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ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

AN INVESTIGATION INTO EFL STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN ACADEMIC WRITING

THESIS

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Department of English Language and Literature

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Thesis advisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Hülya YUMRU

August 2018

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Not: Öğrencinin Tez savunmasında **Başarılı** olması halinde bu form **imzalanacaktır**. Aksi halde geçersizdir.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that all information in this thesis document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results, which are not original to this thesis.

Bayan MOHAMMAD ALNIJRES

To my parents and siblings,,

FOREWORD

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor Dr. HülyaYumru for all the invaluable support, patience, and encouragement she has granted me while writing my thesis. In addition, her feedback could both motivate me and put me on the right path. In short, I consider Dr. Yumru as a symbol of humanity and a person who always tries to help and improve the level of her students.

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August 2018   Bayan MOHAMMAD ALNIJRS

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ABBREVIATIONS

EFL   : English as a Foreign Language
ESL   : English as a Second Language
ELT   : English Language Teaching
SPSS : Statistical Package for Social Sciences
L1   : First Language
L2   : Second Language

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İNGİLİZCEYİ YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRENEN ÖĞRENCİLERİN AKADEMİK YAZMA KONUSUNDA KARŞILAŞTIKLARI ZORLUKLAR ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi bölümü öğrencilerinin kullandıkları yazma stratejileri, yazma ödevlerine karşı tutumları ve bu ödevleri tamamlamak için kullanmayı tercih ettikleri kaynakları ve bunların yanı sıra akademik yazma konusunda karşılaştıkları sorunları ortaya çıkarmaktır. Çalışmaya 2017-2018 akademik yılında İstanbul'da bir vakıf üniversitesinin İngiliz Dili Eğitimi bölümü 2. sınıfında okumakta olan 34 öğrenci katılmıştır. Araştırmanın amaçlarına ulaşmak için nicel ve nitel veriler bir anket yolu ile toplanmıştır. Çalışma sonuçları, öğrencilerin üst bilişsel yazma stratejilerinin öneminin farkında olduklarını ortaya koymuş, bunun yanı sıra öğrencilerin büyük bir çoğunluğunun yazım öncesi evrede beyin fırtınası ve taslak hazırlama stratejilerini kullandıklarını göstermiştir. Öğrencilerin hemen hepsinin en çok düzeltme stratejisini kullandıkları bulunmuştur. Ancak öğrencilerin düzeltme stratejisini kullanırken yazım öncesi evrede akran geri bildiriminden faydalanmayı tercih ettikleri ve yazım süreci sonunda ise akran dönütüne değil öğretmen dönütüne önem verdikleri tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca, öğrencilerin yarısının İngilizce yazma aktivitelerini günlük hayatta kullanmayıp sadece verilen ödevleri yapmak için kullandıkları belirlenmiştir. Öğrencilerin ödevlerini hazırlamakta kullandıkları ana kaynakların sırasıyla kitaplar, dergiler ve Internet veri tabanları olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bunlara ek olarak, öğrencilerin yazma sürecinde en sık yaşadıkları sorunların sırasıyla Konu ile ilgili kaynak bulma, Konu seçme, Açımlama, Kaynak kullanma ve alıntı, Kendi düşüncelerini ifade etme,
Bağlaşıklık ve bağdaşıklık ifadelerini kullanma ve Dili kullanma olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Akademik Yazma, Süreç Odaklı Yazma Öğretimi, Yazma Stratejileri, Akademik Yazma Sorunları.*

AN INVESTIGATION INTO EFL STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN ACADEMIC WRITING

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to explore the writing strategies used by ELT students, their attitudes towards writing assignments and the sources they like to use, and the difficulties they experience in academic writing. The study was designed as a survey based research. Quantitative research methods were employed in order to collect as well as to analyze the data. A questionnaire was used to collect the data that was obtained from 34 second-year students, studying at the English Language Teaching Department of Education Faculty at a foundation university in Istanbul, Turkey in 2017-2018 academic year. The results of the present research revealed that the participants of the study are aware of the importance of using metacognitive writing strategies in the completion of quality writing assignments. It also became clear that the participants pay attention to the identification of what they specifically want to say at the pre-writing stage. That is, they use brainstorming techniques and prepare an outline before they begin to write their first drafts on a given topic. The participants favor peer feedback at the pre-writing stage but not at the post-writing stage. The most frequently used writing strategy was found to be revising strategy. However, it also became clear that the participants prefer self-revision or teacher feedback for the improvement of their papers. In addition, we found out that almost half of the participants do not write in English for pleasure but they only write in English in order to complete their assignments. The findings also showed that most of the participants prefer using both books and journals as main sources to accomplish their writing assignments. The third source as identified by the participants was Internet.

Moreover, the findings of the study reflected that the participants experience many difficulties in writing, such as Finding relevant references, Choosing a significant topic, Paraphrasing, Referencing and Citation, Expressing own voice, Coherence and cohesion, Using conjunctive cohesive devices appropriately, and Language use, respectively.

Keywords: *Academic Writing, Process Approach to Teaching Writing, Writing Strategies, Academic Writing Difficulties.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the study, the statement of the problem and the research questions in addition to the significance of the study respectively. Furthermore, the operational definitions of the study are stated and explained in this chapter.

1.2 Background of the Study

Learning a foreign language is not an easy task, because it requires learners to establish different skills in order to become communicatively competent in the target language. These skills involve reading, writing, speaking and listening. Learners need to employ many strategies to be able to use each of these skills for communicative purposes. EFL learners experience a lot of difficulties when they try to learn and practice these language learning skills and strategies. One of the most difficult language skills that the students encounter when learning English is writing (Al Badi, 2015; Al Fadda 2012 & Xiao & Chen, 2015). Academic writing is of vital importance for learners, because they need to learn English language to be able to learn other disciplines where English language is the instrument of education. Academic writing is considered as a difficult and a complex task, because it consists of learning to use many aspects of writing. EFL students who lack the ability to master all those aspects of writing suffer many difficulties when they try to express their messages in written English (Xiaoxiao, 2010; Xiao & Chen, 2015).

Drawing on the difficulties foreign language learners experience in writing, many researchers conducted studies to find out the best ways of teaching writing strategies (Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu, 2015 & Bustamante and Eom, 2017). The results of those studies highlighted that the process approach to teaching writing show positive results unlike the other approaches to teaching

writing (Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu, 2015; Al Fadda 2012; Echeverri, Marin, & Castillo, 2011). For example, Rusinovci (2015) argues that process approach to teaching writing helps learners to learn writing effectively as the focus in this approach is on the recursive cycle of the writing process in which a text is produced rather than the final product. In this approach, the teacher only facilitates writing operation. That is, the instructor's mission is to raise the students' awareness of the strategies used by effective writers and then to expose the students to the task of writing, paying attention to the meanings to be conveyed at the beginning of the writing process through multiple drafts. The process approach is considered as a learner-centered approach. Following this line of argument, Echeverri, Marin, & Castillo, (2011) state that EFL learners can produce quality written products "through a structured, organized and conscious writing process, which involves different stages such us brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing" (p.10).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Academic writing is a complex and a hard process for many EFL learners. It is a complex process, because it requires learners to generate ideas, select and use appropriate language and vocabulary in addition to organizing information through drafting, revising and editing (Stanley, 1993; Echeverri, Marin, & Castillo, 2011; Rusinovci, 2015). Teachers spend a lot of time and effort to meet the students' needs in academic writing tasks. Despite the teachers' efforts, the students might continue suffering writing difficulties, as they are not only learning a foreign language, but also try to learn how to compose successfully. For these reasons, there is a need to conduct research on the difficulties EFL students experience in academic writing, so that the instructors working at universities can make informed-decisions when teaching academic writing strategies.

1.4 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The current research aimed to explore the writing strategies used by ELT students, their attitudes towards writing assignments and the sources they like to

use, and the difficulties they experience in academic writing. The following research questions framed this study:

- What are the writing strategies used by the students?
- What are the students' attitudes towards writing assignments?
- What are the sources the students like to use in writing?
- What difficulties do the students encounter in academic writing?

1.5 Significance of the study

Writing is considered as a medium of conveying "one's ideas, thoughts, opinions, and attitudes" (Alfaki, 2015, p.40). Writing makes people able to share their points of view with others. Furthermore, they can influence others' decisions and perspectives. On the academic level, it is common that university students show their inadequacy to convey their messages obviously and efficiently through writing (Alfaki, 2015). Al Fadda (2012) argues that learners' writing products in academic English may be affected by many "factors such as students writing style, their level of motivation or anxiety in addition to emotional factors." (p. 123).

Actually, this study was designed from the need to specifically identify the writing strategies used by ELT students, their attitudes towards writing assignments and the sources they like to use, and the difficulties they experience in academic writing, so that the instructors could establish an understanding of the learners' difficulties and to take informed-decisions and help the students overcome those difficulties.

