Exploring Attitudes and Strategies in L2 Writing: A Qualitative Study of EFL Students at Sebha University

Ebraiek Deen Aljheme

ebr.aljheme@sebhau.edu.ly

Sebha University-College of Languages-English-

Libya

Abstract

Writing in a second language involves both cognitive and affective challenges, yet limited research has explored the interaction of emotional and strategic factors among Libyan EFL learners. This study addresses this gap by examining students' attitudes and strategies throughout the writing process. A qualitative design was employed using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations with Libyan university EFL students. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns across participants' emotional, strategic, and behavioral responses to writing tasks. Three central themes were identified: (1) emotional orientations toward writing, (2) strategic approaches to planning and revision, and (3) behavioral patterns before, during, and after writing. Participants reported a continuum of emotions from confidence to anxiety and employed diverse strategies such as outlining, freewriting, and audience awareness. Observational data confirmed consistent behaviors, including pre-writing preparation and post-writing reflection. The findings underscore writing as a complex process influenced by emotional, cognitive, and environmental factors. Pedagogically, the study highlights the need for instructional practices that integrate emotional support and strategic guidance to enhance EFL learners' writing competence and confidence.

استكشاف المواقف والاستراتيجيات في الكتابة بلغة ثانية: دراسة نوعية

لطلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة سبها

ابريك دين الجهيمي

كلية اللغات، جامعة سبها، ليبيا

الملخّص

الكتابة بلغةٍ ثانية تنطوي على تحديات معرفية وانفعالية في آنٍ واحد، ومع ذلك لا تزال الأبحاث محدودة في استكشاف كيفية تفاعل العوامل العاطفية والاستراتيجية لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في ليبيا. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى سد هذه الفجوة من خلال فحص اتجاهات الطلاب واستراتيجياتهم أثناء عملية الكتابة. اعتمد البحث التصميم النوعي، مستخدمًا المقابلات شبه المهيكلة والملاحظات الصفية مع طلاب الجامعات الليبيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وقد تم تحليل البيانات موضوعيًا لتحديد الأنماط المتكررة في استجابات المشاركين الانفعالية والاستراتيجية والسلوكية تجاه مهام الكتابة. برزت ثلاثة محاور رئيسية: (1) التوجهات الانفعالية نحو الكتابة، (2) الأساليب الاستراتيجية في التخطيط والمراجعة، و(3) الأنماط السلوكية قبل وأثناء وبعد الكتابة. وأفاد المشاركون بتجارب انفعالية متباينة تراوحت بين الثقة والقلق، كما استخدموا استراتيجيات متنوعة مثل إعداد المخطط، والكتابة الحرة، ومراعاة الجمهور. وأكدت البيانات الملاحظة على سلوكيات متسقة، من أبرزها الاستعداد المسبق للكتابة والتفكير بعد الكتابة. تؤكد النتائج أن الكتابة عملية معقدة، تتأثر بالسياق، وتتأثر بعوامل عاطفية ومعرفية وبيئية. من الناحية التربوية، تُبرز الدراسة الحاجة إلى ممارسات تعليمية تجمع بين الدعم العاطفي والتوجيه الاستراتيجي لتعزيز كفاءة الكتابة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وثقتهم بأنفسهم.

1. Introduction

In our everyday practices of the language, we all have ideas about how first and second languages are learned. These ideas or what is called by educators "theories," whether derived from personal experiences or from reading books and articles, shape the kinds of learning opportunities for language learners. Learning a second language

is completely different from acquiring a first language which may raise questions for L2 learners. Full mastery of English language requires competence in both the receptive and productive skills. The concept of language skills is premised on the fact that language consists of four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing as proposed by Cushing (2002). Among these four skills, listening and reading are categorized as receptive skills while speaking and writing are categorized as productive skills. Though they are related to each other, efficiency in one aspect does not necessarily lead to efficiency in another. Each of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing requires due attention.

Dimling & Shankland (2006) argue that writing is regarded to be more important than the other skills and it deserves much attention. Studying writing is essential for learners to develop their language skills. Written language is a reflection of spoken language "written language is worth more than spoken language since it is a more proper form" (Cushing 2002).

Recently, researchers in L2 have, increasingly, investigated writing attitudes and strategies that form and enhance the writing process. Studies conducted by researchers such as Ibrahim and Ismail (2023) and Rahimi and Zhang (2024) demonstrate that writing process is affected not only by learners' linguistic competence but also by their emotions, beliefs, and strategic preferences. Positive attitudes toward writing have been connected to high motivation and resolution, while negative emotions such as anxiety can prevent fluency and quality Li & Wang (2023). Simultaneously, Jorgensen & Petersen (2025) argue that strategic behaviors such as planning, revising, and audience awareness play an essential role in improving written output. Understanding how these affective and strategic factors interact provides valuable insight for educators striving to design more efficient and supportive writing instruction.

