

# Investigation of Writing Strategies, Writing Apprehension, and Writing Achievement among Saudi EFL-Major Students

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## Abstract

The tenet of this study is to investigate the use of writing strategies in reducing writing apprehension and uncovering its effect on EFL students' writing achievement. It also attempts to explore associations between foreign language apprehension, writing achievement and writing strategies. The primary aims of the study were to explore the relationship between writing strategies that EFL university students employ and writing apprehension, relationship between writing strategies use and students' writing achievement, and differences between high and low writing anxiety in their writing strategy use. Data were drawn from 198 (68 males and 130 females) EFL-major university students. The participants were asked to respond to a Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI; Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory) (Cheng, 2004) and to complete a Writing Strategies Inventory (Petric & Czarl, 2003). Some interviews were also conducted with some students to explore salient effective writing strategies that they used and the difficulties they faced during writing composition. Correlation, t-test, and ANOVA analyses were used to determine relationships between writing strategies and writing achievement and between students of high and low anxiety. The results of the study calls into question the common assumption that some of the Saudi undergraduates' writing apprehension is pertinent to writing achievement. The results indicated that students with low writing anxiety were more users of writing strategies than the high anxious ones. Moreover, a significant negative correlation was found between students' writing apprehension and their writing achievement.

**Keywords:** writing apprehension, writing strategies, EFL-major students, gender, writing achievement

## 1. Introduction

Writing is claimed to play an important role in intellectual development and career preparation (Gere, 1985). Öz contends: "Writing is the written expression of thoughts, desires, emotions, and schemes; and this requires skill rather than knowledge" (2006, p. 251). So to speak, writing is a skill that serves individuals' communication needs as well as their learning. As writing skills of students develop, they begin to apply their knowledge to the written expression more and more easily and go beyond what they have learnt (Raimes, 1983). According to Dyson (1995), writing is not merely an individual activity but a process which requires social interaction. Rayers (1987) maintain that the fledgling young who begins to write should write in a shared way to accelerate the process. Therefore, the learner is expected to develop a better technical point of view toward writing and have an increased awareness of his/her own responsibilities. One of the key factors which affect writing is the writing strategies. Findings of a number of previous studies suggest that teaching strategies for managing text production is an effective way of improving the writing of students with learning disabilities or poor writing skills (e.g. De la Paz, 1999; García & Arias-Gundin, 2004; García & de Caso, 2004; García-Sánchez & Fidalgo-Redondo, 2006; Graham, Harris, & Mason, 2005; Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000; Graham, Macarthur, Schwartz, & Pagevoth, 1992; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006; Lei, 2008). Most language learners at all levels believe that writing is one of the most difficult language skills to master (Kurt & Atay, 2007; Latif, 2007).

Writing is an essential language skill that is vital to academic success. Since it is an active, productive skill, students learning to write in a foreign language (FL) face multiple challenges (Erkan & Saban, 2011). The complexity of writing in FL as a task tends to heighten anxiety levels in students who are taking writing courses. This anxiety can often lead to discouragement, and thus may result in negative attitudes towards writing (Gere,

1987; Sharples, 1993). Most students, low and high achievers alike, find writing difficult and view it as something they just have to persevere through in order to pass certain exams (Yavuz & Genç, 1998). Lindemann (2001) defined writing as “a process of communication that uses a conventional graphic system to convey a message to a reader” (p.10). Writing involves a deliberate, creative, and complex cognitive process on the part of the writer (Silvia & Matsuda, 2001). As such, Flower and Hayes (1981) hypothesized that the cause of writing anxiety stems from inefficient strategy use.

In a later study, Hayes and Flower (1986) found that a major difference between expert and novice writers has been their use of the planning stage; i.e. experts generate far more elaborate and integrated goal networks than novices do. Good writers recognize the importance of the prewriting phase, viewing it as rehearsal in which preparation comes in the form of “daydreaming, sketching, doodling, making lists of words, reading, conversing, and writing” (Graves, 1983, p. 221). Writing therefore, is a complex skill to master, and it places multiple demands on writers. Mastering the writing process requires hard work, skill development, and years of practice. Many students were found to have difficulty to write clearly or express their ideas well when they write (Applebee, Langer & Mullis, 1986; Ganopole, 1988; Collins & Cross, 1993; Collins & Parkhurst, 1996).

