Investigating the Impact of Constructive Planning as Both a Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategy: A Case Study of Third-year LMD Students of English at the University of Constantine 1, Algeria

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Abstract

The capacity of expressing oneself effectively in the written language is very important in learning languages, and it is only by mastering the different crafting skills, namely textual organization, that student writers can produce acceptable compositions. Through the use of two different research instruments, the ultimate goal of this study is to investigate the position of constructive planning in writing instructions and to emphasize the importance of knowing both the What and How of outlining. Through the use of students' questionnaires, we found that poor content organization is the most common writing problem that Algerian EFL undergraduate students come up against. Despite teachers' efforts to teach constructive planning strategies to their students, students do not effectively grasp the fundamentals of the process. The results collected from the writing test demonstrated the effectiveness of constructive planning as both a cognitive and metacognitive strategy where an overall improvement in students' writing performance was demonstrated.

Keywords: textual organization, undergraduate composition, constructive planning, writing process.

Introduction

The ability of expressing oneself effectively in writing in English demands a particularly wide range of sub-skills relative to the different aspects of writing including content, organization, vocabulary, and mechanics. Part of this ability is to articulate the writing content in coherent pieces where ideas are logically developed.

As students start writing, ideas come to them at random without any organizational frameworks. One of the factors that seem to be impeding students from achieving good performances in writing is that they fail to fit their generated content in well structured texts. Worries about what ideas to include in their essays and how to put them together in order to have a finished product are among other things that overwhelm these writers when starting to write. If students do not generate a scheme to organize their prewriting notes, they might revert to unproductive strategies of padding, contradictions, unnecessary repetition of ideas, and even plagiarism.

Another factor preventing students from achieving good performances in writing is the fact that most of them have the assumption that writing can be done in one sitting and not the result of a set of activities. In the light of a process teaching approach, writing is viewed as a reflective and an inventive activity that involves the intentional use of different techniques such as the constructive planning strategy. As a potential solution for underdeveloped textual organization, this outlining strategy is used to bridge the gap between students' disconnected prewriting notes and finished products.

The Department of Letters and English Language University of Constantine 1, Algeria, offers students a three-year college training that enables them either to be secondary teachers of English or to enroll for postgraduate studies at the university. Throughout these three years, writing is given great importance to as well as outlining which is taught as both a study skill and a writing strategy. In the present article we aim to:

- Explain third-year students' incapacity to write effectively with some degree of acceptability relative to textual organization;
- Study their attitudes towards writing and constructive planning;
- Uncover students' actual writing practices vis-à-vis the different stages of the writing process in general and constructive planning in particular;
- Study the impact of constructive planning as both a cognitive and a metacognitive strategy.

Review of Literature

As noted by Flower and associates (1989), the planning stage as a whole is constructive, but they distinguish the effort writers spend when outlining or writing rough plans as a more constructive effort. They consider constructive planning as a strategy that writers use when facing tasks that "require adaptive use of knowledge or for tasks which are more complex than available scripts" (5). In other words, generating ideas may not be enough for tasks which need synthesized use of knowledge that can only be achieved through selecting and organizing ideas.

The structured representation of prewriting notes is known as the outline. In effect, an outline "is a working plan for a piece of writing. It's a list of all ideas that are going to be in the piece in the order they should go" (Grenville, 2001: 69). This definition implies that outlining is a strategy that is employed just after generating ideas and before drafting, and it is the case in most of the times, but in fact some writers outline after writing their drafts. The type of outlining that is of our interest in the present paper is the plans writers sketch before composing that would

predict the entire structure of the text and get all of the generated ideas in shape. The sort of outlines that are created **from** the drafts are not used to help writers getting started but to check the progress writers have made so far in the writing process just like "a strategy for revising" (Smith, 2003: 18).

Writers have different attitudes towards outlining. Some of them think that outlining is a waste of time; they like to start writing right away and then see which way the wind blows their train of thought (Gramlich et al., 2009). Others think that outlining would restrain their freedom in exploring ideas and it would be better to write freely without following a predetermined plan. Still others cannot involve themselves in writing until they draw a scheme for achieving their final written text (Gough, 2005). Among those who believe that outlining is an effective tool for organizing texts, we distinguish two outline building styles. Novice writers, when outlining, if ever, use rigidly established plans and stick to them from the beginning till the end of their writing without making any amendments. According to Hedge (2005), this inflexible use of outlines will prevent writers from discovering new ideas prompted by the writing process. She points:

> … it is the poorer writers who see plans as strait- jackets and who follow the original plan through rigorously without deviation and without allowing the interplay between writing and thinking that can create new ideas and lead to improvements. (53)

On the other hand, experienced writers seldom use outlines in such a rigid way but rather as a guide to clarify their train of thoughts and to refine their ideas. They outline to delimit the range of their generated ideas and put them in shape and then feel free to cross out, add, and reconstruct whatever is needed (ibid). The gist of outlining is to find a theme for the text according to which ideas are going to be grouped. Grenville (2001: 69) suggests that writers should "*follow"* their ideas and not "*direct*" them because after all ideas are not randomly generated but rather automatically attached.

Outlines provide a visual organizational pattern for the text. The way ideas are plotted in these patterns differentiates between two types of outlines: formal and informal. Formal outlines follow special requirements. They provide a detailed description of the text by "subdividing larger ideas into smaller ones. This, of course, means that every subdivided idea must have at least two categories" (McCuen-Metherell and Winkler, 2009: 87). In a formal outline, main ideas, which represent paragraphs, and sub ideas, developing details, are presented in a sort of a hierarchy using roman numerals and capital letters, for example (Garrison, 2004). It is all up to the writer to decide on how many main ideas and sub ideas adequately describe the topic and the order of their importance.

As noted by Fowler (2006: 26), formal outlines are "meant for another reader" that is why they need to be so conventional. By contrast, he points that informal outlines are not meant for submission to the teacher but for the student writer's personal use. The working or informal outline is a rough plan that provides a brief overview of the main points to be covered in the text. It uses words and phrases to represent ideas without giving details. When writing informal outlines, student writers can drop the numbering system and just use dashes for each idea. Writers in this type of outlining can also make use of shortened forms of words and symbols that they can only understand (26). Informal outlines do not always take the form of lists but they can also take the form of graphic organizers under the shape of rectangles or circles where every shape can represent an idea.

Outlining: A Learning Strategy *per se*

Since the 1970's, researchers increasingly started to be interested in describing good language learners' abilities to succeed, and the use of strategies represents one of the main characteristics to which success can be attributed. The term "learning strategies" refers to the "specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information" (Brown, 2000: 113). They are also referred to as study skills, learning practices, or contextualized actions used to solve learning problems. No matter how they are referred to, strategies are used to make learning more effective and the achievement of learning goal easier (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007). Learning strategies are sub-divided into four main types: cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies (Dőrnyei, 2005). In this way, constructive planning is seen from both cognitive and metacognitive perspectives.

Cognitive strategies have to do with processing knowledge by practicing, analyzing, and summarizing it in order to tackle a specific learning task (Dőrnyei 2005). However, metacognitive strategies have to do with the control learners have on their own learning. The distinction between learning strategies can be made in terms of the way they contribute to one's learning. Cognitive strategies allow learners to operate knowledge directly through categorizing, practicing, deducing, and many other processes while metacognitive strategies indirectly contribute to learning through directing and monitoring the different cognitive activities (169). That is to say, the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies overlaps. If cognitive strategies involve manipulating the material to be learnt in order to achieve a particular learning goal, metacognitive strategies help learners make sure that the learning goal is brought about.

Outlining: A Cognitive Strategy

Outlining is a strategy that involves both cognitive and metacognitive development. One way to look at the cognitive nature of outlining is to consider the processes of grouping, ordering, and labeling information. Cognitive strategies involve a direct "manipulation or transformation of the learning materials/input (e.g., repetition, summarizing, using images)" (Dőrnyei 2005:169). Writers when planning constructively directly operate on their prewriting ideas and set semantic and linguistic relationships among them. They also hypothetically foresee the text's organizational pattern through building mental connections between their major concepts and subcategories. Therefore it is evident that student writers can use constructive planning as a cognitive strategy just by writing an outline.

Outlining: A Metacognitive Strategy

As seen by O'Malley and Chamot (cited in Vandergrift, 2008: 85), learning strategies have "an executive or metacognitive function (metacognitive strategies) and an operative, cognitive processing function (cognitive strategies)." Metacognition "refers to the idea of an individual's considering, being aware of and understanding their own mental (cognitive) processes and ways of learning. It is cognition about cognition" (Pritchard, 2009: 27). Such metacognitive knowledge allows for the intentional use of the cognitive strategy.

