	4.5%
Good	20	30.3%
Poor	43	65.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6 shows that 65.2% of the participants' scores fell into the poor level. While the lowest score was 35, the highest score was 83 out of 100. It may be argued that among the factors contributing to the participants' performance level in writing was strategy use. From the interviews data, it was revealed that a number of students had difficulty with grammar and vocabulary usage due to the L1 use. Furthermore, it was revealed that the participants' EFL writing strategy use was poor, the thing which might lead to low writing performance level.

#### ***The Results of the Third Question***

The third question was "Is there a significant correlational relationship between Palestinian EFL university-level students' use of writing strategies and their EFL writing performance?" The study hypothesized that here was a significant relationship between Palestinian EFL students' writing performance and their strategy use. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated. Table 7 shows Pearson product-moment correlations between the participants' use of writing strategies and their EFL writing performance.

**Table 7: Pearson Product-moment correlations between the participants' use of writing strategies and their EFL writing performance**

Categories	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Pre-writing Stage	0.28	0.018*
Drafting Stage	0.52	*0.000
Post-writing Stage	0.57	*0.000
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>*0.000</b>

Table 7 shows ( $R = 0.60$ ) that there is a strong positive correlation between English writing performance and English writing strategy use. The low levels of English writing performance is associated with low levels of English strategy use. Moreover, table 7 ( $R = 0.28$ ,  $R = 0.52$ ,  $R = 0.57$ ) shows that there are positive correlational relationships between English writing performance and pre-writing strategies, while-writing strategies, and post-writing strategies. Based on these results, the study confirmed the hypothesis posed.

## DISCUSSION

The present study reported that Palestinian EFL university-level students did not exhibit a satisfactory level of writing strategy use. It could be assumed that the participants did not learn the strategies which could help them write well-organized essays. Similar to the results drawn in this study, Salem and Foo (2012) reported that Jordanian EFL students generally failed to use a satisfactory level of writing process in that they tended to avoid the three main stages of the writing process, i.e., pre-writing stage, while-writing stage, and post-reading stage.

The interviews conducted in this study revealed that most participants used their mother tongue language (Arabic) in the first two stages of writing (i.e., pre-writing stage and while-writing stage). Similar to the participants in this study, the L2 students in a study of Wang and Wen (2002) depended on L1 when they were managing their writing process and generating and organizing ideas. In the same vein, Weijen, Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, and Sanders (2009) indicated that all the participants used L1 (Dutch) while writing in L2. It may be argued here that due to their low proficiency levels in writing, the participants might find the L1 use essential while writing in FL/L2. In this context, Woodall (2002) suggests that the less proficient L2 writers use their L1 more frequently than more proficient.

Another result drawn from the present study was that the participants' overall level in essay writing was poor. Similar to most studies conducted on university-level EFL students' writing performance, Palestinian EFL learners' writing performance level was poor. For instance, Algomoul (2011) reported that Jordanian EFL proficiency level in writing was low. Likewise, Jahin, and Idrees (2012) revealed that Saudi EFL pre-service teachers writing proficiency was very low.

The present study also revealed that there was a positive correlational relationship between Palestinian EFL university-level students' writing strategies and their writing performance, as the participants showed a poor level not only in their EFL writing strategy use but also in their EFL writing performance level. Congruent with the study results, Chien (2007) found that low achieving student writers in China neglected revising and editing. Salem and Foo (2012) also found that Jordanian EFL Low proficiency students did not practice the strategies of planning, editing, or even revising while writing. Sadi and Othman (2012) revealed that poor Iranian EFL student writers failed to practice some important strategies including brainstorming, re-reading, revision, and repetition. Similarly, Wei, Shang, and Briody (2012) found that high proficient writers used more planning strategies than others.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study results showed that there was a positive correlational relationship between Palestinian EFL university-level students' writing strategies and their writing performance, as the participants showed a poor level not only in their EFL writing strategy use but also in their EFL writing performance level. It may be argued that among the factors contributing to EFL students' competence level in writing is strategy use. Hence for Palestinian EFL university-level students' writing to be improved, they should be trained to use effective writing strategies. In fact, Palestinian EFL instructors need to place strong emphasis on writing strategies as one of the key procedures to a good essay. White and Arndt (1991) view writing as a thinking process that demands intellectual effort, since it involves generating ideas, planning, goal setting, monitoring, evaluating what is going to be written as well as what has been written, and using language for expressing exact meanings. Winterowd and Murray

(1988) also provide that it is in the post-writing stage, writers should proofread their writing, examining each line carefully for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and style. According to Wei, Shang, and Briody (2012), EFL learners should learn how to plan, generate and organize ideas, and evaluate what was written so as to produce good writing tasks. Chien (2007) also views that EFL students need to be engaged in reviewing and evaluating strategies while writing. In the same vein, Dugler (2004) recommends that using metacognitive strategies can enhance achievement in EFL writing, since learning writing strategies is one of the important factors contributing to good writing tasks.

Related to the study results was that some participants were found to struggle in generating ideas. For Palestinian EFL novice writers to generate ideas, instructors need to give them topics relevant to their interests. Stapa and Abdul Majid (2006) provide that if the topic is familiar to students, there will be more ideas than if the topic is unfamiliar. Additionally, Hamad, Ali, and Salih (2007) and Wei, Shang, and Briody (2012) note that instructors should give EFL students interesting topics.

The interviews in this study revealed that most participants used their mother tongue language (Arabic) in the first two stages of writing (i.e., pre-writing stage and while-writing stage), the thing which might lead to committing errors resulting from word-for-word translation (i.e., using words and phrases in inappropriate contexts). In this respect, Urdaneta (2011) indicates that L1 (Spanish) written structure can negatively affect L2 written structures while writing. In order for Palestinian EFL university-level students to overcome this problem, they need to attempt two important procedures: exposing themselves to EFL authentic texts and using dictionaries and grammar books while writing. Hussein and Mohammad (2011) note that teachers should expose their students to L2 authentic materials and encourage them to get involved in tasks that require the use of authentic language. Furthermore, Wei, Shang, and Briody (2012) note that to enhance the quality of writing, FL students are advised to use dictionaries, grammar books, and reference books when checking their compositions. In this way, EFL students will be aware of the usages of words and phrases, and therefore can use them in the most appropriate way.

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