EFL Students' Perceptions and Behaviors towards Writing Performance Based on Metacognitive Strategies

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*Abstract:-***Among all the learning strategies, metacognitive strategy is a higher-order executive skill which entails planning, monitoring and evaluating. Once learners have a good command of a metacognitive strategy, learners will become more independent and autonomous and will be more capable of planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning process and thus become efficient learners. This research aims to investigate the perceptions and behaviors of EFL students towards writing performance based on metacognitive strategies. The data was collected by Interview 10 students from the secondary school of Irbid, Jordan, the result was analyzed by using ATLAS.TI version 8. The results of the study showed the majority of students talked about the main role of using metacognitive strategies to improve writing performance while some students indicated for the difficulties of using metacognitive in their writing performance. Therefore, intends to introduce metacognitive instruction in order to raise EFL writing instructors' awareness in teaching and in order to train students to become self-regulated learners.**

Keywords: **metacognitive strategies, writing performance, brainstorming, planning writing, monitoring writing, evaluating writing**

I. INTRODUCTION

Struggling writers are facing writing problems. These problems are strategic that need strategic writing techniques to be solved. Students with writing problems are not very thoughtful or are not going to a specific plan. They approach writing as if it involves a single process - content generation (Nagin, 2012). Paradoxically, their papers are impoverished in terms of content, vocab, organization, conventions and purpose. The preceding EFL writing skills need to be perfect. The impoverished writing of struggling writers is in part a strategic problem because they have difficulty gaining access to the knowledge they do have.

Strategic writers are those who are able to use writing strategies in different writing situations or those who are able to change writing strategies from theoretical part into practical one (De La Paz& Felton, 2010). Writing is one of the most important skills in teaching English as a foreign language. It reflects the power of students in mastering writing techniques, so the students need to be aware of writing as a process and as a product as well.

Learning writing also includes the learning of writing skills, rules and conventions. As a result, students should not only know these tactics but also know how to manage and control them. The main purpose of strategic writing instruction is that learning to write includes the learning of mental procedures to produce writing and to control the production of writing (Graham et al., 2012). Research indicates that effective or expert writers are strategic. This means that writers have purposes for their writing and adjust their writing to each purpose and for each writing task. Strategic writers use a variety of strategies and skills as they construct paragraphs (Grabe& Kaplan, 2014). A strategy is a plan selected deliberately by the writer to accomplish a particular goal or to complete a given task (Allison& Kaye, 2011). The goal of all writing instruction is to help students become expert writers so that they can achieve independence autonomy in their writing. Learning to use writing strategies effectively is essential in this research for constructing meaning in students' writing and as a trial to change students' passive attitudes towards writing into a positive one.

Many EFL students find writing the most difficult area of language. In the meantime, teachers also find it hard to assist students in producing pieces of quality academic writing (Okasha& Hamdi, 2014). The underlying reason can be drawn from a number of factors, for instance, the inherent

complexity of the skill, students' limited knowledge of the topic, insufficient practice and inadequate feedback (Chang, 2012). Additionally, studies of language teaching tend to focus mainly on accuracy and correctness of grammar and writing mechanics.Ahmed (2010) stated that second language writers are often assumed to have negative attitudes and apprehension towards writing than first language writers. Students are seldom given feedback on their writing in English language, or the opportunity to revise their pieces of writing. The usual practice is to correct the grammatical errors. In addition, the teacher is the sole or the primary audience for students' writing. According to Ambrose et al., (2010) indicated that the cause of the weak writing skills includes the poor attitudes that students exhibit towards writing. Students often view themselves as incompetent writers and thus a low level of engagement occurs in their writing. Chohan (2011) verified that students move from a grade to another grade and their attitudes towards writing generally worsen. To enable students to write effectively, the researchers proposed this study as a kind of solution model to overcome writing difficulties and change students' attitudes towards writing.

