

## Students' Attitude towards Receiving Training in Learning Strategies of Writing vs. their Writing Performance: The Case of Hawassa University Students

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**ABSTRACT:** This study was intended to examine the correlation between students' attitude towards leaning writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance to discuss relevant contents, organize contents appropriately and use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics. To this end, the selected Year-I students of Hawassa University were taught lessons of the Basic Writing Skills course with training in the strategies. At the end of the program, the students were made to fill in a five-point scale questionnaire intended to explore their attitude towards receiving training in the strategies, and to take a writing test. The correlations were examined through the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ). To determine the strength of a correlation, the cut-off points suggested by Cohen were applied. Moreover, the coefficient of determination was computed to see the extent to which the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies predicts their writing performance. Thus, this research employed a quantitative-methods design. The Pearson  $r$  demonstrated that there was a strong positive correlation between the students' attitude towards leaning the writing lessons through receiving training on the strategies and their writing performance on each of the aspects of writing ( $r$ -values  $\geq .766$ ;  $p$ -value = .000). The coefficient of determination also revealed that the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies predicts their writing performance at above 58%. Based on the findings, recommendations have been made.

**KEYWORDS:** attitude; receiving training; learning strategies of writing; correlation; writing performance.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Hawassa University is a public university found in the South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State of Ethiopia and is a comprehensive university engaged in the provision of all-round education, research, training and community service. The university has more than 64 first degree programs, 43 second degree programs and 4 PhD programs in various schools/colleges. Students of all the departments of Hawassa University, as is the case with students of other universities across the nation, particularly in the undergraduate studies, take English language courses such as Communicative English Skills-I, Communicative English Skills-II, Sophomore English, Basic Writing Skills, Advanced Writing-I, Advanced Writing-II and/or Report Writing.

The main objective of offering the English language courses to the students is to help them improve their proficiency as English is a medium of instruction and nearly all the teaching/learning and reference materials are written in it (Hailemichael, 1993; Gebremedhin, 1986). The written as well as oral communications and meetings within the university, usually, and communications with foreign learning institutions, always, are carried out in English. Moreover, formal as well as informal notices of the university usually appear in English. A great deal of information exchange, thus, takes place mainly in writing. It is also mainly writing that has been offered to the undergraduate program students of all the schools/colleges of the university.

The university curricula, however, as is the case with other universities across the country, have not given room for the issue of training in learning strategies of English language in general and writing skills in particular. Learning strategies training has roots in cognitivism and humanism learning theories. Training in learning strategies of writing involves asking students to learn writing by receiving training on the strategies in which explanations are given to the students as to when (contexts), how and why the strategies can be used (Oxford, 1990).

Though the importance of writing in Ethiopian academic context has been felt and acknowledged, the researcher's experience in teaching and advising at Hawassa University shows that the writing performance of the majority of students is deteriorating alarmingly. This is particularly noticeable in tests/examinations, assignments and senior essay/thesis papers. At conferences and workshops conducted on issues related to English language teaching in general and writing skills teaching in particular, many instructors from other universities of the nation have also reflected that their students too seem to have difficulties in writing intelligibly and effectively. Italo's (1999) study, which corresponds with Geremew's (1999) findings, can be taken as an evidence to the this problem in which he concludes that the freshman program students at Addis Ababa University seem to have serious problems in writing in English.

## **1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

A vast body of research literature on the topic has confirmed that leaning writing through receiving training on learning strategies of writing improves students' writing skills. This is because training benefits students to learn the role of strategies in improving their writing skills and it improves their motivation to learn writing and belief about autonomous learning of writing, and thus they continue to use the strategies appropriately when they carry out writing tasks in and outside class (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Ze-sheng, 2008; Liang, 2009; McMullen, 2009; Zeleke, 2013). To this effect, students should have a positive attitude towards learning writing through receiving training on the strategies (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991). A research conducted by Zeleke (2013), the first local study in its kind, found that students have a positive attitude towards learning writing lessons through receiving training on learning strategies of writing. This is because students feel that they benefit from training to improve their writing skills by using the strategies appropriately as well as taking on more responsibility for their own learning of writing.

However, Zeleke (2013) did not examine the correlation between the students' attitude towards leaning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance to discuss relevant contents, organize contents appropriately and use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics. Hence, this study is intended to examine the correlation between students' attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing and their writing performance on each of the aspects of writing with particular reference to Hawassa University students.

## **1.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The following null and alternative hypotheses were formulated about the correlation.

