

Condition of Creative Writing in the North and South Punjab

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Abstract

Creative writing has an important place in the educational institutions. It is ignored in Pakistani English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. This study was designed to investigate the condition of creative writing skills of 9th graders. This study had been started with the review of the literature; many studies were found which analyzed different aspects of creative writing in ELT classrooms. A need was felt to see the condition of the four levels of creative writing namely descriptive writing, narrative writing, story writing, and functional writing among the secondary school level students. A sample of 238 students was selected from North and South of the Punjab province of Pakistan. Six classes from govt. and private sector schools were the sample. The major objectives of the study were to explore the condition of the above mentioned levels of creative writing in teaching of English at secondary level. Four tasks for creative writing were adapted from the Cambridge University O-level examinations and were piloted at a smaller group. These tasks constituted the achievement test. The tests were marked qualitatively with the help of scoring rubrics by using the method of 'analytic scoring'. The scores in creative writing test were rechecked and verified by the concerned teachers for inter-rater reliability. The results of the study showed that the creative writing skills among the secondary school students are dissatisfactory. In the end it was recommended that teachers should use communicative approach while teaching English language in secondary level classrooms. It was also recommended that the examination papers should have some unseen tasks to enhance the creative writing skills of secondary school students.

Keywords: Creative writing; English language teaching; communicative approach.

1. Introduction and Literature Review

The writing that involves the use of skill and the imagination to produce something new is creative writing. It involves the use of mind for generating new ideas. It needs the involvement of thinking skill of the individual for composition work. This type of writing aims at generating as many ideas as possible. The nature of those ideas should be innovative and imaginative. Such tasks demand use of cognition and thinking. According to Harmer (2004), there are four basic steps involved in the process of creative writing. These are 'thinking about the ideas, arrangement of the ideas, writing the ideas and revising the ideas'. Therefore, thinking and its use is a must and necessary for writing creatively whereas it is criticized that our students are unable to show creative thinking and for improvement in the situation teaching methodology should be improved.

In Pakistan, there is a lack of ability of writing creatively. The most of the students do not use their thinking ability to create any piece of composition. It has been observed by Rahman (2002) that the most of the students rely on cramming. They are not taught the forms of creative writing. They do not know about the techniques of writing, creatively. They seldom write short stories, essays or poetry. The main reason of this situation is faulty teaching method. In this regard Rahman (2007) further stated that in Pakistan the methodology used by the teachers is not up to the mark. Proper guidance by the teachers is lacking. There is no freedom of expression. They use Grammar Translation method. There is no use of language and linguistics in English language classroom. Their approach is subject centered rather than pupil-centered. Due to the poor quality of teaching English the creative writing skills are not developed properly and the rate of failure in English is the highest at secondary level.

According to Arifa (2009), the level of creative writing is better in few schools due to better resources, but in general, Pakistani students are afraid of the idea of writing, something of their own. Since childhood they have been cramming almost all their subjects to get through their exams. For this purpose they rely on guidebooks, test papers, and ready-made notes. They like to select only a few questions, memorize them and try to get through the exams. They do not have faith in writing themselves. They have no idea of creative writing. In this regard, Mansoor (2009) stated about the schools that they are dull places. There is a lack of competent and properly trained teachers; these semi-educated educators appreciate always their pupil to cram knowledge out of substandard and unauthentic materials. It was further reported that most of the classrooms are overcrowded. In these classrooms creative writing skills are not taught and developed properly.

Another aspect of traditional classroom in Pakistan has been highlighted by Siddiqui (2007) that it consists of the teacher centered activities. It has been observed many times that most active participant in the classroom is the teacher; he is supposed to do all the class work in which he is to give the instructions. The students are passive and silent listeners. Activities done by the students commonly are, listening the lectures, note taking and copying something verbatim from the blackboard and remaining silent throughout the time. Similarly, in the same context Hussain (2009) said that the teacher's academic responsibility is to take class in traditional way and nothing else. Bashiruddin (2009) narrated that teachers teach English Language Teaching (ELT) in the way they were taught at their school. The teacher, who does not involve students in learning process, kills student talents instead of polishing them. The main responsibility of the teachers'

job is to explore, channelize and polish the talent of the pupils whereas in Pakistani culture there is seldom such an opportunity of exposing one's qualities; and if it happens, once in a blue moon, it is by mere good luck or by chance.