The general aim behind writing outlines is not to get a sense of the text as a whole and then abandon them but to follow them when writing. If student writers just write outlines and do not write texts *from* them, then they have just theoretically devised a scheme for the text and never put it into practice. Metacognition is then the deliberate application and regulation of cognitive knowledge that would ensure the best execution of the strategy (Skehan, 1998). Thus,

in order for student writers to take full advantage out of outlining, they need to know both the What and How of constructive planning by not only writing outlines but also by using them when writing to regulate and monitor the whole writing process with some degree of flexibility because textual organization is not engraved in stone. As writers review their outlines when writing, they can edit big portions of their text (Hyland, 2003).

Potential Effects of Constructive Planning on the Writing Performance
Constructive planning, if properly used, may provide for student writers a useful organizational and time management writing tool. Starkey (2004) notices that constructive planning has two salient advantages: to help writers gain a sense of direction in proceeding throughout the writing process; and, secondly, a projection of the writing on readers. Planning constructively will give texts a semantic and linguistic orientation by guaranteeing knowledge of purpose before writing and knowledge of content which hopefully would be satisfying for both the reader (supposedly the teacher) and the writing intention.

Equally important, an "outline gives you a wonderful sense of security" (Board, 2003: 4). Student writers who outline for their texts get less frustrated and know for sure that they are going to finish their texts. Outlining can be also beneficial for writing long texts in the sense that it allows writers to get distant from the text without losing track of their ideas and have always something to get back to, especially if it is a detailed outline (4).

Methodology

Tools of Research
To meet the aforementioned aims, two types of research instruments were used: a questionnaire and a writing pretest/posttest experiment. The questionnaire examines students' attitudes towards planning constructively before drafting. The writing pretest-posttest examines the impact of constructive planning on students' writing quality and demonstrates the utility of knowing the What and How of outlining as a planning strategy.

Subjects
The research population is third year students of English as a foreign language in the Department of Letters and English Language, Constantine 1. From the parent population of 3rd-years, we have selected to work with a group of twenty students. The reasons behind choosing to work with these students are the following:

- They have been studying writing for three years which makes us assume that they are relatively aware of the different stages of the writing process, namely the planning stage.

- They are supposed to write extended essays, not only for their writing classes but also to answer some of their content-area subjects' synthesis essay questions, where the effects of constructive planning can be best observed.

The Students' Questionnaire

Administration of the Questionnaire
The questionnaires were given to twenty third-year students at the Department of Letters and English Language at the University of Constantine 1. This questionnaire was administered to students before the writing test during one of their regular writing

sessions.
Description of the Questionnaire

This questionnaire consists of twelve multiple-choice questions. The first four questions are meant to gather information about students' attitudes toward the writing skill, its different aspects, and their most common writing problems. Then, questions from five to nine investigate students' writing habits vis-à-vis the different stages of the writing process. Finally, the last three questions focus on the planning stage and students' outlining practices.

Table 1*: The Importance Given by Students to the Different Language Skills*

Skills	First Position		Second Position		Third Position		Fourth Position	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Reading	06	**30**	05	**15**	05	**35**	04	**20**
Speaking	07	**35**	04	**20**	07	**25**	02	**20**
Writing	03	**15**	02	**10**	04	**20**	11	**55**
Listening	04	**20**	09	**45**	04	**20**	03	**15**

As seen from the table above, the skill that students regard as most important is speaking. It was the most classified first by respondents with a rate of 35%, followed by listening with 45% and reading with 35%. In the last position is writing with 55%. This latter which is a key variable for the present research has been classified the first by only 15% of our students. Given this rank order, we wanted to know how our students perceive themselves as writers. 80% of students think that they have an average level in writing while 15% of them think that they have a low level. Only 5% believe that they are good writers.

Writing in English demands a wide range of sub skills that writers should give great importance to. Of the total number of respondents, 35% attach great importance to correct grammar in writing, followed by content with 30% and organization of ideas with 20%. The least cited as important by students are vocabulary with 10% and mechanics with 5%. Among the different aspects of writing, 25% of our respondent students think that they have frequent difficulties with the content of their writing; 70% of them claim that they occasionally find vocabulary and the different rules of grammar troublesome, and 65% say that they never had difficulties organizing their ideas.

