

An Investigation into the Use of Socio-Cultural Strategies in L2 Writing among Chinese English Majors

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Abstract

This paper reports on the results of a quantitative study that was aimed to measure the use of socio-cultural strategies in learning English writing among a group of 155 Chinese university English major students. This quantitative survey was informed by the socio-cultural theory that holds that L2 learning is a mediational process in which a couple of socio-cultural factors tend to mediate the learning of the second/foreign language. The use of writing strategies was thus conceptualized by an array of mediational factors and measured by a self-designed questionnaire. Descriptive techniques were applied to analyze the collected data. The results revealed that the surveyed participants endorsed a medium to high level of socio-cultural writing strategies. They reported to most frequently use role-mediated strategies in their English writing learning, followed by sign-mediated strategies, rule-mediated strategies, community-mediated strategies, and tool-mediated strategies respectively. The results are implicative for L2 writing learning and instruction.

Keywords: Chinese English majors, Socio-cultural strategies, L2 writing

1. Introduction

Second language (L2) writing is a multi-faceted complex phenomenon. Therefore, L2 writing is one of the most challenging tasks to learners (Chen, 2015). Meanwhile, L2 writing competence is one of the objectives to be achieved in L2 class. Learners are expected to display a satisfactory writing proficiency upon completion of learning the language. How to improve writing competence is a daunting task to L2 instructors, particularly to teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) (Wang, 2013). Writing strategies play a critical role in writing instruction and exert significant influence upon writing competence and learning achievements of the learners.

Existing research on L2 writing strategies has mainly followed the cognitive approach. This kind of research is featured with using normative techniques such as questionnaires (Gao, 2006). Research following the cognitive approach centers on the measurement of writing strategy use levels (Yao & Qin, 2004; Liu, Cao, & Zhu, 2011; Sang, 2016; Yang, 2019); the differences in writing strategy use between successful and less successful learners (Xu & Tang, 2007), relationship between writing strategy use and writing proficiency (Liu, 2004; Xiu & Xiao, 2006; Li, 2013; Gao, 2017); writing strategy instruction (Zhao, Ao, & Zhou, 2012), use of writing strategies and learner variables such as self-efficacy (Li, 2013; Gu & Li, 2018), learning styles (Wang & Zhang, 2013), and anxiety (Zhou, 2014).

These studies are illuminative for us to better understand the use of writing strategies from a comprehensive perspective. However, the cognitive approach tends to take L2 strategies as a psychological feature and a static phenomenon, which is independent of external factors (Gao, 2006). This perspective is criticized for failing to uncover the connection between strategy use and the situational and contextual factors in L2 learners' use of writing strategies (Lei & Pan, 2019). Therefore, a socio-cultural perspective has been recently called for. The socio-cultural perspective argues that the use of writing strategies is a situational phenomenon which is mediated by a number of socio-cultural factors (Lei, 2008). This approach takes into account the socio-cultural factors in the L2 learners' deployment of writing strategies, thus offering us a holistic view of their strategic scenarios in writing learning.

In a nutshell, existing research on the use of writing strategies has been dominantly cognitive-oriented, which fails to consider the effect of external factors. Previous studies mainly focus on middle school students (Huang & Zhou, 2016; Gu & Li, 2018) and non-English major students (Xu, J., & Tang, 2007; Li, 2013; Gao, 2017). Relatively inadequate attention has been paid to English majors (Xiu & Xiao, 2006; Zhou, 2014; Pan & Wang, 2022). More importantly, the role of socio-cultural factors in the use of writing strategies is to be empirically explored. Therefore, this study aims to explore the use of socio-cultural strategies in English writing learning among a group of Chinese university English major students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Writing Strategies from the Cognitive Approach*

Language learning strategies (LLSs) have been extensively defined by a group of pioneers (i.e., Rubin, 1975; Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Oxford, 1990). For instance, LLSs have been taken as the skills, methods or intentional behaviors endorsed by learners for the purpose of achieving better learning results (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987). They are a means for learners to achieve freedom, happiness and success (Oxford, 1990), and a method to assist learners in establishing personal language systems which could have a direct influence on their language development (Rubin, 1987).