Writing in a second language is not only a technical skill but a complex process shaped by both cognitive strategies and emotional dimensions. Although linguistic competence forms the foundation of this skill, learners' beliefs, attitudes, and emotions strongly affect their engagement with writing tasks. Similarly, the use of both metacognitive and strategic behaviors, such as planning and revising, enhance the quality of the written output. Recognizing the correlation between these factors highlights the importance of adopting a process-oriented approach to writing instruction. Such an approach allows educators not only to strengthen learners' technical writing abilities but also improve positive attitudes and decreases anxiety, eventually promoting greater confidence and proficiency in L2 writing.

1.1. Problem statement

Writing in a second language is a complex and challenging process. This complexity arises from the fact that writing includes different stages including discovering a thesis, developing support for it, organizing, revising, and finally editing it to ensure an effective, error free piece of writing Langan (2005). These second language (L2) issues usually overwhelm lower proficiency L2 writers, sometimes to the point of a complete breakdown in the writing process Bereiter & Scardimalia (1987). In Libyan educational context, undergraduate students spend four years developing their language skills, including writing in English. However, Students achieve limited progress in proficiency in writing and little is known about their personal approaches. The current study aims to provide deeper insights into L2 practices and contribute to the literature on EFL Libyan students' writing development by exploring writing strategies and attitudes toward writing when engaging with the process-oriented writing approach.

1.2. Research questions:

1. What writing strategies do Libyan EFL undergraduate English major students use when engaging with the process-oriented writing approach at Sebha University?
2. What are their attitudes toward English writing within this context?

1.3. Research significance

This study is a response to the researcher experience of teaching essay writing to college students at Sebha University. In this level, students' writing was very limited to the product in which correct grammatical sentences were their ultimate goal. In other words, students' writing was only a mean for building grammar without paying attention to the process in which ideas flow and no

examining to the stylistic patterns or rhetorical organization was a matter of concern.

This study sheds light on L2 writing among Libyan learners. Specifically, it focuses on the Libyan EFL students' attitudes and the strategies they employ in L2 writing to provide a cognitive image and more comprehensible understanding of L2 writing in this context. It provides language educators and teachers of writing in Libya with new insights. The study examines this topic from the different aspects. Equally important, this study is insightful to the researcher, providing practical knowledge and ideas that can inform future teaching practices and proficient development.

2. Literature review
2.1. The nature of writing
Emig (1971) argues that writing is an externalization and elaboration of thinking. Writing is a productive skill used for communication through graphic symbols, where letters are combined to represent sounds, form words, and ultimately construct sentences. Similarly, Crystal (2006) defines writing as a system of visual marks on a surface a form of graphic expression.

Writing is not limited to the mere formation of symbols; these symbols must follow specific conventions to form words and sentences that communicate a coherent message. Writing is a learned skill rather than an innate ability. White (1981), cited in Nunan (1996: 36), states that "writing is not a natural activity." To write effectively, a writer must have the desire to convey thoughts, feelings, or viewpoints on a chosen topic. Writing requires sustained mental effort, as it involves attention to punctuation, sentence structure, and word choice simultaneously.

Rivers and Temperley (1979) note that writing enables communication across time and space. Writing is an art that demands conscious effort and deliberate language choices. Additionally, writers must consider the reader as an active participant. Since immediate feedback is absent, clarity is essential to ensure the message is understood without additional guidance. Writing thus involves careful planning, organization, and attention to stylistic and rhetorical patterns. The following section explores the process approach, emphasizing writing as a dynamic, strategic, and recursive activity rather than a mere product.

2.2. The process of L2 writing
Writing research has produced two fundamental views: the product view and the process view (They are also known as approaches.) In the past, teaching students punctuation, spelling, and correct usage was emphasized and the teachers commented on the finished products and graded them. The students read the written materials, and then tried to imitate them. Raimes (2002) argues that teaching writing had merely consisted of practicing grammatical exercises (P: 309). On the other hand, Seow, (2002) questioned the inadequacies of the product view resulted in viewing writing basically as a process of four main stages (i.e. planning, drafting, revising, and editing), where each stage has its own rules, activities, and behaviors to be displayed. Certainly, accuracy is not neglected when developing writing, but it is not the only emphasized issue either. That is, various operations and strategies applied during the completion of a writing task become key processes and elements.

2.3. The process approach
Writing is an important skill that has proved to be significant in most language syllabuses either being taught in first, or foreign language classes. The way to teach this skill has been approached in different ways by many researchers and educators during the history of language teaching. Within the different developments that occurred in this field, the process approach has been the most influential. The process approach views writing as a process which includes different stages and cognitive activities. This orientation has been originally developed for native language learners and was adapted later for second language and foreign language classes.

The process approach was evolved as a reaction to the product approach. The process approach to writing seeks the creativity of the individual writer and sees writing as highly complex activity. In contrast to the product approach which focuses on the final product, the process approach concerns with the writing as a whole process from the writer's initial process as brainstorming to their finished product. (Zamel, 1983; Ferris 2001; Hedge 1988; Raimes 2002), all emphasize that "teaching should be involved in every stage of this writing process and not just the end product". It concerns about the development of good writing rather than what the product approach

demonstrates "the imitation of model texts". Thus, there was a shift from the product itself to the processes that the writer goes through when creating his product of writing. The process approach stresses the idea that writing is an activity that consists of other different activities.