Table 2: *What Students Do after Reading the Topic they are supposed to write about*

Options	N	%
a) Start writing instantly	01	**05%**
b) Think for a while and gather as much ideas as possible	13	**65%**
c) Write down any idea relevant to the topic/ draft	01	**05%**

d) Make a plan and follow it	05	**25%**
Total	**20**	**100%**

As the table exhibits, the majority of students plan before starting to write. (65%) of students dedicate some of their time brainstorming, followed by 25% who plan constructively. Thankfully, only 5% of students write without planning by starting to write instantly their final product or drafting.

Given the process-based syllabus for Writing followed in the Department of Letters and English Language, 95% of our student respondents confirmed that they are encouraged by their teachers to proceed throughout the different stages of the writing process, and only 5% of then claimed the opposite. Within the different stages of the writing process, the planning stage was deemed challenging by 55% of our surveyed students while the remaining 45% of students think that the composing stage is most problematic. As far the revising and editing stages are concerned, none of our students has troubles with these two stages.

Fortunately, 85% of the students think that outlines can be really helpful in selecting and putting in shape their prewriting notes while only 15% of them think the opposite. The present study investigates not only students' perception towards constructive planning but also their actual practices. The obtained responses reveal that the majority of students (60%) plan constructively before drafting with different frequencies. 45% of students occasionally use outlines when writing; 40% never opted for this constructive planning strategy, and only 15% of them regularly organize their prewriting notes in outlines.

Table 3: *Students' Constructive Planning Habits*

Options	N	%
a) write the outline only to get a sense of the text as a whole, and then abandon it as you write	02	**10 %**
b) keep the outline throughout the entire writing process and modify it as you go along	06	**20%**
c) strictly follow the outline as you write without making any modifications	04	**30%**
Total	**12**	**60%**

Among the 60% of students who plan constructively, 30% of them strictly follow the outline as they write without making any modifications; 20% flexibly use them by respecting their organizational decisions and feel free to recast them whenever needed, and only 10% of the students keep outlines at the beginning of their writing an then forget about them.

Table 4: *Students' justifications for not using outlines*

Options	N	%
a) you don't know how to outline	00	**00%**
b) you don't have time to outline	05	**10%**
c) you think that outlining is a waste of time	01	**05%**
d) you think that outlining limits your discovery of ideas	02	**25%**
Total	**08**	**40%**

Among the 40% of students who never outlined for their essays, 25% of them justify their answers by saying that outlining restrains them from discovering new ideas prompted by the writing process; 10% of them claim that they do not have time for outlining, and only 5% think that the constructive planning strategy is worthless and just a waste of time. Finally, no one of our respondents said that he/she does not know how to outline.

Discussion of the Results

The analysis of the students' questionnaire reveals that students still have the traditional tendency to center their attention on the speaking skill at the expense of the writing skill which is a key variable in the present research. The little importance students attach to the writing skill makes us expect them to be less motivated to improve their writing performance which clearly explains why only 5% of students perceive themselves as good writers.

Logically thinking, what is problematic should be given more importance. When we asked students about their common writing problems, 25% of them answered that they have frequently troubles with the content of their writing and 70% of them claimed that they occasionally find vocabulary and grammar troublesome. This positively correlates with the fact that the majority of students (35%) attach great significance to correct grammar in writing, followed by content with 30%. Poor content organization was regarded as less problematic by 65% of students. Thus, the question to be asked is whether students are really aware of their own writing problems, a question which we intend to answer by examining students' essays in the pretest-posttest experiment.

The fact that only 5% of students, as shown in Table 2, start writing instantly without respecting the different stages of the writing process is really promising and reflects the efforts teachers spend in raising their students' awareness about the writing process. When speaking about the writing process, we find that the students who answered the questionnaire seem to regard the planning (55%) and drafting (45%) stages as the most difficult. This finding is reasonable since the planning stage is the stage where students work out what ideas to communicate and how to articulate them, and the drafting stage is the actual act of writing where students put their planning decisions into practice.

Despite the fact that 85% of our respondents think that outlines can be really helpful in selecting and putting in shape their prewriting notes, *only* 15% of them regularly organize their prewriting notes in outlines. The reason behind students' reluctance can be traced back to the fact 30% of students, as shown in Table 3, strictly follow the outline as they write without making

any modifications which would, according to Hedge (2005), restrain student writers' discovery of ideas, and make them feel unwilling to opt for this planning strategy all together as demonstrated in Table 4.

In effect, among students who actually plan constructively, regularly and occasionally, 50% of them (Table 3) write *from* their outlines and respect their organizational decisions throughout the entire writing process, which allows us to think that they are *metacognitively* aware of this strategy and its benefits. Students who put their prewriting notes in organizational frameworks and then follow them throughout the writing of their essays are not only aware of the operative nature of the constructive planning strategy but also of its executive functioning.