**Null Hypothesis (Ho):** There is no correlation between students' attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing and their writing performance to discuss relevant contents, organize contents appropriately and use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics;

**Alternative Hypothesis (Ha):** There is correlation between students' attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing and their writing performance to discuss relevant contents, organize contents appropriately and use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics.

## **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

It is hoped that the findings of this study have the following importance. In the first place, it adds value to our knowledge that there is a strong positive correlation between students' attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing and their writing performance to discuss relevant contents, organize contents appropriately and use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics. Moreover, this study may serve as a springboard for future researchers interested to conduct similar studies on the other macro-language skills, grammar or vocabulary.

## 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### 2.1 LEARNING STRATEGIES OF WRITING

Oxford (1990) has classified learning strategies of writing into the following groups based on various criteria.

#### 2.1.1 MEMORY STRATEGIES

Memory learning strategies of writing include placing new words into a context, using key words, and structured reviewing. **Placing new words into a context** involves applying words that have been heard or read into a meaningful context as a way of remembering them. For example, learners may make a little story by using the new words.

**Using key words** to remember something requires learners to go through two steps. First, they should identify a familiar word in their own language that sounds like the new word. Second, they should create an image of some relationship between the new and familiar words. For instance, to learn the French word *potage* (soup), the English speaker can associate the word with a pot and then draw a pot that is full of *potage*. **Structured reviewing** involves carefully spaced intervals, at first close together and then more widely spaced apart. Learners might start, for instance, with a review of fifteen minutes after the initial learning, then twenty-five minutes afterward, an hour or two afterward, a day later, two days later, a week later, etc. so that they can become so familiar with the information and master it.

#### 2.1.2 COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

The cognitive learning strategies of writing are different. **Using mechanical techniques** involves writing new words on one side of cards and their definitions or full sentences with the words on the other side and then moving the cards from one stack to another when the words are learned. This strategy also includes putting words that have been learned and words that need practice in separate sections of a notebook.

**Repeating** involves writing the same thing twice or more times. For example, when students carry out a piece of writing, they can repeat words or expressions, styles, tones, examples, evidences, etc. to tell us that they are emphasizing these to help them effectively discuss given ideas or concepts.

**Formally practicing with sounds and writing systems** focuses on practicing the writing systems of the target language, for example, by copying letters/words or copying or collecting paragraphs developed by using similar methods in the target and students' own languages to compare and contrast the paragraphs in terms of organization of ideas, subject matter treatment, language use, etc. This helps learners write paragraphs in the target language by effectively applying given methods, for it may be easy to understand about the methods from the paragraphs in their own languages.

According to Oxford (1990), "**Recognizing and using routine formulas and patterns** in the target language greatly enhance the learner's comprehension and production. Formulas are unanalyzed expressions, while patterns have at least one slot that can be filled with an alternative word" (P.72). When students carry out writing tasks, to help them maximize the attractiveness of their writing, they can collect, practice and employ commonly used expressions, structures and formats.

The **strategy of recombining** involves writing new meaningful sentences by arranging together words or expressions in new ways. For instance, a learner can recombine expressions such as going to the warehouse, going to the supermarket, attending a meeting, walking, and going to the cinema and write a little story about a woman who does all these things in the same morning.

**Practicing naturalistically** includes writing autobiography, interviews of family or friends, factual reports, stories, poems, diary, newsletters, magazines, simulated radio and television programs, letters, etc. in the target language. **Using sources for getting information** includes using dictionaries, grammar books, reference books, the internet, television news shows, radio programs, etc. to help learners improve their writing regarding word choice, grammar, mechanics, organization, content, etc.

**Reasoning deductively** involves using general rules and applying them to draw specific rules about a language while writing. It is a top-down strategy leading from general to specific. Reasoning deductively is a common and useful type of logical thinking. For example, to write given adverbs in the correct position, learners can use the general rule that adverbs usually appear before other adverbs, before adjectives, and after verbs they modify.

**Translating** involves using one's own language to prepare the first draft and then changing it into the target language. Writing a draft in one's own language may make him/her easily generate and organize ideas. **Transferring** involves applying one's grammatical knowledge of first language to second/foreign language or his/her knowledge from one aspect of a language to another aspect or conceptual knowledge from one field to another. For example, students can use this strategy

to help them understand or produce the four types of sentences, namely simple, compound, complex and compound-complex which are classified on the basis of grammatical structure. They can apply their knowledge about number and types of clauses (dependent/independent) and about types of coordinating conjunctions and/or punctuation marks of these sentences in their first/Amharic language to help them easily understand or produce sentences in English.