Teachers who use the process approach become facilitators guiding and helping students at each stage of their composing process. Whereas, the students are asked to write multiple drafts at the same time they have to be aware that re-writing and revising are essential to writing.

Berkenkotter, (1982) argues that there are characteristics for good writers. First, an expert writer is the one who has the ability to plan his writing better than novice writers. Berkenkotter suggests that students should engage in explicit pre-writing activities. The normal essay exam context, however, requires student to write a one-draft only response in a time-limit situation. A process writing approach allows time for students to think before writing and revise their initial thoughts. Another important aspect of good writing is revising in which the writer goes back and forth between composing ideas and re-reading and re-writing them as noted by Cohen and Spencer, (1993). To conclude, good writing requires a complex coordination between planning, drafting, and revising thoughts and ideas. Besides giving student writers more time to compose, reflect, and revise their thoughts, process writing allows for collaboration.

By using a process writing approach students get adequate time to plan, draft, and revise and edit their work. The instructor, at the same time, can focus more on the structure and style of the essay, rather than just the grammar or copy-editing which should be a final step in the writing process. Errors usually occur as a result of inadequate proofing and students must develop the attitude of simply taking the time to edit their work.

Haswell (1983) found that if correcting techniques as mistakes indicators (by simply putting check marks in the margin of the line) students could correct many of their own mistakes. Furthermore, Haswell (1983) found that the check system, called minimal marking, allowed him to focus his feedback on the more substantive aspects of the written work.

Atkinson (2003) and Leki (2003) have moved the attention from the process to the term "post-process". The post-process approach shares much with the process approach in focusing on writing as a process that involves different stages such as planning, drafting, revising and publishing. However, post-process conceptions go far to concern on the context and culture in which the writing takes place. Under this perception, researches by Baker and Boonkit (2004) assert the importance of factors such as fluency, accuracy, originality, critical thinking and clarity in the context in which the writing takes place.

2.4. Empirical studies focusing on writing

Early studies by (Arndt, 1987; Jones, 1982; Zamel, 1983; Chelala (1981) and Raimes, 1985) were conducted on previous studies regarding the process of L1 writing, often drawing on insights from L1 writing research. Arndt (1987) argues that L1 and L2 writing processes have similar strategies. Jones (1982) state that similar writing processes in L1 can be found in L2 writing. They claimed that L1 writing strategies are transferable in the way that expert L1 writers who use different strategies are expected to shift these strategies when composing in a second language. Accepting the notion that similar writing processes in L1 can be found in L2 writing, Zamel agreed and further stated that L2 writers follow the same processes of L1 writers. She generally focuses on giving students opportunities to discover meaning and generate ideas, instead of paying attention to language factors, through improving composing processes. Zamel focuses on the way writers can discover the meaning through the writing processes that they use when composing. She inserts that composition is enlightened by what actually writing involves. In contrast, Cumming (1989) and Lay (1982) disagree with those researchers who claim that L2 writers make extensive use of their L1 writing strategies. They argue that, in addition to writing processes, L2 writers resort to L1 to gain specific words as a result of their L2 insufficient cultural knowledge. Chelala (1981) examined the cognitive and linguistic factors that affect L2 writing focusing in three phases: organizing ideas, structuring sentences, and managing language difficulties during the writing process. Raimes (1985) investigated L2 writing processes, and he described the writing process as a recursive activity that involves planning, drafting, and revising. She shed lighted the influence of learners' awareness of writing strategies on the quality of their texts.

Recently, writing has received a considerable attention from theorists and researchers. One of the most significant studies is the study by (Juzwik et al., 2006) in which they reviewed terrain of researches from 1999 to 2004. In their study, four major issues were questioned. They are (a) What are the general problems being investigated by contemporary writing researchers, which of the various problems dominate recent writing research, and which are not as prominent? (b) What population age groups are prominent in recent writing research? (c) What is the relationship between population age groups and problems under investigation? and (d) What methodologies are being used in research on writing?

(Juzwik at el,. 2006) reviewed writing research and addressed other social cultural aspects: sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and linguistic anthropology in addition to writing problems faced by ESL as well as cultural and linguistic minorities. This trend in writing research was clearly mentioned in the reviews of Dyson & Freedman (2003). De Larios, Murphy, and Marín (2002) examined the cognitive mechanisms of L2 writing, emphasizing how planning, monitoring, and revision strategies affect writing quality. Krapels (2012) conducted a study to provide an overview of L2 writing process research, demonstrating the development of metacognitive awareness and strategic behaviors in L2 composition. Abas and Abd Aziz (2016) focused on the classification of writing strategies in L2, identifying recursive stages such as planning, drafting, and revising, and emphasizing the role of strategies like freewriting and audience consideration. Verspoor, Lowie, & de Bot (2004) applied dynamic systems theory to L2 writing, demonstrating the development of writing skills over time and how different cognitive and linguistic factors interact during the writing process.