There have been two cognitive approaches to writing strategies. The first stems from the process-oriented writing research. This view takes writing as a non-linear, exploratory, and generative process in which learners generate and organize their ideas intended to communicate. Under the influence of this view, models like the process-based framework and communicative competence were proposed to research writing strategies. A second approach follows the classic conceptualization of language learning strategies by pioneers like Chamot & O'Malley (1987) and Oxford (1990). Oxford (1990) divides LLSs into direct and indirect strategies, each of which includes memory, cognitive, and compensatory strategies, and metacognitive, social, affective strategies respectively. Researchers mainly followed Oxford's (1990) six taxonomy of language learning strategies and adapted scales from her strategy inventory for language learning (SILL).

Existing research on L2 writing strategies has mainly followed the cognitive approach. Writing strategies are divided into text processing, writing thinking planning, goal-driven monitoring and evaluation, feedback processing, motivational self-dialogue, emotional control, classroom memory, interest improvement, and peer learning strategies from a process-based view. They are also broken down into four dimensions including independent practice strategy, accumulation strategy, imitation strategy and evaluation strategy (Gu & Zhao, 2015).

The cognitive approach mainly focuses on the measurement of writing strategy use (Yao & Qin, 2004; Huang & Zhou, 2016; Yang, 2019). For example, non-English major students were found to have a weak awareness of writing strategies in their English writing learning (Yao & Qin, 2004). Conversely, Hu (2006) reported that Chinese non-English major students adopted various strategies. They most frequently used memory writing strategies, followed by compensatory strategies, but least frequently used affective strategies. Jiang, Liu, & Li (2009) identified three categories of strategies in Chinese university non-English major students' learning of English writing, namely, meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and communication strategies. Of the eight process-based writing strategies, Chinese non-English majors most use composing strategies but least motivational strategies (Sang, 2016). Chinese junior middle school students tend to most use compensatory strategies, but least meta-cognitive strategies (Huang & Zhou, 2016).

A second topic in the traditional cognitive approach to L2 writing strategies is related to the differences in writing strategy use between successful and less successful learners (Yang, 2002; Xu & Tang, 2007). For instance, Yang (2002) reported significance in the use of composing, focusing and revising strategies between successful and less successful L2 writers. The former outperformed the latter in terms of meta-cognitive subject, task and strategic awareness, employment and behavior (Xu & Tang, 2007).

Besides, the relationship between writing strategy use and writing proficiency has also drawn attention from researchers (Liu, 2004; Xiu & Xiao, 2006; Ren, 2013; Li, 2013; Gao, 2017). The use of writing strategies is reported to be closely related to the quality of L2 writing (Liu, 2004). English major students' use of writing strategies exerts direct influence upon the writing process of Test for English majors Band -8 (TEM-8), but indirectly impacts TEM-8 writing scores (Xiu & Xiao, 2006). The positive influence of writing strategies could predict writing achievements (Ren, 2013; Li, 2013; Gao, 2017). Differently, Meng and Wu (2012) reported a weakly correlated relationship between use of writing strategies and writing achievements. This is echoed by Han (2012). Moreover, writing strategy instruction has recently attracted attention from the academia (Zhao, Ao,

& Zhou, 2012). Zhao, Ao, & Zhou (2012) explored the effect of writing strategy instruction on writing motivation and writing proficiency.

Last but not least, the relationship between the use of writing strategies and learner variables such as self-efficacy (Li, 2013; Gu & Li, 2018), learning styles (Wang & Zhang, 2013) and anxiety (Zhou, 2014) has been explored extensively. The self-efficacy of Chinese university non-English majors was found to be highly correlated with their use of writing strategies (Li, 2013). Those with stronger self-efficacy could better and more effectively apply various writing strategies. By contrast, Gu & Li (2018) found Chinese middle school students had an intermediate level of self-efficacy in relation to English writing learning, and partially correlated to their use of writing strategies. Non-English majors' use of writing strategies is significantly related to their preference for learning styles (Wang & Zhang, 2013). Their use of writing strategies bears no significant differences in relation to gender, but is significantly correlated to anxiety in learning English writing (Zhou, 2014).

In summary, research on L2 writing strategies from the cognitive approach has presented us a broad picture of writing strategy use among Chinese English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners. This kind of research is featured with using normative techniques such as questionnaires (Gao, 2006). Studies following the cognitive approach mainly focus on students at middle school (Huang & Zhou, 2016; Gu & Li, 2018), and non-English majors (Yao & Qin, 2004; Ren, 2013; Li, 2013; Gao, 2017). Relatively, English majors received little attention with regard to their use of English writing strategies (Xiu & Xiao, 2006; Zhou, 2014; Pan & Wang, 2022). More importantly, the above review of the relevant literature reveals that there are inconsistent results regarding the use of writing strategies in the Chinese EFL context. Besides, the cognitive approach is criticized for its failure to take into account the socio-cultural factors, which would result in a lack of in-depth understanding of the use of writing strategies.