With regard to **taking notes** as a strategy, learners can take notes on some issues while reading texts in the target language to help them improve their writing skills. For instance, to help them write a similar descriptive essay about their own rooms at home, students can take notes about the uses of the room, its size, decoration, furniture, the size of its window, and how these are paragraphed. Thus, this could help them produce a descriptive essay that discusses all these.

**Summarizing** as a cognitive learning strategy of writing is making a condensed version of a paragraph or an essay. Writing a summary usually needs concentration. Learners need to apply the following procedures. First, they should identify the main ideas and the major supporting details of the text. Second, they should write the ideas in their own words.

**Highlighting**, another cognitive learning strategy of writing, is using a variety of emphasis techniques such as color underlining, CAPITAL LETTERS, big writing, **bold writing**, and using symbols to help one focus on such information. For example, learners can highlight the title and the introductory sentence of their paragraphs to help them effectively develop the theme and produce an appropriate concluding sentence respectively. This is because if they highlight these, they might pay attention to these and thus might not deviate from these. Learners can also highlight the topic sentence to help them write adequate and important supporting details. When they highlight the sentence, they can focus on it and thus might not move away from it and therefore can include adequate and appropriate supporting details.

To help them write effective paragraphs or essays, learners can **go through the following series of steps**: write down the main ideas they will discuss in the essay; arrange the ideas from the least important to the most important; develop the ideas into topic sentences and supporting details; draft the essay of an introductory paragraph, body paragraph/s, and a concluding paragraph; revise the essay; edit the essay by focusing on language and unity, coherence, and adequate development of the ideas and rewrite the essay by improving it.

### **2.1.3 COMPENSATION STRATEGIES**

Compensation learning strategies of writing include selecting the topic, adjusting or approximating the message, coining words, and using a circumlocution or synonym. Students can practice writing by **choosing topics that interest** them; when they select topics, they need to consider their readers' interests, needs, and level of understanding.

**Adjusting or approximating the intended messages** is often used when learners cannot construct the most appropriate sentences. For instance, instead of producing the more difficult sentence: I would have liked to have visited Hawassa, but I could not go because I lacked the necessary funds, they can write I did not go to Hawassa, because I did not have money.

**Coining words** involves making up new words to communicate the intended ideas for which learners do not have the right words. For instance, learners can use tooth-doctor instead of dentist and paper-holder instead of notebook. When students write, they can **use a circumlocution or a synonym** if they could not produce a single word that can accurately reveal the intended concepts/ideas. A circumlocution is a roundabout expression that includes a group of words to express a single concept, and a synonym is a word that has exactly or nearly the same meaning in the same language. For example, if learners cannot think of the word briefcase, they can say leather package that holds papers.

### **2.1.4 METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES**

The metacognitive strategies of writing are as follows. When students learn to write, they can overview comprehensively a key concept, principle, or set of materials of writing tasks and associate these with what they have already known. **Over viewing comprehensively** often comprises three steps: knowing why an activity is being done, including necessary vocabulary, and making associations with what have already been known. For instance, getting ready to carry out a writing task, students can write a kind of brainstorming. They can also brainstorm in groups or participate in debates to generate ideas. Moreover, before learners rush to write paragraphs or essays, they can write down their ideas on a paper, without worrying about the correctness of the grammar and order of ideas.

**Paying attention** as a metacognitive learning strategy of writing is useful to improve one's writing. It has two modes: directed attention and selective attention. Directed attention can be equivalent to concentration which implies deciding generally to pay attention to a writing task and avoid distracters. Selective attention involves deciding in advance to focus on

particular aspects of writing such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, tone, etc. Students can also make efforts to find out how to improve their writing skills by reading books.

Before learners rush to carry out a piece of writing, they need to break up the given time into some minutes and allocate these to different tasks such as to write down the main ideas, draft, revise and edit a paragraph or an essay. **Setting goals and objectives** as a metacognitive strategy of writing includes striving to improve one's writing skills in order to succeed in his/her study, write letters or scientific articles, etc.

**Identifying the purpose of a writing task** involves identifying the general nature of a writing task, its specific requirements, resources available, and the need for further sources before learners start writing. For example, if students are asked to write an argumentative essay, first they note that they want to beat readers' ideas. Then, they need to find counter arguments for each idea, adequately support each idea with evidences, and use appropriate language signposts to point out opposing arguments, state why the readers think like that, reach the turning point, and refute the opposing ideas. After checking if the learners have the necessary knowledge on these, they look for additional information from someone or somewhere.