1.6 Operational Definitions

Academic Writing: Academic writing is, basically, the type of writing students should use at high schools, colleges as well as universities (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). It is also known as "…a mental and cognitive activity since it is a product of the mind" (Al Fadda, 2012, p. 124).

Process Approach to Teaching Writing: This approach attributes great importance to the writing process rather than the final outcomes (Sun, 2009).

Similarly, Nunan (1991) emphasizes the importance of the processes the students go through to produce a piece of work.

Writing Strategies: According to Abdul-Rahman (2011), writing strategies are believed to be identified procedures, which are followed by students to achieve more convenient writing products.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study. First, the focus is on academic writing, process approach to writing instruction and writing strategies used by EFL students. Then, the discussion is on the students' attitudes towards academic writing and the difficulties they encounter in academic writing.

2.2 Academic Writing

Academic writing is, basically, the type of writing you need to follow to fulfill the curriculum of your university. Academic writing tasks vary in labels. For example, they could be essays or research papers. However, all the types of academic writing seek the identical purpose and criterion. When you want to accomplish an academic writing task, you have the chance to investigate whatever you like from your curriculum. In academic writing you are not restricted with a specific topic, rather you can select the topic you prefer and compose your own notions accordingly. In addition, you are able to identify the audience who will read your pieces of work (Whitaker, 2009). As far as the academic life is concerned, writing good academic English could be a challenging task for students. Students should activate lots of different skills. Moreover, there are different sets of rules that students should adopt and adhere to. Students should write in a clear, creative, structured, and well-organized way within the expectations of the reader (Shannon, 2011).

Brainstorming is an important feature of academic writing as it helps students to organize their ideas and reflect on their own writing (Whitaker, 2009). Starting and finishing are two phases of the same coin. For academic writing, the students should have good skills to start with and finish their own work. During the academic writing process, the students should be guided by and listen to the

voices of other researchers, but they should be able to spot light on their own voices as represented by their ideas, feelings, attitudes, and points of view. At the university, the students are challenged by the fact of writing accurately and objectively (Shannon, 2011).

The main goal behind academic writing is not to show off everything that the students know about a specific topic. They need to demonstrate a good mastery of thinking, researching, evaluating, and reasoning skills (Whitaker, 2009). In addition, the students should make their writing and ideas clear and easy to understand by the person who read or mark them. Alfaki (2015) expresses that there are many aims for comprising writing in the process of learning a second or foreign language. One significant aim to be mentioned is that writing aids the students in their learning operation. In other words, writing gives the students the opportunity to observe their development and to receive feedback from their instructors. In addition, it makes the instructors capable of checking the students' level and identifying the difficulties faced by them. This does confirm the significance of writing in the process of language learning. Similarly, Alsamdani (2010) confirmed the significance of writing skill in the academic disciplines and contexts. Hence, in spite the natural order hypothesis of language learning, that says writing comes at the end after listening, reading, and speaking, its significance manifests itself where the students need to use this skill as an instrument to show the knowledge they obtained. So, academic success is very much associated with this skill.

According to Simanskiene (2005), people use writing as a tool to communicate with each other. Writing has many conditions with different kinds of audience and for different aims. The writer's mission is to identify the written pieces of work accordingly. In academic writing, the instructor is often the audience of the writer. In some cases, the writer's colleagues are his/her audience. Besides, effective academic writing composers should have the capacity to make suitable selections from the language structure and to connect their writing products to their readers in a manner that depicts extreme influence. Aunurrahman, Hamied, & Emilia (2017) stated that academic writing comprises specializations that are needed to accomplish successful academic products. These specializations are genres that do shape and mirror the students' perception and cognition skills

along with the variety of linguistic characteristics that embody the skills mentioned above.

Actually, non-native speakers of this language should learn writing conventions, writing processes, and its features in order to use the language correctly and appropriately. Aspects of academic writing that should be learned can be summarized as knowing how to organize paragraphs by employing appropriate styles of structures, paraphrasing, and using suitable conjunctions to maintain a link. The students should also follow certain steps like being able to understand and summarize the paragraph before composing, splitting long sentences or substituting them, and using alternatives of the vocabulary items that express the identical meaning. Furthermore, the students should be acquainted with the main kinds of academic writing such as illustrative, descriptive, and narrative (Abdulkareem, 2013). For Burke (2010), academic writing is a social action. Faigley stated that, "Writing can be understood only from the perspective of a society rather than a single individual" (1986, p. 535). Writing constructs a social bond between writers and readers. In order to reach their targets, writers usually make careful textual alternatives to get across their messages, ideas, and positions successfully. This might occur in an explicit or implicit way through the text (Burke, 2010). That is, academic writing is not only an instrument to achieve communicative goals, but also a significant social exercise. Burke (2010) states, "text is a place where knowledge and writer's identities are constructed, negotiated, and created" (p.40). In writing there is a connection between the writers and the readers. However, in her study, Al khatib (2017) pointed out that academic writing in English is the cornerstone of teaching and learning in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Recent studies have concentrated on the psycholinguistic criterion of academic writing in English instead of focusing on academic writing problems in EFL contexts.

2.3 Process Approach to Writing Instruction

EFL writing is considered as a complex social activity involving skills like choosing topics in relation to an identified audience, generating ideas and appropriate content, using conjunctive devices to achieve cohesion, etc. (Xiaoxiao, 2010). And the completion of a writing task is accomplished by

"independent thinking skills, such as classifying, evaluating, synthesizing, etc."
(Xiaoxiao, 2010, p. 27). Furthermore, Xiaoxiao (2010) argues that those
capacities and skills are not possible to be achieved by remote and fixed
information communication or ways depending on assigning a task then
correcting it. Hence, process approach to writing instruction is believed to
provide the demands of this complex activity by establishing a basis for
interaction between the teachers and the students.

In reflection on related literature, it becomes clear that process approach to
teaching writing is the opposite of product-based writing (Sun, 2009). In fact,
process approach to teaching writing in English is being supported and has its
own privileges over the traditional way that is based on products. Generally
speaking, it is approved of and applied in the classrooms by English teachers
who teach writing skill. This approach attributes great importance to the writing
process rather than the final pieces of work. Although some characteristics of
this approach were identified, there is no universal consensus on a particular
definition for the process approach to writing (Sun, 2009).

For Murray (1980), the main difference between the two approaches lies in the
emphasis placed on the revision stage in the process approach, which is required
to make the meaning clear for both the writers and the readers. Sun (2009)
argues, "good product depends on good process" (p. 151). In a study done by
Rusinovci (2015), it was stated that the process approach to teaching writing
instruction attributes great importance to the writing procedure rather than the
final pieces of work. In this approach, the teacher plays the facilitator role.
Actually, in writing classes, which follow the process-based approach, the
students basically learn writing; it is not instructed. In other words, the teacher's
mission is to make writing skill seem easier and elicit the learners' capability.
So, it is not important to provide the students with information (input) or
provoke them. The process approach is considered as the learner-centered
approach. According to Stanley (1993), process approach considers all writing
as something inventive, which needs both time and helpful feedback to gain
effective results. In this approach, teachers do not ask their students to write a
piece of work about certain topic and receive the final products for correction.
In contrast, teachers who follow this approach intervene the recursive cycles of

writing process. Stanley (1993) also states that feedback is very beneficial when it is done during the process of writing, not at the end when the students submit their final products for grading. When the teacher uses constructive comments on the students' writing, the students become confident and develop positive attitudes for other writing tasks. However, corrections for the students' products after they finish writing seem to show little improvement in the students' writings. Similarly, Nunan (1991) emphasizes the importance of the processes the students go through to produce a piece of work. The process approach to writing implies the fact that there is no perfect text, but the writer will be improved as he/she walks on the right way to attain perfection.

In process-based writing classes, the students learn writing through writing, paying attention in the first drafts to communicating their feelings, experiences, and ideas. In this process, the teacher's mission is to make the students consciously aware of the writing processes. In addition, the teachers' patience and their attempts to create a supportive learning atmosphere are of a vital importance for the students as students might be frustrated due to the difficulty of writing skill (Stanley, 1993). According to Stanley (1993), in the process approach to teaching writing, more time should be spent inside the classroom on writing.

