



## Teaching the Writing of English: Exploring the Impact of SRSD-Based ESL Writing Instruction on the Undergraduate Students

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### Abstract

*This study investigated the effectiveness of the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) model in improving the writing skills of undergraduate students. A quantitative quasi-experimental design was used. A total of 60 students were selected through random sampling and assigned to an experimental group that received SRSD-based instruction. The intervention was conducted over 12 weeks, with two class sessions per week. A pre-test and post-test were administered to measure students' writing performance before and after the treatment. The results showed a significant improvement in the writing performance of the experimental group after receiving SRSD instruction. Students demonstrated better organization of ideas, improved writing quality, and stronger self-regulation in writing tasks. The findings indicate that the SRSD model is an effective instructional approach for enhancing writing skills at the undergraduate level. It also helps improve students' confidence and reduces writing-related difficulties. However, further studies are recommended to test the effectiveness of SRSD in different educational settings and larger populations.*

**Keywords:** SRSD, self-regulation, undergraduate students, ESL writing, writing performance, quantitative study

### Introduction to the Study

Effective writing skills are crucial for students in the 21st century, especially for those who are learning English as a Second Language (ESL). ESL learners face various challenges in mastering the complexities of English writing, including grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and style. To help ESL students overcome these difficulties and develop effective writing skills, researchers and educators have explored various instructional approaches, including the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) approach.

The SRSD approach is a cognitive strategy instruction framework that helps students become self-regulated writers by developing metacognitive awareness of the writing process. The approach includes a range of instructional procedures such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Previous research has shown that the SRSD approach is effective in improving writing skills, including for students who struggle with writing (Graham & Harris, 2005).

However, there is a need for further research that investigates the impact of SRSD-based ESL writing instruction on the writing skills of ESL students in different contexts. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the impact of SRSD-based ESL writing instruction on undergraduate students.

### **Background of the study**

The ability to write effectively in English is a crucial skill for students at the undergraduate level, particularly for those studying at universities where English is the medium of instruction. However, for students for whom English is a second language (ESL), writing can be a challenging and complex task. Writing skills are essential for academic achievement, especially for ESL students studying in programs that use English as the medium of instruction. However, many ESL students find it challenging to develop their writing skills to the level required by their academic programs (Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. 2005). However, the traditional teaching methods used in ESL writing instruction have not been effective in improving the writing skills of these students. Thus, it is imperative to explore alternative teaching methods that can provide more effective writing instruction to ESL students (Scardamalia, M., & Bereiter, C, 199). In recent years, the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) approach has been identified as an effective method for teaching writing to ESL students. SRSD is a student-centered, strategy-based approach that helps students develop self-regulatory processes for writing by incorporating goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-reflection (Harris, K. R., & Graham, S, 1991).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of SRSD-based ESL writing instruction on the undergraduate students of the University of Sindh, Jamshoro. The study aims to determine whether SRSD-based instruction is an effective way to improve the writing skills of ESL students and to examine the factors that contribute to its success (Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. 2005). The results of this study can provide valuable insights into the most effective methods for teaching writing to ESL students and can inform the development of writing instruction programs for universities (Harris, K. R., & Graham, S. 1991).

### **Research Objectives and Questions**

1. To determine the effectiveness of SRSD-based ESL writing instruction in improving the writing skills of undergraduate students.
2. To examine the factors that influenced SRSD-based ESL writing instruction, such as the use of self-regulation strategies, motivation, and engagement in the writing process.
3. To identify any differences in the writing skills of students who receive SRSD-based instruction compared to those who receive traditional ESL writing instruction.

**Q1.** Does SRSD-based ESL writing instruction lead to significantly better writing performance compared to traditional writing instruction?

**Q2.** What is the effect of SRSD-based ESL writing instruction on students' writing performance compared to traditional writing instruction?