**Seeking practice opportunities**, as a metacognitive strategy of writing, includes going to the target language cinema, attending a meeting where the language is spoken, communicating with pen-pals in the target language, etc.

**Self-monitoring** involves identifying errors of one's own writing and determining which ones cause serious confusions and then tracking the sources and eliminating such errors. Learners can help each other to monitor their writing errors, without instructor's direct intervention, and read and comment on each other's paragraphs or essays. They may ask their instructor to mark up serious errors and then themselves figure out the correct forms by helping each other and using reference materials.

The last metacognitive strategy of writing is **self-evaluation**. This strategy involves reviewing one's own paragraphs or essays by noting the style, content, language, etc. Students might also compare their paragraphs or essays with each other. Some important criteria for self-evaluation include sentence length, complexity of thoughts, power of arguments, organization, accuracy and social appropriateness.

#### 2.1.5 AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

Affective strategies of writing include using one's own progressive relaxation, deep breathing, listening to music, using laughter, making positive statements about one's own writing performance, taking risks wisely, rewarding oneself, listening to one's own body, using a checklist, writing a diary, and discussing one's feelings with someone else. **Progressive relaxation** involves tensing and relaxing all the main muscle groups one at a time. **Deep breathing** involves breathing low from the diaphragm. When students relax using progressive relaxation or deep breathing, they reduce anxiety and thus successfully accomplish their writing tasks. **Listening to music** before learners start to carry out especially a difficult writing task can put them in a positive mood. **Using laughter**, for example by using classroom activities such as role-plays, games, active exercises, jokes or watching movies, gives pleasure to learners and thus it helps them successfully accomplish their writing tasks.

**Making positive statements** to themselves about their performance before they start to carry out writing tasks can help learners feel more confident and thus do the tasks effectively. When they perform the tasks with confidence, their performance will be improved.

**Taking risks wisely** involves a conscious decision to take risks regardless of the possibility of making errors or encountering difficulties while writing. When it is said wisely, it means not unnecessary risk, like saying anything at all regardless of its degree of relevance; risk taking must be tempered by a good judgment. After learners have successfully accomplished especially difficult writing tasks, to help them keep on writing well, they can reward themselves for their performances by telling themselves that they have done well and that they deserve a rest, an entertainment, etc.

**Listening to one's own body** while writing involves thinking about one's own emotions: if he/she feels tension, anxiety, or fear, or if he/she tries to avoid or minimize the problems by taking appropriate actions. This could help him/her to successfully accomplish the tasks.

Before they start writing paragraphs or essays, learners can also set criteria such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics in the form of a checklist to assess their own progress and this could make them work hard because in the end they are to see their performance against the criteria by showing the paragraphs or essays to their classmates, friends, parents or neighbors or by referring to the print or electronic resources.

**Writing a diary** involves recording one's own feelings, attitudes and motivations about his/her practicing of writing and information about strategies one finds useful in the process of learning writing. **Discussing one's feelings with someone else**, before and/or while writing, regarding his/her feelings about the writing and problems he/she may encounter (e.g., unable to use the correct grammar or mechanics) in the process of writing helps him/her improve his/her writing skills.

#### **2.1.6 SOCIAL STRATEGIES**

Social strategies of writing includes asking instructor, cooperating with peers, cooperating with proficient writers of the target language, developing cultural understanding, and becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings. When students carry out writing tasks, they can **ask their instructor for correction** of some errors. For example, they may ask their instructor to tell them if they are correctly ordering sentences to show how a story starts and ends. The instructor may say that no correction is needed. To help them successfully accomplish their writing tasks, learners can also **ask their instructor for clarification** on what to do, how to do, when to do, etc before/while doing the tasks.

**Cooperating with peers** involves a concerted effort to work together with other learners on a writing activity. Learners can ask and help each other how to improve their writing tasks. For instance, after they have completed writing, they can ask one another to read and correct their paragraphs or essays. **Cooperating with proficient writers of the target language** involves getting permanent or temporary persons who can help learners improve their writing skills. **Developing cultural understanding** involves learning about the culture of the target language people so that learners can know what is culturally appropriate to say in their writing.

With regard to **becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings**, before/while writing paragraphs or essays, learners need to think about the thoughts and feelings of their readers; they should think about what their readers may like and dislike (e.g., ideas, words/expressions, examples, etc). Learners should keep in mind the readers they are writing to and trying to meet their needs and as a result they may pay attention to the learners' ideas.