2.2 Writing Strategies from the Socio-Cultural Perspective

In light of the criticism over the cognitive approach to L2 writing strategies, the socio-cultural perspective is increasingly called for. The socio-cultural theory provides a new perspective for us to understand the relationship between human beings and the cultural, historical and educational backgrounds where we live (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Li, 2014). Unlike the traditional writing strategies research focusing on internal cognitive mechanisms, this socio-cultural approach emphasizes the dialectical relationship between cognition and socio-cultural context, and the mediating role of resources in strategy use (Liang, 2013; Lei & Pan, 2019; Li, Chen, Ma, Zhang, & Huang, 2021).

The socio-cultural perspective to L2 writing strategy holds that there is a dialectical relationship between cognition and environment (Vygotsky, 1978). The traditional cognitive approach highlights cognition, but a person-in-context perspective is more able to unveil the relationship between cognitive development and social environment (Lei, 2016). The inclusion of the macro, meso, and micro factors could offer a holistic picture of the use of writing strategies (Lei, 2016). Following the socio-cultural perspective, researchers define the use of L2 writing strategies to be a situational social activity that is mediated by an array of socio-cultural factors at tool, sign, rule, role, and community levels in a given context (Chen, 2015; Lei, 2008, 2012, 2016; Yang, 2014).

Although small in number, there have been few researchers following the socio-cultural perspective in their exploration of the use of writing strategies (Lei, 2008, 2012, 2016; Chen, 2015; Yang, 2014; Zareian & Mallahi, 2016). In her series of studies on the use of writing strategies among Chinese university English majors, she found that their use of writing strategies was mediated by artefacts, rule, communicate and role resources. Specifically, Lei (2016) identified four types of writing strategies used by Chinese university English majors, including artifact-mediated strategies, rule-mediated strategies, community-mediated strategies, and role-mediated strategies. Similarly, Kang & Pyun (2013) found that Korean learners were mediated by social agents, self, and cultural artefacts in their use of writing strategies. Yang (2014) and Chen (2015) reported that mother tongue, cultural background, group norms and L2 proficiency exert great mediational influences upon the use of L2 writing strategies.

The above research highlights the importance of mediational resources in the use of writing strategies, indicating that writing strategies are not purely cognitive behaviors that only occur in people's minds, but the behaviors mediated by various resources. These mediating resources can be objects, people, roles and rules. These resources represent the environment in which we live, and writing strategies are always used in certain circumstances (Lei, 2016; Lei, 2012). The socio-cultural perspective offers us a new approach to understand L2 writing strategies. However, currently, to our knowledge, there is little research following this perspective (Lei & Pan, 2019). Therefore, more studies are necessary. Given the gaps identified in the aforementioned review of the

relevant literature, this study thus aims to investigate the use of writing strategies among a group of Chinese tertiary English major students.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

This study aims to understand the use of writing strategies among Chinese university English major students. To this end, two research questions are to be addressed as follows:

Question 1: What are the overall features of the use of writing strategies among Chinese University English majors?

Question 2: What are the category-level features of the use of Chinese University strategies among Chinese University English majors?

3.2 Participants

This study involved 155 Chinese university English major students. The respondents included 23 males and 132 females. Of the participants, twenty-three of them were freshmen, 59 sophomores, twenty-nine juniors and 44 senior students. In terms of the origin of the surveyed students, fifty-six of them were from rural areas, forty-seven from towns, and fifty-two from metropolitan cities.

3.3 Instrument

The instrument for this study was a questionnaire adapted from Zareian & Mallahi's (2016) socio-cultural strategy use questionnaire in writing. The questionnaire was adapted and subjected to a pilot study. The finalized version of the quantitative instrument is composed of two sections. The first section is related to the demographic information of the participants regarding the participants' gender, grade of education, and origin of hometown. The second section includes 62 items intended to measure the participants' use of writing strategies. These 62 items are divided into the following five categories: tool-mediated strategies (Item 1-18), sign-mediated strategies (Item 19-30), rule-mediated strategies (Item 31-40), community-mediated strategies (Item 41-56) and role-mediated strategies (Item 57-62). The questionnaire is framed following the Likert-5 scale. For each item, there are five choices, namely, 1 (absolutely not matched), 2 (basically not matched), 3 (partially matched), 4 (basically matched), and 5 (totally matched). The reliability of the instrument was calculated by means of Cronbach's Alpha. The Cronbach's Alpha of the questionnaire is .960, indicating that the questionnaire has good reliability.