It is an agreed upon fact, according to Oxford Advanced English Learner's Dictionary that the use of imagination and an in-depth thinking is a pre requisite for writing creatively. Siddiqui (2007) stated that if the children ask questions, the teacher as well as parents instead of responding to them properly, the elders snub them. Since their early childhood their habit of putting the questions and freedom of expression are discouraged at home as well as at the schools. Their questions are named as silly, nonsense and unethical; thus their creative ability is not exposed; their thinking skills are slaughtered mercilessly; ultimately children are neither able to think creatively nor to express their ideas through their writing. Lack of proper guidance and practice is another hurdle in the way of creative writing. Rahman (2002) reported that in Pakistani classrooms the methodology used by the teachers is substandard. The content is delivered to the students through cramming in an authoritarian manner. There is no freedom even to talk in the classroom. The children cram the things in the form of chorus. Essays are copied verbatim from the black-board; any originality in thoughts and genuineness of the interpretation is punished in many ways as this deviates the traditional interpretation or knowledge.

In majority of the schools due to the dependence on memorizing the notes and materials, the creative faculty of the intellectual mind is not polished properly, said Siddiqui (2007). The examination system adds fuel to the fire that it promotes and encourages the cramming of knowledge; students are able to secure the good marks but the habit of creative writing dies; examination can play a very significant role if certain items are put in the tests related to thinking ability for writing creatively. The focus of the teachers ultimately would be towards the preparation of such exams and the students would be getting the benefits. In this regard Harmer (2004) remarked that it is the role of the teacher to prepare the students for creative writing in examination as they have been considered to play a significant role in determining what goes on in the classroom in terms of what and how teachers teach and students learn and can have an impact on both teaching and learning. Similarly it can have an impact on improving the situation of creative writing in Pakistani classes if teachers consider it important to build the habit of writing creatively.

In most of the schools in Pakistan, the teacher is venerated as an authority, reported Siddiqui (2007). The teachers exercise tight controls, and provide grammatical structures, concepts and rules. In such ELT settings, there is no natural or communicative environment, available to the learner. Large size classes, lack of resources, untrained teachers, external examination bodies, fixed syllabi and time factor also lead the teachers to ignore creative writing skills and relying on the teacher centered approach. Similarly, Hayes (1991) pointed out the suppression of the children that they are most often suppressed emotionally and psychologically by their parents, teachers and elders; they are always expected to be passive and obedient blindly. Due to these reasons the proper confidence is not produced among the children for the active skills, that is, speaking and writing. This happens only due to poor quality of teaching and poor pedagogical skills at the school. It has also been observed by Rahman (2007) that students perform better on the memory- based disciplines but their performance is very poor in basic comprehension

and understanding of any subject. Moreover concepts used in the textbooks do not match the cognitive or intellectual level of the children. In this situation, the students have no choice but to cram. Further, the present system of examination is based on a summative evaluation of only knowledge level rather than the comprehension or application. Better one reproduces, gets good and better grades.

It has also been reported by Rasool (2009) that lengthy syllabus and discouraging attitude of school administration are also a hindrance in the way of developing creative writing. The teacher is to face the problem of the completion of the course in accordance with the demand and expectation of the school administration. When there is a time of approximately 40 minutes in which roll is called and the structured lessons are delivered in these 40 minutes, that is, the course contents are delivered and ignoring creative writing and keeping it aside because the most active participant in the classroom is the teacher. The students are passive and silent listeners. Activities done by the students commonly are hearing the lecturers, note taking, copying something from the blackboard and remaining silent throughout the time. This situation does not help students in identifying their creative powers. Gradually these inborn abilities die within them as if ability is not used, ends automatically. In Pakistani schools, the teaching methodology is based on the grammatical approach; the traditional grammar-translation method focuses the rote-memorization of grammatical patterns and structures. Bajwa (2004) narrated that through this approach the communicative competence is not produced that is why the Pakistani learners are unable to express themselves properly. Similarly Cooze (2006) was not satisfied with the grammatical approach in foreign language instruction. They argued that this approach did not produce the ability of communication among the learners the ability of writing creatively might be improved by using the communicative approach. It makes use the real life situations that necessitate communication, that is, the teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life.