Writing is the ultimate process through which the students' performances in virtually all phases of educational levels are assessed more especially for transition, grading or entrance examinations. It is a skill which through it students can best demonstrate their grasp of mastery and control of language. Previous research in SL/FL contexts has identified the students' poor writing skills among the major factors causing students' failures in English Language examinations (Bashir et al., 2016; Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007). It could be argued that as an applied phenomenon, the poor writing skill is not only affecting students' performance in language but in almost all of the subjects they are studying (Abeywickramma, 2010). The issue of studying failure or poor performance of the students in the examination, in relation to writing attracts much interest of second language investigators. Over the years, researchers hold a view that acquiring writing proficiency has been a difficult, intricate and complex task that requires rigorous practices that can be learned explicitly through experiences (Mukhtar, Mei, Abdullah, & Bee, 2016; Buyukyavuz & Cakir, 2014; Çakir 2010; Atay & Kurt 2006; Barkaoui, 2007; Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007).

Moreover, some of these investigators concentrate on finding out how writing affects performance of students, what factors are responsible for errors in students' compositions and how to get rid of them (Mu, 2005; Xiao, 2007). Yahya et al., (2012) argue that the lack of competence in writing English results more from the lack of composing competence than from the lack of linguistic competence. Braughton et al., (2003) pin-point other prominent reasons for the inability in writing including: mechanical problems with the script of English; problems of accuracy of English grammar and lexis; problems relating the style of writing to the demands of a particular situation; and problems of developing ease and comfort in expressing what needs ; to be said. In order to provide solution to this overwhelming problem researchers have employed different strategies (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Crossley, Kyle & McNamara, 2016; Paltridge, 2004; Raoofi, Chan, Mukundan & Rashid, 2014). Teaching students with metacognitive strategies is one of the contributing methods employed to help students to overcome writing problem. Thus, the development of cognitive psychology; metacognition has drawn more and more researchers' attention and provides a new perspective for EFL writing (Panahandeh & Esfandiari, 2014).

Although there are many elements towards learning strategies, the thrust of this study is built on meta-cognitive. As a matter of fact meta-cognitive process is not peculiar in Arab countries and this study believes that bringing such strategies learning method can enhance a good writing and communication skills among Arabian countries with particular reference to Jordan (Abdo, & Breen, 2010).The metacognitive strategies could be said to be the significant and more viable tool of improving students learning skills (Novak, 2010;Kauffman, & Chen, 2008). According to O'Malley & Chamot (1990) and Ehrman, & Oxford, (1990) learners can be better in terms of proper planning, monitoring, and evaluation and practical of learning skills with the application of metacognitive strategies which makes students to become better learners. In a nutshell, this study looks towards enhancing writing skill using meta-cognitive strategy among Arab students and Jordanian secondary school students in particular.

Zimmerman and Schunk, (2011) state that metacognitive strategies are mental operations or procedures that learners use to regulate their learning. They are directly responsible for the execution of a writing task and include three main kinds: planning, evaluating and monitoring. Cognitive strategies are mental operations or steps used by learners to gain new information and apply it to specific learning tasks (Zare, 2012). They are used to deal with the obstacles encountered along the way. They are auxiliary strategies that help in the implementation of the metacognitive strategies. In contrast to the metacognitive strategies, the function of cognitive strategies is narrower in scope. In short, cognitive strategies are strategies which are used to solve problems, whereas metacognitive strategies are employed in order to plan, monitor, evaluate, control and understand these strategies.

The study focused on the use and awareness of metacognitive learning strategies in relation to writing skills. Secondary school students who learn English as a foreign language usually find it difficult to write in L2. Writing in L2 is related

to both linguistic (vocabulary choice, grammar used to build clear sentences, spelling, using style adequate to the writing genre) and communicative (text structure, topic and sub-topics, main idea, argumentation). Confused by so many aspects, some students completely depend on the teacher on the planning stage and are unable to monitor the process of writing. This overdependence on the teacher prevents them from becoming autonomous writers. Autonomy is very important in learning a foreign language, especially for developing writing skills. The focus of this paper is on the use of metacognitive strategies by practicing in the classroom during the writing activity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Scarcella and Oxford (1992), learning strategies are defined as "specifications, behaviors, steps, or techniques, such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task used by students to enhance their own learning" (p.2). When a student consciously picks up the strategies that are appropriate for his or her learning style and the L2 task at hand, these strategies become a useful toolkit for active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation of learning. As Oxford (2003) stated in her book, learning strategies are divided into six groups: cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective, and social. The article will mainly focus on the Metacognitive Strategies, particularly in writing skills.

Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive Strategies are employed for managing the learning process overall (e.g., identifying one's own learning style preferences and needs, planning for an L2 task, gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes, evaluating task success and the success of any type of learning strategy). Purpura (1999) states that among native English speakers learning foreign languages metacognitive strategies have "a significant, positive, direct effect on cognitive strategy use, providing clear evidence that metacognitive strategy use has an executive function over cognitive strategy use in task completion" (p.289). Studies of EFL learners in various countries revealed evidence that metacognitive strategies are often strong predictors of L2 proficiency (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996).

Metacognitive strategy is a term used in Information Processing Theory to indicate an "executive" function and it refers to the strategy that is used by learners as the means to manage, monitor and evaluate their learning activities (O'malley, & Chamot, 1990). To put it simply, metacognitive strategies are skills, approaches, and thinking and actions that learners use to control their cognition and learning process.

The functions and the features of Metacognitive Strategies will be presented in the further section in more detail.

Metacognitive Strategies in Academic Writing

Flavell (1979) is considered to be one of the first scholars to introduce the term metacognition in the field of education. According to the researcher, metacognition consists of metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive experience. Metacognitive strategies are mental executive skills that serve to "control cognitive activities and to ensure a cognitive goal is achieved" (Xing, Wang, &Spenser, 2008, p.46). Different classifications of metacognitive writing strategies have been created; however, in this research the model pursued involves the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating taxonomies (Papleontiou-louca, 2003). Metacognitive writing strategies, correspondingly, involve thinking about the writing process, its planning, monitoring, and self-evaluating of what has been written. More explicitly, via the skills of planning, monitoring, and evaluating the writer manages, directs, regulates and guides his/her writing production (Harris, Santangelo, & Graham, 2010).

Concisely, metacognition can be understood as how learners think about thinking (King, 2004). When it comes to writing specifically, metacognition deals with how students understand their own writing processes, and how they adapt their processes to evolving demands. This paper also intends to promote the integration of metacognition into academic writing instruction to benefit writing instruction by laying emphasis on both approaches to writing instruction (i.e., process and product approaches), and to train teachers as well as students to teach and learn with metacognition.

Thus, metacognitive writing strategies are as follows:

Planning:

Planning involves finding focus concerning purpose, audience, ideas, and strategies to be used, among others. It often takes places before writing, but some writers also plan their compositions even while writing their composition. Planning writing is more efficiently done via whole-class or small group brainstorming. If done in a group, each student is recommended to have his/her function: idea generator, writer, or criticizer. However, planning can be done individually, too. The draft plan is made up, later, in the process of writing, it may be reviewed and undergo changes concerning constituent parts (adding or omitting) and their order. Planning may also involve brainstorming some key words and choosing the basic tense for the writing piece.

Monitoring:

Monitoring involves controlling the writing process while writing the text. It refers to checking and verifying progress in terms of global features, such as content and organization, and

also in terms of local aspects such as grammar and mechanics. It can be more effectively done by individual writers.

Evaluating:

Evaluating takes place after writing, and consists of reconsidering the written text in terms of both global and local writing features, and also concerning the strategies used to complete the writing tasks. Evaluating is more effectively done in pairs (peer assessment): two writers exchange their papers and, having viewed them, discuss the improvements to be made. However, students need to be taught to do self-editing and correction, too. They need to develop a strategy for it (what to check first: contents, structure of language, as it is confusing, especially for less experienced writers to do all three simultaneously).