3.4 Data Collection

The researchers first contacted two English teachers at a local university in central China. Upon acquiring consent from them, the authors then communicated with the teachers and their students for the potential survey on them. Before the questionnaire copies were distributed to the students, the purpose of the survey and the methods to answer the questionnaire were briefed to the respondents. Meanwhile, the participants were guaranteed that their information would definitely and completely be used for academic purposes, and be kept confidentially. They were also promised that their response shall pose no threat to the scores of the final exam of the semester. 180 copies of the questionnaire were given out to the participants, with 174 returned. Of the returned questionnaires, removing the incomplete and wrongly answered, there were 155 copies valid for later analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were processed by SPSS20.0. This study mainly relied on descriptive analysis method to answer the two research questions. Means of each category and each item were calculated so as to gauge the overall features of the use of writing strategies among the participants, and then the specific features of their strategy use in English writing at categorical levels.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overall Features of the Use of Socio-Cultural Writing Strategies among the Participants

In order to seek answers to the first research question regarding the overall feature of use of socio-cultural strategies in English writing learning, the collected data were processed by means of descriptive analysis. The results are reported in Table 1. We followed Oxford's (1990) criteria to evaluate the level of the use of language learning strategies. According to her, learners are considered to demonstrate a high level of frequency if the mean values of each category are between 3.5 and 5.0, a medium level between 2.5 and 3.4, and a low level between 1.0 and 2.4.

According to Table 1, we can find that the mean value for the overall level of the participants is 3.4439, which is close to 3.5. This result indicates that the participants displayed a high level of using socio-cultural strategies in their English writing learning. They tend to use these strategies in their learning English writing most frequently. Specifically, the highest to the lowest mean values of the categories range from 3.5323 to 3.3656. The highest mean value lies in the role-mediated strategies (mean = 3.5323), which is subsequently followed by sign-mediated strategies (mean = 3.4629), rule-mediated strategies (mean = 3.4587), community-mediated strategies (mean = 3.4004), and tool-mediated strategies (mean = 3.3656). The mean values for these five categories are all over 3.0, which imply that the participants had averagely a medium-to-high level of using these socio-cultural strategies. They seemed to most frequently use role-mediated strategies, while least frequently use tool-mediated strategies though they showed a medium-to-high level in this category.

The pattern of using socio-cultural writing strategies among the participants differs from Lei (2016) and Zareian & Mallahs (2016). Different from these two studies which reported that their participants most frequently used tool-mediated strategies but least role-mediated strategies, we have found in our study that the English major students used role-mediated strategies the most but tool-mediated strategies the least. This result may be explained by the writing instruction practice in the writing class nowadays. The writing class for English majors recently in China mainly followed the production-oriented approach (POA). The POA approach advocates the integration of language learning and application (Wen, 2015). Learners are encouraged to write to voice themselves both as a language learner, English major, and a human being. The role of identity awareness seems to strengthen the learners' strong awareness of exercising role-mediated strategies in their writing learning.

Table 1. Overall Features of the Use of Socio-cultural Writing Strategies

Category	Number	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
tool-mediated strategies	155	2.11	4.50	3.3656	.46316
sign-mediated strategies	155	2.17	5.00	3.4629	.55172
rule-mediated strategies	155	2.30	5.00	3.4587	.54900
community-mediated strategies	155	1.31	4.50	3.4004	.53928
role-mediated strategies	155	1.33	5.00	3.5323	.56666
Overall	155	1.84	4.80	3.4439	.53396

4.2 Category-Level Features of the Use of Socio-Cultural Writing Strategies among the Participants

For the sake of answering the second research question with regard to the features of using the socio-cultural writing strategies at the categorical levels, the data were further analyzed by means of descriptive analysis. The section reports the results pertaining to the five categories, namely, tool-mediated strategies, sign-mediated strategies, rule-mediated strategies, community-mediated strategies and role-mediated strategies.