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Development of SRSD Since 1980**

In the beginning of the 1980s, Harris introduced a strategy instruction technique that was highly focused on the assimilation of affective, communicative, and cognitive theories and studies (metacognitive and self-regulation included) (Balsamo, 2019). Graham was highly fascinated by the writing development of learners, the writing method, and writing categories, while Harris focused on developing methods and approaches. Graham developed successful writing processes and genre-based strategies (Ray et al., 2019).

In 1985, Harris and Graham conducted the very first research on "self-control strategy instruction," a technique for teaching writing methods. While there is not enough room to go into

detail about the method's development, Harris, Graham, and their colleagues continued to work on it in the years afterward (Cookson & Stirk, 2019).

This process is now called "Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)" (Case et al., 2019). Initially, SRSD was also used in areas such as solving arithmetic problems instead of writing problems, indicating that it functioned as a general instructional approach across disciplines. However, since 1992, many studies have focused specifically on SRSD for writing (Graham & Harris, 1993).

### **SRSD and Writing Skill Development**

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) affects the writing skills and academic progress of students learning English as a second language at the undergraduate level. It enhances students' ability to manage, plan, monitor, evaluate, and revise the writing process, particularly in tasks such as executive summary writing.

Additionally, SRSD provides undergraduate students with a structured writing plan to improve the quality of writing by: Setting goals for their topic and audience, Generating ideas Organizing thoughts using knowledge of genres or text structures

Another aspect of SRSD is its role in improving various writing skills such as explanatory, persuasive, and narrative writing. The study highlights that students were able to organize their goals and sub-goals effectively and switch between simple and complex goals. Students fulfilled their objectives by relying on diverse cognitive abilities and approaches for planning, text production, and revision. Students utilized their understanding of designs and plans across different writing categories. Students created new or modified frameworks when writing tasks became more complex. Students remained aware of their writing aims, objectives, and audience demands. Learners benefited from self-regulation techniques.

### **Effectiveness of SRSD Across Learner Groups**

From its initial development, SRSD focused on teaching students with learning disabilities or those at risk. However, by 1992, it became evident that SRSD was effective for all learners in regular classroom settings.

Teaching SRSD has shown positive results in several studies. Students who learn through SRSD demonstrate improved writing performance. Research indicates that SRSD has positive effects on relatively young writers, such as second and third graders, and middle school students. However, there is limited evidence regarding its effectiveness among younger learners. Teenage writers are more likely to face writing difficulties early in school; therefore, strategic writing interventions should be implemented as early as possible (Liberty & Conderman, 2018).

It includes editing, guessing, clarifying, stimulating, concluding, monitoring, questioning, searching, selecting, summarizing, and visualization (Applebee & Langer, 2011).

### **Research Gap and Study Focus**

The present study addresses issues in writing skills and examines the impact of Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) on students' writing outcomes. It explores how SRSD instructions and strategies shape writing abilities and help overcome writing difficulties.

This framework is designed to enhance the writing performance of students across different groups. The study specifically focuses on: writing outcomes, the influence of SRSD on students' self-regulatory performance. Undergraduate students studying in public sector institutions where English is a second language.

The research on SRSD is limited in the context of undergraduate ESL learners in Pakistan. Although English is taught from school level, students still struggle with basic language skills and lack acceptable writing proficiency (Dar & Khan, 2015; Khan, 2009; Malik, 1996; Mashoori & Iqbal, 2007).