For Stanley (1993), writing process consists of cycles. These cycles include pre-writing, focusing on ideas and evaluation, structuring and editing. At the pre-writing step, the instructor tries to activate the students' creative ability. This is the step when the students start thinking on how to achieve the task of writing. At this step, the generation of ideas is considered as the most significant aim. In the second step, which is focusing on ideas, the students start putting their ideas on paper without a concern for accuracy or the organization of their products. At this step, the students' focus is on meaning. The final step for Stanley (1993) is evaluation, structuring and editing. At this step, the students are guided to concentrate on form and on the achievement of their final written products. The students receive feedback from their peers or teachers and revise their papers accordingly. However, there are some potential problems concerning this approach as highlighted by Stanley. For Stanley, the students might be frustrated due to the difficulty of writing skill. So, patience and creating a

supportive atmosphere are of a vital importance for the students just like with speaking skill. Stanley (1993) also stated that process approach gives great importance to how well the students' communicate and express their feelings, experiences, and ideas rather than testing their language knowledge. Actually, in the process approach to teaching writing, more time should be spent inside the class on writing tasks. But, the students do not spend all their time writing. It is necessary to dedicate more classroom time to writing. Actually, working repeatedly on the same material may make the students have a negative reaction. But, when there is diversity in the activities and the learning targets are clear, then the students do not refuse doing so. Eventually, when the students' written products get better, both the teacher and the students realize the great significance of the process approach to teaching writing skill.

2.4 Writing Strategies Used by EFL Students

According to Abdul-Rahman (2011), writing strategies are known as particular procedures taken by students to make their writing more convenient. Alnufaie & Grenfell (2012) state that writing strategies can go under two categories, which are process-based ones and product-based ones. Researchers had conducted many studies to identify the writing strategies used by EFL students. For instance, Sadi & Othman (2012) conducted a study to explore the strategies used by Iranian EFL undergraduate learners. The data was collected from three skilled and three less skilled EFL writers. The results of the study showed that "L1 use, rehearsal, rereading, repetition, self-questioning, revision and editing" were the most frequently employed strategies by both groups (p.1151). In addition, they expressed that the strategies used by the good writers more than the poor writers were "repetition, rereading, revision and brainstorming" whereas the strategies that were employed by the poor writers more than the good writers were "editing, self-questioning, self-talk, task interpretation and abandoning idea" (p.1151). There are many studies which focus on the relationship between gender and learning strategy, whereas the relationship between gender and writing strategies is still under-researched. The process of composing consists of many stages that vary in number and name. In the 1990s, research on the process of L2 writing focused more on the sub-processes of L2

writing which are planning, formulating, and revising. The following is an explanation of these three sub-processes as highlighted by Abdul-Rahman (2011):

- Planning

Writers usually follow many procedures in order to comprehend the writing tasks they are supposed to achieve. They reread the task repeatedly. Before writing time, writers take into consideration their position on the theme. They also plan and form their messages. In fact, some writers maintain planning all over the process of writing, whereas other writers plan before their writing. In other words, planning can go under two categories which are global planning and on-line planning. Global planning is connected with textual matters and happens in the pre-writing phase, whereas on-line planning is associated with words, sentences, and paragraphs. It happens during the writing stage. There are many strategies used before writing, for instance: brainstorming, listing, idea mapping, free writing, outlining. There are three main advantages of pre-writing: it makes the learners feel relaxed and be confident, it does not give the writers permission to revise mechanically, and it makes the learners write down everything that comes to their mind.

- Formulating

After planning, writers initiate a new stage that involves planning, writing, preparing, and revising texts of source. During this phase, writers do transform their ideas into language. In addition, they deal with linguistic features such as lexis, grammar, and academic standards. Furthermore, the writers reread and assess what they have composed.

- Revising

Previously, the act of revising was considered as an easy task of reviewing which happens when the composition mission finishes. However, after studying the way in which cognitive models function, revision is considered as a point of starting as well as a very complex activity. It is worth saying that revising is a very important operation that prompts discovery, constructs the levels of the skill, and builds experiences in writing skill. In addition, revising improves the writing quality; skillful writers allocate sufficient and suitable time for revising.

Consequently, effective revising leads to good writing. Unfortunately, an enormous number of writers do not revise adequately. They prefer being proofreaders instead of reviewers. Many researchers state that vocabulary is the main reason that leads their participants to revise (at a language level).

In literature, there are many classifications of writing strategies as well as writing processes with different labels. For instance, Mohite (2014) conducted a study to investigate the English language writing strategies used by Polish secondary school students. The findings of this research depicted that revision strategies were the mostly used strategies among the students. The execution strategies and the planning ones followed revision strategies. This depicts the students' inclination to revise their writing products more than planning for their writing assignments before initiating.

Moreover, Chu, Huang, Shih, & Tsai, (2012) conducted a study on first-year students in the central Taiwan to investigate the learning strategies that are used by the students. The findings of this research depict that the students favored using "Compensation, Affective, Social and Memory more to Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies" (p.21). Chu, Huang, Shih, & Tsai (2012) added that the instructors should teach their students a set of learning strategies and try to elicit the most efficient strategies which could show positive outcomes and develop the students more successfully. The instructors should also reinforce the notion of the significance of using learning strategies. Then, they need to inform the students how to utilize them correctly, so that the students will be able to learn more efficiently.

2.5 Students' Attitudes Towards Academic Writing

Writing is often considered as a challenging skill for the students. Usually, the teachers depend on different techniques and strategies to help the students make their academic writing better. It is worth mentioning the fact that the teachers need to take into consideration the students' attitudes towards writing skill itself. This is a very important aspect, because the students' attitudes greatly influence their learning process. Attitudes can affect the students' motivation, self-confidence as well as their behavior. So, positive attitudes make the writers motivated and capable of accomplishing good written products. Hence,

academic success will be the outcome of positive attitudes. (Bustamante and Eom, 2017). Similarly, Graham et al, (2007) stressed the idea that the attitudes towards academic writing can be experienced by the feelings of happiness or sadness. So, positive attitudes towards writing will positively affect the writing process itself and vice versa (Williams, 2012).

In addition, an exploration of the students' views and perceptions might indicate ways of making the learners engaged in the lessons and feel comfortable in their learning environment. According to Wu (2006), when the learners' expectations are undermined, resistance to learning might be identified. "Thus, the need to integrate learner perspectives could add a fuller version of the truth" (Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu, 2015, p. 38). Certainly, attitudes and feelings are connected together solidly as Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2015) put it: "given that learners of L2 writing are usually in an excursion space, which suggests that they are not in their own territory, feeling the pulse of the learners through related means would help researchers design their writing instruction and tailor it more the learners' needs and expectations" (p. 39). Similarly, Eagly and Chaiken (1993) defined attitudes as a psychological inclination that appears by estimating a certain object positively or negatively. This simple definition sheds light on the importance of the evaluative aspect of attitude. Evaluative aspect of attitude is the one that affect the way the students may respond towards academic writing.

Attitudes cannot be observed directly, but they can be interpreted based on behaviors or actions. So, attitudes can affect behavior/action; if a student has a positive attitude towards academic writing, s/he will accept it and work hard to improve it. By contrast, if a student has a negative attitude towards writing, s/he will not be interested in it or may avoid it. So, attitudes are of great importance in directing the learners' behavior and actions towards academic writing. Mantle-Bromley (1995) stressed the idea that attitudes have cognitive, evaluative, and behavioral components. According to Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2015), cognitive component reveals the things or the situations which are connected with attitudes, whereas evaluative component reflects likes and/or dislikes that emerge from specific attitudes. On the other hand, behavioral component pushes the learners to develop specific learning behaviors. So, understanding the learners' attitudes well may help the researchers "develop

reasoning for particular actions, behaviors and situations and so on" (p. 41). Furthermore, attitudes are considered as similar to beliefs towards people, things or objects. For Coon and Mettere (2008, p. 535), "attitudes are intimately woven into our actions and views of the world". Moreover, Krashen (1982) stressed the idea that there are three variables that affect attitude namely motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. So, high motivation, high self-confidence, and low anxiety can help in predicting the students' behavior and can facilitate learning process. By contrast, low motivation, low self-confidence, and high anxiety are obstacles that could hinder writing process. In addition, anxiety and fear hinder the process of writing (Cameron et al, 2009).

Ansarimoghaddam and Tan (2014) tried to draw a comparison on how the learners at a Malaysian university view writing in their L1 versus English where they discover an association between positive attitudes toward English and the productions of writing in English. Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2015) conducted a study on the students' attitudes towards academic writing with 115 students at an English language and Literature department. The study took place at a north-eastern state university in Turkey in 2014-2015. The study revealed that writing is not properly enhanced at the school level and the students lack love for writing. The study also showed that the students have a need to be involved in choosing the topics of writing, so that they feel a sense of ownership of the task and enjoy the writing task. It also became clear that though the students did not enjoy academic writing, they believed in its importance. Furthermore, they found out that the students perceive writing as a skill that could be best improved by practice, and that they believe that it is a talent. For them, mastery of writing could best be achieved by adopting the writing model; when their writings are supported by a model such as essays written by native speakers of English.