4.2.1 Use of Tool-Mediated Strategies among the Participants

Table 2 reports the participants' use of tool-mediated writing strategies. The writing tools mentioned mainly include reading materials (Item 1, 2, 3, 4, 7), writing materials (Item 5, 6), Internet (Item 8, 9, 10), writing Outlines (Item 11, 12), and exercises (Item 13-18). Firstly, the learners showed a medium level of using English reading materials to improve their understanding of the English-speaking world and knowledge of the English language, and to get guidance on good writing (mean for Item 1 = 3.3945, Item 2 = 3.2969). It also can be seen that the respondents frequently used words and phrases learned from English reading materials to express ideas in writing (Item 3 = 3.4323). Evidence and examples in English reading materials are rarely used to support students' arguments and writing content (Item 4 = 3.30978). They used English writing textbooks to learn the basics of writing (Item 5 = 3.3355). Useful writing strategies and techniques in English writing textbooks were also used by them (Item 6 = 3.3097). They used English newspapers, magazines and other short reading materials as useful material for study and writing activities (Item 7 = 3.1484). More noteworthy is that the participants frequently used the Internet to search for information about assigned writing topics (Item 8 = 3.7935), searched the internet for samples of articles and paragraphs they wanted to write (Item 9 = 3.5613), and used online dictionaries to find new words and expressions in writing (Item 10 = 3.7871). They preferred to use outlines in their writing (Item 11 = 3.5548; Item 12 = 3.3161). Relatively, they showed a little lower level in using the following strategies like drills and exercises (Item 13 = 3.3935; Item 14 = 3.0968; Item 15 = 2.9226; Item 16 = 3.1161, Item 17 = 3.3742, Item 18 = 3.4387).

Overall, the participants reported that they most frequently used internet-related tool-mediated strategies. The Internet resources relate to mobile phones, tablets and memory computers. Resources like mobile phones could offer convenience for the students to obtain information necessary for the development of their ideas. Besides, the advance of mobile phones and internet technologies offers affluent affordance for the learners to acquire rich information for their learning of English writing (Cohen & Brooksarson, 2010). Additionally, driven by the outbreak of COVID-19, technology- and internet-based blended learning prevails as a new norm. This new trend seems to nurture the students' stronger need and awareness of using internet-related tool-mediated strategies in their writing learning.

Table 2. The use of tool-mediated strategies

Item	Number	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Item 1	155	1.00	5.00	3.3935	.72521
Item 2	155	1.00	5.00	3.2968	.75742
Item 3	155	1.00	5.00	3.4323	.78144
Item 4	155	1.00	5.00	3.3097	.79420
Item 5	155	1.00	5.00	3.3355	.89208
Item 6	155	1.00	5.00	3.3097	.83408
Item 7	155	1.00	5.00	3.1484	.88855
Item 8	155	2.00	5.00	3.7935	.81142
Item 9	155	1.00	5.00	3.5613	.93339
Item 10	155	1.00	5.00	3.7871	.90444
Item 11	155	1.00	5.00	3.5548	.90555
Item 12	155	2.00	5.00	3.3161	.81188
Item 13	155	1.00	5.00	3.3935	.78539
Item 14	155	1.00	5.00	3.0968	.94508
Item 15	155	1.00	5.00	2.9226	.99044
Item 16	155	1.00	5.00	3.1161	.97338
Item 17	155	1.00	5.00	3.3742	.79893
Item 18	155	1.00	5.00	3.4387	.77362

4.2.2 Use of Sign-Mediated Strategies among the Participants

Table 3. The use of sign-mediated strategies

Item	Number	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Item 19	155	1.00	5.00	3.2258	.86451
Item 20	155	2.00	5.00	3.2710	.78384
Item 21	155	2.00	5.00	3.6452	.71842
Item 22	155	1.00	5.00	3.5871	.82798
Item 23	155	2.00	5.00	3.4774	.78406
Item 24	155	2.00	5.00	3.5742	.76403
Item 25	155	1.00	5.00	3.6065	.87903
Item 26	155	1.00	5.00	3.3097	.84183
Item 27	155	1.00	5.00	3.3742	.84629
Item 28	155	2.00	5.00	3.6258	.85393
Item 29	155	1.00	5.00	3.4968	.89279
Item 30	155	1.00	5.00	3.3613	.88921

