



Pre-Task Planning in L2 Writing: Pedagogical Benefits and Practical Concerns

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While previous pre-task planning (PTP) studies tended to adopt a quantitative method (testing, survey), examining its effects on linguistic measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity, qualitative studies that explored students' perceptions of PTP in practicing L2 writing have been scarce. In an attempt to bridge this gap, this qualitative study, including students' essays, their reflections, and semi-interviews, was adopted for data collection. A total of three EFL college Vietnamese students were qualified to collect data for in-depth analysis. The findings show that students of various levels of English all have positive perceptions of PTP, which helps them reduce cognitive demand and manage time while writing. In addition, PTP has a measurable influence on the quality of writing with regard to higher-level writing skills (content, organization of ideas) in general. For example, students provide relevant information and develop ideas with specific examples in their written performance. It should be noted, however, that composition teachers should consider providing students with explicit instructions and training on how to do PTP appropriately. Students will then know how to apply PTP effectively to their writing practice based on their learning styles. These pedagogical benefits and practical concerns are discussed.

Trong khi các nghiên cứu về lập kế hoạch dàn ý trước đây có xu hướng áp dụng phương pháp định lượng (kiểm tra, khảo sát), để kiểm tra tính hiệu quả của nó đối với độ trôi chảy, độ chính xác, và độ phức tạp của văn bản, thì vẫn còn rất ít các nghiên cứu định tính khám phá nhận thức của học sinh về lập kế hoạch dàn ý trong luyện viết. Trong nỗ lực thu hẹp khoảng cách này, nghiên cứu định tính này, bao gồm các bài viết của sinh viên, phản ánh của họ, và các cuộc phỏng vấn sâu, đã được áp dụng để thu thập dữ liệu. Tổng cộng có ba sinh viên Việt Nam đủ tiêu chuẩn để thu thập dữ liệu cho phân tích chuyên sâu. Kết quả cho thấy học sinh ở các trình độ tiếng Anh khác nhau đều có nhận thức tích cực về lập kế hoạch dàn ý, giúp họ giảm nhu cầu nhận thức và quản lý thời gian trong khi viết. Ngoài ra, lập kế hoạch dàn ý có ảnh hưởng tích cực đối với kỹ năng viết cấp cao (nội dung, tổ chức ý tưởng) nói chung. Ví dụ, học sinh cung cấp thông tin liên quan với đề tài và phát triển ý tưởng bằng các ví dụ cụ thể trong văn bản. Tuy nhiên, giáo viên ngôn ngữ nên cung cấp cho học sinh những hướng dẫn cụ thể về việc lập dàn ý. Từ đó sinh viên sẽ áp dụng sao cho phù hợp với từng phong cách học của mỗi em. Những lợi ích sư phạm và mối quan tâm thực tế về lập kế hoạch dàn ý này được thảo luận.

Keywords: pre-task planning, EFL Vietnamese students, pedagogical benefits, practical concerns

Introduction

Writing is considered one of the most challenging skills that requires cognitive and linguistic strategies throughout a variety of stages and practices (Alkhatib, 2021; De Smet et al., 2011; Do, 2023b; Kellogg, 2008;



Nguyen, 2021; Rao, 2007). In Vietnam, however, popular traditional teaching focuses on a product-based approach (Cao, 2018; Tomlinson & Bao, 2004; Tonogbanua, 2018), which may lead to the popular phenomenon that students mainly learn for the purpose of taking exams. This is a result of some pupils memorizing sample writing texts before exams (Nguyen, 2021) and depending on teachers for their learning (Tonogbanua, 2018). In this case, students may find it hard to compose on different topics and genres because they lack experience in practice writing (Do, 2023b). Considering this problem among learners, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has encouraged teachers to implement different teaching instructions focusing on meaning and process-based approaches to help students improve their L2 writing skills and increase their writing competence. Thus, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is one of the teaching approaches encouraged (Duong & Nguyen, 2021). Accordingly, three tasks, including pre-task, task completion, and task review, are the main tasks of the TBLT writing class (Christison & Murray, 2014).

Pre-task planning (PTP) or strategic planning, in particular, which refers to "the planning stage before students start writing" (Ellis, 2022, p. 77), has gained a lot of traction in teaching L2 writing (Tabari, 2021) because it has been viewed as an important process of written production (Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Johnson et al., 2012). According to Kellogg's (1996) model of writing processes (formulation, execution, and monitoring), planning belongs to the formulation. In this step, students can either plan the content and language that they need to produce in the task performance or do some rehearsal practice before they start writing (Ellis, 2005). For example, *idea generation* is a list of ideas or information presented in order that writers will use for their written production (Joaquin et al., 2016; Walvoord et al., 1995); *clustering* is a "visual network and relation among ideas" (Kellogg, 1990, p. 329), where writers can draw circles around ideas and link related ideas together to show connections between them; and *free writing* is writing without structure. These planning strategies aid students in overcoming their writing anxiety whenever they start to write (Huang et al., 2021), which is considered a daunting prospect for all writers (Hyland, 2019).