Teaching Metacognition

 Like many other processes, metacognition can be taught to students. The approaches in teaching students the metacognitive strategies include direct instruction, teacher modeling, and application (Armbruster, 2010). For direct instruction, teachers give clear explanation about the strategies to be taught, why they are important and when students will need to use them. Teachers also present a number of examples to illustrate their instruction. Other than giving direct explanation, teachers can model the strategies by using the technique "think out loud" to show "when and how" the metacognitive strategies should be   used (Luttenegger, 2012). The important point in this approach is that teachers would provide a model of the thinking process by saying out loud what is going on inside their heads. As important, students must be given ample opportunities to perform the same task under the guidance of teachers in order to internalize them until they become automatic. This application of the strategies serves as independent practice accompanied by teachers' feedback. Recognizing and practice in applying metacognitive strategies will help students successfully solve problems not only in their subject areas but throughout their lives as well.

Metacognitive Strategies and Writing

Metacognitive strategies have been recognized as a feature of expert response to problem-solving in general (Davidson, & Sternberg, 1998) as well as of expert writing (Flower, 1989; Flavell, 1979; Scardamalia & Berreiter, 1987). Proficient writers are more consciously aware of what they write, they make more decisions about planning and regulating as they write and they are more likely to self-evaluate their writing as they write than inefficient writers. To clarify the role of metacognitive strategies in writing, it is important to consider the relationship between cognitive and metacognitive strategies that a strategic writer employs. An efficient writer uses a wide range of cognitive strategies for completing the writing tasks. Cognitive strategies have been designed to help learners achieve their cognitive goal (Flavell, 1979). Examples of cognitive strategies for writing might include brainstorming ideas, formulating an outline, doing the prewriting, writing the first draft, writing effective sentences or editing for grammatical errors. In contrast to cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies have been designed to monitor cognitive progress. Student writers employ metacognitive processes or strategies to orchestrate their engagement in the writing process (Humphris, 2010).

Metacognitive strategies for writing might include analyzing the writing task to determine what is required, making plans in accordance with writing strategies to use in a given writing task (e.g. determining whether brainstorming is necessary), monitoring the success (e.g. judging whether sufficient ideas were generated during brainstorming), and selecting remedial strategies (e.g. deciding that more research is needed to gather ideas). In brief, strategic writers (and learners) use cognitive strategies to achieve a particular writing goal and metacognitive strategies to ensure that the cognitive writing goal has been met (Zumbrunn, Tadlock, & Roberts, 2011). In this context, efficient writers may shift   between cognitive and metacognitive activities while performing the writing tasks. Teachers therefore should help students develop metacognitive strategies to become efficient writers.

Teaching EFL Writing Metacognitive Strategies

Even though external guidance and support can assist learners in performing literacy skills, self-questioning and self-monitoring are believed to better assist language learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their writing processes (Conner, 2014; Azevedo, & Aleven, 2013). When EFL writing instructors have a big class as the instructors in Jordan do, training students to become independent learners who possess metacognitive strategic knowledge for writing and for regulating their own writing should be helpful to solve some of the problems caused by the large class size and to improve students' writing proficiency. This research, therefore, encourages EFL writing instructors to teach for meta-cognition so as to develop and enhance students' metacognitive models and awareness. With Jordanian students, Al-Zboun, & Neacşu. (2014) conducted an empirical study to propose teaching principles of EFL writing. The study confirmed Flavell's theoretical framework of metacognition which consisted of metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive experiences and yielded important pedagogical implications for researchers.In this research, instead of proposing a list of teaching strategies and activities, I would like to suggest three guidelines for EFL writing instructors who plan to teach for metacognition in their writing classrooms on the basis of the abundant literature that explicates the approaches promoting readers' metacognitive

awareness. There are mainly two reasons for providing only the guidelines. First, one general guideline may sometimes involve more than one activity or strategy.