Based on the very nature of writing as a skill, it is obvious that writing needs to go through an effective developmental process. Sommers (2006) argues that writers need plenty of practice in order to get better. This practice needs to occur in and beyond the first year experience. It especially needs to happen within the student’s discipline. Hence, Fidalgo, Torrance, and García (2008) suggest that persistence benefits strategy-focused writing instruction. Chai (2006) stressed that generating a writing plan before writing a composition is beneficial to writers. Similarly, using content area literacy strategies increases students’ abilities to internalize content of courses, and develop conceptual understanding about subject matters (Stephens & Brown, 2000).

A line of research was initiated recently to investigate the significance of writing strategy. For example, Graham (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of 20 group-comparison studies, with both learning disabled and typically-developing students, and concluded that strategy instruction showed great positive effects on writing quality. Findings also presented evidence that effects on text quality can be maintained for 4–10 weeks after the intervention. Based on that, a successful writer uses some strategies for comprehensive writing, such as relating the text to one’s own experience, summarizing the information, concluding and asking questions about the text, and so on. An effective writing process will most probably influence one’s writing achievement. The focus on writing becomes an integral and ongoing part of the institutional culture (Anson, 2006). Moreover, the interaction between intensive L1 and L2 training was found to reinforce the students’ tendency to apply the meta-knowledge they had acquired to their L1 and L2 essay writing (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008).

A number of cognitive-oriented studies, have also found that expert writers use more effective planning and revising strategies than inexperienced student writers and confirmed that the learners, who use effective writing strategies perform better in the language achievement assignment given to them (e.g. Cumming, 1989; Hayes, Flower, Shriver, Stratman, & Carey, 1987; Sasaki, 2000). Further, writing strategy instruction has been found effective, especially for adolescents who have writing difficulty, and it is also a powerful technique for adolescents in general (Graham & Perin, 2006). Writing strategies instruction involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions (Graham & Perin, 2006).

Writing apprehension has been deemed as a critical issue that teachers have to learn how to address (Smith, 1984). Writing anxiety was defined as a fear of the writing process which outweighs the projected gain from the ability to write (Thompson, 1980). Bloom (1985) used the term “writing anxiety” to describe people who exhibit one or a combination of feelings, beliefs or behaviours that interfere with a person’s ability to start or work on or finish a given writing task that he or she is intellectually capable of doing.

As a naturally occurring phenomenon, anxiety pervades every corner of human life, let alone a skill such as writing. For example, early studies reported that nearly 80% of American students fear their composition courses (Eulert, 1976), and an estimation of 25% of American students suffer from severe writing anxiety (Bloom, 1980). Also, Freedman (1983) surveyed college students and found that 45% found writing to be aversive, 61% found it to be difficult and 41% expressed that they had little confidence in their ability to write. Similarly, Huwari and Aziz’ (2011) study showed that majority of the Jordanian postgraduate students experienced high level of writing apprehension.

To pursue meaningful solutions for writing apprehension, a number of researchers attempted study-based suggestions. For example, Smith (1984) provided some strategies that have worked successfully in various classrooms such as teaching writing as a process, giving clear directions, sharing of grading criteria, and allowing students to work in peer groups. These, coupled with assigning some ungraded written work, may work

toward alleviating students' anxiety levels about their papers (Smith, 1984). Furthermore, Tighe (1987) discussed methods that she herself has adopted in an effort to reduce the apprehensiveness levels in her lower level freshmen writing classes. By incorporating journals, allowing ample time for students to complete assignments during class, and encouraging peer critiquing, Tighe noticed that her students' anxiety diminished and their writing levels improved.

Writing achievement can be defined as expressing one's ideas in written form in a second or foreign language, and doing so with reasonable accuracy and coherence (Celce-Mercia, 1991). In this regard, only a few studies have placed a particular focus on examining writing anxiety and its impact on performance. For example, some studies have indicated that writing apprehension is negatively associated with the quality of message encoded (e.g. Burgoon & Hale, 1983; Fleming, 1985), their writing performance (e.g. Faigley, Daly, & Witte, 1981; Fowler & Ross, 1982), and students' willingness to write or take advanced writing courses (e.g. Daley & Miller, 1975). As for L2, negative relationships between anxiety and L2 achievement have been established (e.g. Aida, 1994; Cheng, 1994; Horwitz, 1986). Several studies showed that high apprehensive writers preferred academic majors and occupations that they perceived as requiring relatively little writing, whereas low apprehensive writers favoured academic majors and jobs that appeared to require more writing (e.g. Daley & Miller, 1975; Daly & Shamo, 1978; Schultz & Meyers, 1981).