Published articles about teaching the skill of writing from 2000 to 2004 were examined by Silva and Brice (2004). In their study, they included referred journal articles, book chapters, and books. The focus of their study was on: "1) basic research from composing processes, written texts, and assessment, and 2) applied research from content-based writing instruction, voice and identity, reading and writing, computers and technology, grammar and vocabulary, peer interaction, plagiarism, teacher response, and literature and film" Silva (2005). Krapels (2012) provided an overview of L2 writing process research, highlighting the development of metacognitive awareness and strategic behaviors in second language composition. All the studies mentioned provide insights to the issue of writing, yet further studies are required. The current study focuses on exploring students' attitudes towards writing and the strategies they use in composing through modeling writing process approach. It seeks to understand Libyan EFL undergraduate English major students' writing strategies and attitudes writing to improve their proficiency.

2.5. Attitudes toward Writing and Writing Strategies

Writing attitudes and writing strategies are closely related within the theory of self-regulated learning (SRL). SRL theory is based on the notion that beliefs drive strategy use and the strategies, in turn, influence performance (Zimmerman, 2000). Cognitive process models of writing, such as Flower and Hayes' framework, also emphasize planning, translating, and reviewing as central stages.

Li et al., 2024; Alshahrani (2023) argue that positive attitudes and high motivation enhance students' use of strategies. They also highlight the importance of explicit instruction in strategies especially metacognitive routines and peer-feedback protocols which can shape learners' attitudes by increasing their sense of control and competence. Likewise, Limpo & Oliveira (2024) conducted a study on Portuguese Grade 3-4 students. It revealed that writing attitudes extensively predicted the quality of written planning and the length of texts produced, implying that affective dispositions are not peripheral but central to cognitive writing processes.

The use of writing strategies in Instruction often referred to as strategy-based instruction (SBI). SBI has had a significant affect in improving both writing performance and learner motivation within EFL contexts as argued by Alshahrani (2023). In a systematic study that was conducted by Rijlaarsdam et al. (2024) to review writing motivation literature, it was found that many writing interventions neglect motivational components, even though motivation has a strong effect on strategy use.

Teng et al, (2021); Sun & Wang (2023) argue that validated instruments such as the Writing Strategies Questionnaire helped in distinguishing between the different kinds of writing strategies. These strategies are: cognitive strategies as (generating ideas, organizing text), metacognitive strategies as (setting goals, monitoring progress), social behavioral strategies as (peer feedback, help-seeking), and motivational regulation strategies as (managing effort). These instruments show consistent positive connections between the use of metacognitive strategies and writing quality across age groups and contexts.

Ibrahim & Ismail, (2023) conducted a study to enhancing students' writing skills using mind mapping strategy of 7th graders, they came to a conclusion that mind mapping significantly improved 7th graders' writing scores and attitudes toward writing. Al-Huneidi & Schreurs, (2022) investigated the effects of writing strategy instruction on EFL learners' writing development and it was approved that explicit teaching of writing strategies improved EFL learners' strategic awareness and writing performance. Jorgensen & Petersen, (2025) applied self-regulated strategy development in Danish schools and it was demonstrated that SRSD's effected in improving persuasive writing skills of Danish students. Li & Wang, (2023) explored international students' motivational beliefs and writing self-efficacy in online academic English courses and it was found that self-efficacy and enjoyment of writing increased over a 10-week course among international students. Rahimi & Zhang, (2024) investigated the effects of metacognitive writing strategies on EFL students' writing and motivation and they concluded that strategy-based instruction enhanced writing performance and motivation through metacognitive awareness. Zhao & Xu, (2025) explored writing assessment literacy and psychological factors that affected Chinese undergraduate EFL students and they found that assessment literacy had a positive influence on self-efficacy, motivation, and I helped in reducing writing anxiety. (Elabbar, 2022) conducted a qualitative study at Misurata University to investigate the use of writing strategies among Libyan students. It was found that proficient students employed more planning and monitoring strategies in writing than less proficient peers, indicating that metacognitive awareness differentiates performance levels. In another study

by (Elabbar & Ibrahim (2023), a survey was distributed to Libyan university students to determine the most used writing strategies by them. It was found that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used overall. However, affective strategies were the least used ones; most noticeably, cognitive strategy use positively predicted Libyan university language achievement.

Research shows that writing attitudes and strategies are closely related to motivation, self-efficacy, and metacognitive awareness which influence writing performance. Strategy-based instruction that includes planning, peer feedback, and explicit cognitive and motivational techniques can promote learners' skills and confidence. Evidence from diverse contexts highlights the importance of integrating a learner-centered approach that focuses on emotional and strategic aspects of the writing process in order to enhance more effective and self-regulated writers.