In addition, the present study will include scaffolding instruction to tech study. For instance, when practicing scaffolding instruction in the classroom, EFL writing teachers can adopt teacher modeling, thinking-aloud, self-questioning, and cooperative learning at the same time. Second, a creative teacher can design and develop more and new activities by following the guideline without being restricted by a limited set of activities.

Research on the application of metacognitive strategies for teaching writing

Generally, few researches is held nowadays dealing with the application of metacognitive strategies for the development of writing skills. Recently, some research has been held concerning the application of metacognitive strategies for teaching writing. Surat et al. (2014) 18 secondary school students in Malaysia were asked to do metacognitive reflection on the essay they wrote. It revealed that students practically had no idea how the writing process should be organized. On the other hand, Goctu, (2017) found that 21 undergraduate interviewed Malaysian students possessed well-developed writing strategies. The results seem contradictory, but the little number of the respondents make the study results non-generalizable in both cases. Tierney et al, (2015).held a research with 795 Canadian undergraduate students, which showed that the application of metacognitive strategies for the development of writing skills yielded a self-confidence increase and a decrease in anxiety. Graham, & Hebert (2011). carried out a research with 86 vocational college students in China, which showed that teaching the experimental group writing strategies has a positive impact on their writing skills. Although not numerous, the analyzed research shows that many students (and probably teachers) are not aware of the advantages of writing strategies, however, when these strategies are applied, they have a positive impact on the development of writing skills.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research design

The qualitative data were collected via interviews which were transcribed and then interpreted through a thematic analysis approach. Also, the researcher observed the process of teaching writing, providing some quantitative data as well. The research design involved developing an interview based on literature analysis. The questions used targeted at going into detail in the research.

Participants

The participants of this study were from the secondary school students in Irbid Jordan, the participant number was 10 students while the number of questions was 9 in this study.

Procedure

The research was an action and reflective one. It lasted during the autumn semester of the academic year 2016/2017. The permission was obtained from the School administration. Before the implementation of metacognitive strategies on academic writing, initially, the teacher/researcher asked the students whether they know anything about the aforementioned strategies. Some of them had limited knowledge about the strategies, while, the majority were not aware of writing metacognitive strategies. Then the students were assigned to make a search of information on the topic, to provide some background knowledge for teacher's presentation. The teacher dedicated a special class to dealing with metacognitive writing strategies: presenting theoretical explanations with practical examples, then involved students in discussion. Then, students began writing various types of composition implementing the metacognitive writing strategies. During the process of writing, initially, teacher managed, directed, regulated and guided their writing production, later students did it independently. The students discussed the strategies used. The researcher observed the process of discussion and writing. The data were analyzed by using ATLAS.TI version 8.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Interview Questions and Students' Responses

A set of interview questions was prepared in order to find out students' opinions and to inquire whether the implementation of metacognitive writing strategies was beneficial for them. The interview questions involved the process of writing as well as students' views on the metacognitive writing strategies.