In Hungary, a study was conducted in the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. The purpose of the study was to investigate EFL students' attitudes towards academic writing in English language. The participants of the study were eight MA students in their twenties. They came from different countries all over the world. Structured interviews were used as the main instrument for data collection. The findings of the study revealed a strong positive relationship

between the students' attitudes towards academic writing and the development of the writing process. Moreover, the study shed light on the fact that the students' attitudes were affected by their past experiences which affect their future behavior. In short, the study recommended that for the success of any educational initiative, the students' attitudes toward writing should be seriously taken into consideration.

More recently, a study was conducted by Bustamante and Eom (2017) to investigate the students' attitudes towards writing in English. The study took place in Southwest Texas. A survey was the main instrument for data collection, and it consisted of 22 attitude questions. The findings of the research revealed that the learners implement an affirmative attitude towards composing in electronic domain. The participants showed more positive attitude to general writing than subject-specific ones: humanities and science. This suggests the fact that the students show a positive attitude towards writing if learnt as a tool to attain communicative goals rather than a skill that must be mastered to pass examinations.

2.6 Academic Writing Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners

Academic writing in English language is not an easy task even for many native speakers of this language. Therefore, it is a challenging task for EFL students who speak different languages and have a variety of cultural experiences (Al Fadda, 2012). For EFL students, academic writing is the most challenging skill when compared with listening, speaking or reading (Zhang, 2010). It is worth mentioning the fact that the majority of writing specialists agree that the difficulties in academic writing stem from two issues; the nature of academic discourse as well as the art of writing itself (Schmitt, 2005). Schmitt (2005) gave an example of a Brazilian PhD student who had to forget about her creative way of writing in her mother tongue langue and who struggled to make her ideas clear for her UK supervisor. In other words, she was challenged to adapt her writing in order to cope with the new context (UK).

Paltridge and Sarfield (2007) stressed the idea that writing texts, in a foreign language, that are easy to read and understand is challenging for EFL students. In addition, there are some other factors that make academic writing as

challenging for EFL students. These may be represented by the students' past school poor experiences (Engstrom, 2008). Sometimes writing activities are not given the importance they deserve at school (Rose, 2004). So, enhancing students' academic writing at the secondary school level could improve their academic writing at the university (Cliff and Hanslo, 2009). In addition, writing should be a continuous and inseparable part of education (Mitchell and Evison, 2006). However, preparing students is not the only way for improving their academic writing; teachers themselves should be well-qualified and adequately trained to enhance students' writing skills (Engstrom, 2008).

There could be a strong positive relationship between reading and writing in the sense that reading can positively affect writing. However, the students' academic writing is challenged nowadays by the widespread usage of technology as represented by movies, videos, and television (Jurecic, 2006).Furthermore, Jiang (2011) emphasized the idea that there are cultural and educational factors that affect the students' academic writing. Also, L1 can affect L2 in the sense that poor academic writing skills in L1 can be transferred to L2 (Gomaa, 2010).

At university level, most students' writing in English language seems to lack an obvious structure as well as good cohesion. Writing skill is considered as something difficult even for people who write in their first language (L1). This is a bigger problem for foreign language learners who write using their second language (L2). In the case of L1 British students, it is evident that the students have acquired the needed language in general. In other words, they gain the "minimum level of vocabulary required at university level and are grammatically competent" (Abdul-Rahman, 2011, p.1). However, British students need the knowledge of the significant strategies of academic writing. The situation is worse and more difficult for Libyan and mainland Chinese students' L2 who neither possess the needed language nor the important strategies of academic writing (Abdul-Rahman, 2011).

There are many studies which focus on the academic writing difficulties encountered by EFL learners. For example, Xiao & Chen (2015) conducted a research on academic writing difficulties with university students in South China. The findings of this research pointed out that the learners' major writing

trouble lies in the organization of the ideas in a written piece of work. The next difficulty the students experience is the correct use of language. The results of this research also showed that the biggest language obstacle to writing was the lack of vocabulary knowledge. For this reason, the students lack the capacity of accomplishing writing assignments which contain diversity in vocabulary use.

Keong & Mussa (2015) tried to find out the academic writing difficulties of Iraqi postgraduate students. The analysis of the data revealed that Iraqi postgraduate students encounter many difficulties in the field of academic writing. More specifically, the students have problems in vocabulary and show weakness in paraphrasing. Furthermore, they make mistakes in grammar, referencing, organization, expression of ideas, and critical revision of academic papers. In addition, they do not possess the knowledge of how to compose and organize academic research. They also consider constructing ideas into a story as something totally difficult. However, the students involved in this study stated that they could improve their writing through exposure to academic reading and writing practice activities. As it is reflected from the studies mentioned above, it becomes clear that EFL learners experience many obstacles in accomplishing their writing assignments. The main sources of difficulty for the students seem to emerge from the use of English language and organizing their ideas coherently.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sheds light on the methodology of the current research. It presents the research design, the participants as well as the procedures used in data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research Design

The current study aimed to explore writing strategies utilized by ELT learners, their attitudes towards writing assignments and the sources they like to use, and the difficulties they experience in academic writing. The study was designed as a survey based research. Quantitative research methods were employed in order to collect as well as to analyze the data of this study. It is undeniable that numerical data are the basis in quantitative research methods in order to obtain statistical outcomes at the end of the analysis process. According to Leedy (1993), quantitative research methods are defined as research methods which deal with numbers as well as anything that can be measured. These research methods investigate the phenomena and their relationships in a way that is systematic. Among the quantitative research tools, a questionnaire was employed in the current study to investigate EFL students' difficulties in academic writing.

3.3 Participants of the Study

This study was conducted at İstanbul Aydın University, İstanbul, Turkey in 2017-2018 academic year. The participants of the current study were a total of 34 students, studying at the English Language Teaching Department of Education Faculty. The participants were second year (sophomore) Turkish students. Purposive sampling strategy was used when choosing the participants of the study. Purposive sampling strategy is defined as "a series of strategic

choices about with whom, where, and how one does one's research." These words have two indications. Firstly, the researchers should connect their aims to the sample. A second indication is generated from the first. That is, we cannot consider any sampling strategy to be the most successful, because the issue is connected with the study's setting as well as its purpose (s) (Palys, 2008, p. 697). Table 3.1 reveals the gender distribution of the participants of the study.

Table 3.1: Gender Distribution of the Participants.

Gender	N	%
Male	10	29.4
Female	24	70.6
Total	**34**	**100**

As shown in Table 3.1, the total number of the participants was 34. Twenty-four of them were females and 10 of them were males.

Table 3.2 presents the age distribution of the students who participated in the study. The age of almost half of the students at the time of completing the questionnaire was 20. While 7 (%20.6) of the participants were 21, 5 of them (% 14.7) were at the age of 22. There were a total of 4 students whose ages ranged from 23 (2 participants) to 24 (2 participants). Only one participant was 19. Two of the participants' ages were above 20 years. One of them was aged 32 while the other 38. The median age was 21 with a range of (19-38).

Table 3.2: Age Distribution of the Participants.

Age	Frequency	%
19	1	2.9
20	15	44.1
21	7	20.6
22	5	14.7
23	2	5.9
24	2	5.9
32	1	2.9
38	1	2.9
Total	**34**	**100.0**

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

The data of the current study was collected through the use of a questionnaire developed by Al Badi (2015) (see Appendix A). The questionnaire involves 4 sections. The first section of the questionnaire includes 3 questions to collect demographic data about the participants of the study. These questions focus on the participants' age, gender, and their department of study at university. The aim of the second section of the questionnaire is to find out the writing strategies ELT students use in the completion of writing assignments. To achieve this aim, the participants are provided with 12 writing strategies based on a 6-point Likert-type rating scale. The response options are from *Always* to *Never*. For the purpose of the study and to help the students to answer the questions more accurately, we assigned the following percentages to the options: never 0%, rarely 10%, sometimes 40%, often 60%, usually 80%, and always 100% of the times. Section 3 of the questionnaire aims to identify the students' attitudes towards writing assignments and the sources ELT students like to use in writing. Accordingly, Section 3 involves 2 questions. The first question asks the students to rate whether they find writing assignments easy or difficult based on a 4-point Likert-type rating scale from *easy* to *neither difficult nor easy*. The second question of Section 3 offers the participants 4 sources that they may possibly use to accomplish their writing assignments. The sources the participants are offered include *Books*, *Journals*, *Both*, and *Others* (*specify),* respectively. Section 4 of the questionnaire aims to find out the difficulties ELT students experience in academic writing. In order to find out the areas of difficulty ELT students experience, they are provided with 8 options. The questionnaire contained many options such as, *Referencing and citation, Language use*, *Paraphrasing, Expressing own voice, Finding relevant references, Coherence and cohesion, Choosing a significant topic*, and *Others (specify)* that give the participants the chance to add any additional ideas. The language of the questionnaire was English. There was no need to translate the data collection instrument into any other language, as the participants of the study were prospective English language teachers.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

The first step in data collection procedure was to get a letter of consent from the Social Sciences Institute of İstanbul Aydın University to be able to gather the data of the study from the participants. The data collection process began having received the approval letter from the Social Sciences Institute of İstanbul Aydın University (see Appendix B). Before meeting the students at the university, the schedule for data collection was arranged with the ELT Department Head. At the time of data collection, I (the researcher) was with the students at the university. First, the students were informed that their responses would be used for research purposes only. Completion of the questionnaire took about 20 minutes. Consequently, the data collection procedure was smooth and efficient, because the language of the questionnaire was compatible with the participants' current English language proficiency level.