Description of the Writing Pretest- Posttest Experiment

The purpose of this pretest/posttest, which took place at the end of students' three-year training, is to see the impact of constructive planning on students' writing performance. This test took place in three regular writing sessions which our sample attended. Since it is a pretest/posttest experiment, we had to make sure that our sample attended all these three sessions in order to examine their performances comparatively under the two different experimental conditions.

During the pretest, our third-year subjects were asked to write an essay, say of about five to six paragraphs, without giving them any hints about the experiments' aims, on one of the following topics: **the inconveniences of watching television** and **the benefits of planting trees in dry areas**. We have suggested these topics for the following reasons:

- This kind of topics is, often, dealt with in writing classes.
- They require an expository type of writing which "includes personal observations, knowledge, and experiences" that might make students feel comfortable to write about (Starkey, 2004: 86). We expected students to list either *the advantages of planting trees in dry areas* or *the inconveniences of watching television* from the most to the least important in separate paragraphs (deductive and inductive reasoning), or vice versa.

Given the fact that the outlining strategy was already taught and practiced with our students, something that we made sure of, our instruction was more like a revision session were we tried to raise our students' awareness of the importance of constructive planning in achieving good textual organization and its impact on the quality of their writing. We reminded the students about the constructive planning strategy starting by telling them what outlines are all about, their different types and uses, when they can use them, and how they can benefit from them. It is important to note that the instruction was followed by a classroom practice where the students and the researcher tried to generate ideas and organize the prewriting notes in a careful outline about the benefits of running.

Finally, on the posttest day, students were asked to write another essay on the same topic they have written about on the day of the pretest, but the only difference this time is that we asked them to keep an outline for their essays. Throughout this entire process, the researcher was walking around observing students' writing practices and taking notes about who was and was not using outlining as a planning constructive strategy.

After collecting the students' essays of both the pretest and the posttest, we analyzed them by only considering the organization of their ideas and without any consideration of the

grammar mistakes, poor content, or vocabulary. We analyzed students' textual organization at the level of the text as a whole and the level of its constituent paragraphs by checking how the different sentences cohere logically without any repetitions or contradictions, and how these different paragraphs are tightly organized to serve the general thesis of the essay. In other words, we have checked how the thesis statements of each essay, together with the topic sentences correspond to the supporting details and bring about an effective organization pattern.

Description of the Results

Pretest Results

In order to create a baseline, we examined the general characteristics of students' organization of ideas under the pretest conditions. Of the total number of subjects, 70% of students displayed ineffective textual organization where ideas did not seem to flow logically; only 30% showed tighter organization of ideas.

Posttest Results

When we assigned the post-test writing task and asked students to keep outlines for their essays, we did not specify the type of outlines, but we asked them to opt for the type that they generally use when planning constructively- if ever- and would be more helpful for them. It is interesting to note that 60% of students opted for formal outlines and only 40% used scratch outlines.

Classroom observation allowed the researcher to signal students who wrote their outlines from their drafts and those who wrote outlines to put in shape their prewriting notes. The largest number of respondents, 80% of interest in the present study, used outlines as a constructive planning strategy, and only 20% of them outlined after drafting. Also, among students who used outlines as a planning strategy, 55% wrote their essays *from* the outlines. In other words, outlines' organizational decisions were respected and applied by students when writing the essays. However, 25% of our students abandoned the outlines when they started writing their essays. Of the total number of subjects who planned constructively and wrote from their outlines (N=11), 40% of them displayed a better content organization comparing to their pretest performance, and 15% did not show any improvement in arranging their ideas.

Discussion of the Results

One of the key factors to an effective piece of writing is good textual organization. If ideas are randomly displayed in texts, meaning becomes obscure and the writing purpose is lost. When we decided on students' organization quality, we did not only consider the macrostructure of the essay but also the patterns used in its constituent paragraphs, i.e. the microstructures. What we considered in our analysis essays of a good textual organization displayed the following general characteristics:

- Ideas organized around the basic essay shape of introduction, development, and conclusion;

- The global organization answered "the assertion support structure" where every main idea should be supported with enough details and examples (Chesla, 2006: 49);
- Indented paragraphs;
- The thesis statement clearly indicates what the writer intents to develop in the paragraphs;
- Topic sentences are written in relation to the thesis statement and reflect the general goal of the essay;
- The ideas in the paragraphs are arranged in an effective pattern where all the sentences flow logically without any repeated or irrelevant information;
- The most effective way to organize an expository essay is by order of importance (Smith.2003);
- Given the fact that organizational patterns are also relevant to paragraphs, we considered the paragraphs organized using order of importance or cause-and-effect as well organized paragraphs;
- The concluding paragraph must clearly restate the major points discussed in the essay.