Although PTP has been conducted for decades and has been confirmed to be effective on linguistic measures of product outcomes, studies exploring students' views on the use of PTP (how it affects students' writing performance during the writing process and what concerns students have with this learning strategy) seem modest in numbers. In addition, the effectiveness of PTP has been confirmed differently depending on the circumstances of a given area (teaching context, genre knowledge, and students' backgrounds) (Ellis, 2022; Leeming, 2020; Johnson, 2012), and students with different learning styles may refer to different prewriting strategies (De Smet et al., 2011). Considering this knowledge, this study aims to explore Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of PTP used for practicing L2 writing with the hope of providing EFL language teachers and students with pedagogical implications of PTP in teaching and learning L2 writing.

Research Question: What are students' perceptions of pre-task planning in L2 academic writing?

Literature Review: PTP Research

Over the years, PTP has been conducted in different contexts, which shows a number of similar and divergent results. Accordingly, PTP has a positive effect on the quality of the writing produced (Bui & Le, 2018; Choe et al., 2022; Hashempour et al., 2015; Joaquin et al., 2016; Kellogg, 1988; Kieft et al., 2011; Nguyen et al., 2018; Rao, 2007). In particular, PTP helps students improve their written fluency (Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Ojima, 2006; Tabari, 2016, 2021; Rostamian et al., 2018), reduce mental effort while writing (De Smet et al., 2011; Rostamian et al., 2018), and transfer the ideas into texts faster and smoother (Tabari, 2021; Rostamian et al., 2018). Nevertheless, PTP seems not to be effective on accuracy (Ojima, 2006; Tabari, 2016) and lexical complexity (Johnson et al., 2012; Tabari, 2016).

The majority of researchers indicated that PTP is advantageous in terms of the quality of writing produced in general. Rao (2007) discovered the measurable influence of the instruction brainstorming on Chinese students' writing performance. The results from pre- and post-tests and an attitudinal survey show that brainstorming promotes students' thought processes and empowers them to generate concepts and arrange raw materials logically. In the EFL Iranian context, similarly, Hashempour et al. (2015) investigated the effects of brainstorming strategy on students' writing performance. The quantitative results show that the fundamental pre-writing strategies significantly increase students' application of strategies to deal with writing challenges. Based on this finding, the researchers recommended that teachers should teach students a variety of pre-writing strategies in order to help them become strategic writers. The researchers suggested future researchers examine the effects of other writing strategies such as clustering and word mapping on learners at different levels of proficiency and educational backgrounds. PTP also has positive effects on Korean EFL learners' performance in integrated summary writing (reading and summarizing source texts) (Choe et al., 2022). The researchers suggested language teachers provide enough pre-task planning time for students to do the summary writing task effectively, which prevents students from taking words and phrases from the source texts. In the Vietnamese context, Bui and Le (2018) found that depicting is an effective tool for low-proficiency learners to generate ideas, and outlining is helpful to organize ideas. One-third of the students favored depicting, whereas fifty percent favored outlining. Meanwhile, in another aspect of PTP, Nguyen et al. (2018) showed evidence of the positive effects of pre-writing tasks of free writing and group discussion on the productivity and quality of students' argumentative writing texts. In the same vein, Joaquin et al. (2016), Kellogg (1988), and Kieft et al. (2011) all supported the idea that pre-writing, or preparing the outline, is a critical and important phase that enables the creation of a well-written paper. Students performed better when they used prewriting strategies than those who did not.

Moving to the specific effect of PTP on fluency, Ojima (2006) and Rostamian et al. (2018) indicated that pre-task planning helps students produce more words over a period of time. Ellis and Yuan (2004) found that Chinese students' writing fluency improved as a result of pre-task planning, which is beneficial for the formulation and execution steps of the writing process. Meanwhile, students found it challenging to write without planning, which had no impact on fluency. Thus, PTP improves students' writing quantity, which increases their confidence regarding their writing ability. In the same context, Tabari (2021) found that written and oral planning promote Chinese students' writing fluency, and both planning modes direct students' attention to content, complexity, and organization while writing argumentative writing tasks. When students were assigned unfamiliar topics, they utilized pre-task planning to come up with content-specific details, create semantic representations using their linguistic knowledge, and logically arrange ideas during the planning process. In the Iranian context, Tabari (2016) found that greater fluency is the outcome of pre-task planning. Johnson et al. (2012) also indicated that the planning of idea generation, organization, and goal setting has a slight impact on writing fluency in the Spanish classroom setting.

