On the effectiveness of writing strategies in promoting 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners' writing ability

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Abstract:
The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of writing strategies in promoting 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners’ writing ability. Two writing strategies I selected in this study are Julia's (in James 2000) 8-step writing strategy and Englert's (1991) POWER strategy. Both writing strategies are designed based on Hayes and Flower's (1989) theory of writing process but with different steps in guiding writing. According to their different functions, these two strategies can stand for two main kinds of writing strategies at present. The study included two questionnaires and two writing tests designed for fifteen Chinese students who were chosen randomly in grade 3 of a middle school. Through the analysis of these questionnaires, the students’ attitude to writing and the functions of writing strategies were collected in order to keep the two tests reliable and authentic. And then, the pre-test was used to evaluate these students' primary level of English writing; in the post-test, these students were divided into three groups: the first two groups received two writing strategies and the last one was no strategy group. The comparison of their writing results between the two tests were analysed. Both writing strategies groups in the post-test showed the effectiveness of the given writing strategies.

Two writing strategies were chosen for this study according to the research objects' English level and cognitive capability. And the fifteen research objects chosen in Chinese middle school represent the average level of Chinese ESL learners in writing. The analysis of their results in both tests focused on the content of their writings and writing elements, such as, vocabulary, grammar, organization. In the qualitative research of the study, the 8-step writing strategy is shown to be the more effective one for 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners.

Keywords: writing strategies, effectiveness, ESL learners
# Table of Contents

1. *Introduction* ......................................................................................................................... 1

   1.1 Aim ........................................................................................................................................ 2

   1.2 Material and Method ........................................................................................................... 2
     1.2.1 Participants .................................................................................................................. 2
     1.2.2 Pre-test and first questionnaire ................................................................................. 3
     1.2.3 Post-test and second questionnaire ......................................................................... 3

2. *Theoretical Background* ........................................................................................................ 5

   2.1 Overview of writing and writing strategies in ESL ............................................................. 5

   2.2 Writing elements .................................................................................................................. 7

   2.3 Process of writing .............................................................................................................. 9

   2.4 Design and scoring of the writing task ............................................................................ 10
     2.4.1 Design of the writing task ......................................................................................... 10
     2.4.2 Scoring of the writing task ....................................................................................... 12
      2.4.2.1 Holistic scoring of the writing task .................................................................... 12
      2.4.2.2 Analytic scoring of the writing task .................................................................. 13

   2.5 Writing strategies ............................................................................................................. 14
     2.5.2 POWER strategy for writing .................................................................................... 16

3. *Analysis and Discussion* ....................................................................................................... 17

   3.1 First questionnaire .......................................................................................................... 18

   3.2 Analysis of the pre-test ................................................................................................... 19
     3.2.1 Holistic analysis of the pre-test .............................................................................. 19
     3.2.2 Analytic methods of scoring the pre-test ............................................................... 21

   3.3 Second questionnaire ..................................................................................................... 25

   3.4 Analysis and discussion of the post-test ...................................................................... 26
     3.4.1 Analysis of the first group ..................................................................................... 27
     3.4.2 Analysis of the second group ............................................................................... 28
     3.4.3 Analysis of the third group .................................................................................. 30

   3.5 Comparison among three groups' writings .................................................................. 31
     3.5.1 Comparison of effectiveness between the 8-step and POWER strategies .......... 31
     3.5.2 Comparison between writing strategies groups and the no strategy given group 33

4. *Conclusion* ............................................................................................................................. 34

References ..................................................................................................................................... i

Appendices ................................................................................................................................... iii

Appendix 1 .................................................................................................................................. iv
Appendix 2 .................................................................................................................................. v
Appendix 3 .................................................................................................................................. vi
Appendix 4 .................................................................................................................................. vi
Appendix 5 .................................................................................................................................. vii
1. Introduction

Language, as the main tool of human communication, has been investigated in multi-dimensional ways. With language, individuals communicate basic needs as well as express deep thoughts and feelings. That language is part of human socialization is taken for granted by the mainstream population (Pinhasi-Vittorio, 2007: 115). Scientific interest in human communication as a field of linguistic study has increased over last two decades and research areas such as language acquisition and language ability have become more and more important.

When it comes to language ability, Bachman has demonstrated that “language ability has traditionally been considered, by language teachers and language testers alike, to consist of four skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing” (1996: 74). It is clear that a high level of language ability needs a high level of mastery in all four skills. As to the input and output of language, these four skills can be divided into two groups: listening and reading belong to input, while speaking and writing belong to the output of language.

The output of language, especially speaking, can quickly expose the users' level of language acquisition; perhaps this is why studies in speaking are increasing. However, compared to the emphasis on speaking, writing always receives less attention at both the teaching and learning level. For example, "the priority of speech has been a constant theme in teaching methodology" (Banathy & Sawyer, 1969: 53) and as stated by Terrell, Egasse & Andrade, the Natural Approach to language teaching emphasizes "the ability to understand and speaking" (1990: 93). However, the need to express our thoughts and feelings is innate and both speaking and writing are methods to express ourselves. Kroll clarifies: "When oral and written resources are systematically integrated, a person can make choices within a flexible, organized system of voices, registers, and styles -- choices which are appropriate for the purpose, audience, and context of communication" (1981:53). The written language plays an equally important role in human communication and social activities as speaking, especially when achieving a high level of mastery of language and communication is considered. In a recent report, the National Commission on Writing also addresses this concern. They say, that “if students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly
understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write.” (Graham & Perin 2007:2) In addition, writing is a visual medium and can be conserved. Documents or laws should be recorded in writing, not orally. Writing is not simply speech written down on a sheet of paper (Takagaki 1997:1). The contradiction between the outstanding importance of writing and the inadequate emphasis of writing in teaching language at present demands effective writing strategies in order to promote proficient writing acquisition.

1.1 Aim

The aim of this essay is to study the role of written language in L2 (English as second language) acquisition and then concentrate on analyzing and investigating the effectiveness of different strategies in written language through testing in practice.

1.2 Material and Method

The material consists of two popular strategies in developing written language and 15 second language learners of English. Moreover, the pre-test and post-test supplemented with two questionnaires for learners are adopted as research methods.

1.2.1 Participants

The participants in this study are fifteen third-grade students attending junior high school in China. They are chosen randomly and the quantity of participants is almost half of a class. The students are almost 13-15 years old and all Chinese ESL (English as second language) learners who have learned English for 5 years in elementary school and junior high school. After five years’ acquisition of English, their vocabulary size may be between 1000 and 1500 words according to the instructions in the Syllabus of Chinese 9-year Compulsory Education. The main varieties of writing in their level are writing letters, describing pictures and storytelling. However, they are ready to enroll in senior high school where more advanced varieties of writing will be taught, such as reporting information, proving a point and analyzing a theory or attitude. And as Graham and Perin state, young people who have difficulty writing are not fully equipped to meet the demands of higher education, either. Hence, some effective writing strategies will be helpful for them to prepare further learning in English. In addition, in their age, they are at a relatively
mature level of cognition and can be aware of applying the helpful strategies for their learning (2007: 9).

1.2.2 Pre-test and first questionnaire

The pre-test aimed to evaluate the fifteen students' primary English level in writing. The type of writing test was chosen from learning materials familiar to them. In the pre-test, the writing task included four pictures about environmental pollution. The students were asked to choose two topics about pollution and asked to write a composition with 80-100 words. The results of the students' writings were then evaluated and scored, and the analysis of their pre-test writings could reveal their English level of writing which served for comparing with their results in the post-test.