The most of the students feel difficulty to write something of their own, according to Harmer (2004), but it is important to build the habit of writing. In this regard Coombe (2009) is of the opinion that the teachers, administrators and the school should be responsible for developing the writing skills among the students. Graham (2003) stated that there is a considerable concern that students do not develop the writing skills needed for the school even. A frequent explanation for this is that the schools do not do a good job of teaching this complex skill. Griffith (2006) recommended the communicative strategy for developing the writing skills. Similarly Khan (2009) observed that communicative approach might be useful to develop the creative writing skills as it combines the functional as well as structural aspects of the language. Siddiqui (2007), in this regard remarked that the school should help children in the development of thinking skills including creative writing. Raji (2009) stated that the less importance has been given to the skill of writing creatively. In classrooms the more importance is given to the putting on paper the grammatically correct sentences whereas Fatima and Zubeda (2009) are of the opinion that the writing is best learnt in an interactive and communicative environment.

2. Statement of Research Problem

It can be concluded that the present education system in Pakistan does not motivate pupils for creative writing. The condition of creative writing may be different in different areas of Pakistan that is why the researchers felt that the research is needed for studying

the condition of creative writing skills among secondary school level students in English language and to compare it according to different demographic variables. Hence this study was designed to investigate the differences and similarities among Siraiki and Punjabi speaking majority areas students' ability in creative writing in English. . Lahore is the capital of the province and centre of Punjabi speaking majority area while Ahmadpur East is almost twin town with Dera Nawab sahib, the old cultural centre of former Bahawalpur State as Siraiki speaking majority area, with different socio-economic and cultural background in the same province. It has been observed that the most of the Punjabi and Siraiki speaking students rely on cramming to pass the examination. As the examination system is similar in both areas and students ability is also equivalent. If there is some difference found then it may be the result of different teaching methodologies. The students of both areas hardly create any piece of composition in English. The examination system encourages and promotes the rote-learning. The focus of the teachers in the classrooms is the preparation of such examinations. In this situation, the ability of writing creatively among the students is not developed properly. This study aimed at analyzing the condition of creative writing skills of students at secondary school level.

3. Delimitations

The study was delimited to two centers with the majority of two different native languages i.e. Siraiki and Punjabi. Due to limited time and financial resources the study was delimited to 9th grade. Only the subject of English language was included in the study. The four levels of creative writing namely descriptive writing, narrative writing, functional writing and story writing were undertaken.

4. Research Objectives

More specifically these were the objectives of this study:

1. To study the condition of the creative writing skills of secondary school students.
2. To compare the creative writing skills of girls and boys.
3. To compare the creative writing skills of public and private sector students.
4. To compare the creative writing skills of students of Ahmadpur East (Siraiki speaking majority area) and the students of Lahore (Punjabi speaking majority area), with different socio-economic and cultural background in the same province.

The results of the study will be a source of information to the teachers and educators about the creative writing skills among the students at secondary school level. English language teacher training institutions would use the results of the study for the prospective teachers of English at secondary level by focusing on English Language Teaching methodology and giving them proper pre-service training. Keeping in view the condition of creative writing skills, the teacher training institutes may arrange training sessions for the in-service English language teachers so that the teachers can improve their strategies regarding the teaching of creative writing skills. In addition, the results of the study would be beneficial for the researchers who look for exploring the field of English Language Teaching and creative writing.