### **2.2 APPROACHES TO LEARNING STRATEGIES TRAINING**

#### **2.2.1 NARROW FOCUS, BROAD FOCUS OR COMBINATION APPROACHES**

Oxford (1990) discusses that learning strategies training can be conducted by using a narrow focus, broad focus, or combination approach. A narrow focus approach involves teaching students one or two learning strategies. This approach has the following benefits. Firstly, it makes the trainer to cover more learning strategies in short time as only one or two strategies are introduced at a time independently. Secondly, it minimizes the possibility of confusing students with different types of strategies because the strategies are introduced one by one. Thirdly, a narrow focus allows the instructor to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of training because he/she teaches each strategy separately. However, the downside of this approach is that it does not promote students' language learning because the strategies are not integrated to interact with one another.

A trainer who uses a broad focus approach introduces more learning strategies from all the classification groups. This approach requires a trainer to conduct the training by integrating different types of language learning strategies of each category so that learners could notice how the strategies interact with each other. A broad focus approach improves learners' belief about language learning. "However, this broad focus does not allow precise assessment of training effectiveness in reference to any specific strategy" (Oxford, 1990, p. 205).

A combination approach is an amalgamation of broad focus and narrow focus approaches. This approach involves some procedures. Firstly, the trainer provides students with all the language learning strategies of all the classification groups and asks them to rate the role of the strategies. Secondly, among strategies reported by students as useful, the trainer chooses strategies that are not too familiar and too strange. Then, a separate or an integrated and an implicit or an explicit training is conducted on the strategies. "This is an excellent way to approach strategy training. It gives learners the "big picture" at first, and then moves into specific strategies which the learners have chosen themselves. The element of learner choice in instructing structuring training is very important, since learning strategies are the epitome of learner choice and self-direction" (Oxford, 1990, p. 205).

#### **2.2.2 SEPARATE VERSUS INTEGRATED APPROACHES**

Learning strategies training can be carried out by using a separate or an integrated approach. A separate approach involves teaching learning strategies without incorporating them into the language lessons. According to O'Malley and

Chamot (1990), "Arguments in favor of separate training programs advance the notion that strategies are generalizable to many contexts...and that students will learn strategies better if they can focus all their attention on developing strategic processing skills rather than try to learn content at the same time..." (P. 152). However, according to some scholars such as Oxford (1990) this approach does not enhance students' language learning since students do not receive training on how and when to use strategies and on how to evaluate their learning as well as the success of strategies.

Wenden (1991), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) believe that an integrated approach, unlike a separate approach, requires the trainer to teach strategies by including them into appropriate tasks of a language course. Students are shown when and how to use strategies and how to evaluate the importance of the strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state, "Those in favor of integrated strategy instruction programs, on the other hand, argue that learning in context is more effective than learning separate skills whose immediate applicability may not be evident to the learner...and that practicing strategies on authentic academic and language tasks facilitates the transfer of strategies to similar tasks encountered in other classes..." (P. 152).

### 2.2.3 IMPLICIT VERSUS EXPLICIT APPROACHES

A learning strategies training can be conducted by choosing an implicit or an explicit approach. An implicit approach is an embedded approach. The trainer who chooses this approach sets language tasks intended to make students employ learning strategies to help them successfully accomplish the tasks, but the trainer does not inform students about the role of the strategies and when and how to use the strategies (Wenden, 1991; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, Wenden and Rubin, 1987). This approach, according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990), has two merits. Firstly, as the strategies are embedded, it minimizes the risk learners may oppose the training. Secondly, "An advantage cited for strategy training embedded in instructional materials is that little teacher training is required...As students work on exercises and activities, they learn to use the strategies that are cued by the textbook" (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990: 153). On the other hand, this approach has some drawbacks. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), it does not make students take on more responsibility for their own learning. Moreover, it does not make learners use strategies flexibly in a variety of contexts and maintain strategies overtime (Wenden and Rubin, 1987).

An explicit approach, unlike an implicit approach, requires the trainer to apply the following procedures: identifying language learning strategies by name, explaining/describing the importance of the strategies, demonstrating (through actual language tasks) in which contexts to use and how to use the strategies, and how to transfer the strategies into other contexts, making students practice the strategies, and asking students to evaluate the importance of the strategies in improving their language performance. With regard to this approach, Chamot (2005:123) writes, "Explicit instruction includes the development of students' awareness of their strategies, teacher modeling of strategic thinking, identifying the strategies by name, providing opportunities for practice and self-evaluation." According to Wenden and Rubin (1987), an explicit approach helps learners maintain strategies over time for a variety of learning contexts and thus they take on more responsibility for their own learning. In Oxford's (1990: 201) language, "the general goals of such training are to make language learning more meaningful, to encourage a collaborative spirit between learner and teacher, to learn about options for language learning, to learn and practice strategies that facilitate self-reliance."