The first questionnaire was intended to investigate their understanding of the role of writing and the importance of writing strategies. The questionnaires looked as follows:
(1) Do you think writing is an important ability in learning English and why?
(2) Which factors do you think restrict the improving of your writing?
(3) Have you been taught any strategies to help you develop your writing? Are they helpful or not?
(4) Can writing promote the development of the other language abilities (for example: speaking and reading) or not?

Through this questionnaire, the feedback of the students' attitudes and difficulties in writing were collected in order to figure out the effective writing strategies for them.

1.2.3 Post-test and second questionnaire

Considering that the pre-test and post-test were designed to study the functions of strategies in developing writing skills, the level of the two tests should be as balanced as possible. In other words, both the pre-test and post-test in this study should be equivalent in the degree of difficulty. This is important to achieve reliability of the tests’ results to the greatest extent. Hence, in the post-test, the writing task asked the students to write about another two pictures concerned with environmental pollution which they had not chosen in the pre-test. Only in this way, the results of the pre-test and the post-test were comparable and the investigation of writing strategies' effectiveness should be reliable.
In addition, Hulstijn suggests that the interval between two tests is a week because it will not influence the investigative process (2003:351). Therefore, the post-test was taken a week after the pre-test. However, what was different in the post-test is that these fifteen students were divided into three groups: the first group was instructed with the 8-step strategy before the test; the second group was instructed with the POWER strategy also before the test; the third group was not instructed with any writing strategies. Owing to the aim of the post-test was to evaluate the effectiveness of both writing strategies, there were two parts in the analysis of their results of the post-test. On the one hand, the comparison between two strategies was necessary to figure out the more effective strategy and the different influence of these strategies; on the other hand, the analysis of the results between the writing strategies groups and the non-strategy group should be considered as well which aimed to show the superiority of writing strategies directly. In this way, the study considers the practical effectiveness of writing strategies, on which it could be reflected more. In addition, to maintain the reliability of the two tests, the standards to measure or evaluate the results of these two tests were the same.

After this post-test, there was another questionnaire as follows:

(1) Can these two tests reflect your real level of writing?
(2) Do you think the strategies or suggestions in writing are helpful?
(3) Will you use the strategy or find more strategies to help you to improve your writing in the future?
(4) Except these strategies given, could you give some helpful suggestions in writing?

This questionnaire focuses on the feedbacks of students to the application of strategies. Considering the students' low level of English, both questionnaires were translated into their L1 (Chinese as their First language) to help them finish it better and make their feedbacks worth studying.
2. Theoretical Background

The theoretical background consists of a review of the role of writing in ESL (English as a second language), the characteristics and process of writing, including some representative strategies in teaching written language.

2.1 Overview of writing and writing strategies in ESL

Since the field of linguistics has developed rapidly and the classification of it has become much more detailed, the studies on different language abilities (speaking, reading, listening and writing in general) are explicitly specified as well. However, the communicative functions of language having drawn more and more attention, such as the training or strategies in promoting speaking and listening, they begin to occupy more percentage in language teaching and acquisition. Moreover, the studies in ESL writing occupy a position as important as that for native learners. As Angelova has illustrated, there are several factors affecting the process and product of ESL writing as language proficiency, L1 writing competence, use of cohesive devices, metacognitive knowledge about the writing task, writing strategies and writers' personal characteristics (1999). Among these factors, Arndt (1987) and Raimes (1985) have claimed that it is the writing strategies that primarily separate successful from less successful writers. Furthermore, according to Hsiao and Oxford, strategies can “pave the way toward greater proficiency, learner autonomy, and self regulation” (2002:372) Writing, which is difficult to promote and test, is emphasized less than other language abilities. The present investigation of writing shows that there are three highlighted situations in English writing strategies.

Firstly, the present studies of writing and writing strategies mostly treat the process of writing as an object. Linguists have strived to find effective strategies to arrange the structure of writing, such as beginning with topic sentences, followed by reasons and examples, and then concluding the writing; or they aimed to improve the process of writing, such as writing a composition in a certain order: planning, writing, and revising. The one drawback is that these strategies are not so detailed and targeted for learners to follow in their writings. Additionally, these writing strategies are not designed based on the real difficulties that learners encounter in their writings.
Secondly, Hsiao and Oxford noted, “exactly how many strategies are available to learners to assist them in L2 writing and how these strategies should be classified are open to debate” (2002: 368) and from Chandler's studies---*Writing Strategies* (1995), it is manifested that there is a great deal of writing strategies at present. For many students and teachers, the improvement of writing is always time consuming and the results are difficult to attain in a short period of time. Especially, when they face so many strategies, it is extremely hard to compare the strategies and choose the most effective and suitable one. Therefore, the study on searching for effective strategies in writing is necessary and significant.

Finally, it is extensively acknowledged that writing is an outstanding language ability which cannot be belittled. In fact, the studies on writing strategies for native English learners are numerous, but the strategies for teaching writing for ESL young learners do still not draw much attention. The investigation of effective writing was limited to studies of students in grades 4 to 12 (Graham & Perin 2007: 35). The studies for 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners have drawn little attention at present. Especially in China, these learners have studied English for almost 5 years; they have a relatively mature level of cognition and a fairly good knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and sentence structures which should enable them to improve or develop their writings assisted by some strategies.

On the other hand, ESL learners between 13 and 15 years of age are in transition from middle school to high school and their acquisition of English develops, for example: the types of writing they should acquire from easy picture describing, letters and storytelling to advanced analysis, argumentations and explanations. Research has shown that, if teachers require writing in the early grades, they tend mainly to ask students to write stories, descriptions of personal experiences, and other kinds of narratives (Graham & Perin 2007: 23). In this critical transition, ESL learners should not only prepare for the advanced challenges but also need more skills or strategies in writing which should be helpful for their further acquisition of English.
2.2 Writing elements

When it comes to studying strategies in writing, it is first necessary to be aware of what writing is. In this section, we will focus on some elements of writing related to 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners' level and type of writing. As to the writing elements which were introduced in the study, both Ivanovic's (2002) theory about writing elements and Oates's (2006) theory about the elements of effective writing were considered. However, according to the research objects' level and features of writing, both theories were combined and modified in order to be used in this study.

As the output type of human language, writing conveys meaning in communication which is not just the conversion of sounds into writing. From a historical view, linguists have collected and investigated the writing elements in varied ways based on functions and structures of writing. In this study, the elements of writing will be analyzed in a purely linguistic way.

| Vocabulary | 1. Vocabulary is the foundation of writing. This does not mean that the more vocabulary the writers acquire, the better their writings will be. But adequate vocabulary is the critical premise and guarantee of effective writing. Vocabulary is one of the most important features that determine writing quality (Raimes 1985:248).

2. Word choice is also what the learners should work with; to choose the best idiomatic words or synonyms, which are the well-mastered words, is important to avoid unnecessary difficulties for the readers. As Ediger notes, "variety in selecting words to convey accurate meanings is necessary in speaking and writing, the outgoes of the language arts" (1999: 1). |
| Grammar | Effective writing needs to convey information to readers clearly and correctly which basically means that good grammar helps the writers convey their ideas to the readers; on the contrary, grammatical errors make writings difficult to read and understand. |
As sentences are basic units of writing, the sentence variety will be the standard of the effective writing in getting rid of grammatical errors. On the one hand, the usage of verbs in different tenses and persons and the collocation of phrases should be correct. On the other hand, whole sentences should be written idiomatically in various tenses and expressions of clauses.

| **Organization** | Organization here mainly includes two aspects. The first one is the sentence variety which is in high position of writing and can be demonstrated as follows: writers who use the same length and type of sentence to express each thought miss two vital points: variety helps convey meaning and increases reader interest. In the writing, choosing long sentences or short sentences should be considered carefully. The excess of long sentences or short sentences may make writing hard to understand or readers lose interest. The second one concerns structure or layout which means that writing should be organized deliberately and the whole writing needs to be broken up into several sections due to their different meaning or aims. Ordinarily, however, a subject requires subdivision into topics, each of which should be made the subject of a paragraph (Strunk 1918,19). A manageable length of paragraphs can make writing easily understandable as well. |
| **Punctuation and Spelling rules** | Punctuation and spelling rules focus on the details of the writing which do not exist in other language abilities. Except to make writing better understood by the readers, complying with the rules in punctuation and spelling aims to get writing standard and effective. |
| **Reader adaptation** | In this section, reader adaptation concentrates on the content of writing. When the other elements of writing are included, the writing should be measured according to its stating of all needed information clearly and convincingly. All good writers learn to look at their work from the reader's point of view (Ivanovic 2002). |
Reader adaptation is necessary which can stimulate writers to revise their writings to be better.