Table 3 presents the results of the participants' use of sign-mediated strategies in their English writing learning. They displayed a medium level of using innovative sentences and rhetorical devices in their writing (Item 19 = 3.2258, Item 20 = 3.2710). By contrast, they reported a high level of learning new words and expressions in order to express themselves better in English (Item 21 = 3.6542). They also learned how to use cohesion, coherence and logic to write more effective paragraphs (Item 22 = 3.5871). They were meticulous in their use of words, expressions and syntax, striving to convey meaning accurately and accurately, and to write good paragraphs (Item 23 = 3.4774). In the process of learning English grammar and grammatical structure, they would also most frequently pay attention to some difficult points in the language (Item 24 = 3.5742). They showed a medium level of using their mother tongue in their writing learning (Item 25 = 3.6065, Item 26 = 3.3097, Item 27 = 3.3742). Meanwhile, they often tried to avoid using Chinglish words, expressions and structures in their writing (Item 28 = 3.6258; Item 29 = 3.4968), and used imagination and tried to paint vivid pictures of ideas in writing (Item 30 = 3.3613).

Of these sign-mediated strategies, the respondents seemed to most frequently use memorization of new words and expressions, cohesion and coherence devices, grammar points, and compensation strategies such as mother tongue in their learning of writing. They tended to have developed an awareness of compensating for the shortcomings of their language knowledge in learning writing in English (Zhu & Liu, 2021; Okumus, 2019; Ene, 2020).

4.2.3 The Use of Rule-Mediated Strategies among the Participants

Table 4 shows the results of the respondents' use of rule-mediated strategies in their English writing learning. The survey participants reported a medium level of using various rhetorical skills and features (Item 31 = 3.0913) and generic knowledge (Item 32 = 3.2387) in learning writing. They displayed a high level of making efforts to follow the rules of exams and writing assignments (Item 33 = 3.6000), as well as teacher guidance and time limits (Item 34 = 3.5871). They seemed to frequently using exam preparation as a strategy to learn writing (Item 35 = 3.5032). In writing essays, they would often focus on writing standards and try to use creative, interesting ideas and meaningful content (Item 36 = 3.6839; Item 37 = 3.4710). Besides, they also showed enthusiasm for active writing (Item 38 = 3.4645; Item 39 = 3.0645). Most of them would try every effort to meet the deadline assigned by the teacher (Item 40 = 3.8839).

Table 4. The use of rule-mediated strategies

Item	Number	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Item 31	155	1.00	5.00	3.0903	.77600
Item 32	155	1.00	5.00	3.2387	.79841
Item 33	155	1.00	5.00	3.6000	.72614
Item 34	155	1.00	5.00	3.5871	.83578
Item 35	155	1.00	5.00	3.5032	.86320
Item 36	155	1.00	5.00	3.6839	.79573
Item 37	155	2.00	5.00	3.4710	.83983
Item 38	155	1.00	5.00	3.4645	.82397
Item 39	155	1.00	5.00	3.0645	1.01724
Item 40	155	1.00	5.00	3.8839	.85246

Among these specific rule-mediated strategies, the participants displayed a high level of following rules of writing exams and assignments, teacher guidance, exam preparation techniques, writing standards, and deadlines assigned by teachers. It seems that rule-mediated strategies exert great influence upon the learners' writing learning. Rules here refer to the requirements, norms, evaluations set by teachers, curriculum, and the school. These rules function as yardsticks for formulating and shaping the learners' efforts and behaviors in their learning of English writing. The learners' medium-to-high level of using rule-mediated strategies reflects their satisfactory strategic engagement and regulation in response to the requirements in the learning of writing (Ellis, 2021).

4.2.4 Use of Community-Mediated Strategies among the Participants

Table 5 presents the findings related to the respondents' use of community-mediated strategies in their learning of English writing. It can be found that the participants were strongly mediated by their teachers in English

writing learning (Item 41 = 3.7097; Item 42 = 3.7032; Item 43 = 3.6581; Item 44 = 3.6323; Item 45 = 3.4903). Besides, positive comments from teachers make a big difference to the learners (Item 46 = 3.8065). During the writing process, the surveyed students displayed a medium level of learning writing by interacting and discussing with their peers or seeking help from other students (Item 47 = 3.2258; Item 48 = 3.2452; Item 49 = 3.077; Item 50 = 3.1161; Item 51 = 2.9806; Item 52 = 3.2323; Item 53 = 3.1935; Item 54 = 3.4194; Item 55 = 3.1484). More importantly, they tended to regard themselves as a student who has an obligation to complete the task according to the requirements of the teacher and the course (Item 56 = 3.7677).