Planningstrategy is the initial segment of metacognitive strategies; therefore always it is the prime to start with. It used as the central theme in this study; here there are 7 sub-codes identified it including: brainstorming, advanced organization, organizational planning, functional planning, self-management, selective attention, and directed attention. The results of the analysis as carried out using ATLAS.TI software are presented as follows in figure 1:
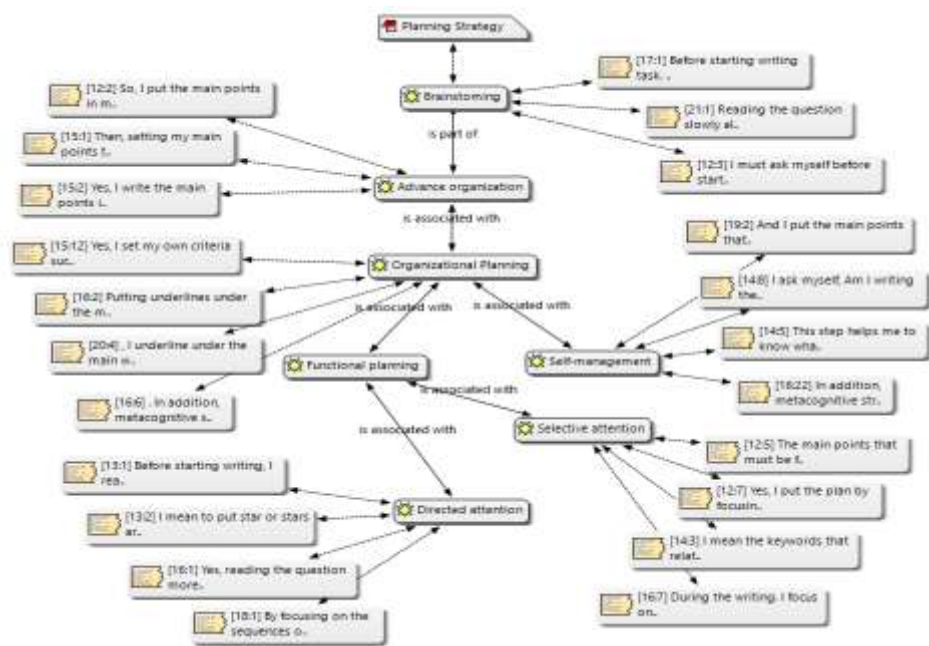
Figure 1 Participants' responses depicting planning strategy exported from ATLAS.TI

The participants' responses categorized under this theme depict planning strategy and their' preparation and readiness to writing tasks. These interviews were conducted immediately at the end of the intervention program in which all the subjects are involved as experimental group. Therefore, prompt effects of the training can be elicited. As described above the planning strategy comprises items which are interrelated such as brainstorming, advanced organization, organizational planning, functional planning, self-management, selective attention, and directed attention.

Monitoring strategy involves the processes applied to supervise the progress during the composing of the text. Or the processes used to track the learning achievement by observing ones abilities and weaknesses. As Zimmerman, & Schunk, (2011) posited that monitoring can help learners understand their challenges and how they can tackled them effectively. Monitoring strategies have powerful effects on learning outcomes. In this study the researcher used three sub-headings to identify the monitoring strategies employed by the participating students. The headings as coded are self-monitoring, monitoring production and monitoring comprehension.
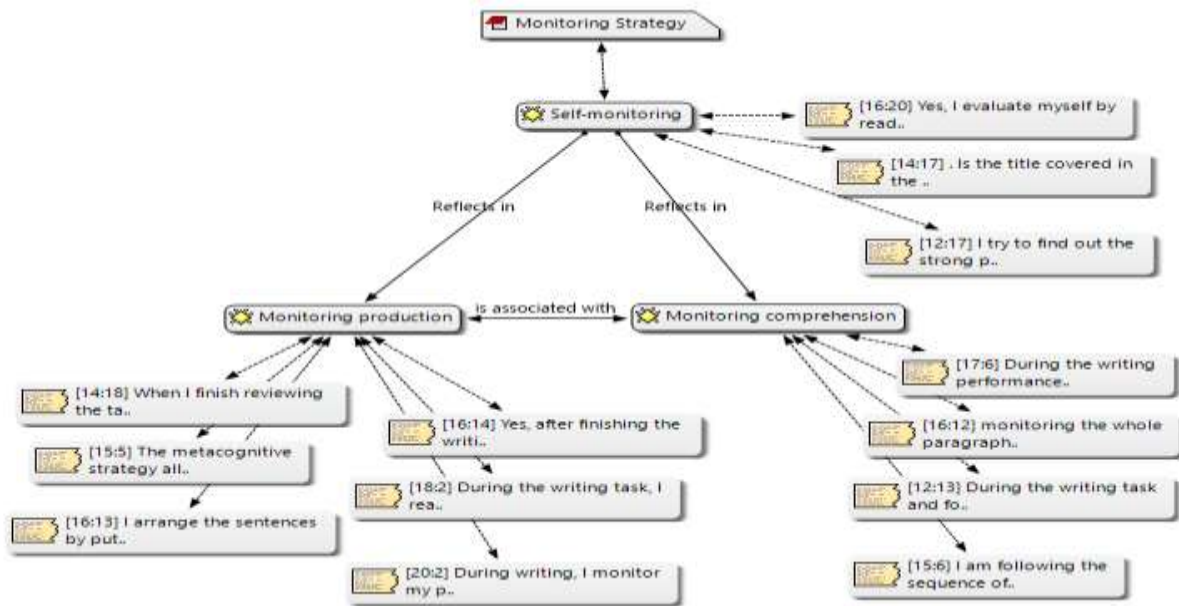
Figure 2 Participantsl' responses depicting monitoring strategy exported from ATLAS.TI