3. Research methodologies
3.1. Research design
This research adopts a qualitative method design study. "A qualitative method design is a procedure for collecting analyzing to understand a research problem, provide comprehensive answers to research questions'' Creswell, (2003). The qualitative paradigm in this study answered the research question employing two instruments: interviews and observation. This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What writing strategies do Libyan EFL undergraduate English major students use when engaging with the process-oriented writing approach at Sebha University?
2. What are their attitudes toward English writing within this context?

3.1.1. Interview:
This interview aims to understand the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral processes involved in writing by exploring participants' feelings, strategies, and habits before, during, and after writing. Semi-structured interviews lasted from 10 to 20 minutes duration. The researcher role during the interviews was to facilitate discussion, employ follow-up questions when necessary to elicit detailed or more in-depth responses. The follow-up or clarifying questions were only utilized when necessary to encourage elaboration and ensure

detailed responses without leading the interview. The researcher started the interviews by explaining the study, asking for verbal consent to start, and collecting basic demographic data about the participants as their age. The interview questions consisted of four main points:

1. Emotional attitudes towards writing

1. How do you usually feel before you begin writing?

2. What emotions do you experience while you are writing?

3. Can you describe how you feel once you have finished writing?

2. Writing Preparation and Planning

4. What steps do you usually take before starting a writing task?

5. Do you prefer to plan your writing mentally or write things down first? Why?

3. Writing Process and Strategy

6. Can you walk me through what you usually do while writing?

7. Are there specific techniques or strategies you use to help you write better?

8. Do you usually write in one sitting or take breaks? Why?

4. Revision and Evaluation

9. What do you usually do after finishing a piece of writing?

10. How important is it for you to revise your writing? Can you explain your revision process?

Follow up questions (Used when Needed) were:
Can you give an example of that?, How does that usually work for you?, Why do you think that is?, What happens if you don't do that? Has that always been your approach, or has it changed over time?

3.1.2. Observation

Systematic observational notes were collected at three different stages of the writing task. The three stages were: before writing, during writing and after completing the writing task. The aim of the observation technique was to document systematically the participants' planning behaviors, strategy use, cognitive engagement, and revision practices, by providing qualitative insights about Libyan students' L2 writing process. The documentation process of the three stages that the students went through ensured that a comprehensive understanding of both procedural and reflective aspects of learners' writing was gained.

3.1.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The collected interview and observation data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Initial codes were generated from recurring ideas and expressions in participants' responses, such as writing anxiety, confidence, planning strategies, and self-evaluation behaviors. These codes were then refined and grouped into broader themes, including emotional attitudes toward writing, strategic approaches to planning and revision, and behavioral patterns before, during, and after writing. The analysis was conducted manually without the use of computer software, ensuring close engagement with the data. To enhance the credibility of findings and reduce researcher bias, reflexive notes were kept throughout the process, and emerging themes were reviewed to ensure consistency and interpretive accuracy.

4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the interview was acquired from six participants. Observational notes (before, during, after writing) were also collected. A thematic analysis was used to classify: participants' attitudes toward writing and the strategies they used. Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase method was used as a framework for conducting thematic analysis of the current study. It is used to provide a structured yet flexible approach to identifying and interpreting patterns (themes) in qualitative data.

4.1. Results of the interview

Using Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase method, three main themes emerged:

Theme 1: Emotional attitudes toward writing

Participants expressed diverse emotional responses before, during, and after writing. These emotions shaped their engagement, confidence, and focus throughout the process.

Before writing: Several participants (S1, S3, S5) described feeling anxious, pressured, or lost when beginning a task, particularly under time constraints. In contrast, others (S2, S4, S6) felt calm, relaxed, or motivated and viewed writing as an enjoyable or productive activity.

During writing: Most students reported that their anxiety decreased once they started writing. S1 and S4 mentioned becoming more focused, while S2 and S6 described entering a "flow state" where they became deeply immersed in writing.

After writing: Emotions ranged from relief and satisfaction (S2, S4, S6) to uncertainty and self-criticism (S1, S3). This shift in emotional state across stages suggests that confidence often increases as students' progress through the writing process.

Overall, emotional attitudes varied across individuals but followed a common pattern: initial tension, increasing focus, and eventual relief or accomplishment.

Theme 2: Strategic approaches to planning and composition

Participants employed a range of strategies for organizing and developing their writing, reflecting both metacognitive awareness and individual style. Structured planning: Students S1, S3, S4, and S6 reported using outlines, notes, or brainstorming techniques before starting. S4 preferred visual planning with bullet points and color coding, while S3 emphasized writing a thesis statement to guide coherence.

Mental or spontaneous planning: In contrast, S2 and S5 relied on mental preparation or freewriting, preferring to develop organization during or after drafting. S2 described starting with the body paragraphs, while S5 focused on writing freely to generate ideas before reorganizing them.

Writing behaviors: Participants displayed habits that supported focus and self-regulation, such as tidying the workspace (S6), using highlighters (S1), or taking short breaks (S1, S3, S5, S6). These patterns suggest that both cognitive control and environmental preparation play important roles in effective writing.