Other studies revealed a close association between students' writing anxiety and their course grades obtained in writing classes. In some early studies, Powers, Cook, and Meyers (1979) reported that some students with low levels of writing apprehension were actually poor writers. Similarly, Bloom (1980) noted high levels of apprehensions among a number of very skilled writers. Powell (1984) and Fowler and Ross (1982) found that highly anxious students were more likely to receive low grades in composition classes. However, Fowler and Kroll (1980) found no significant relationship between writing apprehension and grades in a large composition course. More recently, Chai (2006) reported that there were positive relationships between quality of writing plans and writing scores.

About the relationship between writing anxiety and gender differences, research on gender differences produced mixed results. However, there is a commonly held belief that females may experience less writing anxiety than males. For example, Daly and his associates found that female students had significantly lower scores than male students in writing apprehension (Daly et al., 1988; Xu, 1993). Xu ascribed her results to the fact that men have a lower writing apprehension score than women to the dominant role men traditionally assume in the Chinese society, which contributes to their relatively higher self-esteem than women. In the same vein, Heaton (1980) reported that as many boys were anxious as girls. On the contrary, Thompson's study (1981) revealed that female students felt more anxious than males. Other studies failed to show statistically significant sex difference in writing apprehension (e.g. Schultz & Meyers, 1981; Reed, Vandett, & Burton, 1983; Crigler, 1993). Similarly, Cheng (2002), in a research conducted on writing anxiety among Taiwanese students of English, reported higher levels of anxiety in females. Further, Pappamihel (2002) found that females were much more anxious than males in the mainstream classroom.

Concerning the relationship between the year of study (i.e. level) and language anxiety, some studies reported statistically significant associations. Onwuegbuzie, Baily, & Daley (1999) found that participants, who were at three different FL levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced), displayed a fairly consistent rise in anxiety as they progressed through years of study (i.e. freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors). Cheng (2002), on the other hand, noted that while anxiety did not increase depending on levels of writing proficiency, it did rise with year of study, freshman (first year) tending to exhibit least anxiety, and juniors (third year) tending to exhibit most.

Due to the social and economic development in Saudi Arabia, the learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been seen extremely important. English is generally considered by the public to be essential in expanding foreign trade, accelerating technological development and increasing international communication and cultural exchange (Tse, 1985). In fact, English is the only foreign language that is taught in Saudi Arabia as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum at all levels of primary, intermediate, secondary and in college education. English-major university students are required to take writing courses for eight levels consecutively. However, most of those students are hardly able to communicate with native speakers after four years of studying English at the college level.

Writing is the written expression of emotions, thoughts, desires and schemes, which requires skill rather than knowledge. However, skillful writing is a strategic process, and requires using writing strategies. On the other hand, it is a process which demands hard work, intensive reading, making inferences from reading materials and a long practice. Many students express their thoughts in written form with great difficulty (Kırmızı, 2009). There

are many reasons for this attitude toward writing; and one of them might be writing apprehension. Although some curriculum plans of Foreign Languages Department include writing courses from the first level through the eighth level (e.g. at Taif University, Saudi Arabia), the researcher have noticed that many students' writing performance is poor, which has negative effects on their English writing achievement specifically and on their achievement in general. Some students feel nervous when they are asked to write an essay in English and most students have serious composition difficulties. These difficulties might be attributed to the students' lack of knowledge of the appropriate writing strategies to use when writing an essay. These observations arouse the question as whether these students use writing strategies and whether these strategies may help increase their achievement and lessen their writing apprehension.

Purpose of this research is threefold: (1) to investigate the effects of writing strategies on students' writing apprehension, (2) to discover associations between writing apprehension, writing achievement and study levels of using writing strategies in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> college level, and (3) to identify some of the difficulties that Saudi EFL-major students experience to discover writing strategies they use when writing in English.