Table 1 The elements of writing

This section, especially in Table 1 which is based on Ivanovic's (2002) theory about writing elements and Oates's (2006) theory about the elements of effective writing, deals with the significance of the writing elements. On the one hand, the teaching of every writing element should be considered intensively in order to draw the students' attention to writing and writing strategies. On the other hand, these indispensable writing elements are standards to evaluate the effectiveness of writings. Therefore, the analysis of the students’ writing in this study was based on these writing elements. In the next section, the analysis and introduction on the process of writing will be stated.

2.3 Process of writing

In order to find strategies of writing, an investigation or study about the process of writing is helpful and indispensable. However, the present theories on this part always confine the procedure of writing to a certain task or aim. In fact, as a result of some subjective, complicated and particular features of language or language abilities, the definition of writing can be broad and the creation of writing is intricate enough as well. In this section, I adopt the Hayes and Flower's theory---A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing (1981: 370-372).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three areas of the writers' domain relating to</th>
<th>(1) Task environment is everything beyond the writer that influences the writing task.</th>
<th>For example, topic, audience, the writer's motivation, and the existence of portions of text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) The writer's long-term memory</td>
<td>For example, writer's knowledge (about a variety of topics) and writing plans are stored in the long-term memory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(3) Writing process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing process</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Translating</th>
<th>Reviewing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For example, the sub-operations of generating, organizing, and goal setting.</td>
<td>Take long term memory into plan and formulate sentences.</td>
<td>Aim to improve the quality of the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 A cognitive process theory of writing by Hayes and Flower (1981)

Hayes and Flower's theory about the writing process indicates the procedure of producing writing. Whether the writing strategies are designed as the cognitive process of writing is one of critical factors to measure the effectiveness of the writing strategies. In addition, this theory is also beneficial to explain the difficulties in the students' writing process and figure out the solutions.

### 2.4 Design and scoring of the writing task

In order to assess the effectiveness of the strategies in improving writing, two writing tasks were adopted which were scored and analyzed. Above all, the validity and reliability of these writing tasks should be realized, and then the effectiveness of strategies could be in an effort to measure the effectiveness of strategies. The issue about how to design and score the writing tasks authentically and reliably was discussed below respectively.

#### 2.4.1 Design of the writing task

According to Hughes, a test is said to have content validity if its content constitutes a representative sample of the language skills, structures, etc (1989: 22). Writing tasks in this essay aimed to assess the real English writing ability of junior high school students and seek the effective strategies to improve their writings. In the process of designing the task, the realization of content validity is one of the vital standards. In addition, the design of the writing task should
also comply with some principles which are demonstrated as follows.

1. We have to set writing tasks that are properly representative of the population of tasks that we should expect the students to be able to perform.

2. The tasks should elicit samples of writing which truly represent the students' ability.

3. It is essential that the samples of writing can and will be scored reliably

(Hughes 1989: 75).

In the light of these principles and the language level of Chinese ESL learners who are aged between 13-15, describing pictures was selected as the type of the writing tests. The describing task includes four pictures, in which each of them refers to one aspect of environmental pollution. In the test, the students were asked to choose two of the pictures which worried them, and describe them with explanations; in the post-test, the students should choose the remaining two pictures and write about them.

Firstly, due to the language level of middle school students, their acquired types of writing consist of describing pictures, writing letters and stories, of which describing pictures is more comprehensive than the others to entirely measure their writing ability. Secondly, the middle school students are in the transition to senior high school which requires a more advanced level of English writing. According to Graham and Perin, the students, in their early ages, were asked to writing stories, descriptions and so on. However, in the middle and high school years, writing assignments typically involve expository tasks, such as reporting, summarizing and analyzing factual information, and expressing an opinion with the support of evidence (2007: 23). Hence, in this task students were required to describe pictures with explanations, which was reliable and significant in measuring students' writing ability. At last, the type of the writing task, describing pictures, is familiar to junior high school students. Similarly, the environment pollution was selected as the topic of this task since it is one of the hot topics in daily life. The writing task in this study was not too advanced or difficult for students. Only in this way, the results of their writings represented their authentic writing levels which were worth studying. That is to say, the writing task in this study was suitable for the students since it was neither too advanced nor too
easy. In so doing, the performances of the students in the writing task could represent their authentic writing levels and thus justify the significance of the present study as being worth studying.

Since the writing task was designed based on the above principles and the validity of the test was considered as well, this task was efficient. The issue about scoring methods of the test will be discussed in the next section.

2.4.2 Scoring of the writing task

Grading students’ performance in the writing task is indispensable in comparing the results between the pre-test and post-test, and even assessing the effectiveness of writing strategies. The study of these writing strategies is reliable and significant only if the scoring of the writing task is authentic.

When it comes to scoring writing, Hughes suggests that there are two methods, namely holistic scoring and analytic methods of scoring. Both of these methods were adopted in scoring the writing task, since Hughes claims that, "if high accuracy is sought, multiple scoring is desirable" (1989: 97).

2.4.2.1 Holistic scoring of the writing task

Holistic scoring means to score a piece of writing based on the overall impression of it which is rapid and also can be reliable through scoring the writing repeatedly. There are some advantages in the application of this method when analyzing this writing task of describing pictures. On the one hand, holistic scoring is helpful to obtain a general impression of the writing's theme and the students’ expressions, especially in comparing the results of pre-test and post-test. The direct view of the writing by holistic scoring is also beneficial to evaluate writing generally. On the other hand, since holistic scoring is rapid, repeated holistic scoring was applied to realize a high level of the test's reliability.

When it comes to the holistic analysis in these two tests, three elements should be considered. The first one is to evaluate whether the students complied with the task instructions in their writings. This standard was selected due to the fact that these instructions are part of the test's aim
and also can reflect the reliability of the writing task. Furthermore, it is also necessary to estimate the contents of their writings according to their English proficiency, which were revealed from the investigation of their writing content. The content of writing includes the writers' attitudes and ideas that they want to convey to the readers. As Withrow's states a writer’s unclear attitude towards an object leads to a piece of ineffective writing (1987: v). That is to say, the qualified content refers to the achievement of the test's aim; on the contrary, the disqualified content will devalue the testees' writing and manifest their low-level in English writing.

At last, since the structure of the testees' writings influences readers' understanding and also can be evaluated in a short while, the issue of their writings' structure was considered in holistic scoring.

2.4.2.2 Analytic scoring of the writing task

According to Hughes, analytic scoring requires a separate score for each of a number of aspects of a task (1989: 91). That is to say, compared to holistic scoring, analytic scoring is more detailed. There are also several advantages of analytic scoring. Firstly, aspects of the writers’ performance which the scorer may never have noticed before will be considered; secondly, in order to make the scoring more reliable, the scorer should grade students in accordance with a number of scoring standards concerning different aspects of the writing. In assessing this writing task, analytic scoring was adopted to measure students’ writing task in a more detailed way. Although analytic scoring is time-consuming, it was still adopted in the present study in attempting to make the scoring more reliable.