3.6 Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire was subjected to the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software, version 22 (SPSS Inc. USA). The results of the SPSS were shown on tables. The data was presented as a frequency and percentage.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The present study aimed to investigate the writing strategies used by the participants, their attitudes towards writing assignments and the sources they like to use, and the difficulties they experience in academic writing. This chapter presents the findings in 3 sections: Findings on the writing strategies the participants use (Section 4.2.), Findings on the participants' attitudes towards writing assignments and the sources they like to use in writing (Section 4.3.), and Findings on the difficulties the participants experience in academic writing (Section 4.4.).

4.2 Findings on the Writing Strategies Used by the Participants

This section presents the writing strategies the students use in the completion of writing assignments. Table 4.1 demonstrates the most frequently used 5 writing strategies drawing on the students' choices for *Always*, *Usually*, *Often*, *Sometimes, Rarely, and Never*. Those most frequently used writing strategies are: Strategy 7 *I go back to my writing to revise the content and make my ideas clearer* (17 students), Strategy 8 *I go back to my writing to edit the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation* (14 students), Strategy 5 *I brainstorm and write down ideas about the topic* (12 students), Strategy 10 *I pay more attention to the content (e.g. ideas, organization) than the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary)* (12 students), and Strategy 3 *I ask my teacher about the points I am not sure about or I need help with* (10 students), respectively.

Table 4.1: The Most Frequently Used Writing Strategies.

Writing Strategies	Never f	%	Rarely f	%	Sometimes f	%	Often f	%	Usually f	%	Always f	%
7.I go back to my writing to revise the content and make my ideas clearer.	0	0	3	8.8	1	2.9	2	5.9	11	32.4	17	50.0
8.I go back to my writing to edit the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.	0	0	2	5.9	2	5.9	6	17.6	10	29.4	14	41.2
5. I brainstorm and write down ideas about the topic.	0	0	3	8.8	2	5.9	4	11.8	13	38.2	12	35.3
10. I pay more attention to the content (e.g. ideas, organization) than the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary).	1	2.9	3	8.8	3	8.8	8	32.5	7	20.6	12	35.3
3. I ask my teacher about the points I am not sure about or I need help with.	0	0	3	8.8	7	20.6	5	14.7	9	26.5	10	29.4

Note: f= frequency, %= percentage.

As Table 4.1 shows, the most frequently used writing strategy is Strategy 7 *I go back to my writing to revise the content and make my ideas clearer*. Out of 34 students, 17 of them (%50.0) stated that they *always* use this strategy. The frequency of the participants who *usually* use this strategy is 11 (%32.4). The frequency of the participants who *often* use this strategy is 2 (%5.9), while the frequency of the participants who *sometimes* use this strategy is 1 (%2.9). Only 3 (%8.8) of the students mentioned they *rarely* use this strategy. Students' responses given to the use of this strategy reveal that almost all of the students

are well aware of the importance of revising the content of their papers, paying attention to the ideas conveyed.

Moreover, 14 students (% 41.2) stated that they *always* use Strategy 8 *I go back to my writing to edit the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.* Ten of the students (% 29.4) *usually* use this strategy. Six of them (% 17.6) stated they *often* use this strategy, while 2 (% 5.9) of the students pointed out that they *sometimes* use it. The frequency of the participants who *rarely* use this strategy is 2 (% 5.9). This finding indicates that most of the students are aware of the importance of editing in producing a quality product and that is why they try to check and revise what they have written.

As shown in Table 4.1, twelve students (% 35.3) stated that they *always* use Strategy 5 *I brainstorm and write down ideas about the topic*. Out of 34 students, 13 of them said they *usually* use this strategy while 4 of them *often* and 2 chose *Sometimes*. Only 3 of the students selected *Rarely*. The responses given to this strategy show that the students know they need to brainstorm and gather their ideas together before writing their first drafts. On the other hand, only 12 students indicated that they *always* resort to Strategy 10. Seven students stated they *usually pay more attention to the content than the language.* For the same strategy, 8 of the students chose *Often* and 3 of them *Sometimes*. Students who chose *rarely* are three, while only one student *never* uses it. This finding shows that the students focus on content more than the correct language use. The responses given to Strategy 3 *I ask my teacher about the points I am not sure about or I need help with* show that the participants believe in their teacher as a source of information and as a reliable reference. That is, for this strategy, 10 students chose *Always* and 9 of them *Usually*. The frequency of the participants who *often* use this strategy is 5. The frequency of the participants who *sometimes* use this strategy is 7. By contrast, only 3 students declared that they *rarely* consult their teachers concerning the points they are not sure about or need help with.

The analysis of the students' responses given to the questionnaire showed that the most frequently used five writing strategies (7, 8, 5, 10 & 3) were followed by the writing strategies mentioned below: Strategy 11 *I give almost equal attention to both the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) and the*

content (e.g. ideas, organization) (12 students); Strategy 2 *I go back to check carefully the assignment requirements and Instructions* (8 students); Strategy 6 *I make an outline including the main points of my assignment* (5 students); Strategy 4, *I discuss what I am going to write with other students* (2 students); Strategy 9 *In my assignments, in general, I pay more attention to the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) than to the content (e.g. ideas, organization)* (10 students). Table 4.2 reveals the students' responses given to these strategies.

Table 4.2: Frequency of Writing Strategies Used by the Participants.

Writing Strategies	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Usually		Always	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
11. I give almost equal attention to both the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) and the content (e.g. ideas, organization	1	2.9	3	8.8	3	8.8	8	32.5	7	20.6	12	35.3
2. I go back to check carefully the assignment requirements and Instructions.	0	0	6	17.6	7	20.6	5	14.7	8	23.5	8	23.5
6. I make an outline including the main points of my assignment.	1	2.9	6	17.6	11	32.4	3	8.8	8	23.5	5	14.7
4. I discuss what I am going to write with other students.	1	2.9	7	20.6	7	20.6	6	17.6	11	32.4	2	5.9
9. In my assignments, in general, I pay more attention to the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) than to the content (e.g. ideas, organization).	1	2.9	7	20.6	5	14.7	6	17.6	5	14.7	10	29.4

Note: f= frequency, %= percentage.

As Table 4.2 shows, twelve students stated they *always* use strategy 11 and 7 of them chose *Usually*. While 8 students chose *Often*, 3 of them opted for *Sometimes*. On the other hand, 3 of the students stated that they *Rarely* use this strategy, while 1 student chose *Never*. The responses given to this strategy show that the students are aware of the importance of giving equal importance both to the correct use of language structures, vocabulary and spelling as well as the quality of messages conveyed and how those messages are organized in a written product.

Eight students mentioned that they use Strategy 2 *I go back to check carefully the assignment requirements and Instructions.* The frequency of the participants who *usually* use this strategy is 8 and the percentage is 23.5. The frequency of the participants who *often* use this strategy is 5 and the percentage is 14.7. The frequency of the participants who *sometimes* use this strategy is 7 and the percentage is 20.6. The frequency of the participants who *rarely* use this strategy is 6 and the percentage is 17.6. This finding denotes that the participants want to make sure that they have included all the needed items in their assignment, and they have not forgotten anything.

Five students out of 34 stated that they use Strategy 6 *I make an outline including the main points of my assignment.* The frequency of the participants who *always* use this strategy is 5 (% 14.7). While 8 students chose *Usually*, 3 of them opted for *Often*. The frequency of the participants who *sometimes* use this strategy is 11 (% 32.4). Six students stated they *rarely* make an outline before starting to write their writing assignments, and one student mentioned s/he *never* makes an outline at the outset of a writing task. The frequency of the responses given to the use of this strategy indicates that 7 students out of 34 are still not aware of the benefits of making an outline at the beginning of the writing process.

The analysis of the students' responses for the use of Strategy 4 *I discuss what I am going to write with other students* shows that 2 of them stated they *always* use this strategy. The frequency of the participants who *usually* use this strategy is 11 (% 32.4). The frequency of the participants who *often* use this strategy is 6 (% 17.6), while the frequency of the participants who *sometimes* use this strategy is 7 (% 20.6). Seven students mentioned that they *rarely* use this

strategy, and 1 student pointed out that s/he *never* discusses what s/he is going to write with other students. The students' responses given to the use of this strategy denote that the participants give importance to their peers' opinions, perspectives, and experiences. That is, they believe sharing their knowledge with their peers and learning their opinions are beneficial for them. Furthermore, 10 students stated they *always* use Strategy 9 and 5 of them said *Usually*. While 6 students chose *Often*, 5 of them opted for *Sometimes*. On the other hand, 7 of the students stated that they *rarely* use this strategy, while 1 student chose *Never*.