Research Hypotheses are:

1. EFL students vary in using writing strategies.
2. There are relationships between the use of writing strategies, writing apprehension and students' writing achievement
3. There are significant differences between students with high and low writing anxiety in their writing strategy use and their writing achievement in favour of low anxiety group.
4. There are no gender differences among the participants in the variables of the study.
5. There are differences in the students' writing anxiety according to their levels of English study.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Participants*

One hundred ninety eight English-major students (68 males and 130 females) in the Faculty of Arts, Taif University participated in the present study. They were selected from the second level (14 males and 52 females) and the eighth level (54 males and 78 females). The reason for this level-based selection is that these participants would have already undertaken all writing courses offered by the department at different levels.

### *2.2 Research Design*

The present study attempted a mixed methodology approach comprising quantitative and qualitative methods. Used together, qualitative and quantitative research paradigms can provide a descriptive picture of a group and a snapshot of the individual learner's experience (McCracken, 1988, p. 1). In discussing her research with ESL student writers, Zamel (1983) argued that using qualitative research methods, especially interviews, promotes better rapport and collection of authentic information from non-native participants because this method more readily establishes a better personal relationship between the researcher and the participants. In addition, these qualitative interviews allow the participants to express their individual feelings, experiences and perceptions in an informal, non-threatening way.

### *2.3 The Pilot Study*

The pilot study was conducted and examined for validity, reliability and to determine the amount of time required to complete the questionnaire. The sample group hit fifty participants. The Sample age of participants is  $M= 20.24$ ,  $SD= 1.97$ . The students responded well to the survey inventories and the interviews. Further, Cronbach alpha coefficient is .86. All of them are Saudis.

### *2.4 Data Collection*

The qualitative and quantitative data for this research were collected from three principle sources: (1) a personal interview with each of the 16 participants and (2) a short written response to four questions about writing, (3) participants' responses to a writing apprehension questionnaire and a writing strategies inventory. The participants completed the questionnaires in a whole-class session. To examine differences in writing strategies, inventory and writing apprehension questionnaires between males and females,  $t$  tests were used. To see possible differences in writing strategies and writing apprehension between groups at different levels (2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>), MANOVAs was used. To examine the relationship between writing strategies (independent variables) and writing apprehension (dependent variable), correlation was used.

## 2.5 Instruments

### 2.5.1 Writing Anxiety Inventory

Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Cheng, 2004) was used in this study. SLWAI measures the degree to which an individual feels anxious when writing in an L2. It contains 22 items that are answered on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The SLWAI has good internal consistency with a reported Cronbach alpha coefficient of .91 (Cheng, 2004).

Item validity and internal consistency for writing anxiety inventory in the current study:

The corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.411 to 0.723 ( $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting adequate item validity. The internal consistency was high for the total scale ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ), and the mean for the total is  $M = 65.20$ ,  $Sd. = 10.26$ .

### 2.5.2 Writing Strategies Inventory (SLWAI)

The researcher used Petric and Czarl, (2003) on assessing Saudi English major students' writing strategies. The inventory consists of 38 items and includes three dimensions. Items (1-8) are concerned with 'before starting' the writing of an essay in English, items (9- 22) deal with 'during writing in English', items (23-38) represent 'during revision'. Participants answer each item statement using a 5-point Likert-scale that ranged from 1 (Never true) through 5 (Always true).

Item validity and internal consistency for the writing strategies inventory in the current study:

The corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.313 to 0.632 ( $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting adequate item validity. The corrected item-Subscale 1 correlation ranged from 0.263 to 0.613 ( $p < 0.01$ ); for the Subscale 2 correlation ranged from 0.314 to 0.631 ( $p < 0.01$ ); for the Subscale 3 correlation ranged from 0.341 to 0.582 ( $p < 0.01$ ). The internal consistency was high for the total scale ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ), as well as for Subscale 1 ( $\alpha = 0.653$ ), Subscale 2 ( $\alpha = 0.781$ ), and Subscale 3 ( $\alpha = 0.762$ ). The means for Subscale 1 ( $M = 21.82$ ,  $S.D. = 4.85$ ), for Subscale 2 ( $M = 47.52$ ,  $S.D. = 7.42$ ), and for Subscale 3 ( $M = 47.64$ ,  $S.D. = 6.76$ ).