Aside from the benefit of fluency, PTP reduces mental demand while writing. De Smet et al. (2011) demonstrated the effects of electronic outlining on Dutch students' argumentative writing performance and the benefits of outlining instruction in helping students understand its working and reducing mental effort. Rostamian et al. (2018) also emphasized that pre-planning reduces non-planning processes during writing time. Last but not least, Tabari (2021) and Rostamian et al. (2018) argued that PTP assists writers in more smoothly translating their ideas into text and transferring the content in subsequent writing performance. As a result, pre-task planning is more favorable in L2 writing than no-task planning.

Despite the benefits mentioned above, PTP appears to be ineffective in terms of accuracy and complexity in some cases. Ojima (2006) and Tabari (2021), for instance, found that PTP has no impact on accuracy, which means that it does not aid students in minimizing grammatical and lexical errors. In addition, Johnson et al. (2012) and Tabari (2021) did not find any positive effect of PTP on lexical and syntactic complexity in their findings. These findings were explained by the reasons for different educational backgrounds, educational

experiences, planning conditions, and writing genres (Ellis, 2021; Johnson et al., 2012). For example, participants in Johnson et al.'s (2012) study spoke Spanish as their first language, and the genre of their writing was narrative, which is different from the Japanese and Iranian students in Ojima's (2006) and Tabari's (2021) studies, respectively.

It is recognized that the majority of previous PTP studies in various EFL contexts applied the quantitative method (testing on students' writing texts and surveys) to examine the effects of PTP in L2 writing in general (Bui & Le, 2018; Hashempour et al., 2015; Joaquin et al., 2016; Kellogg, 1988; Kieft et al., 2011; Nguyen et al., 2018; Rao, 2007) and on linguistic measures as the product outcomes in particular (Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Ojima, 2006; Tabari, 2016, 2021; Rostamian et al., 2018). Meanwhile, there is insufficient qualitative research in EFL contexts that has attempted to explore students' emotional experiences and perceptions about using PTP as a process-based approach, analyzed in parallel with their written performance. To bridge this research gap, the current study purports to provide deeper insights into students' perceptions of PTP as well as problems or concerns that they have regarding PTP, which are authentically illustrated through the writing process.

Methodology

Participants

A total of eight college students (at low-intermediate, intermediate, and high-intermediate levels) participated in this project. The consent statements were obtained before the project started, including the purposes of the project, the project procedures, voluntary participations, and the researcher's contact information. Importantly, students were informed that their names would be anonymized in this study and that there were no risks associated with the project. There were three students (Hoang, Sau, and Hang, all pseudonyms) who completed all the required assignments (written texts and reflections) and attended all classes during the project. Therefore, the data from these three students was qualified to be collected for in-depth analysis. They were then invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews. At the time of data collection, they were third-year students in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, majoring in English language and studying in different classes. Of note is that they have completed all four writing courses, from Writing I to Writing IV. In other words, at the English program, they all learned about writing paragraphs and essays with different composition teachers. As for the English backgrounds of the three participants, Hoang has good English and is confident in using English for communication because he has been studying English for 11 years and has lived abroad for 5 years. Meanwhile, the time period for learning English for Sau and Hang is shorter (9 and 7 years, respectively), and they have no experience studying, living, or traveling abroad. They are studious students (comments from their supervisors) who are studying English as their goal is to become English teachers for kids at churches. Regarding their English proficiency, these students perceived themselves (based on the demographic survey) as low-intermediate (IELTS – 4.0), intermediate (IELTS – 5.5), and high-intermediate (IELTS – 6.5), which matches their supervisors' evaluations. Table 1 below presents detailed information about these three participants.

TABLE 1

Background Information of the Three Participants

Students	Age	Class	Gender	Self-perception of English proficiency	Abroad experience
Hoang	29	A	Male	High-intermediate	Yes - Philippines, Sri Lanka
Sau	27	B	Female	Intermediate	No
Hang	28	C	Female	Low-intermediate	No

Instruments

To answer the research question, I collected data from students' written texts, reflections, and semi-structured interviews, which support the qualitative research method of the current study. It is important to keep in mind that students joined the class via Zoom and showed their faces during the class time. Table 2 presents an overview of the process, followed by detailed descriptions of each instrument of data collection.

TABLE 2
Calendar of the Project

Date	Activities	Mode	Assignment	Deadline
Oct 15. 2022	Introduce the project (Purposes, objectives, timelines) Consent form and demographic survey	Zoom	Writing 1 (No planning) Reflection 1	Oct 21. 2022
Oct 22. 2022	Training on how to plan (Language use is English) Part 1: Theory introduction (Listing keywords and synonyms; generating ideas; selecting and organizing ideas; determining essay structure) Part 2: Practice (Detail in Appendix C)	Zoom	Writing 2 (Planning) Reflection 2	Oct 28. 2022
Oct 28. 2022	Interview - Hoang	Zoom	No	No
Oct 29. 2022	Interview - Hang, Sau			

Writing tasks

Students were asked to write two short essays (around 300 - 350 words) (one without planning for the first week and another with planning for the second week). They shared their essays written on Google Docs with me after finishing the drafts. Of note is that I did not provide feedback to students in order not to affect their written performance between the two weeks. According to the suggestion of Bui and Le (2018), however, I provided a writing rubric (Appendix A), instructions and training (Appendix C) before asking students to write with planning in the second week. The writing topic is related to social media, which is popular with all of them. Also, argumentative writing was chosen because it demands more mental effort than writing narrative and descriptive texts (Weigle, 2002). The two argumentative writing tasks adapted from the IELTS writing samples were chosen:

First writing: "The use of social media is replacing face-to-face interaction among many people in society. Do you think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?"