On analyzing the responses given to the questionnaire items, we found that the least frequently used strategies were Strategy 1 *I write for pleasure in English in my free time* (14 students) and Strategy 12 *I discuss my work with other students to get feedback on how I can improve it* (2 students). Table 4.3 presents the students' responses given to these strategies.

Table 4.3: The Least Frequently Used Writing Strategies.

Writing Strategies	Never f	%	Rarely f	%	Sometimes f	%	Often f	%	Usually f	%	Always f	%
1. I write for pleasure in English in my free time	14	41.2	6	17.6	7	20.6	2	5.9	5	14.7	0	0
12. I discuss my work with other students to get feedback on how I can improve it.	2	5.9	7	20.6	6	17.6	2	5.9	12	35.3	5	14.7

Note: f= frequency, %= percentage

As indicated in Table 4.3, the least used strategy is *I write for pleasure in English in my free time* (Strategy 1). None of the students stated that they

always use this strategy. While 14 of the students said they *never* write for pleasure in English in their free time, 6 of them stated they *rarely* use English in writing for pleasure. Five students out of 34 chose *Usually* 2 of them opted for *Often*. The number of the students who stated they *sometimes* use this strategy is 7. This finding shows that almost half of the students do not write in English for pleasure, but they only write in English in order to complete their assignments.

On the other hand, for Strategy 12 five students stated they *always* use this strategy, and 12 of them said *Usually*. While 2 students chose *Often*, 6 of them opted for *Sometimes*. On the other hand, 7 of the students stated that they *rarely* use this strategy, while 2 students chose *Never*. This finding shows that almost half of the students in the study have not conceptualized the importance of receiving peer feedback. Figure 4.1 displays the summary of students' responses given to the questionnaire items.
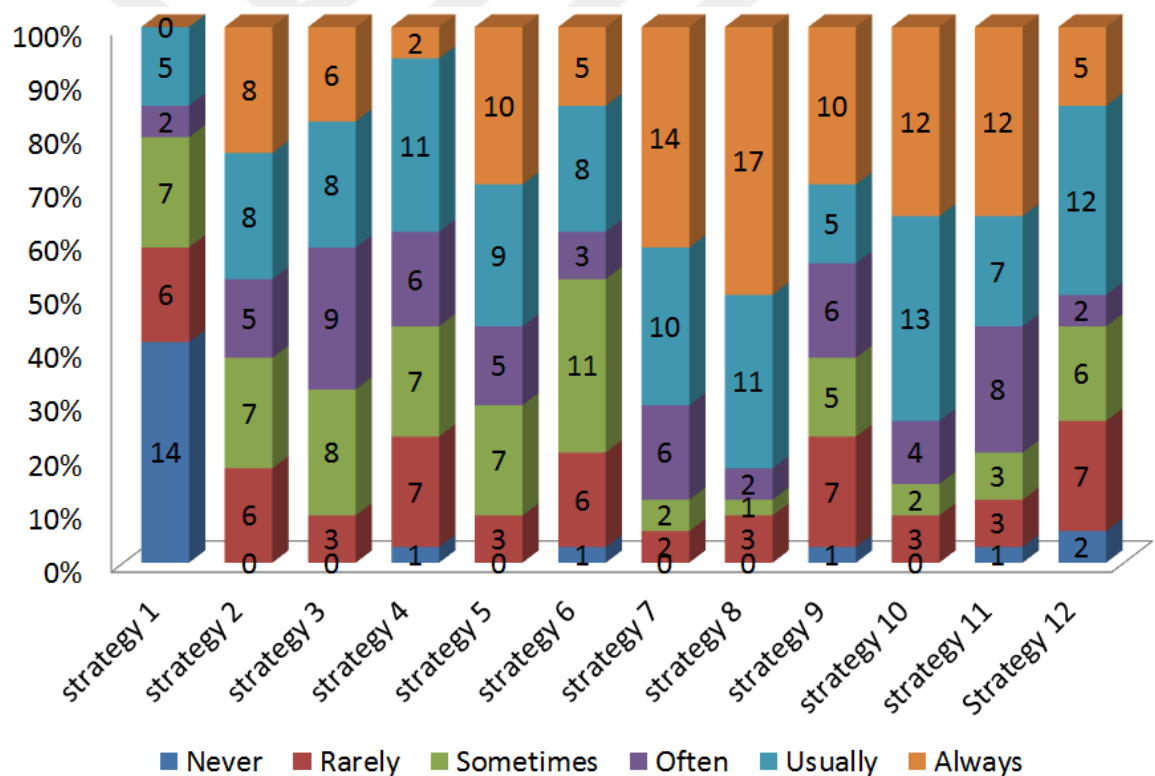

Figure 4.1: Writing Strategies Used by the Participants.

4.3 Findings on the Participants' Attitudes Towards Writing Assignments and the Sources They Like to Use

The purpose of the first question in Section 3 of the questionnaire was to find out whether the students think writing assignments in English is difficult or not. The second question aimed to identify the sources the students use to accomplish their writing assignments. This section presents the findings regarding these two purposes. Table 4.4 below demonstrates the students' attitudes towards writing assignments in English.

Table 4.4: The Participants' Attitudes Towards Writing Assignments in English**.**

Student attitude Item	Very difficult		Difficult		Neither difficult nor easy		Easy	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
I find writing assignments in English:	1	2.9	7	20.6	12	35.3	14	41.2

Note: F= frequency, %= percentage

As illustrated in Table 4.4, almost half of the students 14 (% 41.2) find writing assignments in English *Easy*. Next comes the frequency of the participants who find writing assignments in English *Neither difficult nor easy*. The number of those students who chose this item is 12 (% 35.3). While 7 (% 20.6) students find writing assignments *Difficult*, 1 (% 2.9) student finds this task *very difficult*. Figure 4.2 presents the participants' attitudes towards writing assignments in English.
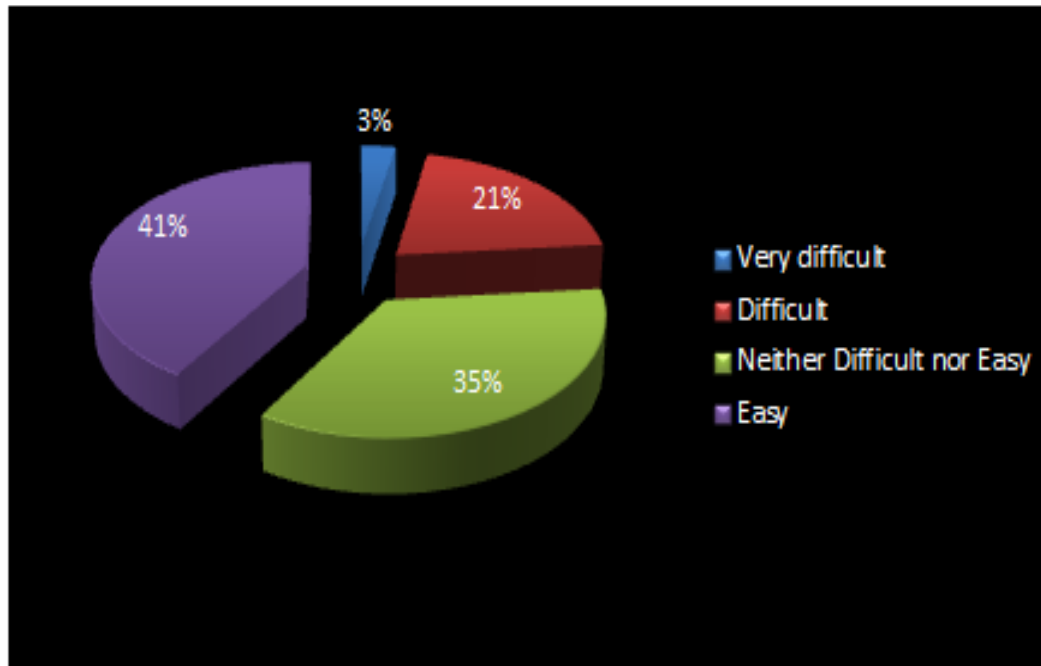
Figure 4.2: The Participants' Attitudes Towards Writing Assignments in English.

The second question in Section 3 of the questionnaire aimed to identify the sources the students use to accomplish their writing assignments. To achieve this goal, the students were provided with four options: *Books, Journals, Both, and Others (specify)*. On analyzing the students' responses, we found out that most of the students prefer using *Both Books and Journals* as references. A total of 15 students (% 44.1) out of 34 chose this source. The second most frequently source chosen was *Others* (9 students), and all the answers were specified to be as Internet sources. The following mostly used reference is *Books* with a frequency of 8 students (% 23.5). The least frequently used reference is *Journals* (2 students). Table 4.5 reveals the sources the participants use in accomplishing writing assignments in English.