5. Research Methodology

This study involved a survey to see the condition of creative writing skills. There were six sections of 9th class students involved in the study. The creative writing test comprised of the four levels of the creative writing skills namely descriptive writing, narrative writing, story writing, and functional writing. The compositions written by the participants were analyzed qualitatively with the help of the scoring rubrics. The writing skills were assessed on the basis of five factors namely vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, fluency, and the form. The descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The descriptive were the mean scores for each sub skill separately and an overall mean score for the creative writing skills.

6. Sample

The technique used for the selection of the sample was “purposive sampling”. The schools and the participants were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Permission from the principals of the schools.
- Willingness of the class teachers to spare their classes voluntarily for the test.
- The similarity of syllabus taught in private and public sector schools.
- The easy access to the schools in both cities i.e. Lahore and Ahmadpur East.

On the basis of the mentioned criteria, the participants were selected as sample of this study. Total number of the participants involved in the experiment was 238. There were 37 girls and 201 boys in the study. The students from Govt. (Boys) High School Allama Iqbal Town Karim Block Lahore, Govt. Sadiq Abbas (Boys) High School Ahmadpur East and from Private Sector, Qurban and Surriya Educational (Trust) School for Boys Lahore, Qurban and Surriya Educational (Trust) School for Girls Lahore, Al-Huda Girls High school Ahmadpur East, Al-Huda Boys High school Ahmadpur East, participated in the study. There were separate campuses for the boys and girls. One section from each campus was selected.

7. Adaptation, Development and Trialing of Test / Instrument

Four tasks were adapted from the previous O-level’s English examination papers administered by the University of Cambridge. The first task was related to assess the descriptive writing skills. The second task was related to assess the narrative writing skills. The third task was related to assess the story writing skills. The fourth task was related to assess the functional writing skills. Before piloting these task items, adapted and included in the test for the creative writing skills were validated by the experts’ opinion. The experts were the faculty members at the Department of English Language Teaching and Linguistics, Institute of Education and Research University of the Punjab Lahore. The test was piloted at the secondary level students of the Punjab University Laboratory High School Lahore. These students were taught the syllabus of the Punjab Textbook Board Lahore. The data were collected and analyzed with the method of ‘analytic scoring’ that has been highlighted by Hughes in his book ‘Testing for the Language Teachers’. Tests were analyzed according to the scoring rubrics. ‘Reliability Analysis’ was done and the reliability coefficients were found separately for the boys and girls. The values of Cronbach’s Alpha remained 0.868 in case of the boys and in case of

girls its value was 0.863. After incorporating the necessary changes, the test was administered on the sample.

8. Data Analysis

If we have a glance on the data, it can be easily seen that the mean scores of the creative writing skills of boys are better than girls and creative writing skills of private school students are better than that of students of government schools. Creative writing was divided into sub skills i.e. descriptive writing, narrative writing, story writing, and the functional writing. Hence the data is presented according to these skills.

Table 1: Creative Writing Comparison between Government and Private Boys' Schools

	Govt. Ahmadpur East		Govt. Lahore		Private Ahmadpur East		Private Lahore	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Descriptive Writing	6.79	3.54	9.07	3.33	10.44	3.82	7.87	2.80
Narrative Writing	5.30	3.82	8.42	3.24	8.04	3.70	7.95	2.72
Story Writing	2.18	3.14	5.04	3.50	8.04	3.36	3.11	3.10
Functional Writing	0.91	2.62	4.42	3.82	5.41	3.58	3.68	3.57
Overall(Creative Writing)	15.18	10.4	26.96	9.37	31.93	10.3	22.61	6.45
	N=66		N=71		N=27		N=38	

Table No.2: Creative Writing Comparison between Private Sector Girls and Boys

	Girls Ahmadpur East		Girls Lahore		Boys Ahmadpur East		Boys Lahore	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Descriptive Writing	7.04	4.43	11.71	2.673	10.44	3.81	7.87	2.80
Narrative Writing	5.43	4.18	10.86	2.507	8.04	3.69	7.95	2.72
Story Writing	1.74	2.86	6.07	4.649	8.04	3.35	3.11	3.10
Functional Writing	0.22	1.04	4.93	4.047	5.41	3.57	3.68	3.57
Total (Creative Writing)	14.43	10.16	33.57	7.355	31.93	10.32	22.61	6.45
	N=23		N=14		N=27		N=38	