This theme highlights individual variation in planning strategies, ranging from structured and deliberate to flexible and intuitive.

Theme 3: Behavior patterns observed

Revision emerged as a central and highly valued phase for most participants.

Nearly all students (S1, S3, S4, S5, S6) emphasized revising and editing multiple times to ensure clarity, accuracy, and coherence. S3 referred to revision as "where my real writing starts."

Revision strategies included rereading aloud to check flow (S4), highlighting or bolding areas to edit (S1, S5), and adjusting tone and style (S6).

S2 was the only participant who reported minimal revision, preferring to make only minor corrections.

Summary of Interview Findings

The thematic analysis of interviews revealed that Libyan EFL students' writing processes involve the interaction of emotional, cognitive, and strategic elements. Emotional attitudes fluctuate across stages of writing, planning strategies range from structured outlining to spontaneous drafting, and revision is widely recognized as essential to effective composition. Together, these findings emphasize that L2 writing is a holistic process shaped by affective, metacognitive, and behavioral factors.

4.2. Results of the observation

Table 1: Observational Notes Summary

Participant	Before Writing	During Writing	After Writing
S1	Nervous, pacing	Frequently paused to think	Reread twice, made corrections
S2	Calm, no prep	Writes continuously	No revisions
S3	Sighing, restless	Kept glancing at the clock and me	Looked unsatisfied, deleted paragraphs
S4	Organized desk	Used bullet points and headings	Reviewed
S5	Scribbled random notes	Wrote fast, stream of consciousness	Edited entire first paragraph
S6	Relaxed, calm	Wrote slowly drafted	Smiled while reviewing

5. Summary of Findings:

It was found from the analyzed data that emotional state plays a critical role in writing behavior. Planning styles and revision habits vary widely but are crucial to strategy. Observations confirmed that both conscious preparation and post-writing review are essential to effective writing.

6. Discussion:

This qualitative study explored the attitudes and strategies used by Libyan EFL students during the writing process through interviews and behavioral observations. Three key themes were revealed by thematic analysis: (1) emotional attitudes toward writing, (2) strategic approaches to planning and

revision, and (3) behavioral patterns observed before, during, and after writing.

Findings showed that while some participants approached writing with confidence, others experienced anxiety, especially at the beginning of the process. Strategic approaches varied from structured outlining and mental planning to freewriting and audience awareness. Nearly all participants emphasized the importance of revision and in shaping their writing performance. Observational data supported these claims by capturing consistent behavioral patterns, such as pre-writing rituals, pauses during composition, and post-writing self-evaluation.

The findings of this qualitative study align with previous research in the field of writing. The results emphasize that there is a complex interplay between emotional and cognitive dimensions L2 process of writing. This is consistent with Li and Wang (2023), who demonstrated variations in motivational beliefs and writing self-efficacy among learners. Their study observed a range of emotional attitudes from confidence to anxiety at separate stages of writing in which learners; confidence enhanced writing proficiency. The results are also aligning with Rahimi and Zhang's (2024) who emphasis that metacognitive strategies enhance both writing performance and learners' motivation.

Furthermore, the results from observing the behavioral patterns of the participants before, during, and after the writing task, such as pre-writing rituals and post-writing self-evaluation, correspond to Jorgensen and Petersen's (2025) results on the effectiveness of self-regulated strategy development in writing. The salience of revision factor in participants' experiences align with Ibrahim and Ismail's (2023) conclusions about the role of strategy use and affect in improving writing skills.

The findings of this study align with previous research regarding Libyan university students' writing strategies. Elabbar (2022) suggests that students who use more planning and monitoring strategies are proficient in writing, highlighting the role of metacognitive awareness in writing performance. Similarly, Elabbar and Ibrahim (2023) argue that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used by Libyan students, while the less used strategies were the affective strategies. They also added that cognitive strategies positively predicted writing achievement. In the current study, Libyan undergraduate participants demonstrated a range of strategic approaches when writing as structured outlining, and mental planning. They also showed different emotional attitudes toward writing, such as confidence and anxiety. The data obtained from the observation instrument confirmed these patterns, echoing previous findings that assert how metacognitive and cognitive strategies support successful writing achievement. Taking together, these studies and the current research assert that effective L2 writing involves correlation of strategic, cognitive, and affective factors, highlighting the importance of both attitudes and strategies in L2 writing instruction.

Overall, this study corroborates and extends previous research by integrating emotional, strategic, and behavioral perspectives, highlighting L2 writing as a holistic process. These insights reinforce calls from the Clark et al. (2024) for instructional practices that address both the emotional side of writers such as (Motivation, attitudes, and anxiety) in addition to practical side of writing as (planning organizing, planning and problem solving), providing a foundation for more detailed, learner-centered writing pedagogy. It confirms that writing is a deeply personal, emotional, and strategic activity. Understanding the subjective experiences of writers can inform better writing instruction, support, and curriculum design, especially in educational settings.