Table 1. Internal consistency for writing strategies inventory

Sub factors	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Total
Factor 1	1			
Factor2	0.397**	1		
Factor3	0.332*	0.490**	1	
Total	0.671**	0.846**	0.802**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### 2.5.3 Interview Questions

Weiss (1994) believes that interviews are an effective way to peer into the interior of individuals and their particular perspectives and experiences. Sixteen students were chosen for personal interviews. Eight females; 4 from the second level (2 high writing achievement and 2 with low writing achievement) and 4 from eighth level were chosen. Eight males were also chosen; 4 from the second level and 4 from eighth level. The students were asked to describe their writing feelings, experiences, difficulties when writing compositions, especially in writing classes. They were also asked open-ended questions to discover the writing strategies they follow to reduce their writing difficulties. On the average, the interviews lasted from forty – five minutes to an hour. The length of each interview depended largely on the subject's talkativeness and to a certain extent, his/her oral English proficiency and understanding of the questions that were posed. The interview concentrated on four major open-ended questions as follows:

- (1) What were your early schooling and literacy experiences in English language?
- (2) How did you feel about writing in English?
- (3) What kind of difficulties do you encounter when writing in English?
- (4) What writing strategies do you employ to cope with these difficulties?

### 3. Results and Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between writing strategies and writing apprehension, and their relationship with Saudi EFL-major students' writing achievement. Analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data showed that many EFL suffered from anxiety when writing in English. Findings are discussed thematically as follows: Use of writing strategies and the relationship between writing anxiety, writing strategies, and writing achievement. Also, differences related to achievement, gender, and study levels are also discussed.

#### 3.1 Use of Writing Strategy

Table 2. EFL-major students' use of writing strategies

Writing strategies dimensions	Scale items	Students' number who used	Percentage %
1. Before starting the writing of an essay in English	7	168	84%
2. during writing in English	14	185	93%
3. during revision	16	169	85%

To answer the first research question, the data were tabulated to see which group uses the writing strategies more in writing. The maximum score in the Likert scale is 5 and the minimum score is 1. The writing strategies inventory is divided into three factors representing the writing strategies. Therefore, the total maximum score was of the first factor 'Before starting the writing of an essay in English' is  $7 \times 5 = 35$ , the second factor 'during writing in English' is  $14 \times 5 = 70$ , and for the third one 'during revision' is  $5 \times 16 = 80$ . The minimum score was  $7 \times 1 = 7$ ,  $14 \times 1 = 14$ ,  $16 \times 1 = 16$ . Based on their scores on the SLWAI, the participants were divided into two groups. The respondents, who scored 17.5 on the first factor, 35 on the second factor, 40 on the third one and more, were considered to use more of the writing strategies and. Conversely, those who scored less than the mentioned scores were considered low users of the writing strategies.

According to the median score of each factor, the number of the respondents on the first factor was 168 out of  $198 = 84\%$ . On the other hand, the number of the respondents for the second factor was 185 out of  $198 = 93\%$ . For the third factor, the respondents were 169 out of  $198 = 85\%$ . Despite the differences among students regarding their early school writing experiences and the difficulties they encountered in writing English essays, the majority of respondents used the second writing strategy in the first rank, which are the strategies used 'during writing' in English. The third one 'during revision' comes in the second rank and finally the first strategy comes in the third rank. In other words, most of respondents seem to focus on the strategies 'during writing' their essay, because they may think this is the most important stage. It can also be assumed that students may lack awareness of the importance of writing strategies before and during the revision process.

The first research question focused on exploring the writing strategies that EFL-major students employ more often. The writing strategies inventory that was used in the current research was divided into three dimensions: Strategies before starting the writing of an essay in English, during writing in English, and strategies used during revision. Participants in the current study used the second writing strategy (during writing in English) the most. The third dimension (i.e. during revision) comes in the second rank and finally the first strategy comes in the third rank.

Many previous studies (e.g. Cumming, 1989; Hayes & Flower, 1986; Hayes, Flower, Shriver, Stratman, & Carey, 1987; Sasaki, 2000) have found that expert writers use more effective planning and revising strategies than inexperienced student writers. In the present study, the reported students' lack of appropriate knowledge of writing strategies can be attributed to the absence of directed instruction on writing strategies by the teachers in the writing courses, more specifically during the students' public school education. This was further confirmed by interviews implications which revealed that participants were not exposed to any overt instruction on how to approach their writing, apart from tips on essay structure and basic grammatical and lexical advice. Another explanation for these results is that the students followed unsuitable writing strategies to study these writing courses; e.g. they depended on memorization strategies. Hence, the students did feel anxious when writing composition.