However, Hughes clarified that analytic scoring covers several different aspects and thus might divert attention from the overall effect of the piece of writing (1989: 94). Since both scorings have their pros and cons, they should be considered as complementary instead of exclusive, and therefore the present study aims to strike a balance between these two scoring systems. Hence, the combination of holistic scoring and analytic scoring should be adopted because multiple scoring can realize high accuracy and reliability of the test.
2.5 Writing strategies

In this section, two writing strategies will be introduced. As to the rapid development of linguistics and the high demand in promoting writing, the studies in writing strategies are booming. Graham and Perin stated that "strategy instruction involves explicitly and systematically teaching steps necessary for planning, revising, and/or editing text" (2007: 4). From the above, it is clear that most of writing strategies focus on three steps in the process of writing: planning, revising, and editing.

In the overview of the writing strategies section, based on Hsiao and Oxford's statements and Chandler's studies, we have been clear that there is a great deal of writing strategies at present. However, it is strange that, with these writing strategies, the Chinese 13-15 years old learners' writing is still at a low level and develops slowly. This phenomenon is attributed to two reasons mainly. Firstly, these writing strategies focus on all types of writing but few of them were designed for 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners according to their low-level of English and limited types of writing they had acquired. Accordingly, Graham and Perin suggest that more attention needs to be put at the impact of individualized instruction as well as small-group instruction, especially with low-achieving writers (2007:27). In addition, some writing strategies are not especially catered for young learners, for example, the one Graham and Perin mention: planning, revising and editing. Such kinds of strategies are helpful only if they can be instructed or taught explicitly. Secondly, even if some practical strategies are given to the students, they are still confused about how to apply the strategies into practice. This study aims to find the most effective writing strategy which is based on the young learners' writing habits and can be easily utilized by them.

According to these restrictions in the previous studies of writing strategies, the basic of this study was to select two typical writing strategies. In this way, the 8-step strategy for writing and the POWER strategies were chosen and adopted carefully.

2.5.1 8-step writing strategy
The 8-step strategy was designed by Julia M. Harford\(^1\) (in James 2000:16); it aims to help students formulate a step-by-step process for describing paragraphs writing. The reason to choose this strategy in this research is as follows: the limited types of writing that young learners have acquired are mainly short paragraphs and descriptive writing and this strategy points to the most common types in 13-15 years old Chinese high school students' English writing. Additionally, the writing task of describing pictures in this study is suitable for the adaptation of this strategy presented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Follow the footsteps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Choose</strong> your topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you want your paragraph to be about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Write</strong> 2-3 topic sentences about your choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO NOT choose one to use yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Brainstorm</strong> a list of words or phrases you could use to describe and discuss the topic you chose for your paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Create</strong> 3-4 sentences using some of the words/phrases you came up with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Put</strong> those sentences in order to form a paragraph that makes sense to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Choose</strong> the best topic sentence from the choices in Footstep 2 for the sentences you have written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Write</strong> a closing sentence to your paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Rewrite</strong> the final product. Does your</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{1}\) The 8-step strategy for writing designed by Julia M. Harford, was found in James, L. Collins, *Handbook of practical reading & Writing Strategies* which was published in 2000.
This strategy includes 8 steps which respectively focus on different procedures in producing writing. The 8-step strategy asks the students to finish their writings as the instructions. Every step in this strategy is detailed and targeted which is easy for the low level student to understand and apply in their writings.

2.5.2 POWER strategy for writing

The POWER strategy\(^2\) is based on a strategy presented by Englert, etc. who declared that the POWER strategy includes three stages. The first stage is a prewriting stage before you actually start writing and this includes the planning and organizing steps. The second stage is writing and includes the writing step. The third stage is the post-writing stage and includes the editing and revising steps. This strategy is detailed originally; however, due to the subjects investigated in this study are 13-15 years old Chinese students at low-level of English acquisition, I modified this strategy in order to make it more understandable and acceptable by them.

Plan.

* First start with a clear topic. Be sure you know exactly what you want to write about.

* Brainstorm and list all the ideas you know about this topic.

* Make a list of topics for which you need to get more information. Take notes on notecards of all the information that you want to include in your paper. Write down as much information as possible so that you will not have to go back later and get more information. Do not write complete sentences; just write phrases representing the ideas.

Organize.

* Review the notes of your ideas and your notecards.

• Organize these in an outline using the main ideas of your paper as the major headings.

Write
• Use your outline and notecards as a guide for writing your paper.

• Write complete sentences for the phrases on the notecards.

• Do not pay attention to mistakes at this stage. Just make sure that you include all the ideas and that you state these clearly and in order.

Edit.
• Check all spelling, capitalization, punctuation, order of words, and grammar.

• Check whether your ideas are well stated.

• It may be helpful to read your paper aloud as a way of checking for errors.

Revise.
• Based on your editing, revise your paper.

• Re-read it one last time before turning it in.

The POWER strategy includes five steps which concentrate on the writing process generally. This strategy needs the students to understand every instruction firstly and then plan, organize and revise their writings step by step. After modification, the POWER strategy is also comprehensible for the research objects in this study.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The following analysis was based on the theories stated in the theoretical background section and aimed to analyze the students' attitudes to the writing strategies, evaluate the effectiveness of the 8-step strategy and POWER writing strategy and figure out the most suitable and effective strategy for 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners. This analysis and discussion section includes five parts in which the first four parts respectively concentrated on the questionnaires and tests in a sequence from the first questionnaire, the pre-test, the second questionnaire and the post-test.
Finally, the last part focused on the comparison between the writing strategies groups and no strategy given group in the post-test. This section was stated as follows.

### 3.1 First questionnaire

The first questionnaire includes four questions which focus on the students' comprehension of the writing and the main problems that restrict their writings' development. The results of this questionnaire are illustrated in Table 4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Do you think writing is an important ability in learning English and why?</td>
<td>Evaluating how the students recognize or understand the importance of writing.</td>
<td>100% students recognize the importance of writing. 4 out of them explained that writing is helpful to develop their English acquisition: vocabulary, grammar and so on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Which factors do you think restrict the improvement of your writing?</td>
<td>Investigating the students' understanding of their writing level and restrictions in developing the writing.</td>
<td>The main restrictions in their writings are showed in order: vocabulary, grammar, expression and spelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Have you been taught any strategies to help you develop your writing? Are they helpful or not?</td>
<td>Collecting feedbacks from the students about their attitudes to the functions of writing strategies.</td>
<td>Seven of them have been taught writing strategies and they all recognize the significance of them. The other eight students have never been taught any strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Can writing promote the development of the other language abilities?</td>
<td>The aim is the same as that of the first questions, but</td>
<td>Two students are unaware of that writing can promote other language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And explain it. also to check the students' motivation to improve their writings. abilities. One has no idea about this question. The others agree on the importance of writing.

Table 4 The analysis of the first questionnaire

On the basis of the feedbacks from the students in Table 4 above, three comments are given here. Firstly, regarding the first and fourth question, 90% of these students recognized the significance of writing and the effect of writing in facilitating other language abilities. The students' positive attitudes to the writing are so crucial that they may directly influence their performances in two writing tests and the strategies' functions in their writings. Secondly, 47% students (seven out of fifteen students) had been taught strategies before and all of fifteen students agreed on the positive effect of writing strategies. In other words, the students did not feel reluctant to writing strategies. And their positive attitudes to the tests and writing strategies were beneficial for them to utilize the given writing strategies in the post-test. And at the same time, the effectiveness of writing strategies might be achieved. Finally, from the students' views, the most primary restrictions in their writings were vocabulary, grammar, expression and spelling. This point plays a vital role when two writing tasks were compared and evaluated.