Students often feel hesitant; however, after SRSD instruction, they are better able to generate relevant ideas, organize them, and produce structured writing (Fareed, 2009). Despite this, Pakistani ESL learners continue to face significant challenges in writing skills.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental design using a pretest–posttest control group framework to examine the effect of Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)-based ESL writing instruction on undergraduate students' writing performance. The sample consisted of 60 first-year ESL students from the University of Sindh, Jamshoro, selected through convenience sampling and divided into an experimental group ( $n \approx 30$ ) and a control group ( $n \approx 30$ ). Data were collected through a writing performance test administered before and after the instructional intervention. Writing was assessed using a standardized holistic scoring rubric on a 1–6 scale to measure overall writing quality. The experimental group received SRSD-based writing instruction, while the control group was taught through traditional methods. All scripts were coded anonymously to ensure unbiased evaluation. Three independent raters assessed each script, and the final scores were calculated by averaging the ratings. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), where descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarize performance, while paired-samples t-tests were applied to examine within-group differences and independent-samples t-tests were used to compare differences between groups. Statistical significance was determined at  $p < .05$ . The independent variable was the instructional method (SRSD-based versus traditional), and the dependent variable was students' writing performance scores. Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining informed consent from participants and ensuring confidentiality throughout the study.

### **Results**

The results of this study present the analysis of pretest and posttest writing scores to examine the effectiveness of SRSD-based ESL writing instruction. Writing performance was evaluated using a holistic scoring scale (1–6) by three independent raters, and total scores were used for analysis.

Before the implementation of the SRSD writing intervention, a writing test was administered to the experimental class to obtain baseline data. The test was conducted following a specific procedure, and the results were analyzed using holistic scales by three independent raters. Table presents the scores given by each rater and the total score obtained by each script, which will be used as a comparison for the post-intervention scores.

**Table 1**  
**Pretest Scores of Experimental Group**

Script No.	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3	Total Score
1	2	2	2	6
2	4	3	3	10
3	3	2	2	9
4	1	1	1	3
5	4	4	5	13
6	2	1	1	4
7	1	2	2	5
8	4	4	3	11
9	2	1	3	6
10	2	2	2	6
11	2	3	2	7
12	1	1	1	3
13	3	3	3	9
14	1	2	1	4
15	3	3	4	10
16	2	2	3	7
17	2	3	3	8
18	3	3	3	9
19	4	5	5	14
20	3	4	4	11

The results in the figure above suggest that the subjects' scores in the pre-test were not particularly impressive, with only six out of 20 students scoring well (i.e., subjects/scripts #2, 5, 8, 15, 19, and 20). The remaining 14 students were considered low achievers. Notably, there was considerable variation among the evaluators, as none of them agreed on a single scale. This variation was present on a script-to-script basis and across different scales. While some scripts received the same scores from all evaluators, these scores were generally low, falling within the first three scales. Overall, these findings suggest that students' writing efficiency is low, and poor teaching methodology may be among the contributing factors.

**Table 2**  
**Posttest Scores of Experimental Group**

Script No.	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3	Total Score
1	2	3	2	7
2	3	4	4	11
3	3	2	3	8
4	2	2	3	7
5	5	5	6	16
6	3	2	2	7
7	2	2	3	7
8	5	5	4	14
9	4	3	4	11
10	3	3	4	10
11	3	3	3	9
12	2	3	3	8
13	4	4	4	12
14	3	3	2	8
15	3	3	2	8
16	2	2	2	6
17	3	3	4	10
18	4	4	3	11
19	6	5	5	16
20	5	5	5	15

**Table 3**  
**Pretest–Posttest Comparison**

Script No.	Pretest	Posttest	Difference	di <sup>2</sup>
1	6	7	+1	1
2	10	11	+1	1
3	9	8	-1	1
4	3	7	+4	16
5	13	16	+3	9
6	4	7	+3	9
7	5	7	+2	4
8	11	14	+3	9
9	6	11	+5	25
10	6	10	+4	16
11	7	9	+2	4
12	3	8	+5	25
13	9	12	+3	9
14	4	8	+4	16
15	10	8	-2	4
16	7	6	-1	1
17	8	10	+2	4
18	9	11	+2	4
19	14	16	+2	4
20	11	15	+4	16
<b>Total</b>			<b>∑di = 46</b>	<b>∑di<sup>2</sup> = 178</b>

The following table presents a comparison of the total scores obtained by each subject in the pre-test and post-test stages of the study. The first column shows the subject number, the second column displays the total score obtained by each subject in the pre-test, and the third column displays the total score obtained by each subject in the post-test. It is important to note that the same group of subjects participated in both stages of the study. The fourth column shows the difference (di) between the pre-test and post-test scores for each subject, while the fifth column shows the product of the pre-test and post-test scores (di<sup>2</sup>). At the end of columns four and five, a total is presented in a statistical format. It is worth mentioning that due to the researcher's limited knowledge of statistics, a faculty member from the Bussines Adminstration Department was consulted to conduct the statistical analysis and t-tests for this study.