### 3.2 Relationship between Writing Anxiety, Writing Strategies, and Writing Achievement

Table 3. The correlation coefficients between the writing anxiety, writing strategies and writing achievement

	TOTAL Writing anxiety	TOTAL SLWAI	Writing Achievement
Total of writing anxiety	1.000		
Writing strategies	-.203	1.000	
Writing achievement	-.416	.326	1.000

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results reveal that there are negative correlations between writing strategies and writing anxiety/apprehension. Also, there are negative correlations between writing achievement and writing apprehension. However, there are positive relationships between the writing achievement and writing strategies. These results demonstrate the participants' low awareness of writing strategies. These findings also indicate that the students' apprehension badly affected their use of strategies and their writing achievement.

Table 4. A descriptive analysis for writing anxiety, writing achievement and writing strategies

writing Strategies dimensions	Low & High anxiety	N	St.d	df	T	Sig	
1. Before starting the writing of an essay in English	Low anxiety	46	21.2653	4.8980	93	- 0.651	0.519
	High anxiety	49	20.5652	5.5724			
2. during writing in English	Low anxiety	46	49.0408	7.5414	93	2.722	0.008
	High anxiety	49	44.1304	9.9456			
3. during revision	Low anxiety	46	48.8571	7.5691	93	1.137	0.259
	High anxiety	49	46.7826	10.1103			
Total of writing Strategies factors	Low anxiety	46	119.1633	12.8944	93	2.147	0.034
	High anxiety	49	111.4783	21.2349			
Writing achievement	Low anxiety	46	80.717	9.928	93	2.938	0.004
	High anxiety	49	75.265	8.116			

The main differences between higher and lower users of writing strategies in relation to writing anxiety were investigated by means of taking the highest 25% (N=49) of writing strategies use from the total sample (198), and the lowest in writing anxiety 25 % (N=46) to compare between these two groups in writing strategies and writing achievement. Accordingly, data analysis show that there are significant differences between low and high writing apprehension in the participants' total score of writing strategies. Also, there were significant differences between the two groups regarding the second factor of writing strategies and writing achievement. In both factors, the differences were in favour of low writing apprehension. This indicates that the students used the second strategy 'during writing' more than the first and the third ones. Perhaps because they thought that writing the essay is the most important stage, they concentrated heavily on the strategies that helped them to write well. As such, they do not seem to fully concentrate on the first and third set of writing strategies, which again convey their lack of awareness of these important strategies. Under this hypothesis, three sub-results were closely examined. Firstly, the results revealed that there were negative correlations between writing strategies and writing apprehension. This result can be consistent with the results of Tighe (1987) which reported that her students' anxiety diminished and their writing levels improved through using some strategies. Also, the present study finding was aligned with well a established research line which hypothesized that the cause of writing anxiety stems from inefficient strategy use (e.g. Flower & Hayes, 1981). Based on that, the current study results

suggests that giving students lectures concerning the writing strategies and its importance to make the students aware of these strategies and how and when to use them can potentially reduce their anxiety and increase their writing achievement. Participants of this study focused only on the writing strategies during writing and they did not focus much on writing strategies before writing or during the revision process. Similarly, Al-Sawalha and Chow (2012) revealed that Jordanian EFL students do not exhibit a satisfactory level of awareness of the mechanics of the writing process when writing in English, inconsistency and lack of awareness of the equal importance of each stage in the writing process. Accordingly, it is highly urged that students be made aware of the importance of the three phases; before, during and in the revision.

Secondly, the present study revealed that there were negative correlations between the writing achievement and writing apprehension. This result goes in line with many previous studies which have argued that writing apprehension is negatively associated with writing achievement (e.g. Daley & Miller, 1975; Faigley, Daly, & Witte, 1981; Burgoon & Hale, 1983; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Fleming, 1985; Stolpa, 2004; Erkan & Saban, 2011). On the other hand, other previous studies conversely indicated that the higher the apprehension level the better the respondents performance (Singh & Rajalingam, 2012). In the present study conditions therefore, the teachers are urged to encourage their students to use the appropriate writing strategies in order to impact positively on their achievement and reduce their anxiety.