3.2 Analysis of the pre-test

The pre-test aimed to evaluate the original writing level of the testees and investigate the main problems in their English writings, which were used to be compared with their post-test results and assessed the validity of the given writing strategies. The pre-test was analyzed in both holistic and analytic aspects.

3.2.1 Holistic analysis of the pre-test

As has been mentioned in the theoretical background part, Hughes claimed, "[H]olistic scoring involves the assignment of a single score to a piece of writing on the basis of an overall impression of it" (1989: 86). In this section, in the light of the holistic scoring, the overall impression of the students' writings in the pre-test consisted of three aspects which are as follows:
Firstly, there are three instructions of this writing task and two of them can be regarded as the standards in the holistic way (see appendix 3): (1) Choose two pictures in your composition and do not choose more or less; (3) The composition should consist of 80-100 words. These two instructions reflected the aim of the test and whether the students complied with the test instructions or not represented the authenticity of the test. Based on these standards, 100% of the students finished their writings in 80-100 words about two pictures. However, two of them chose only one picture in their compositions, in which the students wrote the correct amount of words as well. The result that not all of the students complied with the test instructions manifests the students' inadequate attention to the test instructions and their low levels of planning writing.

Secondly, the content of their writings is on the mainstream level of holistic analysis which reflects the testees' writing level and effectiveness. All students described the pollution situations in the pictures they chose. Five out of the fifteen students did not, however, illustrate the reasons which were part of the instruction (see Appendix 3). When analyzing the content of this writing task for all, it was obvious that the absence of explanation parts in their writings mirrored the students' carelessness and feeble control in organizing their writings. In addition, the problems, either the absence of explanation parts or inadequate descriptions, appeared in all fifteen students' writings and their inferior writings were attributed to that they did not have clear writing intentions before they started writing. As Nordquist has stated that good writing has a clearly defined purpose (2010), those students' writings were ineffective with their unclear and inadequate writing purposes. This problem devalued their writings and reduced the effectiveness of their performances in writing. According to Hayes and Flower's Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, the students' feeble control in organizing writings is attributed to their low mastery of the planning and goal-setting in the pre-writing stage (1981:373).

Finally, the evaluation of the structure is also a vital point when the writing task is analyzed. Through the investigation of the fifteen testees' writings, three compositions did not contain the formal beginning and conclusion; five of them were written just in one paragraph without any clear division; another three compositions were characterized by good structure which contained describing and analysis parts and were organized clearly and reasonably. The other four students finished their writings with a beginning and concluded them consciously, but when it comes to
the structures of the main body, they were still without clear and logical theme although they were better than one-paragraph compositions.

The analysis of the students' writing structures reflects Withrow's statements about the characteristics of the ineffective writings:

1. The ideas are not in an order that makes sense; the piece is not well-organized.
2. The ideas are not grouped together into paragraphs.
3. The writer does not start the piece with a beginning that starts the reader in the right direction.
4. The writer does not finish the piece with an ending that leaves the reader with a sense of completion.

(1987:v)

In this pre-test, except three good structure compositions, there were kinds of problems in the others students' writing, for example, the absence of a clear beginning or ending, their ideas were not in an order that makes sense and their ignorance of organizing their writing into paragraphs clearly, and so on. It follows that 80% (12 out of 15) of these students' writing was ineffective with problems in structure. Based on Withrow's theory, chaotic structure and organization are the most highlighted features of the ineffective writings. And through the analysis above, it can be concluded that the thirteen students' inferior command of writing structure is widespread, which coincides with Withrow's statement. Additionally, the students' inferior obedience to the test instructions, unclear expressed content of their writings and their chaotic writing structures are attributed to their feeble ability to plan and organize their writings.

3.2.2 Analytic methods of scoring the pre-test

Based on Hughes' theory which we have claimed in the theoretical background section, the choice between holistic and analytic scoring depends in part on the purpose of the testing; if high accuracy is sought, multiple scoring is desirable (1989:97). In order to realize the authenticity of the study on writing strategies, multiple scoring is indispensable and critical. Since the process of analytic methods is various, in this study, the analytic methods of scoring was based on the writing elements which were mentioned in the theoretical background (see table 1: The elements of writing).
First and foremost, vocabulary was a primary problem in the 13 to 15 years old Chinese ESL learners' writing and this vocabulary problem can be divided into two parts. The first one is their limited vocabulary size revealed in the students' first questionnaire. In it, 80% of the students chose inadequate vocabulary as the greatest obstacle in improving their writings and 60% of the students were obsessed by their own limited vocabulary size in the practical writing test. Research has shown that lack of vocabulary contributes to writing difficulty for foreign learners (Santos 1988:70). That is to say, the limited vocabulary is the universally acknowledged obstacle in writing, especially for 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners.

Apart from the limited vocabulary size, there was another vocabulary problem when analyzing the students' writings and this was word choice. Even though, according to the questionnaire, the limited vocabulary size was the main problem in writing according to these students, when analyzing their writings, the inadequate vocabulary was not the most obvious restrictions at the level of expression. When the testees found some words which they wanted to use but did not know the accurate spelling and meaning of these words, they always resorted to select other words of similar meaning instead. Ediger notes: "Variety in selecting words to convey accurate meanings is necessary in speaking, writing and the outgoes of the language arts" (1999:1). As to the testees in this study, they were not proficient in selecting the most suitable words because of their inadequate vocabulary size, but they were avoiding words that they were not sure of in meaning or spelling in their writings. Although the limited vocabulary size was seen to be the main restriction in the students' writings, for the readers, the problems in comprehending the students' writings is not highlighted because they were always prone to use words with similar meaning instead.

In addition, the outstanding problem in their word choice was that it was colloquial. The application of colloquial words makes their writings inferior and on a low level, for example, "OK" and “Let’s go" appeared frequently and half of sentences in their writings begun with first person “I” and so on. On the one hand, the frequent application of colloquial words was caused by their limited vocabulary. On the other hand, in the pre-writing stage, they collected information and even words, phrases and sentences in their minds. Some of these phrases or sentences might be colloquial and should have been modified by the students when they wrote
them in the papers. However, the existence of these colloquial phrases or sentences is due to their inferior ability of planning and language organization in their writings. That is to say, if the stage of planning was inadequate, the occurrence rate of colloquial words would be relatively high; on the contrary, if the planning was carefully prepared and they paid more attention to organizing their language in writing, relatively fewer colloquial words would be used in their writings.

In China, Wen Qiufang, Ding Yanren & Wang Wenyu (2003) have studied 240 compositions randomly selected from 472 timed compositions across four grades with 60 from each grade in elementary school. The results show that Chinese ESL learners clearly employ a more spoken type of discourse in their English writing than ESL learners from other countries do, and they moved from a more "spoken" type of discourse to a more "written" type of discourse as they progressed in L2 learning. Their results are similar to Reppen's (1994) study about the students' language in elementary showing that the colloquialism reduces as the learners' English acquisition develops. In addition, as Whale, K. B. Robinson, S. and Lockhart state, the word choice should be deliberate in order to gain an effective writing (1988:55). Therefore, the colloquialism in Chinese students' writing is widespread and in order to achieve the effective writing, the choice of colloquial words should be avoided, and this may apply especially for the 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners' further learning in writing.