Second writing: "Social networking sites (Facebook, TikTok) have had a huge negative impact on both individuals and society. To what extent do you agree?"

Reflections

There are two reflections that students wrote after they finished each round of writing. Some questions were provided (Appendix B) for students to write reflections. The primary goal of the reflections is to learn how students experienced writing during the writing process, with and without planning. Students were free to write in whichever L1 (Vietnamese) or L2 (English) they felt most comfortable with. As a result, Hoang and Hang used English, while Sau used Vietnamese to write their reflections. These reflections were written under their drafts.

Semi-structured interviews

The major purpose of the interviews is to ask students about their perceptions of pre-task planning (the differences between no planning and planning, and how it affects their writing performance). Based on their written reflections, I asked for more details in the interviews to elicit in-depth information. Accordingly, I asked questions about what they shared in the reflections to ensure everything was clear. For example, one of the participants shared that she felt confident in Writing 2, so I inquired as to why. Besides, I asked questions if any interesting things came up during the interviews. Participants said, for instance, that they were aware of PTP but that they had not used it frequently before. I inquired about the cause of the issue after receiving this response. The three participants joined the classes regularly and finished all the writing tasks and reflections, so they shared a lot of valuable information in the interviews, especially Hang (low-intermediate), and they seemed to be happy and excited to share their responses. I utilized L1 (Vietnamese) to allow students to express their answers openly and naturally. The time schedule for the interviews was negotiated with participants beforehand. All the interviews were recorded and saved as audio files. It is important to keep in mind that students' responses were transcribed and then translated from Vietnamese to English. Accordingly, I tried to remain original as much as possible by translating closely from Vietnamese to English. I also kept some English words used by students in the interviews, and those words were kept original and underlined in the excerpts. Another important point is the significant difference in the number of words transcribed and translated (table 3). This is because I did not translate repeated opinions. In addition, Hoang's and Hang's interview times appear to be close (around 32 minutes), but the words transcribed are different (643–1062). This is because Hang was eager to share her PTP experiences, so I did not ask much during the interview and let her freely share her opinions. As a result, Hang's interview had more words transcribed. Table 3 below presents detailed information about the interviews, transcription, and translation.

TABLE 3
Interview Information

Participants	Date	Mode	Time (min)	Words transcribed (Vietnamese)	Words translated (English)
Hoang	Oct 28, 2022	Zoom	32.28	643	467
Sau	Oct 29, 2022	Zoom	22.44	666	425
Hang	Oct 29, 2022	Zoom	32.36	1062	801

Data Analysis

After having the data from students' reflections and interviews, I selected and categorized the data by relevant themes associated with the students' perceptions of PTP (the impacts of PTP on students' written performances and practical concerns about PTP). In case all the participants had the same comment, I chose one of them to represent all the opinions. I also did not select all the students' reflections because some excerpts provided in this article contained their reflections. All these responses were analyzed and supported by the students' written papers from writing one and writing two, which were collected with their consent. In other words, the impacts of using PTP in practicing L2 writing as reflected (reflections) or shared (interviews) by students would be analyzed with their written performances. Thus, I looked closely at the students' written papers to see the connections between the students' reflections and their essays. It is worth knowing that this study mainly focuses on students' perceptions of PTP, which were analyzed in parallel with their writing performance regarding content and organization in general, as opposed to the previous studies' goal of examining the effects of PTP on linguistic measures of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Thus, the rubric developed by Weigle (2002) regarding content and organization (Appendix A) was adapted to help me evaluate students' written

performance and analyze the difference between students' papers written with and without planning. The rubric also helps me categorize and name the effects of PTP as reported by students. For instance, if students talk about the connections between sentences or ideas, then I will categorize these responses under the theme of organization.

Findings and Discussion

Pedagogical Benefits of PTP in L2 Writing

The three students in this study have positive perceptions of PTP, which helps them reduce cognitive demand and manage time while writing. It also has a measurable influence on their writing performance in terms of content development and organization. In particular, PTP assists them in avoiding irrelevant information and writing off topics, as well as developing and including specific facts or examples. As a result, students become more confident when they plan before writing: *"Now I want to improve my writing skills, so I really like this strategy. Since I know my English ability, I can communicate with native speakers; however, I am sure my writing skills will be improved if I do PTP."* (Hoang – high-intermediate; reflection).