7 Conclusion

This study explored the emotional, strategic, and behavioral aspects of Libyan EFL students' writing processes, revealing that writing in a second language is a complex interaction of affective and cognitive factors. Participants demonstrated diverse emotional attitudes ranging from confidence to anxiety. They also employed various strategies such as planning, outlining, and revision. Those with higher metacognitive awareness and positive attitudes showed greater control and fluency in their writing.

The findings confirm that effective L2 writing extends beyond linguistic competence, depending also on motivation, self-efficacy, and self-regulation. These results align with previous studies emphasizing the significance of metacognitive and affective dimensions in writing development.

Overall, the study highlights the need for a holistic, learner-centered approach to writing instruction that supports both the emotional and strategic needs of learners. Recognizing writing as a personal and self-regulated activity can help educators design pedagogies that foster confidence, autonomy, and sustained writing improvement.

8 Limitations

Despite the valuable insights generated, this study is subject to two notable limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small, involving only six participants. While this allowed for an in depth qualitative exploration of individual experiences, it limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to broader EFL writing contexts. Second, the study was constrained by time, which restricted the duration and depth of observational engagement. A longitudinal approach conducted over an extended period could yield a more comprehensive understanding of how learners' writing behaviors and strategies evolve over time.

Future research is therefore encouraged to include larger and more diverse participant groups and to adopt longitudinal or mixed-method designs. Such approaches would deepen our understanding of the dynamic interplay between emotional, cognitive, and strategic factors in L2 writing development.

9 Suggestions for Further Research

To build upon the findings of this study, future researchers are encouraged to consider the following directions: 1. Expand participant diversity: Include participants from a variety of educational levels, disciplines, and linguistic backgrounds to explore cultural and contextual differences in writing attitudes and strategies. 2. Longitudinal studies: Investigate how writing strategies and attitudes evolve over time, especially in response to feedback, instruction, or increased writing practice.

References

- Al-Huneidi, A., & Schreurs, J. (2022). The effects of writing strategy instruction on EFL learners' writing development. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly, 28*(4), 112–130.
- Alshahrani, A. (2023). Metacognitive writing strategy instruction in the EFL context: Focus on writing performance and motivation. *Arab World English Journal, 14*(2), 75–90.
- Abas, I. H., & Abd Aziz, N. H. (2016). Writing strategies of Malaysian ESL undergraduate students. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature, 4*(9), 32–45.
- Arndt, V. (1987). Six writers in search of texts: A protocol-based study of L1 and L2 writing. *ELT Journal, 41*(4), 257–267.
- Atkinson, D. (2003). L2 writing in the post-process era: Introduction. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 12(*3), 3–15.
- Baker, W., & Boonkit, K. (2004). Learning strategies in writing in English as a foreign language: A study of Thai university students. *Regional Language Centre Journal, 35*(3), 299–328.
- Bereiter, C., & Scardamalia, M. (1987). *The psychology of written composition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Berkenkotter, C. (1982). Decisions and revisions: The planning strategies of a publishing writer. *College Composition and Communication, 34*(2), 156–172.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3* (2), 77–101.
- Chelala, S. (1981). Attitudes toward writing in English as a second language: A study of Arabic-speaking college students. *English Language Teaching Journal, 35*(3), 231–238.
- Clark, C., Picton, I., Cole, A., & Bonafede, F. (2024). *Children and young people's writing in 2024*. National Literacy Trust.
- Cohen, A., & Spencer, J. (1993). *Language in use*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Pearson/ Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Crystal, D. (2006). *How language works: How babies babble, words change meaning, and languages live or die*. London, UK: Penguin Books.
- Cumming, A. (1989). Writing expertise and second language proficiency. *Language Learning, 39*(1), 81–141.
- Cushing, I. (2002). *English teaching and the moving image*. London, UK: Routledge.
- De Larios, J. R.-F., Murphy, L., & Marín, J. (2002). Critical reflections on the process of writing in a second language. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 11*(3), 235–250.
- Dimling, L. M., & Shankland, R. K. (2006). Writing and literacy development: An integrated approach. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education, 2*(1), 45–59.

- Dyson, A. H., & Freedman, S. W. (2003). Writing. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, J. R. Squire, & J. M. Jensen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (2nd ed., pp. 967–992). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- Elabbar, A. (2022). A study of metacognitive strategy knowledge in writing: The case of Libyan university students. *Misurata Journal of Educational Research, 3*(1), 55–72.

- Elabbar, A., & Ibrahim, S. (2023). Libyan university students' language learning strategy use and their language achievement. *Arab World English Journal, 14*(1), 1–20.

- Ferris, D. (2001). Teaching writing for academic purposes. In J. Flowerdew & M. Peacock (Eds.), *Research perspectives on English for academic purposes* (pp. 298–314). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Haswell, R. (1983). Minimal marking. *College English, 45*(6), 600–604.

- Hedge, T. (1988). *Writing.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

- Ibrahim, M., & Ismail, Z. (2023). Enhancing students' writing skills using mind mapping strategy. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 11*(2), 45–56.