Figure 2presented code-quote links concerning the students' perceptions and behaviour on monitoring strategies. As described above the self-monitoring is the students' ability to monitor their writing processes and progress. And this ability can be reflected on how they can monitor their production and comprehension processes in their writing.

Evaluating strategies are the criteria employed to check the ability, performance of a learner after completing a given learning task. As in the case of the present study for instance,

evaluating strategy refers what the participant does after completing their writing task to check to check the outcome of their task against the standard criteria. Moreover, during the interview session the participant were being asked to give their views and perception concerning these techniques. Those participants who use these strategies can also judge and reflect on how well they accomplish their writing task. The Evaluating strategies involve three main strategies: Self-Assessment, Self-Evaluation, and Self-Reflection.
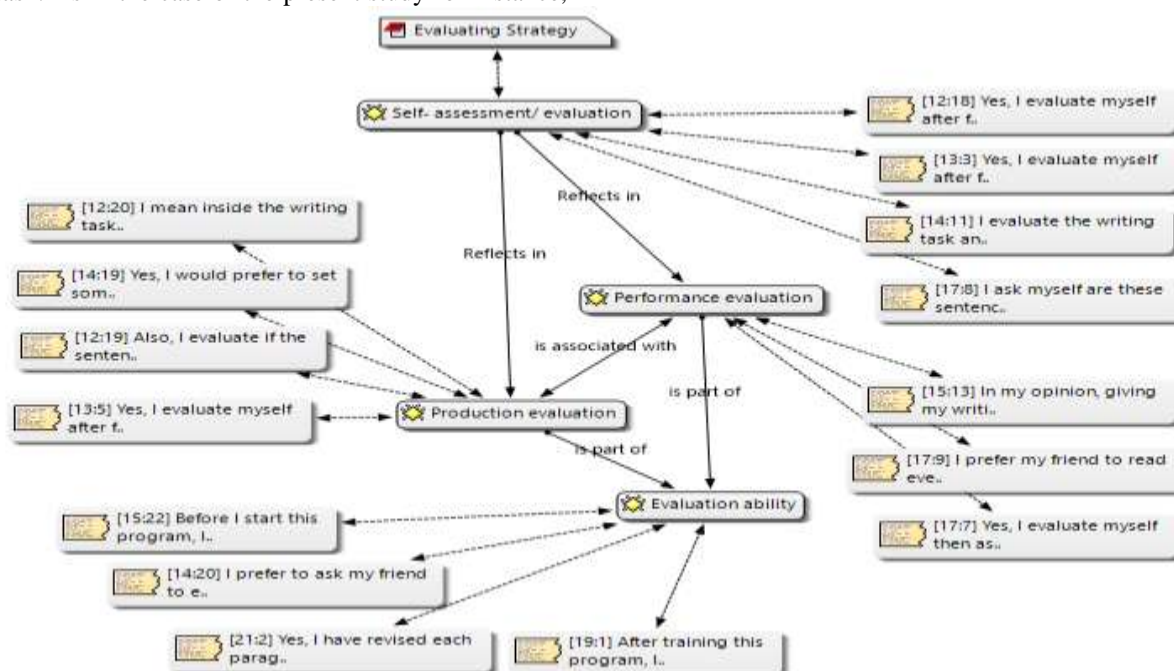