Finally, the present study findings added some support to previous studies on writing strategy use and argued that there were positive relationships between the writing achievement and writing strategies. These findings emphasized several findings of much previous research which showed that students who used effective writing strategies performed better in the language achievement assignment given to them (e.g. Hayes & Flower, 1983; Hayes, Flower, Shriver, Stratman, & Carey, 1987; Cumming, 1989; Sasaki, 2000; Graham & Perin, 2006; Anson, 2006; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008; Lei, 2008; Kırmızı, 2009, Erkan, & Saban, 2011; Mahnam, & Nejadansari, 2012). Again, the curriculum designers should urgently consider including teaching writing strategies that help students to write good essays in the writing courses. Needless to say, teaching writing strategies should be considered as a main part of the writing courses. Rather than rushing the student to attempt essay writing on the outset of the class, each writing session should start with instructing the students on appropriate writing strategies that eminently help them attempt efficient writing.

### 3.3 Level-Based Differences

Table 5. Differences in students writing anxiety and their use of writing strategies according to their levels

	Level	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig
Total of writing anxiety	2.00	66	64.6061	9.8119	-2.179	0.031
	8.00	132	67.5833	8.6704		
Total of SLWAI	2.00	66	114.9545	15.0756	-1.517	.131
	8.00	132	118.8636	18.0164		

Differentiating the students at different academic levels, Table 5 shows that there are differences between students' academic levels in terms of writing anxiety. To determine the differences between the students' levels in writing anxiety and writing strategies use, t-test was used for independent groups. For the use of writing strategies, there are no differences between levels 2 (M = 114.9545, SD = 15.0756) & level 8 (M= 118.8636, SD= 18.016). As for writing anxiety, results report significant differences between level 2 (M = 64.606 SD= 9.8119) & level 8 (M= 67.583 SD= 8.6704). So to speak, level 8 has more anxiety than level 2,  $t(196) = -2.179$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Also, level 8 participants used the writing strategies more than level 2. This might be because level 8 students were significantly different from their counterparts in level 2 in terms of writing anxiety as a state. In other words, such results indicate that students of level 8 may have more awareness of the importance of writing process. However, the results show that level 8 respondents displayed higher anxiety, but their anxiety level was not so severe, and they used writing strategies more.

The present study results showed that there were significant differences between low and high writing apprehension in the participants' total score of writing strategies in favour of low-anxiety students. Also, there were significant differences between the two groups regarding the second factor of writing strategies and writing achievement in favour of low-anxiety students too. In both factors, the differences were in favour of low writing

apprehension. Simply put, low writing apprehension students' use of writing strategies and their writing achievement were much better than their high-anxiety counterparts. This finding is consistent with several studies which found that highly anxious students were more likely to receive low grades in composition classes (e.g. Daly & Miller, 1975; Daly & Shamo, 1978; Schultz & Meyers, 1981, Fowler & Ross, 1982; Powell, 1984). Such findings call for a serious demand to implement organized instructional sessions on writing strategies to raise the students' awareness of these strategies. Findings also imply that such instruction on writing strategies is no less significant than other basic areas of instruction; e.g. generic writing skills.

### 3.4 Gender-Based Differences

Table 6. Gender-based differences among the participants in the variables of the study

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. D	Df	t	sig
Total of writing anxiety	1.00	68	66.0588	8.8265	196	-.591	0.549
	2.00	130	66.8692	9.3373			
Total of writing strategies	1.00	68	113.0441	16.6082	196	-2.723	0.007
	2.00	130	119.9231	17.0210			
Writing achievement	1.00	68	75.9853	9.9379	196	-1.160	.247
	2.00	130	77.6923	9.7788			

Table 6 shows that there are significant differences in the total of writing strategies in favour of boys. In terms of writing anxiety and writing achievement, there are no significant differences between boys and girls.

The findings of the current study revealed that there were significant differences in the total use of writing strategies in favour of males. This result is consistent with a number of previous studies which discovered that women use fewer language learning strategies than men (e.g. Tran, 1988). On the contrary, many previous studies in this area have reported a greater use of language learning strategies by women (e.g. Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002). Interestingly, a more recent study did not find a significant difference between male and female students in using learning strategies for their examination (Punithavalli, 2003). As for the present study, there seems to be an urgent need to help the female EFL-major students to be aware of using the writing strategies such as making graphic organizers in general in order to make their writing more convincing.

The present study findings also showed that there were no significant differences between males and females in terms of writing anxiety. This finding comes in accordance with the results of Heaton's (1980) which reported that boys were anxious as much as girls. However, this result contradicted the results of Thompson's study (1981) which revealed that female students felt more anxious than males. In the same vein, it is also inconsistent with the results of Daly and his associates who found that female students had significantly lower scores than male students in writing apprehension (Daly, et al., 1988; Xu, 1993). Such results are owed to the fact that men may have a lower writing apprehension score than women.