Secondly, the grammatical problems were widespread in these testees' writings. As is known, grammatical errors will lower the effectiveness of the writing and impede the readers' understanding. In these fifteen students' writing, the errors in the collocation of phrases and idiomatic usage of certain sentence patterns concerned basic grammatical problems. Their low level in English acquisition limited them from being proficient in grammar; furthermore, their neglect to revise caused unnecessary grammatical errors in their writings. That is to say, revising, as the final part in the writing process, is helpful to correct some grammatical errors in their writings. The emphasis of revising is important for the effectiveness of the writing and should be paid attention to.

In addition, the spelling errors in these testees' writings should be analyzed together with the grammatical errors since both of them attribute to similar reasons. As is shown in the
investigation, there were serious spelling errors in 80% of the students' writing and only three out of fifteen students' writing were exceptions. Some of these spelling errors came from the students' low-level mastery of vocabulary; others would have been avoided by careful revising after writing.

The analytic methods of scoring also concentrate on the testees' organization in writing. The problems in these testees' writing structure have been discussed with holistic analytic method. Based on the theory of writing elements in table 1 and Withrow's statements about ineffective writing, it is universally acknowledged that one-paragraph compositions are less clear and effective than well-structured writing. In order to compose well-structured writing, students need to pay attention to both the stage of planning and the process of writing. Additionally, one of the negative influences on organization was that the themes of their writings were always not clearly expressed as the topic sentences were absent. Owing to faulty planning of the analyzing or describing parts of their writings, the topic sentences were not highlighted to draw the readers' attention. The common problem in these young ESL learners' writing was that they even did not know exactly about what they wanted to write before they began to write. In other words, they thought about the theme or what they wanted to write in the process of writing but they did not plan it carefully before they started writing. In this way, the problems in their organizations existed universally but could be corrected or improved only if they could be reminded to pay more attention to plan their writings.

Corona, Spangenberger and Venet concur on the importance of these items: "At any level, written communication is more effective when a depth of vocabulary and command of language is evident" (1998:26). In this study, the analysis of the first questionnaire and the pre-test also indicates that vocabulary and grammar are inherent problems in ESL young learners' writing. However, besides vocabulary and grammar, the problems in their writing structures are prominent as well which debases the quality of their writings. The absence of planning and revising or the students' neglect is the main root cause for the problems in their writing structures. That is to say, if these students could plan and revise their writings more carefully, some of the grammatical and spelling problems would be found and corrected. At the same time, another
obvious problem in their writings is that the writing organization or structure should draw more attention of these students with the guide of some writing skills or strategies.

3.3 Second questionnaire

The second questionnaire including four issues was taken after the post-test and aimed to collect the testees' feedbacks to writing strategies. These four issues were classified into three parts according to their particular emphasis on different aims.

First of all, the first question is about the testees' attitudes about whether they considered that the two tests reflected their real levels of English writing. The aim was to investigate the students' feedbacks to the authenticity of the tests which are critical and helpful to evaluate their writings. In other words, the cognitive attitudes of the students to the tests, negative or positive, determined their dynamism in this writing test to a certain extent. The more passive attitudes they held, the less reliably their writing levels were reflected in these tests, and vice versa. In addition, the research objects' attitudes to the authenticity of the tests are helpful to evaluate the effectiveness of the post-test and the given writing strategies as well. The results were that only one out of fifteen students insisted that the tests could not reflect his real level of English writing with the reasons that the limited words of the test and time were disadvantageous for him to write better. As to this point, Hughes states that the limited words and time are the features of the writing test which are critical and cannot be changed (1989: 87). So this single counterview is not reasonable to influence the authenticity of the test. In all, 93% of the testees held positive attitudes to the tests which meant the tests' authenticity was achieved.

Secondly, in the second issue prepared for the two groups who were given writing strategies, 10 students in the two groups, who had received instructions about them, acknowledged that writing strategies were useful and helpful for their writings. The aim of this issue was to collect these students' attitudes to writing strategies and then the degree of their acceptability to writing strategies was reflected. For example, in this question, 100% students acknowledged the function of writing strategies which means these two writing strategies were acceptable for them and their low level of English, especially for 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners.
Finally, the last two questions focused on the practical function of these strategies to their future writing and English learning. The testees' reactions to the third question were that 100% of them will resort to these strategies in their future writing learning or find more strategies from now on to improve their writings. In other words, through the tests and questionnaires, all students recognized the importance of writing and the writing strategies' profound significance in improving their writings. When it comes to the last question which asked them to offer more useful writing strategies, 6 students from the writing strategies groups mentioned both planning and revising or either of them. It is significant that more than half of them were conscious of the vital function of a writing process which meant that writing strategies were acceptable to them and writing strategies' effectiveness was achieved.

Through the investigation of the second questionnaire, it is concluded that the students' feedbacks to the function of writing strategies is positive which may not only achieve the authenticity of the writing test, but also support the reliability of the analysis in the post-test and effectiveness of writing strategies in the next section.

3.4 Analysis and discussion of the post-test

In this section, the testees' writing results will be analyzed and discussed. Due to the aim to investigate the effectiveness of two writing strategies, fifteen students were divided into three groups in which the first two groups were offered the 8-step writing strategy and POWER strategy respectively. In this way, the three groups' writings were assessed. In addition, both holistic and analytic methods of scoring were resorted to in the scoring of their post-test and this scoring method concentrated on three aspects: writing structure; vocabulary, grammar, spelling, etc and organization.

The reason for this analysis method is that, on the one hand, some of the previous analysis methods applied in the analysis of the pre-test are not necessary anymore. The reason is that due to the particular feature of this writing task in which there are four pictures, two of them for the pre-test and the others for the post-test, the testees had known the content and writing instructions well enough through the pre-test. In this way, the analysis of the writing content and their understanding of the instructions are not considered in the analysis of post-test. On the other hand,
through the investigation of the pre-test, the main problems in their writings have been exposed such as structure, vocabulary, organization and so on. Hence, the analysis in the post-test concentrate on these aspects, which not only took less time, but also make the analysis more effective and targeted. The targeted analysis in this part is helpful and available for authentic research results.

3.4.1 Analysis of the first group

The first group included five members who were selected randomly and provided with the 8-step strategy in writing.

Firstly, the analysis of the students' post-test results found some improvements in their writings. 5 students in this group had written clear beginnings and conclusions and it is obvious that the bodies of their writings were much longer than the beginning and conclusion. In addition, none of their writings were only in one paragraph which is different from the results of the pre-test in which one paragraph compositions and unclear beginnings or conclusions are universal. On the other hand, in their bodies of writing, key words and topic sentences were more highlighted. Some advanced words were even used and the logic order of their describing and analysis parts was better compared to their pre-test writing as well. The reason for this is that the application of the 8-step strategy focuses more on planning the topic and the construction of the main part of writing which is to proceed in the order from key words to topic sentences and then complement the writing with more relevant information. In Withrow's statements of effective writing and from the analysis of the first group's writings, it is concluded that these five students' writings in the post-test were much more effective than those in the pre-test. That is to say, this strategy to make the key words and topic clearly expressed in their writings is helpful for the students.

Secondly, the problems in vocabulary, grammar and spelling were discussed. The result was similar to the pre-test to some extent. According to the evaluation, the limited vocabulary and some grammatical or spelling errors still existed. Through the signs of erasure in the students' hand-in writings, it is manifested that some careless errors in grammars and spelling were corrected. Compared to their writings in the pre-test, the students were conscious to revise their compositions after they finished writing. However, still some grammatical problems existed. That
is to say, with the 8-step strategy the improvement in correcting grammatical or spelling problems was insignificant. Although with the guide of the writing strategy the students could pay more attention to the editing or revising parts when they wrote, there were still a number of grammatical and vocabulary problems. The reason is that some grammatical or vocabulary problems caused by their incorrect memory or low-level of English learning cannot be avoided or modified by the writing strategy.