### 2.3 PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING A LEARNING STRATEGIES TRAINING LESSON

There are several models suggested for conducting a language learning strategies training lesson by various scholars (Hosenfeld et al., 1981; Chamot and Kupper, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Grenfell and Harris, 1999). Oxford (1990) writes that the instructor of a language learning strategies training lesson should follow the procedures below (note that only the model of Oxford is discussed here for being chosen for the present study): ask learners to do an activity without strategy training; ask learners if they have used any strategy while doing the activity, and ask them to evaluate the role of the strategy (if used); suggest and explain some useful strategies and the rationale for using the new strategies; ask learners to practice the strategies by doing the task again or through other language tasks; demonstrate how to transfer the strategies to new learning tasks; ask learners to practice the strategies in new learning tasks; ask learners to evaluate the importance of the strategies used, i.e., if they found the strategies useful in helping them successfully accomplish writing tasks.

### 2.4 ATTITUDE

Attitude can be stated as the positive/negative image one forms about something after he/she perceives it and forms opinions about it and when the opinions get very strong. Dandapani (2004:193) defines attitude as "a dispositional readiness to respond to certain situations, persons, objects or ideas in a consistent manner, which has been learned and has become one's typical mode of response." Chauble and Chauble, 2007; Albery et al., 2008; Hogg and Vaughan, 2002; Dandapani, 2004

discuss that attitude cannot be directly observed; it can only be inferred from responses made by a person. Moreover, attitude is not inborn trait; it is a result of education, perception and inspiration. Attitude is mainly described as positive or negative. The above scholars discuss that a person's attitude towards something (e.g., instructional method) is usually measured through a set of questions constructed on a five- point Likert Scale questionnaire. "Likert developed a more refined Likert Attitude Scale. It resembles a simple questionnaire, but involves refined techniques of item-selection. It is a series of statements either favorable or unfavorable on a five- point scale...Each response is given a numerical score. An individual's score is the sum of his ratings on all items" (Dandapani, 2004: 194).

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 PARTICIPANTS**

The participants of this study were 60 students (46 males, 14 females). They were between 18 – 21 years old. All of them completed Grade 12 and are currently in their Year-I program at Hawassa University, Ethiopia.

#### **3.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study was intended to examine the correlation between students' attitude towards receiving training in learning strategies of writing and their writing performance to discuss relevant contents, organize contents appropriately and use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics. To this end, the selected Year-I students of Hawassa University were taught lessons of the Basic Writing Skills course with training in the strategies. At the end of the program, the students were made to fill in a five-point scale questionnaire intended to explore their attitude towards receiving training in the strategies, and to take a writing test. The correlations were examined through the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ). Moreover, the coefficient of determination was computed to see the extent to which the students' attitude towards receiving training in the strategies is related to their writing performance. Thus, this research employed a quantitative-methods design.

#### **3.3 PREPARATION OF TEACHING MATERIAL**

A teaching material on Basic Writing Skills course was prepared, based on the course syllabus, by choosing the combination, integrated and explicit approaches. It was prepared by using the model of Oxford (1990). Her model was chosen because it includes procedures that are easy to understand and thus preferred by many researchers. The teaching material asked the students to make use of the learning strategies of writing while completing sentences by writing appropriate subjects and predicates and rewriting sentences by correcting errors, completing paragraphs by writing appropriate topic sentences, concluding sentences and relevant details, rearranging jumbled sentences in logical orders and completing paragraphs by writing appropriate cohesive devices, completing essays by writing appropriate thesis statements and concluding paragraphs, identifying parts of an essay: introduction, body and conclusion, rearranging jumbled paragraphs in logical orders and writing essays to argue for/against. To validate the teaching material, comments were obtained from the researcher's most senior colleagues.

#### **3.4 PREPARATION OF WRITING SKILLS TEST**

A writing test was prepared by the researcher. It was constructed based on the course syllabus. The test was intended to measure the students' writing skills with regard to discussing relevant contents, organizing contents appropriately and using accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics. The students were asked to complete sentences by writing appropriate subjects and predicates and rewrite sentences by correcting errors, complete paragraphs by writing appropriate topic sentences, concluding sentences and relevant details, rearrange jumbled sentences in logical orders and complete paragraphs by writing appropriate cohesive devices, complete essays by writing appropriate thesis statements and concluding paragraphs, identify parts of an essay: introduction, body and conclusion, rearrange jumbled paragraphs in logical orders and write essays to argue for/against. To validate the test, comments were obtained from the researcher's most senior colleagues.