The results of this study also showed that there were no significant differences between boys and girls regarding writing achievement. This finding comes in line with the several studies (e.g. Hyde, Lindberg, Linn, Ellis, & Williams, 2008) which concluded that there were no gender differences in math performance. Similarly, Abu Shawish and Atea (2010) found that gender had no significant role in writing apprehension. As such, the present study findings imply that gender may not be a significant issue in terms of writing achievement of EFL learners. This indicates that both boys and girls are hard workers concerning their achievement. Both of them nowadays have become aware of the importance of scoring high for a better GPA. As far as the Saudi context is concerned, girls recently seem to work towards obtaining their rights in society and claiming equal opportunities for employment and careers as the boys have always done. From a similar perspective, in a society which restricts women to some extent, the girls may have a better potential to focus more on education whereas the boys are expected to face more distractions, and to have more job opportunities available to them at lower levels of education.

The present study reported that level 8 students displayed more anxiety than level 2 students. This finding is consistent with Cheng's (2002) which reported a rise in anxiety based on the year of study; freshman (first year) tending to exhibit the least anxiety, and juniors (third year) tending to exhibit the most. A possible explanation

for this finding is that level 8 students by now have more experience dealing with exams and assignments, and consequently they have become more anxious about a potential drop down in their GPA than their younger counterparts. It is possible that they have also become more mature and aware of prospective job competition.

As for the use of writing strategies, the results showed that there were no differences between levels 2 and level 8. This indicates that both of levels 2 and 8 may still be unaware of the importance of writing strategies.

### 3.5 Interviews

The last two research questions focused on finding out the difficulties the Saudi EFL-major students encounter and the strategies they use in writing English essays. By means of interviews, the present study attempted to explore how the participants overcome their language difficulties when writing essays. Quantitative data analysis showed that the respondents' early school experience in writing English essay seemed to play an essential part in identifying language problems, and adopting strategies to cope with them such as the strategies used 'during writing' in English and 'during the revision' part. The kinds of strategies they employed indicated how they survived and succeeded in writing in English.

The interviews responses also presented implications for the English teaching practices. Teachers need to consider their learners' early writing experience and devise suitable and effective writing strategies accordingly. At an early stage in their writing career, EFL-major students need to be instructed that composition can be written with their limited writing skills, using the set phrases and simple sentence patterns employed in their books. As such, it is urged that language teachers investigate their students' problems and concerns at the outset of the course, and actively help the students with appropriate strategies, especially in writing essays or composition.

Based on the findings of this study, many EFL students seem to have similar challenges when writing. Such challenges seem to be rooted at early stages of EFL education back in their schools. Therefore, there is a growing demand on the part of school teachers to develop appropriate teaching strategies addressing these problems at early stages of EFL education. The later these problems are contained, the possibility increases that such problems persist with students, and the more anxious they are expected to become as they become adult learners, especially when it comes to writing in the foreign language.

## 4. Conclusion

The current research was intended to explore the students' use of writing strategies and its relation to their writing apprehension and writing achievement. This was attempted through the administration of questionnaires to examine the use of writing strategies in reducing writing apprehension and to find out its effect on EFL-major students' writing achievement, including the associations between foreign language apprehension, writing achievement and writing strategies.

As the data analysis was unfolded, results showed that the students who used effective writing strategies performed better in language achievement. Accordingly, EFL practitioners are urged to investigate their students' use of writing strategies concerning their writing capabilities and their level of apprehension about writing performance. EFL teachers also need to exert efforts to help students understand how their writing strategies can influence their EFL writing achievement. This process should be exercised by EFL teachers not only at the university level, but it is also recommended that they start doing so at early stages of EFL education.

The present study findings stressed that gender has been a significant factor in EFL writing process; similarly as in such fields as education, psychology and linguistics research. Accordingly, EFL teachers need to recognize the range of factors affecting strategy use among their students. In the present study, findings showed that males might differ from females in their strategy choices and uses.

This research could be considered a preliminary investigation on which follow-up work could be based. In a comparative future study, it would be interesting to assess whether student achievement improves after training on the use of writing strategies, and whether their writing apprehension could be reduced after employing appropriate writing strategies.

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