First and foremost, pre-task planning decreases cognitive demand during writing. Without planning, students frequently rethink all of their ideas while writing. According to Ellis and Yuan (2004), Joaquin (2016), Kellogg (1988), and Rostamian et al. (2018), if writers develop an outline before they start to write, they could be able to concentrate on their writing and reduce cognitive demands while writing. In other words, determining and organizing ideas logically before starting to write makes writing flow more smoothly and reduces revisions. Indeed, when Sau (intermediate) wrote about the negative impacts of social media on individuals and society, she divided her main essay into two main body paragraphs: one about individuals and another about society. Each body has two main ideas, and each idea is supported by a specific example. Then she just focused on transferring ideas from the outline to the text while writing. It is clear to note that this second essay is more coherent and well-organized compared to her first essay, which lacked preparation. In light of the findings of Ellis and Yuan's (2004) and Tabari's (2021) studies, planning helps EFL Chinese students in these studies transfer the content smoother where content is outlined, leading to better written performance. In particular, Ellis and Yuan (2004) stated that "pre-task planners produced fewer false starts and self-corrections" (p. 78).

When I outline my ideas, I can consider more ideas, and it makes my brain work and think more logically. When I write with planning, I don't need to rethink whether this idea should be written or not or where to put it because the ideas have been decided before I start writing, so I don't have to write and think about the organization at the same time. I feel more confident when I learn how to plan and then write more comfortably without thinking too much, compared to the first time I wrote without planning. [Sau - intermediate; interview]

Second, planning beforehand enables students to manage their writing within a constraint time. Hang (low-intermediate) admitted that she had to eliminate a few small ideas in order to adhere to the timeline. When she first outlined the ideas, she had two main ideas, and each idea had three small ideas. However, she realized that she could not write all of them in 40 minutes, so she decided to delete one small idea for each main idea. Finally, she has a total of four small ideas that support two big ideas instead of six. In the same vein, Chinese students in Ellis and Yuan's (2004) study could handle the writing task easily with PTP, which helps them write more quickly.

In the second essay with planning, for each big idea, I have three small supporting ideas, but I think if I write all of them in 40 minutes, it will be very long and I won't have time to write it down, so I decided to drop one small idea. Also, when I look at the outline, I see that the first idea is done, and I will move on to the second, which means it's very clear and easy to visualize. It helps me not to go over the writing time. [Hang - low-intermediate; interview]

Third, PTP assists pupils with concentrating on the writing topic and providing relevant information. This benefit can be seen clearly in the case of Hang (low-intermediate). Regarding the writing topic, she seemed not to pay attention to it in her first writing without PTP (social media with regard to face-to-face interaction). Instead, she discussed the advantages and disadvantages of social media in general. After joining the training about PTP and practicing with some strategies (listing, outlining, clustering ideas), she appeared to realize this problem in her first writing and began concentrating on it in her second writing. Accordingly, the second writing topic asks about the negative impact of social media on both individuals and society. She neglected to mention the aspect of society. When she looked back at the key words she had underlined, she recognized that she had forgotten to outline the side of society, and she immediately added this to her outline. In Tabari's (2021) study, a Chinese student had a similar experience to Hang, in which the student pointed out three broad ideas from the key words and added detailed ideas to support the main ideas.

When I was trained on PTP, especially how to underline key words in the writing topic, it helped me focus on the topic: Know what the topic is about and what the main question of the topic is. When I finished the outline, I looked at the writing question again and found that I was missing an idea according to the requirements of the writing question, so I added it right away in the outline and omitted unnecessary ideas. From those keywords, I have two big ideas in the outline, and from there, I draw small ideas. [Hang - low-intermediate; interview]

Considering the consistency of the ideas, Hang's ideas expressed in the first writing are not relevant to each other, which leads to some confusion. Look at this example: "Today, we are familiar with using the internet to study and work. There are millions of people who use smartphones and computers to solve their issues or more, like relaxing and shopping... especially, during the pandemic, we need to quarantine." Based on her first sentence, readers may expect to see how the Internet helps people in terms of study and work. However, she talked about relaxing and shopping in the next sentence, which makes all her sentences inconsistent. She confirmed this problem in the interview:

The first paper, which I wrote without planning, was vague and unclear. I think I understand what I wrote, but other people may not. I did not outline or do any PTP, so when I wrote, I didn't pay attention to what I needed to focus on, and I found it a bit confusing with ideas and my arguments. I definitely didn't know which ideas I should arrange first and which ones to arrange later. [Hang - low-intermediate; interview]