At last, the organization of the first group's writing was considered. The organization of their writings did not only concentrate on the structure which have been discussed above, but also included the sentence variety, paragraph breaks and so on. It is obvious that in this group’s five writings there were more sentence varieties, even more advanced sentences than these in the pre-test. This improvement should be attributed to the detailed writing outline in the 8-step strategy which drew the students' attention more to organize the written language before they wrote. The problem of paragraph breaks also had been improved; these group members were conscious to divide their writings into several parts based on different intentions and ideas.

From the analysis above, it is clear that the obvious improvements of first group are represented by that the testees organized their writings better and their expressions were relatively advanced compared to their pre-test writings. There is no doubt that some grammatical or spelling errors still existed in their writings. However, with the help of the 8-step strategy, the revising or editing parts had drawn the students' attention more than before. This change in their writing process is one of the improvements of the first groups in the post-test. Using Withrow's theory about ineffective writing and the comparison between the pre-test and post-test in the first group, it is concluded that the first group's writing in the post-test is effective and facilitated by 8-step writing strategy. In the next section, the results of second group's writing were investigated.

3.4.2 Analysis of the second group

The second group's writings were analyzed in accordance with the analysis in the first group, so structure, vocabulary, grammar and organization were considered.
Firstly, after analyzing the structure of the second group's writing, there were three of their writings well-structured, but another two were still in only one paragraph. As to the main body of their writings, describing and analyzing parts were not highlighted to draw enough attention and even the main body is shorter and briefer than the beginning and conclusion. Because the POWER strategy concentrates more on the procedure of writing produced, from the planning to writing and then editing or revising, it is not as detailed as 8-step strategy in producing writing. Even though the structure problems in their writings still existed to some extent, the testees also obviously paid attention to planning their writings which was revealed by the better logical order of their describing or analysis than that in the pre-test. However, the two one-paragraph compositions manifested that this strategy is not as effective as the 8-step strategy in improving their structure.

Secondly, the problems of vocabulary, grammar and spelling were as follows. The word choice had drawn the students' attention which was represented by the decrease of colloquial words and the introduction of some phrase collocations, such as "with the development of...", "not only...but also" and so on. The grammatical and spelling errors were improved as well compared to their pre-test results. It is the same with the analysis in the first group that the essential errors of this kind, such as misapplication of vocabulary and grammars due to their misunderstanding, had not been improved in this group. However, some spelling errors or misapplications in articles and plural or singular form of a noun could be found by the second group members when they edited and revised their compositions.

Finally, the organization of their writings was discussed. Besides the issues of paragraph breaks that have been analyzed above, sentence variety was focused in this part. In the holistic way, there were limited improvements of sentence variety in their writings, for example, compared to the first group, more sentences in the second group started with the first person. There is no doubt that this limited improvement comes from the students' low level in English learning. However, it is also manifested that the function of the POWER strategy in improving or enriching their sentence varieties is insignificant.
3.4.3 Analysis of the third group

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the two given writing strategies, in the post-test, there were still five students who were grouped but without any writing strategies. Their writings were about to be compared with another two writing strategies groups. In this section, the third group members' writing is analyzed.

First of all, after the analysis of the structure in this group, there were three one-paragraph compositions and another two writings were well-structured. These two well-structured writings belonged to the students who also were good at structuring their writings in the pre-test. So these two students were good at English writing even before the test. It is manifested that well-structured writings are the results of advanced writing habits which could be taught or guided by effective writing strategies. In these two good students' writing, the beginning, main body and conclusion were organized clearly and logically. Except these two well-structured writing, in the other three writings, there were still problems in the structure and the lack of beginning and conclusion parts made their writings less effective to be understood. Using Withrow's theory, these three amiss writings in the third group were still ineffective.

Secondly, in these five writings the traces of revising or amending were few and the errors in vocabulary, grammar and spelling were excessive compared to the other two groups' writing. Due to the lack of revising part or the students' neglect to do so, errors or misapplications in articles and plural or singular form of a noun existed more than in the other group results. In other words, the situation in errors of vocabulary, grammar and spelling were similar to the results of the third group’s pre-test.

Finally, the discussion of organization issues was as follows. In the two well-structured writings, the sentence varieties the learners used were richer and more advanced than in the other three writings. This situation must be attributed to these two students' relative high level of English learning. In addition, the problems in paragraph breaks were so highlighted in the other three writings. The students did not divide their writings into the beginning, main body and conclusion and their ideas were not in an order that made sense. That is to say, except for these two good
students, the problems of structuring and organization in the third group's other students' writings were the most highlighted.

3.5 Comparison among three groups' writings

In this section, there are two parts included. The first one is the comparison of effectiveness between 8-step and POWER writing strategies; the second one is the comparison between the strategy-given groups and the third group, given no strategy, which aimed to investigate the extent of improvement in writing with writing strategies compared to the no strategies group.

3.5.1 Comparison of effectiveness between the 8-step and POWER strategies

The comparison in this section concentrates on both the similar and different effectiveness aspects of two writing strategies based on the analysis of their writings above. Through the comparison, the merit and demerit of both writing strategies are discussed.

It is clear that both the 8-step and POWER strategy can improve the effectiveness of writings in structure and organization. Still, both writing strategies cannot play an outstanding role in correcting the errors of vocabulary, grammar and spelling in their writings. It seems that both writing strategies could improve the students' writing but their functions are different because they include different procedures and priorities.

On the one hand, it is obvious that in the first group, with the help of the 8-step strategy, the students paid more attention to the bodies of their writings. The 8-step strategy is detailed and practical from planning to translating their thoughts into sentences, meanwhile, it focuses more on how to write the main body. The 8 instructions in this strategy are given step by step which is easy for low level ESL learners to understand and follow. For example, the students in the first group only needed to choose a topic, brainstorm some relevant words or phrases and then create sentences with these words or phrases and after that organize these sentences and the topic sentences to produce their writings. All of these steps had been instructed by the strategy clearly and what's more, these steps were designed strictly as the process of writing from planning to writing and then revising. With these easy and understandable instructions, the students could pay more attention to the expressions, sentence variety and even the theme of their writings.
Besides, the structures of their writings also had been guided by this strategy. As a result of the detailed and deliberate instructed writing strategy, the first group students' writing had better organization and sentence variety. This point was revealed by the fact that, in the first group, the students divided their writings based on different emphasis and intentions expertly; but in the second group, there were still two one-paragraph compositions which manifested the POWER strategy's minimal effect to improve the students' writing structure.

On the other hand, the POWER strategy improved the second group's writings but not as effectively as the 8-step strategy. The reason is that although the POWER strategy was designed and based on the process of writing, every step in the POWER strategy was descriptive. It was different from the 8-step strategy in which every step was more instructive, explicit and even demanding the students to record some information clearly step by step. Good developmental measures should be able to lead to progress in language learning and make clear distinctions between learners at different levels of language proficiency (Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki & Kim, 1998: 3). That is to say, the good measure or writing strategy should be applicable for practical purposes. Different strategies for different learners at different levels of language proficiency means that realizing the effectiveness of the writing strategy should consider if the measure or writing strategy is designed or prepared specially for the learners at a certain level of language proficiency. Whether the strategy is suitable for the learners or not can be determined or measured by the learners' comprehension and acceptance to the strategy and whether the writing strategy can improve the learners' writings practically. Only the learners' individual levels of language proficiency are considered, meanwhile, the writing strategy indeed improve the learners' writing under the premise that the learners can comprehend and apply it during their writing, the effectiveness of the writing strategy can be evaluated and discussed. This is concrete analysis of concrete conditions. In this study, the 8-step strategy is so detailed that the students could easily retrospect every step or instruction of the strategy in the process of their writings. When it comes to the POWER strategy, even though the students seem to have understood it well, during their writing, they could seldom find useful information from the strategy guiding them about what to write or how to write due to their low levels of English. This difference in the two writing strategies made the 8-step writing strategy easier to follow for the low level ESL learners.
At that these strategies were instructed a short while before they took part in the post-test of writing.