#### **3.5 PREPARATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE**

A questionnaire intended to obtain data on the students' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing was prepared by taking ideas from Gardner (1985), an authority of AMTB

(Attitude Motivation Test Battery) for Second Language Learning, and included items in which each item has five possible responses: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaire included a cover page that discusses the purpose of the questionnaire and asks the students to read the items carefully and respond honestly and frankly. The researcher's most senior colleagues were requested to comment on the questionnaire regarding its validity. Cronbach Alpha was computed on SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 20 to examine the reliability of the items of the questionnaire. The computation showed that the items were reliable at above 0.80. Cranach's alpha was chosen because the questionnaire has a five-point scale.

### 3.6 SELECTION OF STUDY SETTING AND DEPARTMENTS

The researcher purposefully chose Hawassa University to which he is a member of staff. From the existing departments of the university, Mathematics and Management were randomly selected by drawing lots. The researcher used a simple random sampling because it allows a department to have equal chance of being selected; the probability of a department being selected is unaffected by the selection of another department. Thus, it is possible to be confident that the departments chosen represent all the departments of the university.

### 3.7 ADMINISTRATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire intended to collect data on the students' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing was administered after conducting the training to the Mathematics Department students for 30 hours (5 hours for 6 consecutive weeks) and to the Management Department students for a semester (5 hours for 16 consecutive weeks). Careful attempts were made to make the environment conducive to fill in the questionnaire.

### 3.8 ADMINISTRATION AND SCORING OF THE TEST

The writing test meant to measure the students' writing skills with regard to discussing relevant contents, organizing contents appropriately and using accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics was administered at the end of the program. Careful attempts were made to make the environment conducive for taking the test. The test paper of each student was corrected by two randomly selected English language instructors of the university who had received training on how to correct the test papers. The analytic approach was chosen to mark the compositions. This approach is preferred for being the most effective approach to achieve reliability. The rating scale used was the one provided by Heaton (1990). Heaton (1990: 146) describes the scale in this way: "The following rating scale is the result of considerable and careful research conducted in the scoring of compositions in the United States."

### 3.9 METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

In order to find the students' scores on the attitude questionnaire, the researcher applied the procedures used by prominent social science researchers of these days. First, for the questionnaire, values 1 to 5 were given for strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree respectively so that the minimum scores a student would score is the number of the items of the questionnaire multiplied by 1, and the maximum scores a student would score is the number of the items of the questionnaire multiplied by 5.

In order to take the students' average scores on each of the aspects of writing, the following procedures were applied. First, Pearson  $r$  was conducted on SPSS version 20 to see the correlation of the scores given by the instructors. To determine the strength of a correlation, the cut-off points suggested by Cohen (1988), as cited in Greasley (2008), were applied. "As a general guideline, a value ranging from 0.1 to 0.4 would be classed as a weak correlation, and anything above 0.5 would be regarded as a strong correlation... A value approaching zero indicates the absence of any relationship between two variables, in other words no correlation" (Greasley, 2008:80). Then, the students' average scores were taken since Pearson  $r$  computed showed that the correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed); there was a strong positive correlation between the scores given by the instructors.

Lastly, Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficient was computed on SPSS version 20 to examine the correlation between the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance. To determine the strength of a correlation, the cut-off points suggested by Cohen (1988), as cited in Greasley (2008), were employed. The coefficient of determination was also computed to examine the extent to which the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies predicts their writing performance. In relation to this idea, Greasley (2008:82) says, "It is referred to as the coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ), and provides a measure of the degree to which one variable

'predicts' the other by simply squaring the correlation value. You can then simply multiply this by 100 to give a percentage value."

#### 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1 RESULTS OF PEARSON'S R CORRELATION COEFFICIENT

The following tables demonstrate the results of Pearson's r correlation coefficient computed to examine the correlation between the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance to discuss relevant contents, organize contents appropriately and use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics.

**Table 1: Correlation of \*SARTLSW and their Writing Performance on Content**

		SARTLSW	Writing Performance on Content
SARTLSW	Pearson Correlation	1	.766**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	60	60
Writing Performance on Content	Pearson Correlation	.766**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	60

\*SARTLSW = Students' Attitude towards Receiving Training on the Learning Strategies of Writing

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

Table 1 above depicts the correlation of the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance on content. The table shows that the r-value is .766\*\*. Thus, the r-value is closer to 1.000. The p-value is .000, and the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This indicates that there is a strong positive correlation between the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance on content. That is, as the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies increases, their performance to discuss relevant contents in their writing increases as well. The coefficient of determination computed indicates that the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies predicts their writing performance with regard to discussing relevant contents at 58.6756%.