Table No. 3: Comparison between the students of Siraiki Speaking and Punjabi Speaking Majority Areas

	Lahore			Ahmadpur East		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Section 1	26.96	9.37	71	15.18	10.37	66
Section 2	22.61	6.45	38	31.93	10.32	27
Section 3	33.57	7.355	14	14.43	10.16	23
Total	83.14	9.37	123	61.54	10.37	116

9. Findings

1. There is a huge difference between number of students studying in government and private schools as N=66 and N=71 for government school and N=27 and N=38 for private schools (Table No.1).
2. Mean scores of overall and sub-constructs of creative writing show that students of private school perform better (mean score=31.93 as compared to 15.18 and 26.96) (Table No.1).
3. The higher level SD reflects greater individual differences among students. These differences are equally present in both streams of schools.
4. The boys of one section of Government school perform slightly better in narrative writing only (mean score= 8.42 as compared to Mean score = 8.04) (Table No.1).
5. The data reflects that government schools are contributing more in numbers but lesser in quality of creative writing of boys in Punjab (Table No.1).
6. Gender wise comparison of students from Ahmadpur East show that boys are performing better than girls (mean score= 31.93 & mean score = 14.43).
7. Girls from Lahore are performing better than boys of the same city (mean score = 33.57 & mean score = 22.61).
8. Overall performance of boys in the whole study is better than girls'. Functional writing was found to be the poorest among all aspects and among all the students.
9. There is statistically significant difference in overall scores of students from Punjabi speaking majority area and the students from Siraiki speaking majority area as mean scores are 83.14 and 61.54 respectively (Table No.3).
10. There are greater individual differences among the students of Siraiki speaking majority area as SD=10.37 (Table No. 3).
11. Overall similar number of students is studying in similar type of schools i.e. more students are studying in government schools and lesser in private schools.

10. Conclusion

The condition of creative writing skills of students at North and South Punjab schools is not satisfactory. One reason is large number of students in classes. When the results were compared in terms of number of students in class; it was found that students of small

classes performed better. Overall boys performed better in the test of creative writing skills. There is statistically significant difference in overall scores of students from Punjabi speaking majority area and the students from Siraiki speaking majority area. There are greater individual differences among the students of Siraiki speaking majority area. Overall similar number of students is studying in similar type of schools i.e. more students are studying in government schools and lesser in private schools. The major reason in Punjab is the availability of better teacher, teaching methodology and liberty to choose the better schools. The students of Lahore perform better in this test mostly due to overall environment and socio-economic conditions of the area. The students from Lahore seem to be more used to the English language because English language can be seen in the environment of Lahore city. It is also observed that students are not provided enough opportunity to write something new, and creative writing is even discouraged so when functional writing was assessed it was seen the worst situation.

There is no statistically significant difference in the performance of boys and girls in the schools of North and South of the Punjab. Only environment and teachers makes the difference.

11. Recommendations

On the basis of the data analysis, findings and the conclusions, the following suggestions are recommended:

1. It is recommended that number of students in a class may be reduced especially in government schools.
2. Teaching methodology plays an important role in students learning and their performance in tests, so modern teaching methodologies like communicative approach may be adapted in place of traditional approaches, used in the schools in English Language Teaching classrooms.
3. It is also recommended that some special tasks related to creative writing skills should be added in the final examinations.
4. The environment of the school and area also play an important role in creative writing of the students, so walls of the school should be decorated with quotes and verses in English language.
5. Teachers must encourage their students to write their new ideas and present them to other students.
6. Cultural differences among the cities of the Punjab may be reduced through students' interaction with one another. For this purpose study tours may be arranged.

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