Not only does Hang have this problem, but Sau (intermediate) also has trouble arranging ideas in appropriate places. For instance, the idea of "depression" in her first paragraph should be moved to the second paragraph when talking about "health problems". It can be recognized that unplanned writing left pupils struggling to organize their ideas before writing (Neumann & McDonough, 2015). After joining the training about PTP and practicing with this strategy in the second week, Hang (low-intermediate) and Sau (intermediate) appeared to write more effectively about this issue. This is an example from Hang's second paper: "In society, we easily enter virtual life. Nowadays, many people like to share all things in life on facebook or tiktok. We can easily become connected with people, so we can talk, share, comment, and debate with another person that they do not know about us." Although it is not the best, she now focuses on her main idea. She mentions how people

can "easily enter virtual life," then goes on to describe Facebook and Tiktok and what people do on those platforms. At least she continued to work on that idea, which is different from her first writing. Similarly, in Sau's second paper, all her ideas are arranged appropriately, as opposed to her earlier writing, which she did without planning. In line with the results found by Rao (2007), that planning strategy helps Chinese students in his study create ideas and organize them logically. This experience confirms that PTP can aid writers in gathering thoughts and structuring them into cohesive texts (Do, 2023a; Ellis, 2022).

Last but not least, students know how to develop ideas from general to specific and include specific examples based on pre-task planning. Hoang (high-intermediate) emphasizes this benefit in the interview:

Planning helps me know what I have to write in each paragraph and what examples I should use to support those ideas. I have to determine what the main ideas and the detailed ideas are. Sometimes I choose ideas that are too small to develop. So, I have to think of a broad idea first, then develop it and provide examples.
[Hoang – high-intermediate; interview] [Underlined words are original]

This comment can be seen clearly in his first unplanned writing. In contrast to Hang's first writing, he concentrated on one idea in a paragraph, yet his idea remained stable. In other words, he did not develop the idea and provide specific examples to support his main idea. For example, "social media is a way for us to seek relaxation and entertainment. There are a lot of useful and meaningful websites which we can make use of for lessening our pressure and updating what happens every day." He stopped here and moved on to another paragraph. It would be preferable if he provided a detailed example here to shed light on his idea. Surprisingly, he planned it out and did it in his second essay with planning: "People are unaware of the fake news on social media and thus they are at risk making wrong decisions or judgments. For example, a photo declaring that Cristiano Ronaldo would come to Vietnam in 2023 on a Facebook page. The rumor went viral, and it caused Cristiano Ronaldo's fans to eagerly wait for his coming, but it was actually a rumor." To bolster his argument, he provided a Facebook example of fake news about Cristiano Ronaldo's arrival. This result parallels that of the Japanese student (Chie) in Ojima's (2006) study, who found PTP helpful for organization (topic sentence, examples, conclusion). As Chie mentioned, the concept mapping helped her generate ideas for writing, which she could visualize ideas on a piece of paper.

Practical Concerns of PTP in L2 Writing

Lack of practice and in-depth planning instructions

The three participants in this study all had positive attitudes toward PTP after joining the project. Surprisingly, they seemed to not use PTP frequently before. This leads to a concern as to why this planning strategy was not commonly used by students. In fact, they had previously heard of and known about PTP, but their teachers had only briefly introduced it in writing classrooms. In other words, teachers introduced the strategy of planning to them without giving any practice and in-depth instructions. This reality demonstrates the statement of Tompkins (2001) that pre-writing planning is the stage that gets the least attention. To be specific, Johnson (2014) indicated that teachers seemed to neglect to teach students PTP, which has been viewed as a crucial step in the writing process. This echoes the statement of Hinkel (2015), who stated that "most L2 writers have probably never heard of making an essay outline or have never been taught how to do it, unless it was incidentally included as a side-note in their writing textbooks without much instruction" (p. 264). Although students in this study could outline ideas, they had trouble clustering and organizing them, which was also found by Bui and Le (2018) with their Vietnamese participants. This problem diminished their motivation to practice writing with planning, so students chose not to plan before they started to write essays. In light of the results found by Ojima

(2006), the three Japanese students who participated in the study struggled to create maps, which might prevent them from using this strategy throughout their actual writing practice. Hence, one of the factors influencing students' decisions to use or not use PTP is how familiar they are with planning strategies. This concern is described by the students as follows:

In the past, some teachers introduced this strategy in a sketchy way (it was just theory), and there was no in-depth guidance, direction, or practice for me to understand, apply, and develop... Means that little concern about the obstacles faced by students when using this strategy. Sometimes I have a hard time drawing the tree. Actually, I've learned about this skill before, but I haven't practiced it much. When I was learning about writing essays in my second year, the teachers gave us writing topics and asked us to write about them without guiding the pre-planning skills or providing any writing strategies for us to practice. Instead, they corrected grammatical errors. [Hoang – high-intermediate; interview]

I don't do it often because it's difficult and we don't have experience practicing this skill. Most of my previous teachers did not teach this skill. They gave us writing topics and asked us to write them and hand them in. There was a teacher who introduced this skill, but he did not ask us to do or practice it. [Sau – intermediate; interview]

I hadn't had that experience before (she meant PTP experience), so when I wrote it, I found it dreamy and confusing with all the ideas that were linked to each other, so I wrote in a very messy way. [Hang – low-intermediate; interview]