**Table 2: Correlation of SARTLSW and their Writing Performance on Organization**

		SARTLSW	Writing Performance on Organization
SARTLSW	Pearson Correlation	1	.841**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	60	60
Writing Performance on Organization	Pearson Correlation	.841**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	60

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

Table 2 above shows the correlation of the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance on organization. In the table, it is indicated that the r-value is .841\*\*, which is closer to 1.000; the p-value is .000, and thus the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This shows that there is a strong positive correlation between the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their ability to organize contents appropriately. In other words, as students continue to develop a positive attitude towards

learning writing lessons in this way, their writing performance with regard to organizing contents appropriately gets improved accordingly. The coefficient of determination carried out reveals that the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies predicts their writing performance regarding organizing contents in logical orders at 70.7281%.

**Table 3: Correlation of SARTLSW and their Writing Performance for Grammar**

		SARTLSW	Writing Performance on Grammar
SARTLSW	Pearson Correlation	1	.936**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	60	60
Writing Performance on Grammar	Pearson Correlation	.936**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	60

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

Table 3 above demonstrates the correlation of the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance on grammar. As indicated in the table, the r-value is .936\*\*. Thus, the r-value is closer to 1.000, and the p-value is .000. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This tells us that there is a strong positive correlation between the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their performance to write grammatically accurate sentences. That is to say, as the students' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training, their writing performance to produce grammatically accurate sentences increases as well. The coefficient of determination conducted shows that the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies predicts their writing performance with regard to using accurate grammar at 87.6096%.

**Table 4: Correlation of SARTLSW and their Writing Performance on Vocabulary**

		SARTLSW	Writing Performance on Vocabulary
SARTLSW	Pearson Correlation	1	.799**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	60	60
Writing Performance on Vocabulary	Pearson Correlation	.799**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	60

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

Table 4 above demonstrates the correlation of the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance on vocabulary. The table depicts that the r-value is .799\*. Thus, the r-value is closer to 1.000. The p-value is .000, and the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This shows that there is a strong positive correlation between the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their performance to choose appropriate vocabulary. That is to say, as the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies increases, their performance to come up with appropriate vocabulary increases too. The coefficient of determination computed indicates that the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies predicts their writing performance to choose appropriate vocabulary at 63.8401%.

**Table 5: Correlation of SARTLSW and their Writing Performance on Mechanics**

		SARTLSW	Writing Performance on Mechanics
SARTLSW	Pearson Correlation	1	.925**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	60	60
Writing Performance on Mechanics	Pearson Correlation	.925**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	60

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

Table 5 above reveals the correlation of the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance on mechanics. As shown in the table, the r-value is .925\*\*. It is closer to 1.000, and the p-value is .000. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This indicates that there is a strong positive correlation between the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their performance to correctly spell, capitalize and punctuate. The coefficient of determination conducted shows that the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies predicts their writing performance with regard to correctly spelling, capitalizing and punctuating at 85.5625%.

**4.2 MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

Pearson's r correlation coefficient computed to examine the correlation between the students' attitude towards receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance on each aspect of writing (content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics) revealed that there is a strong positive correlation (r-values  $\geq .766$ , p-value = .000). As the students' attitude towards learning the writing lessons through receiving training on the strategies increases, their writing performance to discuss relevant contents, organize contents appropriately and use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics increases too. The coefficient of determination indicated that the students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies predicts their writing performance at above 58%.

**5 CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the findings, this study concludes that there is a strong positive correlation between students' attitude towards learning writing lessons through receiving training on the learning strategies of writing and their writing performance to discuss relevant contents, organize contents appropriately and use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics. That is, as students' attitude towards receiving training on the strategies increases, their writing performance on each of these aspects of writing increases as well.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations have been made based on the conclusions of this study.

- While conducting training on learning strategies of writing, the instructor should use various techniques to help students develop a positive attitude towards learning writing lessons through receiving training on the strategies; as a result, their writing performance will be improved accordingly;
- Students should develop a positive attitude towards learning writing lessons through receiving training on learning strategies of writing so that they will benefit from training to improve their writing performance;
- Similar studies on the other macro-language skills, grammar or vocabulary can be conducted.

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