Figure 3 Participants responses depicting evaluating strategy exported from ATLAS.TI

The description given at 3 above indicated that self-evolution as criteria followed by learners to judge their ability and performance for a given task. This strategy can also be related to other strategies categorized under evaluation. It can be reflected in production evaluation whereas the learners evaluate their productivity and the quality of what they produced and performance evaluation, whereas the learners evaluate their overall performance on a task given to accomplish. Lastly, evaluation ability is used to indicate ability of the participant to use this strategy and what sort of the evaluation those participating students preferred or used.

Discussion

This question sought to explore in-depth information on the EFL students' perceptions and behaviors towards writing based on metacognitive strategies. Henceforth, the results obtained through interviews provide more information on findings found in quantitative phases of this study. More information on the three stages of metacognitive strategy (planning, monitoring, and evaluation) strategies are elicited from the interviewees at the planning strategy items such as brainstorming, advanced organization, organizational planning, functional planning, self-management, selective

attention, and directed attention were observed based on intervention model. Other functional techniques which are also related to monitoring and evaluating strategies, such as self-questioning and self-evaluating are observed.

Furthermore, the results indicated that despite, the training students still need to be more trained on how to use brainstorming techniques because the information they provided revealed that they poorly utilized brain storming as match with study of (Al-Wreaker, & Abdullah, 2010; Alsenaidi, 2012). Still on planning students, consider strategies such as underline the main idea as helpful in organizing the text. They also believed that metacognitive help them to be more organized in planning their writing compositions, and claimed in another instance that before this training they don't know how to arrange their composition in English. Some of the techniques they are reported being using include: using marks, symbols and keywords, as well as focusing on the main points on how they link together to develop paragraphs. Meanwhile, on monitoring, students showed that the learned to be more self-reliant after this program, as it increases their ability to monitor their writing processes and progress as results matched in study (Muchyidin, 2013). Moreover, this ability is reflected on how

they can monitor their production and comprehension processes in their writing through self-questioning and revision technique. On the evaluating techniques more information is elicited from the participants on three main strategies self-assessment, self-evaluation, and self-reflection.

Moreover, the findings of interviews helped to elicit more information on writing difficulties faced by the students and the how they struggle to overcome them during the training session using metacognitive strategies. It was found that time management is one of the most one overwhelming issues students are facing in when writing under time constraint. Other problems reported by the students include spelling and grammatical mistakes which can be related to second language effects. Another study which revealed a result that is in agreement with this postulation, was conducted by (Schoenfeld, 2009; Nor, & Ibrahim, 2012).

In addition, the findings revealed mixed reactions of students on the strategies the found to be difficult learn and apply, whereas some perceived, planning stage, whereas others believed that monitoring stage and to some evaluating stage as well are more difficult. The students reported that they need more time to be trained using metacognitive strategies.

However, some of the approaches followed by students to curve up the difficulties were also explored from the interviews, these include: selective attention by focusing on only the important information and ignoring unrelated details. Another step is writing short paragraphs due to time constraint, here I argued that this cause another problem that not reaching the required length of the composition or essay, and writing a sentence as a paragraph which is very common among the EFL learners especially at high school level.

V. CONCLUSION

Metacognitive writing strategies can increase the writing performance and raise their satisfaction. Among all the learning strategies, metacognitive strategy is a higher-order executive skill which contains planning, monitoring and evaluating. The research held succeeded in introducing metacognitive instruction in order to enhance students' writing performance skills and their self-awareness in learning and to train students to become self-regulated learners.This study investigated students' awareness of metacognitive strategies use in their writing performance and students' views on how much they did in relation to writing performance. The findings showed that the students named many advantages of using metacognitive strategies and few disadvantages that can be overcome over time. The students gained advantages not only in writing, but in transferable skills, which makes the metacognitive strategies based teaching of academic writing especially valuable.

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