Indeed, the three students who joined the training said that they learned how to group the ideas into one section and create a thesis statement for all those ideas, which makes their essay more organized. Therefore, these students wanted to experience this strategy and do it effectively rather than simply know it as a theory. As Thorne (1993) discussed, the very first stages of writing are the most challenging for many writers, so prewriting is the most crucial ability to emphasize and practice frequently in writing classes. Likewise, Ellis (2022) suggested that teachers should consequently consider offering planning instruction to all students. In one class, in fact, while some students are able to know how to plan, others may lack prior experience or be unskilled planners like the three students in this study and the Japanese in Ojima's (2006) study. In particular, Tabari (2021) emphasized that language teachers should take PTP into consideration as a practical pedagogical technique instead of viewing it as a simple activity. It is important for students to "understand more clearly the purpose of the prewriting activity, recognize the importance of evaluation of ideas and organization, and actively engage in individual brainstorming" (Tabari, 2021, p. 12). This is a significant finding because it reflects the current problems of students using PTP for their writing practice. Since these students have completed all the writing courses of the English language program, they seemed confused about using PTP as a result of this uncertainty. All in all, this finding may provide L2 language teachers with the fact that students could find it challenging to plan without assistance (Kieft et al., 2011). Therefore, one of the key aspects of the L2 writing curriculum that calls for extra focus is teaching learners how to organize discourse and ideas for PTP (Hinkel, 2015).

Students' learning styles (planners or revisers)

Aside from the lack of in-depth planning instructions, Hoang (high-intermediate) and Sau (intermediate) both stated that they previously preferred free writing because of their personalities (their own learning style). Nevertheless, they seemed not to be aware of the purpose of free writing in practicing L2 writing. Although

free writing has been encouraged in L2 writing (Alharthi, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2018), these two pupils fail to distinguish between free writing and the final product. Based on their sharing, in writing one, they started writing straight away and revised while writing (checked grammar), and then turned their papers in. It can be recognized that the focus solely on grammar from their previous language teachers, as they mentioned in the interview earlier, might limit their knowledge of L2 academic writing. Students need to be aware that free writing should be followed by revisions (Torrance et al., 1994) that address not only lower-level writing skills (grammar, language use) but also higher-level writing skills (content and organization). Moreover, free writing is viewed as an idea generation activity and is unstructured (Nguyen et al., 2020). As Kellogg (1988) indicated, writing a rough draft had little effect on the efficiency or quality of writing. Indeed, the first papers written without planning by Hoang and Sau were not better than the second ones written with planning, and they also realized this result between their two papers and shared this in the interviews. There is no denying that the lack of instruction may have led to this confusion, as students were unable to distinguish the differences between free writing and the final product. In other words, students like Hoang and Sau can choose free writing as planning, but they should re-outline and revise their papers before submitting them to teachers. Along with grammatical checking, students should also know that "re-ordering or re-organizing ideas in written discourse is part and parcel of all academic writing" (Hinkel, 2015, p. 271). All in all, students with varying levels of writing ability or learning styles may have different preferences regarding planning; however, they should be clearly instructed about PTP, and then they can decide which planning styles are best for them. For instance, students like Hoang and Sau can freely compose, re-outline their thoughts, and revise their essays. Meanwhile, Hang can prepare an outline (map or diagram), then start to write and revise. According to the learner groups categorized by Torrance et al. (1994), Hang seems to prefer to be a planner who plans extensively and then makes revisions, while Hoang and Sau are revisers who develop content and structure through revision. Whatever their writing styles are, they should be carefully instructed about PTP when practicing L2 writing.

In the past, I wrote in a free-writing style... It's my personality. I just jotted down the ideas and didn't worry much about the quality of the writing. So my scores were not always high because I did not answer the question clearly. When I write freely, I write faster, but the ideas are scattered. I have a good idea in my head, but then I forget it, and I delete a lot. [Hoang – high-intermediate; interview]

Usually, I think and write freely. I just read the title, put my hand down, and wrote. Writing in this way makes me write faster, but my writing is not logical. [Sau – intermediate; interview]

Conclusion and Implications

The students in this study, who have varying proficiency levels, have favorable views about PTP, which reduces cognitive demand and helps them manage time while writing. In addition, planning helps students provide relevant information about the topics, develop and provide specific facts and examples, and determine and organize ideas before writing. Since pre-task planning has been considered a basic skill and not a new strategy, the students in this study indicated that they did not know how to do it effectively. Some of them also misunderstood the difference between free writing and the final product before joining this study. This reality was also stated by researchers in previous studies conducted in EFL contexts that students "know" about PTP, but not many of them truly "understand" the benefits of this writing strategy, especially how to use it for their writing practice appropriately. Therefore, this concern should be taken into consideration by language teachers.