From the analysis in effectiveness of two strategies, both strategies were beneficial to improve the ESL young learners' writing, but the 8-step strategy was more effective as a result of its detailed and understandable feature. The POWER strategy could also be effective if it was taught detailedly and carefully. For the 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners, the 8-step writing strategy was more suitable due to their levels of ESL and comprehensive abilities.

3.5.2 Comparison between writing strategies groups and the no strategy given group

This comparison between strategies-given groups and the no strategy group was intended to show the possible effectiveness and function of writing strategies. Through the analysis of the third group's post-test in writing, it was found that their writings were mainly on the same level as their pre-test.

On the one hand, there were still three one-paragraph compositions without clear beginning, conclusion, logical describing or analysis and well-organized writing structure. Although two students in this group organized their writings in a better way, both of their writings in the pre-test were also well-structured and on a higher level in English writing compared to those of the other students. For the other three in the group without any writing strategies, the problems in the writing structure and organization were same as in their writings in the pre-test and mainly unchanged.

On the other hand, although the one-paragraph compositions existed in both the second group and the last group, there were still some differences. In the second group, the two students had made the theme or subject sentences clear, but they did not divide their writings reasonably. It was different from the problems of the third group in which their writings were more unclear in theme and the structure. This obvious difference in their writings was due to the fact that both strategies focused more on the planning part and brainstormed the students' thoughts before their writings than the third group without writing strategies.
In addition, there was another feature in these fifteen students' post-test writings. In the five post-test results of the third group, there were fewer signs of erasure or correction than in those of the two groups with writing strategies. One result of this was that there were more errors in spelling, vocabulary and grammar caused by carelessness in the third group and their writings were more ineffective than another two groups. For example, through the signs of erasures or modifications in the writing strategies groups, some similar spelling errors, misapplication in articles and plural or singular form of a noun were corrected, but careless mistakes were universal in the third group's writing without modification. That is to say, except the subjective factors of the students and the different primary English level of these students, writing strategies indeed played a critical role in drawing the students' attention to the editing and revising part. The analysis of the second questionnaire shows that the students in the writing strategies groups held positive attitudes to the writing strategies given which meant the students confirmed the functions of the writings strategies in improving their writings and then were willing to comply with every step of the strategies. In this way, the effectiveness of the writing strategies could be realized to the greatest extent. Meanwhile, realizing the effectiveness of the given writing strategies drew the students' attention to revising. In this way, students in the writing strategies groups corrected more careless mistakes in their writings than the students without strategies. Although it is strange that none of the students mentioned that the writing strategies reminded them to correct some grammatical or spelling errors after their writing in the second questionnaire, the reason may be that they attributed this to their own carefulness or in such a short time they had not understood every advantage of the strategies well enough.

4. Conclusion

As a result of English becoming the world language, studies on ESL learning have increased. However, while the speaking and listening ability receive more and more attention, studies in writing and reading, especially writing as a vital output of language abilities as speaking, are still inadequate. Especially, 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners who stand in the transition from middle school to high school and from the low level of English writing to advanced writing are in need of effective writing strategies. As Graham and Perin note, helping young people to write clearly and coherently about ideas and views will expand their access to higher education, give them an edge for advancement in the workforce, and increase the likelihood they will actively
participate as citizens of a literate society (2007:28). In addition, because of the real situation about English acquisition of the 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners, especially the writing as the bottleneck for them, the subject and research objects were selected.

Through the two questionnaires, the students' attitudes to English writing and writing strategies and their needs of writing strategies were revealed. After that, from the careful analysis of the pre-test, their original levels of writing were manifested; through the analysis of the post-test, the effectiveness of both the 8-step and POWER writing strategies were compared and investigated mainly from structure, vocabulary and grammar aspects. Their results of the post-test illustrate that writing strategies are beneficial to improve the effectiveness of their writings in structures and theme expressions, especially is the 8-step strategy. In addition, vocabulary and grammar, as the critical elements of the writing, can be revised or modified to some extent with the help of strategies, but not all of the problems with vocabulary and grammar cannot be corrected thoroughly by writing strategies but only can be improved by the daily learning. However, the results of the group with the 8-step strategy were the best in the post-test and the improvements of the first group's students in writing were the most significant. It is concluded that the 8-step strategy is more suitable because it is explicit and detailed for the students to understand and follow, especially the 13-15 years old Chinese ESL learners who are generally at a low level of English and comprehensive abilities.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1

First questionnaire

(1) Do you think writing is an important ability in learning English (compared to listening, reading and speaking) and why?

(2) Which factors do you think restrict the improving of your writing, eg, inadequate vocabulary, not good at grammars or sentence variety and you can add some more?

(3) Have you been taught any strategies to help you develop your writing? Are they helpful or not, can you give some examples?

(4) Can writing promote the development of the other language abilities (for example: speaking and reading) or not? If yes, could you give any explanations based on your understanding?
Appendix 2

**Second questionnaire**

(1) Can these two tests reflect your real level of writing; please give the reasons if it cannot?

(2) Do you think the strategies or suggestions in writing are helpful and why? If you are given strategies?

(3) Will you use the strategy or find more strategies to help you to improve your writing in future? Besides, in what ways do you want to work hard to improve your writing, such as acquiring more vocabularies, reciting texts or sentences and so on, you also can add more methods of your own and give the reasons?

(4) Except these strategies given, could you give some helpful suggestions in writing?
Appendix 3

After reading these following four pictures about environment pollutions, you should choose two of them which you worry most and then illustrate the reasons and try to give some suggestions as possible as you can.
You should pay attention to that as well: (1) Choose two pictures in your composition and never choose more or less; (2) Make your statement clearly and reasonably in both right grammars and punctuations; (3) The composition should include 80～100 words.（Time: 30 minutes）

Key words: Suggest 建议 v./ Suggestion n. Gas 气体 n. Pollution 污染 n.

THE POLLUTIONS
One third of the world's people don't have enough clean water.
More and more diseases are caused by polluted air.
People are disturbed quite often by kinds of noises.
Every person in our city makes about 1.8 kilos of rubbish every day.
Appendix 4

问卷调查（一）

(1) 在英语学习中，你认为写作能力是否重要（相对于听力，阅读和口语）？为什么？

(2) 你认为限制你写作能力提升的因素都有哪些？比如：词汇量不够（包括拼写错误），语法掌握不好或者表达方式错误？可以自己补充。

(3) 在你之前的英语学习中，你是否被教过一些写作技巧？这些写作技巧是否有用并举例说明。

(4) 你认为写作是否可以促进其他语言能力的提高？比如写作对口语或者阅读是否有促进作用？可否给出自己的解释？
Appendix 5

问卷调查（二）

(1) 你认为这两次写作测试是否反映了你真实的写作水平？如果没有，请阐述原因？

(2) 在第二次测试中，如果你被提供的一些写作技巧或者建议 那你觉得是否有用？为什么？

(3) 在未来的英语学习中，你是否会使用这些写作技巧或是自己去寻找更多的写作技巧来帮助你提高写作水平？以及你希望自己能在那些方面做出努力来提高英语写作？（如：词汇，背诵课文，熟悉语法等等，并阐述原因）
（4）除了这些写作技巧，你是否可以给些你自己认为有用的写作建议或者技巧？