Table 4.5: The Sources the Participants Use in Accomplishing Writing Assignments in English.

Student source item	Books		Journals		Both Books and Journals		Other sources specified as Internet	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
The references I mostly use:	8	23.5	2	5.9	15	44.1	9	26.5

42

Figure 4.3 presents the most frequently cited references the participants use to complete their writing assignments.

Mostly Used References

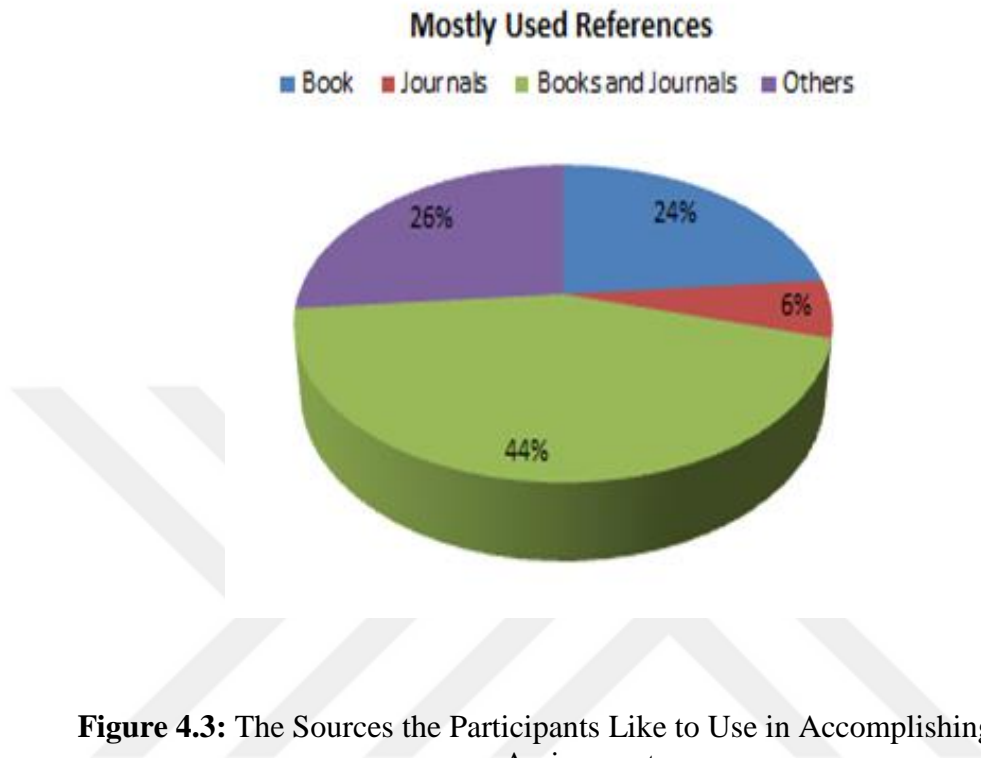■ Book ■ Journals ■ Books and Journals ■ Others

Figure 4.3: The Sources the Participants Like to Use in Accomplishing Writing Assignments.

4.4 Findings on the Difficulties the Participants Experience in Academic Writing

This section presents the findings on the difficulties the participants experience in academic writing. In order to find out the areas of difficulty the participants experience, they were provided with 8 options in Section 4 of the questionnaire (see Appendix A). Table 4.6 demonstrates the frequencies and the percentages derived from the analysis of the participants' responses to the difficulties they experience when writing their assignments.

Table 4.6: Areas of Difficulties the Participants Experience in Academic Writing.

Areas of Writing Difficulties	f	%
Paraphrasing	13	38.2
Language use	7	20.6
Expressing own voice	8	23.5
Finding relevant references	15	44.1
Referencing & citation	11	32.4
Coherence & cohesion	8	23.5
Choosing a significant topic	15	44.1
Others (specify):		
Time management	2	5.9
Using the same words continuously		

Note: F= frequency, %= percentage.

As we can see from Table 4.6, the most frequently cited writing areas that the students experience difficulty with are *Finding relevant references* (15 students) and *Choosing a significant topic* (15 students). This finding indicates that almost half of the students in the study suffer when trying to find suitable references that help them complete their writing assignments. In addition, almost half of the total number of the students in the study is confused about how to select important topics and leave those of less importance. The next difficulty that 13 students experience is *Paraphrasing*. This finding reveals that the students need additional practice activities on paraphrasing in order to be able to say someone else's ideas using their own words. The following area of writing difficulty as identified by 11 students is *Referencing and citation.* This clearly depicts that the students find it difficult to quote from a book, paper, or author and then list the sources they have cited. Eight students mentioned that they find areas of *Expressing own voice* as well as *Coherence & cohesion* difficult in writing English. This finding reveals that the students have difficulties in conveying their ideas in addition to linking their ideas logically.

Moreover, this finding also shows that the students have difficulties in using conjunctive cohesive devices appropriately. The next difficulty that the students suffer is *language use (*7 students). This finding reflects that some students experience problems in using grammatically correct and appropriate sentences in English. Finally, 2 students pointed out that they find *Time management* and *Using the same words continuously; difficulties in Finding synonyms* difficult to cope with in writing assignments. Figure 4.4 presents the findings regarding the participants' writing difficulties.
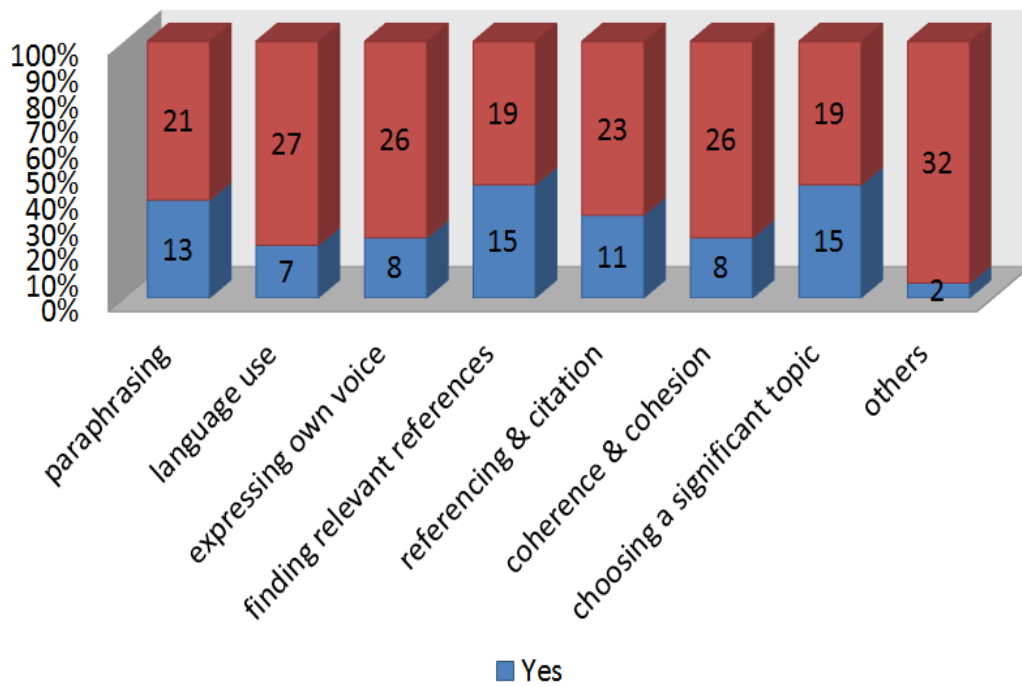

Figure 4.4: The Participants' Difficulties in Academic Writing.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter first presents a brief summary and the conclusions of the current study. And then, it highlights the limitations of the study and suggestions for further studies.

5.2 Summary of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate the writing strategies used by the participants, their attitudes towards writing assignments and the sources they like to use, and the difficulties they experience in academic writing. The participants of the current study were a total of 34 students studying at the English Language Teaching Department of Education Faculty. The participants were second year (sophomore) Turkish students. Purposive sampling strategy was used when choosing the participants of the study. The study was designed as a survey based research. Quantitative research methods were employed in order to collect as well as to analyze the data of this study. The data of the current study was collected through a questionnaire developed by Al Badi (2015) (see Appendix A). The data gathered from the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The following research questions guided the study to achieve the aims mentioned above:

- What are the writing strategies used by the students?
- What are the students' attitudes towards writing assignments?
- What are the sources the students like to use in writing?
- What difficulties the students encounter in academic writing?