Building on these findings, the main pedagogical implication of PTP for L2 writing pedagogy in the field of TEFL is the affirmation of the advantages of PTP. In particular, the experiences with PTP of the three EFL

Vietnamese students in this study support EFL language teachers' efforts to introduce this writing strategy to students in L2 writing classrooms. It should be noted, however, that teaching PTP experiments to students is more important than knowing it as a theory. As Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) indicated, "awareness of strategies does not guarantee that students actually use them" (p. 255) (cited in Do & Phan, 2021). *"After participating in this project, I think teachers need to specifically guide students on how to do effective planning before writing and analyzing its benefits. Maybe students have already learned this skill, but it might have been taught too quickly and without practice. There are some good students, but they are not confident and cannot write a complete essay. The teachers have not given specific instructions on how to list ideas and how to include and cluster ideas"* (Sau - intermediate, reflection). To assist students in comprehending the effects of PTP and properly applying it to their writing, L2 writing instructors must consider providing in-depth instruction, guidance, and practice to students regarding the use of PTP activities (how to make a plan) in writing classrooms. Notably, it is crucial to thoroughly introduce and model all pre-task planning activities to all students because the classroom may have a variety of students. As a result, students will gain a clear understanding of PTP and know how to use it effectively and efficiently. Once students have a clear understanding of PTP, they will be able to determine which type of planning is best suited for them and why they should use it in L2 writing practice. To do this, EFL language teachers are suggested to investigate students' prior experience with PTP in order to provide students with appropriate assistance based on their level of familiarity with PTP. The participants in this study, in particular, each had a unique learning style, and after participating in the project, they all determined which writing process or strategy worked best for them. In other words, L2 students with varying English proficiency levels can benefit from PTP training.

In the future, in light of some limitations of the current study, the researchers, first, may consider expanding beyond the current number of participants so that the findings can be generalized more widely. Second, since the focus of this study was on argumentative writing, more investigation is required to ascertain how PTP influences other types of writing. Third, the mode of instruction was Zoom, which may have influenced the students' perceptions towards the use of PTP in practicing L2 writing. Thus, future researchers are highly recommended to explore the use of PTP in other modes of learning to widen the implications. And finally, exploring students' preferences and their problems with the use of PTP in other EFL contexts through reflections, interviews, and observations is recommended, as very few qualitative studies have shed light on this. Then composition teachers will have an overall picture of EFL students' needs regarding PTP and have suitable teaching or training for particular classroom settings and students. These suggestions may warrant further notice from L2 writing researchers. Despite these shortcomings, the experiences of EFL Vietnamese students with PTP in this study have contributed to the study of PTP through qualitative analysis, providing EFL teachers and L2 learners with insight into how PTP affects students' writing performance and problems students encounter when using PTP. The findings support and reassure EFL composition teachers' decision to use PTP as a process-based approach in teaching L2 writing.

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Appendix A

Writing Rubric

Writing Rubric Proposed by Weigle (2002)

<i>Content</i>	<i>Organization</i>
<p>Is complete, accurate, and thorough. Includes all important ideas and demonstrates an understanding of important relationships. Is fully developed and includes specific facts or examples. Contains no irrelevant information.</p>	<p>Is logically organized around major ideas, concepts, or principles. Restates the question accurately. Develops ideas from general to specific. Achieves coherence through the appropriate and varied use of academic language structures and other cohesive devices.</p>

Appendix B

Reflections

Reflection 1

How do you feel after finishing writing without planning?

Do you have any difficulties? What are they?

Reflection 2

How do you feel about doing PTP before you start writing?

Any differences compared to the previous writing done without planning? Is PTP helpful to your written performance?

Do you think training is helpful? In what ways? Any recommendations or suggestions for teachers to do in future training?

Appendix C

PTP Training

Step 1: Listing keywords and synonym words

Read the writing topic and list or underline keywords to make sure you understand the topic and requirements that you should answer in your essay.

List any synonym words to avoid repeating the same keywords in your essay if possible.

Step 2: Outlining ideas

List as many ideas as you can about the benefits of social media, along with examples.
List the ideas of drawbacks of social media along with examples as much as you can.

Step 3: Selecting and clustering ideas

Look at your ideas, group them into groups, and develop thesis statements for each group (advantages and disadvantages).

Look at how many ideas you have between advantages and disadvantages, then decide your answer, which guides your essay: Which one outweighs than another?

You can create a map for all your ideas or any way you feel comfortable with.

Step 4: Determining the structure of the essay

After you have completed the previous stages, you decide on the structure of your essay. For example:

Introduction paragraph: Should include your answer (thesis statement).

Body: Depending on your answer, you will determine which ideas are for body 1 and body 2.

Body 1: Topic sentence, supporting ideas (facts, examples), concluding sentence. What are they?

Body 2: Topic sentence, supporting ideas (facts, examples), concluding sentence. What are they?

Conclusion: Restatement of the answer and recommendation.

Note: The writing topic used for the training is the use of social media in society. Do you think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?