In the pretest, only 30% of the tested students wrote essays which met the aforementioned requirements, and 70% of them were unsuccessful in building adequate organization patterns. Most students' organizational troubles were at the level of paragraphs and not in organizing content around the introduction, body, and conclusion pattern.

Given that the students who answered the questionnaire are the same students who underwent the prettest-posttest experiment, it was possible for us to draw inferences from the questionnaire. Despite the fact that 65% of our students claimed that they do not have problems with content organization, only 30% displayed a relatively good textual organization. In light of these findings, we can trace students' serious problem organizing their content back to the fact that students do not really know what a good essay structure is and its significance in achieving effective writing since only 20% of them gave importance to this particular writing aspect.

In the aim of improving students' content organization, we asked students to keep outlines for their essays in the posttest. What we find interesting is in spite of the sophisticated nature of formal outlines and the time required to write them, 60% of students opted for this detailed type of outlines- where they gave complete sentences to all entries. Given that we requested students to use the constructive planning strategy, it was expected to find students who write outlines just for perfunctory purposes. 20% of students outlined after finishing their drafts which we do not think they used them to revise their content organization but out of obligation.

Since we are investigating the impact of outlining as a planning strategy on students' textual organization, we needed to refine the number of students who did not only write outlines before drafting but also who wrote their essays *from* the outlines. Among the 80% of students who used outlines as a planning strategy, 25% of them did not follow outlines' organizational decisions. Taking into consideration the fact that 10% of our students when asked about their outlining habits, claimed that they write outlines only to get a sense of the text as a whole and then abandon them as they write (see Table 3), and considering also the fact that students might have written the outlines as a matter of duty -explains why not all students followed their outlines.

By emphasizing the need to differentiate between students who wrote from the outlines and those who abandoned them, we wanted to highlight the utility of constructive planning as both a cognitive and a metacognitive strategy. When the 25% of students arranged their prewriting notes in outlines regardless of the quality of the ideas and the outlines themselves,

they only made a cognitive use of this strategy. However, when the 55% of students structured their ideas in patterns and then followed the outline guidelines, they metacognitively ensured a better application of this strategy. In other words, when student writers group their ideas under particular headings and label them and then respect their arrangement of ideas, the operative and executive functions of this strategy are secured.

Among the 55% of students who met the adequate requirements for testing the impact of the constructive planning strategy, the majority (40%) showed remarkable signs of improvement in their textual organization. The results obtained from comparing students' pretest and posttest textual organization demonstrates that if student writers bridge the gap between the cognitive and metacognitive functioning of constructive planning by writing outlines, respecting their organization decisions and getting back to them as a way of monitoring the writing development, they will not only achieve better textual organizations but also better overall writing performances.

Conclusion

From what we have seen, writing is a complex activity that requires from learners to have knowledge about the different features of writing. Whether writers write for themselves or for others, writing is conceptualized as a very important social, cultural, cognitive, and recursive process that involves many stages rather than a product of correct language structures. Constructive planning was highlighted in this paper as a strategy that students can use to ensure a better textual organization and therefore a more effective writing.

This paper has been concerned with demonstrating a connection between the two variables of this research, namely, the adequate use of the constructive planning strategy and students' writing performance. The results yielded enabled us to conclude that there is a gap between the What and the How of outlining. Despite the fact that students know what constructive planning is, they fail to follow through and execute the strategy. The effect of outlining was best seen when students made a cognitive and metacognitive use of the strategy by keeping outlines for their essays and writing from them which did not only result in a more logical organization of ideas but also in a better overall writing quality. Therefore, this outlining strategy should be incorporated in writing instructions given its plausible effects in making students' writing more effective.

In the light of our findings, we recommend the following:

- Teachers of Writing should encourage their students to start writing beyond the word and sentence level and focus more on arranging their content in structured patterns that best fit the various types of writing.
- Teachers need to urge their students to spend more time planning, specifically outlining, in order for students to produce more meaningful papers.
- Teachers need also to promote the proper cognitive and metacognitive use of writing strategies for better results.

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