5.3 Conclusions

The first research question of the study aimed at finding the types of writing strategies the students use in the completion of their writing assignments. The findings of the current study revealed that the most frequently used writing strategies by the majority of the students are *Revising the content and ideas* and *Editing the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation*. The frequent use of these two strategies shows that revising strategies are the most commonly used writing strategies among the students. Based on this finding, we may conclude that almost all of the students are conscious of the importance of revising the content of their papers, paying attention to the ideas conveyed. We can also state that almost all of the participants know that editing is very important in producing a quality product and that is why they try to check and revise what they have written. This conclusion is in line with some other studies, which also investigated the students' use of writing strategies. For instance, Sadi & Othman (2012) conducted a research on writing strategies of Iranian EFL learners. After analyzing the data of their study, they found that "repetition, rereading, revision…" are the mostly used strategies by good writers (p.1151). Moreover, Mohite (2014) conducted a study to investigate the English language writing strategies used by Polish EFL learners. The findings of this research revealed that the participants tend to "favor revision strategies over the planning strategies" (p. 39). On the other hand, the findings of other researchers may contradict the conclusions arrived in the current study. For example, in his study of Japanese students, Yasuda (2004) found out that "students used more strategies in the writing stage than in the prewriting and revising stage" (p. 54). In the current study, however, we concluded that almost half of the participants have not established the habit of giving or receiving feedback from their peers when revising their papers, but that they prefer self-revision or teacher feedback for the improvement of their papers. Based on this conclusion, we might argue that the participants of the study need additional explicit exercise on how to give and receive peer feedback at the revision stage. The findings of the current study indicated that almost half of the participants perceive their teacher as a source of information and as a reliable reference. On the other hand, more than half of the students stated they discuss what they are

going to write with other students at pre-writing stage. In addition to the frequent use of revising strategies, we found out that almost all of the students use pre-writing strategies. That is, they use brainstorming techniques and prepare an outline before they begin to write their first drafts on a given topic. Following Riazi's (1997) classification of ESL writing strategies, we may conclude that the students in the study are aware of the importance of using metacognitive writing strategies in the completion of quality writing assignments (cited in Abdul-Rahman, 2011). We may also conclude that the students in the present study pay attention to the identification of what they specifically want to say at the pre-writing stage. Finally, we conclude that all of the students do not write in English for pleasure, but they only write in English in order to complete their assignments.

The second aim of the study was to identify the students' attitudes towards writing assignments. The analysis of the data revealed that only one third of all the participants find writing assignments difficult. Drawing on this finding, we might assume that the participants of the study are used to writing in English and this is why they do not perceive writing as a difficult task. This finding is in line with that of Hanane (2015) who also conducted a research on students' attitudes towards academic writing in Republic of Algeria and came up with similar results to those of the current study. These results show that most of the participants find it interesting and easy to write in English.

The third aim of the study was to find out the sources the students like to use in the accomplishment of their writing assignments. The findings showed that most of the students prefer using both Books and Journals as main sources to accomplish their writing assignments. The second source as identified by the students was Internet. On reflection, we realized that the students' choice is dependent on the nature of the writing assignments required by the instructors at the university. For this reason, we might conclude that the instructors at ELT department use books, journals, and web sites frequently as sources of information. Review of literature regarding the sources ELT students use in the completion of their writing tasks seem to be under-researched. We could not find much study to compare this conclusion with those of other researchers. However, in a related study, McCulloch (2012) stated that it is necessary that

the students become acquainted with using source materials successfully. This would assist them in their discussions. In other words, the most important thing is to utilize source materials efficiently and successfully whatever these materials are.

The final aim of the study was to identify the types of difficulties the students encounter in academic writing. On analyzing the students' responses to the questionnaire items, we concluded that the most difficult areas of writing for most of the students were *Finding relevant references* and *Choosing a significant topic*. This finding indicates that the students in the study suffer when trying to find suitable references that help them complete their writing assignments. In addition, they are confused about how to select important topics and leave those of less importance. These two difficulties are discussed in a study done by Al Badi (2015). In this study, the results reflect that finding relevant references as well as choosing a significant topic are two difficulties faced by the students. The second most difficult area of writing for many of the students in this study was *Paraphrasing*. This finding reveals that the students need additional practice activities on paraphrasing in order to be able to say someone else's ideas using their own words. This finding is in line with that of Liao & Tseng (2010) who concluded that the students had serious problems in appropriate paraphrasing which resulted in plagiarism. The next most difficult area of writing for most of the students in our study was *Referencing and citation*. This conclusion clearly indicates that the students find it difficult to quote from a book, paper, or author and then list the sources they have cited. This finding is in line with that of McCulloch (2012) who conducted a case study on five Japanese postgraduate students. McCulloch (2012) concluded that the students had difficulty to cite the materials that they had used in their writing products. Moreover, we concluded that the students in the current study experience difficulties in *Expressing own voice*. This conclusion reveals that the students have difficulties in conveying their ideas in addition to linking their ideas logically to produce coherent texts. This conclusion is in line with the conclusion of Bailey & Pieterick (2008). Bailey & Pieterick (2008) conducted their study on first year students at a UK university, and they concluded that the students suffer when trying to express themselves in academic writing.

Furthermore, the students' responses reflected that they encounter difficulties in *Language use* as well as in producing *Coherent & cohesive* written pieces. This finding shows that some students experience problems in using grammatically correct and appropriate sentences in English. Moreover, the students have difficulties in using conjunctive cohesive devices appropriately. This conclusion is compatible with that of Al Badi (2015). In this study, the findings depict that the most frequently experienced difficulties are language use as well as coherence and cohesion. Finally, 2 students pointed out that they suffer other difficulties. They find *time management* and *using the same words continuously; difficulties in finding synonyms* difficult to cope with in writing assignments. Experiencing difficulties in time management was also cited in Yeoh & Terry's (2013) study. This study was conducted on research students in Australia. The results indicated that time management was one aspect of the academic challenges faced by the students. Secondly, using the same words continuously and having difficulties in finding synonyms is in line with the findings of Chi (2010) who conducted a research on engineering major students at Hong Kong University. The finding of this study demonstrated that "the students lacked vocabulary knowledge" (p.171).

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The findings on the writing strategies used by ELT students, their attitudes towards writing assignments and the sources they like to use, and the difficulties they experience in academic writing are specific to this setting only, and the limited number of the participants is not enough to generalize the findings of the study. Another limitation may be the use of a questionnaire as a data collection instrument based on a Likert-type rating scale which might have hindered to collect a full expression of the participants' thoughts, needs, or perspectives. Finally, no interview data was collected to confirm the results gathered from the questionnaire.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Study

In further studies, the number of the participants could be increased. Not only the students', but also the teachers' perceptions could be gathered to have a

better understanding of the difficulties experienced by the students, so as to find solutions to the academic writing problems. In addition, in further studies, conducting interviews with both the students and the teachers may help the researchers to get a wider perspective on the issue.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Questionnaire: Academic Writing Difficulties Encountered by Language Learners When Writing Assignments.

This questionnaire aims to identify the academic writing difficulties that you experience when writing assignments. Your answers to the questionnaire will be used for research purposes. Thanks in advance for your collaboration.

Section 1: Personal Information

Gender: Male (   )   Female: (   )

Age:

Department:

Section 2: Students' writing strategies and behavior

How often do these statements apply to you *when* writing assignments? Put a tick in the suitable column.

Strategies	always (100%)	usually (80%)	often (60%)	sometimes (40%)	rarely (10%)	never (0%)
1. I write for pleasure in English in my free time.						
2. I go back to check carefully the assignment requirements and Instructions.						
3. I ask my teacher about the points I am not sure about or I need help with.						

4. I discuss what I am going to write with other students.		57				
5. I brainstorm and write down ideas about the topic.						
6. I make an outline including the main points of my assignment.						
7. I go back to my writing to revise the content and make my ideas clearer.						
8. I go back to my writing to edit the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.						
9. In my assignments, in general, I pay more attention to the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) than to the content (e.g. ideas, organization).						
10. I pay more attention to the content (e.g. ideas, organization) than the language (e.g. spelling,						

grammar, vocabulary).						
11. I give almost equal attention to both the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) and the content (e.g. ideas, organization).						
12. I discuss my work with other students to get feedback on how I can improve it.						

Section 3: Students' attitudes towards writing assignments in English and the sources they like to use

1. In general, you find writing assignments in English:
   A) easy   B) difficult   C) very difficult   D) neither difficult nor easy
2. The reference(s) you mostly use:
   A) books   B) journals   D) both   C) others (specify) ………………

Section 4: Students' difficulties in academic writing

Put a tick next to the weaknesses or/and difficulties you have faced when writing your assignments.

paraphrasing   referencing & citation

language use   coherence & cohesion

expressing own voice   choosing a significant topic

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finding relevant references   others (specify)

………………………………………

………………………………………

APPENDIX B: Survey Permission Petition.

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