Table 5. The use of community-mediated strategies

Item	Number	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Item 41	155	1.00	5.00	3.7097	.93258
Item 42	155	1.00	5.00	3.7032	.88402
Item 43	155	1.00	5.00	3.6581	.88596
Item 44	155	1.00	5.00	3.6323	.89747
Item 45	155	1.00	5.00	3.4903	.96945
Item 46	155	1.00	5.00	3.8065	.84590
Item 47	155	1.00	5.00	3.2258	.94352
Item 48	155	1.00	5.00	3.2452	.96928
Item 49	155	1.00	5.00	3.0774	.81810
Item 50	155	1.00	5.00	3.1161	.92550
Item 51	155	1.00	5.00	2.9806	.91503
Item 52	155	1.00	5.00	3.2323	.92455
Item 53	155	1.00	5.00	3.1935	.91946
Item 54	155	2.00	5.00	3.4194	.82863
Item 55	155	1.00	5.00	3.1484	.94521
Item 56	155	1.00	5.00	3.7677	.91750

The results indicate that the participants were strongly mediated by teachers and peers in their learning of English writing. These findings echo that found in the first research question that the surveyed respondents seemed to have a high level of using socio-cultural strategies, particularly strategies related to interaction with others such as teachers and peers. Students learned to write by interacting with teachers and other students in class or on campus. Through interaction with communities, the learners would become more empowered in terms of self-regulation and autonomy in English writing learning (Wang & Gao, 2020).

4.2.5 Use of Role-Mediated Strategies among the Participants

Table 6. The use of role-mediated strategies

Item	Number	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Item 57	155	1.00	5.00	3.6000	.89443
Item 58	155	1.00	5.00	3.6774	.80530
Item 59	155	1.00	5.00	3.5742	.85999
Item 60	155	1.00	5.00	3.6129	.80087
Item 61	155	1.00	5.00	3.3290	.87616
Item 62	155	1.00	5.00	3.4000	.84975

Table 6 associates with the results of the surveyed students' use of role-mediated strategies in their English writing learning. It can be found that the participants are eager to show their writing ability and gain recognition from others (Item 57 = 3.6000). They were strongly motivated to write about topics that are close to life (Item 58 = 3.6774). They would use other resources and courses in their major to improve their writing (Item 59 = 3.5742, Item 60 = 3.6129). By contrast, they showed a medium level of applying their English major writing skills to other fields (Item 61 = 3.3290, Item 62 = 3.4000).

Overall, the participants reported a high level in all of these specific role-mediated strategies except for Item 61 and Item 62 of which they had a medium level. It seems that the respondents have a strong awareness of self identity in their English writing learning. This identity awareness of being English majors not only affects the improvement of their English learning and writing competence for the moment, but also influences their career choice in the long run (Lei Xiao, 2016).

5. Conclusion

This descriptive study examined the use of socio-cultural writing strategies applied by a group of Chinese university English major students. Analysis of the questionnaire survey reveals that the participants most frequently endorsed role-mediated strategies, then sign- and rule-mediated strategies, but relatively less frequently used community- and tool-mediated strategies in their English writing learning. This study contributes to the literature in the field of research on L2 writing strategies in that it offers a preliminary attempt to quantify the use of socio-cultural writing strategy in a Chinese EFL context.

The findings of this study offer implications for English writing in EFL context. For instance, English major students are found to most frequently deploy role-mediated strategies in their English writing learning. This indicates that the awareness of self-identity as an English learner and English major seems to be conducive for English major students to develop good strategic awareness. This again would be beneficial for English majors to enrich their strategic repertoire in learning English writing. Thus, writing teachers are encouraged to consider forming their students' identity as English majors. Secondly, given that the investigated English majors reported a relatively medium level of using community- and tool-mediated writing strategies, and in light of the new norm of blended teaching mode in tandem with the promotion of online and offline resources, instructors are advised to increase the learners' strategic awareness of making full use of interaction opportunities with community members such as teachers and peers as well as diverse materials and others.

This study has its shortcomings. Firstly, the study only relied on questionnaire surveys. Future studies may triangulate themselves with more data sources such as interviews and classroom observations. Secondly, this study mainly adopted descriptive methods to analyze the data. It is suggested to further explore the topic with inferential techniques. Thirdly, it is advisable for future studies to explore the use of socio-cultural writing strategies in relation to other learner variables such as language proficiency, motivation, and self-efficacy.

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