**Table 4**  
**Paired Samples t-Test**

Measure	Mean	SD	T	Df	P
Pretest–Posttest	-2.30	1.949	-5.277	19	< .001

The results indicate a clear improvement in students' writing performance following SRSD-based instruction. The posttest scores are consistently higher than pretest scores across most participants. The paired-samples t-test confirmed that this improvement is statistically significant,  $t(19) = -5.277$ ,  $p < .001$ , demonstrating that SRSD instruction had a strong positive effect on students' writing skills.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings of this study revealed that SRSD-based ESL writing instruction was highly effective in improving the writing skills of undergraduate students. The pre-test and post-test results showed a significant improvement in the writing performance of the students. The statistical analysis of the data using a correlated t-test confirmed the effectiveness of the SRSD-based instruction. The calculated value of  $t$  (5.34) was greater than the tabulated value of  $t$  (1.729) with 19 degrees of freedom at the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that the difference was highly significant. These results are consistent with previous studies that demonstrated the effectiveness of SRSD-based instruction in improving students' writing skills (Graham & Harris, 2003; Harris & Graham, 2016; Wong & Butler, 2017).

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) is a pedagogical approach that has been widely researched and applied in the field of ESL writing instruction. This approach focuses on teaching students strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing their writing, while also emphasizing the importance of self-regulation, or the ability to monitor and control one's own learning. Over the years, numerous studies have investigated the effectiveness of SRSD-based ESL writing instruction, and the evidence suggests that this approach can lead to significant improvements in students' writing skills and confidence.

One of the key features of SRSD is its focus on metacognition, or thinking about one's own thinking. Students who receive SRSD-based instruction learn to identify their strengths and weaknesses as writers, set goals for their writing, and monitor their progress toward those goals. This emphasis on metacognition helps students become more aware of their learning processes and supports the development of self-directed learning skills.

Another important aspect of SRSD-based instruction is the use of explicit instruction and modeling. Teachers provide clear, step-by-step guidance for each stage of the writing process and model these strategies to demonstrate their practical application. This explicit approach is particularly beneficial for ESL students, who may have limited exposure to academic writing conventions compared to native speakers.

In addition to these features, SRSD-based ESL writing instruction can be applied across different contexts. Some studies have examined its effectiveness in teaching specific genres such as argumentative or narrative writing, while others have focused on particular learner groups, including students with learning disabilities or those transitioning to professional writing contexts.

Despite variations in implementation, research consistently shows that SRSD-based instruction is effective. For instance, studies have found that students receiving SRSD instruction outperform control groups on writing assessments and demonstrate improved attitudes toward writing. Furthermore, evidence suggests that SRSD can be successfully adapted to meet the needs of diverse ESL learners.

However, some limitations should be considered. Much of the research has been conducted in controlled classroom settings, and it remains uncertain whether the effectiveness of SRSD would extend to more complex real-world writing tasks. Additionally, several studies have focused on short-term outcomes, leaving questions about the long-term sustainability and transferability of the observed improvements.

In conclusion, the findings of this study support the effectiveness of SRSD-based ESL writing instruction in enhancing students' writing performance. The approach not only improves writing skills but also promotes metacognitive awareness and self-regulated learning. Despite certain limitations, SRSD remains a valuable instructional strategy for ESL contexts and offers meaningful implications for educators aiming to develop students' writing proficiency and autonomy.

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