- Jones, S. (1982). Attention to rhetorical form while composing in a second language. In M. Freedman, I. Pringle, & J. Yalden (Eds.), *Learning to write: First language/second language* (pp. 152–168). London, UK: Longman.

- Jorgensen, H., & Petersen, A. (2025). Applying self-regulated strategy development in Danish schools. *Journal of Writing Research, 17*(1), 78–101.

- Juzwik, M. M., Curcic, S., Wolbers, K., Moxley, K. D., Dimling, L. M., & Shankland, R. K. (2006). Writing into the 21st century: An overview of research on writing, 1999 to 2004. *Written Communication, 23*(4), 451–476.

- Krapels, A. (2012). Second language writing: Multidisciplinary perspectives. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 21*(4), 321–325.

- Krashen, S. D. (1978). The monitor model for adult second language performance. In M. Burt, H. Dulay, & M. Finnochiaro (Eds.), *Viewpoints on English as a second language* (pp. 152–161). New York, NY: Regents.

- Krashen, S. D. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Langan, J. (2005). *College writing skills with readings* (6th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Long, M. H. (1991). *An introduction to second language acquisition research*. London, UK: Longman.

- Leonard, T. C. (2002). *Origins of behaviorism*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Leki, I. (2003). A narrow thinking system: Nonnative-English-speaking students and their response to writing in English. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 12*(1), 17–31.

- Li, Q., Yin, J., & Ma, X. (2024). The motivational mechanism underlying primary students' writing performance: The mediating role of self-efficacy for self-regulation. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 11*(1), 1–13.

- Li, X., & Wang, Y. (2023). Motivational beliefs and writing self-efficacy of international students in online academic English courses. *Journal of Language and Education, 9*(3), 145–162.

- Limpo, T., & Oliveira, S. (2024). Writing attitudes predict text planning and text length in elementary grades. *Frontiers in Education, 9*, 1323345.

- Nunan, D. (1996). *Language teaching methodology: A textbook for teachers*. London, UK: Prentice Hall.

- Rahimi, M., & Zhang, L. (2024). Effects of metacognitive writing strategies on EFL students' writing and motivation. *SAGE Open, 14*(1), 1–15.

- Raimes, A. (2002). *Techniques in teaching writing* (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

- Raimes, A. (1985). What unskilled ESL students do as they write: A classroom study of composing. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*(2), 229–258.

- Rijlaarsdam, G., Janssen, T., & Van den Bergh, H. (2024). The ABCs of writing motivation: A systematic review of theory and research. *Frontiers in Education, 9*, 1396484.

- Rivers, W., & Temperley, M. (1979). *A practical guide to the teaching of English as a second or foreign language*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Seow, A. (2002). The writing process and process writing. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 315–320). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Silva, T., & Brice, C. (2004). Research in teaching writing. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 24*, 70–106.

- Silva, T. (2005). On the future of L2 writing: A colloquy. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 14*(3), 195–207.

- Sun, P., & Wang, Y. (2023). Validation of the self-regulated writing strategies questionnaire for advanced EFL learners. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 63*, 100712.

- Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass & C. Madden (Eds*.), Input in second*

language acquisition (pp. 235–253). Newbury House.
- Teng, F., Wang, C., & Zhang, L. J. (2021). Assessing self-regulatory writing strategies and their predictive effects on young EFL learners' writing performance. *Assessing Writing, 48*, 10–25.
- Verspoor, M., Lowie, W., & de Bot, K. (2004). *Variability in second language development: Using dynamic systems theory to study the L2 writing process*. John Benjamins.
- Zamel, V. (1983). The composing processes of advanced ESL students: Six case studies. *TESOL Quarterly, 17*(2), 165–187.
- Zhao, X., & Xu, Y. (2025). Writing assessment literacy and psychological factors affecting EFL students' writing performance. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 58*, 101234.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: A social cognitive perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 13–39). Academic Press.

Appendix I

Interview questions
1. Emotional attitudes towards writing
1. How do you usually feel before you begin writing?
2. What emotions do you experience while you are writing?
3. Can you describe how you feel once you have finished writing?
2. Writing Preparation and Planning
4. What steps do you usually take before starting a writing task?
5. Do you prefer to plan your writing mentally or write things down first? Why?
3. Writing Process and Strategy
6. Can you walk me through what you usually do while writing?
7. Are there specific techniques or strategies you use to help you write better?
8. Do you usually write in one sitting or take breaks? Why?
4. Revision and Evaluation
9. What do you usually do after finishing a piece of writing?
10. How important is it for you to revise your writing? Can you explain your revision process?
5. Environment and Influences
11. What kind of environment helps you write well?
12. Do you think about who will read your writing while you are writing? If so, how does that affect what you write?
Follow up questions (Used when Needed) were: Can you give an example of that?, How does that usually work for you?, Why do you think that is?, What happens if you don't do that? Has that always been your approach, or has it changed over time?